

# Communitas: a trope made to travel

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## Abstract

As a key trope in the social scientific study of pilgrimage, *communitas* has been heavily criticized for its overly simplistic characterization of motivations for sacred travel and its failure to acknowledge the continued salience of conflicts among visitors to sacred shrines. Nonetheless, despite repeatedly being ‘falsified’, the trope remains a significant one within contemporary research. This paper uses the concept of entextualization to explore why *communitas* has been so readily applied to a variety of contexts. I argue that the development of the term by Victor and Edith Turner reflected an increasing degree of abstraction in their own work, resulting in a ‘seductive semiotics’. I reflect on what the apparent ubiquity of *communitas* has enabled and occluded in the study of pilgrimage.

**Key Words:** Christianity; *Communitas*; Entextualization; Pilgrimage; Victor Turner

## Communitas: um tropo feito para viajar

### Resumo

Como um tropo fundamental no estudo científico-social da peregrinação, a *communitas* tem sido fortemente criticada por sua caracterização excessivamente simplista das motivações para viagens sagradas e seu fracasso em reconhecer a eminência dos conflitos entre os visitantes aos santuários sagrados. No entanto, apesar de repetidamente ser “falsificado”, o tropo permanece significativo na pesquisa contemporânea. Este artigo usa o conceito de entextualização para explorar por que a *communitas* foi tão facilmente aplicada a uma variedade de contextos. Argumento que o desenvolvimento do termo por Victor e Edith Turner refletiu um grau crescente de abstração em seu próprio trabalho, resultando em uma “semiótica sedutora”. Reflito sobre o que a aparente ubiquidade da *communitas* permitiu e ocultou no estudo da peregrinação.

**Palavras-chave:** Cristianismo; *Communitas*; Entextualização; Peregrinação; Victor Turner

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## Communitas: un tropo hecho para viajar

### Resumen

Como un tropo clave en el estudio científico-social de peregrinación, *communitas* ha sido fuertemente criticado por su caracterización demasiado simplista de las motivaciones para los viajes sagrados y por no reconocer la prominencia de los conflictos entre los visitantes a los santuarios sagrados. Sin embargo, a pesar de ser repetidamente “falsificado”, el tropo sigue siendo importante en la investigación contemporánea. Este documento utiliza el concepto de entextualización para explorar por qué *communitas* se ha aplicado tan fácilmente a una variedad de contextos. Sostengo que el desarrollo del término por Victor y Edith Turner reflejó un grado creciente de abstracción en su propio trabajo, dando como resultado una “semiótica seductora”. Reflexiono sobre lo que la aparente ubicuidad de *communitas* ha habilitado y ocluido en el estudio de la peregrinación.

**Palabras clave:** Cristianismo; *Communitas*; Entextualización; Peregrinación; Victor Turner

Some scholarly concepts refuse to fade away, no matter how often they are dismissed, deconstructed, or apparently superseded. One obvious example in the anthropology of religion is ‘belief’, a term whose parochial, Christian-inflected association have been exposed on numerous occasions (NEEDHAM, 1972), but which somehow seems too useful to ignore. Within pilgrimage studies, the obvious candidate for such ‘undead’ status is *communitas*. Even after enduring many criticisms, the term is very much alive some fifty year after it first appeared, continuing its trajectory along an intellectual pathway located somewhere between trope and cliché<sup>1</sup>. A piece by the anthropologist of religion Marjorie Snipes (2018) is called “‘*Communitas* Keeps Revealing Itself’: The Unfinished Business of *Communitas*”, suggesting that there is much life left in the term. In some texts, it actually becomes a normative ideal. Thus, in her last book Edith Turner, who developed the concept with her husband Victor Turner in the 1960s and 1970s, claimed that *communitas* was beyond strict definition, made up of endless variations, and yet “has to do with the sense felt by a group of people when their life together takes on full meaning” (TURNER 2012, p.1). *Communitas* remains unignorable in any overview of the development of pilgrimage studies, even up to the present day.

By ‘trope’ I refer to an analytical device or motif that is widely used within a sub-field, guiding the direction of research and discussion. In themselves, such devices are not to be condemned rather the reverse: they emerge and retain salience because they provide rare insights, furnishing the discursive means through

<sup>1</sup> See also the important special issue from 2011 focusing on the theme “Pilgrimage: *Communitas* and Contestation, Unity and Difference” (Di Giovine 2011).

which resonant conversations can take form and cluster, as well as enabling comparisons across contexts. Accordingly, *communitas* remains a powerful catalyst for much academic work that includes but also goes far beyond pilgrimage, in part because of the brilliance of its original conception, but also because of its sheer applicability and mobility. But it has also run the danger of stifling other perspectives because of its sheer ubiquity.

In this paper, I highlight a particular feature of *communitas*, related to its impressive trajectory. I argue that the continued progress of *communitas* through scholarly texts illustrates what linguistic scholars (PARK AND BUCHOLTZ, 2009) call ‘entextualization’- a process whereby a stretch of language (or, in this case, an analytical term) becomes easily removable from its original context and applied elsewhere. Entextualization refers to how certain forms of speech - jokes, quotes, and authoritative utterances - can become almost reified as they circulate and are dropped ‘whole’ into other conversations or writings. I have this process in mind as I describe how the development of *communitas* emerged in the Turners’ work as a result of what I see as their increasing tendencies towards both broad comparison and high abstraction as they moved from a focus on a specific ‘field’ in Africa toward creating a much larger field of interest, combining anthropological, theological, literary, and ethical concerns. I analyze such movement as made up of a series of journeys in their personal and intellectual lives, as they responded to wider political and cultural developments in the latter half of the twentieth century. But I also argue that the way in which *communitas* has subsequently been taken up by other scholars has reinforced its entextualization, speeding its continued passage through pilgrimage studies.

## **Journey Toward Ritual**

The story of the emergence of *communitas* as an analytical term in the study of pilgrimage has been much told and retold. Some of what I say is therefore already well known, but I also want to expand current perspectives in two ways. First, I wish briefly to lay out the complex influences on the Turners, which have been documented by some scholars but often ignored within pilgrimage studies<sup>2</sup>. Understanding these influences help to explain how *communitas* has become a term and ultimately a trope that lends itself very readily to being shorn of its cultural and intellectual roots, moving across texts and case studies. Sec-

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<sup>2</sup> Di Giovine’s (2011) excellent introduction to his special issue is an exception. See also Edith Turner’s (2006) memoir *Heart of Lightness*.

ond, I hope to show that readings of the Turners' work have often been shallow not only because of a lack of appreciation of historical and academic context, but also because writers have neglected much of the larger argument surrounding *communitas*, at least as it was framed in the Turners' most famous work on pilgrimage, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (1978). There is a hidden irony here. It is undoubtedly the case that the trajectory of any trope is not fully under the control of those who originally produce it; but it may well be that some of the writing by the Turners encouraged limited understandings of the full import of what they had to say in *Image and Pilgrimage*.

Mathieu Deflem (1991, p. 2) points out that Victor Turner (1920-1983) studied not anthropology but English language and literature as an undergraduate at University College, London in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Victor and Edith Brocklesby Davis (1921-2016) were married in 1943 and 'Edie' was to become an important contributor to work that is sometimes attributed too readily to 'Vic' alone (ENGELKE 2004, 2008)<sup>3</sup>. In fact, as Stephen Glazier (2018, p. 37) points out, *Image and Pilgrimage* is the only book where Edith has co-author status, as opposed to merely being acknowledged as a collaborator and co-fieldworker. A literary sensibility remained salient to both of the Turners even as they became increasingly interested in anthropology during the early 1940s. Both also retained a propensity to combine moral commitment with a degree of outsiderhood: Victor for instance remained a pacifist during the War, serving as a non-combatant bomb disposal officer, and Edith became a founder member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in the 1950s.

