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**“THE CONCEPT OF HEALING IN RELIGION, CULTURE,
HEALTH SCIENCES AND THE ECONOMICAL PROSPECTIVE”**

PROCEEDINGS

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NEW AGE TOURISM IN BALI: NATURE RELIGION AND SELF SPIRITUALITY

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Abstract

The New Age movement has grown to considerable proportions in recent years as people have become dissatisfied with traditional religion and as life in Bali societies has become too frenzied and materialistic. People have begun turning to alternative forms of spirituality and health that rely heavily on nature and self-transformation. Adherence requires inner transformation. These inward journeys are manifest in physical pilgrimages to ancient cultural sites, natural that are based on harvesting earth energies and mystical encounters with spirits and extra terrestrials areas, and spas or other healing destination in Bali, believed to be endowed with sacred powers that can cure the mind, body, and soul. These spatial-religious expressions are reflected in the tours purchased and guidebooks acquired. Owing to their status as centers of earth power or cosmic energy, several tourism destination in Bali have developed as major spiritual centers. Several tourism destination in Bali have emerged in recent years with the growth of this postmodern tourism. As a result of New Agers' reliance on indigenous culture and natural sites for their own spiritual pilgrimages, the most looming concerns are environmental degradation, commodification of culture, and commercialization of religion.

Keyword: healing, spiritual, postmodern, commodification, tourism destination

INTRODUCTION

Since the mid-twentieth century rapid modernization and technological growth in the western world have brought with them fast-paced consumer societies, where people get caught in a time crunch feeling stressed and burned out. Few people in the developed world have time to relax and appreciate nature, develop personal interest, and improve their mental and spiritual health (Lengfelder and Timothy 2000; Schor 1993). At the same time, for various reasons there has been a wave of dissatisfaction with some aspects of traditional organized religion, resulting in breakaway sects, changes in theological viewpoints, transformations of politico-religious view, and varying levels of adherence (Allitt 2003; Houtman and Mascini 2002). These two factors, the frenetic pace of contemporary life, and varying levels of commitment to traditional religion, have caused people to seek alternative lifestyles and spiritual worldviews, particularly in the Bali.

Several spiritual philosophies, or religious orders, focus not on an individual god or multiple gods, but rather channel devotion to the earth and the realm of nature. These so-called 'nature-

religions' or 'earth religions' advocate respect for the universe and harmonious human-ecology relationships (Hooper 1994; Ibrahim and Cordes 2002). Animism, the belief that spirits inhabit everything in nature (plants, minerals, air, mountains, water, earth, fire, and animal). Nature-based belief systems focus on human as part of nature, not separate from it. From this viewpoint, humans do not have dominion over the earth, should they control it. Instead, they are simply one part of a larger system where in all things on the earth, including the earth itself, interact, have spirit, live and are capable of feeling. Such belief systems are common in indigenous societies throughout the world and are believed to be one of the oldest forms of worship.

The New Age movement may be seen as both a form of nature religion and self-spirituality. It embraces the oneness of humanity, nature, and the cosmos and is essentially animist in perceiving that the earth and the cosmos are a live and conscious (Albanese 1990; O'Neil 2001). For New Age adherents, nature promotes spiritual growth and provides mystical oneness, mysteries beyond the ordinary, and transcendence beyond the limitations, structure, and laws of the physical world. According to Ivakhiv (1997) New Ageism is a way of gaining personal meaning in life and effecting self-transformation by living a simpler, more ecologically oriented lifestyle. New Agers endorse the use of chants, meditation, *yoga*, astrology, fortune telling, palm reading, channeling spirit beings, past-life regression, extraterrestrial communication, out-of-body experiences, acupuncture to achieve their goals of self-transformation and holistic living. The body is viewed in energy terms, and healthy body will allow a free flow of life energy. It involves holistic, vegetarian, organic, and naturopathic approaches to eating and health care and criticizes conventional medicine.

This self-centered approach to spiritual living does not, as traditional religion does, bind people to larger social groups or require submission to a higher authority. In fact, according to Tucker (2002:50), "it does just the opposite ... New Agers mostly reject the social world and any kind of authority beyond the self." Tucker goes on to note that this worldview creates a fairly distinct demographic associated with the movement.

