### TOMMI MENDEL

# **Foot-Pilgrims and Backpackers**

## Contemporary ways of travelling

### Introduction

This article deals with two modern forms of travelling, which both have developed into boom industries over the last 25 years: the foot pilgrimage along the *Camino Francés* to *Santiago de Compostela* in Spain and journeys along so called backpacker's trails. Whereas the label of 'pilgrim' is still mostly associated with devotional persons leaving home out of purely religious motives, young people taking to the road as 'backpackers' are generally perceived as pleasure seeking globetrotters. However, the intention of this essay is to break with these stereotypes and to work out some of the major similarities between what at first glance appear as two entirely different ways of travelling. Although there do exist some studies about the relations between pilgrimages and tourism,<sup>1</sup> nobody, as yet, seems to have focussed particularly on the similarities between foot-pilgrims and backpackers.

The idea of studying these two peculiar forms of travelling arises, on the one hand, from my own long-term backpacking experience, comprising almost a decade, and on the other hand, from over nine months of field research that I conducted along the *Shikoku Henro* pilgrimage in Japan, which resulted in the ethnographic documentary film *Arukihenro*.<sup>2</sup> Comparing the outcomes of my studies in Japan with literature about the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela and about backpacking generally, I not only came across many parallels and similarities between these two pilgrimages with completely different cultural and religious backgrounds, but also between the religious connotations ascribed to pilgrimages and the perceived secular character of backpacking travels.

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Graburn 1989, Smith 1992, Rinschede 1992, Badone & Roseman 2004, Timothy & Olsen 2006, and Swatos 2006.

<sup>2</sup> *Arukihenro—Walking Pilgrims*. Documentary film, Tiger Toda Productions 2006. 73 min, OV/e. For more information, see www.tigertoda.ch.

The present article gives a short overview of my ongoing research, which involves field research along the *Camino Francés* in Spain and along back-packer's trails in South-East Asia applying audio-visual methods, with the aim to present the conclusions in a scientific documentary film.<sup>3</sup> Having just returned from the field in Spain, the paper at hand is still predominantly based on literature from other scholars and only to a lesser extent on my own empirical findings.

I will begin by defining the terms 'foot-pilgrims' and 'backpackers' as a first step before elucidating the development of the current travelling boom. Second, I shall delineate a theoretical basis, referring to Victor Turner's conceptions, and work out a structural frame for both foot-pilgrimages and backpacker's travels. The final part of this article will then discuss the similarities between foot-pilgrims and backpackers, regarding the protagonists, the preconditions, the motives, the practices *en route* and the aftermath within the proposed travelling structure.

### Definitions

'A tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist' (Turner & Turner 1978: 20). This oft quoted sentence implies that pilgrims are externally almost indistinguishable from ordinary voyagers and that the borderlines regarding their aims, structures and motives are blurred. Accordingly, pilgrimages are, and always have been, frequently undertaken in combination with touristic interests, such as visits to historical or cultural spots, and experiences of nature, adventure and sport. Similarly, touristically motivated journeys usually include religious places such as churches, temples and sacred sites. Current discussions of pilgrimages include localities and landscapes with spiritual importance for indigenous people, like *Ayers Rock* in Australia (Digance 2003: 143 ff.), as well as sites of religious significance of past cultures, like *Glastonbury* in the UK or *Sedona* in the USA, which have recently been enjoying a revival, especially among new religious groups (Reader 2007: 213). Furthermore, there are pilgrimages to non-religiously associated locations such as the graveyards of famous people or war victims, disaster sites, as well as to monuments of

3 Additional information about the project, see http://www.research-projects.uzh.ch/ p10661.htm. cultural and national importance.<sup>4</sup> These implicitly religious-associated pilgrimages often form part of a touristic itinerary as well.

With regard to 'foot-pilgrims' and 'backpackers', we are dealing with two particular sub-groups of pilgrims and tourists, respectively. In order to work out the similarities between these travelling modes, it is first of all essential to define both terms. This is a difficult task however, since neither foot-pilgrims nor backpackers form an explicitly homogeneous group. Both are dynamic phenomena, continuously influenced by historical, socio-cultural, economic and political factors. I consider, therefore, a universal definition to be redundant and instead propose, as a heuristic definition for both terms, the selfperception and the peer recognition of the protagonists.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, in what follows I would like to stress certain general determining factors relating to these two ways of travelling, which are important for the later discussion.

Regarding the pilgrims along the Camino Francés, it makes sense to distinguish between walkers and cyclists, and accordingly motorised pilgrims, whether individuals or groups, who have their baggage transported by a vehicle. This is significant insofar as foot-pilgrims often distance themselves from the above mentioned other means of transport, labelling themselves 'authentic' with reference to the traditional ways of medieval pilgrims. Two major facts distinguishing foot-pilgrims from other pilgrims are the physical and mental efforts involved, as well as the need for a large amount of time to cope with the long distance. In connection with the duration, walking pilgrims can get divided into long-term, part-time and even weekend pilgrims. By long-term walking pilgrims I refer to people who walk, continuously, at least from Pamplona to Santiago de Compostela, a distance of around 730 kilometres, taking approximately one month to walk. Part-time pilgrims often do week-long stretches, whilst weekend pilgrims limit themselves to even shorter stages. When using the term 'foot-pilgrims' in this article, I am referring to long-term walkers who carry their own luggage. Focusing on this group is significant, because it involves a daily pace and practice on the road

- 4 See some detailed examples in Reader & Walter 1993, Coleman & Eade 2004, Dubisch & Winkelmann 2005, and Reader 2007.
- 5 During the recent field-research along the Camino in Spain I came across a few informants who either declared themselves not to be pilgrims, or who were uncertain whether to call themselves pilgrims, although they all walked along the same route over an equal time performing identical daily procedures. From the perspective of their fellow walkers, however, as well as of the local people, they were clearly perceived to be foot-pilgrims, who similarly took advantage of the inexpensive infrastructure along the way.

that implies meeting the same fellow pilgrims over and over again for several days or even weeks.