Victor Turner completed his PhD not at the 'establishment' institutions of Oxford or Cambridge but at the newly started Department at the University of Manchester. The latter provided an intense social and intellectual context, committed to debating questions of social justice and change, urbanization, migration, and the politics of a post-War, post-colonial landscape, not least in Africa. The founder of the Department and Victor's supervisor, Max Gluckman, was originally trained in law, and famously encouraged what was called the extended case-study method, also termed situational analysis, which anatomized complex and conflictual sets of encounters in order to discern and reveal the wider norms and assumptions at play. Gluckman followed the 'structural functionalism' of his training in his desire to understand the ways in which social order was reinforced by social practices (EVENS, HANDELMAN, 2006, p.1); at the same time, his method emphasized

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen Glazier notes (2018, p. 35) that the couple favored the names 'Vic' and 'Edie'.

the need to comprehend social relations as inherently dynamic, with argument and contradiction viewed as “key to social order and process” (ibid., p. 3). In these senses, his perspective combined a Durkheimian interest in stability with a Marxian interest in dialectical relations. It also encouraged a significant questioning of “the unambiguous boundedness of groups” (FRANKENBERG, 2006, p. 210),<sup>4</sup> as the anthropologist was encouraged to trace the complex intermeshing of different social formations - an approach that would prompt some of Gluckman’s students to develop a “network vision of situated social process” (ibid.).

The fieldwork that resulted in Victor’s PhD was based on research among the Ndembu of Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), published with the suggestive title *Schism and Continuity in an African Society: A Study of Ndembu Village Life* (TURNER, 1957). Deflem (1991, p. 4) observes that this work reflected some of the intellectual restrictions imposed by Gluckman, who advised Turner to avoid writing about Ndembu ritual until he understood their social structure (see also ENGELKE 2008, p. 281). Further in line with Gluckman’s emphasis, the Turners’ considered that such ‘structure’ emerged in part out of relations of tension and dispute within and between villages, alongside mechanisms that could be introduced to mitigate the effects of such strife. As Edith later explained to Matthew Engelke, Victor Turner’s “version of political anthropology was local-level politics and the actual political rivalries” (ibid., p.279), and this perspective was reinforced by a fieldwork location in a village that lay at the intersection of numerous different influences (ibid., p. 280).

The most famous concept to emerge out of this early work was the idea of the ‘social drama’, the assertion that Ndembu social life was made up of successive periods of discord, rupture, and resolution, reflecting inherent contradictions in the principles underlying social life (KAPFERER, 2006, p. 136) alongside ongoing efforts to seek ways to co-exist. In this way, Victor Turner retained Gluckman’s concern with understanding order in a dynamic, chronic sense, as well as the tendency to think in dialectical terms of society being made up of shifting alliances and oppositions. From a methodological viewpoint, close examination of the heightened stages of ‘drama’ permitted the researcher to observe in high relief what lay below the surface regularities of everyday life.

Many of the themes that would inform the Turners’ future work on pilgrimage had now been established. However, soon after Victor submitted his thesis,

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<sup>4</sup> Frankenberg is referring in particular to a famous piece by Gluckman (1958) nicknamed “The Bridge Paper” by the latter’s students—an interesting image, given the Turners’ interest in pilgrimage as a crosser of boundaries.

the couple initiated a series of intellectual and social breaches of their own dramas that would not result in any easy resolution. In 1957, Victor not only renounced Marxism and his membership of the Communist Party, but also, along with Edith (the daughter of an Anglican clergyman) joined the Roman Catholic Church. The following years also saw them devoting their attention more closely to Ndembu ritual as a discrete topic in its own right. Deffem (1991, p. 5) attributes such a shift to both the theatrical influence of Victor Turner's mother and the sheer importance of ritual to the Ndembu. Frankenberg (2006, p. 215) adds another, surely significant dimension of this move for the couple: its wider relevance "in their own shared similar experience in the Eucharist and in pilgrimages of his newfound and her rediscovered Catholic faith". This impression is reinforced by Edith herself in her characterization of that time: "I suppose that for us there was something of this ritual fever in the Catholic Church" (quoted in ENGELKE, 2008, p. 284). The conjoining of ethnographic field with personal styles of worship reinforced a blurring of boundaries that would continue as their domestic and professional lives blended in a powerful combination of religious calling and intellectual commitment.

These ruptures again contained significant continuities. The Turners retained their desire to support the underdog, and to value popular expressions of culture. The turn to ritual reinforced their interest in heightened expressions of social life dramas or performances where roles were openly enacted or rejected, basic principles exposed, through an understanding of the differentiated rhythms of social life. Much later, Edith Turner (2012, p. 6) reflected that her husband emerged from the 'process anthropology' developed in Manchester with the desire to "set out the rituals he had documented, not as structured custom, but as moment-by-moment living situations". One of the further significant arguments of *The Forest of Symbols* (TURNER, 1967) was that Ndembu ritual contained 'dominant symbols', deployed across different rituals, which evoked clusters or fans of abstract, interconnected meanings but also catalyzed arousing experiences, so that - in rather Durkheimian fashion - such rituals might become effervescent occasions when the socially "obligatory" was converted into the humanly "desirable" (ibid., p. 30). Thus, mind and body might work together in the consolidation of social and cultural commitment.

The isolation of ritual as an object of study contributed in due course to what would become a more general shift in the Turners' work, toward a broader comparative scale and a greater abstraction of both cultural focus and conceptual apparatus. The change in focus occurred at a significant point of transition for the Turners, when they were about to depart to the United States for Victor to take up

a professorship at Cornell University<sup>5</sup>. Deflem (1991, p. 7) notes that during this interlude Victor first read Arnold Van Gennep's *Rites of Passage*, a work originally published in France in 1909 by a scholar who was a contemporary of Durkheim, but not available in English until 1960. Van Gennep's text provided at least two key elements for the Turnerian view of ritual, and ultimately their approach to pilgrimage: an ambitious attempt to make generalizations about rites around the world, alongside an argument that showed how rituals not only operated at times of social and cultural transition, but also displayed an inherently processual form in their very constitution (compare DEFLEM, 1991). Van Gennep claimed that rituals marking and enacting social transitions followed a strikingly common pattern of separating initiates from society, holding them temporarily in threshold-like periods of liminality, and then reintegrating them back into society as publicly acknowledged occupants of their new social status.

This idea of 'passage' resonated well with the Turnerian emphasis on 'process'. In his first response to Van Gennep - written in the same library in Hastings where he originally came across the work - Victor Turner wrote the essay "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*" (1964). One part of Van Gennep's 'grammar' of pilgrimage is focused on: the period of liminality rendered distinct from, and defined dialectically in relation to, the behaviors surrounding it. Turner emphasized that, during liminality, ritual initiates are kept apart from everyday life, while many of their distinguishing features - gender, personality, status - are stripped away, rendering them equal to each other and socially nullified, even blank. During such a period of transition, when they are neither one thing nor the other, initiates are rendered particularly receptive and submissive to powerful sacred symbols and the effects of playful if temporary reversals of social order<sup>6</sup>. Liminality therefore presents an alternative to the status quo, but usually ends in people being returned, albeit transformed, to everyday structures of life and new obligations associated with whatever new status has been reached<sup>7</sup>. What is changed is not society, but the person undergoing ritual

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<sup>5</sup> Glazier (2018, p. 37) remarks that Manchester colleagues were surprised and vexed when Victor accepted a professorship in the US, but even more surprised when the Turners announced they had converted to Catholicism.

<sup>6</sup> In his summary of such liminality, Peacock (2018, p. viii) talks for instance of how in initiation young people might be isolated from their family and community, perhaps in a forest. Rituals are then led by adults and the strangeness of the situation accentuated by harsh treatment.

<sup>7</sup> Thus Turner (1969, p. 103): "The neophyte in liminality must be a tabula rasa, a blank slate, on which is inscribed the knowledge and wisdom of the group, in those respects that pertain to the new status."

induction. Thus, a key point is that liminality is presented as most prevalent within social and ritual systems constituted by forms of stability, repetitiveness, and communal participation, which are seen by the Turners as most characteristic of ‘tribal’ as opposed to Western, industrial contexts. This distinction between industrial and non-industrial now seems anachronistic, but the point is that liminality emerges out of situations of social and collective obligation (TURNER, 1974, p. 42) where even the breaking of rules (‘anti-structure’) is regulated and carefully framed, and where the initiate is ultimately pitched back into a society marked by rigid normative structures and shared role expectations (COLEMAN, 2018).

