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## When Brother Becomes Other: *Communitas* and Conflict along the Camino de Santiago

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It is widely believed, both by scholars and practitioners of pilgrimage, that during the rite most if not all pilgrims experience *communitas* - a sense of community, of mutual understanding and acceptance of their fellow ritual initiates that is unfettered by traditional social structures or markers of difference. Nevertheless, evidence indicates that conflict also regularly arises among pilgrims, even as they navigate the same *liminoid* space in pursuit of a common goal. Pilgrims may experience conflict with one another due to differences in personality, divergent cultural backgrounds, the perception of scarcity of resources, the intrinsic stress of transformation, or myriad other reasons. Differences in personal and group identity do not necessarily fall away or become invisible during pilgrimage; they may even become more deeply inscribed. How do difference and conflict fit into a theoretical and practical understanding of *communitas*? What happens when markers of social or personal difference follow pilgrims into the liminal or liminoid space? How can pilgrims who seek *communitas* mitigate and / or make sense of conflict during pilgrimage? The present article attempts to answer these questions, with a focus on the Camino de Santiago (Way of St. James), drawing on examples from popular and scholarly accounts of pilgrimage as well as research from cultural studies and the social sciences. Finally, some recommendations are offered for the cultivation of *communitas*, including mindfulness practices and maintenance behaviors.

**Key Words:** *communitas*, conflict, maintenance behaviors, mindfulness, pilgrimage, Camino de Santiago

As pilgrims enter the liminoid space of the pilgrimage ritual, somewhere between what they were before and what they might become after, they generally find that ‘likeness of lot and intention is converted into commonness of feeling, into ‘*communitas*’ (Turner & Turner, 1978:13). During the ritual, pilgrims enjoy relationships with one another that are ‘undifferentiated, egalitarian, direct, spontaneous, concrete, and unmediated’ (Turner 2012: 4). Victor Turner famously found *communitas* to be an identifying component of the pilgrimage ritual, one considered ‘sacred or ‘holy’ almost everywhere for its



transgression of normal restrictions and for its potency (1969:128).<sup>[1]</sup> Among contemporary scholars and practitioners of pilgrimage, *communitas* is often lifted up as an unassailable element of the ritual.

Many pilgrims along the Camino de Santiago report that their relationships with others have an indelible impact on their pilgrimage. Indeed, each pilgrim tells personal stories of bonds forged and strengthened during pilgrimage, of friendships that defy social norms and transcend the boundaries that normally divide humankind. In her collection of *Pilgrims Stories*, Nancy Frey finds that

*In the open social contexts of the pilgrimage participants come to trust themselves and others - even humanity - to a greater extent (1998: 91).*

1. The Turnerian model of *communitas* fits into a larger narrative of how researchers have understood temporary and permanent communities. Victor Turner’s understanding of community formation during the pilgrimage ritual was built on the framework of Arnold van Gennep, among others, and ‘attempt[s] to posit a ‘third way’ between Durkheim and the Marxist Manchester School’ (Di Giovine, 2011:251).

And yet, along the well-worn and increasingly popular Camino de Santiago, an ever more diverse cast of pilgrims has also been known to judge one another for what may be perceived as inconsiderate behavior; to feel competitive with one another, as Annie does in *Six Ways to Santiago*, as they pass one another on the trail; and to question the motivations of their fellow pilgrims, concerned with the authenticity of their journey in comparison to others. Are they *bad* pilgrims for having these thoughts and feelings?

Many of the best-loved depictions of pilgrimage - films and memoirs that inspire countless travelers to become pilgrims - complicate our understanding of communitas. Take, for example, interactions between the irascible Tom (Martin Sheen) and his companions in the film *The Way* (2010). Their eventual bond of friendship is initially fraught with conflict fueled by past heartache, present personality differences, and occasionally by red wine. Joost betrays Tom's trust, Tom insults Jack, Sarah strikes Tom, and on it goes as they navigate the messiness of the liminoid space. Or, recall the case of Tatiana and her brother Alexis from the documentary *Six Ways to Santiago* (2014). Tatiana notes that prior to their pilgrimage she and her brother often argued. Their disagreements during filming, which lead the siblings to travel separately for a stretch, represent a continuation of their customary sibling dynamic, rather than its disruption or suspension as one might expect. During the pilgrimage, their religious differences - one believing in God, the other not - are brought to the fore, as well. As pilgrims prepare for their journey, they are led to believe that during the rite of passage the *other* may become *brother*, but what of when a *brother* becomes *other*?