DISCUSSION

New Age Spirituality and Tourism

New Agers and nature and self-religionists comprise a major world market for tourism. Millions of New Age trips are taken every year and typically involve activities and tourism destination that teach people to become more aware of themselves, spiritually tuned, and less materialistic. With the growth in New Age spirituality and the noteworthy levels of travel that follow, a growing number of tour operators have discovered this valuable market during the past twenty years. According Associated Press (2002), likewise, several US States have begun to realize the potential economic impact of this lucrative niche and are trying to promote themselves as centers of spiritual energy and important tourism destination for New Agers. For instance, attempted to lure travelers to the state's native and energy sacred sites to discover themselves and receive enlightenment.

As noted earlier, New Age travel is very place-oriented. During the counter-culture of the 1960s and early 1970s, many people began to adopt elements of mysticism and spiritual

philosophies, into their "alternative lifestyle." A Strong interest grew in "earth mysteries," including theories of sacred geography and geometry, which focused on powerful energies and unseen forces at ancient places. According to one perspective, powerful archeological site are aligned with one another, representing linear, prehistoric power line, which radiate earth's energies. These ancient places "became important to some groups who viewed prehistoric monuments as living places imbued with sacred energy and not as relics from a completed past" (English 2002:8). New Age spiritualists, site of ancients ritual are among the most important tourism destination because they are believed to have been built in accordance to the energies of nature.

Essential to spirit travel is the "sacred site" -sometimes known as a "power place"- a spot endowed, for a variety of reasons, with a special dollop of genius loci. There may be mysterious geological features, such as artesian wells or anomalous currents, enchanted groves or cliffs with strange carvings. Perhaps Druid sorcerers are burried there, or Incan kings and queens, or Pythian sibyls, or a great saint or bodhisattva. Maybe there are pyramids, monasteries, dolmens, sacred serpent mounds. Whatever the reason, these site -including Delphi, the Egyptian Pyramids, Machu Picchu, parts of the American Southwest and the entire island of Bali, to name a few- are seen as cracks in the universe where the external is revealed (Hooper 1994:72).

New Age tourism is also uniquely defined by the activities and types of trips undertaken, combining many elements of cultural, religious, nature-based, and health tourism (Gee and Fayos-Sola 1997). Most New Agers are deep tourist in the sense that they do not simply go to see a place, lay out on the beach or take picture they participate and become part of the destination through meditation, prayer, and other rituals (Attix 2002; Ivakhiv 2003; Reisinger 2006; Timothy 2002). This is evident in tour packages that cater specifically to the needs of New Agers.

At least four types of New Age tours or activities can be identified: education, health, spiritual growth/personal development, and volunteer. Educational tourism, or "edutourism" as Strutt (1999) calls it, entails travelling for the purpose of learning and getting hands on experience. Many of these focus on photography, art, kayaking, gardening, weaving, music and dance, and studying ancient languages. These "alternative vacations" educate and allow people to develop specific skills and "are aimed at immersion rather than observation" (Strutt 1999:27).

Health holidays, or "holistic tourism" focus on activities such as *yoga* and spa treatments, nature hiking, reflexology, meditation, and aromatherapy. Unlike most forms of mass tourism that focus on escapism, holistic holiday emphasize getting travellers to engage with their inner selves and reconcile internal discord through deeper personal and spiritual experiences (Lange 2001; Smith 2003; Timothy 2002). These fitness and healing tours operate on the notion that good physical health leads to strong spiritual health (Cogswell 1996).

While all forms of New Age travel ultimately aim to increase spiritual growth, there are various types of journey that concentrate more overtly on the spiritual elements. Specific rituals and activities, such as attending seminar and workshop in Nusa Dua, praying with Besakih Temple, meditating in Candidasa, or undergoing a ceremonial death and rebirth inside one of the Matahari Terbit beach are common example. Package tour of a more spiritual nature are often guided by experienced New Age authors, or other revered persons and teach people to slip into deeper dialogue with nature, to receive earth's powers and show the best way of live their lives. According Smith (2003), the fourth form of New Age organized travel involves volunteering in

service-oriented endeavors, primarily in the developing world. Teaching people to read, practice personal hygiene, build house, and grow vegetables are typical volunteer activities.