Such ideas were being developed by the Turners as they were migrating not only from the United Kingdom to the United States, but also away from a British anthropological focus on social structure toward relatively freer, North American interpretations of culture and symbol (see e.g. GEERTZ, 1973)<sup>8</sup>. Summarizing Edith Turner, Engelke (2008, p. 284) notes that the important book *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (TURNER, 1969), based on lectures delivered in 1966 and written while the two were at Cornell, was produced at a time when the Turners - as ever combining the personal and the professional, the practical and the theoretical - were hosting ritualized anthropology seminars in their home, with academic presentations (‘structure’) being followed by ‘beer and a break for informal conversation (‘anti-structure/liminality) and then focused discussion (‘reaggregation’).

At a larger scale, the 1960s also saw periods of student revolt (MOORE, MYERHOFF, 1977), mass ‘dropping out’ of hippies and others, and the increased visibility of newer Pentecostal and charismatic movements. All of these events and ‘happenings’ contributed to a wider sense that something akin to anti-structure could be witnessed not only at the center of Ndembu ritual, but also on the streets and campuses of Euro-American life, with universities one of the chief fostering-grounds for liminal-like behavior. Indeed, to some degree such antinomianism might even be said to have permeated the rituals of Roman Catholicism to which the Turners were devoted, given the prominence of the controversial Vatican II reforms, instituted during the 1960s to modernize and democratize the liturgies and wider structures of the Church. It seemed that “process” was in the air.

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<sup>8</sup> Nelson Graburn (2011) also mentions the significance of Victor Turner’s period of leave (1961-2) in the very “unstructured” Center for the Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences in Palo Alto, California.



## Journey Toward Communitas

If the 1960s saw significant personal, political, and intellectual transformations for the Turners, *The Ritual Process* signaled a further development in the speed and direction of their anthropological trajectory. This is not only the book where the concept of *communitas* was first developed, it also represented a shift from a focus on the Ndembu to a much wider, comparative, perspective. Thus, Chapter Three, called “Liminality and Communitas”, begins with a summary of Van Gennep’s rites of passage idea, and moves from a more detailed discussion of the Ndembu to swift summaries of other African ethnography juxtaposed with brief glances at millenarian movements, hippies, and Benedictine monks. The next chapter, “Communitas: Model and Process” starts with reference to student seminars Victor ran at Cornell, moves through Tolstoy, Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, the poverty of Franciscan monks, Indian *bhakti* movements, and ends with Bob Dylan. We see Van Gennep’s concept of liminality being further abstracted and extended, positioned on the borders between orderly transition and wider societal change. Edith Turner (1992) herself later described this book as marking a new turning point, shifting “attention to the ways of the West” that would continue throughout much of the rest of their careers.

It is in Chapter Three of *The Ritual Process* that Victor Turner argues that the character of human relationships during the liminal period “is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders”, adding that “I prefer the Latin term ‘*communitas*’ to ‘community’, to distinguish this modality of social relationship from an ‘area of common living’” (TURNER, 1969, p. 96). The term itself seems to have been borrowed from a book by urban planners Percival and Paul Goodman, called *Communitas: Means of Livelihood and Ways of Life* (1947) - an influential and visionary text, but one devoted to the best methods of running the post-war city rather than an anthropological depiction of social relations of radical equality to be found in conditions running the full range from, say, millenarian movements to tribal relations of matrilinearity in societies where patrilineal ties are stressed<sup>9</sup>. Interestingly, Victor Turner actually removes his version of *communitas* not only from connections with everyday community but also from rootedness in conventional understandings of place: “I have tried to eschew the notion that *communitas*

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<sup>9</sup> Edith (2012: 6) adds that Victor gained a sense of *communitas* when working in the British Army during World War II, as a conscientious objector loading food on to railroad wagons.

has a specific territorial focus, often limited in character, which pervades many definitions” (1969, p. 126)<sup>10</sup>.

In the Turnerian view, escape from structure, territory, and ‘societas’ did not need to result in what the political scientist Thomas Hobbes, in *Leviathan* (1651), had famously called a “war of all against all” but might be funneled more positively into “a relationship between concrete, historical, idiosyncratic individuals” (ibid., p. 131), and one where “these individuals are not segmentalized into roles and statuses but confront one another rather in the manner of Martin Buber’s ‘I and Thou’” (ibid.: 132; BUBER, 1923). This invocation of Buber, an Austrian-born, Jewish philosopher and theologian, seems significant for what it says about the expanded intellectual and ethical landscape through which the Turners were now moving with some speed. According to Edith Turner (2012, p. 6), at stake was the imagining of a form of solidarity that neither celebrated the triumphalist individualism of post-War America nor recalled the ominous mass rallies of 1930s Germany. For Buber and the Turners the conjuring of a sense of ‘I-Thou’ represented a spontaneous removal of mediating obstacles so that a temporary relationship of mutual ‘flow’ might emerge between people, creating unbounded reciprocity and unfettered interpersonal connection what Buber called *Zwischenmenschliche* (TURNER, 1969, p. 127)<sup>11</sup>. These equalizing tendencies had both semiotic and spiritual implications: the cultural and the social baggage of everyday life could be cleared away, producing something akin to both a Christian ideal of irenic reconciliation and a counter-cultural celebration of authenticity.

At one point *The Ritual Process* refers to the ways in which Christianity retains traces of “the passage quality of the religious life” (TURNER, 1969, p. 107) in the depiction of the believer as stranger to the world, traveler, and/or pilgrim. Four years later, Victor published a famous essay in *History of Religions* called “The Center out There: Pilgrim’s Goal”, where he referred to wide-ranging work in progress on “those pilgrimage whose pilgrimage processes, many of which have consolidated into pilgrimage systems, to be found in the major historical religions: Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Shintoism” (ibid., 1973, p. 191). Laying out much of his future approach, he links pilgrimages with the idea of networks, suggesting that sites are notable for the ways in which they bring

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<sup>10</sup> Indeed, my choice of paper title consciously echoes the sub-title of a book about Pentecostalism (Dempster *et al.*, 2011) that describes it as “A Religion Made to Travel”.

<sup>11</sup> Another important influence for Victor Turner in linking notions of flow to an anthropology of experience was the German thinker Wilhelm Dilthey (see e.g. TURNER; BRUNER, 1986).

together multiple journeys to and from the relevant sacred location. Thus, the notion of the “center out there” claims the possibility of creating a location for religious authority separate from political or economic concentrations of power. It plays on the structural peripherality of many sites - the fact that they are often reached only through arduous journeys along routes that become increasingly sacralised along the way (ibid., p. 214) - while also asserting that they have a magnetic quality, generating a “field” of communications and other activities that may even result in the growth of cities and other infrastructure such as markets and roads.

However, it is with the jointly-published publication of *Image and Pilgrimage* in 1978 (dedicated to the late Max Gluckman) that the Turners consolidate their processual approach through a major study of Christian pilgrimage that presents sacred travel as a prime ritual activity through which *communitas* can be cultivated. By this point, the Turners had spent a decade or so at the University of Chicago but had also carried out numerous pilgrimages together in Europe and the Americas. Such work represented a further methodological shift from the Ndembu years. As Edith recalled (ENGELKE, 2008, p. 287):

It was different from standing with a clipboard in the middle of the bush... For the pilgrimage work, we did do ‘traditional fieldwork’ in the sense that we went on pilgrimages ourselves. But a lot of it was textual analysis. We looked a lot at writing by devotees.... And then of course the experience of going on the pilgrimages as Catholics was personal as well as observational.

Edith also makes an explicit connection between this approach to pilgrimage and the writing about ritual from a decade earlier, suggesting that it “strikes me as being of a very different nature from the Ndembu work, and more a continuation of the latter chapters in the *Ritual Process*” (ENGELKE, 2008, p. 287).

