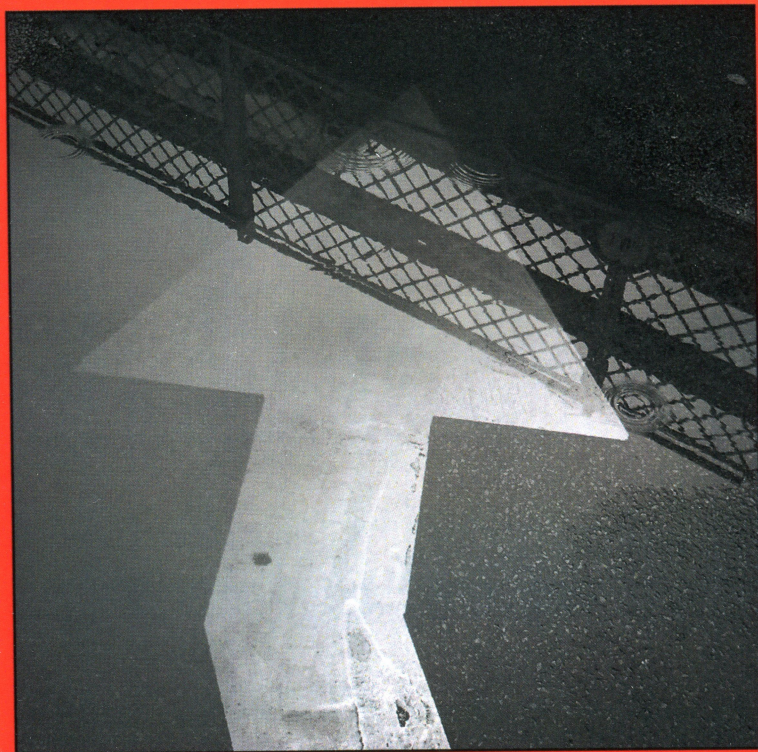


EDITED BY
MARINA MARTYNOVA
IVANA BAŠIĆ

**PROSPECTS FOR
ANTHROPOLOGICAL
RESEARCH
IN SOUTH-EAST EUROPE**



**PROSPECTS FOR ANTHROPOLOGICAL
RESEARCH IN SOUTH-EAST EUROPE**

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Prospects for Anthropological Research in South-East Europe

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The book marks a new phase in the fruitful collaboration between the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology Russian Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Ethnography Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. It is an important publication for any future research on the development of ethnology and anthropology in Southeast Europe. The papers presented here, the topics they raise and the methods they employ, comprise an overview of the issues, concepts, phenomena and research methodologies anthropology in this has been dealing with in the early 21st century. Positions of the discipline itself, transformations of traditional culture and various phenomena of contemporary culture in Southeastern Europe are subjected to a theoretical scrutiny in the papers of this volume.

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Biljana Anđelković

SOME BASIC FACTORS OF PILGRIMAGE IN CONTEMPORARY SERBIA¹

Pilgrimage tourism in Serbia represents a developed, yet highly unregulated activity. Seeing as official tourist organizations, the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) or the state take no part in its development, it mostly takes place within the “gray zone”. A lack of control over this activity leaves tour guides and organizers of pilgrimage tours with a lot of leeway in choosing the sacred places which will be visited and narratives utilized during the trips. This kind of “liberty” in (re)presentation is reflected in very uneven concepts of SOC sacred places among pilgrims, as well as in different religious practices in them. In this paper I will present the results of research conducted between 2013 and 2017 on pilgrimage tours in Serbia. The aim of the paper is to point out the most important traits of contemporary pilgrimage in Serbia – ways of organizing, the structure of pilgrim groups, the kinds of narratives used on these voyages, as well as the role and significance that pilgrimages had in the process of “spiritual growth” of traditional orthodox believers.

Key words: pilgrimage tourism, pilgrims, monasteries of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Serbia

Even though organized pilgrimage tourism has been present in Serbia for the past three decades, it is still an unexplored

¹ The text is a result of the work on the project *Identity strategies: contemporary culture and religiosity* No. 177028, which is financed entirely by the Ministry of Science and Technological Advancement of the Republic of Serbia.

phenomenon.² Its roots lie, in part, in the increase of the numbers of religious people in Serbia, and in part in the national-political pilgrimages to shrines of the Serbian Orthodox Church which had a significant role in the mobilization of the populace and the awakening of the ethnic/national identity of Serbs in the late 1980's and early 1990's. Because of the double role that pilgrimages played in this period, it is difficult – even today – to view them as simply religious or spiritual voyages. This period left behind certain narratives and ideas about monasteries as “border stones of Serbian spiritual space”³ (Mileusnić 1997) and “material evidence of the long tradition and continuity of the nation” (Perica 2006, 40).⁴ Thus, the religious and national aspects of pilgrimages – as in public discourse – are hard to separate.

