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**LET HER BE:
EXPLORING FEMININE DIVINE, PILGRIMAGE AS CONTINUUM, AND RITUAL
CREATIVITY ON THE CAMINO DE SANTIAGO**

by
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Ultreia et Suseia!

Abstract

As one of the world's most popular pilgrimages, the Camino de Santiago runs millennium deep and has been the subject of much scholarly research. However, I argue there is a gap in research concerning what is characterised throughout this thesis (by historic and symbolic associations) as being feminine divine aspects of the Camino in contemporary pilgrimage and anthropological religious studies. This contrasts with measurable increases in feminine divine studies and Marian pilgrimage studies in recent times. Through the use of an impressionist narrative, phenomenological approach, this digital ethnographic research explores the experiences of six pilgrims, asking how, and if, they applied any significance to the Camino's feminine divine. And, where this was not the case, the research establishes that there were significant aspects of the Camino that led the participants to respond to a recruitment notice with 'feminine divine' as its organising principle. This research was conducted during periods of isolation during the Covid-19 pandemic, and consequently participants were recruited from a private Facebook community that had an ethos of enabling virtual pilgrimage. The study reveals multiple ways that participants suggested both beneficent and problematic associations with the Camino's feminine divine. Additionally, it explores the ways that pilgrims enacted and regarded pilgrimage as a continuum while living as 'pilgrims in place'. To achieve this, the research determines the creative ritual practices and material means that pilgrims used to enable a sense of simultaneous pilgrimage between their homes and Santiago de Compostela. I conclude this research underscores the value of understanding feminine divine associations, as well as other aspects of alternative pilgrimage, with Santiago de Compostela, alongside existing studies of the dominant pilgrimage narrative, to broaden pilgrimage scholarship and better appreciate the particular sociocultural indicators that such research offers.

Keywords: Camino de Santiago, Feminine Divine, Sacred Feminine, Pilgrimage in Place, Pilgrimage as Continuum, Creative Ritual, Alternative Pilgrimage, Materiality, Digital Ethnography, Virtual Pilgrimage, Camino Energy

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Crossing the Pyrenees from France via the Napoleon Pass and descending into the Spanish village of Roncesvalles is the stuff of legends. There are historic legends, such as the claim you can still hear the horn of Roland calling for Charlemagne as he died at the hands of the Basques in the forest near Roncesvalles in 778 CE (Brierley, 2022). Then there are everyday pilgrim legends – people of all ages, both fit and unfit, who haul themselves up over the mountains to begin the Camino Frances, the most popular route to reach the pilgrimage destination of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, northern Spain. Millions of people have walked ‘the Way’,¹ as the Camino is affectionately referred to, for well over a millennium. As the map below (Figure 1) indicates, various routes head westward across Europe, crossing Spain and France to reach one of the most popular pilgrimage destinations on the planet.

Almost thirty years ago, anthropologist Nancy Frey noted that an increase in popularity was seeing as many people make the journey to Santiago then as had during the Middle Ages. She described it as a contemporary phenomenon that included people of many religious and spiritual persuasions, atheists, and agnostics all tracing the footsteps of a millennia-deep route (Frey, 1998, p.7). In 2019, pilgrimage numbers to Santiago de Compostela broke all previous records, when 347,578 pilgrims collected their Compostela, the official pilgrim’s certificate, from the pilgrim’s office in Santiago de Compostela. During the Covid-19 pandemic, numbers dropped markedly, recovering somewhat in 2021 to 178,912 pilgrims.² Then, the 2022 tally superseded earlier records with 438,182 pilgrims officially recorded.

¹ **Camino** – Spanish translation, *caminar* – to walk, can also mean ‘way’, ‘path’ or ‘walk’

² Official Pilgrimage Statistics – 2021 and 2019 available from:
<https://oficinadelperegrino.com/en/statistics/>



Figure 1: Major European routes of the Camino de Santiago. © Beebe Bahrami, used with permission.



Figure 2: Author at Roland's Memorial, Camino Frances (Ibaneta Pass 2022). Image credit: Tim Davis, used with permission.

In 2012, I was lucky to be doing okay in the first week with no blisters, except for a random one on my shoulder. It is almost impossible to avoid blisters on the first day's walk, which includes a gruelling climb to the highest point of the Camino Frances route. And by the time pilgrims reach Santiago de Compostela they have traced an 800-kilometre trail to do so. Scant wonder that many are forced to withdraw before they get to Pamplona, around the first week of the journey, when their blisters become infected. Thankfully, that didn't happen to me but by Pamplona I had gained enough humility from witnessing other's injuries to seek advice from Sofía³, who was not only a *hospitalera*⁴ but someone pilgrims refer to as 'the foot goddess'.

³ Sofía – pseudonym.

