

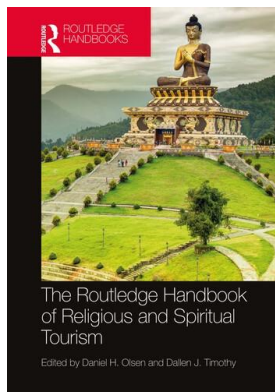
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GENDER AND PERFORMANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL TOURISM

Pilgrimage and sacred mobilities

Avril Maddrell

Introduction

The ways in which the social construction of gender has had a significant impact on the institutional organisation, regulation, power structures, practices, and performances of organised religion are well rehearsed. This includes gender-exclusive clergy and spaces, authority and roles based on gendered norms, and gender-defined codes of behaviour and dress within particular religious communities and/or spaces. As Morin and Guelke (2007: xix) note, “Most of the theology and practices of Christianity, Islam and Judaism were developed by men at times and places where women’s inferior social (if not metaphysical) status seemed self-evident and where men placed premiums on women’s sexual virtue”. Even where religious teaching insists on equality in belief, the lived experience of that equality may be compromised, with social gendered norms shaping religious-spiritual beliefs, practices and mobilities. Indeed, “Women’s and men’s religious experience may differ significantly because religions often promote segregation in religious practices, congregation attendance, ordination, religious life, and religious identities” (Morin & Guelke 2007: xix). Historically, it is also significant that *across different faiths* gendered roles and beliefs have frequently been marked in differences between institutional and tactical religion, with women’s beliefs and practices often constituting everyday tactical religion rather than loyalty to text-based authority (Ahmed 1999). It is also interesting to note that outside of institutionalised religion, women are the obvious majority in the sphere of (Western) holistic spirituality (Sointu & Woodhead 2008).

Many of these gendered relations have been highlighted and their uneven power relations are critiqued by feminist scholars (e.g., Jansen & Notermans 2012). However, if the study of religion has been gender-blind, so has gender studies often lacked sensitivity to the significance of religion, constituting a co-existing “double blindness” in this field (Gemzöe & Keinänen 2016). Attention to the mutual significance of gender and religion has prompted fruitful study of women’s everyday religious experience (Ahmed 1999), including in majority and minority contexts (Aitchison, Hopkins & Kwan 2007) and in relation to different masculinities (Hopkins 2004) and femininities (Gemzöe 2005). This includes everyday spirituality (MacKian 2012), Queer spirituality (Browne, Munt & Yip 2010), and the significance of often gendered alternative spiritual beliefs–practices such as the belief in angels

and Goddess worship (Rountree 2002; Utriainen 2016). At the heart of a number of these conceptual shifts is a focus on the ways in which beliefs intersect with and shape lived and embodied experience, often expressed through practice and performance—themes that are central to this chapter.

Despite these shifts and tourism's engagement with gender issues since the mid-1990s (Byrne Swain 1995; Apostolopoulos, Sönmez & Timothy 2001), gender typically remains marginal to the majority of studies of religious and spiritual travel, either ghettoised or omitted, with participant "voices" often being homogenised. While trends identified in recent religious tourism journal articles include greater diversity of beliefs and settings, the de-differentiation of religion and tourism, and transformative travel (e.g., Collins-Kreiner 2020), gender and associated intersectional identities are absent from current trends or efforts to signpost future agendas for the field. It is self-evident that if gender is significant to the study of both tourism and religion, it is significant to the study of religious-spiritual tourism. This chapter outlines the intellectual benefits of gender-sensitive research, drawing on recent scholarship and outlining an agenda for future research.

Each of the terms in this chapter's core theme of "religious and spiritual tourism" is loosely defined, the focus is on travel of any distance or duration centred on religious-spiritual sites, events, and rituals. Within the scholarship, the "religious" and "spiritual" are frequently dichotomised as mutually exclusive. However, then in fact overlap in the lived experience and practices of many (Olsen & Timothy 2006). Echoing the use of the term "pilgrim-tourist" (Vukonić 1996; Coleman & Eade 2004; Stausberg 2011), this blurred relationality is embodied in the conscious use of the hyphenated terms here, such as religious-spiritual, where appropriate. This does not deny the boundaries that institutions, individuals, and communities may choose to draw around their creeds and designations of sacred spaces and practices. Rather, the *analytical* insistence on blurred boundaries and relationality centres attention on their intersection and the spaces, practices, and experiences produced at and by those intersections rather than being unduly constrained by definitions and categories of who, what, or where is included or excluded. In response to arguments that the study of religious tourism is overly fragmented due to a focus on individual case studies (Collins-Kreiner 2020), this chapter highlights the value of attention to gender through thematic analysis of embodied participant-centred experience and meaning-making across *varied* case studies of organised and individual pilgrimages as a form of sacred mobility (religious-spiritual, spiritual and secular) (Maddrell, Terry & Gale 2015).