Indeed, *Image and Pilgrimage* does not look at all like a conventional ethnographic monograph. A preface and initial chapter signal the intellectual and methodological move that the Turners feel that they are making: “The ‘extended case-method’ has been temporarily set aside, the ‘social drama’ abandoned, in order to expound the interrelations of symbols and meanings framing and motivating pilgrim behavior in a major world religion” (TURNER; TURNER, 1978: xxiv). We see here a rejection of some of the Manchester School approach, alongside a scaling up to examine the operations of a globe-spanning religion. The ethnographic focus shifts from social context to symbolic complex, village-bound Ndembu to mobile pilgrim, intimate rivalries to anonymous encounters, opening up the possibility of a dazzling comparative survey.

The increased scope of the perspective operates not only across space but also across time, as historical accounts and narratives are examined along with contemporary observations. Indeed, temporal considerations form part of the Turners' rather categorizing of four different 'types' of pilgrimage, which include but also transcend Christianity (TURNER; TURNER, 1978, p.17-18): 1) prototypical forms, established by the founder of a historical religion or his disciples, such as Rome and Jerusalem (Christianity), Mecca (Islam), Benares and Mount Kailas (Hinduism) and Kandy (Buddhism); 2) pilgrimages displaying syncretism with earlier religious practices (including Chalma in Mexico, with its Ocuiltecan and Aztec elements); 3) pilgrimages of the European middle ages; and the post-Tridentine - referring to Catholic theological responses to the Reformation - period of European Catholicism, especially from the nineteenth century onwards, marked by fervent personal piety, anti-secularism, and elements of self-conscious medievalism.

These classifications inform some of the organization of the book, which devotes individual chapters to Mexican pilgrimages (especially Guadalupe), the ancient St. Patrick's Purgatory, originally medieval pilgrimages including Walsingham, and post-industrial Marian pilgrimage such as Lourdes. In the middle of these accounts, one chapter takes a semiotic approach to the vexed question of iconophily and iconoclasm, with special reference to Marian pilgrimage as it is manifested in Christian history and theology. Some of the tone and approach of the writing can be discerned from the following two extracts from the chapter on St. Patrick's Purgatory in Lough Derg in Country Donegal:

The pilgrim may now break his fast. He eats in the hostel, seated on a long bench by a plain table, his bare feet resting on the cold cement floor. He is provided with an oaten biscuit, eaten dry, or dry bread, which may, as a concession to the gourmet in all of us, be toasted! In drinks he has a choice: cold or hot water...flavoured with salt and pepper or sweetened (TURNER; TURNER, 1978, p.120).

Each boatload of pilgrims contains a cross-section of human society that has a special interest. Sharp contrasts in age are frequent: two men of ninety have been known to have made the pilgrimage in recent years, while girls and boys in their very early teens are always among the crowd...When the newcomer casts off his footwear it is a symbol that he is shedding at the same time all those externals that make up status and lend importance to the individual: house, family and dependents, atmosphere, daily occupation. If he is a personage in his ordinary life, he here undergoes an immense levelling and becomes just one of the crowd (*ibid.*, p. 134).

In fact, the second paragraph is not a direct observation but a quotation by the Turners from a book by Alice Curteyne (1944), further signalling their ethnographic distancing from the field. It is presumably included because it illustrates so clearly an anti-individualistic, *communitas*-like experience, as genders, generations, and classes are rendered temporarily irrelevant. This dimension of the pilgrimage is reinforced by the Turners' universalizing, even impersonal references in the first paragraph to "the pilgrim"<sup>12</sup>. Much of the focus is also on pilgrimage as exceptional experience, a sharp disciplining and humbling of the body in order to cultivate both the soul and a particular form of sociality. Operations of Church authorities are noted but mostly placed in the background, rendered less relevant than the actions of ordinary pilgrims praying and processing in and to extraordinary places. The book celebrates a populism oriented not toward everyday life but rather embodied by noble and direct forms of piety.

The reader's own movement across the landscape of *Image and Pilgrimage* involves a rapid if exhilarating intellectual ride through a "Christian culture" that is broad to be sure, but still largely made up of major Catholic shrines of Europe and Mexico. It must be acknowledged that the book actually contains much more than can be contained by the concept of *communitas* (COLEMAN, 2014). Early on, the Turners state that pilgrimage should be understood in relation to larger histories and materialities (TURNER; TURNER, 1978, p. 23), and deploying but also appropriating Weberian imagery they accept that a Protestant Ethic has often been linked to capitalism, while arguing that a "pilgrimage ethic", with its emphasis on 'holy travel' and the benefits flowing from such travel, may have helped to create the communications networks and contractual relations that later made mercantile and industrial capitalism a viable national and international system" (ibid., p. 234; also TURNER, 1973, p. 28). Pilgrimage is even presented a permeable form of ritualized action, given that it "is more responsive to social change and popular moods than liturgical ritual, fixed by rubric" (TURNER; TURNER, 1978, p. 231). One of the broadest depictions of a wider, differentiated, pilgrimage field occurs with the programmatic statement: "We insist, as anthropologists, that we must regard the pilgrimage system...as comprising all the interactions and transactions, formal and informal, institutionalized or improvised, sacred or profane, orthodox or eccentric, which owe

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<sup>12</sup> Though this more impersonal style of ethnographic writing was more common in the 1970s than it is now.

their existence to the pilgrimage itself” (ibid., p. 22). This system includes an environment of both servicing mechanisms and antagonistic agencies<sup>13</sup>.

Yet, what is curious about such a far-reaching program is that it is largely occluded by the powerful imagery of anti-structure. While that the Turners agree that “pilgrimage should be regarded not merely as an ideal model but as an institution with a history” (1978, p. 231), they also trace the workings and presence of *communitas* across time and space, linking it to biblical language and a wider conception of ‘flow’. The statement “Pilgrimages are an expression of the *communitas* dimension of any society, the spontaneity of interrelatedness, the spirit which bloweth where it listeth” (ibid., p. 32) is illustrated not only by moving across Christian shrines, but also through occasional references to other religions, such as when it is claimed that “Islam is ideally conceived as a vast *communitas* of cobelievers” (ibid., p. 188) or when tendencies toward liminality “are located in local-level pilgrimage shrines in both Hinduism and Christianity” (ibid., p. 239). Idiosyncrasies of history are acknowledged but also erased through the depiction of forms of anti-structure that do take some of their character from the structures they are dialectically opposing, yet seem to have a pan-human ontological consistency in the spirit-like appearance of a *communitas* that is capable of appearing anywhere.

One further dimension of the book should also be mentioned, as it illustrates further the freeing of the Turnerian depiction of anti-structure from specific social bonds or contexts (COLEMAN, 2018). The Turners pose the question of what happens to liminality in so-called industrial societies. While they accept that it can continue to exist in certain tightly-knit organizations such as masonic orders, they argued that it tends to move toward a looser condition, which they term the *liminoid*. While resembling the liminal in its manifestation within spaces set aside from mainstream productive and political events (see also TURNER, 1974, p. 32), the *liminoid* emerges from contexts marked by cultural pluralism, an extensive division of labor, fragmentation, individualization, contractual relations, commercialization and, above all, choice. Thus “optation pervades the *liminoid* phenomenon, obligation the liminal” (ibid., p. 43), and if liminality pitches anti-structure predictably against structure, the *liminoid* is concerned more with play and experimentation, realized through such varied media as literature, scholarly ex-

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<sup>13</sup> The sense of a wider pilgrimage landscape is picked up again when the Turners use the geographer Surinder Bhardwaj’s (1973) well-known analysis of Hindu shrines to consider the catchment areas of Christian shrines as existing at scales ranging from intervillage to international levels (TURNER; TURNER, 1978, p. 238-9).

ploration, drama, sport, and ritual. Whereas the liminal is ‘eu-functional’ (ultimately contributing in a conservative way to social structure, *ibid.*, p. 52), the liminoid has the potential to embody social critique. In this vein, while the Turners (1978, p. 253-254) see Christian pilgrimage as sharing a number of features with ‘passage rites,’ including release from mundane structure and homogenization of status, they conclude that it is for the most part a liminoid rather than a liminal phenomenon, given its origins in the voluntary decision to leave home to visit a shrine.