⁴ *Hospitalera* (F) – a traditional pilgrim *albergue* (hostel) manager who cares for pilgrim's physical, spiritual, and emotional wellbeing

As Sofía took my foot in her hands, she remarked about my obnoxiously long second toe, telling me it was the culprit for such troublesome feet. Then she pointed out to her garden, saying, ‘Go and walk out in that long grass. The energy will fix your feet.’ I did as she said and took my time in the soothingly cool grass before heading back inside for a much-anticipated foot massage from Sofía.

I had to hide disappointment as Sofía told me my feet were ‘good now’ and did not need a massage. She did have one more instruction for me though:

You must take the detour to Eunate tomorrow. You have come all this way. You will know why when you get there. Don’t miss it. It is this land. It is a very special triangle in this part of Navarra that goes back to the time of Solomon.

As someone who was raised Catholic in Aotearoa New Zealand, and at this time a mature student freshly graduated from art school, I was keen to take a look. I had more than a passing interest in sacred geometry, architecture, and mythical aspects of various forms of religion and spirituality.

The following morning, I wandered out to a golden wheat field empty of much else except a few swaying poppies and an evocative twelfth-century Romanesque wonder called Iglesia de Santa Maria de Eunate⁵ (see Figure 3 and Figure 4).

⁵ Iglesia Santa Maria de Eunate – *Eunate* is a Basque word meaning one hundred doors: <https://visitnavarra.info/visitnavarra/en/iglesia-de-santa-maria-de-eunate/>



Figure 3: Iglesia de Santa Maria de Eunate, Navarra, Spain, August 2022. Image credit: Tim Davis, used with permission.

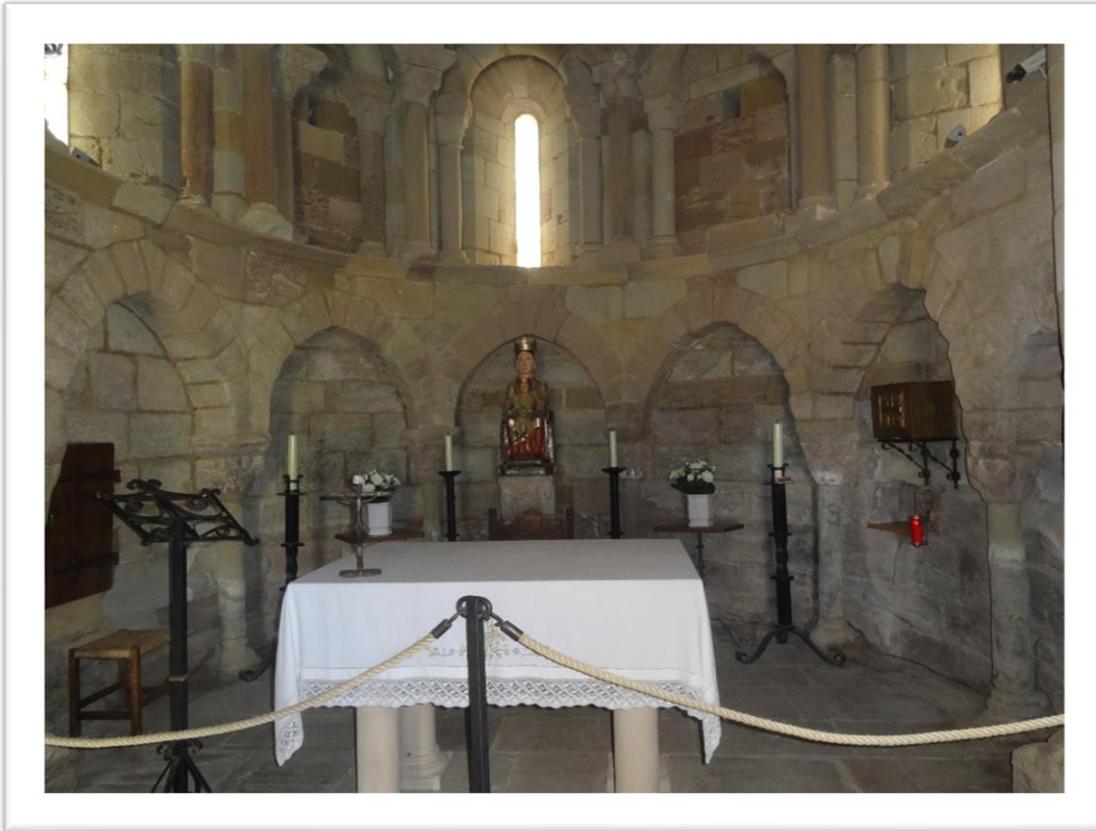


Figure 4: Nuestra Señora de Eunate, Navarra, Spain, May 2012. Image credit: Tim Davis, used with permission.