In addition to these considerations and curiosities, those of us who accompany students on their pilgrimages may wonder: Have our class readings about communitas set realistic expectations for the relationships we will form during the ritual?

In spite of the supposition that initiation rites such as pilgrimage create bonds that are undifferentiated, evidence indicates that markers of difference follow us into the liminoid space, and may even be exacerbated by the operant conditions therein. As Yoram Bilu observes, experiences that conform to the discourse of communitas reflect

*'the dominant, culturally endorsed atmosphere of the pilgrimage [while experiences] that intensify sentiments of rivalry, envy, and self-aggrandizement [are] a part of a latent aspect*

*of the pilgrimage; more covert and subtle, however, they are no less a part of its texture* (1988: 323).

A relationship, whether born of long-standing ties or of nonvoluntary association, such as that which forms between fellow pilgrims not known to one another prior to travel who coincide on the path, may become undesired if the individuals come to dislike one another for reasons of negative affect (e.g., interpersonal differences) or if they have interfering goals (e.g., competition for resources) (Hess, 2003). In non-liminoid contexts, such as the workplace or a romantic relationship, unwelcome relationships may be terminated. Nevertheless, in a context of pilgrimage, as long as those in the undesired relationship still continue to engage simultaneously in the ritual, the forces of the liminoid space serve to counteract

*the pressures that would otherwise tear the relationship apart . . . [which] creates an emotionally strenuous situation* (Hess, 2003:111).

Conflict will also exist within communitas as long as pilgrims are somehow dependent upon one another. Morton Deutsch explains, when people are 'independent of one another, no conflict arises; the existence of a conflict implies some form of interdependence' (2006:25). Pilgrims often require help to navigate a foreign space, to locate and secure resources, and to persevere in pursuit their goal. The same interdependence that lies at the heart of the ritual's transformative and relational potential - dependence on one another, on local residents, on the land, and on the divine - also provides fuel for conflict among and between pilgrims.

How do difference and conflict fit into a theoretical and practical understanding of communitas? What happens when markers of social or personal difference follow pilgrims into the liminoid space? How can pilgrims who seek communitas mitigate and / or make sense of conflict during pilgrimage? And, how can answering these questions be of benefit to pilgrims, especially those who value communitas, and to those who study them / us? The present article attempts to answer these questions, before concluding with some recommendations for the cultivation of communitas.

### Conflict within Communitas

Since articulating his model of communitas in a series of writings during the latter half of the 20th century, Victor Turner's framework has been called into

question by numerous scholars. Most notable among these, perhaps, is Michael Sallnow, who argued that:

*As the purported goal of pilgrimage[,] the notion of communitas is spurious, and leads to a deterministic view of what is essentially a polymorphic phenomenon (1981:163).*

Similarly, C. Bawa Yamba described 'the Turnerian framework as producing a kind of theoretical strait-jacket' (Coleman 2002:356).

Sallnow's seminal questioning of Turnerian communitas arose from his observations of Andean pilgrimages in which community members travel together to regional sacred sites. Sallnow did note that these ritual participants exhibited elements of communitas, remarking that pilgrims shared lodging and food, and that they forged a strong sense of internal solidarity within their groups. Nevertheless, he found that gender and ethnic differences within groups persisted during the pilgrimage and had an impact on interpersonal dynamics. Moreover, Sallnow observed conflict between groups of pilgrims traveling to these local shrines.<sup>[2]</sup> Along the way

*various parties of pilgrims from different communities maintained a ritualized distance from one another which accentuated, rather than attenuated, the boundaries between them. At the shrine itself they maintained their separateness, and never coalesced into a single unified congregation. Furthermore the regional cult was differentiated into mestizo and Indian devotions (Sallnow, 1981:176).*

Once groups reached a shrine, they marked the boundaries of their camps with stones, and dancers and musicians from respective groups competed to demonstrate their superior skills (Sallnow, 1981:173).