Gender and pilgrimage

Many pilgrimages stress the equality of pilgrims, and aspects of pilgrimage experience may cut through social and gendered norms, as reported by pilgrims in numerous contexts (see Hopkins, Stevenson, Shankar, Pandey, Khan & Tewari 2015 on the Magh Mela). Nonetheless, many forms of pilgrimage are highly gendered (Gemzöe 2012). For example, female pilgrims are not allowed to land on the Athos peninsula to visit the Orthodox monastic community, and Roman Catholic and Buddhist religious communities or retreats are commonly single sex spaces and practices. Worldwide, pilgrimage sites are typically controlled by male authorities and gatekeepers: "operating sacred sites is an almost exclusively male prerogative" (Shackley 2001: xv). However, case studies frequently demonstrate the predominance of women as pilgrims (on Christian sites, see Gemzöe 2009; Maddrell 2011; Jansen 2012). Indeed, it has been argued that the very feminisation of pilgrimage explains its marginalisation in the (Western) study of religion prior to the 2000s (Gemzöe 2005).

For many devout and/or impoverished women, pilgrimage is the only justification for travel and deprioritising material service to family, albeit they are enacting spiritual service for their families, as is evident in both Roman Catholic and Muslim women's narratives (McLoughlin 2015; Maddrell 2016; Notermans, Tuolla & Jansen 2016). This pilgrimage-in-service-of-family role has been evidenced in Catholic shrines where women overwhelmingly undertake the emotional spiritual labour of booking masses and collecting or buying commodities deemed to have sacred site-specific spiritual-therapeutic qualities such as holy water, oil, rosaries, and prayer cards (Shackley 2006; Maddrell 2016). However, in all but the most hasty of visits (as may be the case on tours), these gendered familial roles and practices do not preclude individual spiritual practice and renewal of wellbeing (Maddrell & della Dora 2013b). Just as non-institutionalised holistic spirituality practices provide a framework for women's gendered negotiation of selflessness and expressive selfhood (Sointu & Woodhead 2008), the holistic space-time of pilgrimage offers people of faith an opportunity to reconfigure the self spiritually-emotionally-physically-rationally (Maddrell 2013; Nilsson & Tesfahuney 2016). As Werbner (2015: 27) argues of Muslim pilgrimage, "the whole study of ritual embodiment, and of charisma as sacred embodiment, necessarily hinges on an understanding of symbolic movement as effecting both a metonymic and metaphoric transformation."

The work of Jill Dubisch has been pivotal in stimulating and shaping gender-informed pilgrimage studies. Using ethnographic methods, Dubisch's (1995) study of a Greek Orthodox pilgrimage church on the island of Tinos highlighted the ways in which pilgrimage devotions there are highly feminised and the ways in which such research is inflected by the gendered biography of the researcher. Other studies have shown Jewish women's devotion at the three Rachel shrines in Israel (the only women venerated in Jewish pilgrimage) (Sered 2005), and the predominance of women pilgrims at Marian shrines (Gemzöe 2009; Hermkens, Jansen & Notermans 2009), including where those shrines attract devotees from multiple faiths (Jansen 2009). While there is equality of status for women and men on the Hajj, women need to have a male chaperone and do not wear the simple white wrap worn by male pilgrims to symbolise both death and rebirth (McLoughlin 2015; Werbner 2015). Further, transgender pilgrims have been refused visas to travel to Mecca (Wasif 2017), which signals the diversity of gender issues significant to understanding the complexities of pilgrimage and other forms of religious tourism.

