

# **The Journey is the Destination:**

An Exploration of the Experience of Pilgrimage



A Hermeneutic Literature Review

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*The sense of having walked from far inside yourself  
out into the revelation, to have risked yourself  
for something that seemed to stand both inside you  
and far beyond you, that called you back  
to the only road in the end you could follow, walking  
as you did, in your rags of love and speaking in the voice  
that by night became a prayer for safe arrival,  
so that one day you realized that what you wanted  
had already happened long ago and in the dwelling place  
you had lived in before you began,  
and that every step along the way, you had carried  
the heart and mind and the promise  
that first set you off and drew you on and that you were  
more marvellous in your simple wish to find a way  
than the gilded roofs of any destination you could reach.*

Excerpt from "Santiago" by David Whyte.



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## **Attestation of Authorship**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Jessica Walsh

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## **Abstract**

Historically, a pilgrimage has referred to a journey undertaken to a sacred place for religious or moral reasons, which often resulted in pilgrims experiencing miraculous healing events (Dubisch & Winkleman, 2005; Talbot, 2002). In modern times, the meaning of pilgrimage has shifted and evolved, though it remains capable of affecting pilgrims in remarkable ways, including psychologically. This study attempts to act as a bridge between pilgrimage and psychotherapy; investigating how the experience of pilgrimage affects pilgrims, in the hope that this knowledge may benefit psychotherapists and the communities they serve. This dissertation proceeds through a hermeneutic literature review, weaving the author's own process—including her experience on pilgrimage, cultural background, and role as a psychotherapist—with literature on the topic of pilgrimage.

The study finds that pilgrimage affects pilgrims in three significant ways: it enables them to feel a healthy sense of community with their fellow pilgrims; facilitates a profound inner journey, alongside their outer journey; and fosters a spiritual connection. Based on these findings and the proven health benefits of community, looking inside oneself and spirituality, it is recommended that pilgrimage be prescribed for clients deemed appropriate by their psychotherapist and utilised as a holistic intervention, alongside regular psychotherapy. Strong connections between Māoritanga and pilgrimage were also discovered, especially regarding the centrality of community, spirituality, and being connected to the natural world. Further recommendations are made pertaining to the relevance of pilgrimage for upholding Te Titiri honouring practice.

## Chapter One: Introduction/“Beginning”

*Most of us live our lives half asleep...  
Pilgrimage is one attempt to wake up.*

Gurdijeff, cited in Reason (2018, p. 9)



*In mid-2016 I was at a particularly low point in my life; 27 years old, stuck in a career that did not excite me, and nursing a freshly broken heart. Lost and dejected, I was searching for something though I did not know what. Serendipitously, the idea of pilgrimage was introduced to me by somebody I trusted dearly and appealed to my “inner knowing” with a strength I could not ignore. Taking a rather large leap of faith, I packed my hiking boots and purchased a plane ticket to Europe. Prior to beginning my pilgrimage, I spent time backpacking; catching up with friends whom I had not seen in years, exploring new cities, learning how to surf and sunning myself on some truly stunning beaches. My nerves led me to delay starting more than once and I almost succumbed to the temptation of relaxing on the beach, drink in hand, for the remainder of my trip. It took all of my determination and courage to catch an overnight train and*

*three buses to St Jean Pied de Port in Southern France where I began my Camino de Santiago pilgrimage. I vividly recall taking my first tentative steps on that fateful first day and the sense of immense mystery which surrounded the journey ahead of me. I felt unprepared and apprehensive. My motivation for walking over 800 kilometres, alone, on the other side of the world, with just a small backpack, evaded even myself. Yet my intuition told me I was exactly where I needed to be.*

The experience I ended up having on pilgrimage was deeply transformative, leading me to enquire whether other pilgrims have had similar experiences. This dissertation is a hermeneutic literature review exploring the research question: How does the experience of pilgrimage affect pilgrims? The study aims to synthesise findings from research and literature on pilgrimage, using Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic's (2014) hermeneutic circle approach, to provide a greater level of understanding of the longstanding but little understood endeavour. The study sourced review journal articles, book chapters, and books from online databases and the AUT library's physical collection, using the search terms "pilgrimage", "pilgrim", and "experience". Due to the broad appeal and multi-layered nature of pilgrimage, the study incorporates literature from a varied blend of disciplines, including anthropology, culture, religion, spirituality, mental health, counselling, holistic healthcare, and tourism/recreation. Currently, there is an almost complete lack of publications on pilgrimage within psychoanalytic literature; a gap which this study begins to address.

It is my hope that this research will be of particular interest to my fellow pilgrims—past, current, and prospective—as well as to psychotherapists and psychotherapy clients. My pilgrimage and psychotherapy journeys have been the most healing and transformative experiences of my life. This has led me to wonder whether attaining a greater understanding of pilgrimage could enrich the psychotherapy community in some way. Warfield (2012) asserted that pilgrimage can be undertaken in conjunction with therapy to address client presentations related to healing, identity, belonging, and spirituality. Trauma survivors, military veterans, and refugees have

been identified as client groups for whom pilgrimage may be especially beneficial, as well as clients who are grieving a significant loss or generally feeling lost in their lives (Schmidt, 2009; Warfield, 2012). Therapists who are aware of the effects pilgrimage can have will be better equipped to assist clients who go on a pilgrimage journey and, perhaps, also to raise the possibility of pilgrimage as an intervention alongside psychotherapy.

To begin, I provide brief explanations of the key terms “pilgrimage” and “pilgrim”. I outline the wider context of the study, including my motivation for choosing the research topic, and acknowledge the pre-understandings that I inevitably bring as the researcher. I conclude with an overview of the structure of the dissertation.

## **Key Terms**

### **Pilgrimage**

Just as I had set off on my pilgrimage with only a vague idea of why, I realised that I was beginning this research with only a vague idea of what a pilgrimage actually was, even though I had been on one. Historically, a pilgrimage was understood to be a journey undertaken to a sacred place for religious or moral reasons (Dubisch & Winkleman, 2005; Pullen, 2018). The tradition dates back to ancient times whereby significant numbers of pilgrims were found to experience miraculous healing events when they reached their destination, including being cured of mental and physical illnesses (Talbot, 2002). The appeal of pilgrimage traverses centuries, continents, cultures, and religious affiliations. For thousands of years, Buddhists have undertaken pilgrimages to the Buddha’s birthplace (Lumbini, Nepal) or where he attained enlightenment (Bodh Gaya, India); Muslims have journeyed to the holy city of Mecca (birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad); Christians have made their way to Santiago (the final resting place of the Apostle St James) or Lourdes (where apparitions of the Virgin Mary have been sighted); Catholics have ventured to Vatican City (home of the Pope); and Hindus have voyaged to the “four holy sites” which make up the Char Dam

pilgrimage circuit in India. And that is to name only a very small proportion of pilgrimage paths.

In more recent times, the meaning of pilgrimage has shifted from its religious beginnings. Dubisch and Winkleman (2005) questioned if it was even possible to define pilgrimage as a single, universal phenomenon, given the variability between people's motivations to go on pilgrimage, experiences on pilgrimage, and outcomes and meaning-making following pilgrimage.

Pilgrimage is a highly physical and sensory experience that needs to be rendered in as much of its colour and complexity as possible if we are to understand the nature and appeal of pilgrimage itself and to apprehend its healing power. (Dubisch & Winkleman, 2005, p. xi-xii)

This sense of pilgrimage, and Dubisch and Winkleman's (2005) description of the "totalising nature" of pilgrimage as "an experience that cannot be adequately represented in detached, academic prose alone" (p. xi), resonated deeply with me, and perhaps goes some way towards explaining my difficulty with settling upon an adequate definition and the strong pull I feel to, instead, give readers a "feel" for my own experience. While a singular definition that manages to successfully encapsulate all of the idiosyncrasies of pilgrimage may prove elusive, and possibly counterproductive, the literature generally corroborates that a pilgrimage involves separating from one's home and day-to-day existence to make a journey, through a liminal or 'in-between' space, towards a destination rich in spiritual magnetism and power (Dubisch & Winkleman, 2005; Turner & Turner, 1978).

### **Pilgrim**

More succinctly, a pilgrim is a person who undertakes a pilgrimage. The term pilgrim originates from the Latin word 'peregrinus' which refers to "a foreigner, a stranger, someone on a journey or a temporary resident" (Reason, 2018, p. 7). Pilgrims are said to differ from tourists as they are "seeking a deep inner purpose rather than a superficial experience of travel" (Kelly, 2018, p. 26).



## **Motivation for the Research**

My inspiration to research pilgrimage was born from my own experience of pilgrimage. Roughly six weeks after my fateful first day walking, I returned home feeling refreshed, renewed, transformed, and healed—far beyond what I had experienced previously from extended overseas travel. I had made lifelong friends and brought home a sense of purpose, wholeness, and empowerment. I credit my pilgrimage with changing the course of my life, including setting in motion my plan to return to study to become a psychotherapist.

Pilgrimage seemed to have worked its magic on me in mysterious and enigmatic ways. Though I knew that my experience had a significant impact on me, the question of “how?” remained. What was it that had occurred in those six weeks? How had this long walk along an ancient trail so drastically altered the course of the rest of my life? Also, was my experience representative of that of other pilgrims who completed the Camino or other pilgrimage routes? Six years on, I hope to shed some light on these lingering questions through this dissertation. I embark on this research journey feeling the same sense of mystery I felt on the first day of my Camino, yet certainty that I am on the right path—researching a topic that I hold so close to my heart and that may yield benefit to the psychotherapy profession and the communities it serves.

## **The Researcher**

Inevitably, I enter into this study carrying a range of biases and pre-understandings shaped by my previous personal experiences in the wider cultural and historical context (Gadamer, 1982). To provide background, I was born and spent the first decade of my life in Hong Kong, though my parents originated from Aotearoa New Zealand. Hence, I feel as if my formative years were infused with a unique blend of Eastern and Western cultural influences. My mother’s side of my family has Māori ancestry and I identify as a blend of Pakeha and Māori. As I have matured, my blended cultural identity and expatriate childhood have helped me to make sense of my feeling

of being drawn to Buddhist and Māori philosophies over the Western worldviews which tend to prevail in the modern Aotearoa New Zealand context. In particular, the premise that we are intimately interconnected to all other living beings as well as to the natural world resonates with my worldview more than the Western values of individualism and consumerism (Coupland, 1991; Stewart, 2020).

As a psychotherapist, I am informed by and view the world through the lens of psychoanalytic and relational theory. I am also developing a holistic and integrative approach to my practice, focusing on the whole person sitting across from me, rather than just what is going on in their mind. It has been reasonably argued, by neuroscientists amongst other disciplines, that each person's mind, body, and soul are intimately connected and cannot be separated as Cartesian dualism would have us assume (Broom, 1997). In a similar vein, Latorre (2000) asserted that human consciousness is generalised within a person's entire system (rather than localised in their mind); therefore, the entire system should be the focus of therapy. Holistic models such as Durie's (1998) Te Whare Tapu Wha and Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs resonate with me, as they take into account the wider context of a person's health and motivations, acknowledging links between mental and physical health, sense of safety, familial and social relationships, living environment, and spiritual connectedness. Where appropriate, I have encouraged clients to embrace the benefits of other healing practices, alongside psychotherapy, including meditation, yoga, exercise, nature immersion, fostering their wider social support network and connecting to their spirituality (Durie, 1998; McManners, 2006). I also do my best to incorporate these practices into my own life in order to care for my whole self.

Due to the factors discussed, I acknowledge that I do not embark on this research as a removed, impartial observer. My personal history, cultural background, and resonances and holistic view of health contributed to my decision to undertake my own pilgrimage. These factors, alongside my more recent knowledge of psychodynamic and relational theory and my experience of being deeply affected by my pilgrimage, will inevitably inform my approach to the current study.

## **Dissertation Structure**

In the following chapter, I outline the methodological framework of this study; a hermeneutic literature review, within the hermeneutic methodology and the interpretive research paradigm. Chapters three, four, and five constitute an exploration of my key findings; with chapter three focusing on how pilgrimage may aid pilgrims to feel a strong sense of community, chapter four delving into the elements of pilgrims' inner journeys, and chapter five shedding light on how pilgrimage can facilitate pilgrims to foster a spiritual connection. Finally, chapter six attempts to consolidate these findings, linking them to current research and practice in psychotherapy and healthcare, and describing their implications for psychotherapy practice. This chapter also outlines the strengths and limitations of the study and makes recommendations for further research.