I was still wondering about Sofía’s reference to a triangle and Solomon when I entered Eunate’s distinctive interior. It had a striking pentagonal apse, flanked by alabaster glass windows that threw diffuse light onto the only statue in the building, dedicated to Nuestra Señora de Eunate. To me, it seemed clearly ‘Her’ place. A fellow pilgrim from Canada appeared and mentioned that this was a very ‘feminine’ place. I savoured this anecdote for some time, enjoying the fact that for once a female symbol was revealed in a central position in a Catholic church. As a little child, and youngest of ten, my sister and I had considered it a show of solidarity to our mum to sit on Mary’s side of the church. It was clear to us that the men had all the say on the main altar, a place where women were not permitted to walk during the 1960s – something that confounded me.

Back in 2012, I did not realise that the central placement of the Virgin Mary is common in parts of Europe, including southern France, and Spain. It is uncommon in Aotearoa New Zealand, and other nations that were colonised by the British, where the dominant discourse surrounding Catholicism is one of interrupted devotion due to

the Protestant Reformation, and more recently by the influences of Marian doctrinal reforms of Vatican II, as discussed in this thesis's literature review (Warner, 1978, p.296).

My curiosity about the significance of 'Her' on the Saint James Way did not leave me. Since 2012, I have made other pilgrimages towards Santiago de Compostela. In 2019 I walked part of the Via Podiensis route, beginning in Le Puy-en-Velay, in the Auvergne region of France, to finish in the south-western French city of Cahors. In 2022 I repeated the Camino Frances route from 2012, walking from France to Santiago de Compostela. I shared these pilgrimages with one companion, my husband, Tim.

By 2022, I had visited numerous churches in France and Spain that could be described as Marian-centric, similar to the Eunatic Church. These included the famous Black Madonna at Le Puy's massive Romanesque cathedral, which is built on the Gallic devotional site Mont-Anis. Le Puy was originally named Anicium and, as with Mont-Anis, the name refers to the Celtic mother Goddess Ana, known as Don in Gaul and Dana in Ireland (Markale, 1988, p.176–177). The Black Madonna of Le Puy, like the Madonna in Eunatic Church, sits on the central altar at the cathedral. She presents an imposing image, backgrounded with dark heraldic and fleur-de-lis symbolism (see Figure 5).



Figure 5: Notre Dame du Puy, Le Puy-en-Velay, France, June 2022. Image credit: Tim Davis, used with permission.

1. Research aims and trajectory

My personal interest in sacred feminine aspects of the Camino de Santiago took a scholarly turn in 2018, when I began considering a postgraduate research journey about the feminine divine on the Saint James Way. It was from this point onward that I started carrying out practical research while on my pilgrimages. I noticed that, while there was much scholarly literature on Marian pilgrimage and other forms of sacred

feminine pilgrimage, there was very little scholarly work on what I had begun to identify as the sacred feminine aspects of the Camino, particularly as they relate to pilgrims and their journeys to Santiago de Compostela. This study therefore addresses this gap in scholarly research by contributing an anthropological and religious study on pilgrimage that does explore sacred feminine aspects on the Camino. And yet, as can be expected with ethnographic research, this has not been a straightforward research journey. In fact, like each Camino I have walked, the path altered considerably from my original plans and expectations.

The arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic halted my plans to conduct fieldwork in Spain. Conversely, Covid-19 times also provided me with unexpected opportunity when I joined a private Facebook group in August 2020 called Pilgrimage in Place (PIP). PIP is an international community of pilgrims who, like me, were at that time waiting for international borders to reopen. In lieu of being able to travel to the actual Camino, PIP members virtually shared reflections, photographs, Zoom meetings, and guided virtual pilgrimages of genuine Camino routes they had imaginatively mapped over their local environments, as ongoing experiences of pilgrimage. As I participated in these activities, I considered how PIP represented a potential recruitment site for digital ethnographic research. In February 2022, I followed due process as outlined in the methodology chapter and recruited six participants from within PIP's community to participate in this qualitative digital ethnographic study.

Situated firmly in the field of anthropology, this study builds on the work of scholars such as Anna Fedele and her work on Mary Magdalene pilgrims in the south of France (Fedele, 2013); Jill Dubisch and her work at a Greek Marian shrine (Dubisch, 1995); and Amy Whitehead and her research on the Cult of the Virgin of Alcala (Whitehead, 2013). These works lay foundational context for this study on feminine aspects of alternative and emergent forms of pilgrimage and ritual creativity on the Camino de Santiago, by specifically exploring *whether or not*, and *if so, how*, and *why* feminine divine or sacred feminine aspects are used to shape a form of continuing pilgrimage practice and community during the time of Covid-19. In addition to the scholars just mentioned and elaborated on in the literature review, there is one other theorist, Daniel Miller (2020), whose work is used extensively as a methodological bedrock for this study.