In the context of religious diversity and the parallel growth of secularisation in the West, it is important to note the polysemic nature of pilgrimage practices, particularly evident in "unregulated" or "open" pilgrimages (Maddrell & della Dora 2013a, 2013b). Also important to note is that not all pilgrimages are framed by religious or spiritual meaning or intent (Shackley 2001), secular pilgrimages to symbolic places or events are imbued with secular-sacred status, attributed with "magnetism" and evoke ritual performances, devotions, and embodied-emotional responses, which some describe in spiritual terms. In a later study, Dubisch (2004, 2005) participated in the annual motorcycle pilgrimages to "The Wall" in Washington, DC, commemorating US service personnel who died in the Vietnam War. This work evidenced the interstices of veteran and biker masculinities, communal remembering, and therapeutic spaces within this secular commemorative practice. A similar sense of collective identity and shared purpose is identified in other secular biking events, such as the Isle of Man TT races, which attract predominantly male spectators from around the world. Many of the 30,000 spectators who travel to the island for the annual TT festival with over 10,000 motorcycles, couch their commitment to attending the races as the compulsion to fulfil an annual commitment or a "once in a lifetime" secular pilgrimage, some explicitly

using the vocabulary of pilgrimage. While on the island they perform various embodied rituals, including visiting famous-symbolic sites, meeting racers, and riding the road course. These rituals, in conjunction with clothing, particular forms of events/socialising, and bike and racecourse knowledge, coalesce around event-specific hegemonic masculinities (Maddrell, Terry, Gale & Arlidge 2015).

Within Christian pilgrimage, men tend to dominate numerically in military and nationalistic pilgrimages (Eade & Katić 2017) or in those pilgrimages that centre on physical endurance such as the Camino de Santiago de Compostela. In the latter, forms of hyper-masculinised and literal “muscular” Christianity are identified, centring variously on embodied speed and the ability to protect female pilgrims they perceive as “vulnerable”, as well as authoritative knowledge (e.g. using GPS technology to master routes and blogs to establish pilgrimage narratives) (Gemzöe 2012). Rather than being vulnerable, many middle-aged Swedish women found themselves empowered by their experience of walking the Camino, captured in the eponymous quote from one respondent that she felt “big, strong and happy” (quoted in Gemzöe 2012: 37). However, it is important to note that both men walking the Camino and those attending the TT races demonstrate multiple masculinities rather than a singular monolithic masculinity. Likewise, military pilgrimages may be undertaken in the spirit of international peace-keeping as well as by those asserting nationalistic pride or territorial claims (Eade & Katić 2017). A recent study interrogating pilgrim motivations of Italian pilgrims visiting Medjugorje showed gendered differences, with men being more interested in “discovery”, while “social” dimensions were more important for women (Scaffadi Abbate & Di Nuovo 2013). However, the social dimensions can also be important for some male pilgrims (Maddrell 2015), which underscores the need for nuanced gender-sensitive research design, methods, and analysis on both individual and macro scales.

Similarly, different expressions of femininities are experienced and expressed through different pilgrimages. Marian shrines are a focus for women’s relation to the divine through the female personhood of Mary, with whom they identify, and see themselves and their lives. Hence, women’s Marian devotion often centres on female embodied concerns such as fertility and giving birth, as well as the role and responsibilities of family and lifelong mothering (Gemzöe 2005; Hermkens et al. 2009; Jansen 2012), including diasporic family (Notermans 2012; Notermans et al. 2016). However, Mary is also a focus of intimate relationality, which can give those same women spiritual-social agency and authority, including the justification for religious travel as an expression of Marian and familial devotion. This agency and authority were notable at the Maltese national shrine of the Madonna Ta Pinu, on Gozo where, despite the institutional patriarchy of the Roman Catholic Church and male dominance of formal liturgy, older women were clearly the matriarchs, occupying the inner sanctuary of the Madonna, leading recitations of the rosary for public broadcast, and teaching spiritual practices to younger generations. Women of all ages were notably more active and expressive in their devotions at the shrine, some approaching the Madonna and the graves of venerated locals on their knees. When asked about this, the female shrine staff commented: “Men tend to give money to Our Lady rather than walk on their knees ... women are less ashamed to do these things” (Maddrell 2016: 232; also see Gemzöe 2005). Whereas masculine veneration of the Madonna, including that of visiting popes, is typically performed through financial or material gifting, feminine-relational devotion was evident in embodied performances of intimate respect-petition.