## **Journey toward Abstraction**

We can now take stock of the Turners’ trajectory from the intimate social dramas of the Ndembu to the great pilgrimage sites of the (mostly) Catholic world, and their use of *communitas* as a vehicle through which to make this journey. We see how linguistic form and descriptive content come together to create an analytical apparatus that is seductive, mobile, and increasingly unspecific. Indeed, it is worth remembering that in one sense the Turners are writing a book about pilgrimage; but in another, they are using pilgrimage to illustrate a still wider theme: ‘processual analysis’<sup>14</sup>.

A feature of *Image and Pilgrimage*, seemingly trivial and not often remarked upon, is that it ends with appendices<sup>15</sup>. These additions might appear to provide the driest possible conclusions to such a vividly written text, but Appendix A lays out the intellectual and linguistic apparatus required for others who wish to apply the general principles that underpin the book. Ethnography is stripped away to reveal abstractions, often expressed in Latinate language<sup>16</sup>. The Turners’ lexicon and grammar is much more extensive than the tripartite framework provided by Van Gennep, and it is made up numerous components including “dominant symbols”, “root paradigms”, “flow”, “transience’ (also called “nomadism)”, “marginality”, “liminality”, “the liminoid”, and of course “*communitas*”. The latter is defined initially as “A relational quality of full unmediated communication, even communion, between definite and determinate identities, which arises spontane-

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<sup>14</sup> It is worth considering this processual approach in the light of Hodges’s remarks (2008, p. 400) that, as globalization has become implicated in anthropological analysis, the sense that social experience is ‘fluid’ has become a dominant paradigm. See also Kapferer’s (2006, p. 135) linking of Gluckman’s ‘situational’ ideas to Deleuze and Guattari’s emphasis on continual becoming.

<sup>15</sup> Appendix A is termed “Notes on Processual Symbolic Analysis” and B is a chronology of the Lough Derg pilgrimage.

<sup>16</sup> *Limen* is Latin for threshold. *Communitas* in Latin refers to an unstructured community in which people are equal.

ously in all kinds of groups, situations, and circumstances” (ibid., p. 250). In this sense, *communitas* is understood to be constituted through dialogic relations that do not depend for their manifestation on the presence of any particular type of social form or frame.

As a term, ‘*communitas*’ contributes to the potential for its wide deployment by being almost but not quite an academic neo-logism, evoking but also distinct from ‘community’ and ‘communion’. It plays on a double register of sounding both Catholic and scholarly, and as a word that is not used in everyday language (unlike for instance ‘belief’), it is insulated from the semantic vagaries of being deployed in everyday discourse. At the same time, it embraces and partially appropriates other terms such as ‘spirit’ and ‘flow’, while having affinities with both Durkheimian ‘collective effervescence’ (OLAVESON, 2001) and Weberian ‘charisma’ (cf. KAMAU, 2002).

More generally, *communitas* plays on a key ambiguity of Durkheimian sociology: the fact that ‘the sacred’ may or may not refer to the explicitly or officially religious. In discerning anti-structure within but also beyond conventional forms of worship the Turners and their students were able to extend their analysis to take in social movements and other ways of ‘opting out’ that touched on performance, the arts, popular culture, and so on (see e.g. MOORE; MYERHOFF, 1977). These ambiguities are also contained within one of the most famous/infamous observations of the Turners, to the effect that “tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist” (TURNER; TURNER, 1978, p. 20). It is worth also taking into account the words immediately following, which are often omitted by commentators: “Even when people bury themselves in anonymous crowds on beaches, they are seeking an almost sacred, often symbolic, mode of *communitas*, generally unavailable to them in the structured life of the office, the shop floor, or the mine.” The adverbs “almost” and “often” are highly suggestive, pointing the reader toward the counter-intuitive idea that sacrality and *communitas* might be found in seeming unreligious places. On the one hand, anti-structure thrives on its dialectical relationship with that which is deemed structural. On the other, the retention of “almost” may reveal an anxiety over too easy an equation between the assumed asceticism of pilgrimage and the hedonism implied by certain forms of tourism. The half pilgrim/half tourist formulation is thus notable in its ambivalence, distinguishing between while also conjoining pilgrimage and tourism, implying nonetheless that they might be evaluated along a single criterion of assessment: the extent to which they contain the transient, transcendent quality of



communitas<sup>17</sup>. It is notable that Edith Turner's (2012) much later book on communitas has the sub-title "The Anthropology of Collective Joy": the latter, after all, is a noble sentiment, yet one that is locatable on the beach as easily as in a shrine.

It must be admitted that communitas, despite its seeming ineffability, is also broken down by the Turners into a number of variations, which begin to complicate the picture of easy and abstracted 'flow' (see Appendix A of TURNER; TURNER, 1978, p. 252; also TURNER, 1973, p. 193-4). First comes the spontaneous or existential kind, "which defies deliberate cognitive and volitional construction" and is directly opposite to social structure. A secondary, normative sort is said to "capture" (TURNER; TURNER, 1978, p. 252) communitas within institutional forms, ethical precepts, and rules. The third variation is called ideological, involving "the formulation of remembered attributes of the communitas experience in the form of a utopian blueprint for the reform of society" (ibid.).

This list has a rather Weberian flavor in in the way it hints at 'ideal types' of anti-structure versus structure, formlessness versus form, but also in its implication that communitas represents a charismatic experience that is always liable to being crystallized into and compromised by bureaucratic rules and institutions (compare PEACOCK, 2018, p.ix; DI GIOVINE, 2011, p. 252). Yet, it is also rather non-Weberian in its explicitly normative, spiritual implications. The Turnerian description seems to place highest value on the most fragile manifestations of communitas. Victor Turner (1973, p. 194) states that his "preliminary survey" of types of communitas indicates that the most common form in pilgrimage situations is actually 'normative', in other words, always already hedged around by a degree of institutionalization. Nonetheless, hope is at hand: "Yet the communitas spirit is still latent in the norm and can be reanimated from time to time" (ibid.). Much later, Edith Turner's *Communitas* celebrated the concept's "shyness and its untouchability by commercialization and institutionalization" (ibid., p.xii), claiming further that "communitas is most likely to turn into something else when watched. Researchers can only get a purchase on this slippery thing when they are right inside of it" (ibid., p. 8).

In subsequently re-characterizing the Turners' depiction of communitas, it is tempting to deploy some of their own analytical vocabulary in order to understand its place in their intellectual trajectory. Recall that the earlier idea of the 'dominant

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<sup>17</sup> Dean MacCannell's *The Tourist* (1976) is a well-known exploration of the structure of modern mass leisure that explores the quest for an 'authenticity' missing from everyday lives. Graburn's influential essay "Tourism: The Sacred Journey" (1977) equated pilgrimage and tourism by showing similarities in their structure.

symbol' was that it moved across ritual contexts, containing a fan of interconnected and cognitive meanings while also being capable of provoking intense physiological experience. Similarly, *communitas* is not only mobile, but also seems to incorporate a range of theoretical and theological references - to the spirit, to charisma, to flow, to process, and so on - alongside the emotional and physical effects of anti-structural, threshold-like behaviors. Yet, while dominant symbols among the Ndembu embody culture-specific themes, including matriliney and local understandings of both fertility and maturity, *communitas* draws on a processual symbology assumed to apply to humanity as a whole, and to have a broadly ethical dimension. It seems that the Turners were attempting to create a language through which anthropological and spiritual sensibilities might be combined, thus creating for themselves a rather liminoid discursive space within their own discipline<sup>18</sup>.