2. Ethnographic chapter outline

Daniel Miller's work on digital anthropology encouraged my transfer to digital methods. His holistic contextual framework is well suited to understanding and exploring participants' interpretations and contextualisation of their pilgrimages to Santiago as temporal continuums in their everyday lives (Miller, 2020). Qualitative research with members from the PIP group yielded three emergent themes as detailed in three ethnographic chapters of this work. These are:

1. **Initial Encounters:** Locating the sacred feminine and/or feminine aspects along the Camino de Santiago
2. **The Constant *Peregrina*:** Determining any roles of feminine divine or sacred feminine aspects from the Camino that are grounded in the concept of living pilgrimage as continuum, referred to as being a Pilgrim in Place
3. **The Material *Peregrina*:** Determining the roles of materiality and creative ritual while living as a Pilgrim in Place.

3. Terms of engagement

As this work involves relatively new research and exploratory work on specific forms of contemporary Western pilgrimages to Santiago de Compostela, it requires contextual understanding of my usage of certain terms as outlined here.

Feminine divine and sacred feminine: These terms are used interchangeably throughout this study as an organising principle for emergent themes on alternative pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. As evidenced in the findings, they present ways through which to explore how participants incorporate myriad interpretations of feminine religious symbolism and metaphors (or not) within this research data about their pilgrimage experiences. These include cross-cultural forms of both emerging and reclaimed forms of vernacular religious and experiential usage of religious materiality and creative ritual. For instance, 'feminine divine' can equally encapsulate Goddess associations such as the Hindu Goddess Kali, Basque Bird-Goddess Mari, Yoruba Goddess Oshun, the Mayan Earth Goddess Pachamama, Saint Mary Magdalene, and the Virgin Mary of Catholicism and High Anglicanism.

Use of ‘Her’ as pronoun: Throughout this work, ‘Her’ is used as a reference to the organising principle of feminine divine within this study.

Vernacular (or lived) religion and Camino energy: This study incorporates similarities and differences as presented through six belief systems. I acknowledge that at times vernacular and doctrinal (prescribed) religion merge in a form of mutual influence, and at other times they stand apart in unpredictable responses that are emotionally imbued with discourse such as ‘Camino energy’, understood as a multisensory interpretation of sacred space however the *peregrinas* in this study define that to be. Accordingly, ‘vernacular’ religion draws on Leonard Primiano’s description: ‘Vernacular religion is, by definition, religion as it is lived: as human beings encounter, understand, interpret, and practice it’ (Primiano, 1995, p.44).

Feminist hermeneutics: As will be discussed in the methodology section, this study uses a feminist hermeneutics lens with the aim of supporting an engaged form of scholarship, employing theory that interrogates the relationship of power to meaning and offers analysis that seeks to empower women by incorporating their life stories into spaces they have previously been omitted from, or historicised out of, and privileging no one person over another. In so doing I use a feminist theory that holds gender as an influential factor in practices of qualitative anthropological religious inquiry (Flanagan 2014, p.xxiv).

Peregrina: A Spanish word for a pilgrim who self-identifies as female. I use this term for the participants interviewed in this study as distinct from discourse about other pilgrims, such as other members of the PIP forum or those involved in any other of the myriad forms of contemporary pilgrimage.

Alternative pilgrimage: Alternative pilgrimage (Fedele, 2013, p.17) refers to pilgrimage practices that differ from officially prescribed and dominant pilgrimage discourse, and shift towards alternative forms of spirituality. Notably, not all participants in this study regard the Camino as tethered to sacred feminine meanings. Only some do, at times linking their activism to the worship of Goddess, Mother Earth, or Mother Mary. At other times, some participants understand and relate meaning to ‘feminine aspects’ as themselves and other human beings have applied meaning to such objects – experientially, in other words – and they apply significance as sacred places, objects, or people that they associate with feminist and ecological activism.

4. Conclusion

This introduction began with the background to a decade-long evolution of research on the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, followed by an outline of the research aims and context, and an overview of the terms of engagement. Chapter 2 will supply a review of the literature in which the theoretical framework of this study is situated. Chapter 3 describes this study's research methodology, characterized by the particular, protracted implications of undertaking research restricted by a global pandemic – circumstances that also accentuated PIP as a field site for digital ethnography. Following these guiding structures, there are three ethnographic chapters: Chapter 4 provides an intimate lens into the ways *peregrinas* in this study define the concept of feminine divine on the Camino, how and if they encountered it, along with expressions of any gender- or power-based discomfort the *peregrinas*' expressed within these accounts. Chapter 5 examines alternative forms of pilgrimage as continuum, along with evidence and analysis of the ways some *peregrinas* have conducted virtual pilgrimages during pandemic confinement, informed by their membership in the PIP community. Chapter 6 explores the role of materiality and creative rituals in enabling *peregrinas* to live their everyday lives as pilgrims in place, and how these aspects inform pilgrimage and religious studies. I hope the overall structure of this work is in some ways analogous to the circuitous nature of the pilgrimage itself, with the theoretical framework as a backpack to cope with the commonalities and distinction that presents in the data, and a methodological overcoat that accommodates the vagaries of pandemic times and underscores the valuable contribution the qualitative data of these *peregrinas* make to scholarly works on the Camino de Santiago.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter addresses the core scholarly literature that has informed the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis and situates it in the ethnographic/anthropological field of pilgrimage and religious studies. The field of pilgrimage studies is interdisciplinary, and at times this work has drawn on other theological and historic studies to reflect this. However, it is primarily based on anthropological studies of religious pilgrimage. I have noted there is an array of scholarly literature available that addresses centuries of religious forms of pilgrimage, and the relationships between pilgrimage and tourism to Santiago de Compostela in northern Spain. Notably much of the scholarly research on this pilgrimage has focused on the Christian origins of the pilgrimage with a central focus on Saint James, one of Christ's apostles, who is purportedly buried at the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela (Frey, 1998, p.8–9; Gonzalez, 2013, p.9–11; Turner, 1973, p.201).

