

Indigenizing Pilgrimage Conference

growing, identifying & localizing transformative journeys
Presentation Abstracts: Saturday May 9, 2015

Tahar Abbou (University of Adrar, Algeria):

"The Pilgrimage to Rakb Sidi Cheikh."

Session 2.3 (1:00-2:30pm) pilgrimage, place and ancestry II

This paper explores Rakb Sidi Shaykh, a yearly celebration that takes place in Labiodh Sidi Cheikh, a town located in the Algerian West Saharan Atlas, on the last Thursday of June. The festivities take place under the auspices of Ouled Sidi Shaykh, the sons of Sidi Shaykh, descendants of the prominent Sufi figure Sidi Abdul Qadir Ben Mohamed. Thousands of pilgrims from the communities affiliated with the Shaykhiya, a Sufi Brotherhood founded by Sidi Shaykh, take part in the religious rituals and secular festivities. Rakb Sidi Shaykh has recently been classified a world heritage site by UNESCO.

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Sawsan Al Saraf (Multimedia Artist, Montreal, QC):

"Rihla: Re-presentation of a Diaspora-Nomad's Life."

Session 1.3 (10-11:30am) pilgrimage, place and ancestry I

Rihla, named for a classical Arabic term for journey, is a multimedia series that represents the personal narrative of my life-stories in diaspora. The decision I made to leave my homeland, Iraq, a quarter of a century ago has shaped my lived history, and formulated the unstable and shifting terms that make up my past and present. I have traveled 53,037.83 miles in 21,345 days, crossing many geographic landscapes between the Middle East and North America. With the ongoing *Rihla* project, I am critically engaging and exploring the conflicted inner lives and nomadic experiences of displaced, diasporic individuals.

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Matthew Anderson (Concordia University, Montreal, QC):

"The St Olaf Pilgrimage among Diaspora Scandinavians."

Session 2.3 (1:00-2:30pm) pilgrimage, place and ancestry II

According to humanist geographer Tim Cresswell, "Places are sites where stories gather." North American descendants of Scandinavian emigrants repeat their grandparents' stories of a homeland increasingly romanticized, and distant in time and memory. Those few who walk the St-Olaf trail in Norway encounter a place whose meaning is as much under negotiation as their Scandinavian identity. In this paper I argue that pilgrims following routes in ancestral homelands highlight some of the most interesting ambiguities in the revival of western walking pilgrimage.

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Pauline McKenzie Aucoin (Simone de Beauvoir Institute, Concordia Univ., Montreal, QC):
"Transitions and Meaning-Making in the Journey of Nishiyuu."

Session 2.1 (1:00-2:30pm) journey in indigenous traditions II

This paper examines the journey of Nishiyuu undertaken by Cree youth of Quebec and their guides in the winter of 2013. Walking over 1500km from northern Hudson Bay to the national capital (Ottawa), the trekkers were joined by Mohawk, Algonquin, Miq'maq, and Inuit walkers, and they were met on Parliament Hill by a very emotional gathering of thousands over two months after their departure. This trek has been described by its participants as a spiritual journey; in this presentation, it will be interpreted as a pilgrimage event with the features of vision, transformation, avowal, endurance and healing.

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Sébastien Caquard (Concordia University, Montreal, QC):

"Online Mapping of Stories and Journeys."

Session 1.2 (10-11:30am) mapping pilgrimage

Mapping journeys and stories has been a growing activity in the context of the Web 2.0. There is now a broad range of online mapping applications designed to enable Internet users to map their own narratives. As part of a research project dedicated to the mapping of life stories of refugees, we are currently reviewing various online cartographic applications for story mapping. This presentation discusses both the potentials and limits of these applications for mapping physical and spiritual journeys. Throughout this review, the conceptual and methodological challenges raised when attempting to trace stories on maps will be presented and discussed.

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Garrett Cook (Baylor University, Waco TX):

"A Recurring Pattern in Mesoamerican Pilgrimage."

Session 2.1 (1:00-2:30pm) journey in indigenous traditions II

Historical, archaeological and linguistic evidence supports the existence of institutionalized pilgrimage within aboriginal (pre-conquest) Mayan culture. This paper presents ethnographic research that outlines distinctive patterns of sacred travel in Mesoamerican, and more widespread indigenous American pilgrimage, including consideration of the Huichol pilgrimage to their ancestral homeland (Northern Mexico), the Cuiquillo pilgrimage to the Christ of Chalma (Central Mexico), the K'iche' pilgrimage to Esquipulas (Guatemala) and the Andean journey to the sacred lagoon.