Elsewhere, I have argued that the 'scaling up' evident in *Image and Pilgrimage* was prescient in envisioning an anthropology of Christianity a quarter of a century or so before the sub-field fully came into existence (COLEMAN, 2014). The latter's goal to treat the religion as a coherent tradition (ROBBINS, 2003) with a certain cultural logic (TOMLINSON; ENGELKE, 2006, p. 19; MCDUGALL, 2009, p. 185) certainly fits with the Turnerian depiction of a "Christian culture" in the sub-title of their book. Here, I want to add that just as the Turners' work on Christianity looked forward to later research in certain respects, so it can profitably be examined retrospectively in light of central preoccupations of the contemporary sub-field. To follow this argument, we must first take a brief theoretical detour.

In an influential overview, Fenella Cannell argues that Christianity was a "repressed" theme within anthropology over the formative period of the discipline (2006, p. 4). This lack of recognition reflected the need to separate anthropology from theology as a legitimate method for studying religion (*ibid.*, p. 14). At the same time, the very proximity of Christianity to the culture of many Western ethnographers rendered its more diffuse influences "only imperfectly perceptible" in the construction of such potentially ethnocentric categories as ritual and belief (*ibid.*, p.5; compare ASAD, 1993). Cannell notes that these gaps in self-awareness have increasingly been exposed over the years, but are still evident. Where anthropologists have discussed Christianity, they have often taken as normative an ascetic stereotype of the religion, and one that has tended to highlight the cultivation of forms of subjectivity and interiority that look rather Protestant, even

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<sup>18</sup> One of the architects of the contemporary anthropology of Christianity, Joel Robbins (2006), distinguishes theology from anthropology by arguing that the former is a 'committed' discipline in the way that the latter is not.

Calvinist (ibid., p. 20)<sup>19</sup>. Furthermore, one of the reasons why such a perspective has resonated with anthropologists and others - whether or not they profess to any personal faith - is that the stereotypically Protestant focus on transcendence, freedom, and individuality fits more broadly with the “supposedly destined trajectory of modernity” (ibid., p. 39).

Cannell’s arguments are complemented by a piece by Webb Keane in the same volume called “Anxious Transcendence”. In line with much of what Cannell argues, he explores links between characteristically Protestant ideas of personhood, individuality, and sincerity and broader, ‘modern’ notions of authenticity and freedom, where it is assumed that realization of a true and free self involves release from obligations of kinship, tradition, and regimented, repetitive forms of self-expression (KEANE, 2006, p. 318). Authentic sincerity becomes a form of transcendence, rendering the person transparent to themselves and to others, so that “I am making myself - as a private and inner self - available for you in the form of public, external expressions” (ibid., p. 317). Keane accepts that these sentiments are idealized: indeed, our chronic anxieties as modern subjects arise from our inability ever fully to abstract ourselves from material limitations and standardized means of expression. We are condemned to permanent failure in our attempts to achieve ultimate freedom; yet we are conditioned to keep trying.

Both Keane and Cannell expose anthropology’s anxieties about transcending its Christian inheritance, but also the wider resonance of ideas that suggest the possibility of breaking free of binding, ‘inauthentic’ obligations. They also refer to underlying tensions between broadly - or at least stereotypically - Protestant and Catholic understandings of Christianity and modernity (NORGET et al., 2018), centering around differing understandings of authority, tradition, materiality, and mediation. At the beginning of the twentieth century, such tensions informed Weber’s tendency to portray Catholicism as a ‘backward’, idolatrous, ‘magic-oriented’ faith (STARK, 1968). Sixty years later, they also became evident in the reverberations around the Second Vatican Council, the great ecclesiastical reform taking place as the Turners were turning to the Catholic faith, and which was aimed at modernizing the Church and simplifying its liturgies while seeking a degree of reconciliation with Protestantism.

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<sup>19</sup> If Cannell’s argument itself seems rather abstract, we might consider how the history of colonialization has often involved European missionaries condemning local ‘pagans’ for being in thrall to materialism and idolatry. In contemporary contexts, those Christians who receive the most scepticism are often those who appear to blend spiritual and material concerns, such as the much-derided ‘Health and Wealth’ Gospel.

Given these debates and developments, it is striking that Edith noted in her preface to the paperback version of *Image and Pilgrimage* that “I now find myself interested in tracing how the revival of the Catholic pilgrimage system paralleled the revivalist movements in Protestantism” (2011, p.xix). For her, the two were not irreconcilable in that both celebrated authentic and popular, rather than artificial and elite, culture. Furthermore, *communitas* - located across people, rather than within objects; concerned with spontaneity and directness; and “not yet externalized and fixed in structured form” (see TURNER, 2012, p. 3) - addressed long-standing tensions between Protestant and Catholic attitudes towards materiality and mediation and appeared to provide some kind of reconciliation between the two.<sup>20</sup>

The developments described by Cannell and Keane reflect a rather Protestant-inflected intellectual agenda, whereas the Turners were ostensibly constructing a Catholic landscape of worship. Nonetheless, the latter’s preoccupations came very close to some of the themes highlighted by Cannell and Keane concerning transcendence, sincerity, and personhood. The Catholicism they foregrounded was not the mundane one of parish adherence and regularized worship, but more evanescent moments of devotion achieved after exceptional effort, when ties to kinship and home could finally be stripped away in favor of the purified, transcendent fellowship of *communitas*<sup>21</sup>. In this focus on the embodied experience of faith alongside the more spirit-like character of *communitas* the Turners were actually wrestling with tensions over the relationship between abstraction and experience that had surfaced earlier in their depiction of ‘dominant symbols’ - ritual objects that might take the form of a tree among the Ndembu or be exemplified by the Virgin Mary in Catholic culture, but which combined high moral principles with “grosser” dimensions of physicality and desire (see TURNER; TURNER, 1978, p. 247), perhaps exemplifying what Edith also called “the oxymoron ‘the body of the spirit’” (*ibid.*, p.xxi).

There is a further dimension to this juxtaposition of transcendence and materiality, and it refers to the broader theoretical and methodological abstractions and expansions of scale being attempted by the Turners, which would also become a central preoccupation of a much later anthropology of Christianity. It is

<sup>20</sup> Of course, she was also writing at a time when Catholic charismatic renewal was emerging.

<sup>21</sup> In this respect we might contrast the antinomianism of their Catholicism with, for instance, Mary Douglas’s emphasis on structure and order, though Douglas was also interested in developing a symbolic anthropology in which the powers and dangers of thresholds came to the fore (e.g. DOUGLAS, 1966, 1970).

notable that the central chapter of *Image and Pilgrimage*, dealing with the key historical and theological questions of tensions between iconophily and iconoclasm, is also devoted to Marian shrines and the figure of the Virgin Mary. While much of the chapter concerns Mary as intercessor and healer as well as dominant symbol in various historical cases, the chapter ends on a normative note that bring three dimensions of Mary together: first, her power as personification of the Church in its “nonlegalistic aspect, a collective mother in the order of freedom”; second, her affinity with anti-structure - “As Mary goes, so goes the Church....As *communitas* goes, so goes the Church”; and third, the significance of Mary in pointing to a specifically “global” *communitas*, yet one always vulnerable to being subverted by “political structure” into becoming localized, and thus “a symbol of xenophobic localism” (TURNER; TURNER, 1978, p. 171).

Here, the Turners are celebrating the powers of a universal symbol in her most extensive, globalizing manifestation (intimate yet universal), and they are doing so in a text that emphasizes the benefits of transcending specific contexts through a processual anthropology that cannot be confined to the boundaries of any single ethnographic case. For the Turners at least, *communitas* represents a spiritually infused activity unconfined by specific material form or context, even as its fellowship is oriented toward the expression of a profoundly human sociality. Thus, the trajectory of Turnerian processual anthropology proceeds by combining a number of elements that are expressible through a number of dialectical relationships: larger scale cultural analysis juxtaposed with smaller scale fieldwork; sacralised movement with sacred place; abstract faith with embodied commitment; egalitarianism with hierarchy; a ‘modern’ concern to achieve religious purity and transcendence with respect for tradition and ritual discipline. Of course, such binaries were not always so simple to discern, and the relationships between terms varied from opposition to complementarity. But the overall direction was toward abstraction, and pilgrimage provided an immensely powerful vehicle through which to embark on an ongoing journey that was at once scholarly and spiritual.