## **Chapter Summary**

The literature, coupled with my personal experience, has given an initial explanation of what constitutes a pilgrimage journey and recognised a pilgrim as one who embarks upon a pilgrimage. My motivation to engage in this study stemmed from a search for answers about my own experience of pilgrimage, coupled with the potential benefits further knowledge of pilgrimage could offer psychotherapists and their clients. The study proceeds through a hermeneutic enquiry in which I, as the researcher, am involved and bring my own unique pre-understandings. The next step is to elaborate on the research design, methodology and method which will guide the journey ahead.

## Chapter Two: Methodology and Method/“The Journey”

*As you walk out on the way,  
the way appears.*

Rumi



*Beginning my pilgrimage was difficult and nerve-wracking. My knack for getting lost, even in places I have known for my entire life, worried me. I felt afraid as I started walking sheepishly through the countryside near the French/Spanish border hoping to make it to Santiago de Compostela; a distance of over 800 kilometres. I had read that the Camino trail follows the route of the Milky Way and that ancient pilgrims walked following the stars. It had sounded so romantic, but my reality felt very different. The journey ahead seemed long, mysterious, and daunting. Thankfully, after the first few days, my worries eased significantly. I discovered that the trail was carefully dotted with yellow arrows to keep pilgrims on track. These trusty arrows provided the reassurance and structure I needed; the solid “frame” which helped me to relax and remain open to*

*what the journey may bring, listening to my inner knowing and trusting I would reach my destination.*

This chapter presents the ‘yellow arrows’ which guided me throughout this research; the methodological framework. The study comprises a hermeneutic literature review exploring the ways in which the experience of pilgrimage affects pilgrims. It aims to enhance understanding of the phenomenon of pilgrimage, particularly for psychotherapists, psychotherapy clients, and pilgrims.

What follows is an outline of the design of the study, including the research paradigm, methodology, and method. In a similar vein to my pilgrimage journey, I have endeavoured to strike a balance between a tight following of predetermined methodological guidelines and staying open to how the process unfolds. Starting broad and becoming more specific, I discuss the interpretivist research paradigm and explain why it is the best fit for a study within the discipline of psychotherapy on the topic of pilgrimage. I introduce and explore the hermeneutic methodology, providing a rationale for my choice. I conclude with a description of my chosen method, stepping the reader through Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic’s (2014) hermeneutic circle approach to conducting a literature review.

### **Research Paradigm: Interpretivism**

It is important to consider one’s own values and beliefs (as the researcher), alongside the research question, when determining which paradigm will best serve a study (Grant & Giddings, 2002). Prior to my pilgrimage and psychotherapy training, I attained an undergraduate degree in psychology. Within this training, I learned that quantitative research methods grounded in the positivist paradigm (i.e., randomised control trials) were considered the ‘gold standard’ (Webber & Prouse, 2018). The positivist paradigm asserts that there is one objective, observable, universal ‘Truth’ that can be uncovered through observation, experimentation, and verification (Grant & Giddings, 2002). Even then, this worldview and its associated research position

seemed reductive and overly simplistic and left me feeling unconvinced about its assumptions and value as a research method, especially for understanding the human subject.

When I was introduced to the qualitative interpretivist research paradigm, in my subsequent psychotherapy training, I felt refreshed. Interpretivism is concerned with how we, as humans, make meaning of our worlds (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). It originated in the 18<sup>th</sup> century when Giambattista Vico began to question the steady rise of rationalism (Hamilton, 1974). He argued for a need to differentiate how we research the social realm from how we study the natural world due to the different relationships we, as humans, have to each of these domains. The interpretivist paradigm encapsulates a variety of research approaches, including social constructivism, hermeneutics, and phenomenology. See Table 1 (below) for a comparison of positivism and interpretivism.

As a psychotherapist, I endeavour to work with each client's subjective experience within our unique intersubjective relationship; rather than applying a 'one-size-fits-all' approach. Similarly, as a researcher, interpretivism feels natural and appropriate, especially within the field of psychotherapy, and is more closely aligned with my personal values and beliefs. I value the level of depth, complexity, and openness that it invites; as well as how it supports understanding of elements of the human experience empathically, from the 'inside' (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). Interpretivism also constitutes the best fit for the current study which seeks to explore the subjective experience of pilgrimage and the subjective meaning attached to it for each pilgrim, rather than to seek one 'true' meaning of pilgrimage. This research relies on multiple levels of subjective interpretation; the interpretation of pilgrims reporting on their personal experiences, the interpretation of authors who have published literature on pilgrimage and, finally, my interpretation as the researcher who reads and interprets the published texts, with the background of having experienced pilgrimage.

**Table 1***A Comparison of Positivist and Interpretivist Research Paradigms*

	<b>Positivism</b>	<b>Interpretivism</b>
<b>Reality:</b>	Is singular and absolute.	Is socially constructed, multiple and bound by time, context and culture.
<b>Truth:</b>	There is one objective truth which can be discovered through research.	There is no one objective truth to be discovered. Understandings are inevitably shaped by subjective interpretations.
<b>Research aims:</b>	To explain phenomena.	To understand the diverse and nuanced meanings people attach to their experiences.
<b>The research process:</b>	Seeks to cultivate outcomes by attempting to control or eliminate the natural, unpredictable parts of the human experience.	Engages with the 'messiness' and complexity of life and posits the experience of understanding as a journey of reflective discovery in which the researcher is intimately and unavoidably involved.

Note. Adapted from Consumer behaviour in travel and tourism (p. 133), by A. Pizam & Y. Mansfield, 2009, Taylor & Francis. Copyright 2009 by Taylor & Francis Group.

**Methodology: Hermeneutics**

As a methodology within the interpretivist paradigm that attends closely to subjective experience, the hermeneutic approach is best suited to answer my research question. The term "hermeneutics" is derived from the Greek word "hermeneuō" meaning to translate, explain, or interpret (Klein, 2000, p. 344). Hermeneutics has also been associated with the mythical Greek deity, Hermes, whose duty it was to carry and translate messages between the Gods (Caputo, 1987; Grondin, 1994). Though hermeneutics was originally concerned with the interpretation of scriptures in biblical studies, more recently it has become a lens through which to interpret a wide range of texts (Thiselton, 2009).

Hermeneutic research is concerned with the interpretation and understanding of ambiguous texts, reflective inquiry, and intersubjectivity (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic,

2010). “The hermeneutic act is infinite in its horizon because the text is what it is only in relation to and as a relation with a reader. Thus, hermeneutics is about the co-creation of reality” (Romanyshyn, 2020, p. 221). Here, Romanshyn (2020) explains that hermeneutics is an ongoing process with no clear endpoint, as the researcher’s understanding of a phenomenon is continually evolving as their understanding of each text deepens. While scientific modes of understanding involve a ‘knowing’ that moves away from personal experience into a world of objective, human-made concepts; by contrast, hermeneutic understanding concerns itself with personal, subjective experiences of being in the world (Palmer, 1969 cited in McManus-Holroyd, 2007). It is considered highly appropriate for use in the field of psychotherapy because the unique nature of the psychotherapeutic endeavour—whereby therapists work with clients intersubjectively, co-creating a shared understanding—effectively mirrors the process of hermeneutics (Buirski et al., 2020).

Subsequently, hermeneutic research rejects the notion of the ‘detached observer’ whilst encouraging ‘effective historical consciousness’ on the part of the researcher (Gadamer, 1982). This refers to acknowledging that, and having an awareness of how, one’s history will affect their interpretations. Gadamer (1982) spoke of the restless back and forth or ‘play’ which occurs between a phenomenon and the person interpreting it; whose history inevitably affects their process of understanding. I appreciate the realism of this aspect of hermeneutics. It reminds me of my psychotherapy practice whereby it feels as though my own history is interwoven with my understandings of my client’s. In this context, it is my ‘effective historical consciousness’—gained through my own therapy, training, and cultural sensitivity—which allows me to understand the lens through which I am viewing my clients and work intersubjectively, rather than within a science practitioner model that requires detachment. With regard to this research, my personal history, cultural background and resonances, holistic viewpoints, and my own pilgrimage experience are inevitably interwoven with my interpretations, as is my knowledge of and experiences within psychotherapy. It is vital that, as the researcher, I reflect upon and think reflexively



about these factors in order to conduct credible and philosophically sound hermeneutic research (Spence, 2017).

### **Method: Hermeneutic Literature Review**

I have chosen to use the hermeneutic literature review method to guide me as I research the experience of pilgrimage. A hermeneutic literature review differs from a systematic literature review as it does not seek to consolidate every piece of literature written on a topic in order to advance research and inform practice (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010). Instead, it involves a process of constant interpretation and reinterpretation of literature, valuing subjectivity over detached objectivity and depth over breadth, in the process of gaining a comprehensive understanding of a topic (Gyollai, 2020). Reflection, reflexivity, and unexpected 'detours' along the way are allowed and encouraged as the researcher's engagement with the topic area deepens. The flexibility of this method lends itself to research in the field of psychotherapy, as well as to the deliberately broad, open nature of my research question. The 'hermeneutic circle' describes the underlying phases of the hermeneutic literature review process.

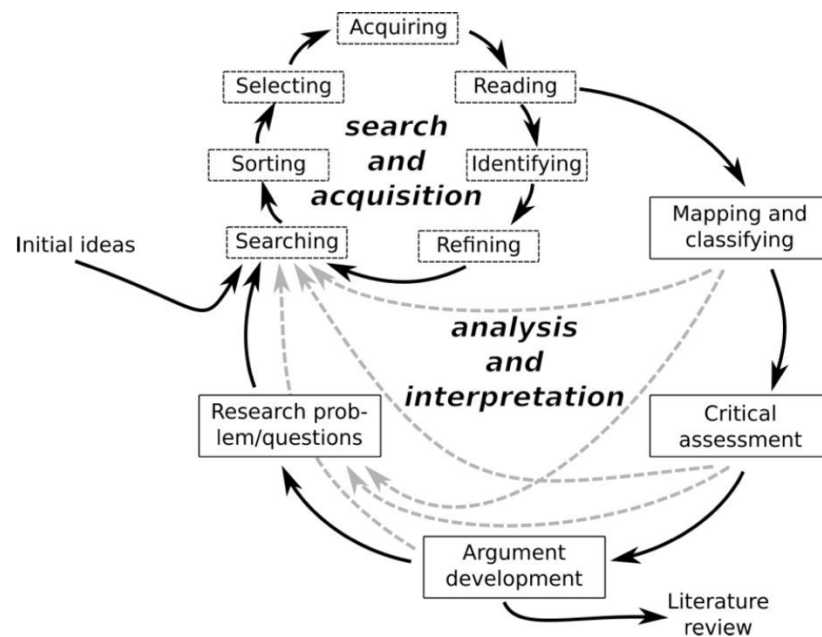
#### **The Hermeneutic Circle**

Originally coined by Heidegger (1962), the 'hermeneutic circle' refers to the inter-relatedness of what can be considered 'reality' and each individual's experience of reality. Gadamer (1982) depicted the hermeneutic circle as an iterative process whereby new, enhanced understandings of reality are developed through exploring the detail of each individual existence. Similarly, Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic (2010) argued that in a hermeneutic literature review the researcher's understanding of each paper is never isolated and, instead, occurs in the context of all the other papers they have read and the entire body of relevant literature. In other words, the understanding of each 'part' is dependent upon the understanding of the 'whole' and vice versa. This

movement back and forth, between the parts and the whole, in search of understanding, constitutes the hermeneutic circle (see Figure 1 below).

**Figure 1**

*A Hermeneutic Literature Review Framework Incorporating Two Major Hermeneutic Circles*



*Note.* This model was produced by Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic in 2014, summarising the hermeneutic literature review process. From “A hermeneutic approach for conducting literature reviews and literature searches,” by S.K. Boell & D. Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014, Communications of the Association for Information Systems, 34(12), p. 264 (<https://doi.org/10.17705/1CAIS.03412>). Copyright 2014 by AIS Electronic Library.

As displayed in Figure 1, the hermeneutic literature review encompasses a number of phases that fit within two mutually intertwined hermeneutic circles: the search and acquisition circle and the analysis and interpretation circle (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010). The search and acquisition circle is linked to seeking information. Its phases include searching for literature, sorting search results for relevance, selecting which results to include, acquiring the selected literature, and further refining the search, before circling back around to conduct further searches. The analysis and

interpretation circle is associated with seeking insight. It involves analysing and interpreting the information sourced within the search and acquisition circle. My progress through these phases in the current study is detailed below.