Nonetheless, as mentioned in the introduction, when I first walked the Camino to Santiago de Compostela in 2012, the number of what can be considered feminine divine religious sites (due to their different physical and historical associations) I encountered along the Way had a significant impact on me. Since 2012, I have read a wide number of non-fiction works and novels (including Green, 2000; Bahrami, 2022; Markale, 1988; Rey-Henningsen, 1994; Scott, 2012; Sommer, 2014; and Vincenot, 1996) that reveal cross-cultural and popular interest in the feminine divine along the Camino de Santiago. Such publications underscore the apparent lack of scholarly literature on the subject. As a result of this observation, this research is organised as an exploration of the ways pilgrims engage with the feminine divine on the Camino de Santiago. Due to the lack of literature about this particular type of feminine divine pilgrimage along the Camino, my literature review draws on the growing body of anthropological literature, and literature found within 'lived religion' – a new and dynamic subfield in the study of religion that is useful to addressing these phenomena.

To assist navigation, I have organised the literature review into four main sections. The first section identifies the current state of the field of pilgrimage studies, while the final three sections reflect the literature found in the three ethnographic chapters of this thesis.

1. **The contemporary field of pilgrimage studies.** The first section provides a bedrock of literature in support of this research's ethnographic account and its associated findings by situating these within emergent and alternative forms of pilgrimage study.
2. **Gender and power on the Camino de Santiago.** The second section focuses on Mary and modernity; contextualising sacred feminine multiplicities; and embedding 'herstory' on the Saint James Way.
3. **Understanding and conducting pilgrimage in place.** In this section, I cover what I mean by 'relational pilgrimage'; walking a virtual pilgrimage; and merging temporalities with pilgrimage in place.
4. **Creating links: the use of materiality and creative ritual.** Finally, I provide an overview of interpretive tools for enacting pilgrimage in place, including nature-based spiritual ecology and energy discourse; the use of home altars, prayer gardens, and labyrinths; and exploring reciprocity between art and pilgrimage.

1. The contemporary field of pilgrimage studies

Journeying by pilgrimage takes many contemporary forms, such as the Kumbh Mela festival for Hindus, Shikoku Pilgrimage for Buddhists, the Hajj to Mecca for Muslims, Lalibela by churches in Ethiopia, and Our Lady of Vailankanni in India. As just one example of growth in popularity of pilgrimage among scholars and pilgrims alike, the Kumano-kodo pilgrimage in Japan has recently aligned with the Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage to share a UNESCO World Heritage classification. Underneath this classification, both pilgrimages are registered as sacred sites and pilgrimage routes (UNESCO, 2004; Kato & Prozano, 2017, p.247). This is just one example, and these two pilgrimages sit with many others in the field of pilgrimage studies as scholars take a closer look at pilgrimage's growing popularity, and at what constitutes being a pilgrim today (Coleman and Eade, 2004; Derks, 2009; Dubisch and Winkelman, 2005; Hermkens, Jansen, and Notermans, 2009; Morinis, 1992, Reader, 2007; Turner & Turner, 1978). This trend is further exemplified by the introduction and establishment of the Institute for Pilgrimage Studies in 2011 at William and Mary College in the United States. This institute represents an interdisciplinary research, teaching, and discussion on pilgrimage, and it places special emphasis on the

pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela (William & Mary College, 2022). Commensurately, scholarly interest in pilgrimage has expanded markedly in recent years (Eade & Sallnow, 2000 (1991); Dubisch, 1995; Veer, 1988). The focus of this study is concerned with how, and if, pilgrims use the feminine divine from the Camino de Santiago in their lives. As such, it can be situated with new and emergent forms of Western pilgrimage studies.

