THE SAGE Encyclopedia of the
SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

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religious practices even when they are not members or believers in the tradition they are practicing with. 'Religion', for some, is thus something one can experience or 'do' on holiday—something unusual or unavailable in the course of normal everyday life. The boundaries between 'religious pilgrimage' and 'secular tourism' cannot easily be distinguished, and it is thus theoretically simpler to posit that pilgrimage is a form of tourism.

Research on pilgrimage traditions, and particularly on the role of such practice in the lives of individuals, has shown the social tensions in play in traditions of religious travel. Certain conditions for the success and popularity of pilgrimage sites are common around the world. Amongst these, having appropriate infrastructure and marketing appear vital; put simply, pilgrims will not travel to a site if it is not known to be 'good to travel to'. Similarly, entertainment, an oft-neglected part of religious identity, also appears to be an important part of pilgrimage. Western scholarship, however, has been uneasy with 'enjoyment' when it comes to religiosity, often eliding it. Nonetheless, pilgrimage routes and sites have been observed to be places of entertainment, including food, performances, conviviality, and sex, regardless of the norms of the society or the dominant religious group. Indeed, sociological literature on pilgrimage has established that this is an important part of what attracts people to go on pilgrimage.

Moving forward, future sociological research has a number of important avenues to pursue. In the first instance, a more thorough understanding of the ways religious traditions embrace touristic activities is needed. This entails understanding not only how religious groups deal with becoming objects of a touristic gaze but also understanding how they articulate the role of 'nonreligious' tourism for group members. Second, the theoretical problem of secularisation is present in pilgrimage and tourism studies, as elsewhere. Participant numbers in religious travel events (World Youth Day, the Camino de Santiago, Shukoku, the Kumbh Mela, Hajj) would belie the secularisation-as-death thesis. What is of particular interest for sociologists is the extent to which secularisation may be connected with a form of 'boundary-softening' whereby the religious practices are opened up to the participation of those who do not claim to be members of the group. This is particularly evident in what has been called 'spiritual tourism'.

Because of the ubiquity and valorisation of tourism as a consumer product, religious sites and events commonly feature as sites of interest for tourists. Within many religious traditions, the social value of travel produces pilgrimage traditions. While these traditions may be to 'sacred' sites, they are also phenomena that illustrate the variety and contradictions of human society. The overall point, however, is that from the outside, pilgrimage traditions are those traditions of travel in which meaning and/or transformation are important, but that hang in tension with other equally important motivations and desires, such as curiosity and fun. Sociology, as a discipline, is well placed to observe and theorise this tension so that we can better understand the roles pilgrimage and tourism play in the lives of our neighbours.

Alex Norman

See also Lived Religion; Ritual; Secularization; Spirituality

Further Readings

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PILLARIZATION

Pillarization is the segmentation of society into groups (pillars) that each identify with a particular religion or worldview, while the political

representatives of each of these groups strive for mutual accommodation and conflict avoidance. While the term technically refers to a *historical process*, namely the emergence and expansion of this mode of dealing with pluralism, it is also used to refer to the *result of such a process*. Pillarization started to erode and dissolve (depillarization) after societal demands for democratization and liberation from institutional pressures sparked processes of secularization back in the 1960s.

Pillarization is found in some, though certainly not all, pluralist societies, the best examples being the Netherlands and Belgium. The former country is traditionally religiously pluralistic with sizable Catholic and Protestant groups existing alongside each other. Besides these two, the Netherlands featured a socialist pillar. The existence of a fourth, liberal pillar has always been a matter of debate, principally because while liberals obviously dislike a society that consists of mutually exclusive pillarized communities, it was precisely and paradoxically this shared aversion that united them. Belgium, unlike the Netherlands, did not feature a Protestant pillar because it historically boasts a Catholic religious monopoly. In Belgium, the Catholic pillar has traditionally dominated the Dutch-language region of Flanders and the socialist one the French-language region of Wallonia, historically Belgium's industrial heartland.

Pillarized societies sustain the plausibility of religions and worldviews by shielding believers from the potentially corrosive consequences of exposure to competing worldviews. Pillars provide their members with political parties, trade unions, broadcasting organizations, schools, and universities that are all firmly tied to their own religions or worldviews. The Netherlands, for instance, boasted Protestant, Catholic, and socialist broadcasting organizations (e.g., NCRV, KRO, and VARA, respectively); newspapers (e.g., *Trouw, Volkskrant,* and *Parool,* respectively); political parties (e.g., ARP, KVP, and SDAP, respectively); trade unions (CNV, NKV, and NVV, respectively); and universities (VU University Amsterdam, the Catholic universities of Nijmegen and Tilburg, and the University of Amsterdam, respectively). The logic of pillarization also extended into the realm of leisure activities by catering to an even wider range of (typically local) youth organizations, sports clubs, music associations, choirs, and hobby clubs. In the heydays of pillarization, even businesses and enterprises tended to recruit personnel from the pillars their owners identified with. Pillarized societies thus feature marked religious polarization at the grassroots level, as exemplified by taboos on intermarriage, discouragement of interreligious friendships, and even housewives refusing to buy in stores with owners from the wrong pillar.