### **Searching and Sorting**

Searching struck me as a logical phase at which to enter the hermeneutic circle and begin the literature review process as I was not yet in possession of any relevant literature. Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic (2010) recommended initially seeking literature with a broad, overarching focus; therefore, I began searching online databases, ideally seeking review articles or introductory book chapters on the topic of pilgrimage. In a hermeneutic literature review, sourcing a small collection of highly relevant publications is preferable to a large number of documents with varying levels of relevance (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014). Hence, I used the Boolean operator AND in my search terms to ensure the results I obtained discussed the experience of pilgrimage. I began by searching “pilgrimage” AND “pilgrim” AND “experience” in the databases: Google Scholar, SCOPUS, PEP, PsycArticles and PsycINFO, and soon discovered that my searches were, in some cases, going to yield a large number of results. In other cases, however, I found I was only able to obtain very few results. Table 2 (below) summarises my initial literature search.

I decided that manually narrowing down broad searches would ensure that I did not risk missing highly relevant publications that may be excluded using narrower search terms. On some databases, I was required me to omit “pilgrim” from my search terms in order to obtain a sufficient number of results. The ‘most relevant’ features (ranking algorithms) on Google Scholar and SCOPUS proved effective in sorting results by relevance. Sorting thousands of search results by ‘number of citations’ in SCOPUS made me aware of Turner and Turner’s (1978) fundamental works on pilgrimage, as well as Dubisch and Winkelman’s (2005) book *Pilgrimage and Healing*, which provided a very useful overview of pilgrimage theory and research. I quickly identified Warfield and Jorgensen as important authors on pilgrimage in recent times,

with various publications between 2008 and 2020. I was also excited to discover the *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*, which I was able to access in full online.

**Table 2**

*Initial Literature Search*

Database	Search Term	Field Search	Results
Google Scholar	"pilgrimage" AND "pilgrim" AND "experience"	n/a	80,000
SCOPUS	"pilgrimage" AND "pilgrim" AND "experience"	Article title, Abstract, Keywords	308
PEP	"pilgrimage" AND "pilgrim" AND "experience"	Article	17
PsycArticles	"pilgrimage" AND "pilgrim" AND "experience"	Keyword	1
PsycArticles *	"pilgrimage" AND "experience"	Keyword	62
PsycINFO	"pilgrimage" AND "pilgrim" AND "experience"	Keyword	14
PsycINFO *	"pilgrimage" AND "experience"	Keyword	127

\* Search terms were broadened (i.e., "pilgrim" was omitted) to obtain more search results.

### Selecting and Acquiring

After searches have been undertaken and results sorted, Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic (2014) recommended selecting and acquiring literature for inclusion in the review; the 'parts' which will make up the 'whole'. I found Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic's (2010) strategy of scanning titles, keywords, and abstracts helpful in determining which publications I would include. I initially selected 32 highly relevant journal articles and book chapters and stored them digitally for ease of access. I quickly realised that my pre-understandings were causing me to "incline towards" (Smythe & Spence, 2012, p.17) literature that viewed pilgrimage through a secular or

spiritual rather than a religious lens. Heidegger's (1962) assertion that "we truly incline toward something only when it, in turn, inclines toward us" (p. 369) resonated. This reciprocal "inclining towards" is a natural and necessary part of the hermeneutic process though not without implications; inevitably skewing the information present in the 'parts' and influencing the insights found within the 'whole'. For this reason, I decided to also include a small number of texts which I did not incline towards. This enabled me to challenge my pre-understandings and determine whether these 'parts' could surprise me by contributing something of value to my 'whole'.

### **Reading, Identifying, and Refining**

Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic (2010, 2014) argued that the most important step in the literature review process is reading. Reading and re-reading my selected publications helped deepen my understanding of the phenomenon of pilgrimage; to identify important terms, concepts, and ideas; and to get a feel for different authors' differing perspectives. As I read, I kept in mind Smythe and Spence's (2012) assertion that "to read in a hermeneutic way is to be attuned and engaged. One brings a willingness to be surprised, openness to difference and courage to make the leap into the space of thinking" (p. 17). I accepted that my relatedness to the literature was what would help me discover the potential insights within, but endeavoured to stay open to what may arise, rather than trying to prematurely shape my understanding and draw conclusions (Smythe & Spence, 2012). I followed Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic's (2010) recommendation to take notes while reading and used a reading diary to record what I considered to be key points made by each author in each 'part'. Additionally, this diary allowed me to document any thoughts, feelings, interpretations, and critiques which arose. I kept track of what I had read using EndNote, which also helped me to cite each source correctly.

Through reading I was also able to identify further pieces of literature to include. I found Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic's (2014) concept of 'snowballing'/citation tracking especially useful in leading me towards additional 'parts' to add to my 'whole'. For

example, scanning the reference list of Jorgensen et al. (2020) led me to read Mikaelsson (2012) and Schnell and Pali (2013); both of which proved highly relevant. Reading also helped to further refine my understanding of my topic and, subsequently, which publications I would be best served to include and exclude. As I read more deeply, some publications that initially seemed to address my research question no longer seemed suitable. This led me to further refine my focus towards literature examining the journey aspect of pilgrimage rather than the sacred destination, as well as to limit myself to only including literature exploring contemporary pilgrimage experiences (undertaken within the last 50 years). Imposing these limits ensured that my focus remained broad enough to allow the inclusion of a sufficient amount of literature, but not so broad that I risked straying from answering my research question and becoming overwhelmed.

### **Uncertainty and Grace**

At times during this research—akin to the beginning of my pilgrimage—my fear of getting ‘lost’ troubled me. I struggled with how unstructured the process felt and how, despite my gratitude for the guidance provided by the hermeneutic circle, it did not quite constitute the “logical, linear process that moves from start to finish” (Smythe & Spence, 2012, p. 21) for which I longed. I worried that my thoughts may never become organised and my dissertation may never take shape. One day, in the midst of my anxious uncertainty, I flashed back to how I felt at the outset of my pilgrimage and challenged myself once again to let go, trust the path laid out before me, and listen to my inner knowing. This timely revelation made it possible for me to approach my research in an open and less fearful manner. It also led me to draw parallels between the processes of hermeneutic research and psychotherapy. While both follow a consistent and predetermined framework, both oftentimes—within the confines of the frame—feel vague, open, and unstructured. This open and intuitive, but far from passive, way of being reminded me of Bion’s (1967) notion of the therapist listening “without memory or desire” in order to best attend to what is happening right in front of

them. Approaching the research process in this way allowed insights and understanding to come to me in moments, when I least expected them, of what Gadamer (1982) called 'grace'. When these insights occurred, I was sure to note them down in my reading diary. One notable example occurred when I was out walking one morning and the notion of the links between the pilgrim community and the therapeutic alliance suddenly arose, seemingly out of nowhere.

### **Analysis, Interpretation, and Writing**

My reading diary proved invaluable when it came time to analyse and interpret my data. I was immensely grateful to have kept a record of the development of my understanding as I moved between each 'part' and the 'whole'. It allowed me to safely stow away ideas, insights, and notes I had made in meetings with my supervisor until it came time to use them. Guided by my reading diary, I was able to map out, classify, and critically assess key ideas which had emerged within the literature I had reviewed to date (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014). This led me to identify a need to return to the original search and acquisition circle seeking further information to strengthen and solidify my arguments in order to best answer my research question (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014). I reassured myself that because the hermeneutic circle denotes a circular process with no beginning and no end, this was a normal and expected part of the research (Smythe & Spence, 2012).

As I progressed, I found that writing became important in clarifying my thoughts and interpretations. At times, my ongoing engagement with the literature, coupled with my supervisor's guidance on the writing process, enabled me to write intuitively, in a 'flow-like' state (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). Smythe and Spence's (2012) eloquent description of how "in the interplay of seeking and waiting, of writing and pondering, of knowing and doubting, tentative understandings take shape. Meaning happens in the play, finding its own way" (p. 20) resonated with this experience. At other times, when writing felt like an uphill battle, I made a point of escaping the hermeneutic circle and engaging in physical movement in an attempt to stimulate my thinking and,

subsequently, my writing (Kramer & Erikson, 2007). After a relaxed walk in nature (reminiscent of a 'mini-pilgrimage') or some gentle breath-focused yoga, I returned reinvigorated and ready to re-enter the circle and re-engage with my writing.

### **Leaving the Circle**

Knowing when to leave the hermeneutic circle (for good) can prove challenging, as its circular nature means potentially going through the literature review process forever (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010). Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic (2014) recommended researchers leave the circle when they hit a saturation point, whereby identifying new texts only very slightly increases their understanding. I felt I had hit a saturation point when citation tracking ceased to identify 'parts' that were not already known to me, taking this as a sign I had exhausted the supply of relevant literature. At this point, I felt satisfied with how much my understanding of pilgrimage had grown and my pre-understandings had been challenged. Externally-imposed factors, such as time constraints and word limits, also contributed to my decision to leave the hermeneutic circle when I did.

The notion of deciding when to complete a process for which there is no defined endpoint reminded me of the uncertainty linked to finishing long-term psychotherapy. As, if an endpoint was not imposed by external factors or signposted by goals achieved, psychotherapy also has the potential to become endless. Similarly, I recalled how I did not feel my pilgrimage was finished when I reached Santiago de Compostela, my intended final destination, prompting me to walk an extra 200 kilometres. Though I had always struggled with endings, my pilgrimage came to a natural and satisfying end on the picturesque North Atlantic coastline. To revisit Rumi's words in the epigraph of this chapter, I believe that the rightful end of your "way" only makes itself known as you "walk".



## Chapter Summary

This process has given a clear sense that in hermeneutic research, and on pilgrimage, though there is a trail laid out, the journey is always unique to the researcher/pilgrim undertaking it. On this journey, the interpretive paradigm provided a fitting research framework due to its valuing of subjectivity over detached objectivity, coinciding with my values as the researcher. Hermeneutics, as a methodology, effectively facilitated my process of interpreting and understanding my chosen texts through the lens of my own pre-understandings. Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic's (2010, 2014) hermeneutic circle approach provided the method which guided me, like the Camino's yellow arrows, as I searched for and acquired information, and analysed and interpreted that information, seeking insight. My research journey, like my pilgrimage, eventually reached a natural and satisfying endpoint. The following three chapters provide an outline of my findings; the key insights I discovered—within the 'parts' and the 'whole'—along the way. In short, these pertain to the strong sense of community present amongst pilgrims; pilgrimage providing an avenue for pilgrims to go on an inner journey; and the potential of pilgrimage to help pilgrims foster a sense of spirituality.

## Chapter Three: Experiencing a Sense of Community/“Belonging”

*He aha te mea nui o te ao?  
He tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata.*

*What is the most important thing in the world?  
It is the people, it is the people, it is the people.*

Māori Proverb.



*I began my pilgrimage believing that it was going to be a very personal, individual endeavour but was surprised by the speed, ease, and depth at which I connected with my fellow pilgrims. On day one a group of Irish pilgrims took me under their wing; after a week I formed strong sisterly bonds with three other solo pilgrims from Brazil and Italy; for the final two weeks, I walked with a multinational group of 10, referring to ourselves as, and acting as if we were, a “Camino family”. The special atmosphere on pilgrimage seemed to lend itself to positive social interactions, and acts of kindness among pilgrims were the norm: communally tending to the sick and injured; sharing food, hiking equipment and medical supplies; and generally doing whatever possible to aid each other as we walked the road to Santiago.*

This chapter, the first of three chapters dedicated to my findings, shares my understanding of one way in which the experience of pilgrimage affects pilgrims; by facilitating them to feel a sense of community. The chapter opens with a brief overview of my journey towards this finding. McMillan and Chavis' (1986) definition of sense of community is shared and used to illuminate the healthy sense of community present on pilgrimage journeys. Finally, I delve deeper into ideas that piqued my interest: the concept of *communitas*; the shared importance of community on pilgrimage and in Tikanga Māori; and the conflict pilgrims face between collectivism and individualism.