Just as the travelling style of what is nowadays called 'backpacking' has changed over the last four decades, so has the terminology which is used in scholarly discourse: from drifter (Cohen 1972), wanderer (Vogt 1976) and budget traveller (Riley 1988) to hybrid-tourist (Rotpart 1995). The term backpacker has only become established in scientific literature in the last few years, reflecting the contemporary self-designation of the protagonists themselves. The latter deliberately distance themselves from more organized forms of tourism, such as package tourists and consider their travelling style to be 'real' (Riley 1988: 322; Sørensen 2003: 858), with early explorers or the founders of the *Hippie trail* as role-models in mind.<sup>6</sup> The criteria for this distinction are concerned less with the journey's destination, since touristic highlights are frequented by all tourists, and more with the duration as well as mode and practice on the road. Most backpackers travel for several weeks or months, since their budget is usually limited and the airfares to their starting and return destinations occasion the highest costs. As a result, mostly local and inexpensive overland means of transport are preferred, as well as low-priced accommodation. Furthermore, an individually designed and flexible travel itinerary, the desire to meet fellow backpackers and extraordinary activities along the journey are strong aspirations (Binder 2005: 27).

This briefly summarizes the major characteristics of the terms 'footpilgrims' and 'backpackers', applied as heuristic categories in this article. Interestingly enough, both phenomena emerged, or, better, re-emerged at almost the same period of time, as I will now elucidate.

## **Development and boom**

The pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela first arose in the eleventh century as a European phenomenon, and reached its initial culmination in the twelfth century. With the exceptions of two revivals in the fifteenth and seventeenth century, the pilgrimage's importance and the numbers of pilgrims steadily declined after that initial period.<sup>7</sup> It was not until the nationalistic politics of

- 6 One of the immediate origins of backpacking can be seen in the large quantities of European youths travelling overland to Asia in the 1960s, on a journey generally called the *Hippie Trail*. For further details see next section.
- 7 For details about the history of the Camino see Frey 2002: 323 ff.; Herbers 2006, and Windisch 2008: 41 ff.

Francisco Franco and the development of the Spanish tourist industry in the 1950s and 1960s that the pilgrimage was protected as a part of medieval cultural heritage and actively propagandized. In the course of this reactivation, the first pilgrims travelled by cars and buses to Santiago de Compostela and later, after the mapping of the medieval footpaths from the 1960s onwards, sporadically some individuals started to walk along the historical paths in the direction of St James' tomb again. Nonetheless, the actual development started in the late 1980s and developed to a fully-fledged boom at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Whereas in 1987 only 2,905 people walked the pilgrimage, the numbers climbed continually and reached a figure of 125,141 in the year 2008, including a steady growth of different nationalities.<sup>8</sup> This explosion can be explained by the persistent promotion and support of the pilgrimage, not least by the European Union. In 1987 the Camino de Santiago was declared as the first European Cultural Route and in 1993 listed as one of UNESCO's World Heritage sites. Not only have the roads and the infrastructure been constantly improved, so also has media interest grown steadily. Countless books, articles, diaries, reportages, films and websites about the Camino sprang up, alongside internet forums and blogs affording the pilgrims a means of exchange and an arena in which to stimulate the diffusion of the walking idea. This latter point is also of considerable interest regarding the development of backpacker's travels.9

Just as the medieval pilgrim stands as a role model for the contemporary foot-pilgrims along the Camino, so also the twenty-first century backpacker is still influenced by the image and attributes of the first European discoverers (O'Reilly 2006: 1003): the brave adventurer travelling to unfamiliar territories

- 8 http://www.americanpilgrims.com/camino/statistics\_docs\_images/compostelas\_by\_ year\_090226.pdf or http://www.jakobus-info.de/jakobuspilger/statiko1.htm (both accessed on 30 November 2009). These numbers have to be interpreted with caution because they come from the pilgrims' office in Santiago de Compostela and are based on the issued Compostelas, the official documents confirming one's pilgrimage. The numbers include cyclist pilgrims as well, and besides Compostelas are issued to everybody who can prove to have walked only the last hundred kilometres. As a consequence, the numbers of what I term walking pilgrims are much smaller, although continually increasing as well.
- 9 Of particular relevance to Santiago pilgrims are Paulo Coelho: O Diário de um Mago (1987), Shirley MacLaine: The Camino: A Journey of the Spirit (2000), Hape Kerkeling: Ich bin dann mal weg – Meine Reise auf dem Jakobsweg (2006), Coline Serreau's film Saint-Jacques...La Mecque (2005) and the German TV-soap Das grosse Promi-Pilgern (2007). Concerning backpackers, see Jack Kerouac: On the Road (1957), Alex Garland: The Beach (1996) as well as different titles and websites specified by O'Reilly 2006: 1011.

for several months, far from one's home country being responsible for oneself, discovering new places and peoples, confronting dangers, reaching one's physical and mental limits and returning with a wealth of experience. From this point of view, the roots of backpacking reach back quite far in history. Whilst Judith Adler (1985: 335 ff.) points out a range of precursors of the modern backpacker; such as the grand tourist of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the journeymen of the nineteenth century and the hobos of the 1930s, the immediate forerunners are generally seen as the drifter described by Erik Cohen (1972: 164 ff.). Influenced by the Hippie ideals of the 1960s and the alternative movements of the early 1970s, drifters deliberately broke off from societal norms as well as from institutionalised forms of tourism<sup>10</sup> and travelled along the Hippie trail to Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Nepal. These dropouts from affluent societies rambled without exception overland, relying on other travellers' information. Accordingly, travelling conditions were adventurous and the time needed very long, and in most cases even of unlimited duration. In the second half of the 1970s, though, the overland trip to Asia became more and more dangerous due to the Cold War's trouble spots, resulting in the decline, and even disappearance, of the drifter, marginalised from society (O'Reilly 2006: 1005). A new upsurge of alternative travelling unfolded in the 1980s owing to affordable air-tickets and a surge of guidebooks, initially with the main destination of South-East Asia, and then later along the backpackers' trails worldwide. Although it is difficult to map this development with quantitative data, it can be estimated that the backpacker phenomenon has been steadily growing since the 1980s (O'Reilly 2006: 1006). Not only have the above mentioned media triggered this boom, but also the emergence of a specialised travel industry can be seen as a major contributory cause. With the formation of budget flight travel agents, travel and outdoor equipment shops and accurately detailed guidebooks, as well as backpacker aimed infrastructures in the countries of destination, backpacking became possible for everybody, and moreover it became accepted and even encouraged by society, as we will see later.