Three decades ago, when the process of building and restoration of numerous churches and monasteries of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Serbia and Former Yugoslavia began,⁵ a number

² In Serbia the term *pilgrimage/religious tourism* is accepted by all organizers, including official church agencies, because the term *tourism* in the title refers to the way of organizing and not the purpose of the trip.

³ The website of the official agency of the Serbian Orthodox Church, founded in 1990, up until recently it was written: “Through visiting Serbian monasteries and churches which are the border stones of Serbian history, ‘Dobročinstvo’, each year from April until October, takes you to the sources of our spiritual and national identity. Every program is an anthology, stemming from years of experience and research of culture and spirituality of the Serbian people” (Taken from the official website of “Dobročinstvo” in 2013).

⁴ Such (re)presentation is based on the fact that monasteries of Serbian Orthodox Church contain tombs and remains of Serbian rulers from the middle ages, on the idealized relationship they had toward monasteries (such as founding monasteries, and later on, becoming monks), as well as on the significance of the role which monks and monasteries played in the advent of literacy, medicine and church art in Serbia, that they were a forerunner of museums with rich treasures and libraries etc.

⁵ Since the 1990s the Serbian Orthodox Church has erected and/or restored about 500 churches and monasteries. The majority of churches are erected at the request of local believers who mostly help with the building of churches. Besides generous donations from believers, church building is funded from state funds and the funds of local communities (Spasojević and Milojević 2014, 37).

of priests and people close to the church – as one of the most prominent organizers of pilgrimage tours from Belgrade states – wished to:

“(…) bring the importance of orthodox sacred sites and spiritual healing in all sacred places closer to the people, as well as to develop a bond between the people and orthodox monasteries and monks in order to foster close contact and cooperation for the benefit of both sides. For the people to experience spiritual healing at the sacred sites, and help the monks with restoration and other needs”.

After decades of atheism, the primary goal was, on the one hand, to bring monastery life, spirituality and Christian values to laypeople, and on the other hand to give financial aid to further projects of building and restoration of monasteries.

When pilgrimage tourism in Serbia first began, the organization of such voyages was the domain of the official patriarchate agency of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and its priests. In the meantime, as interest in visiting sacred places and shrines grew, the number of organizers of pilgrimage tours grew as well. Recently, aside from official agencies of the SOC (beside the patriarchate agency, a number of eparchial agencies have been founded) and priests, pilgrimage tours are organized by people close to the church who aren't ordained – representatives of associations and societies that foster orthodox or traditional values, organizers of spiritual lectures, professors or students of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, organizations that promote and safeguard Serbian national identity, tourist bureaus that, organize pilgrimages aside from organizing ordinary tourist trips, as well as transportation firms which offer transport to sacred sites to self-organized groups without guides, and, finally, groups that organize pilgrimages on foot. Even though most of these organizers take pilgrims to sacred sites of other Orthodox churches as well, most of the voyages throughout the year are organized to monasteries of the Serbian Orthodox Church, as those are easier to organize and cheaper for the pilgrims.

Information on current pilgrimage can be found on official websites of the organizers, on posters discretely pinned in front of parochial churches, on social networks as well as through text messages from organizers once contact has been established. Text messaging is especially popular among independent organizers who sometimes work in tourist bureaus. They have databases containing the phone numbers of pilgrims, acquaintances and other interested parties whom they inform about the pilgrimages they organize through text messages. Unlike official agencies that promote their pilgrimage tours for months in advance, independent organizers send out invitations up to ten days in advance and organize pilgrimages more frequently. These tours are organized throughout the year including weekdays, and are often connected to religious holidays or monastery *slavas*.⁶ These groups often travel in minibuses transporting up to twenty pilgrims.⁷ This way the pilgrims are devoid of comfort but such conditions foster integration within the group and encourage communication and sharing of experiences among members.⁸

⁶ The *slava* is an annual family ceremony that venerates a family's patron saint but may also be a church/monastery ceremony.

⁷ These are usually older models of minibuses which are less comfortable than regular buses. There's less space for sitting, which impacts older and less mobile pilgrims the most. Aside from this, there isn't enough room for the things that the pilgrims carry with them (personal items or things they wish to gift to the monasteries). Because of this, they are often forced to keep their things in their laps during most of the trip. The minibuses also often have other flaws – the AC doesn't work, there's not enough air, the microphone or the speakers don't work – so the pilgrims can't hear the guide etc. The lack of comfort is, among other things, connected to the fact that the cost of the voyage should be as low as possible (travelling by minibus is 20 to 30% more expensive than taking a bus to the same pilgrimage place), and the lack of comfort is often seen as a kind of "tribulation" or "feat" by the pilgrims, so they never complain about transportation.