## **The Journey Continues**

Victor Turner died relatively soon after the publication of *Image and Pilgrimage*, in 1983, but his legacy certainly lived on and was cultivated energetically by Edith, who for the next three and a half decades moved the processual approach in phenomenological and psychological directions, not least through her distinctive contributions to the anthropology of consciousness (e.g. TURNER, 1993). There is no doubt, as Michael Di Giovine states (2011, p. 247), that “the theory

has proven to be foundational in the social scientific study of pilgrimage and, later, (secular) tourism”. Such influence has gone beyond studies of Christianity or Christian contexts. Kiran Shinde (2011, p. 337) notes for instance that “debates about possibilities of *communitas* are also found in many scholarly works on Indian pilgrimages (e.g., GOLD, 1988; MORINIS, 1984)”. Furthermore, even a scholar who would become synonymous with powerful opposition to the model, Michael Sallnow, acknowledged (1981, p. 163) that it “proved widely influential in the recent upsurge of interest in the phenomenon amongst social anthropologists”, in part because it appeared to provide a way of discussing ritual that was not tied to particular political, ethnic, or social boundaries (also WERBNER, 1977, p.ix).

With influence came critique. A much-cited response from Erik Cohen (1992) focused scepticism on the Turnerian imagery of a ‘center’ divorced from socio-political concerns, and did so from the perspective of an ethnographer of Thai Buddhist shrines. Cohen (*ibid.*, p. 35) made the point that the model tended to generalize from Catholic examples, where the separation between religious and political domains was institutionalized (see also READER, 2005). Other cultural and religious situations, such as “Eastern and particularly the Indian, religions—Brahmanism, Hinduism, Buddhism” (*ibid.*), did not distinguish such spheres in a similar fashion. Moreover, certain prominent Christian pilgrimage centers, such as Rome (not one of the locations highlighted in *Image and Pilgrimage*) could hardly be called remote and “out there’ in the Turnerian sense (*ibid.*, p. 36). A further problem was the Turners’ seemingly rather deterministic assumption that supra-local centers would automatically be more inclusive than local shrines. Generally, Cohen preferred to think of shrines in terms of the greater or lesser degrees of formality required of pilgrims, while accepting that pilgrimage might combine in some circumstances with tourism.

Other authors reinforced a general sense that the Turnerian framework of ‘flow’ and ‘fellowship’ was - ironically - too rigid to apply to all pilgrimages. The point was made succinctly by Ellen Badone and Sharon Roseman (2004, p. 4; also MORINIS 1984, p. 257-60; 1992, p. 8): “While *communitas* may be one element of the pilgrimage experience, this social and emotional quality cannot be assumed to exist in all pilgrimages; nor can the concept be used as a master key to unlock the meaning and significance of pilgrimage for all participants in every cross-cultural setting.”

Most devastatingly, the passionate promotion of *communitas* invited an equal and opposite response emphasizing the fomenting of structure through sacred travel. Just three years after the publication of *Image and Pilgrimage*, Donald

Messerschmidt and Jyoti Sharma (1981, p. 572) reported that during their field-work in the Nepal Himalayas “we sought evidence to support or refute Turner’s concept of anti-structure or *communitas*”. Their definitive conclusions are worth quoting at some length:

The few instances of assistance, humane gestures of help and comfort between strangers thrown together on an arduous mountain trek under treacherous monsoon conditions, were no different from those observed on a crowded cross-country bus two weeks later and did not stand out as behavior unique to pilgrimage. In short, the pilgrims fully supported the structural status quo, taking care to abide by the standard rules of avoidance and austerity to maintain individual and caste purity.... Our data, then, refute the *communitas* hypothesis; this pilgrimage is fundamentally and unequivocally a structure-affirming occasion. We now posit an alternative to Turner’s hypothesis: that pilgrimage serves to highlight and reinforce the principal themes idiosyncratic to a religious system. *Communitas* seems a reasonable expectation of Christian pilgrimage, reinforcing Christianity’s stress on ‘brotherly love’ and equalitarian social relationships, while structure-affirming behaviour ...seems a more reasonable expectation of pilgrimages within the hierarchical system of Hinduism, a system which rewards social division.

Clearly such a view challenged the idea that the special fellowship described and almost prescribed by the Turners was universal, although it retained the possibility that it might have validity within Christianity, while suggesting that pilgrimage more generally might have the power to amplify tendencies already present within a religion. Even within Christianity, *communitas* appeared hard to find in the form that the Turners would have recognized. A little over a decade after the publication of *Image and Pilgrimage*, an edited volume emerged whose sub-title referred to the emergent field of “The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage” (EADE; SALLNOW, 1991). In this text, the central image of *communitas* was replaced by one of chronic conflict through the trope of contestation.

By 2008, Peter Margry concluded (2008, p. 21) of the Turners’ work that: “the theory has been falsified over and over again on the basis of ethnographic case studies”. Yet, what interests me about Margry’s statement is not so much the assertion that *communitas* has been found wanting as his observation that it has *repeatedly* been discovered to be inadequate<sup>22</sup>. Sustained falsification in the natural

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<sup>22</sup> What Margry means by ‘falsification’ might imply that no ‘*communitas*’ has been located in a given shrine (as suggested by Messerschmidt and Sharma) or rather that it is not the only form of sociality to be observed.

sciences tends to mean that, even in the absence of an intellectual revolution, a theory no longer retains salience among active researchers, and drops from attention<sup>23</sup>. What has been intriguing about *communitas* has been its capacity to withstand recurring intellectual assassination within pilgrimage studies and beyond. It has been ‘disproved’ again and again; but scholars are still being provoked into searching for its existence.

I suggest that an important part of the explanation for *communitas*’s continued animation within pilgrimage studies takes us back to its qualities as an ‘entextualizable’ concept, and therefore its capacity to move across contexts in simplified and relatively coherent form. To put the point in slightly different way, *communitas* offers a seductive semiotics, whereby the researcher is encouraged to search for its presence or absence, or to index a given site or situation in relation to the degree of authentic *communitas* found, and then to report findings back to the community of other pilgrimage scholars. Indeed, the concept seems actively to invite such inquiry in determining what is most significant about any given system of pilgrimage. Even Messerschmidt and Sharma’s stern refutation of its applicability for Hinduism provides a case in point, as they are drawn into attempting to support or refute the concept through close observation of certain forms of pilgrimage sociality. They did not find any *communitas*, but much of their project was nonetheless framed by the attempt to assess the relative generosity and equality - or otherwise - of relations among pilgrims<sup>24</sup>.

Much subsequent research has tended to be snared into searching for *communitas* in some way, not so much challenging the ontology of the concept as seeing whether ‘it’ does or does not apply in the case under consideration. Indeed, the very ineffability of *communitas* may encourage researchers to seek it. Consider the wording of Sean Slavin’s account of his walk to Santiago de Compostela, where he notes (2003, p. 12):

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<sup>23</sup> Of course, all scholarly tropes have trajectories that shift over time, but when they block alternative perspectives, they become like Thomas Kuhn’s (1962) famous notion of ‘normal science’, where established paradigms discourage the questioning of long-established assumptions, occluding alternative ways of understanding or observing phenomena under study. The social sciences probably have even more of a tendency than the natural sciences to accumulate concepts and paradigms rather than abandoning them altogether. For instance, Galina Lindquist and I (Lindquist and Coleman, 2008) ultimately concluded that it was impossible to remove ‘belief’ from the analytical lexicon of scholars of religion. Instead, we argued that by writing ‘against belief’ it was possible to both invoke and critique the concept at the same time.

<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Miles-Watson and Sukanya B. Miles-Watson (2011, p. 327) refer to other studies of pilgrimage in the Himalayas (SAX, 1991; VAN DE VEER, 1988) that see *communitas* as providing too simplistic a model for understanding motivations for pilgrimage.