Other scholars have since described similar evidence of difference and conflict among those engaged in pilgrimage. Mary Crain finds that gender norms persist during the El Rocio pilgrimage in southern Spain, where women are expected to prepare food for their group and to care for children participating in the ritual

2. If one group crossed paths with another, they engaged in an elaborate ritual involving facing one another, exchanging icons, kissing said icons, and reciting prayers. Sallnow wrote:

*At times this ritual proved irksome to the pilgrims, especially in the vicinity of a shrine where contingents were constantly passing one another, and they would occasionally make a diversion to another footpath in order to avoid the delay which the passing procedure entailed (1981: 173).*

(Juschka 2003:202). At the site of the Black Christ in Guatemala, Carl Kendall notes that differences of race and class do not disappear during pilgrimage, but rather are further inscribed 'by clothing, transportation, and housing during the pilgrimage' (Juschka 2003:201).

In popular depictions of the Camino de Santiago, instances of difference, discrimination, and conflict also abound, such as the cinematic examples offered in the introduction. In the memoir *I'm Off Then* (2006), the friendship between author Hape Kerkeling and his companion Anne was nearly over before it began due to one key difference: gender. Anne met the friendly overtures of this well-known (and openly gay) German actor and comedian with exceeding skepticism because she had been approached by so many other male pilgrims who has been 'looking for some sex' (Kerkeling 2006:233). As Shirley MacLaine recounts in *The Camino: A Journey of the Spirit* (2000), the American actor's renown does not disappear during her time on the Camino de Santiago; she is frequently *othered* by fellow pilgrims and starstruck locals who recognize her. She spends much of her pilgrimage seeking solitude and retreating into existential visions.

A letter written by a pilgrim from Portland, Oregon, published in the *Friends of the Road to Santiago Newsletter* in 1998, provides a representative example of how one pilgrim may make assumptions of difference based on small behavioral cues and manner of dress:

*While at the Cathedral office, a woman from California was decked out in her tourist pilgrim outfit and claimed to have walked enough to qualify for the Compostela. She was denied, and I explained to her why she was getting an alternate document. Of course, she made a bit of a scene . . . This lady was clearly there for a neat vacation and to obtain a trophy to show off to her tennis club friends. Had she walked, she would have been recognized by at least one of the several of us there, and would have participated in that post-pilgrimage joint hug that only those who've actually done it can understand (Dunn, 2016:28).*

The letter-writer not only presumes to know the woman's motivations and socio-economic status, but also assumes a common or universal manifestation of communitas based on her personal understanding of it, as if any experience that does not resemble her own is inauthentic, even disqualifying.

By the same token, pilgrims along the Camino have been known to judge one another based on their mode of transportation and perceived physical toil. Aside from the tension between walkers and cyclists, pilgrims are divided between fast-walkers and slow-walkers, those who start before and after certain cities along the route, and between those who do and do not carry their belongings on their backs. In Kevin Codd's memoir *To the Field of Stars*, we encounter an unforgiving account of how the tranquility of Codd's morning walk is disrupted by

*a squawking family of pseudo-pilgrims who walk along at my pace so that I cannot escape their annoying company. They yak and yammer and laugh bawdily and generally disturb the peace without let-up. Only one or two of the bunch wears a mochila, which makes me suspicious of their authenticity as pilgrims (2008:189).*

He goes on to wish that he had the energy to flip their *coche de apoyo* into a ditch. Our otherwise generous narrator launches into a tirade, raging against those whose exertion and demeanor do not mirror his own.

Differences in personal and group identity do not necessarily fall away or become invisible during pilgrimage. In fact, Darlene Juschka argues that during pilgrimage the markers of social stratification are

*more boldly inscribed. The world, as it is represented in pilgrimage, is smaller and the negotiation and contestation of power are, therefore, socially and symbolically more visible (2003:200).*

Yoram Bilu posits that, to the extent that pilgrimage fosters fraternity (in which the *other* becomes *brother*), it also creates a space for a sort of 'sibling rivalry' (1988:305). Collapsing traditional social barriers and concentrating individuals in the ritual space - especially individuals in need or in search of something - may 'intensify processes of social comparison, resulting in envy and competition' (Bilu 1988:309). This is especially true if there is a perceived scarcity at the pilgrimage site. Situating the divine in a particular space, writes Bilu, 'reinforces the image of divine blessings as bounded and scarce' (1988:311). In the same way that siblings compete for their parents' affection, pilgrims may feel the need to compete for

resources perceived as limited, such as space, material goods, and even blessings.<sup>[3]</sup>