Not only have the Camino Francés and various backpackers' routes undergone a real boom among young people from the post-industrialized nations during almost the same period of time, there are also some parallels in relation to their structures. In order to analyse these parallels I shall briefly refer to the theories of Victor Turner.

<sup>10</sup> Cohen distinguished between institutionalised and non-institutionalised forms of tourism (1972: 167–8).

### Rites de passage and communitas

Victor Turner (1973, 1974, 1978) provided a model of the structure of pilgrimages, referring to Arnold van Gennep's 1908 denominated rites de passage. The latter are transition rituals accompanying individual alterations with regard to a person's state, social status or particular points in the life cycle and consist of three phases. First, the separation: individuals leave their previous state. Second, transition or liminal phase: the daily social routines and hierarchies are abolished and the individuals are prepared for their new status. Third, reaggregation: through a ritual transformation the individuals acquire a new social status. Turner transferred this threefold model to the structure of pilgrimages and stated that a pilgrimage gave a person the opportunity to escape from the familiar surroundings of society and that pilgrims were released from the daily social routines all through the liminal phase en route. According to Turner, during this extraordinary and temporary period, labelled *liminality*, pilgrims are detached from hierarchical structures and all members of this pilgrimage community are socially equal. He called it communitas, representing an anti-structure to everyday life.11

There are noted weaknesses in Turner's model, notably that Turner's communitas thesis is based on a generalisation of a few examples from Christian pilgrimages, and the egalitarian status between pilgrims has been clearly disproved by more recent case studies.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, two points in connection with Turner's communitas theory remain valid for the purpose of my present research. First, for both foot-pilgrims and backpackers it is exceptionally easy to meet, re-meet and spend several days or weeks on the road with fellow travellers. And secondly, during the experience of this liminal and unconventional time of the journey a particular identity among like-minded people can develop, overlapping social strata and nationalities. Thereby hierarchical distinctions may occur, but they manifest themselves on a different level to everyday life.<sup>13</sup> According to my own empirical findings along the Shikoku pilgrimage, the Camino Francés and various backpackers' routes, one of the core factors making this kind of journeying so exceptional are the mutual feelings of solidarity, togetherness, security as well as the community spirit, expressed by many participants as the 'pilgrimage' or 'backpacker family', re-

<sup>11</sup> Turner later distinguishes between *spontaneous* or *existential, normative* and *ideological communitas* (Turner & Turner 1978: 252). For the current discussion the former is relevant.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Eade & Sallnow 1991: 4–5; Morinis 1992: 8.

<sup>13</sup> I will describe these distinctions in the section 'Practices en route'.

sur le chemin j'ai fermme de ma

'On the Camino I found the love of my life, Brigitte. I love you Brigitte. Signed: Jean-Lui on the way back, 16.09.09.' It's comparatively easy to meet people in the liminal state of travelling. Filmstill from research footage © Tommi Mendel 2009.

spectively. Understanding *communitas* in this sense, rather than as a universal category, I think that Turner's concept remains extremely valuable.

In the succeeding discussion I also consider Turner's postulated structure of pilgrimages to be relevant-the separation from daily routine, the temporary as well as geographically different reality and the return to daily lifewhich can also be applied to backpacking. Hence, some scholars compare backpackers' journeys with contemporary forms of rites de passage, stating that long-term travellers go through an inner transformation and experience a new identity or find a new direction in life in going through this threefold structure.<sup>14</sup> As we will see later, foot-pilgrimages and backpacker's travels can indeed be seen as rites de passage, however, I think that the structure of a journey and ergo the involved transformation process starts before and ends after Turner's threefold structure. I therefore propose to examine all types of travelling and especially foot-pilgrimages and backpacking travels with a tenfold model, expanding Turner's model by paying attention to each of the relevant steps of a journey: beginning with the decision-making process and the preparation to go on a longer voyage, followed by the departure from home and the succeeding transition, then the journey itself including the ar-

<sup>14</sup> See for example Adler 1985: 351; Graburn 1989: 21 ff.; Osterrieth 1997: 25 ff.; Cohen 2003: 102 and O'Reilly 2006: 998.

#### TOMMI MENDEL

#### Model of a journey's structure.

	Proposition	Turner
1	Decision-making	-
2	Preparation	-
3	Departure	Separation
4	Transition	Separation
5	Journey	Liminality
6	Arrival	Liminality
7	Return	Reaggregation
8	Reintegration	Reaggregation
9	Working up the experiences	-
10	Lasting effects	-

rival at a physical spot, furthermore the return and the reintegration into the ordinary life and last but not least the working up of the entire experiences made plus the lasting effects.

Thus to travel involves more time than simply the duration on the road and likewise the transformation process has neither a fixed starting nor an ending point as in traditional *rites de passage*. Besides, the transformation process comes about on a self-imposed and individual rather than at a social level.

Having worked out a structural frame for both foot pilgrimages and backpackers' travels, the following section will focus on similarities within this proposed structure regarding the protagonists, the preconditions, the motives, the practices *en route* and the aftermath.

## Similarities

### Protagonists

Comparing the foot-pilgrims along the Camino Francés and backpackers generally from a demographic point of view, noticeable parallels can be identified among the participants. Although it is very difficult to find valid data regarding both types of travelling, the following estimates can be made.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Regarding the Camino, I mentioned already in footnote 8 that the evaluations of the pilgrims' office in Santiago de Compostela do not distinguish between the particular

The mean age of the foot-pilgrims is 30 years with a gender distribution of a 60/40 male preponderance ratio. The majority of foot-pilgrims come from the middle or upper-middle class, from urban areas, and with a high educational level (Frey 2002: 44). Whereas most foot-pilgrims originate from European countries, there is also quite a large number from North and South America and to a lesser extent from Australia, South Korea and Japan. Likewise, back-packing travellers are predominantly from post-industrial countries, especially of Western origin. Most come from Northern Europe, the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, followed by the USA, Israel, Japan and South Korea (O'Reilly 2006: 1001; Sørensen 2003: 852). The vast majority are between 20 and 33 years of age, with a similar 60/40 male preponderance ratio, and like the foot-pilgrims, most come from an urban, well-educated middle-or upper-middle class background (Spreitzhofer 1998: 982; Sørensen 2003: 852). Furthermore, there are noticeably few black/ethnic minorities among both forms of traveller.