### **My Journey towards Connectedness**

Akin to my belief upon beginning my pilgrimage that I would be walking alone, I began this research with a preconception of pilgrimage as a heavily self-focused endeavour. Consequently, when I began reading, the first papers I reached for explored pilgrimage as self-therapy, a personal learning experience, and a means to find oneself (Im & Jun, 2015; Mikaelsson, 2012; Warfield et al., 2014). Curiously, I noticed these papers subtly challenged my preconception by mentioning the value that other pilgrims added to a pilgrim's journey. Initially, I took note of this without giving it too much thought and continued to read more widely. The notion of pilgrims connecting with other pilgrims continued to appear repeatedly and undeniably, demanding my attention (Devereux & Carnegie, 2015; Dubisch & Winkelman, 2005; Jamieson, 2019; Jorgensen, 2008; Jorgensen et al., 2020; Hetherington, 2018; Warfield, 2013; Wijesinha, 2019). I wondered about my preconception which rendered this finding a surprise, despite my firsthand experience of forming connections on pilgrimage. My general ambivalence toward human relatedness came to mind. I regard myself as fairly independent, enjoy my own company, find groups of people overwhelming, and do not open up to others easily. However, reading, analysing, and interpreting the literature related to this theme made explicit to me the role of my fellow pilgrims in my experience on pilgrimage.

## Why Sense of Community?

A challenge I faced in the analysis and interpretation phase was determining which terminology best described the connection that occurs between pilgrims, encapsulating all of its unique facets. A multitude of related terms appeared within the 'parts' and the 'whole', including connectedness (Jorgensen, 2008); community (Devereux & Carnegie, 2015); sense of community (Jorgensen et al., 2020); *communitas* (Turner & Turner, 1978); belongingness (Warfield et al., 2014); companionship, relationality, solidarity, mutual dependence (Im & Jun, 2015); kinship, friendship (Donovan, 2018); sociability (Margry, 2008); openness, inclusiveness, supportiveness (Schnell & Pali, 2013); camaraderie and togetherness (Wijesinha, 2019). Eventually, I decided upon sense of community.

Sense of community refers to a person's experience of belonging to a community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). A community is a group of people who are similar in some way and can form among people who share a wide range of attributes, beliefs, values, purposes, passions, or experiences (Collins English Dictionary, 2022b). Human beings have an innate drive to form and maintain lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships with their fellow humans (Hagerty & Williams, 2020). Therefore, belonging to a community can be greatly beneficial based on the social connectedness it provides. It can offer a sense of self-esteem and safety; allow us to find comfort and support in difficult times; ensure we are taken care of when we are sick, injured, or otherwise vulnerable; and provide us with access to resources beyond our own (Townsend & McWhirter, 2005). Belonging to a community protects us against loneliness, isolation, and alienation, which can have devastating consequences including mental and physical illness, premature death, and suicide (Lieberman, 2013). Put simply, communities aid our survival.

I chose the term 'sense of community' to represent the connectedness between pilgrims for three reasons. Firstly, because it refers directly to the pilgrims' experience and is therefore highly relevant to my research question; secondly, because its root term (community) appears frequently throughout the literature; and, finally, because it

effectively represents the complex, multi-faceted nature of the connectedness between pilgrims, arguably encapsulating all of the related terms.

## **Sense of Community**

I faced my next challenge shortly thereafter while I was developing my argument for this finding. I had a wealth of highly relevant material in my reading diary but was unsure how I was going to illustrate the sense of community on pilgrimage in the most effective and authentic way. I returned to searching the literature, seeking answers. As someone who is drawn to the clarity provided by categories, I was heartened to discover McMillan and Chavis' (1986) study of people's experience of community. In this influential paper, the authors developed a seminal definition of sense of community which has since been cited in more than 5,000 articles (McMillan & Lorion, 2020). Along with its centrality in this topic area, McMillan and Chavis' definition appealed to me because it is explicit and clear; its parts are concrete and identifiable; and it effectively represents the warmth and intimacy associated with the concept, as well as the dynamic nature of the development and maintenance of the experience.

McMillan and Chavis (1986) claimed that for someone to feel a sense of community, four key elements must be present. The first of these elements is membership, experiencing a feeling of belonging or being a part of something; the second is having a shared emotional connection with other community members; the third is influence, having a sense that one can have an effect upon and be affected by the community; and the fourth is reinforcement, having faith that one's needs will be fulfilled as a result of their community membership.

## **Sense of Community on Pilgrimage**

I was excited to realise just how well my own experience on pilgrimage and what the literature had to say fulfilled these four elements. I recognised that McMillan

and Chavis' (1986) definition would be the most appropriate way to illustrate the sense of community on pilgrimage. Here I describe the four elements in turn.

Membership is linked to a feeling that one has invested themselves to become a member, therefore has a right to belong (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Pilgrims have undoubtedly invested in becoming pilgrims; often planning their journeys for extended periods, making sizable sacrifices of time, money, and comfort, and risking illness and injury (Warfield, 2013). Despite the sacrifices and risks, the pilgrim's motivation remains strong; a testament to the personal importance of their journey and their belief in its power to benefit them in some way (Schmidt, 2009; Warfield, 2013). Pilgrims can easily recognise and approach each other due to shared characteristics (e.g., clothing and symbols); thus, they recognise the investment that the other has made, the strength of their motivation, and their warranted membership in the pilgrim community (Jorgensen, 2008). I felt a feeling of membership before I even began my pilgrimage when some other soon-to-be pilgrims recognised me as one of them at a bus station and struck up a friendly conversation.

The belief that they have shared and will share history, common places, time together, and similar experiences contributes to the development of shared emotional connections between pilgrims (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Furthermore, the environment on pilgrimage is perceived as warm and welcoming, with pilgrims coming across as more open to connecting with others than we have grown used to people being in our everyday lives (Jorgensen et al., 2020). This openness is also evident in the topics of conversation that pilgrims are willing to broach; often engaging in candid and vulnerable conversations concerning their sorrows, family conflicts and uncertainties. Providing a much-needed safe space for pilgrims to have such meaningful conversations also helps to build levels of trust and emotional connection (Warfield et al., 2014). I certainly felt shared emotional connections as I spent more time with my fellow pilgrims, learnt more about them and their lives, and shared more about myself and my life.

A bi-directional influence exists between individual pilgrims and the pilgrim community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Pilgrimage has been positioned as providing a sort of microcosm of society whereby pilgrims are able to test and improve their social skills in a safer and less judgemental environment than they may have available in their normal lives (Hetherington, 2018). Pilgrims speak of redefining themselves in relation to others, while discovering, strengthening, expressing, and validating their 'true selves' (Dubisch & Winkelman, 2005; Greenia, 2014; Winnicott, 1960). This results in enhanced self-worth, enabling them to feel confident enough to have an influence upon the pilgrim community and to be further influenced by the community. I felt influenced by the pilgrim community when we started to decide as a group how far we would walk each day to enable us to stick together. I felt I had an influence on the community when I began to feel comfortable speaking up and participating in these decisions.

Giving and receiving acts of kindness and exchanging support and encouragement with each other serves to assist pilgrims in reaching the ultimate destination of their pilgrimage; and simultaneously meets their need for social connectedness, effectively reinforcing their decision to belong to the pilgrim community (Im & Jun, 2015; Jorgensen, 2008; McMillan & Chavis, 1986). My membership in the pilgrim community was reinforced in many ways, including through the amount of fun I had with my fellow pilgrims and the assistance they offered me when I was injured.

## **Communitas**

As I developed my argument for this chapter, I became curious as to whether the sense of community described in the literature was unique to pilgrimage or if a similar feeling could be found elsewhere. As I reflected upon the 'parts' and the 'whole', I recalled a concept I discovered fairly early in the reading phase; *communitas*.

*Communitas* is one of the key theories put forward by the pioneers of anthropological research on pilgrimage, Turner and Turner (1978). It is a Latin word meaning "spirit of community" and refers to the special type of tight-knit group formation which occurs on

pilgrimage due to its liminal and transitional nature and refreshing detachment from normal social structures and hierarchies (Collins English Dictionary, 2022a).

On pilgrimage, nobody is overly interested in your social status or occupation, everyone is more or less wearing the same clothing and little effort is made by pilgrims to compete with or impress each other (Donovan, 2018). In this sense, pilgrims tend to be accepted for who they are as people and why they are on pilgrimage, rather than what they do or have back home. This creates an atmosphere of authenticity, egalitarianism, acceptance, and living in the present (Devereux & Carnegie, 2015; Margry, 2008). Diverse pilgrims of all ages, genders, nationalities, religions, and cultural and socio-economic backgrounds—who would never usually meet or associate with each other—mix and mingle harmoniously. On my pilgrimage I formed connections with pilgrims who were very different to me in many ways, but very similar when it came to our innermost values and philosophies. This level playing field, created by *communitas*, makes the sense of community on pilgrimage both unique and special.

### **Collective Living, Whanaungatanga, and Manaakitanga**

Reading about, analysing, and reflecting upon the sense of community on pilgrimage brought to mind another journey that I have been on in recent years—my journey back towards my Māori heritage. As a New Zealander who has spent much of my life overseas, my Māori heritage is a part of me that I am now determined to reclaim. On pilgrimage, sleeping in close proximity to hundreds of fellow pilgrims and cooking and eating communally constitute important parts of the experience. It is within these settings, even more so than on the walking trails, that close bonds between pilgrims are formed (Jorgensen, 2008). Upon reflection, I am reminded of how, traditionally, Māori lived in large *whānau*-based villages, sleeping communally in *wharepuni* and congregating in *wharekai* to eat (Schrader, 2013). I will never forget how strange my first nights on pilgrimage felt; sleeping in large, open spaces packed with snoring pilgrims and cooking and eating meals alongside near strangers. After a while, however, this way of life became second nature and enjoyable, giving me a taste



of how my whakapapa had lived, and I felt uneasy returning to sleeping and eating alone.

Alongside living collectively, looking after others and treating them well is of utmost importance in Tikanga Māori (Durie & Hermansson, 1990). When I learned of the Māori principles of whanaungatanga and manaakitanga, they resonated with me on a deep, ancestral level, and I realised they featured in my experience on pilgrimage. Whanaungatanga refers to kinship and a sense of connection between people which provides them with a feeling of belonging and works to strengthen them against hardships and challenges—like pilgrimage (Te Aka Māori Dictionary, 2022b). Manaakitanga denotes extending respect, generosity, and care to other people (Te Aka Māori Dictionary, 2022a). Extending manaakitanga enhances the mana of both the receiver and the giver and is a way of life for mana whenua and pilgrims alike. As I recall the whanaungatanga and manaakitanga I have been lucky enough to experience both on marae and pilgrimage, it is difficult not to idealise how open, warm, and supportive these settings felt and to compare them favourably to the individualistic, lonely, and disconnected existence we increasingly lead in modern, Western society (Hari, 2018).

### **Collectivism Versus Individualism on Pilgrimage**

Based on the principles described above, and their wider values and philosophies, Māori are considered a collectivistic culture. The likeness between how people relate to each other in Tikanga Māori and on pilgrimage led me to wonder if the 'culture' of pilgrimage is also collectivistic. It could be reasonably argued that the pilgrim community is interdependent rather than independent; that an atmosphere of solidarity rather than individual freedom is prevalent; and that achieving objectives as a group is emphasised over pilgrims' individual goals (Devereaux & Carnegie, 2015; Jorgensen et al., 2020; Krys et al., 2019). However, while being part of the collective is central to the pilgrimage experience, a pilgrimage can also be a deeply personal endeavour that requires a degree of privacy (Morinis, 1992). Frey (1998) asserted that

it is culturally dependent whether pilgrims will be more focused on forming meaningful connections or on their own experience. Based on what is expressed in other 'parts' and what emerged on my own pilgrimage, I would argue that it is less about pilgrims inclining one way or the other and more about them striking a balance between their community involvement and needs for independence and solitude (Gothoni, 1993; Jorgensen, 2008). As I dove deeper into how pilgrims were able to achieve this balance, various strategies were presented including: dividing their time between walking alone and with others; walking alone during the day and connecting with others in the evenings; communicating when one feels the need to be alone; sensing and respecting when others wish to be alone; and finding walking companions who desire a similar balance of solitude and togetherness to oneself (Jorgensen, 2008). The relaxed nature of the pilgrim community is also emphasised, whereby there are no rules or expectations for pilgrims to have any level of community involvement (Margry, 2008).

