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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Beek, Suzanne van der, 1988- author.

Title: New Pilgrim stories: narratives, identities, authenticity / by Suzanne van der Beek.

Description: Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, [2022] | Series: Ritual studies monograph series | Revision of the author's thesis (doctoral)—Tilburg University, 2018. | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022029313 (print) | LCCN 2022029314 (ebook) | ISBN 9781531019716 | ISBN 9781531019723 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Christian pilgrims and pilgrimages—Spain—Santiago de Compostela—History—21st century. | Camino de Santiago de Compostela—In literature. | Camino de Santiago de Compostela—In mass media. | Group identity. | Narration (Rhetoric)—History—21st century.

Classification: LCC BX2321.S3 B44 2022 (print) | LCC BX2321.S3 (ebook) | DDC 263/.0424611-
-dc23/eng/2022090

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2022029313>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2022029314>

Carolina Academic Press
700 Kent Street
Durham, NC 27701
(919) 489-7486
www.cap-press.com

Printed in the United States of America



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Narratives · Identities · Authenticity

SUZANNE VAN DER BEEK



CAROLINA ACADEMIC PRESS

Durham, North Carolina

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*Marcheur, ce sont tes traces ce chemin, et rien de plus;
Marcheur, il n'y a pas de chemin,
le chemin se construit en marchant.
En marchant se construit le chemin,
et en regardant en arrière on voit la sente
que jamais on ne foulera à nouveau.*

Antonio Machado

After my first night on my first Camino, at an albergue in St-Jean-Pied-de-Port, the unbelievably hospitable Joxelu gave me this poem as inspiration for the coming journey. It was the first time that a stranger reached out to try and help me on my journey—and it would not be the last. I'd say that the poem could also be a reflection on the writing of a book: never forget that a project that seems daunting to begin with is only finished by simply keeping going. Looking back after five years of work on this book, I only now see the path I have walked, the product of which you are holding in your hands. However, as no pilgrimage is completed solely on one person's strength, this book is carried by many people whom I all owe my gratitude.

First and foremost, I want to thank my two academic supervisors: Paul Post for challenging and reassuring me at all the right moments, and Jan Blommaert for celebrating curiosity and keeping me enthusiastic for pursuing this research. Beyond this, Tilburg provided me with a whole new academic family that has pushed me, comforted me, and kept me on the right track while writing this book: Lieke, who is both a comrade and a mentor; Sandra, my trusted deadline buddy; Piia, who inspires me with both her knowledge and her kindness; Sander, who taught me that teaching is an integral part to being a good academic; Tom, who introduced me to the

magical world of digital humanities; Karin, who turned a manuscript into a book; and the Peers family, who endlessly read my work, listened to my doubts and concerns, and provided me with solid feedback on almost everything I have written.

Although this research started out as a strictly academic project, there is no denying the important place that the Camino has taken up in my life and in my heart. This is largely due to the warm welcome I received in the pilgrim community, both in Spain and at home. I want to thank all pilgrims who opened up and told me their stories. Without you this book would have never existed.

Last but not least, many thanks to my family, both the one I was born into and the one I picked up along the way. Papa, mama, oma, Maarten, Hanneke, little Abel and Luuk, Hannah, Wouter, Cootje, Renée, Francisca, Rike, and Max—I can't believe how lucky I am to have you in my life.

SERIES EDITORS' PREFACE

Pilgrim Paradoxes: Identity, Experience, and Contradictions

*Andrew J. Strathern and Pamela J. Stewart**

The first two words of our title here are taken from the last two words of this book. Van der Beek's overall purpose in her finely tuned study is to examine the narratives given by participants in the famous pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Spain and to tease out from these accounts the various senses of identity that they instantiate. In addition, she brings to bear on her analysis her own experiences of walking the "Camino", the pilgrim pathways that lead to the sacred site itself. She has immersed herself in the copious publications and blogs produced about the Camino and she deftly and painstakingly weaves these into her own account, openly pointing to the intertextuality of texts by pilgrims and scholars since the site was established in the ninth century A.D. when the grave of St. James at Santiago de Compostela was said to have been discovered there, followed by the building of a Cathedral on the site to honor him.

Van der Beek's initial concentration is on the material of narratives by pilgrims. From her thoughtful discussion of these narratives she moves on to consider how their creators develop senses of identity around the experience of pilgrimage. In looking at the narratives she notes a certain overlap between tourism and pilgrimage, sensitively picking her way through the opposed analytical trends in this arena and concluding that, while there is overlap, at the pilgrimage end of the spectrum the religious background and the foregrounded search for meaningful experience transcending daily life emerge as defining foci.

She centers her study on contemporary experience more than on all the detailed history of pilgrimage from medieval times onward. Nevertheless, she recognizes that a sense of the layered experiences of pilgrims in the past focuses on important components of contemporary experience, consistent with the weaving together of narrative elements and themes from the past and from written as well as oral sources. Pilgrims on the Camino are often concerned to write about their experiences as a record and as a testimony, directed to their own social circles as well as to a putative wider public. Their narratives show a mixture of the pragmatic, the banal, and the transcendental. Suffering and frugality are significant elements in these accounts. Classically, the pilgrims must walk long distances over the Pyrenees. For example, they must make slow but intense journeys and stay as guests for one night in accommodation reserved for certified pilgrims.