It is noteworthy that both foot-pilgrims and backpackers often set out on the journey at a time of transition in life. Life's junctures, such as gap years between school and career entry, changes of job, unemployment, but also divorce or loss of a loved one lead frequently to a feeling of insecurity and uncertainty about a person's own future (Riley 1988: 317). A longer journey offers the possibility for an individual to confront this momentary life-crisis away from daily surroundings and affords the chance to think about consequential decisions. While I met many foot-pilgrims, both in Spain and in

sub-groups of the participants and therefore the official numbers do not correspond with my definition of foot-pilgrims mentioned above. The official numbers for the year 2008 in regard to age are: 52,619 (-35 years of age), 65,364 (36-60 years of age) and 7,158 (60+ years of age) (http://www.jakobus-info.de/jakobuspilger/statiko2. htm); as to gender: 72,936 (male) and 52,205 (female) (http://www.jakobus-info. de/jakobuspilger/statiko3.htm) and as to nationalities: 61,112 (Spain), 15,746 (Germany) and 10,707 (Italy) among others (http://www.jakobus-info.de/jakobuspilger/ statiko6.htm) (all accessed on 30 November 2009). I argue that the high number in the age-group of 36-60 year-olds does not represent the long-distance walkers, who do the route in one go, and that therefore younger people are underestimated in the category of what I term foot-pilgrims in this article. Furthermore, many Spanish people do the pilgrimage in stages and quite a lot of Italians go in organised groups: for this reason the numbers cannot be accurate for this study. The estimations above are based on my own observations and correspond to a great degree with Frey's finding (2002: 44). With regard to backpackers, quantitative data exist only in certain regional case studies, but not on a worldwide basis. For Australia see, for example, Loker-Murphy & Pearce 1995 and for a comparison between Israeli backpackers travelling to Latin America and Southeast Asia, see Reichel et al. 2009.

Japan, in such a situation of transition, I also came across a few opposite cases, namely that the wish to do the pilgrimage had been prevailing for many years and the informants were either waiting for a convenient gap in life or they quit their job in order to undertake this long desired journey. Anders Sørensen (2003: 853) mentions similar cases with regard to backpackers.

A further correspondence between foot-pilgrims and backpackers is the deliberate and clearly enunciated dissociation from motorised or organised pilgrimage respectively, or from package tourism (Haab 1998: 127; Spreitzhofer 1998: 980). As already mentioned above, the protagonists refer to 'authentic' styles of travelling holding up as role-models the medieval pilgrim or the early discoverer as well as the drifter of the 1960s. Many argue that the real pilgrimage or backpacker experience can only be sensed through long duration and through one's own efforts spent en route such that a possible transformation may only happen this way. Such dissociation is also manifested through the appearance of such travellers. Both foot-pilgrims and backpackers are, in most cases, easily recognisable by their clothing and equipment. It is not only through the worn-out shoes, clothes and backpacks, which clearly indicate the time spent on the road, but also quite a few travel with special paraphernalia, such as mended clothes as well as equipment, and some of the well-worn look may even be artificially created (Sørensen 2003: 856). The unitary look not only serves to distance pilgrims and backpackers from the institutionalised forms of travelling; it also helps to create and



Different nationalities, one common aim: the commitment-free feeling of being on the road. Filmstill from research footage © Tommi Mendel 2009.

maintain an identity among like-minded foot-pilgrims or backpackers, like the shell does for Santiago pilgrims.

#### Preconditions

To travel for its own sake was only possible for a well-off minority in former eras and still today, only people from affluent societies can afford this luxurious time-out, hence a small part of the world's population only. Thus, one of the most important preconditions to undertake a pilgrimage or a backpackers' trip is financial affordability. As mentioned before, in most cases the largest part of a backpackers' total budget is spent on the airfares, since most typical backpackers' destinations are countries with a low cost of living. Due to the relatively low priced airfare offers of the last few years, even students and people with a modest income from post-industrial nations can afford to undertake a longer voyage. This is also true for the foot-pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela: the journey to the starting point and the return journey occasions the greatest part of the total expenses, provided one stays in the inexpensive pilgrim's hostels and does not spend too much money on food and drink.

Another important factor regarding the preconditions for pilgrimages and backpackers' journeys are the political circumstances. Whereas in mediaeval times the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela was connected with dangers and political obstacles, today it is easy for everybody to perform the journey. The same applies to backpacking worldwide: with only a few exceptions like Saudi Arabia, Bhutan and North Korea, all political borders are open for individual travellers and most countries are comparatively easy to visit.

Also socio-economic changes in post-industrial societies in the last three decades are of importance. Unlike in the past, a lifelong engagement with the same company is neither given, nor is it desired by most employers. In addition, nowadays career entry can be postponed without any substantial consequences and it is often possible without further ado to pause one's assigned job and career in order to take some time out.

In this context it should also be mentioned that to travel for its own sake is nowadays generally accepted and legitimised by Western societies. Whereas in former times only pilgrimages and itineraries of merchants and craftsmen were socially approved forms of travel for the commonalty, nowadays a lengthy time-out, in whatever form, neither has to be justified nor it is regarded as something unusual or extrinsic. Considering the social stigmatisation of the tramps in the 1930s and the hippies in the 1960s as fringe groups, travelling is not only legitimised today, it is even encouraged and travellers generally win a wide acceptance (Binder 2005: 10–11; O'Reilly 2006: 998). Regarding the Camino, a similar observation can be made: according to a local hostel owner, in his village foot-pilgrims were regarded with suspicion and often associated with the homeless and beggars until the 1980s. This picture has completely changed in the last few years. Michael Rotpart (1995: 122) claims that having journeyed enhanced not only status and prestige, but also one's identity and Camille Caprioglio O'Reilly (2006: 1010) suggests that welltravelled people even had a greater chance to find a job due to their empirical knowledge. Although this latter point can not be pursued within this paper, I think it is important to note that a pilgrimage or a backpacking journey is in today's Western society widely accepted and encouraged, whereas people spending their holidays at home 'doing nothing' are regarded rather sceptically (Graburn 1989: 23).