## **Chapter Summary**

Drawn from the literature, coupled with my personal experience, this chapter has presented how feeling a sense of community is a key facet of how the experience of pilgrimage affects pilgrims. My journey towards presenting sense of community as the first finding in this literature review was shared, before McMillan and Chavis' (1986) definition was used to demonstrate how the four key elements of sense of community are ever-present in the pilgrims' experience. Finally, key ideas related to community—the concept of *communitas*; the shared importance of community on pilgrimage and in Tikanga Māori; and the conflict between collectivism and individualism on pilgrimage—were explored in greater depth. While this chapter has dealt with the pilgrim's experience of connecting with other pilgrims, the following chapter focuses on the pilgrim's experience of connecting to their inner experience.

## Chapter Four: Going on an Inner Journey/“The Labyrinth”

*Your visions will become clear only when you can look into your own heart.  
Who looks outside dreams; who looks inside awakens.*

Carl Jung



*While I treasured the connections I formed on my pilgrimage, I also struggled to balance them with my need for space and at times found myself feeling imposed upon and depleted by others. The Camino was something I had decided to do for myself; yet, I found myself spending significantly more time thinking about, talking about, and expending energy on the thoughts, feelings, and troubles of those around me. However, this was certainly not unique to my time on pilgrimage. Back home I had also welcomed opportunities to focus on the needs of others to avoid confronting my own. I decided to finally address this on pilgrimage; resolving to stay present for and with myself for the remainder of my journey. I practised setting boundaries and walked alone more often, turning my focus inwards rather than outwards. It was then that I began to feel more at peace and my answers began to come.*

While the previous chapter examined the sense of community among pilgrims, this chapter shifts the focus to the pilgrim's relationship with themselves. I present a second way in which the experience of pilgrimage affects pilgrims—by facilitating them

to go on an inner journey, simultaneous to their outer journey. Within this chapter, the various stages of the pilgrim's inner journey are depicted through the lens of walking a labyrinth. Stage one: entering the labyrinth, outlines the initial stages of the pilgrim's inner journey; their motivations, fear, resistance, and ambivalence and separation from their everyday lives. Stage two: walking the labyrinth, portrays the pilgrim's entry into the liminal space of pilgrimage, their movement through this space, and their need for solitude. Stage three: the centre of the labyrinth, represents the pilgrim reaching their desired destination. Somewhat paradoxically, the notion of "the journey is the destination" is introduced and explored. Stage four: walking back outwards, explores the changes pilgrims may experience within themselves during the later phases of their journey. Stage four is continued in the following chapter, which explores a significant example of inner change that pilgrims may experience; fostering a spiritual connection. Finally, stage five: exiting the labyrinth, is addressed in chapter six and depicts what happens for pilgrims when they finish their (outer) journeys and return home.

## **The Labyrinth**

The theme of the pilgrim's inner journey featured prominently in many 'parts' of the 'whole' in which I immersed myself throughout the search and acquisition phase (Jamieson, 2019; Jorgensen, 2008; Kelly, 2018; Mikaelsson, 2012; Poland, 1977; Pullen, 2018; Schmidt, 2009; Slavin, 2003; Warfield, 2012). However, despite my extensive reading and note-taking, and my firsthand experience, it felt abstract, multidimensional, and difficult to grasp. I felt somewhat uncertain about how to think about it, let alone portray it; Bollas' (2017) notion of the 'unthought known' resonated.

In a meeting with my supervisor, they introduced me to the concept of the labyrinth and my interest was piqued. I made notes in my reading diary and left our discussion to marinate in my mind as I continued reading and note-taking. Months later, when I progressed to analysing and interpreting, the labyrinth fortuitously re-entered my awareness. I took this opportunity to return to searching to deepen my

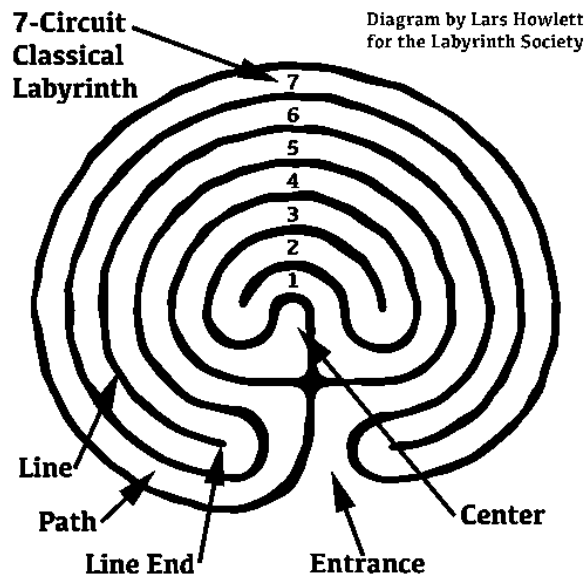
understanding of labyrinths, following a hunch that they may inspire my interpretation and ensuing argument development.

What I discovered was encouraging. A labyrinth comprises a meandering path with a singular trail leading to its centre, then back out again the same way (see Figure 2 below; Saward et al., 1998). Labyrinths are ancient spiritual tools that have existed for over 4,000 years in nearly every corner of the globe; nestled within Egyptian pyramids, Greek palaces, Roman bathhouses, French cathedrals, Indian temples, and countless forests, mountain ranges, and coastlines (Billock, 2016; James, 2021). Labyrinths are designed to foster contemplation, increase wisdom and discernment, and generate spiritual transformation (James, 2021). In Medieval times, when Christians were unable to make pilgrimages to holy sites, due to political turmoil or other barriers, labyrinths were developed to imitate these pilgrimage journeys, offering a convenient and time-efficient alternative (Connolly, 2005).

Perhaps the most famous example of a labyrinth exists in the Greek myth, Theseus and the Minotaur. In this story, Theseus enters the Labyrinth of Crete as a boy, successfully navigates his way to its centre, defeats the Minotaur and exits as a hero. The Minotaur in this myth has been posited to symbolise the unknown, unconscious, or 'shadow' parts of one's psyche; while the labyrinth represents the route one takes—into the unknown—to meet these parts (Diamond, 2009). Subsequently, the symbol of the labyrinth has come to represent a person's winding, but purposeful journey towards 'wholeness' (Mark, 2018; Pavlinac, 2015).

**Figure 2**

*An Example of a 7-Circuit Classical Labyrinth*



*Note.* This model was produced by Howlett in 1998, displaying an example of the layout of a 7-circuit classical labyrinth. From “What is a labyrinth?,” by L. Howlett, 1998, The Labyrinth Society (<https://labyrinthsociety.org/about-labyrinths>). Copyright 1998 by The Labyrinth Society.

### **The Labyrinth as a Lens**

The more I read about labyrinths, the more it resonated with what I had read about the pilgrim’s inner journey. The concept of entering a labyrinth, going on a meandering journey, feeling a sense of illumination, and then re-entering the outside world having evolved as a person, impeccably portrayed my own inner journey as a pilgrim. As I considered this, I was drawn to recall how the act of interpretation forms the basis of hermeneutic research, allowing the researcher to work intersubjectively with the ‘parts’ and the ‘whole’ in order to gain a greater understanding (Romanshyn, 2020). Furthermore, in my psychotherapy practice, I have often found that metaphors have greatly assisted my clients and me to interpret, understand, and communicate their implicit, unconscious material. On this basis, I decided to employ the metaphor of walking a labyrinth as a lens through which to interpret, understand, and communicate the literature on the pilgrim’s inner journey in this chapter. My use of this lens has enabled me to present my findings in a coherent, orderly, and novel way; and helped

me to understand that the pilgrim's inner journey does not happen all at once. The labyrinth and the pilgrimage both have stages and the pilgrim's inner experience changes and develops at each stage (Pavlinac, 2015; Simpson-Green, 2015). These stages are expanded below.

### **Stage One: Entering the Labyrinth**

When someone enters a labyrinth, they are said to release their past, reservations, and expectations and prepare for new beginnings (Simpson-Green, 2015). This corresponds to the initial stages of the pilgrim's inner journey, including their motivation to undertake the journey; their fear, resistance, and ambivalence; and their separation from their everyday lives.

#### **Motivation**

A pilgrimage begins as soon as someone decides to make the journey. According to the literature, a range of factors may motivate pilgrims to go on pilgrimage, including looking to make a change in their lives (Poland, 1977); coping with a painful life situation (Jorgensen, 2008; Schmidt, 2009); seeking healing from mental distress (Frey, 1998); marking an important life transition (Donovan, 2018; Wijesinha, 2019); honouring one's religious yearnings or expectations (Gesler, 1996); trying to find themselves or their purpose in life (Dubisch & Winkelman, 2005; Liutikas, 2017); or simply taking a break to recharge and reflect (Jorgensen et al., 2020). As was the case for myself, some pilgrims are not even consciously aware of their motives but are responding to a strong intuitive pull.

#### **Fear, Ambivalence, and Resistance**

In spite of pilgrims' motivation, making a pilgrimage is physically, mentally, and emotionally challenging, and represents a significant change to their normal lives and routines. Pilgrims commonly experience feelings of fear, ambivalence, and resistance prior to making their journeys, which may show up as procrastination, uncertainty,

making excuses, and changing one's mind in either the pre-contemplation, contemplation, or preparation stages (Poland, 1977; Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983). As such, the pilgrim's motivation and determination are tested, and their inner journey is underway well before their outer journey begins.

### **Separation**

As I immersed myself in the reading and note-taking phase, a longing to be on pilgrimage again stirred within me. I felt trapped and exasperated; studying the life-changing experiences of others and being prompted to reminisce upon my own life-changing experience, all while being confined to my home, city, country, during a string of COVID-19 lockdowns. I reflected upon how I had read that it is not coincidental that popular pilgrimage sites are dissociated from everyday life; meaning pilgrims must intentionally separate themselves to undertake a pilgrimage (Margry, 2008). This led me to wonder about how separating from their everyday lives to go on an outer journey may assist pilgrims to go on an inner journey. Thankfully, the literature had a lot to say about this.

As I perused the 'parts' of the 'whole', I found that some 'parts' argued that physical travel is not necessary for pilgrimage and that anyone with a heart and mind open to change can be considered a pilgrim (Kumar, 2014 cited in Reason, 2018). While I understood this sentiment, I could not help but feel dissatisfied. In my experience, my outer journey across an unfamiliar country on the other side of the world was fundamental to my inner journey as a pilgrim. As I continued to read, I was relieved to find a number of 'parts' that agreed, asserting that travel is imperative as it separates pilgrims from the familiar, taken for granted habits and structures of their everyday lives, and releases them from the monotony, constraints, and conformity of everyday consciousness (Dubisch & Winkelman, 2005; Maddrell, 2011; Schmidt, 2009). Entering a new physical environment also often carries an evocative power for pilgrims, prompting them to experience themselves and their surroundings more profoundly.



## **Stage Two: Walking the Labyrinth**

As someone makes their way through a labyrinth, they become immersed in the new and unfamiliar physical environment, leading them to feel a sense of lostness and liminality, alongside an urge to keep moving forward whilst engaging in self-reflection (Hunt, 2019). This stage includes the pilgrim's entry into the liminal space of pilgrimage, their movement through this space and their need for solitude.

### **Liminality**

Following their separation from their everyday lives, pilgrims enter the liminal space of pilgrimage (Turner & Turner, 1978). A liminal space is a transitional or in-between stage one enters while undergoing a personal or social transformation, leaving them suspended at the threshold between one place and another; past and future; the person they were and who they are becoming (Thomassen, 2012). This may leave pilgrims feeling disorientated, vulnerable, and uncertain and, while this can initially lead to panic and despair, paradoxically, it can also free their minds, leading them to enter a meditative state of calm (Hunt, 2019). This makes sense because, neurologically speaking, when humans are disorientated, their brains enter their most permeable and open state, sparking immense potential for new discoveries and realisations and priming them for transformation (Liutikas, 2017).

### **Movement**

A pilgrim's physical movement along the pilgrimage trail is also integral to their inner journey and may represent an outer manifestation of their inner psychic movement (Jamieson, 2019). As a pilgrim walks, their bodily experience takes precedence, prompting them to reconnect with themselves and their inner experience (Mikaelsson, 2012). As such, pilgrimage walking has been described as an extended walking meditation, a time of self-immersion, liberation of the mind, and a soul-cleansing exercise (Jorgensen et al., 2020). Many renowned early philosophers and authors, including Hegel, Nietzsche, Dante, and Dickens, shared the belief that walking

revitalised their perceptions and reconnected them with themselves and the world around them; resulting in clearer thinking, an enhanced sense of self, and more sophisticated powers of expression (Jorgensen, 2008). This makes sense because, on a biological level, when we walk, our hearts work harder, pumping more blood to our organs, including our brain (Jabr, 2014). Furthermore, because walking is instinctual, it does not require much conscious attention, leaving our thoughts free to wander and our minds open for meaningful insights to emerge. The dynamic nature of pilgrimage walking also means that when conflicts or struggles emerge, a solution or change in perspective often transpires so long as the pilgrim keeps moving forward. I capitalised on the link between walking, thinking, and insight throughout the research process, as walking helped me to digest the literature in the reading phase, as well as to map and classify key ideas and develop my arguments.