⁸ During the research I conducted travelling with different pilgrim groups to Serbian Orthodox Church monasteries in Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Metohija between 2013 and 2017, I noticed that, within the smaller pilgrim groups, communication and exchange of experiences came about more easily in the smaller groups, as opposed to the larger groups numbering between 50 and

Even though almost three decades have passed since pilgrimage tourism was first established, this activity still lacks official, institutional support. As an institution which formally deals with and controls pilgrimage tourism doesn't exist, aside from partial information on the organizers of such voyages, little is known about this activity. In this paper I will attempt to systematize some of the basic factors of development of pilgrimage tourism, present what actual pilgrimages in Serbia entail, and demonstrate the ways in which pilgrimage destinations are chosen by the pilgrims and which narratives dominate pilgrimage voyages.

PILGRIMAGE DESTINATIONS BETWEEN RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR DISCOURSES. In the influential edited volume *Contesting the Sacred. The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage* Eade and Sallnow conclude that pilgrimage destinations are “an arena for the interplay of a variety of imported perceptions and understandings, in some cases finely differentiated from one another, in others radically polarized” (Eade and Sallnow 2013, 10). Like other pilgrimage destinations, SOC monasteries represent a space in which many religious and secular discourses intertwine. Different actors in the pilgrimage process produce representations and meanings of monasteries which are integrated through different interpretative frameworks. In this part of the paper, the focus is on two main actors – organizers or tour guides and the monks – who play the largest role in shaping the ideas of pilgrims about monasteries (in the production of ideas about monasteries other pilgrims also play a significant role).

PILGRIMAGE ORGANIZERS AND TOUR GUIDES. In most cases, organizers of pilgrimage tours are people close to the church or dedicated Orthodox Christians with many contacts within the Serbian Orthodox Church. Aside from providing transportation and

80 pilgrims. However, the degree of integration into the group is lesser among married couples and those who travel in small groups (friends, siblings...), because they are more focused on their own company than on other pilgrims.

information to pilgrims about tours, they exercise a kind of “control” over the way pilgrims experience the monasteries and over their knowledge of faith, religious practice and life in general. Pilgrimages serve to help a number of pilgrims to obtain information on important issues of faith and religious practice. Because of this, pilgrimages represent a didactic framework in which the faithful are “nurtured” and educated in the spirit of extant and desirable values. During the trips, tour guides utilize a number of types of narratives which can be characterized as *informative* (when tour guides dispense basic information about a sacred site), *educational* (when tour guides provide information on history, art, geography, theology, ecology etc.), or *propaganda* (when tour guides utilize political and nationalist rhetoric to point out the vulnerability of Serbian sacred sites and/or the Serbian people to Others, especially in Former Yugoslav territories).

In the first case, when tour guides give out basic information on sacred sites and relics, and when narratives of the importance of the site in the national pantheon – or the miraculous qualities of the relics – are left out, some of the pilgrims will use this “space” and fill it with their own observations and interpretations of visiting the sacred site, as well as advice on “what we should do first when we get to the monastery” or “how to pray”.⁹ In the other two cases,

⁹ During one journey with a group of pilgrims from Belgrade, I met Divna, a woman in her seventies who had been going on pilgrimages for the last ten years or so. She was well acquainted with the tour guide we traveled with, as well as with most people in the group whom she knew from her parish church or from previous journeys, so she used every opportunity to complement the guide with information about the sacred site and miraculous healings, because the guide had only provided us with basic information about the site. She walked through the bus during the trip offering information about faith, the church, national history, orthodox customs and the sacred site, probably believing that what we had heard from the guide wasn't enough. She also gave advice on what we should do first when we arrive, how we should pray, what to say, where to light a candle, how big the candle should be, what we mustn't do. Because this was her eighth visit to this specific monastery, she used her experience as social capital which enabled her easier integration and positioning within the pilgrim group. She had also used this opportunity to sell teas and medicinal salves on the bus.

when tour guides utilize the educational or propaganda types of narration, they have a larger degree and sometimes absolute control over the discourses involved. In these cases, tour guides impose themselves as authorities that are not only attempting to inform and explain the places being visited to the pilgrims, they are trying to indoctrinate them and impose their own view of wider social processes which fit into the religious dogma in different ways. Such narratives are most present on tours of monasteries located in ethnically or religiously diverse areas, such as the Raška region in Serbia, Kosovo and Metohija, Bosnia and Herzegovina or Croatia.¹⁰ Thus, the more informed or “authoritative” the tour guide, the lesser the need – and indeed, possibility – for the pilgrims to use their own experiences and interpretations to construct the ideas about a sacred place. In this sense, we can speak of pilgrimages which foster free exchange of experiences and interpretations of institutional messages, and those which entail solely the absorption of narratives from the institutional (or quasi-institutional) level of the tour guide. Pilgrims react to messages of the second kind in various ways, because guides are not officially certified by the church, and their knowledge can be questioned.