Scholars such as Anna-Karina Hermkens, Willy Jansen, and Catrien Notermans (2009) have noted that Marian pilgrimages have been ongoing since medieval times and that these pilgrimages remain popular, contrasting with a decline in numbers of attendees in some traditional forms of organised religion. Contemporary examples include, but are not limited to, pilgrimage sites such as Lourdes, Guadalupe, Our Lady of Czestochowa, Krakow, the Virgin of Urkupina (Bolivia), Fatima, and Sendagsono (2009, p.1). Hermkens, Jansen, and Noterman's work focuses on the constant cultural movements and the relationship between gender and pilgrimage as revealed through the active agency of the participants themselves. Similarly, this research explores the changing relationship that *peregrinas* reveal through their narratives about expressions of gender and power that they noticed on their Camino. It also relates to how, why, and if they responded to numerous Marian statues, shrines, and Marian-centric places of worship along their Camino. These experiences will be detailed in Chapter Four, which examines *peregrinas*' formative Camino experiences.

Although writing over twenty-five years ago, Appadurai is another scholar who applies a relevant lens to Marian pilgrimage in a lived religious sense, arguing against what he considers a fallacious assumption that religion and modernity are incompatible. He argues, 'Growing evidence indicates that religiosity and religious movements such as Marian devotions may be more consequential than ever in today's highly mobile and interconnected global politics' (Appadurai, 1997, p.7). In this sense, the apparent gap in scholarly literature about the sacred feminine on the Camino de Santiago could be viewed as omitting informative sociopolitical changes. Whereas other Marian pilgrimage studies, such as those mentioned earlier in this chapter, have been paying considerable attention to comparisons and contrasts within traditional forms of Mariology, which represent dynamic forms of lived religious understandings in contemporary pilgrimage studies.

During my own experience walking three pilgrimage routes to Santiago, I have observed numerous votive offerings at roadside shrines, sacred springs, sacred feminine sites, and candlelit rituals, all of which demonstrated a variety of religious and spiritual engagement. Most of these opportunities for engagement are devoted to the Virgin Mary, sometimes depicted as Black Madonna (which may represent earlier Goddess associations to some pilgrims). There are also numerous votive offerings to Mary Magdalene and various Catholic saints, such as Jeanne d'Arc. As could be expected on a pilgrimage named for him, Santiago, or Saint James, also features prominently along the Caminos I have travelled. Santiago is frequently accompanied by either the Virgin Mary or Mary Magdalene, such as in Figure 6 below.