While I do not claim to have observed instances of *communitas* amongst pilgrims to Santiago, they did create common ground with each other by sticking to simple conversations about present events. They would commonly talk about the landscape, the day's events, the history and myths of the route and, sometimes, deeper issues of theology and philosophy.

Or again, in Jonathan and Sukanya Miles-Watson's sensitive and insightful observations on pilgrimage in the Himalayas: "Communitas is not entirely absent from Indian pilgrimage. After their ritual bath at the Manimahesh dal the pilgrims establish a bond or *mitri* with a fellow traveller by anointing their foreheads with a symbolic *tilak* or sign from the waters of the lake." Or again, in John Sherry, Jr. and Robert V. Kozinets's exploration of the New Age Burning Man ceremony in Nevada, where they describe the construction and destruction of a sacred building (2007, p. 132):

The Temple is a personal labor of love, designed and largely executed by a 'people's' artist. It is widely viewed as the single most heartfelt gift given to the entire community... It convenes community in the heart of community, and harnesses *communitas* in the service of mindfulness or soulfulness.

Or, for a final example, this time taken from an historical study of Chinese pilgrimages to Mount Tai (DOTT, 2004, p. 92): "Communitas within any particular pilgrimage society would probably have been strong, given the members' common point of origin and their mutual membership in an organization that outlasted the pilgrimage". All of these authors are writing long after *Image and Pilgrimage* came out, and all express some doubts about the widespread applicability of the concept; and yet it is still invoked and indexed in a way that assumes that 'it' somehow exists - in social contexts that range from the Nevada desert to Late Imperial China.

The ways in which *communitas* has been deployed post-*Image and Pilgrimage* reinforce its dizzying trajectory and further entextualization. Often, as in the examples just given, it is deployed in isolation from much of the rest of the analytical lexicon that constituted Turnerian processual anthropology, or the wider environment of servicing mechanisms and antagonistic agencies that the book also mentioned in passing. Furthermore, the variations listed by the Turners tend to be conflated into a generic state of solidarity and equality<sup>25</sup>. Part of such stripping away of the

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<sup>25</sup> There are of course honorable exceptions to this tendency. Emily Porth (2005) for instance argues for the importance of specifically normative *communitas* at a Canadian Catholic shrine.

subtleties of the concept involves the tendency to use the word ‘liminal’ to describe pilgrimage behaviours, even in highly complex, voluntaristic social contexts. In other words, the attempt to distinguish the liminal from the liminoid has generally failed to strike much of a chord in the scholarly imagination (COLEMAN, 2018). Andrew Spiegel (2011, p. 11) suggests that one reason may be that the distinction rests on far too crude a division between ‘primitive’ and ‘modern’ societal types. In any case, its removal makes *communitas* even more open to being appropriated by scholars considering what must be assessed in any study of pilgrimage activity or sacred tourism<sup>26</sup>.

Such simplification leads us to a further dimension of the seductive semiotics of *communitas*. The concept resonates with a broader anthropological and indeed social scientific tendency to focus on situations of maximum intensity and high relief in examining religious commitment (compare BANDAK; JORGENSEN, 2012) - a tendency that reflects a Durkheimian inheritance of emphasizing the important of overtly marked ritual activity. The Turnerian interest in anti-structure, hedged around by protective behaviors, continues this trend even further. Thus, what is interesting about the imagery of “the center out there” is not only its depiction of a sacred realm separated from the everyday, but also the idea of the “center” as a framing device, encircling and amplifying ritual and symbolic commitment amongst those who have gathered together from far and wide.

### **Concluding Remarks: On Entextualization and Enclaving**

In November 2013, a group of anthropologists including myself contributed to a special panel of the American Anthropological Association, which that year was being held in Chicago, a place that had been the Turners’ home town for a number of years. The panel was being held to reflect on the impact of *Image and Pilgrimage* as a recognized anthropological ‘classic’ that had been published thirty-five years earlier. I knew that Edith was a little nervous about the occasion and the reception the book would receive, but her talk was a typically committed, passionate performance, using language that ranged between the academic and the poetic. After other people had given their presentations, she noticed that speakers and audience could scarcely fill the very large space allocated to the session, making the question period potentially rather stilted. So she took control,

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<sup>26</sup> The potential for more imaginative adaptations of *communitas* certainly exists, even if it has not been fully realized in the literature. An interesting example is provided by Kiran Shinde’s (2011) attempt to focus on socio-spatial arrangements rather than experiential perspectives in generating *communitas*.

arranging everybody in a large circle where everybody - ranging from young graduate students to distinguished Professors - could converse on an equal basis.

Perhaps even more than what was said on that occasion, Edith's spontaneous action was eloquent in its directness and generosity - converting the formality and hierarchy of the panel into a sociality that embodied a vision of *communitas*. The circle she created was inward-looking, but for a positive reason, helping to focus attention and direct participants away from the limitations of the space, giving our conversation an intimacy and intensity rare at such anonymous conferences. And so academic discussion was combined, as so often in Edith's life, with concrete practice.

This paper has approached *communitas* in way that has been critical but also appreciative of the most influential trope in the sub-field of pilgrimage studies. In my concluding remarks I wish to reflect briefly on a further dimension of the entextualized quality of *communitas*, and one that has had both positive and less positive effects on the field: its tendency - like the circle that Edith created at the AAA - to focus on actions separated from the everyday, highlighting points of peak intensity and concentration. My argument is that this anti-structural approach has provided a model that can flow easily between fieldwork contexts, yet it has also had the effect of manoeuvring pilgrimage studies into an enclave, disarticulated from wider academic discussions to which it could contribute (COLEMAN, 2014). To illustrate my argument the obvious point of comparison and contrast is with the study of Pentecostalism. While Edith clearly saw strong parallels between pilgrims and Pentecostals in the 1960s, I want to emphasize some differences in the subsequent trajectories of research into these two phenomena.

Over the past half century or so, growing academic interest in both pilgrimage and Pentecostalism has reflected the increasing mobility of populations in many parts of the world. Nonetheless, while Pentecostalism has made its mark as a dynamic religion of the migrant to the world-city or the wealthy inhabitant of the suburban mega-church, until the last couple of decades or so pilgrimage has mostly been presented as an escape to remote and set-apart landscapes.

What we might think of as the Pentecostal paradigm has done much to form the current anthropology of Christianity and other scholarship, in part because it has given scholars a powerful ethnographic means to discuss the globalization of religious forms - truly representing a "religion made to travel" as it follows population movements across the world, while embodying an activist stance toward the cultures it encounters. On the one hand, Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity (as ROBBINS [2004] terms it) seems to replicate "its doctrines, organizational

features, and rituals in canonical, Western form wherever it is introduced” (ibid., p. 118), while on the other it seems skilled at accepting “local enchanted cosmologies only to attack them, thus profoundly altering the way they are understood” (ibid., p. 126-7). The point here is that such Christianity can be represented as inherently mobile but also deeply engaged—no matter how controversially - in attempting to transforming the wider contexts in which it finds itself. In these terms, Pentecostalism is what I call a “part culture”, presenting worldviews meant for export but often in tension (and therefore in strategic struggle) with the values of any given host society (COLEMAN, 2006, p. 2). In Turnerian terms, it represents a kind of ‘anti-structure’ that is also constitutionally and chronically oriented toward transforming ‘structure’: it is not easily confined within set apart spaces and times of operation.

By way of contrast, scholarly emphasis on the anti-structural dimensions of pilgrimage has tended to direct attention toward the dimensions of pilgrimage that - ideally or in actuality - take it away from close connections with other centers of action and debate. If Pentecostalism is a ‘part’ culture, pilgrimage has come to seem more like an ‘apart’ culture (COLEMAN, 2014). And if Pentecostalism reaches out toward society in order to convert it, the Turnerian depiction of pilgrims reaching toward the ‘center out there’ turns analysis away from political, economic, and cultural dimensions that go into the creation and maintenance of any pilgrimage environment. The scholarly trajectories embodied in these two popular religious forms therefore took them in different directions for much of the past half century - a divergence that scholars are only beginning now to question.

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