### **Solitude**

As I discovered on my own journey, though the sense of community on pilgrimage can thrive, walking or travelling alone for periods of time is crucial for the pilgrim's inner journey. Periods of solitude offer pilgrims space and silence to reflect upon their lives, be alone with their thoughts, and get in contact with their innermost selves (Jorgensen, 2008). The nature of the inner journey is deeply personal, and something that no one else is able to do for us. Stepping back from the incessant demands and stimuli of our external worlds to be alone and focus our attention inwards in this way can feel like a rare—but wholly necessary—luxury in modern Western society (Melmed, 2020).

### **Stage Three: The Centre of the Labyrinth**

Illumination and clarity—pertaining to the deep knowledge the walker holds within themselves—is believed to be found at the centre of the labyrinth (Simpson-Green, 2015). This stage introduces and explores the notion of “the journey is the destination”.

## **The Journey is the Destination**

While the labyrinth metaphor was well-suited to the first two stages of the pilgrim's inner journey, likening the centre of the labyrinth to a stage of pilgrimage proved more challenging. The centre of the labyrinth is said to be where the change happens; where the pilgrim accesses their deep self-knowledge and regains their 'wholeness' (Simpson-Green, 2015). Though the obvious place for this to occur would be at the pilgrimage's final destination, often a sacred place of spiritual significance, this did not match what the literature was telling me nor my own experience (Gesler, 1996). Though I recall spending my first days on pilgrimage daydreaming about arriving and experiencing a profound inner transformation, I spent the vast majority of it savouring every moment and not wanting the journey to end.

While pilgrimage is more than capable of generating impressive inner change in pilgrims, it is often not straightforward to determine when it occurs. Instead of happening all at once, a pilgrim's transformation is often experienced as a more gradual process over the course of their journey and many years post-pilgrimage, possibly even for the rest of their lives (Haller, 2017; Morinis, 1992; Slavin, 2003). This may explain why many pilgrims describe arriving at their final destination as anticlimactic (Donovan, 2018; Greenia, 2014). I never understood what the phrase "the journey is the destination" meant, but my pilgrimage experience taught me that on pilgrimage, and in life, change is a process rather than an outcome. There is much to be gained by embracing the journey rather than simply waiting to 'arrive'. As a researcher, I sometimes struggled to stay present with the hermeneutic process and found myself attempting to prematurely draw conclusions. When I noticed this happening, I pictured myself dwelling in the centre of my metaphorical labyrinth and reminded myself that "the journey is the destination". I then made sure I took a break or engaged in physical movement before re-immersing myself in the process with a renewed sense of patience, presence, and openness to what may emerge.

## **Stage Four: Walking Back Outwards**

On their way back out into the world, labyrinth walkers are said to finally integrate their deep inner knowledge and become 'whole' (Simpson-Green, 2015). Similarly, this stage details some of the changes pilgrims may experience within themselves during the latter phases of their pilgrimage journey.

### **How Pilgrims Change**

As I read, I was initially surprised that the potential 'outcomes' of pilgrimage did not appear within the 'parts' and the 'whole' as frequently as I had expected them. However, when I moved on to mapping and classifying, I was reassured that they still comprised an important piece of the puzzle that is the pilgrim's inner journey. If we believe that "every experience changes who we are, and the more intense the experience the greater the change" (Donovan, 2018, p. 14), pilgrimage should change pilgrims in significant and lasting ways. I was excited to discover that much of the literature corroborated this experience by referring to pilgrimage as transformational and/or a turning point in pilgrims' lives (Dubisch & Winkelman, 2005; Jorgensen et al., 2020; Reason, 2018; Poland, 1977; Pullen, 2018; Schmidt, 2009; Schnell & Pali, 2013; Warfield et al., 2014). Some of the most common ways in which pilgrims may experience inner change following a pilgrimage are outlined below.

### **Healing**

Pilgrimage has been renowned for its ability to help pilgrims heal from a range of traumatic experiences (Dubisch & Winkelman, 2005; Jorgensen, 2008; Pullen, 2018; Schmidt, 2009). The pilgrim may realise the extent of their emotional turmoil and psychological woundedness prior to their decision to go on pilgrimage or it may occur to them gradually over the course of their journey (Mikaelsson, 2012). My curiosity about the healing power of pilgrimage led me back to searching, seeking literature on the topic of trauma. Van der Kolk's (2015) ground-breaking book, "*The Body Keeps the Score*", details how emotions that have been shut down due to trauma or dissociation

get trapped in our bodies and need to be expressed physiologically through movement in order to be shifted. It is, therefore, no coincidence that pilgrims often report experiencing catharsis as they walk, releasing both historical and recent emotions and traumas and allowing healing to occur (Lawson-McConnell, 2018). My pilgrimage helped me to heal from my preceding relationship break-up and initiated my process of healing from historical traumas that I had suppressed for many years.

### **Individuation**

As well as facilitating healing, pilgrimage has been posited as a way for pilgrims to achieve individuation and realise their 'true selves' (Hetherington, 2018; Mikaelsson, 2013; Moaven, 2020; Pullen, 2018). Once again, I returned to searching to gain a clearer sense of what is meant by individuation. As a psychotherapist, I inclined towards Jung's (1937) explanation of individuation as a process by which a person recognises their own uniqueness and differentiates themselves from those around them; shedding the aspects of their public persona they have adopted to be like or please others, freeing themselves to lead a more authentic and fulfilling life. Pilgrimage aids individuation for many reasons: it separates pilgrims from their usual lives and the people who have had a significant influence on them; it allows them to gain autonomy over their own time, routine, and suffering rather than having their day to day actions dictated by external parties; it places them in a community who accept them for who they are rather than what they do or have; and it gives them a new identity as a 'pilgrim' from which to build. I recall feeling very free from pretence on pilgrimage, enabling me to discover and foster the growth of my 'true self'.

### **Self-Integration**

While the literature acknowledges that a pilgrimage can serve defensively as a way to escape from one's inner conflicts, pilgrimage can also represent a flight toward one's conflicts in search of self-integration and psychic growth (Poland, 1977; Schmidt, 2009). Pilgrimage walking has been posited as a type of constructive 'acting out',

carrying the same adaptive function for adults as play does for children. The act of going on pilgrimage facilitates the resolution of inner conflicts by forcing realisation. For example, the opening paragraph of this chapter describes how one of my own inner conflicts—my tendency to focus my energy on others rather than on myself—was realised on my pilgrimage, enabling me to finally confront it. Pilgrimage can also benefit pilgrims who are experiencing a fragmented sense of self (Jamieson, 2019). The word ‘pilgrim’ essentially means ‘foreigner’; therefore, it is fitting that the act of becoming a ‘foreigner’ on pilgrimage aids pilgrims to uncover, make space for and integrate the ‘foreigners’ that live within them; the parts of their identities which have been kept hidden from even themselves.

### **Self-Efficacy**

Another ‘outcome’ that emerged within the ‘parts’ and the ‘whole’ was that going on pilgrimage increased pilgrims’ self-efficacy (Im & Jun, 2015; Jorgensen et al., 2020; Vistad et al., 2020). This is logical as making a pilgrimage is no small feat; requiring significant motivation and dedication, and compelling pilgrims to overcome challenges, obstacles, and hardships. Pilgrims can be forever proud of reaching their destination successfully and growing as a person along the way, which may inspire them to believe in themselves and become aware of their vast inner resources. I can personally attest to this experience and believe that my increased self-efficacy following my pilgrimage enabled me to believe that I could make the drastic life change of returning to study to train as a psychotherapist.

### **Altered Outlook on Life**

The power of pilgrimage as a way to contemplate and reassess one’s life has been widely documented, with pilgrims often reporting that their pilgrimage experience altered their outlook on life and helped them to find existential meaning (Donovan, 2018; Jorgensen, 2008; Mikaelsson, 2012). It is also common for pilgrims’ priorities to change following a pilgrimage, prompting them to live more simply, trust that everything

is unfolding as it should, and let go of their need for control; essentially enabling them to lead more fulfilling and harmonious lives. My aforementioned decision to become a psychotherapist while on pilgrimage has undoubtedly allowed me to live more authentically and added significant meaning to my life.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has laid out a roadmap of the various stages of the pilgrim's inner journey, simultaneous to their outer journey, viewed through the lens of walking a labyrinth. The first stage, entering the labyrinth, comprises the pilgrim's motivation to undertake the journey, fear, resistance and ambivalence, and separation from their everyday lives. Next, walking the labyrinth includes the pilgrim's entry into the liminal space of pilgrimage, movement through this space and need for solitude. When a pilgrim reaches the 'centre' of the labyrinth, the notion of "the journey is the destination" is emphasised and, finally, as they make their way back out towards the exit, some ways pilgrims may change were presented. The following chapter begins where this chapter left off; on the journey back out of the metaphorical labyrinth. It explores the pilgrim's experience of potentially fostering a spiritual connection.

## Chapter Five: Fostering a Spiritual Connection/“Awakening”

*You are not a drop in the ocean.  
You are the entire ocean in a drop.*

Rumi



*Early one morning, towards the end of my Camino, my dearest walking companion and I traversed a steep mountain in darkness and heavy fog, reaching our destination—the Cruz de Ferro (Iron Cross)—just in time for a dramatic sunrise. Though neither of us identified as Christian, we quickly embraced and gave each other some space to take in the atmosphere of this very special place. As the sun emerged and the fog lifted, I felt as if dawn was breaking on a new chapter of my life. I sensed the presence of my grandfather and brother who had passed away and felt at one with the energy of the natural landscape and all those pilgrims who had walked before me. I then experienced a sudden rush as my life path spontaneously arrived in my heart and mind. I approached the cross and left behind a special keepsake that I had carried with*



*me since childhood, sensing that I was leaving behind my tendency to doubt myself and hold myself back; freeing myself to live the life I was born to live.*

This chapter comprises a continuation of chapter four, tracking the pilgrim's inner journey as they make their way back out of the metaphorical labyrinth, having potentially accessed their deep inner knowledge and experienced profound inner change. It examines a third way—alongside experiencing a sense of community and going on an inner journey—in which the experience of pilgrimage affects pilgrims; through aiding them to foster a spiritual connection. To begin, a brief explanation of spirituality is offered and the links between spirituality and pilgrimage are explored. The Māori notion of wairua is used to examine the pilgrim's experience of spirituality, and rituals are explored as an avenue for pilgrims to act out their spiritual beliefs and engage in meaning-making. An investigation of the spiritual power of pilgrimage locations and the intimate relationship between pilgrims and the natural environment concludes the chapter.

### **What is Spirituality?**

Spirituality implies a connection with something both within and beyond ourselves; a sense of transcendence; or a sacred dimension of reality (Valentine et al., 2017; Victor & Treschuk, 2020). It is deeply personal; highly subjective; and can be understood, experienced, and practised in countless different ways. Spirituality is sometimes erroneously confused with religion and, though the two are related, they are far from synonymous. While spirituality plays an important role in religion, one does not need to be religious to harbour spiritual beliefs (Koenig et al., 2020).

### **Spirituality and Pilgrimage**

Though many pilgrimages are deeply rooted in religion, not all pilgrims are religious. Therefore, while pilgrimage can serve as a way to affirm one's religious

beliefs, it can also be a quest one undertakes towards a more autonomous, personalised form of spirituality (Mikaelsson, 2012). As I read about and made notes on the spiritual aspects of pilgrimage, I felt both resonance and a sense of resistance emerge within me. Though I had expected spirituality to feature within the 'parts' and the 'whole' and had faced in to my own spirituality (albeit unexpectedly) on pilgrimage, writing about spirituality felt like a daunting prospect. As I developed my argument, I worried that I had interpreted the literature 'incorrectly' and that my personal understanding was somehow 'wrong'. I wondered why I found spirituality so anxiety-inducing and reflected upon how it is something that many people reject or neglect in their daily lives. I returned to searching to investigate further.

