

Religious tourism in San Giovanni Rotondo, the worship of Padre Pio: narrations and testimonies

Paola de Salvo University of Perugia

Pasquale Guerra ISUC (Institute for the History of Contemporary Umbria)

New meanings, new perspectives and renewed interests increasingly converge on tourism and pilgrimage (Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Kong, 2001; Sharpley, 2015). Post-modernism, such as the mercy of pilgrimage (Henderson, 2010), the secularisation of society leads to a weakening of spiritual experience and its transformation into a tourist experience. Pilgrims also become victims of modernity that affects the personal and existential authenticity of the pilgrimage, transforming spirituality into an inauthentic experience that undermines the simplicity, values and modalities of religious travel (Qurashi, 2017). The work is aimed at showing the radical changes that took place in San Giovanni Rotondo (Foggia, Italy) where he lived and worked Father Pius by Pietrelcina, now San Pio. Devotion to the Holy One occupies an important segment of tourism in San Giovanni Rotondo, and religious travels in this place have become over time, and more and more secular travel patterns emerge. The worship of Padre Pio seems to be increasingly characterised by tourist behaviour that takes the outward forms of pilgrimage losing its most important aspect: the idea of sacred and devotional (Nocifora, 2010). The work involves the observation of a first period, from the arrival of the Friar to the convent of S. Maria delle Grazie, in San Giovanni Rotondo, until his death in September 1968. A second, from the death to the beatification (2.05.1999) and subsequent canonization of Father Pio, and finally a third period that goes from the canonization (16.06.2002) by Pope John Paul II to our day. Padre Pio (born in Pietrelcina in the province of Benevento) miraculously receives the stigmata on September 20, 1918, in the little church of the convent of St. John. The fame of the stigmatised friar spreads quickly in the province, reaching to Rome where Cardinal Gasparri and other prelates of the Holy See will receive the task of carefully examining the case of the Capuchin friar so as not to generate pilgrim flows in an uncontrolled way and without evidence Official on the veracity of the stigmata. Father Gemelli will go to the doctor before becoming a religious person to observe the Friar, creating an entirely negative impression personally. The Friar will be prevented from confessing, and other restrictions will be imposed. But only after the Second World War, thanks to the rotocalchi and the coated press, most Italians find out the existence of the stigmatised friar. San Giovanni Rotondo became the destination of an unprecedented phenomenon of pilgrimages to what they called the "living saint": not only people of the country and therefore of the province but also men of culture, entertainment and politics are attracted to the friar. For some of them, it is just a conversion that will lead them to become "Spiritual Children of Father Pious." Among them are some actors, scientists, entrepreneurs, and some doctors who will settle in St. John, including Dr Giuseppe Gusso, the first to run from the friar, Dr Sanguinetti and Dr Giuseppe Sala who will become his personal physician until his death. Thanks to the influx of wealthy believers, legacies and donations, Father Pio can realise the dream of giving work to his fellow citizens and relieving the pain of those suffering in suffering. The hospital "House Relief of Suffering", inaugurated by Cardinal Lercaro, Archbishop of Bologna, in May 1956, will be considered by the press and ordinary people as a "real economic miracle". Even as a result of that realisation and the new Shrine, we are developing a real mass pilgrimage that will gradually take on the characteristic of "religious tourism". The death of Padre Pio on the night of September 23, 1968, decreed a change of route

on the pilgrimage to San Giovanni Rotondo, while the independent one remained and detached from San Giovanni: the path to St. Michael at Monte S. Angelo. Continuing to expand the veneration towards the Capuchin Friars, organisations and groups were established to organise pilgrimages to the sanctuary and to the places of Padre Pio (the natural areas, the convents where he had stayed before going to San Giovanni). The "Prayer Groups" were born, an organisation that, considering the Relief House of Suffering, spreads not only in Italy, but also in all parts of Europe and even America. Members of the organisation, devoted to the Capuchin Friar, went into the cities where the facility was present to visit them, talk to them about the Father, raise funds and donations to the hospital. The structure is still present in every part of the world: at the top lies the bishop of the diocese of Manfredonia, as president, along with representatives of the Capuchin friars and doctors of the hospital (Luzzato, 2009). Between 2008 and 2009, when the resurrected body of the saint was exposed to the worship of the faithful, there was an incredible increase in tourist flows which, even in the opinion of the Capuchin friars themselves and the municipal councillor for tourism, did not It was possible to quantify. Indeed, the new religious tourism of this period was characterised by "*bites and fugitives*": from all over Italy, there are tours around San Giovanni Rotondo with buses travelling at night, thus avoiding hotel hospitality (Resta, 2015). For this reason, many receptive exercises realised in a short time (estimates refer to an exponential increase in the structures, often modest, obtained from existing housing on which one or more floors have been raised) to meet the needs of tourists came into crisis. They have resisted more organized structures or because they have been present in the Apulian town for many years or because within some hotel chains of a certain level. Religious tourism, in any case, is mainly directed towards the places of the Shrine (monastery, fraternal places, the House Relief of Suffering), leaving entirely outside the centre and structures of the city. There are also other religious attractions such as San Michele Sanctuary or sacred archaeological sites such as the Sanctuary of Santa Maria di Siponto and San Leonardo di Siponto. Tourists are reserved for a journey within the places - the symbol of the life of the Friar in San Giovanni, processions and rituals of the community (the climb to the mountain of the Via Crucis), religious rites within the old sanctuary and the new structure designed by Renzo Piano was inaugurated in July 2004. Today, the work of spreading the Friar's thoughts with the Prayer Groups, with a subscription magazine, continues with a radio television (Tele Radio Padre Pio) that is both digital and on the platform Sky satellite.

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