¹⁰ For example, when passing through parts of the Former Yugoslavia inhabited by Bosnians some guides will say things like “these parts are inhabited by former Serbs and former orthodox Christians who gave up on their faith and converted to Islam”; or “If this is your first time in Raška or you weren’t in a similar situation before, based on many years of moving through these areas I suggest you pray to St. Peter Koriški, the Mother of God, St. George Bringer of victory and others and there will be no trouble. It is only important that we, as orthodox Christians do not provoke the situation and don't provoke anyone with our behavior and everything will be all right”; or “to the left you will see the tomb of the holy martyr Hariton who was killed by the Šiptari during the last war 1998–9. They beheaded him...”, after which there is usually a long discussion among the pilgrims about how the Serbs are threatened by other peoples, especially the neighboring ones (sometimes the anger is directed at the US or EU), wherein the focus is always on the fact that Serbs are endangered on “their own territory”, wherein their territory entails any and all spaces where Serbs lived at any point in history, which “is best attested to by the material remnants of their churches and monasteries”.

With regard to the discourses they favor throughout the pilgrimage, the tour guides themselves can be divided into different groups: those who favor historical facts with clear national meanings, those who are primarily focused on the artistic side of sacred sites, and those who are focused on the spiritual aspects of the monastery which is being visited. In accordance with this, there is a difference in the degree of acceptance of the tour guides by monastery brotherhoods or sisterhoods. According to this criteria, the guides can be divided into those who are well acquainted with the monastery staff and thus get a lot of attention and their group is well received, and those who are fairly distant from the monks and nuns, and are thus received more coolly or in a “strictly professional” manner. Groups led by the latter are often bereft of meaningful information or useful informal conversations with monks.¹¹

Today, *monks* (especially elders or spiritual fathers), along with monastery grounds and holy relics, make up an important factor that attract pilgrims and pilgrimage groups. Through example, and their spiritual achievements and words, they represent role models and authorities which should be seen and obeyed. Because of this, the possibility of direct communication with clergy represents a special event which influences the overall experience of pilgrimage for the pilgrims. However, the monks and nuns have different approaches toward pilgrim groups and this

¹¹ In accordance with this, pilgrims often gather information on who the tour guide is, even when they use the services of official agencies, so as to know what they can expect, and so they can decide whether they want to travel with a certain guide at all. Because of this it can be said that pilgrims have a certain possibility of control over the context and discourse of the journey, depending on personal traits, the characteristics of the sacred site itself, the personality of the guide, the time of the visit etc. They can have some choice in the matter when or with whom they will travel, what they will watch or listen to during the trip (they carry their own CDs), how much they will attempt to influence other pilgrims etc. Because of this, the journey is never just a passive process of accepting, but also an active process during which desired meanings are read into the sacred sites being visited. Also, the pilgrimage destination in and of itself doesn't have to be the primary reason for travel – a certain kind of experience or emotion which pilgrims wish to feel can be the reason.

form of “tourism” – some see them as an opportunity to raise the spiritual awareness of the faithful, others utilize it to keep up folk religiosity, while a third group attempts to use their sermons to awaken or strengthen national/ethnic identity as well as religiosity, and utilize different discourses to these ends.

K., a young nun, represents the first group. A member of the younger generation of clergy, this woman retreated to a monastery after obtaining two university degrees. A refugee from Bosnia, she came to Serbia with her mother in the early 1990’s, and today is very critical toward nationalist discourses and nationalism within Serbian Orthodox Church. She, being the only nun in the monastery, and a priest who comes by from the local parochial church, strive to help pilgrims and local churchgoers separate Christian from pagan religious practices:

“(…) both the Father (author’s note: priest) and I often tell them how to act, we try to point out that there’s no need for some things, that it isn’t good to exaggerate in one’s faith... a person can fall into *prelest* (translator’s note: a kind of spiritual illness or false spiritual state in Orthodox theology). We tell them how they should treat the relics, but they won’t listen. They always say – this is how my mother or my grandmother did it, this helps, I heard that you should do this. (...) Some monasteries offer skirts and scarves, we don’t do that here. We can’t do the washing because people don’t respect the dress code. (...) I always tell them to take something to read, to pray, to strengthen their faith. Sometimes I give them advice on how to deal with life problems, to worry less about material things...”

On the other hand, there are those monks who support elements of folk religion. Thus, all pilgrims who come to the Nikolje monastery receive “instruction” from the nuns or guides to “walk three times around the pine tree” located in the church yard, so

their wishes will come true.¹² There are numerous such examples. They stand in opposition to monasteries in which such practices are interpreted as magic and superstition. Such contradictions mostly occur because concepts of pilgrimage sites and religious practices within them aren't uniform as they are constructed based on different discourses. Since the start of the new millennium, the media and public discourse have engaged in a hyper production of stories about miracles and miraculous cures, which have since become the main trait of sacred sites in Serbia (Radulović 2012). Testimonies of miraculous events and relics can be read daily both online and in print media.