Throughout all this, Van der Beek points out that the identity of the pilgrim is gradually acquired and consolidated. Being a pilgrim is the result of becoming one, as an extended process of movement towards the desired destination. This concept of movement and the removal of the traveling pilgrims from their everyday homes and activities is what led Victor and Edie Turner (1978) to apply the concepts of 'liminality' and 'communitas' to the pilgrim experience, linked to the idea of a ritual of passage and to the removal of the initiate in such a rite from a former identity and their entry into a new one. The virtues and problems of this approach have repeatedly exercised thinkers. Van der Beek's take on these debates follows a trend in which the generalizations in the Turners' model are replaced with a recognition of the variability of experience, including multiple variations on secular versus religious forms and the partial blending of these domains. She accompanies her discussion with a careful review of the wide-ranging literature on such issues, providing a readable road map to authors and their classificatory schemes. In the end she finds merit in the original ideas of the Turners as well as important modifications that emerge from her understanding of variability in the data, perhaps a feature related to post-modern sensibilities and a decline in institutional religious affiliations. With this decline in formal religiosity and the growth of a more general idea of spirituality there comes also the possibility of different sensibilities to be revealed in the pilgrimage process, as Lena Genzöe has explored in a study of the Swedish pilgrims to Santiago, published in the *Journal of Ritual Studies*. Vol. 28.2

(Genzöe 2014). Counteracting the emphasis on variability, Richard Werbner's 'Sacred Journey' study reasserts the general model of the movement of the pilgrim towards a sacred center. (Werbner 1989). And Kathleen Ashley and Marilyn Deegan have provided a richly aesthetic general picture from medieval times on Art and Ritual in the routes to Santiago (Ashley and Deegan 2009). On another set of fronts, one can think of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* as a harbinger of the stress on narratives that inform Van der Beek's study, and a further trope on the whole idea of life as a pilgrimage or travel to a place in Heaven is in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Searching for a further aid to the analysis of narrative Van der Beek makes effective use of Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of 'the dialogic' (1981). Narratives, Bakhtin argues, are aimed at readers or listeners, who are in turn anticipated to have a response to the narrative. The writers of blogs about the Camino (and other pilgrimage sites) may be aiming first at an immediate circle of readers today. In more formal contexts, however, the aim may be to reaffirm tenets of faith, validated by experience. At the same time, the writers are writing personally to find their own identity. There is a tension between this individual aim and the aim of contributing to the collectivity. This tension is one of the constituents that make up the 'Pilgrims' Paradoxes' that are flagged by Van der Beek in her Conclusion. Perhaps the contradictions are at least partly dissolved in the holistic and moving mix of the pilgrimage experience itself along the Path or Way of Life.

Note

*Pamela J. Stewart (Strathern) and Andrew J. Strathern are a wife-and-husband research team who are based in the Department of Anthropology, University of Pittsburgh, and co-direct the Cromie Burn Research Unit. They are frequently invited international lecturers and have worked with a number of museums to assist them with their collections. Stewart and Strathern have published over 50 books, over 80 prefaces to influential books, over 200 articles, book chapters, and essays on their research in the Pacific (mainly Papua New Guinea, primarily the Mount Hagen, Duna, and Wiru areas) and the South-West Pacific region, (e.g., Samoa, Cook Islands, and Fiji); Asia (mainly Taiwan, and also including Mainland China and Inner Mongolia, and Japan); Europe (primarily Scotland, Ireland, Germany, and the European Union countries in general); and New Zealand and Aus-

tralia. One of their strengths is that, unlike some others working in Mount Hagen among the Hagen people, they learned the language, Melpa, and used it to understand the lives of the local people. Their most recent co-authored books include *Witchcraft, Sorcery, Rumors, and Gossip* (Cambridge University Press, 2004); *Kinship in Action: Self and Group* (Prentice Hall, 2011); *Peace-Making and the Imagination: Papua New Guinea Perspectives* (University of Queensland Press with Penguin Australia, 2011); *Ritual: Key Concepts in Religion* (Bloomsbury Academic Publications, 2014); *Working in the Field: Anthropological Experiences Across the World* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); *Breaking the Frames: Anthropological Conundrums* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); *Sacred Revenge in Oceania* (Cambridge University Press, 2019); *Sustainability, Conservation, and Creativity: Ethnographic Learning from Small-scale Practices*. (Routledge Publishing, 2019); and *Language and Culture in Dialogue* (Bloomsbury Academic Publishing, 2019). Their recent co-edited books include *Research Companion to Anthropology* (Routledge Publishing, 2016, originally published in 2015); *Exchange and Sacrifice* (Carolina Academic Press, 2008); and *Religious and Ritual Change: Cosmologies and Histories* (Carolina Academic Press, 2009), along with the updated and revised Chinese version (Taipei, Taiwan: Linking Publishing, 2010). Stewart and Strathern's current research includes the topics of Eco-Cosmological Landscapes; Ritual Studies; Political Peacemaking; Comparative Anthropological Studies of Disasters and Climatic Change; Language, Culture and Cognitive Science; and Scottish and Irish Studies. For many years they served as Associate Editor and General Editor (respectively) for the *Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania* book series and they are Co-Series Editors for the *Anthropology and Cultural History in Asia and the Indo-Pacific* book series. They also currently serve as Co-Editors of four further book series: *Ritual Studies*, *Medical Anthropology*, *European Anthropology*, and *Disaster Anthropology*, and they are the long-standing Co-Editors of the *Journal of Ritual Studies* (on Facebook: at facebook.com/ritualstudies). Their web-pages, listing publications and other scholarly activities, are: <http://www.pitt.edu/~strather/> and <http://www.StewartStrathern.pitt.edu/>.

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