## Normative Communitas

A sense of competition may be further exacerbated by institutional forces, be they private, governmental, or religious, as they structure interactions between pilgrims and sacred sites. At highly-trafficked pilgrimage destinations, lines and holding places are often established to manage high volumes of visitors. For example, 'pilgrims are strongly encouraged to move quickly by the shrine, as at Tinos, or quickly in and out of sacred spring, as at Lourdes' (Juschka, 2003:198). Although in these cases all pilgrims are subjected to the same regulations, the perception of limited access still may lead to competition or tension among ritual participants.

Along the Camino de Santiago, infrastructure is provided by regional, national, and international entities, by various pilgrims associations and, in Santiago de Compostela, by the Pilgrims Office, which manages the arrival of astonishing numbers of pilgrims each year and awards coveted certificates of completion. Although the rite of passage is complete, or nearly so, by the time a pilgrim arrives at the Pilgrims Office, the *communitas* of the pilgrimage carries over into this space as pilgrims share their stories with one another while waiting in line, and again with a volunteer attendant sitting behind a desk. This culminating moment of the Camino de Santiago has been further ritualized through its depiction in literature and film. As such, in June 2017 my students were understandably excited as they arrived at the Pilgrims Office. Unexpectedly, we were asked to leave the queue and go through an expedited process for groups. A representative explained that, because of the size of our group, it would be better to list all of our information on a sheet of paper, leave our *credenciales* behind, and return for our *compostelas* later in the day. Although a perfectly pragmatic response to record numbers of pilgrims arriving in Santiago de Compostela, the unequal treatment or *othering* of certain pilgrims based on their belonging to a group may lead to negative emotional responses. More importantly, such policies disrupt the potential for *communitas* across populations, such as that which may occur spontaneously as pilgrims share their stories at the end of the pilgrimage ritual.

3. Those who have walked the Camino de Santiago may recall experiences of rushing to secure a bed in the albergue during high tourist season, or arriving early at the cathedral in Santiago to secure a coveted seat with a view of the *botafumeiro*.

while also minimizing costly conflict (Di Giovine, 2011:249). The discourse of *communitas* works, according to Bilu, ‘to suppress feelings of rivalry and animosity detrimental to its functioning [of the pilgrimage]’ (1988:309). Victor Turner describes this sort of *communitas* as *normative*, in which

*under the influence of time, [due to] the need to mobilize and organize resources, [and] the necessity for social control among the members of the group in pursuance of these goals, the existential communitas is organized into a perduring social system* (Turner, 1969:132).

This sort of *communitas* does not eliminate structural divisions, but rather ‘attenuates them, removes their sting’ (Victor Turner, quoted in Bilu, 1988:303).

Furthermore, some disruptions of *communitas* are only temporary, as

*friendships may suffer from the expanding sense of self, different rhythms, renovation, and experimentation that are common in the way. Paths begin to diverge, leading to a temporary rupture or misunderstanding* (Frey, 1998:94).

Pilgrims must be given space and encouragement to reconnect with one another following episodes of conflict. To enable such reconciliation, we must begin with the recognition that conflict is a likely and natural part of the pilgrimage process.

While institutions do their portion to maintain stasis, individual participants in the ritual may also deploy strategies to cultivate *communitas*. The next sections offer two possible mechanisms for doing so: mindfulness practices and maintenance behaviors.



### Mindful Communitas

Mindfulness, whether understood as a personal trait or as a state achieved through practice, provides a ‘heightened capacity for careful ... attention to internal and external stimuli from moment to moment’ (Berry and Brown, 2017:154). Some come by this heightened capacity naturally, while others cultivate the trait

intentionally over time. At its best, mindfulness combines decentering (stepping back from present moment in order to observe it) with curiosity (an openness to what may come and a nonjudgmental appraisal of the situation) (Laurent *et. al.*, 2016:910). In a study of 100 couples asked to complete a conflict task, the curiosity component - that is, the open-mindedness of the participant - was found to be more helpful than decentering component in conflict navigation. In other words:

*the ability to maintain an open, curious attitude during stressful situations’ correlated with greater well-being and satisfaction during trying times* (Laurent, *et. al.*, 2016:913).