Connected to the preconditions of pilgrimages and backpacking is also the decreased anxiety about the unknown and the unpredictability which usually comes along with each journey. The previously mentioned improvements of transportation and infrastructure along the Camino and along backpacker's routes contribute to this, as well as the prevalence of travelling information worldwide through different media. The wide choice of pilgrimage- and backpackers' guidebooks gives the unknown a name and helps to prepare and plan the journey.<sup>16</sup> Also the recent growth of telecommunications is of importance: there is hardly a foot-pilgrim or a backpacker without a mobile phone on the road and some are even carrying laptop computers along in order to maintain their regular travelling blogs. Further, there are internet access points in almost all the hostels along the Camino and a wide range of internet cafés are prevalent at backpacking places. In addition to improved telecommunication possibilities, the astonishingly comprehensive information available in guidebooks ensure safety as well as comfort and better enable inexperienced and reluctant travellers to undertake the journey. Thus the pilgrimage guidebooks through Spain are furnished with various items of advice and detailed maps listing all the possibilities for food and shelter. The same can be said of backpackers' guidebooks, which additionally provide advice for transportation. Hence it does not occasion surprise that the longselling South America Handbook is called 'the Bible' and Lonely Planet's South-East Asia on a Shoestring 'the Yellow Bible'. In brief, it has become very easy

16 Travelling guidebooks have developed as a literary genre of their own, to such an extent that they are even parodied by travel authors writing about non-existing countries. See, for example, http://www.jetlag-travel.de/ (accessed on 30 November 2009).

to travel on one's own in most parts of the world. In the case of the Camino it must also be said that the mostly flat route is fairly easy to walk and very well marked with yellow arrows, in a way that it is almost impossible to get lost and therefore daily planning is not necessary.

Travel information and documentation not only minimize the anxiety about the unknown, they also function as triggers to undertake a journey and at the same time they fire the imagination and expectation of the participants.

#### Motives

As neither foot-pilgrims nor backpackers form a homogeneous group, their reasons and motives to undertake a journey are equally multi-layered as well as 'multifunctional' (Rinschede 1992: 52) and correlate with the sociocultural and economic changes of their societies. Therefore usually a wide range of push and pull factors are of relevance for the individual in deciding whether to go on a journey, rather than a single motive. The motives range from a love for adventure or sports activities, meeting other people, the desire for freedom, independence and fun, to historic and cultural interests and the quest for self-development, as well as spiritual needs (Frey 2002: 13; Riley 1988: 318). However, not only are the motives interwoven and likely to change along the journey, they are also often elusive for the protagonists themselves, besides being influenced by former travelling stories. During my research in Spain and Japan, I not infrequently came across statements such as 'the need for some time-out', 'for self-discovery', 'I was called by the road' or 'my motives are rather spiritual than religious', thus stereotypical expressions that must have been picked up deliberately or unknowingly by other travellers or accounts in media and advertising. Consequently, it is very hard to get valid data regarding the motives of foot-pilgrims and backpackers, not least because it usually takes a few days to inspire the confidence of the informants in order to learn the real reasons. What follows are therefore conceptions of casual relations and tendencies.

In the preceding section the socio-economic changes that have occurred post-industrial societies over the last thirty years was mentioned, which has led to different working and living philosophies. The less rigid working structures permit, on the one hand, individual freedom and nearly unlimited personal development possibilities, but on the other hand they also imply insecurities regarding personal responsibility, place of employment and future orientation. Whereas these insecurities were absorbed by family and working structures, as well as religious institutions in former times, young people today are confronted with a fast growing, economically focused world, and so are more and more self-orientated, resulting in a sense of unease. A longer time-out in the form of a pilgrimage or a backpacking journey therefore forms an ideal way to evade the daily routine and the pressure of society and enables an individual quest for alternative forms of living. Regarding the motives of backpackers, Pamela J. Riley (1988: 317) points out that many desire to escape from the daily routine and from making decisions regarding the future. By travelling they can postpone responsibilities and commitments such as family, children and careers. Escape from, and postponement of, responsibilities due to insecurity were also an often stated incitement among the foot-pilgrims in Spain as well as in Japan. Quite a number hoped that a long respite in an unfamiliar environment and the social exchange with other people might result in new ideas and insights concerning their path in life.

Reasons for a longer time-out are also connected with personal crisis and the hope for self betterment. It was already mentioned above that crises often occur in a time of transition due to various circumstances. Pilgrimages as well as backpacking travels can therefore provide a form of therapeutic act for certain people (Morinis 1992: 9; Frey 2002: 296) in order to cure personal and social, physical and psychological as well as spiritual deficiencies (Dubisch & Winkelmann 2005: X). An evident example of a personal crisis with hope for betterment is the loss of, or resignation from a job; this is especially the case for walkers along the Camino and the Shikoku Henro, but it also seems to be a motive for backpackers. Adler for example suggests that 'many young people clearly seek compensation for missing occupational satisfaction in the achievements of travel "careers" (1985: 352).

Another point in this context is the frequently expressed criticism by footpilgrims and backpackers of modern Western society (Spreitzhofer 1998: 982; Rotpart 2006: 14), which is based upon consumption, materialism and economic efficiency with a shortcoming in spiritual needs (Reader 2007: 222). Attracted by myths, miraculous stories and information inspired by so called *New Age* ideas, pilgrimages and backpacking destinations raise hopes and fantasies of an exotic and spiritual other, not relating to one's own cultural and religious direction. Although the Camino Francés is clearly embedded in a Christian and occidental tradition, the possibility of walking evidently permits a person to live a personal spiritual alternative on a daily basis, away from the organised and established religious institutions. This is also true for backpackers, who often develop an interest in other religious or spiritual traditions and combine their travels with a sojourn in an Indian ashram or in a temple in Thailand (Riley 1988: 319; Reichel *et al.* 2009: 224). When I visited the pyramids in Gizeh for the first time as a backpacker, a local watchman approached and offered to allow me to spend the night inside the Sphinx to meditate—for a small gratuity of course. The example shows that desires like this apparently exist among travellers, especially when the aspired spirituality can be combined with an unusual setting or an adventure.

In the course of this discussion it has to be clearly stated that primarily religious motives are hardly ever found, either among Santiago foot-pilgrims or backpackers.<sup>17</sup> Although foot-pilgrims are generally still associated with devotional people doing the Camino out of purely religious or spiritual motives and even though this image is gratefully enhanced by the church authorities through their own statistics,<sup>18</sup> Barbara Haab (1998: 54) as well as Nancy Louise Frey (2002: 46) and Patrick Windisch (2008: 103) argue that only a minority of the long-term walkers undertake the pilgrimage out of religious motives. My own recent findings support this conclusion in all respects, and correspond with my previous study of the pilgrimage in Shikoku.

