

The Geographical Review

VOLUME 93

July 2003

NUMBER 3

TRANSPLANTING PILGRIMAGE TRADITIONS IN THE AMERICAS

CAROLYN V. PROROK

ABSTRACT. Transplanting pilgrimage traditions, or the process of remaking the collective self in sacred places, requires new sacred places as worthy destinations. As people migrate from the lands where sacred places developed to those where such places may become only a distant memory, many communities attempt to recover their pilgrimage tradition by co-opting sacred sites of host communities, maintaining links to their homeland, or re-creating sacred sites in the lands of resettlement through replication, (re)recognition, creating movable rituals, celebrating sites of sacred embodiment, and ritual historicizing. Examples taken primarily from Catholic and Hindu experiences in the Western Hemisphere illustrate this preliminary typology. Transplanting pilgrimage traditions may be viewed as anchoring our individual, existential quests to fleeting ships of “collective selfhood.” *Keywords:* Americas, Catholicism, collective selfhood, Hinduism, pilgrimage, sacred places.

*T*ransplanting a pilgrimage tradition is a precarious endeavor. In theory the possibilities are endless, but in practice many difficulties must be overcome. Notions about how the sacred shows itself are carried easily enough from one land to another, but whether one will recognize the sacred there is an entirely different matter. The myths that tie specific supernatural entities to specific places at home may not be conducive to transplantation, and the collective conscious that produces a community of potential pilgrims may be so frayed by the migration experience that its original form cannot be recovered. Moreover, the new society may be unreceptive to, or outright intolerant of, one's traditions. Under these circumstances, diasporic communities with pilgrimage traditions have had varying degrees of success in re-creating a sustained, organized, and functional pilgrim circulation system.

This article is concerned with the prevailing strategies that underlie the transplantation and reinvention of an already established and deeply embedded pilgrimage tradition by migrant communities—primarily from Catholic Europe and Hindu South Asia to the Western Hemisphere. This entails the struggle to make new sacred places. Making and remaking sacred place is essential to pilgrimage circulation systems. Three metascenarios for the potential emergence of a sacred place for transplanted peoples are presented in this essay. These scenarios and their associated

✦ DR. PROROK is a professor of geography at Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania 16057-1326.