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Stacey Engels (Independent Researcher, New York, NY):

"The Ground beneath her Feet: the Artist as Seeker in the Big City of Dreams."

Session 2.2 (1:00-2:30pm) pilgrimage as personal journey

New York City is frequently referred to as a 'cultural Mecca'. Tourists travel to New York to go to Broadway plays and Museum Mile, Ground Zero and Strawberry Fields. They 'make pilgrimages' to iconic stores, historical sites, the watering holes of famous artists. Coexisting with the mythological city are not just the real and the quotidian, but also the remnants of revolution, slavery, settlers, indigenous culture, as well as the natural world. In this paper, I will paint a more holistic portrait of NYC, simultaneously exploring how focus on the real and the present is at least as likely to bring us in contact with the sacred as focus on the distant ideal.

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Lesley D. Harman (King's University College, Western University, London, ON):

"The River, My Soul: Women of the Thousand Islands Journey Home."

Session 2.2 (1:00-2:30pm) pilgrimage as personal journey

The magnetic lure of islands in the Thousand Islands has drawn women home since the border region of the St. Lawrence River was settled by Americans and Canadians in the early twentieth century.

Adventure, self-reliance, love of the water and the unparalleled healing power of the River all feature in the experiences of River Women who come home, year after year, generation after generation. Based on a seven-year autoethnographic study of forty-three women living on islands alone or with their families, this paper will discuss their stories and experiences using a feminist perspective on pilgrimage.

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Christine Jamieson (Concordia University, Montreal, QC):

"Journey in Aboriginal Spirituality."

Session 1.1 (10-11:30am) journey in indigenous traditions I

Pilgrimage is a distinctive expression of spirituality that potentially transforms human consciousness, speaking to the deepest longings of the human heart. Spiritual journeys in Aboriginal traditions are often constituted as cyclical encounters with the sacredness of land, vegetation, animals and all beings. This presentation will explore the phenomena of Aboriginal journeys as catalysts for transformation of consciousness via their expansion of linear notions of pilgrimage and their alteration of the human experience of time and space.

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Ann MacDonald (St Paul University, Ottawa, ON):

"Virtual Pilgrimage as Pathway to Spiritual Transformation."

Session 1.2 (10-11:30am) mapping pilgrimage

This paper considers the need to nourish new forms of spirituality within a large faith-based organization whose vibrant spiritual life has declined. Medievalist Kathryn Rudy had used the term "virtual pilgrimage" to describe the monastic practice of imaginatively walking in Christ's footsteps as legitimate alternative to actually visiting Jerusalem in the Middle Ages. In pilgrimage, walking as an act of meaning becomes the framework for personal and communal transformation. I will explore the potential for spiritual expression and renewal that virtual pilgrimage might offer both a contemporary faith community and those they serve.

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Danielle Moretti-Langholtz & Martin D. Gallivan (College of William & Mary, Williamsburg, VA):

"Return to Werowocomoco: Attempts to Re-Indigenize a Powhatan Sacred Site."

Session 1.1 (10-11:30am) journey in indigenous traditions I

Located in what is known as Virginia's "Historic Triangle," hundreds of thousands of tourists travel annually to Jamestown, Yorktown and Colonial Williamsburg to visit key locations associated with the founding of the United States. Arguably, these visitors are engaged in a civic pilgrimage. However, these seventeenth and eighteenth century sites overlay the cultural, spiritual and historic places of indigenous peoples, including Werowocomoco, once the seat of power of the Powhatan polity. In this paper we ask, "Is the Indigenization of Werowocomoco truly possible while the site remains in non-Native hands?"

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Eileen Moore Quinn (College of Charleston, SC):

“Rocks Are His Written Words’: the Cognitive and Mnemonic Dimensions of *An Turas Cholmcille*.”

Session 2.3 (1:00-2:30pm) pilgrimage, place and ancestry II

An Turas Cholmcille is considered to be the longest continuous pilgrimage in Ireland. Annually on June 9, members of the indigenous community of Gleann Cholmcille, County Donegal, and interested others gather at midnight to trace the pilgrims’ path. After providing a phenomenological overview of the journey, this paper examines a set of *stidia* (pilgrimage stops) to demonstrate how indigenes’ ideas about this pilgrimage are reinforced daily. Such quotidian reiteration of *An Turas Cholmcille*’s meaning anchors community members in the cognitive and mnemonic dimensions of the pilgrimage, contributing to its longevity.

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Larry Russell (Hofstra University emeritus, Long Island, NY):

“Beyond the Site: the Amplification of Pilgrimage to Chimayó, New Mexico.”