New Age Destinations

Ivakhiv (2003:99) suggests that New Age travelers can be divided into “mere tourist” and “genuine pilgrims,” the difference being that the mere tourist plan to return home rather quickly, while the genuine pilgrims drift from place to place, seeking longer-term spiritual connections. The latter form of New Age travel, Ivakhiv argues, gives rise to the development of networks of healing centers, spiritual communities, retreats, and places of New Age commerce. These “pilgrim-migrants” are an important part of the economic and social life of the community and outside of work spend much of their time hiking, meditating, seeing psychics and other spiritual counselors, chanting, channeling spirits, and conducting rituals inside stone circles (medicine wheels).

While not all tourists to Sedona are New Agers, many of the four million visitors each year are, and they seek out the same activities as the pilgrim-migrants who live there now. Allen (1999) refers to Sedona as the “New Age Lourdes,” and in popular lexicon it is commonly referred to as the “Capital of New Age Tourism”. According to Page Bryant, the famous Sedona psychic, vortexes are the “point at which energy currents meet or become coagulated into funnels of energy” (Ivakhiv 1997:373). Likewise, McGivney and Archibald (1997:46) describe vortexes as “natural power spots where psychic energy gushes from the earth like a geyser” and are usually manifested in areas “tremendous natural beauty created by the elements of land, light, air and water” (Andres 2000:12).

Tours in Sedona focus overwhelmingly on the vortexes and the potential for extraordinary/extraterrestrial experience (Ivakhiv 1997, 2003). The town is saturated with tour companies that offer four-wheel drive, off-road tours to sacred shrines, areas of intense energy flows, and mystic canyons. Likewise, dozens of businesses offer palm and tarotcard reading, past-life interpretation, spirit channeling, spas and naturopathic healing. Encampment activities include drumming circles, medicine wheel ceremonies, sweat lodges, and lectures by well-known New Age promoters and self-proclaimed shamans.

The New Age movement in Japan is known as “World of the Spiritual” and essentially follows the same practices and belief systems as those of North American and European New Age, although with a slightly more influence from China and India. In tourism terms, followers of the World of the Spiritual also tend to travel in search of truth and spiritual enlightenment. While they do sometimes travel to other parts of the world, most of their worship takes place in Japan and other parts of East Asia. One example is Tenkawa Benzaitensha, a famous pilgrimage site of the World of the Spiritual and an old shrine located in the mountains of Yamato in central Japan. Like Sedona, it attracts thousands of spiritual mediums and psychics, eccentric artists, and young people on spiritual quests (Shimazono 1999).

Machu Picchu is a popular destination for New Agers from the world over who value its ancient role as a ceremonial site (as some scientists believe) and an abode of Inca high priests and holy Virgins of the Sun (Barnard 1993). New Age pilgrims believe that the white granite of Machu Picchu vibrates with earth energy. Meditation, ancient medicine rituals, fire ceremonies,

water purification rites, healings, and pipe ceremonies with indigenous leaders are among the most popular activities.

a. Controversy in New Age Tourism

Perhaps more than any of the other spiritual and religious worldviews discussed, the New Age faction has seen tremendous conflict and experienced the most controversy in tourism destination societies in Bali. The majority of this controversy has focused on the social impacts of New Age behavior and tourist activities. Such concerns have grown in spite of the movement's emphasis on social (e.g. cross-cultural tolerance). The root of the problem lies in the fact that the movement is so young, beginning in earnest only in the 1950s, and that it has no formal organizational structure at its roots. The group's relative youth, therefore, means that there are no sites New Agers can truly claim to be their own no ancient monuments, temples, or shrines built early on by adherents and passed down through the centuries. Neither are there areas of natural significance that are not already under the control of public land agencies, indigenous groups, or private individuals.