The motif of the miraculous, presented as real, personal events served as a marketing strategy for sacred places, the role of which was to foster and strengthen godliness. Even though, at first glance, these miracles have individual meanings, on a wider social scale, they are interpreted as messages directed at the "Serbian people". This interpretation mostly comes from the clergy. Mass gatherings in monastery churches and church yards are usually an opportunity to pass religious messages to the faithful, but sometimes these messages are social and political in nature as well. Recently, I listened to a priest's sermon directed at thousands of gathered followers in a monastery in Central Serbia:

"(...) this is why we have monasteries in which we have people and girls to pray to God for us every day, this is why we have Hilandar on Mount Athos, Dečani in Kosovo, and this is why we have the hermitage of Saint Sava where the Psalters are read every day. And it was said that if the Psalters were to stop being read in that hermitage, the Serbian people will disappear, and the world will come to an end. Brothers and sisters, our fate is tied to this faith; we are fatefully tied to the Mother of God and the god-man Christ. Because of this,

¹² The brochure on the monastery also states that "the churchyard is home to a hundred year pine tree which the ill, led by a priest, walk around seeking salvation. It is believed that the pine heals the mentally ill and helps barren women".

brothers and sisters, let us remember why we came here. We came to repent, to forgive each other, so the Serbian people can move forward, to pray to God and the Mother of God, to save the Serbian lands, the Serbian people, so there isn't forty thousand less of us each year, so there is more of us, so we can move forward for once. The Mother of God wants to help us, but the question is will we?! We ourselves must decide to move forward. We have role models, we have saints, we have the church, we have everything. We just have to come to Christ our God, to confess our sins and take a new path. The path of penitence. The path of forgiveness. And thus we will achieve what God wants from us..."

These words confirm Morinis' (1992, 4) observation that the pilgrimage destination is a place which reflects an intensive version of a collective ideal of culture.

The examples given here show that the official church still has weak power over discourses and religious practices in monasteries, which is reflected in the multiplicity of religious practices and religious "knowledge" encountered during pilgrimages. Also, many Orthodox Christians go to monasteries because they believe that praying in a certain place is more effective or because they are spurred on by nationalist discourses about monasteries as holy places of nation, wherein national identity takes supremacy over religious identity.

THE HIERARCHY OF PILGRIMAGE DESTINATIONS. The choice of pilgrimage destination depends on the motives of the pilgrims, while their motives depend on factors such as the degree of religious culture, knowledge of orthodox teachings, the degree of connection to the church as well as the expected outcome of the visit. In accordance with pilgrims' perceptions, monasteries in Serbia can be divided into a number of categories: healing (where pilgrims go believing that praying in that specific monastery will help them achieve their goals or be cured of disease); sacred sites of

the Serbian nation – where many pilgrims go not only to bow to the sacred place, but to bow to national history and tradition (eg. Hilandar in Mount Athos); monasteries to which pilgrims are attracted by certain members of the clergy.¹³ If we were to construct a hierarchy based on the “popularity” of monasteries among pilgrims, it would look something like this. This hierarchy is a product of belief in the power of a sacred place, or, as James Preston (1992) called it *spiritual magnetism*. However, when asked directly whether they differentiate between monasteries, the pilgrims usually respond negatively and claim that the “*blagodati*” (translator’s note: grace of God) is the same everywhere”. This begs the question why they visit monasteries in the first place, as well as how they differentiate between churches and monasteries.¹⁴ Of around seventy pilgrims I’ve interviewed, only four clearly stated that they differentiate between sacred places – one man prioritized them by the importance and prominence of the relics (icons, graves and remains of saints), one woman stated that her hierarchy was based upon “personal feeling after contact with the sacred place” and the “amount of *blagodati*”, a third man divided monasteries into old and new saying that for him personally “the new ones aren’t as meaningful, they are built for generations that will come after” and that he visits monasteries built by Serbian rulers “because they are our greatest holy treasures”, while another woman said that the “*blagodati* is greater in older monasteries, because more prayers have been accumulated during the centuries in these places”. Other respondents, even if they claim that they do not differentiate, often choose the same or similar type of monastery they visit or the same

¹³ Even though many SOC monasteries have different cultural, historical and artistic significance, and some of them are on the UNESCO list of cultural heritage, the pilgrims rarely pay any attention to the frescoes, architecture or other things in a church unless they’ve been told that it is “miraculous”.

¹⁴ Many pilgrims, including churchgoers, claim that there is no difference between liturgy in a monastery and liturgy in a church, but they state that “their feeling in monasteries is more intense and that the *blagodati* in them is greater than in parochial churches because of the prayers to God which occur in them every day”. This understanding influences the feelings and relationship of the pilgrims to monasteries and assures that it is different than their relationship to parochial churches.

tour guide. On the other hand, there are those pilgrims who always choose tours that take them to monasteries they hadn't visited before. It is therefore clear that they wish to mark as many sacred sites in their pilgrim biographies as possible. This practice is more frequent among those pilgrims who are searching for something they are unable to find in themselves and their own faith or parochial church, so when visiting a monastery they will say things like "I've never felt peace such as this" or "this is a wellspring of true spirituality".