Aside from practices such as meditation or prayer, keeping a journal can help pilgrims cultivate and monitor their self-awareness and sense of curiosity. In *The Mindful Traveler*, Jim Currie recommends journaling as a discipline to add structure to daily reflections so as to raise awareness of ‘[u]nconscious motivations and impulses’ in order to see travel experiences and ourselves more clearly (2000:10-11).<sup>[4]</sup> Currie’s recommendations include regular articulation of one’s values and objectives, checking-in with oneself physically and spiritually, observations of sensory experiences, and narratives of daily dramas. Shorter, minimalistic entries allow for deeper contemplation at a later time.

Keeping a journal during travel allows for the careful consideration of travel mates, so as ‘to recognize people who feed your spirit, [and] those who weaken it’ (Currie, 2000:153). The practice also provides knowledge of one’s own triggers and sensitivities, in the hopes of keeping conflict from growing out of hand. When conflict does arise, contemplating one’s current experiences of conflict as well as:

*on the framework of conflict resolution that you are employing’ may lead to personal strides in conflict management and resolution* (Deutsch, 2006:41).

Mindfulness not only helps to mitigate conflict before and during its occurrence, but also offers the opportunity after-the-fact to learn and improve upon reflection.

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4. As Currie explains, on each journey “What we think and what we are aware of also guide the experiences that come our way. This is the domain of the extended mind that reaches out to create synchronicities, uncanny human connections, and unpredictable opportunities,” those very special moments produced as a “resonant grace note from a charged consciousness” (2000: 8-9).

Regarding the personalities of pilgrims, which most certainly accompany them into the liminoid space and which may cause friction while there, research indicates that some traits are mutable and can be impacted by self-awareness as well as external factors. The notion of personality change is neither new nor radical. Many personality traits shift in predictable ways throughout the maturation process, as one's biological systems mature and as social roles shift (e.g., from child to parent) (Ashton, 2018:88-93).

Aside from the biogenic and sociogenic factors that contribute to one's personality, each person's 'idiogenic motives', one's unique 'plans, aspirations, commitments, and personal projects' contribute to how personality traits are expressed (Little, 2014:53). For example, one who is biogenically introverted may exhibit extroversion upon discovering that their professional aspirations require it. Engaging in what Brian R. Little calls 'free trait' behavior, or acting out of accordance with our natural personality inclinations, is an adaptive strategy to aid in the pursuit of core personal goals. Meaningful personal goals or projects, those worth the energy required to move beyond the confines of our natural inclinations, are perceived to be consistent with core values, self-expressive, absorbing, and enjoyable (Little, 2014:187). By those measures, completing a pilgrimage qualifies as a core personal goal for most pilgrims. Those with higher levels of self-monitoring (a concern for how one is perceived by others, and an understanding of the expectations of others in social situations) are generally more capable of adapting their personal traits in the pursuit of their goals (Little, 2014:81).

Take, for example, the trait of agreeableness within the Big Five model, a commonly deployed trait-based to describe salient personality factors.<sup>[5]</sup> Predictably, more agreeable people are more likely to ascribe positive attributions to the behavior of others, which leads to constructive conflict resolution (Canary & Lakey, 2013:86). Happily, this personality factor can be augmented by cognitive strategies. Daniel Canary and Sandra Lakey explain that:

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5. A less commonly-deployed personality inventory, the Environmental Response Inventory, may be helpful to pilgrims to anticipate their emotional and psychological response to the various spaces they will encounter along the pilgrimage route: forests and fields, expansive and historic cathedrals, cramped *albergue* bedrooms, quaint towns, contemporary urban centers, etc. (Little 2014: 168). Knowing one's own personal orientation regarding space can be helpful in making choices such as lodging, transportation, and route-planning.

*being agreeable over time does not occur on its own. Instead, individuals must make efforts to control their thoughts as well as their actions . . . It takes mindful effort to be agreeable* (2013:86).

It is no surprise that on the whole, neurotic individuals - those who 'experience arousal more than emotionally stable people when faced with interpersonal problems' (Canary & Lakey, 2013:86) - are less adept at managing conflict; nonetheless, research here also suggests that mindfulness may allow an individual to shift thought patterns so as to interpret the behaviors and motives of others more generously, which would lead to improved conflict management.