Agency and authority are also sought, and found, by women in New Age religions such as Neo-Paganism and alternative or self-spiritualities as experienced through practices such as Reiki massage and yoga retreats (Woodhead 2007). The Goddess movement has mobilised

largely middle age and middle-class Western women to engage with their spirituality outside of patriarchal religious and social structures, thereby representing a political project as well as an opportunity to reimagine self and femininity through belief and ritual. This movement has generated both individual and themed group tours-pilgrimages, primarily to sites associated with ancient matriarchal societies and/or female deities, often encompassing more than one country and belief system. The Goddess pilgrim is frequently a tourist-pilgrim, described as a “postmodern figure, alienated from many of modern society’s values; collecting a plethora of deities, myths, rituals and sacred sites from the world’s religious traditions” (Rountree 2002: 478). Rountree’s (2002) study demonstrated the ways in which embodied experience and expression is a key element of Goddess pilgrimage, whether through ritual acts or embodied resonance with site-specific “energies” through contact with the past through the materiality of place. In this she highlights the ways in which bodies simultaneously are sites of *embodied* experience and *embody* values and beliefs, as is common with other pilgrimage practices, and that in the specific case of Goddess pilgrims, they further “experience their female bodies as sacred, themselves as divine” (Rountree 2002: 494).

Beliefs, practices, and embodied performativity

Calls to engage with the psychosomatic aspects of pilgrimage (Morinis 1992) have coalesced with interest in the “spiritual magnetism” of places (Preston 1992), related notions of therapeutic spaces and practices (Winkelman & Dubisch 2005), feminist attention to gender as an analytical theme, and gender as scripted and performed identities (Butler 1990). These approaches have also served to focus attention and understanding of the *lived and embodied* nature of the human experience, including religious-spiritual beliefs and practices. Attention to embodiment, practice, and performance, combined with gender-sensitive methods and analyses, can provide valuable insights. As with gender, the study of religion in recent years has drawn much from its focus on embodiment, practice, and performance as a counterbalance to emphasis on beliefs, texts, and material artefacts, but in reality, these are often inseparable.

Religion and gender are both performative—not only represented by but also constituted in and through embodied performance (Butler 1990; Jansen 2009) as well as through mobilities that shape both religious-spiritually motivated travel and the rituals or activities enacted en route and at destination sacred sites. Mobilities, as performative embodied action and movement, is both a semantic field and metaphor (Coleman & Eade 2004); further, religious-spiritual travel and performances encompass movement and being moved, such as through embodied-material-emotional-spiritual-psychological mobilities (Hermkens, Jansen & Notermans 2009; Maddrell 2011).

This can be seen across case studies from different faiths and spiritual practices. For example, the embodied physicality of Goddess pilgrim spiritual practice was exemplified by one pilgrim at the Neolithic temple at Hagar Qim, Malta, who described lying against the ancient stones of the temple in order to connect with the “energy” of the sacred place and religious practice and practitioners of the past: “I lay down against the curved wall, fitted my body within their warm contours, and felt utterly connected to the past, present and future in the great cycle of being” (Rountree 2002: 488). For this pilgrim, her experience was an encounter with the female deity, reflected in the curved womb-like walls of the temple and the sense of personal-gendered self-acceptance and empowerment this evoked. Similar relational embodied-performative-material religious-spiritual experience through touch is also seen in other contexts. For example, Muslim pilgrims touching the Kaaba; Buddhists spinning prayer wheels; Orthodox Christian pilgrims kissing icons; and those experiencing a

sense of temporal and spiritual liminality when encountering the remains of early medieval Celtic Christian chapels (Maddrell & della Dora 2013a; Maddrell 2015; Maddrell & Scriven 2016). Significantly, these heightened experiences through embodied performance are commonly reported across genders, as recorded in the experience of prayer walks in the Isle of Man:

it was a profound experience to touch with Christians from centuries ago and with [other] Christians [...] as we prayed together

(Female, Roman Catholic)

Touching the stones and sitting on the walls gives me a great sense of connectedness to Christianity, to our ancestors and to this beautiful Island ... the Celtic crosses are reminders again from whence we have come. I love to come and just be in their presence

(Male, Methodist)

Similar embodied-spiritual experiences have been reported in recent descriptions of the Hajj, where British pilgrim accounts, from both men and women typically reflected on bodily performances and related emotional responses:

.... I see it as a very holistic experience and I think mainly it was the fact that I was walking in the footsteps of these great personalities that I had always heard about and spoken about and read about and thought about and imagined [at the Kaaba] You get this sort of rush through your body ... it just fills you up ... you just want to stand there forever, just not move from that one spot ... a lot of what you experience happens on such a spiritual level, almost like a molecular level, when you're vibrating with that anticipation ... (Aminah, 20s, London, Hajj 1997).