That there are differences between monasteries and that they are shaped by current public discourse and media marketing is evidenced by one example. In October of 2014 in the monastery *Pokrov Presvete Bogorodice* (eng. The Shroud of the Holy Virgin) in Djunis, the only SOC sacred place where the Mother of God was said to have appeared, which is one of the most visited sacred sites in Serbia, I conducted a survey among pilgrims who came on the day of the monastery slava, from different parts of Serbia and republics of Former Yugoslavia. Few of them knew about the Saint Roman monastery (one of the oldest monasteries in Serbia which houses the remains of Saint Roman)¹⁵ and is located merely 5 km from the monastery in Djunis. Those who knew about it would visit it "in passing" – because it is nearby. Most of the pilgrims learned about monastery in Djunis (which was founded in the 1960's) during the last ten years thanks to the media, pilgrimage tours and from the experiences of pilgrims who were healed in this monastery. Thus, the "power" of this sacred site spread through narration and media, spreading further from the local legend which was known as far back as the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when local people used the spring of holy water to cure illnesses. A similar thing occurred in October 2017 when I visited this monastery with a group of about fifty pilgrims from Belgrade. We were all informed that after Djunis monastery we will be visiting the Saint Roman monastery, as well as two other monasteries in the region. Because

¹⁵ This monastery is famous because the heart of the Russian colonel Nikolaj Nikolajevič Rajevski is buried there. Rajevski had been the inspiration for Leo Tolstoy's character count Vronsky in the novel *Ana Karenina*.

we were held up at Djunis, the tour guide suggested that we “do not spend too much time at St. Roman”, because we would be late to liturgy at the Lešje monastery (third monastery on our pilgrimage). None of the pilgrims protested this decision, and they all stated that they couldn’t wait to visit the healing relics at Lešje. I spoke to 14 women who were sitting around me on the bus and asked if they knew whose remains are housed at Lešje monastery, and most of them didn’t know (one knew about two saints and another knew of one),¹⁶ but they all “heard that they help” and that “we are visiting a great holy place”. Print media, internet forums and social networks play a significant role in the promotion of sacred places. Because of this, local governments and members of local communities, recognizing the economic potential, work tirelessly on promoting monasteries. I have also given this example in order to show one of the ways in which tour guides, not always on purpose, influence the construction of hierarchies of sacred sites. I’m talking about the amount of time spent in each monastery which is decided by the guides. The length of the stay usually reflects the position of the monastery with regard to other monasteries which the group visits during the pilgrimage.

This practice is further enabled by folk belief and a magical relationship toward the relics which are still present among the faithful. Even though the pilgrims have learned over the years that such behavior is not in accordance to Orthodox dogma and belief, most of them have so far managed to “Christianize” their narratives about sacred sites, but their practices are still rooted in folk religion. Thus, pilgrims in a church may be seen dipping their fingers into the oil in the cresset (*kandilo*), taking photos of healing relics so they can pray to them when they are not at church or touching different objects to the holy relics.

PILGRIMAGE AS A FEAT. Pilgrimage, in an ideal sense, represents a kind of feat during which spiritual growth of the pilgrim occurs.

¹⁶ The monastery houses the remains and partial remains of ten early Christian martyrs.

During short pilgrimages which last a day or two and to not include far off destinations and don't cost too much, the feeling of accomplishment is somewhat absent. When tours are well organized, there doesn't even have to be a lot of walking involved, because for the elderly or the sick and those who have difficulty walking there are cars to take them from the bus parking space to the monastery itself. In this sense, these trips do not represent feats such as pilgrimages that took place when transportation and infrastructure around monasteries wasn't developed, or such as bathing in holy springs in winter in Russia (more about pilgrimage in Russia in: Kormina 2010, Naletova 2010). Because of this, pilgrims try to make their journeys as difficult as possible. Sometimes they do this by choosing a cheaper organizer which often entails less comfortable transportation. In this discomfort and bodily suffering (the elderly experience back pain, their legs swell up etc) pilgrims find a way to perceive the pilgrimage as a feat. Another way is to visit monasteries which are located in ethnically or religiously mixed areas, where both the guides and pilgrims go with a dose of fear and uncertainty and "with God's help". One of the tour guides remembered the first trip to Kosovo and Metohija he organized in 2003, a couple of years after the war, when a young man from the group approached him and suggested that they "take the icons and relics of the bus's windshield when they pass into Kosovo, so that they do not provoke the Albanians". For Orthodox Serbs, sacred sites in these territories aren't just religious, they are also national, because even today they serve as a reminder that Serbs used to ("until recently") live there. When they take pilgrims to these sites, organizers tend to remind them that it is a great *blagodati* to see these endangered sites and leave a contribution to the brotherhood/sisterhood. Almost all of my male respondents had visited monasteries in Kosovo and Metohija (these pilgrimages are rarer among women, but they are definitely present). These pilgrimages are more than religious affairs for them – they are pilgrimages to history, tradition, myths and suffering (both of individuals and the nation as a whole):

“When I stepped into Kosovo... When I stepped onto the bus for Kosovo, I felt a kind of force. I felt that unbelievable thing - the *blagodati* connected to

suffering. The joy of blagodat mixed with the suffering down in Kosovo. Of all the pilgrimages I've undertaken, this one left the strongest impression on me. Kosovo!"