The same can be said for several other characteristics in trait-based personality inventories. Narcissism, once considered a personality disorder, is now seen by researchers as a personality trait that individuals exhibit to varying degrees (Canary & Lakey, 2013:92). In the context of pilgrimage, heightened narcissism may resist communitas as narcissists prefer to see themselves as unique and special, rather than as part of a larger whole. Narcissists also tend to lack empathy. Nevertheless, mindfulness strategies may mitigate these narcissistic tendencies that hamper the formation of communitas.

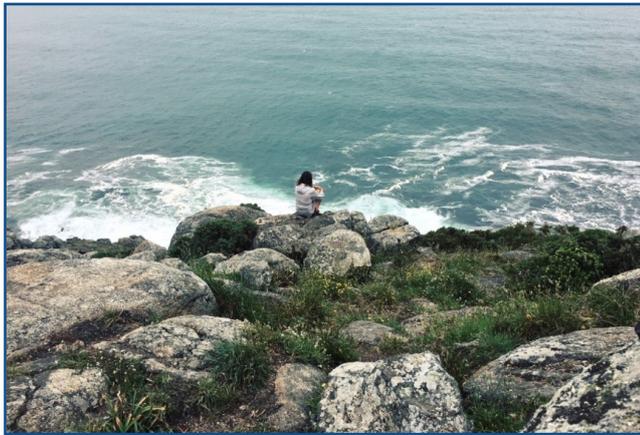
Daniel R. Berry and Kirk Warren Brown find that mindfulness practices lead to:

*less emotional reactivity to identity threats, greater understanding and acceptance of social group differences, and ultimately more harmonious intergroup interactions' and may promote 'higher levels of prosocial action* (2017:161).

By allowing one to 'attend deeply' to self and other, mindfulness has also been shown to 'reduce . . . implicit bias' by inviting individuals to tune in to their automatic responses to people and to situations (Berry & Brown, 2017:153, 157).

A reduction in implicit bias and an increase in prosocial behavior would be beneficial to *all* pilgrims as they navigate in-group and out-group differences such as gender, ethnicity, national origin, and religious identity. Thus, pilgrims need not despair at the results of a given personality test, or at the inevitable markers of differences that will remain operant in the liminoid space. Those who hold communitas as a *goal* or a valued component of their pilgrimage may deliberately cultivate traits (such as agreeableness, emotional stability, openness, and low levels of narcissism) that

are favorable to the formation of healthy relationships through mindfulness practices that shift *how* they think about themselves and others.



### Maintained Communitas

The model of Strategic Conflict presupposes that conflict is ‘inevitable in ongoing interpersonal relationships’ and that its presence is not itself problematic, but rather its handling by the parties involved (Canary & Lakey, 2013:ix).<sup>[6]</sup> Strategic Conflict, then, involves ‘managing conflict events by mindfully using thoughts and communication to obtain what you want’ (Canary & Lakey, 2013:1). Along with the mindful awareness of one’s goals (instrumental, self-presentational, or relational) in a given interaction, Strategic Conflict models also stress *maintenance behaviors*: activities that do not avoid or nullify conflict, but rather help with its management by nurturing the quality of the relationship. These behaviors may include shared tasks, supportive messages, and cultivating a positive outlook (Canary & Lakey, 2013:39). Pilgrims naturally participate in many common activities and experiences: the physical rigor of the long walk, sharing meals and communal spaces, achieving short and long-term goals, and engaging in rituals together. Additionally, many pilgrims share

6. Strategic Conflict encourages individuals to identify their goals, of which there are three primary types: instrumental, self-presentational, and relational (Canary & Lakey, 2013:3). Pilgrims may hold any / all of these goals at various points during the pilgrimage ritual: instrumental goals relating to a perceived scarcity of resources available to meet their basic and / or spiritual needs, self-presentational goals to the extent that they wish to be seen as an authentic pilgrim, and relational goals pertaining to the maintenance and deepening of existing interpersonal bonds along with the formation of new ones. If an individual is aware of their goals before entering into or addressing conflict, they are more likely to achieve their desired outcome.

supportive messages with one another, offering encouragement and empathy on the trail or over a meal.