Session 2.2 (1:00-2:30pm) pilgrimage as personal journey

The linear vector of pilgrimage suggests a journey from a place of origin to a destination that holds religious significance. It can be traced on a map. However, the practice of pilgrimage cannot be contained within these boundaries because the physical and religious acts of a pilgrim are far reaching in time and space. This paper is a series of narratives drawn from fifteen years of pilgrimage to a village shrine in New Mexico. It describes the spill of energy and knowledge from these events into the mundane life of the pilgrim after his or her return. Over a period of time, the permeable frontiers between his discrete journey and his broader movement through life become evident as one informs the other. The specific details drawn from experience sharpen the description of pilgrimage as a metaphor for life when the one becomes a training for the other.

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Alison Smith (The Citadel, Charleston, SC):

"Sacred, Filmic and Contested Spaces: Lourdes and Santiago."

Session 1.2 (10-11:30am) mapping pilgrimage

Pilgrimages to Lourdes and Santiago have helped shape broad cultural narratives of national pride and identity for French and Spanish Catholics. However, by engaging with these sacred spaces in ways that highlight contradiction, conflict, and also humor, filmmaker Luis Buñuel and journalist Jean-Dominique Bauby free the spectator from preconceived notions about what pilgrimage means. Both Buñuel in his film *The Milky Way* and Bauby, in Julian Schnabel’s film *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, approach pilgrimage as a secular, quasi-accidental experience. They open space for new meanings by presenting contested views of iconic national shrines.

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Sara Terreault (Concordia University, Montreal, QC):

"De Vieux-Montréal à Kahnawa:ké: Pilgrimage and Performative Pedagogy."

Session 2.1 (1:00-2:30pm) journey in indigenous traditions II

In 2014, a group of professors and students walked a 32 kilometre pilgrimage between two historic pilgrimage centres: a seventeenth century chapel in Vieux-Montréal founded by Saint Marguerite Bourgeoys (1620-1700) and the shrine of Saint Káteri Tekahkwí:tha (1656-1680) at Kahnawa:ké Mohawk

reserve, south of the city. Though pilgrimage is often conceived of as taking place far from home in an often idyllic natural setting, I will discuss how this pilgrimage through our own metropolitan neighbourhoods – and their complex histories - constituted a profound experience of meaning-making and simultaneous discovery of self and other.

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Anne Väitalo-Paré (Independent Researcher, Montreal, QC):

“Sung by the Journey, Voiced by the Earth – ‘Yoiked’ to Wisdom.”

Session 1.3 (10-11:30am) pilgrimage, place and ancestry I

In the Lappish forest, birds chirp, reindeer bell, bears growl, and the Saami walks ... and yoiks. The Saami are the indigenous nomadic people of the Arctic Sápmi region of Northern Europe; yoiking is their evocative singing that stems directly from communion with person or place. I was born in Finland of a Lappish mother, but left when I was two for an expatriate nomadic life. I would like to present and transmit the power of yoiking and its connection to walking the land. For many of us with frail links to ancestral ways, walking can restore dialogue with the land, one in which we may find ourselves birthing practices similar to those of our ancestors.

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Will Walker (Independent Researcher, Montreal, QC):

“Walking into the Wisdom of my Name: a Pilgrimage of Ancestral Reclamation and Indigenous Becoming.”

Session 1.3 (10-11:30am) pilgrimage, place and ancestry I

I come from a line of ten generations of William Walkers. I have discovered that I am not only a Walker by name: arriving in North Carolina from Ireland in the mid-1700s, my ancestors literally walked north to Ontario in pursuit of freedom and possibility. Their journey lasted four months and nearly took their lives. In 2012, I began my own pilgrimage from Hillsborough, NC to my destination of Beamsville, ON. I learned that indigeneity is not only an identity associated with cultural history: it is a process, a pilgrimage, available to anyone willing to become radically intimate with their personal life journey, and the inner and outer ecologies that shape it.

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Buck Woodard (Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA; American Indian Initiative, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, VA):

"The Return of Indian Nations to the Colonial Capital: Heritage Relationships, Indigenous Pilgrimage and the Production of Native Public History."

Session 1.1 (10-11:30am) journey in indigenous traditions I

The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation (CWF) is dedicated to the preservation and restoration of Virginia's 18th-century capital city. While the institution's educational mission aspires to represent "diverse peoples who helped shape" America, CWF has struggled with the inclusion of indigenous peoples and with developing a Native public history. Native peoples are once again pilgrimaging to Williamsburg, but it has been a journey of conflict, success, and irony for both the CWF and tribal communities. Through the lens of applied anthropology, this paper explores the successes and challenges of Native partnerships in Williamsburg's public history.

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