THE STRUCTURE OF PILGRIM GROUPS. Most pilgrim groups I have travelled with are dominated by women, which gives the impression that they go on pilgrimages more often than men. The interviews (50) I did with both men and women, however, show that the average number of pilgrimages among men and women is similar (around 10). Of course, there are those who travel a couple of times a year but also those who go on pilgrimages up to twenty times. The difference is in that men go to further destinations or longer trips more often. Thus it may occur that men go to Mount Athos and Hilandar monastery a number of times during the year. Men travel to Kosovo and Metohija, Russia and the Holy Land more often. Also, men will more often organize trips themselves, they will form groups, rent vehicles and create their own circles of pilgrims, carefully choosing the organizer, so in a way they are less visible in group pilgrimages. Interest in holy relics is also lesser among men (eg. they will rarely take objects from their loved ones and touch them to holy relics), and they are more interested in the history of sacred sites and their national importance.

Regardless of gender, pilgrimage tours attract a large number of people who are familiar with the church's teachings – liturgy, fasting, prayer, mostly they fast during all the fasts, they confess and take communion. A group will almost always have new pilgrims, those who had just “awakened” and who use these journeys to get close to Orthodox teachings or experience a spiritual transformation. New pilgrims are always most interested in the narrative offered by the tour guides, other pilgrims and clergy. Their ideas about monasteries and their relationship toward religious practice is shaped by these narratives.

A large number of pilgrims undertakes these trips alone. The reason for this is that in many families in Serbia one member was converted into a churchgoer, while other members remained atheists or traditionally religious. Regardless of the high number of

self-declared Orthodox Christians in Serbia (over 70% of the populace), churchgoers number less than one percent.¹⁷ Orthodox Christians who regularly go to church, fast, pray and confess often feel stigmatized in the larger community, and their familiarity with church doctrine is viewed as “straying into faith”, or as “over the top”, “pathological”, “fanatic” or a “sectarian” turn toward the church (Simić 2005). Pilgrimage tour groups afford a higher degree of understanding and acceptance to these people than their normal surroundings do. In these groups, prayer or the belief in the power of holy relics is not viewed as primitive behavior. A number of pilgrims I spoke to had similar stories about how people close to them didn’t understand or accept them. Milena (1973) converted to the church and pilgrimage some ten years ago after the demise of a long relationship, because her fiancé thought that “she became too attached to the church”. Biljana (1975) started going on these pilgrimages in order to meet religious people, because there aren’t any among her family, friends and work colleagues. She says she started going on these pilgrimages because it was “the easiest thing to do”. As she told me –

“When I started visiting monasteries regularly, a sort of change occurred. At first, my friends teased me because of this, but when they saw that it was genuine and that my interest in faith kept growing, they started abandoning me using different excuses. None of this threatened them in any way, I did not try to persuade them to convert to orthodoxy... it’s just that I lost interest in partying, inebriation and vulgarity. Sometimes when I would invite them to go to a monastery, they’d come but it turned into a kind of day trip which included other tourist attractions, lakes, restaurants and such, which I didn’t like. On the other hand, I figured out that these group trips are the easiest

¹⁷ Precise statistic data on the number of churchgoers in Serbia do not exist. This piece of information became the most often given answer among the faithful and the clergy of parish churches I have spoken to. This is a number one gets by considering the number of those present at liturgies as opposed to the number of people who live in the parish.

for me, and they are cheaper than if I were to take my own car. Here I meet people to whom I don't have to explain why I believe in something or convince that God exists... and besides, I can learn things from them. This exchange of experiences really helped me at first, when I didn't know anything, and didn't even go to church. They especially helped me to figure out which monasteries I should visit".

Her story shows that other pilgrims and their experiences really do play a part in the promoting of certain sacred sites.

THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF PILGRIMAGES. Pilgrimage can have a transformative potential for those who are otherwise not connected to the church, and who acquire their first knowledge about faith through these voyages, at first from tour guides and other pilgrims and then from clergy. These trips are an opportunity to get an informal religious education in interaction with a wider religious community. For many who grew up in socialism and in atheist families, their first contact with religion, doctrine and *the sacred* occurred on trips such as these. Even though they lack formal control and oversight and have certain economic goals, these voyages are also a kind of evangelism. The posters and flyers that are left in public spaces – on bus stops, street lights, at cultural centers, near churches etc. galvanize people with fuzzy ideas about religion who will more easily decide to visit a monastery than to go to the local church. I have met a number of people who are uninterested in the religious aspect of these trips – they equate pilgrimage tourism with cultural tourism which enables them to learn about Serbian history, but after some time they will spontaneously approach faith and begin taking part in religious ceremony. I had met women who came with too much make up or inadequately dressed, and who, after some time and warnings (or friendly advice) from guides or monks began following regulations. Because of such examples, I believe that pilgrimage tours, even with the differences in narrative or organization, had a certain role in attracting people to the church and “spiritual awakening” of religious people in Serbia who are devoted to traditional orthodoxy.