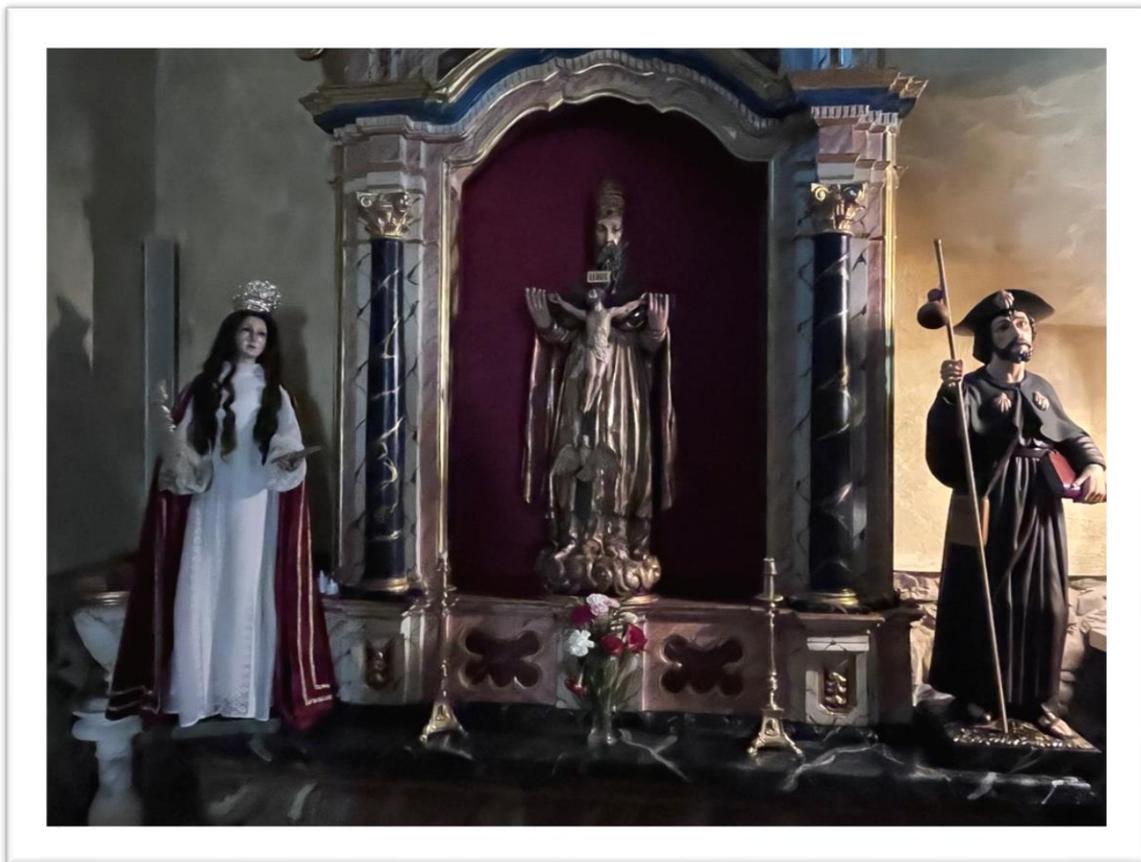


Figure 6: Iglesia de Nuestra, Senora de la Plaza, Cacabelos, Leon (Camino Frances route). Image author's own.

Had it been possible for me, for instance, to conduct traditional fieldwork, I would have coincided my field placement with an annual festival for Saint James and

Mary Magdalene that occurs in the township of Viana, Navarra, between 21–25 July.⁶ I make this observation not to dispute that Saint James is the dominant official and popular pilgrimage narrative. Rather, to contend that there is little scholarly attention to the many sacred feminine holy figures that accompany Santiago in many instances on the Camino.

2. Gender and power on the Camino de Santiago

Mary and modernity

As demonstrated by existing literature (Frey, 1998, p. 8–9; Gonzalez, 2013, p. 9–11; Turner, 1973, p. 201), scholarship has been examining pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago from a variety of perspectives for decades. Considerable scholarship exists about the political economy and ongoing debate as to what constitutes a pilgrim – a tourist, as well as religious tourists, for instance (Badone & Roseman, 2004; Coleman, 2002; Murray & Graham, 1997; Vasquez & Marquardt, 2003). While these studies are invaluable to contemporary pilgrimage studies, it is not within the scope of this research to contribute to tourism and pilgrimage discussions. That said, certain studies on the cultural and religious impact of the Protestant Reformation on pilgrimage numbers to Santiago de Compostela do align with this research’s work, where ethnographic account reveals a cultural contrast between Anglo-European/US experiences of Mariology in Catholicism and that observed by some *peregrinas* in this study.

Marina Warner’s (1978) extensive work explores the role of the Virgin Mary and the contested nature of the Virgin Mary in theological discourse. Warner points out that while the Virgin Mary has no direct link to the arguments on transubstantiation raised by Protestant reformers, the same reformers felt horror at Marian devotees’ propensity for relational engagement. She writes, ‘her cult excited precisely those excesses of external idolatry, with their accompanying hollowness of the spirit, that horrified the men who pressed for reformation’ (Warner, 1978, p. 296). This suggestion corresponds with the data in this study that reveals sacred feminine appropriation, interpreted as *peregrinas* have seen fit in home altars, jewellery, garden

⁶ Annual Fiesta of Saint Mary Magdalene and Saint James
<https://www.pamplona.es/en/caminodesantiago/caminofrances/viana>

sculptures, labyrinths, and other forms of creative ritualisation and materiality that will be detailed in Chapter 6 of this research.

In many ways, Warner's observation goes some way towards answering my question about why I witnessed statues of Mary being removed or sidelined in some Catholic churches in Aotearoa New Zealand, while at the same time elements of it do not correspond to the sacred sites and shrines I came upon on the Camino. Having lived through these contrasting experiences, I became aware of possible metaphors between the religious placement of female representations in public churches, and the lack of female representatives in general public spaces in the so-called progressive West. In the first ethnographic chapter, Chapter 4, the *peregrinas* in this study bring their own observations about gender and power to bear as they discuss their formative Camino experiences.

Contextualising sacred feminine multiplicities

To better understand other's interpretations, I researched the historic layers of the sacred feminine on the Camino in Spain. The work of archaeologist Marija Gimbutas, for instance, claims the roots of Goddess spirituality as ancient, dating back to the palaeolithic era (25,000 BCE). Gimbutas' work on early Goddess culture was based in northern Spain and focused on the Basque Bird-Goddess Mari (Gimbutas, 2001, p. 123). To bring this earlier cultural observation back into the lens of contemporary pilgrimage discourse, I note that many of the Camino routes still provide architectural symbology, place names, and other forms of iconography that acknowledge a contemporary presence of Mari the Bird-Goddess. Indeed, this will be further demonstrated in Chapter 4 of this study, when the data aligns with this aspect of the Camino's sacred feminine associations.