A further motive often mentioned by many foot-pilgrims, backpackers and scholars alike is the desire for self-discovery and personal development. Although these terms seem to be a little stale and, as mentioned above, influenced by earlier narratives, they can be more helpfully seen in terms of education and personal challenge. Whereas many take to the road in order to study more about other cultures and people, at the same time they also learn lots about themselves, such as openness, communication, self-reliance and their physical and mental limits, as well as their own culture. According to Jana Binder (2005: 122 ff.) backpacking is even a part of the education system and a supplement to career entry; she calls it 'an economic capital', and refers to its assessments by both potential employers and backpackers. Although

- 17 Religious is understood here as a personal affiliation to a religious tradition or institution.
- 18 The pilgrim's office in Santiago de Compostela asks the pilgrims to fill in a form regarding the motives of the journey before handing out the pilgrimage certification. In the year 2008 one could tick either 'religious', 'religious-cultural' or 'cultural' motives. The result for the year 2008 is: 50,732 religious, 63,598 religious-cultural and 10,811 cultural (http://www.jakobus-info.de/jakobuspilger/statiko5.htm, accessed 30 on November 2009). The overwhelming numbers of religiously motivated numbers must not only be rigorously questioned in view of the survey method, but also with regard to the implications mentioned in the footnotes 8 and 15. In the year 2009 one could choose between 'religious', 'religious' motives were asked whether they were not interested in spirituality and when affirming it was displayed as a religious motive.

this view might depend on particular cultural and societal considerations,<sup>19</sup> the motive to undertake a backpacking journey or a foot-pilgrimage is often curiosity and the desire to learn more. Concerning the Camino for instance, I talked to a few foot-pilgrims who saw their journey as a personal challenge, hoping to get enough self-esteem in order to be able to do a future trip in other, more exotic parts of the world.

Evidently the motives correlate with the decision making process to do a journey and to a lesser extent also concerning its preparation. Although the motivation can change along the way, with the departure the practices *en route* are about to start, including all the above mentioned steps in the tenfold model until the return.

### Practices en route

The foot-pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela and backpackers' travels can also be compared with regard to the pre-defined routing. Although travellers often claim to look for individual or alternative roads, in most cases the plainly described ways of the common guidebooks are chosen. This stands in contrast to most pilgrims who declare that wandering by themselves is one of the crucial points of the Camino and it also diverges from a central issue of backpacking, to travel 'off the beaten track' with a spontaneous itinerary every day (see Binder 2005: 92). With regard to the Santiago pilgrims, there are actually manifold walking possibilities, on the one hand along various routes throughout Europe, and on the other hand along different established hiking paths in Spain and Portugal, which all end up at the famous cathedral in Santiago de Compostela.<sup>20</sup> As a matter of fact, however, the bulk of travellers follow the Camino Francés. By analogy fixed backpacker routes have been established over the years, with the protagonists 'following similar itineraries, staying in the same currently popular enclaves, and participating in similar sightseeing, vacationing and partying activities. . .' (Cohen 2003: 102). This can be explained through the activities of the media and touristic advertising strategies, as described earlier, as well as through the word-of-mouth propaganda among the travellers themselves.

Over the years hostels and guest houses sprang up along the pre-defined routes, which developed to form pilgrims' or backpackers' centres, respec-

20 Besides the prominent Camino Francés there are the Via de la Plata, the Camino de la Costa, the Camino Primitivo, the Camino Português, the Via Lusitania and the Camino de Santiago Mozárabe.

<sup>19</sup> Binder also states that most positive statements regarding travelling as a form of education originate from English-speaking travellers and employers (2005: 125).



Cold beer, a pool in the garden, free internet and a kitchen surrounded by Bob Marley tunes. Cheap and convenient accommodation is necessary for both foot pilgrims and backpackers. Filmstill from research footage © Tommi Mendel 2009.

tively. These single places are quite simply furnished and low priced, often offering a communal kitchen, lounge and dormitory. It is here, where the travellers meet people of their own kind, that exchanges happen and relations get established. Not only do backpackers frequently schedule their itinerary according to the location of these centres, but also foot-pilgrims deliberately plan to stay at certain hostels with particular reputations along the way.

The rather collective road practice is not only evident regarding the predefined routing and the visited meeting places, but also concerning common perceptions and experiences of the travellers along the route. Photos and descriptions in guidebooks and by fellow travellers trigger to shoot the same pictures and experience equivalent sensations and happenings as outlined. For example lines like 'Meseta pure! The following stretch is one of the hardest and for many the spiritually most thrilling along the way'<sup>21</sup> lead to a broadly perceived spiritual experience at this particular stretch, as it was communicated to me by various foot-pilgrims during my research.

Although many foot-pilgrims and backpackers set out on their journey on their own—considering being on one's own a unique experience and a chance to reflect about oneself—a central facet of being on the road is the meeting and the contact with fellow travellers from various nations. 'Travelling with

<sup>21</sup> Translated quote from Joos & Kasper 2009: 147.

#### TOMMI MENDEL

others offers the advantage of "security and protection". Most [backpackers] said they occasionally felt physical and emotional loneliness, but overall expressed the belief that travelling alone is preferable because one has more interactions with other travellers. . .' (Riley 1988: 324.) Even though most footpilgrims and backpackers travel only for a certain time together, the exchange can generate valuable insights about oneself and one's culture as well as long lasting friendships, or love may develop (see Frey 2002: 135). As mentioned above, it is astonishingly easy to meet people along the way because of the liminal situation abroad, which provides a necessity to be and talk with someone in a language one commands. Hence there is a need to socialize in whatever form and therefore it is comprehensible that travellers prefer to mingle with one another rather than with locals. On the other hand the pre-defined routing provides the possibility to meet the same people over and over again, sometimes at a stage, that one knows the new acquaintance already before the actual encounter with the person, due to the stories and rumours along the road. Like a sworn circle, solidarity, togetherness, friendship and a feeling of belonging to a wider community from different nationalities may evolve, in which the usual categorisations such as nationality, sex, age, social strata and marital status are not relevant. Within this communitas the same major aims and daily issues are pursued and through mutual understanding and a sense of security, a new identity can come into being, either as a pilgrim or a backpacker. This identity is often affirmed by the acknowledgement of short-term pilgrims or package tourists met on the road who express their admiration for long-term travelling. 'It has something magic about it. Those who experience



A family-like community: travelling, cooking, eating and living together away from the daily routine. Filmstill from research footage © Tommi Mendel 2009.