Whichever narrative aside from the religious the organizers used the aim was always the same – laying the spiritual groundwork which would change the type of religiosity of a number of people. Also, pilgrimage tourism created a framework through which people who are in the process of conversion from traditional to church orthodoxy can get to know the purpose and meaning of the orthodox faith. These pilgrimages afford many an opportunity to be integrated into a society of faithful and assess how far their further spiritual development can go. For those who regularly go to church, pilgrimage tours offer an alternative to classic tourism practiced by most, while for those who normally don't go, pilgrimages represent a phase during which they will slowly get acquainted with orthodox teachings and practice.

RETURNING HOME – THE OTHER SIDE OF THE PILGRIMAGE. The relationship between tourism and pilgrimage was a topic of discussion in a number of papers over the last few decades (Cohen 1992; Badone/Roseman 2004; Timothy/Olsen 2006; Swatos 2006; Strausberg 2011). Unfortunately, anthropologists in Serbia have not dealt with this topic, while researchers from other disciplines insisted on clear divisions between tourism and pilgrimage (ex. Nikolić 2010), or rather, on interpreting the reasons for pilgrimage as being entirely of a religious nature.¹⁸

¹⁸ During my fieldwork, I had often encountered people who had started going on pilgrimages in order to visit monasteries as “parts of our or global cultural heritage” or to “keep company” to a friend or family member. An example of this is a married couple whom I had encountered on different pilgrimage trips for years. At one point they explained their desire to visit monasteries by travelling specifically with pilgrim agencies: “We spent a lot of time travelling around Greece, and they have great monasteries. We would go on vacation and then make a field trip to a church or monastery. First we went to see Meteora, and one years my husband and my older son went to Mount Athos. After some years we realized that we haven't gone to see our monasteries at all, even though we went abroad to see others'. We started searching on the internet, and saw that “Dobročinstvo” (author's note: the official agency of the Serbian Orthodox Church) organizes visits to monasteries and that's how we started. By now we've been to many places... This is a way for us to learn more about monasteries, and we hear a lot of wise words and

When viewed from the sidelines, it is hard to draw a definitive line between a pilgrim and a tourist, even when the reasons for travel are solely internal or religious. This is best demonstrated while the pilgrims are on the bus during the trip back. It is then that they begin to relax; they tell stories and anecdotes from their trips, or about their everyday lives, unburdened by religious discourses. They often insist on taking breaks and having coffee together, whence they discuss many different things – from everyday stuff to larger political issues. Sometimes, during this last leg of the pilgrimage, a kind of communion occurs between the pilgrims – in the sense that, regardless of differences in their initial motivation for undertaking the journey or the extent of their religiosity, in the end they all act as if they had fulfilled a common goal.

Another conspicuous occurrence is the summation of impressions on the way back – and the unwritten rule says that these impressions must be positive. Over the last few years, even though I had witnessed many oversights and lapses in organization, bad tour guiding, the disapproval or dissatisfaction of pilgrims due to the changes in travel plans, not following the timetable or a cool reception of the group by the clergy, I have never heard negative comments expressed on the way back. The impressions are always positive and the journey is always discussed in a positive light. In order to facilitate a good mood on the bus, tour guides will usually interpret any negative occurrences as “the great temptations which were put in our way in order to strengthen our faith”. Sometimes they will go so far as to assure the pilgrims that the more challenging the journey, the greater the sacred place they visited. When faced with dissatisfied pilgrims, some tour guides will say “forgive...”, inviting the pilgrim to react to any kind of problem or issue in a Christian manner.

CONCLUSION. In this paper I have offered a classification, systematization and description of the basic elements which make

advice for our everyday lives from the monks who welcome us. This doesn't happen when travelling with the usual travel agencies”.

up pilgrimage journeys. Even though the paper is rife with generalizations and “most case scenarios”, it does not undermine the value of personal experiences and impressions during contact with pilgrimage destinations, rather it strives to view them in light of the appropriate social and political contexts.

Unlike other Orthodox countries (Russia, Greece, Romania) whose sacred sites are recognized and visited by all orthodox Christians, pilgrimage tourism in Serbia is, for now, “closed type” – mostly intended for Orthodox Serbs, and to foster their *spiritual growth* and *churchgoing* habits. Seeing as the sacred sites of the Serbian Orthodox Church do not attract foreigners to the extent that they do in other orthodox countries, all the actors of the pilgrimage ritual (the organizers, clergy, pilgrims...), when interpreting the meaning and significance of the pilgrimage have trouble dividing the religious from the national aspects of it. These aspects are still strongly intertwined, as are folk belief, magic and religion. Today, pilgrimage voyages are organized along the thin line between tourism and spirituality, representing a new space of social interaction and a framework for (re)constructing the religious and national identity of the pilgrims.

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