

Review of: "Spirituality of Pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago: Existential Questions and the Meaning of Life"

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The article initially delineates three distinct elements for discussion: the rituals of passage, the contemporary configurations of life, and the notion of spirituality and existentialism among individuals undertaking the Camino de Santiago. The discourse surrounding these elements is marked by numerous generalizations, prompting the suggestion that a more focused exploration be undertaken to discern the prevailing ideas along the Camino de Santiago, many of which undoubtedly possess existential characteristics. The overarching narrative of the Way emerges as a secular exploration, emphasizing the pursuit and confrontation of self through fundamental inquiries. While open to debate, it is noteworthy that the discourse on living at the fringes of society is not novel, and the concept of embarking on a path of self-discovery has been intricately linked with truth systems since, at least, the eighteenth century.

In any critique of the author's work, while acknowledging the author's creative autonomy, three essential considerations come to the fore. Firstly, a suggestion is made to temper the overarching epic tone in the portrayal of contemporary existence, recognizing it as a construct primarily relevant to the European middle class. Secondly, a nuanced understanding of the Camino experience is advocated, encompassing various perspectives, including those within a tourist and commercial context, which coexists with other authentic experiences. Thirdly, the primary criticism centers on the work's adherence to a colonial framework. The author is admonished for overlooking individuals engaged in work beyond their linguistic, environmental, and cognitive domains, particularly neglecting the myriad non-Spanish-speaking walkers and the diverse service personnel contributing to the overall experience.

The work is accused of adopting a colonial tone, reminiscent of academic works that disregard the substantial efforts undertaken within the country traversed, depicting it as an exotic and primitive backdrop. The author's failure to acknowledge the rich academic landscape, exemplified by the presence of some of the oldest universities in Europe and vibrant departments of anthropology, philosophy, and history, is highlighted. Furthermore, the critique questions the use of English-centric citations, asserting that the work denies agency not only to the subjects studied but also anchors the Camino de Santiago within external and unfounded frameworks (referencing authorities such as Franz, Berger and Luckmann, Bauman, or Giddens). The ethical concern raised revolves around the work's dubious interrogation of the studied subjects' capacity to impart intrinsic meanings, sidelining their voices and attributing their concerns to external influences.

The analogy of a Spanish social anthropologist from the University of Santiago de Compostela writing about the Espadas show in Moreska, without knowledge of Croatian, relying solely on English bibliography, and interviewing only tourists, is

presented to underscore the potential ethical shortcomings. The argument posits that such an approach may be perceived as lacking in fairness by the individuals associated with the studied phenomenon, implying a disregard for contextual nuances and diverse perspectives. The critique concludes by urging the author to consider the Camino as a potential political project, acknowledging alternative viewpoints, and recognizing the ongoing discourse regarding the truth of the Camino.

Spain, Portugal, Greece, and the Camino de Santiago serve as illustrative cases for comprehending a broader issue. These regions are often approached by numerous European and Anglo-Saxon academic contexts as intriguing sites for reflections on problems that generate interest, yet they frequently overlook or dismiss the significance of local researchers in understanding the subjects under investigation. This work is emblematic of such tendencies, compounded by the fact that, to a certain extent, the author has disseminated the same content in various forms on at least five prior occasions.