(Quoted in McLoughlin 2015: 49, 51)

Recent participant-centred analysis of the Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, evidence other embodied experiences and meaning-making. Women's accounts highlighted the risks associated with Hajj crowds and with particular phases and situated performative elements of the pilgrimage (e.g., stoning the pillars representing the devil), which are spaces of corporeal danger as well as of spiritual benefit. These observations were intermeshed with the gendered roles of motherhood, articulated by one mother who was conscious of her children left at home while she fulfilled her religious obligation to complete the Hajj: "that was one of the things that was upsetting me the most about leaving my children behind" (Asma, 40s, West Midlands, Hajj 2008) (quoted in McLoughlin 2015: 48). Another recent study analysing selfies from pilgrimages at Mecca (Hajj and Umrah) posted on social media by English-speaking pilgrims identified and analysed selfies as a performance of religious identity and belonging as well as religious travel. Analysis of these publicly available images showed that while both men and women pilgrims took and posted selfies, gender played a role in the framing and reception of the images. Men were overwhelmingly more likely to take *solo* selfies, compared to women, who more commonly posted group selfies. Female pilgrims were also more likely to be *criticised* for posting pictures of themselves, including by clergy from the global Muslim community. However, online community-solidarity between these women facilitated a collective response, for example assertively posting photos tagged #Selfie4Siauw after Felix Siauw, an Indonesian cleric, declared Muslim women's selfies showing their faces to be "shameless" and against Islamic law (Moumtaz 2015; Caidi, Beazley & Colomer Marquez 2018). As these brief vignettes

highlight, the study of embodied sacred mobilities—religious-spiritual travel, situated and virtual practices and performances—highlights the need to interrogate the embodied experience “not least in terms of gender, ethnicity, class and empowerment. [and] the, as yet, underdeveloped analysis of the politics of pilgrimage” (Maddrell & Scriven 2016: 19) as part of the wider politics of gendered bodies and norms within religious travel practices.

Conclusion: setting an agenda for a critical gendered analysis of pilgrimage and spiritual tourism

Despite widespread rhetoric about the equality of pilgrims (gender, wealth, ethnicity-race, and health), many studies of pilgrimage travel and performance evidence gender (and other) differences. These differences are variously identified in degrees of inclusion/exclusion; the power relations of gendered institutional and liturgical roles; literal and normative permission to travel; gendered spaces, including gendered bodies; gendered practices and performances, including hyper-masculinity or -femininity; gendered norms of behaviour, etiquette, and dress; and circumscribed or empowered gendered agencies through religious-spiritual authority and performance. Clearly, there is a need for more systematic examinations of gender as an important aspect of intersectional identity that shapes access to, and the experience of, pilgrimage and other forms of religious-spiritual travel. Attention to gender requires reflection on the theoretical framing, research design, and methodologies of research (Maddrell 2020), as well as engagement with gendered critiques in relation to the hierarchies, discourse, opportunities, and agencies associated with empirical case studies. However, just as we need to be sensitive to the public patriarchal power relations that have shaped many formal religious institutions, pilgrimages are also mediated by their context and individual experience, evidenced in the accounts of those who find empowerment through their experience of sacred mobilities and matriarchal or gender-equality spiritual networks despite the gendered constraints of their religion or wider society. In addition to the character of the religion-spiritual practice and cultural context, socio-economic agency and age are also significant factors that intersect with gender, as is life-cycle stage, including parenthood, work commitments, retirement, elder status, and specific “significant” life events that are culturally defined as pivotal time-spaces for personal reflection and possible redirection.

The study of pilgrimage and religious-spiritual travel has been impoverished where gender has been omitted/silenced and/or monolithic (often masculine) accounts/perspectives have been presented as normative. While focusing on women’s experience in pilgrimage is a priority, so too is moving beyond overly simplified gender stereotypes and binaries in studies of religious-spiritual experience. As noted above, gender needs to be treated as contingent and intersecting with other axes of identity—beliefs, institutional role, class, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, and so on—in order to situate participant (and researcher) positionality. This in turn requires participant-centred research methods to be at the heart of such work, complemented by other methods as appropriate, including ethnographic methods and visual or textual discourse analysis.

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