*communitas* have a feeling of endless power.' (Turner & Turner 1978: 14.) This powerful experience is enhanced through the ongoing living of a commitment-free life with no professional or daily social obligations. Although travelling partners can, theoretically, be chosen every day anew, there are hardly any commitments or responsibilities involved due to the temporary limited time to be spent together. This liminal freedom intensifies the emotions on a daily basis, leading to a common 'pilgrimage or backpacker family' feeling. The term 'family' was not only used by pilgrims both in Spain and in Shikoku during my own researches, it is also applied in backpackers' narratives, as in Binder's findings (2005: 208).

However, as mentioned earlier, contrary to Turner's theory I recognise that hierarchical structures within this family or *communitas* exist, which are manifest in the foot-pilgrim's or backpackers' 'road status' (Sørensen 2003: 856). Road status is multifaceted, consisting of the number of journeys already undertaken, the duration of the trip, the distance of the route, the speed at which the distance is covered, the hardship and the difficulty of the routing and the optimizing of a minimal budget.<sup>22</sup> Nelson H. Graburn (1989: 34) labels these 'measurements of the hierarchies of prestige'. Status and prestige can also be associated with levels of authenticity, which correlate to the duration and distance of the trip. As stated above, authenticity is based on the role models of the pilgrims of the Middle Ages as well as the early explorers and the drifters, but also with the assumption that longer journeys have the potential to induce an existential change (Frey 2002: 174).

Another common attribute between foot-pilgrims and backpackers is to travel on a low budget, which forms part of the road status. Riley states that 'status among travellers is closely tied to living cheaply and obtaining the best "bargains" which serve as indicators that one is an experienced traveller' (1988: 320). However, to journey on a low budget is only possible through the support and the privileged treatment of the local people and authorities. Along the Camino various public and private hostels have sprung up in the last few years, allowing the pilgrim to stay for a small donation or a few Euros. These hostels are run by volunteers supporting the pilgrims and giving them a feeling of doing something and being somebody special. Also backpackers' accommodations and means of transport are comparatively inexpensive, and

22 An apparent example of hierarchy among pilgrims can be found in Shikoku. Pilgrims carry different colours of *Osamefuda*, name cards to be furnished with wishes and to be placed at temples along the pilgrimage. They are also handed over to locals in order to thank them for support and they are considered as talismans. The colour of the Osamefuda correlates to the number of performed pilgrimages.



A common way to carry on one's trip is to open up a pilgrim's or backpacker's hostel. Filmstill from research footage © Tommi Mendel 2009.

in addition backpackers are often provided with support by the locals due to their 'exotic bonus'. This is particularly true in traditional nomadic societies with their long lasting cultivated hospitality. The earned generosity of previously unknown people makes another incisive and poignant experience of a journey and contributes to the pilgrim or backpacker identity.

The reverse of the coin is a potential exploitation of the local people's benevolence and friendliness. Backpackers from a middle class background often 'play with their identities' (Riley 1988: 321), simulating being budget travellers in order to save on their travelling expenses, as well as to enhance their road status. Analogue Frey mentions the partially critical positions of Spanish villagers describing the foot-pilgrimage as *mucho morro*, as fatly impertinent, and as an inexpensive way to go on vacation (2002: 192). I heard similar statements along the Camino, especially regarding apparently well-off walkers playing with identity in imitation of the medieval, poor pilgrims.

The unsolicited asceticism through application of a limited budget, as well as through the physical and mental endeavours, which come along with foot-pilgrimages and backpackers' trips alike, are *ergo* differently understood and interpreted. Nevertheless, I have not met any foot-pilgrim connecting the Camino's strenuousness with the suffering and penitence according to a traditional Christian understanding during my own research. Rather, I would stress that the consequence of an arduous journey are personal satisfaction and self-affirmation, or, as Graburn states, a 'self-imposed rite of passage to



Handicraft and souvenir shops along the pilgrimage route. A similar sight can be found along backpacker's destinations. Filmstill from research footage © Tommi Mendel 2009.

prove to themselves and to their peers that they can make their own way in life' (1989: 35). This self-affirmation results for both foot-pilgrims and back-packers alike through an achieved material reduction to a minimum, with all personal possessions and necessities fitting into one's backpack. In this context, letting go of unimportant material items helps to discover and appreciate small but essential matters and values, which have been lost in the post-industrialised affluent societies (Haab 1998: 133) and provides the base for a transformation regarding one's identity or view of the world.<sup>23</sup>

Unlike the drifters, contemporary backpackers usually leave home with a fixed return date and the intention to go back to normal life after the journey (Sørensen 2003: 852), akin to the foot-pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela, where the destination is clearly defined. However, for a certain number, the pilgrimage, or backpacker, experience is so striking that they do not stop at a single trip but rather look for a way to continue the journey, either by keeping on travelling or by returning for a new trip after a short while. The Spanish expression *estar enganchado*, meaning being wound up or addicted to, is used for pilgrims who keep coming back to the Camino either as walkers or volunteers running the hostels (Frey 2002: 282). Regarding backpacking Riley talks about the 'addictive experience' of travelling and mentions examples of backpackers being on the road for years, in two cases even for 18 and 32 years

<sup>23</sup> Regarding the transformation and the aftermath see the next section.

(1988: 320). Another way to extend the travelling experience and to escape from the ordinary life back home is to open up a hostel or a restaurant along the Camino or a backpackers' route or to sell some handicraft and clothing, as can be often encountered along the path in Spain as well as at several backpacker's destinations.