My search led me to materialism; a belief system that asserts that everything is made up of matter and nothing non-material exists (Taylor, 2018). Materialism maintains that human behaviour can be explained purely in physical terms (due to chemical reactions occurring in the brain) and that souls, spirits, and gods are nonentities. Materialism has become such a prevalent model of reality in modern Western society that it is often taken for granted. The heavily rational and commercialised way of life resulting from a materialist belief system, coupled with a complete absence of mythic awareness, can leave people feeling empty, disillusioned, and searching for a different way (Taylor, 2018). This may explain the recent rise of religion, spirituality, and pilgrimage in the Western world (Corbett, 2019; Mikaelsson, 2012; Schnell & Pali, 2013). To develop my argument for this chapter, I drew inspiration from Scruton (2014) who asserted that experiences such as watching the sunset, viewing a great work of art, or walking a pilgrimage can be experienced as spiritual and considered meaningful, even if their meaning is only felt inside the experiencer and cannot be explained by science or proven by empirical evidence.

## **Wairua**

As I contemplated the 'spiritual deficiency' of modern Western society, I thought of my home country, Aotearoa, and how different things had been for my whakapapa.

Spirituality plays a central role in Māori culture, to the point where it has been posited as “the ultimate reality” for Māori (Marsden cited in Royal, 2003, p. 47); and justified the addition of a fourth oral covenant to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, protecting the freedom of Māori to practice their spiritual customs (Reese, 2022). Spirituality is also undeniably central to the practice of pilgrimage and the pilgrim’s inner journey (Devereaux & Carnegie, 2015; Jorgensen et al., 2020; Kelly, 2018; Schmidt, 2009; Slavin, 2003; Warfield et al., 2014). Once again, I returned to searching, eager to learn more about Māori spirituality to determine if it may help me better understand the role of spirituality in the pilgrim’s experience.

Māori refer to the spiritual dimension of existence as wairua (Valentine et al., 2017). Wairua is made up of two words: ‘wai’, meaning either water or unique/special and ‘rua’ meaning the number two or container. This may imply two bodies of water flowing in a balanced, complementary way (i.e., the physical and spiritual selves) or refer to an entity that is unique, special, and contained within oneself. My love for categories once again led me to Valentine et al. (2017) who explored how Māori conceptualise wairua and found four recurring themes: that wairua is 1) essential to Māori existence; 2) a powerful, though intangible, entity that cannot be seen or touched, but is felt or sensed—particularly as people become more self-aware; 2) related to everything in existence—past, present, and future; 4) can provide an important link to whakapapa.

This framework is easily transferable to the pilgrim’s spiritual journey, which also cannot be seen, touched, or quantified, but is felt and experienced by the pilgrim—often in the latter stages of their journey after they have gained a certain amount of self-awareness and insight. The pilgrim’s spiritual journey is also linked to their past, present, and future, with pilgrims reporting that they have confronted long-forgotten traumas, ancestors, and past-life experiences (Kerkeling, 2009; MacLaine, 2001); felt a greater sense of connection to the present moment, including the natural environment (Ivakhiv, 2003; Reason, 2018); and gained a clearer sense of their future (Jorgensen, 2008; Pullen, 2018). As mentioned in the opening of this chapter, my pilgrimage

connected me to my past through the energy of my whakapapa and the re-emergence of long-forgotten traumas; to my present through a deep connection to the natural landscape; and to my future by revealing my life path. I now realise that it also enabled me to glimpse of a way of life closer to that of my whakapapa than I had ever experienced, whereby wairua comprised a fundamental aspect of existence.

## **Rituals and Meaning-Making**

Having established early in the reading phase that spirituality is central to the pilgrim's experience, I began to wonder exactly how pilgrimage facilitates pilgrims to awaken to their spirituality. As I continued to read, I discovered rituals. A ritual is a formal pattern of action which carries meaning extending beyond the ritual itself, instilled by the person performing it (Schnell & Pali, 2013). Spiritual rituals can be defined as acts that people engage in which resonate with and hold special meaning for them, allowing them to step into the sacred, turn inward and reflect (Ludwig, 2021). Pilgrimage itself undoubtedly fits this description and is sometimes referred to as a 'ritualistic journey' (Dubisch & Winkelman, 2005; Mikaelsson, 2012; Nordin, 2011).

As rituals provide an avenue to act out one's spiritual beliefs, they have been found to assist people in making meaning of their lives and overcoming crises of meaning (Kelly, 2018; Schnell & Pali, 2013). Frankl (1984) stated that each individual has a responsibility to assign meaning to their life at each given moment. Many 'parts' of the 'whole' view pilgrimage as an attempt to do just this (Margry, 2008; Moaven, 2020; Warfield, 2013). While going on pilgrimage is a ritual in and of itself, each pilgrimage also comprises other unique rituals. These could include taking along and eventually leaving behind a meaningful object at a spiritually significant place—as I did at the Cruz de Ferro—or participating in a special ceremony upon reaching the sacred pilgrimage site (Gesler, 1996; Schmidt, 2009).

## Power of Place

As I searched the literature familiarising myself with rituals, a related idea became apparent; the inherent spiritual power of certain geographical locations. Pilgrimage locations often have rich histories of having a profound effect on pilgrims through aiding them to connect to the divine (Dubisch & Winkelman, 2005; Gesler, 1996). I began to question what gives these places such spiritual power. I immersed myself within the 'parts' and the 'whole' and, once again, wound up in an ethereal realm beyond the reach of materialism, empiricism, and science. A deep curiosity, coupled with resistance and disbelief, emerged within me as I read, but I kept reading, keeping in mind Smythe and Spence's (2012) advice to retain "a willingness to be surprised" and "an openness to difference" (p. 17).

It is widely accepted that certain locations became pilgrimage sites because events of great religious importance took place there (Gothoni, 1993; Warfield, 2012). For example, the Buddha's birthplace (Lumbini, Nepal) and where he attained enlightenment (Bodh Gaya, India) are popular pilgrimage sites, as is the birthplace of the Muslim prophet Muhammad (in Mecca, Saudi Arabia). Not wholly satisfied with this explanation for what gives power to place, I decided to keep reading, sensing there was more to be discovered.

Before long, I found myself entranced by MacLaine's (2001) popular account of pilgrimage trails following lines of spiritual energy points underneath the Earth's surface, known as ley lines. Curiously, science has been unable to explain why many sacred locations are heavily charged with negative ions, causing biochemical changes in people who visit them. Perhaps even more curiously, many of these sacred locations happen to fall within straight lines of each other on a world map (MacLaine, 2013). Once again I was torn between my resistance and resonance; feeling equal parts dubious and like I may have stumbled upon something of utmost importance. I returned to searching and was heartened to discover literature supporting the existence of ley lines (Hardy, 2011; Hix, 2014; Nickell, 2016) and their association with popular pilgrimage sites (Fedele, 2014; Ivakhiv, 2003). Successfully testing Silva's (2022)

account of how a straight line can be drawn on a world map between the profoundly sacred sites of Kura Tawhiti in my homeland, Uluru in the centre of Australia, the Borobudur Temple in Indonesia, and Santiago de Compostela, the Camino's revered endpoint, left me all the more receptive to the idea.

As I continued to read and reflect, a conversation I had with my supervisor resurfaced. They had been reflecting upon their own experiences on pilgrimage and wondered if the spiritual energy of pilgrimage locations could be connected to the collective spiritual energy—or conscious intent—of the millions of people who have visited them over hundreds or thousands of years. This resonated with my memory of sensing the energy of pilgrims who had walked the Camino trail before me and was reflected in 'parts' of the 'whole' which posited that the transfer of spiritual energy between pilgrims and pilgrimage locations is bidirectional (Jamieson, 2019; Jorgensen, 2008).

## **The Natural Environment**

As I mapped out ideas linked to power of place, I noticed a unique, but related, topic appear within the 'parts' and the 'whole'; how pilgrimage enables pilgrims to experience the connection between their body, self, and the world around them, helping them to realise the intimate, though often overlooked, relationship between humans and nature, oftentimes resulting in profoundly spiritual experiences (Slavin, 2003; Vistad et al., 2020). As a nature-lover, this was an idea I found myself inclining towards as I fondly recalled how I had never felt so connected to the natural world as I did on pilgrimage.

Reason (2018) asserted that the ecological crisis we are currently facing is due to modern humans no longer knowing how to 'live well' on Earth. Once again, this led me back to my whakapapa, who are widely known as 'Tangata Whenua'—people of the land. Whenua means both 'land' and 'placenta', and Māori regard the land as a mother to the people, referring to her as Papatūānuku—Mother Earth (Royal, 2007). This alludes to a pure and beautiful sense of oneness between people and the natural

world which is sadly becoming rare in Aotearoa, and arguably most places in the world. Pilgrims' accounts of nature as nourishing their spirits and enabling them to feel a sense of belonging to a bigger whole hints that pilgrimage may be one way to reclaim what has been lost, potentially paving the way for the healing of both humans and the natural environment (Jorgensen et al., 2020; Pullen, 2018). This was certainly what happened for me, with pilgrimage enabling me to revel in a sense of connectedness to the whenua (land), rangi (sky), and moana (ocean)—similar to that which my whakapapa enjoyed.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter outlines a third way in which the experience of pilgrimage affects pilgrims; by aiding them to foster a spiritual connection to elements both within and beyond themselves. The concept of spirituality is briefly explained, the links between spirituality and pilgrimage explored, and the Māori notion of wairua is used to examine the role of spirituality in the pilgrim's experience. Rituals are posited as ways pilgrims act out their spiritual beliefs and engage in meaning-making; and the spiritual power possessed by pilgrimage locations and the intimate relationship between pilgrims and the natural environment are investigated. The next chapter details the pilgrim's exit from the metaphorical labyrinth and transition back into the outside world; comprising a discussion of my findings pertaining to the pilgrim's experience as a whole, including the potential implications for psychotherapy practice.

## Chapter Six: Discussion, Implications, & Conclusion/“Integration”

*To undertake a pilgrimage is to place yourself at risk: not just the physical risks, but the risk that you may not return the same person as you set out*

Palmer, cited in Reason (2018, p. 9)



*My pilgrimage ended on a beach in a town called Finisterre, which translates to “the end of the world”. Coming from Aotearoa, not seeing the ocean for six weeks had been a strange experience for me, so walking barefoot in the water at the end of my journey felt very fitting. A few days later, I began my travels home in a taxi, two buses, and three aeroplanes. Over the following weeks, I settled back into my pre-pilgrimage life—friends, family, work—often feeling like a fish out of water and longing to return to my simple life on the Camino. In time, I came to realise that though “home” had not changed, I had been so deeply changed that in order to feel “at home” again, I must change “home”. Over the coming months and years I did (and continue to do) just that; shaping my life to fit the new version of me, integrating the lessons I learnt and insights*



*I gained on my pilgrimage and materialising an “outside life” that better reflects my transformed inner world.*

In a similar vein to returning home from pilgrimage and integrating my experience, this chapter serves to relate the study's findings back to the wider context of psychotherapy and healthcare. To begin, key findings are summarised and their implications discussed in relation to other research and current theory and practice in psychotherapy and healthcare. The strengths and limitations of the study are outlined, and recommendations for future research are offered.

I was led to research pilgrimage because of how deeply transformative my personal experience on pilgrimage was. I hoped to discover what it was that gave my experience such potency and decided that the research question: “How does the experience of pilgrimage affect pilgrims?” would help me to find out. As I engaged in a hermeneutic literature review process, going back and forth between the literature and my interpretations, three key findings became apparent. These were that pilgrimage may affect pilgrims by facilitating them to feel a sense of community with their fellow pilgrims; to grow as a person through undergoing an inner journey of self-discovery; and to foster a connection with the sacred or transcendent dimensions of experience.

## **Discussion of Findings and Links to Psychotherapy**

Though I was not consciously aware of the links between pilgrimage and psychotherapy when I began this research, they emerged naturally alongside the study's findings. These links are detailed below, as well as links to current research and theory within psychotherapy and healthcare.