It is a common practice for New Age spiritualists to leave crystals, rock arrangements, fire remnants, candles, and other offerings at sites they consider powerful or sacred. In Sedona, medicine wheels are made by the faithful as a way to channel earth's energy, much to the dismay of the National Forest Service, which controls much of the land surrounding the town and which New Agers consider holy. This 'religious graffiti' (Ivakhiv 2003) or 'ritual litter' may contribute to the deterioration of cultural and natural sites. At some locations, the soil is rather thin above archeological relics, yet worshippers build fires on them. Likewise, candles are often placed too closely to heat-sensitive limestone (Powell 2003).

At most New Age venerated spots of archeological importance there have been problems associated with worshippers chipping away at the stones to take bits and pieces with them as sacred souvenirs. This is an especially severe problem at Pemuteran (Buleleng Regency) and Candidasa (Karangasem Regency), although some of the more influential believers are beginning to discourage this type of behavior. The biggest complaint, by the Balinese is the commercialization or commodification of their spiritual heritage for non-indigenous use and profiteering. Aldred (2000:330-336) provides a great deal of insight into the controversies surrounding the New Age utilization of Native American spiritual heritage. For example, New Age paraphernalia are now being marketed in mass quantities and promoted as 'Native American sacred objects.'

Many New Age shamans claim to be able to contact Indian spirits and perform Native rituals. They write best-selling books and lead expensive workshops and claim they can instruct people how to perform Native American spirituality, earning large sums of money, while many Native people still live below the poverty line (Aldred 2000). The commercialized practices of these self-proclaimed New Age shamans, or "Shake and Bake Shamans" or "Plastic Shamans," as they are derogatorily known to many Native Americans, are offensive, particularly when they claim to be "authentic." According to Aldred (2000:336) their claim is founded on the idea that everyone has a right to such tradition, because spirituality and truth cannot be owned. Spirituality is not something which can be 'owned' like a car or house. Spiritual knowledge belongs to all humans equally.

The final controversial element of tourism in this context relates to the commercialization of spirituality. Observance of New Age is underscored by a lifelong inner journey for spiritual health

and enlightenment, best realized through travel and consumption of various tourism product and services. As such, "seeking" which takes on a very physical and spatial form, is the primary mode of participation. Whereas in other religions, a church or other organization forms the structural element of spiritual life, in New Age practice, commercialism itself is seen as the organizational element that guides the New Age (Redden 2005). This, according Redden, is realized in material terms through the selection and consumption of commoditized goods and services through New Age Businesses, such as tour operator and merchandisers. Thus, the foundation on which New Ageism is based, involves the commercial promotion of ideas and practices. According Redden (2005) in words, spiritual products "be they objects or service (such as a weekend's training), are sold for a fee."

CONCLUSIONS

The New Age movement has grown to considerable proportions in recent years as people have become dissatisfied with traditional religion and as life in Bali societies has become too frenzied and materialistic. People have begun turning to alternative forms of spirituality and health that rely heavily on nature and self-transformation. New age religion is defined by a complex and distinctive assortment of activities, ritual, behaviors, and material cultures, borrowed from the ancient traditions of pagans, animists, indigenous societies, and other nature-and self-oriented creeds. This unique approach to spiritual systems manifest itself in various ways in the context of tourism.

Adherence requires inner transformation that are based on harvesting earth energies and mystical encounters with spirits and extraterrestrials. These inward journeys are manifest in physical pilgrimages to ancient cultural site, natural areas, and spas or other healing tourism destination, believed to be endowed with sacred powers that can cure the mind, body, and soul. These patial-religious expressions are reflected in the tours purchased, guidebooks acquired, tourist object and activities undertaken.

Owing to their status as centers of earth power or cosmic energy, several tourism destination in Bali have developed as major spiritual centers. The most visited among New Agers are Ubud (Gianyar Regency), Pemuteran (Buleleng Regency), Candidasa (Karangasem Regency) and are many other places that are equally important New Age Tourism Destination.

Several controversies have emerged in recent years with the growth of this postmodern tourism worldview. As a result of New Agers' reliance on indigenous culture, archeological relics, and natural site for their own spiritual pilgrimages, the most looming concerns are environmental degradation, commodification of culture, and commercialization of religion.

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