From the 1960s onward, societal demands for democratization and emancipation sparked processes of secularization and depillarization. Since then, many formerly firmly religiously rooted organizations have come to downplay their religious identities or have merged with what used to be ideological competitors. In the Netherlands, the Catholic (NKV) and socialist (NVV) trade unions merged into the FNV in 1976, and in 1980 Protestant (ARP and CHU) and Catholic (KVP) political parties merged into the new Christian party CDA. While Catholic and Protestant universities still exist in Belgium and the Netherlands, their religious identities have become less prominent than they used to be. The Catholic University of Nijmegen was renamed Radboud University Nijmegen, thus downplaying its Catholic identity, while still leaving it recognizable to Catholic *connaisseurs* (Radboud was a 10th-century bishop). Similarly, the Catholic University of Leuven is nowadays routinely called *KU Leuven*, with *KU* (Katholieke Universiteit, or Catholic University) puzzling many an international observer, yet once again appreciated by Catholic insiders.

Political scientists have studied pillarization as a mode of social and political organization that prevents countries with multiple competing minority groups from succumbing to conflict and polarization, as exemplified by the civil war in Lebanon in the 1970s and 1980s. For while pillarized societies surely feature marked polarization at the grassroots level, they also boast political elites that stick to a logic of accommodation to prevent full-out political conflict. Political scientists have also studied the consequences of (de-)pillarization for voting behavior, typically within the framework of the so-called cleavage politics. This is the tendency of political parties to represent a particular type of interest (e.g., class or religious interests) and of voters to support parties for precisely that reason. In this theoretical context, it has been shown that

pillarization incites religious voting that cross-cuts class voting and hence dampens class conflict. Students of politics have furthermore demonstrated that while pillarization made voting behavior and election outcomes highly predictable, this has changed from the 1960s onwards due to depillarization. New political parties emerged, often giving voice to the socially critical spirit of the times, and parties could no longer count on a loyal and predictable quota of voters. Depillarization in effect led to the emergence of the 'floating voter' and increased the necessity of political campaigning in election times.

Finally, in the Netherlands, depillarization has in at least two ways stimulated the rise and electoral success of rightist populism since Pim Fortuyn paved the way for Geert Wilders in the early 2000s. On the one hand, depillarization has fueled longings for a new collective identity to fill the void left by the dissolution of the pillarized ones. This explains Dutch populism's marked ethno-nationalism, played out again and again as an irresolvable conflict between "freedom-loving and tolerant native Dutch" and "backward and intolerant Islamic immigrants," typically by construing acceptance of women's rights and gay rights as cornerstones of Dutch identity. On the other hand, while citizens felt politically represented by "their own" politicians under pillarized conditions, depillarization has prompted experiences of political alienation and an unbridgeable gap between politicians and *the people*. This has increased the appeal of populist rhetoric about a corrupt and self-serving political caste that is not even interested in the problems of ordinary citizens.

Dick Houtman

See also Culture; Modernization and Modernity; Nationalism; Politics and Religion; Reasonable Accommodation; Secularization

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PLAUSIBILITY STRUCTURE

The term *plausibility structure* is associated with Peter L. Berger and his classic theoretical exposition in *The Sacred Canopy*, published in 1967. Building on the base of his earlier work with Thomas Luckmann in *The Social Construction of Reality*, Berger asked how religious ways of being in the world are sustained. His answer was that the same social processes that produce the rest of reality also produce religion. He painted a picture of a dynamic social process in which religious ideas and experiences are expressed (externalized, in his terms), recognized and named by others (made objective), and rendered subjectively meaningful (internalized). The social context in which religion is recognized, named, and taken to be real is the plausibility structure.

This concept combines phenomenology (drawn from Alfred Schutz) with Karl Marx's dialectical understanding of society and George Herbert Mead's symbolic interactionism. That is, religious realities are produced in the dialectic of everyday social interaction (Marx's "social relations of production") and come to be social *products* that can act back on their producers. The responses of significant others (and perhaps an entire society) reinforce a taken-for-granted understanding about what is real, who we are and where we fit, and how we should act. That context of social interaction and internalization is what Berger termed a *plausibility structure*. It is a *social base* that makes possible the continuing existence of the predictable patterns and ideas that guide people through