Both psychotherapy and pilgrimage begin with relationships. I joined the pilgrim community and formed close bonds with my fellow pilgrims before I felt safe and ‘held’ enough to deepen my inner journey. In retrospect, I can see how closely this reflects a client's need to form an alliance with their therapist before their work in therapy can deepen. It is well known that the formation of a strong therapeutic alliance is of

paramount importance; so much so that it is the single strongest predictor of clinical outcomes (Asay & Lambert, 1999; Halfon, 2021; Kaiser et al., 2021). If a strong alliance is not able to be formed, it is significantly less likely that the therapy will have favourable outcomes and much more likely that the client will terminate the treatment prematurely (Anderson et al., 2019; Sotero & Relvas, 2021). I would posit that the same two points apply to pilgrimage; that the quality of the relationships pilgrims foster with their fellow pilgrims determines the extent to which they are able to go on a fruitful inner journey, as well as the likelihood that they will decide to end their pilgrimage prematurely. This was corroborated by the literature, as pilgrims who did not develop strong bonds with their fellow pilgrims early on were found to be more likely to give up before reaching their final destination (Jorgensen, 2008). The relational theory of psychotherapy explains the importance of the therapeutic alliance by asserting that clients' emotional difficulties stem from deficiencies in their early caregiver relationships, as well as from broader social inequities, and that therapy aims to provide the client with an empathic, restorative, corrective relational experience (Greenberg & Mitchell, 2006; Maroda, 2013; Stark, 2000). It does not seem like much of a stretch to suggest that the pilgrimage community provides pilgrims with a similar type of empathic, restorative, corrective relational experience.

Outside of the therapy room, it is becoming more widely accepted that human brains are wired to seek social connection, as it is a fundamental human need essential to our survival (Lieberman, 2013). It makes sense, therefore, that high-quality social relationships are now acknowledged as a key determinant of health and doctors are writing 'social prescriptions' instead of offering medication, in some cases with excellent results (Hari, 2018; Haslam et al., 2022; Holt-Lunstad, 2021; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2017). On the flip side, the dangers of social isolation have become especially topical in the last two years, in the midst of the enforced quarantines and social distancing of the COVID-19 pandemic (Hagerty & Williams, 2020). Social isolation and loneliness are known risk factors for death from any cause, high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, weakened immune functioning, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic

stress disorder, addiction, and Alzheimer's disease (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2017; Leigh-Hunt et al., 2017; Lim et al., 2020). Social connectedness and community involvement play a key protective role in people's mental health recovery following disasters; therefore, in the aftermath of COVID-19, social reconnection is becoming a key area of focus for governments and public health providers (Matos et al., 2021; Saltzman et al., 2020).

A pilgrimage journey offers access to a unique community with an enhanced sense of kinship, where strangers are treated like friends—a rare phenomenon in our highly individualised modern society where we often do not know our neighbours (Donovan, 2018; Smith & Lim, 2020). It has been posited that feeling cared for and supported by others on pilgrimage helps pilgrims cope better with life post-pilgrimage and feel a renewed commitment to build a stronger sense of community around themselves. Now that international borders are re-opening, there is an opportunity for pilgrimage to provide an avenue for people to improve their social connectedness, community involvement, and, in turn, their mental and physical health in a post-COVID-19 world.

The second, and perhaps most obvious, similarity between psychotherapy and pilgrimage is that both provide a supportive environment for people to embark on an inner journey. Humans are born with a set of innate emotional needs and, in order to develop mentally, they must learn (through experience) how to meet those needs (Solms, 2018). Most people's attempts to meet their needs occur unconsciously; therefore, must be brought into consciousness in order to be changed and, consequently, to achieve more favourable outcomes. This is where psychotherapy excels; helping people to gain insight, easing their suffering, and optimising their functioning (Bateman et al., 2021; Freud, 1922). Jung (1931) believed that most of the malevolence in the world occurs because people live unconsciously, out of touch with their own psyches. He proposed that if people worked on gaining more insight into and acceptance of their unconscious, shadow parts, not only could they achieve greater

inner peace but the world would become a more peaceful place; likely reminiscent of the friendly and harmonious atmosphere on pilgrimage (Donovan, 2018).

The literature reviewed, coupled with my own experience of pilgrimage, makes a strong case that pilgrimage enables pilgrims to focus their attention inwards and bring their unconscious parts into consciousness in a way that is similar to psychotherapy (Devereaux & Carnegie, 2015; Haller, 2017; Morinis, 1992; Slavin, 2003), potentially achieving outcomes comparable to those of psychotherapy (Dubisch & Winkelman, 2005; Jorgensen, 2008; Pullen, 2018; Schmidt, 2009). Bringing unconscious material into consciousness has proven effective in increasing self-awareness (Sousa et al., 2019), emotion regulation (Frederickson et al., 2018), and emotional wellbeing (Jankowski et al., 2020); as well as in treating depression and anxiety (Munder et al., 2019, Weitz et al., 2018), preventing suicide (Méndez-Bustos et al., 2019), healing the traumatised (Kristoper et al., 2019), and rehabilitating those who have committed violent acts (Papalia et al., 2019). Fascinatingly, it is now being shown that it can also change the structure and improve the functioning of people's brains (Beauregard, 2022; Cozolino, 2017; Solms, 2018).

A key point of difference between psychotherapy and pilgrimage pertains to the propensity of pilgrimage to support pilgrims to foster a connection to their spirituality, whereas spirituality is often partly or wholly neglected within the domain of psychotherapy (Captari et al., 2018; Rupert et al., 2018; Steere, 2018). This may reflect a wider pattern of spirituality being undervalued in modern Western society and is theorised to occur because a relatively low proportion of psychotherapists consider themselves 'spiritual' and very few therapists receive training on how to incorporate clients' spiritual beliefs into their treatment (Captari et al., 2018; Taylor, 2018). This is potentially problematic because clients' spiritual beliefs, experiences, practices, struggles, and questions comprise an integral part of their selves (Captari et al., 2018).

Frankl (1984) related each person's spiritual realm to their 'core' or 'essence' and considers spirituality a key component of the human spirit, intimately connected to our search for meaning and pursuit of our life purpose. Feeling that their life is

meaningful and that they have a purpose leads people to have hope for their future and is linked to all facets of health and wellbeing (Britt & Acton, 2022). It is, therefore, unsurprising that an ever-increasing body of research illustrates that fostering a sense of spirituality within oneself is related to increased inner tranquillity, gratitude, resilience, and ability to cope with stressors, decreased risk of developing a mental illness, healthy blood pressure, improved cardiovascular health, reduced inflammation, a higher chance of healing from serious illness, greater quality of life, and increased longevity (Jones et al., 2019; Loi & Ng 2021; Muehlenbein, 2020; Shattuck & Saad et al., 2019). The benefits of embracing one's spirituality are not isolated to the individual themselves. Eastern philosophies posit that each person has a responsibility to attach meaning to their existence and that it is one's purpose that connects them to the wider universe and represents their own unique way to be of service to others (Chopra, 2011; Pulla & Mamidi, 2020).

Though psychotherapy and pilgrimage have many parallels, a pilgrimage is able to act as a quest one takes toward their own spirituality; providing an avenue to discover and embrace their personal sense of meaning and purpose. I experienced this firsthand on my pilgrimage when my life path and purpose spontaneously entered my conscious awareness, prompting me to return to study to become a psychotherapist; a career which, for me, holds significant meaning and allows me to be of service to my fellow humans.

### **Implications for Psychotherapy Practice**

Going on a pilgrimage provides people with a rare and unique combination of three diverse factors essential for healing and psychic growth: community, deep introspection, and spirituality. Dubisch and Winkelman (2005) coined the healing effects of pilgrimage as "biopsychosociospiritual" (p. x) which aligns perfectly with how Māori conceptualise health using 'Te Whare Tapu Wha'; addressing all four cornerstones of taha tinana, taha hinengaro, taha whānau, and taha wairua (Durie, 1998). Pilgrimage also aligns with Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation and

has the potential to address simultaneously the biological, safety, belongingness, esteem, and self-actualisation needs of pilgrims.

Due to its remarkable potential for offering pilgrims both healing and growth, I propose that pilgrimage be utilised as a holistic intervention, alongside regular psychotherapy. I was heartened to discover that this is already happening, though to a limited extent, for war veterans (Watson et al., 1995; Wijesinha, 2019), those diagnosed with mental illness (Jorgensen, 2008; Pullen, 2018), former substance users (Cherry & Mallyon, 2013), and recently-released incarcerated people (Lois, 2019). However, I would recommend that pilgrimage be extended beyond these client groups and offered as an option to any client who has undergone a predetermined amount of preliminary therapeutic work and has sufficient ego strength and emotional stability to make the sometimes demanding journey. Psychotherapy would be utilised: before the pilgrimage to prepare the client for the journey ahead and set their intentions; after the pilgrimage to help integrate their experience and its transformational effects, as well as to aid adjustment back to their day to day life and implement any changes they decide upon; and perhaps even during the pilgrimage (remotely) to provide support in unpacking the inner conflicts which will inevitably arise along the way. A pilgrimage could also provide an effective 'bridge' through which to introduce the client's spiritual beliefs and concerns into their therapy.

### **Strengths and Limitations of the Study**

A probable critique of this research would be that it is not an empirical investigation grounded in quantitative data and purely observable facts. As is characteristic of hermeneutic enquiries, my subjectivity as the researcher has significantly affected the study results and would be considered a shortcoming in an empirical study that aims to eliminate researcher subjectivity in order to ensure the study is replicable and that future predictions can be made from the results (Ponterotto, 2005). Had this study utilised a quantitative methodology, such as a randomised

control trial, different data may have been discovered and different conclusions would likely have been drawn.

However, the methodology used in this study constitutes one of its greatest strengths. Conducting a hermeneutic literature review allowed me to reflect upon my subjective responses to the literature, informed by my unique background as an ex-pilgrim and a psychotherapist with Māori whakapapa, which provided an additional layer of depth to the results I was able to obtain. Weaving my own experiences and perspectives into my interpretations of the literature, and having my understanding change at each stage of the hermeneutic circle enabled me to become intimately acquainted with and understand the pilgrim's experience of pilgrimage on a deeper level than I could have ever imagined. The hermeneutic process also lent itself to the complex, multi-faceted, and often indescribable experience of pilgrimage in a way that a randomised control trial could not have possibly done.

Another potential limitation of this study pertains to a disproportionate amount of the literature included—6 'parts' of a 'whole' of 32—being solely focused on the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage, which was the pilgrimage I went on. Throughout the research process, I noticed and questioned this focus, wondering if I had unconsciously skewed my search results, while keeping in mind that it is natural and expected for a hermeneutic researcher to "incline towards" some pieces of literature more so than others (Smythe & Spence, 2012). While I am sure that some "inclining" occurred, I did not use the names of any pilgrimages in my search terms and believe this imbalance in the 'parts' mostly reflects the fame and popularity of the Camino and perhaps, on a deeper level, the predominance of Christianity as the world's most practised religion (Deshmukh, 2022).

## **Recommendations for Further Research**

To address the previous limitation, further research could be undertaken to investigate if differences exist in pilgrims' experiences based on which pilgrimage they go on. Because so many different pilgrimage routes exist, within so many different

countries and cultures, rooted in different religions, this could go some way towards determining if/how the pilgrimage route chosen affects the pilgrim's experience, as well as whether the findings of this study closely reflect the Camino experience or are more generalisable across a range of pilgrimages.

I also suggest that further research could be undertaken to investigate the efficacy of pilgrimage when used alongside psychotherapy as a mental health intervention for those suffering from different psychological or emotional ailments. These studies could use quantitative (i.e., randomised control trials using surveys reporting on symptoms before and after) or qualitative methodologies (case studies or interviews with open-ended questions focused on participants' experiences). Alternatively, a mixed-methods approach could be employed in order to combine the strengths and mitigate the limitations of qualitative and quantitative approaches (Paoletti et al., 2021).

## **Concluding Remarks**

This study has explored how the experience of pilgrimage affects pilgrims and discovered that going on pilgrimage affects pilgrims in a number of varied, profound, and often transformative ways. It has presented how the discipline of psychotherapy could benefit from incorporating pilgrimage as a particularly potent, complementary intervention in order to ease the suffering and aid the growth of many clients, now and in the future.

An unexpected, but welcome, discovery that arose pertained to the strong connections between Māoritanga and pilgrimage, especially regarding the importance of living collectively and caring for each other and the centrality of wairua and being connected to the natural world. Undertaking this research helped me realise another reason why my pilgrimage was so transformative; it gave me a glimpse of a way of life closer to that of my whakapapa. This only serves to increase the relevance of pilgrimage as an intervention to psychotherapists in Aotearoa, aiding them to continue in the work of Te Tiriti honouring practice.



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