Nonetheless, most foot-pilgrims and backpackers return home after the liminal phase of the journey and go back into daily life again. This entire process is similar to the first two steps in the above-mentioned model, largely neglected by scholars in regard to both pilgrimages and backpacking, although it forms part of the journey and is therefore equally essential. Arriving in Santiago de Compostela, or at the ultimate destination of the backpackers' trip and realising that the journey was about to end, I met a few protagonists expressing desires and plans to either redo their travels or to do something similar in another part of the world. This can be interpreted as a wish to prolong the liminal time and identity, but also as worries relating to a return to a former life. In fact, the return journey comes all too suddenly for many and hardly anybody is prepared for it or its aftermath. Whereas the travellers moved on for several weeks or even months either on foot or with simple means of transport, the return journey comes about very quickly, either by direct train or flight. In the course of this, the homecomers lack the time to work up their experiences and are insufficiently prepared to confront another reality within a few hours.

Considering the return as a part of the whole route, the reintegration including the working up of one's experiences and their lasting effects are, however, intertwining, elements of the aftermath.

### Aftermath

The aftermath of the journey begins with the arrival at home and the reintegration process into daily life. Thereby, not infrequently, two different worlds collide and many feel alienated from their former familiar surroundings. This alienation can be explained through the experienced transformation due to the long time-out as well as the sudden absence of the pilgrim- or backpacker-family. Whilst homecomers often feel like communicating to family and friends in a similar way to their pilgrimage- and backpacking-peers, they soon realise that either the interest or the frame of reference regarding experiences, narrations and encounters is absent in their case. By the same token, the homecomer may appear to be a 'familiar stranger' for the people at home (Frey 2002: 301). Thus returning foot-pilgrims and backpackers are, in the first instance, confronted with two different value systems, a condition, which might lasts for a while or even persist and becomes part of one's new identity. 'A significant number may adopt a "post-modern", hybrid identity, embracing concomitantly two centres or cultural worlds - that of their own Western society and that of the country of their choice. .' (Cohen 2003: 104). Further, as mentioned above, the achievement of the accomplished travel and the affiliation to an expanded communitas often generate a sentiment of satisfaction and self-affirmation. Both foot-pilgrims and backpackers frequently report an increase in self-confidence after the journey such that they wanted to continue their life more independently (see Frey 2002: 301; Riley 1988: 325; Spreitzhofer 1998: 982). In this connection O'Reilly (2006: 1012-13) mentions the accumulated 'social, cultural and symbolic capital', enhancing prestige and reputation in different contexts, such as in employment or in social circles. Therefore due to the journey's achieved new points of view, the feeling of alienation of former close people, a greater self-confidence and the enhanced social prestige can lead to a complete reorganisation of the antecedent life, regarding familial, social and occupational relations. In this sense the return and the reintegration may be seen as a renascence after the antistructural phase of the journey, however, considering the journey as a rite de passage must include the working up of the experiences and the lasting effects, as suggested in the expanded model above.

Foot-pilgrims and backpackers may become aware of the achieved transformations immediately after the return, but in many cases the changes become manifest only after a certain duration, when the experiences concretise and meaning can be allocated (Frey 2002: 253). For instance one of my core informants in Shikoku stated one day after finishing his foot-pilgrimage that nothing had changed, although he desired a transformation. In an interview seven months later, however, he acknowledged that his life had changed in various contexts and that the transformation happened through the findings and insights he gained with his travels. Thus the working up of the experiences might take a few months for both foot-pilgrims and backpackers, whereby the photos, diaries and souvenirs brought back help to reconstruct their journey, experiences and insights. Whether the effects of the journey are long-lasting cannot be discussed in this article, since there exist no empirical studies in this regard. Nevertheless, I consider the lasting effects a considerable element in studying pilgrimages and backpacker's journeys, which should be afforded close attention in future research work. The lasting effects not only form the final component of the proposed tenfold travel structure, they are also relevant regarding the similarities between foot-pilgrims and backpackers.

## Conclusion

The goal of this article was to outline and discuss the similarities between contemporary 'foot-pilgrims' to Santiago de Compostela and travellers more generally termed 'backpackers'. It was noted that due to their dynamic characteristics neither foot-pilgrims nor backpackers can be considered a homogeneous group and that the motives to undertake the journey are for each protagonist multi-layered and multifunctional. However, as I tried to show, both ways of travelling have re-emerged simultaneously in the 1980s and developed into an evident boom by the beginning of the twenty-first century. Thereby not only the protagonists and their demographic backgrounds evince parallels, but also the travellers' preconditions, which in turn influence the motives as well as the practices on the road. Following the proposed tenfold model as a journey's structure, I demonstrated the similarities between foot-pilgrims and backpackers, from their motives to the practices en route and to the aftermath. Within this long lasting travelling process the exterior journey always correlates with the inner journey. At the same time, a personal transformation of the protagonists is very possible to occur, be it an increase in self-confidence or an enhancement in status, prestige and identity, alongside further personal insights. Whilst travelling can therefore be seen as a form of a transition, in contrast to traditional rites de passage there is neither a fixed starting point nor a determined ending point, moreover the transformation is self-imposed and occurs on an individual than on a social level. In this context a foot-pilgrimage and a backpacker's trip can be understood as an ideal way to evade the daily routine and the societal pressure in order to look for a different kind of living. But it may also be a personal quest for a change or an improvement of one's situation as well as an alternative to the established social and religious institutions. In whichever context a footpilgrimage or a backpacker's travel is undertaken, I suggest that there are two core factors held responsible for the extraordinary time experienced on the road, which both serve as a trigger to leave one's ordinary life as well as to enable a personal transformation. Both factors are correlated with the collective road practice, on the one hand it is the liminal and commitment-free feeling of being on the road and on the other hand the easily achieved encounter with fellow-travellers from all over the world and the sentiment to belong to an extended pilgrim or backpacker community. Within this family-like community however, the travelling partners can be chosen on a daily base with no further responsibilities involved. In this sense Turner's concept of *liminality* understood as a period free of daily commitments, which allows one to be part of a *communitas* comprehended as a family with very well established hierarchical road statuses, can be applied to both, foot-pilgrims and backpackers. As a result the foot-pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela should not be considered as a purely religious journey nor a backpacker's travel simply as a pleasure-seeking trip, but rather as an opportunity for a transformation towards new perspectives. Or as the renowned Swiss travel writer Nicolas Bouvier formulated: 'The magical power of a journey lies in the purification of one's life before it gets established and decorated.'<sup>24</sup>

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- 24 Quote translated from Bouvier 2004: 26.

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