The activity of walking has itself been shown to enhance cooperative and prosocial behavior, both of which are key to the prevention and management of conflict. Christine E. Webb *et. al.*, report that

*Wiltermuth and Heath (2009) established a causal linkage between synchrony and prosocial behavior: Participants who were instructed to walk in synchrony as a group (vs. uninstructed walking) were more willing to make personal sacrifices for the benefit of the group, above and beyond the effects of positive emotions (2017:380).*

The authors also posit that walking (in unison) may also restore relationship synchrony during conflict. On a deeper level, the physical act of walking ‘returns the body to its original limits again, to something supple, sensitive, and vulnerable’ (Solnit, 2000:29). Displaying and experiencing such vulnerability in the presence of others is likely to bond walkers to one another.

In May and June of 2017, I completed a segment of the Camino Frances with a group of 18-22 year-old students. Given the many differences between these students - age, gender, socio-economic status, religious identity, personality, and so on - the potential for conflict and misunderstanding was undeniable. Yet, miraculously, these souls formed incredible bonds across the boundaries that normally would have divided them while on campus. They looked after one another, shared resources, and became a loving, affirming Camino family. The group's cooperative bonds did not form by accident; rather, we established our own sort of normative communitas, born not only of the spontaneous communitas generated by the liminoid phenomenon but also of mindfulness exercises and maintenance behaviors both before and during the pilgrimage.

Prior to our departure for Spain, the group engaged in many group bonding activities while on campus: walking and hiking together; practicing various forms of meditation; sharing personal insights during class discussions; completing reflective writing assignments; and, collaboratively drafting the program’s code of conduct, which allowed students to give input and set expectations for the group. During our time in Spain, aside from the countless unstructured hours the students spent together as part of daily rhythm of pilgrimage, we met each afternoon for a daily debriefing session, thereby providing a space for

sharing experiences and exchanging affirmations. We also wrote each other notes of affirmation and appreciation that were presented on our last day together in Santiago. These activities and others were essential to navigating differences and mitigating interpersonal conflict within the group.



### Conclusion

In her upliftingly titled monograph *Communitas: The Anthropology of Collective Joy* (2012), Edith Turner describes *flow* or the convergence of meaning and purpose among pilgrims as an active pursuit. Communitas is:

*something that we become so avid for that we elbow our way through the gap, over and through the wall, flinging ourselves into the arms of the one-time enemy* (Turner, 2012:218).

Pilgrims need not wait passively for communitas to happen *to them*; rather, they may (and often do) pursue it with deliberation and passion.

As pilgrims prepare for their ritual experience, and as they later make sense and meaning of it, a nuanced understanding of communitas helps to navigate interactions with others. Communion with like minds and souls is, indeed, a true and beautiful element of pilgrimage. Communitas is both natural and normative. As we seek to embrace it, we must also allow for its lack, its gaps, its shortcomings. As Simon Coleman warns:

*we should not allow such ethnographically rich spaces to become prisons of limited comparison. Belief in the worth of studying pilgrimage can become self-defeating if it turns into dogmatic assertions of what sacred travel must, or must not, contain* (2002:364).

We do a terrible disservice to Turner, Sallnow, and others if we see their understandings of communitas as one-dimensional and diametrically opposed. Both communitas and contestation, understood together, ‘create the significance of pilgrimage sites’ (Di Giovine, 2011:263).

Let us not become so blindly assured of a perfect experience of communitas within the liminoid space that we, as Alan Morinis warns, reduce the ritual to the pursuit of ‘the satisfaction of emotional needs’ (Bilu, 1988:304-05). Furthermore, let us not disregard the fertile ground that conflict provides for learning and personal growth. When conflict is reframed as a mutual problem, one to be resolved via cooperative efforts by both parties, pilgrims may learn from one another and gain an improved ability to work together.

To the extent that relationships with other pilgrims are key to the ritual’s transformative potential, one ought to embrace, then, the *volitional* component of communitas. If it is to be achieved, pilgrims must be willing to suspend judgment, seeing difference without allowing it to divide them. They must also be mindful of their thought patterns, in touch with their values and goals, and engage in maintenance behaviors that will forge and strengthen their relationships with the people who travel alongside them, those who, according to Jennifer Westwood, ‘help you explain and enlarge the spiritual patterns unfolding around you’ (2003:109).

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