It is widely recognised by scholars who study feminist spirituality that women's self-determination and autonomy are frequently derived through a form of sacred feminine/Goddess pilgrimage that supports the pilgrims' dismissal of patriarchal control in their sociocultural and political lives. Scholars such as theologian Carol Christ's recent reflection on the theological necessity of the Goddess in contemporary times (Christ, 2012, p.243–244). Christ's argument for the significance of Goddess worship in contemporary religious study can be supported by the fieldwork of anthropologist Anna Fedele on three Mary Magdalene pilgrimages in the south of

France (Fedele, 2013, p.55–57). Adding to these and from a contemporary Pagan lens, religious scholar and anthropologist Amy Whitehead’s work on Goddess pilgrimages at Glastonbury (Whitehead, 2019, p. 215–220), aligns closely with anthropologist Kathryn Rountree’s work on forms of sacralised travel (Rountree, 2002, p. 475). All four of these scholars posit a synergetic argument that pilgrims are encouraged by witnessing and experiencing symbolic interpretations of women in positions of power that are politically, spiritually, or socially represented. Moreover, in a similar fashion to the aims of this research, they each accommodate a broad range of meanings from their participants, such as mythopoetic, spiritual, agnostic, or religious interpretations.

In light of this, I consider how the Camino de Santiago has many religious buildings that date back to the ninth century and sacred sites with ancient roots (Bahrami, 2019, p. 119). The ethnographic chapters in this study feature discussion that readily spans centuries, weaving earlier times into present evocations. Adding to this, this study and pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela incorporate an amalgam of different belief systems. Whitehead observed a similar scenario within her study at Glastonbury, which plays host to different strands of Paganism, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Sufism, and those who might self-identify as ‘New Age’ (Whitehead, 2019, p. 217). As outlined in the methods section in Chapter 3, the *peregrinas* in this study have identified as being Pagan, Christian, Atheist, Nature Mystic, and Spiritual.

Pilgrimages that can be considered to have feminine divine influences feature regional and national contrasts in terms of the effects of the Reformation and modernity. The original ancient statue of the Black Madonna of Le Puy was publicly burned on a pyre in a public square after the French Revolution, for instance. After which the cathedral at Le Puy replicated the statue and Her prominence is unquestionable in today’s cathedral. Aligning with this example professor of theology Charlene Spretnak, has suggested that feminine divine influence on European pilgrimage has fluctuated, due to the cultural waves of the Age of Reason, the French Revolution, and the Catholic counter-reformation that followed Vatican-sanctioned apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Lourdes and Paris (Spretnak, 2004, p.160).

By contrast, Spain was not affected in the same way as France. Whitehead (2013) describes this contrast as:

The Virgin of Alcala can be said to come from a line of ‘continuous devotion’ when discussing the effects that the Reformation had on Catholic England. Spanish Catholics have been venerating, touching, kissing, processing, and adorning statues since Roman Catholicism was superimposed onto the pre-Christian Gods and Goddesses (Iberian, Greek, Roman, Egyptian) who previously played significant roles in the lives of Iberians (Whitehead, 2013, p.36).

The work of these two scholars provides context for two components that are useful to understanding the *peregrinas*’ accounts in this research. Firstly, it reveals how the placement of feminine divine associations in places of worship can serve as a barometer for not only religious but social changes throughout history, particularly in terms of public expressions of gender-based power and visibility in public spaces. Secondly, their work highlights how stark Marian-based contrasts can be within Catholicism and wider society – something this research examines in greater detail in Chapter 4, exploring formative Camino experiences.

Embedding ‘herstory’ along the Saint James Way

While both this study and Fedele’s work are contemporary, this chapter has shown there is a long history of examples where cosmological interpretations of the Virgin Mary (or as she is interpreted by *peregrinas* in this study) are nature-based and focused on a relational sense of belonging that does not fit easily with patriarchal and hyper-individualist forms of state control. Whitehead sums this up when she writes:

The land, nature, and all things earthy, bodily, and material (matter, mother) have also been suppressed, abused, and exploited as a result of (imagined) Christian and modern discourses that prize the transcendent mind over earthly matter (Whitehead, 2019, p.220).

Such understandings can draw upon earlier works by cultural geographer Adrian Ivakhiv who studied eco-spiritual pilgrims while visiting Glastonbury, England, and Sedona, Arizona, describing them as a newly emerged form of pilgrimage. Ivakhiv understood these pilgrims through James Lovelock’s work on ‘Gaian pilgrims’, who considered the Earth a sacred feminine being (Ivakhiv, 2001; Lovelock, 1979). To put it more simply, at times the data in this study can be supported by earlier scholarly associations of the sacred feminine with Gaian principles.

Such findings segue with the upcoming ethnographic chapters, which will reveal how some *peregrinas* in this study use a feminist and/or sacred feminine understanding as they outline social and ecological concerns. The concepts they raise reimagine an improved relationship between humanity and nature – a relationship based on spiritual ecological principles that incorporate either feminine divine or feminist aspects from their Camino experiences. Their narratives also call for a move away from a gendered and binary approach to language and understanding each other. To accommodate such findings, it has been useful for this research to draw upon the work of Carol Christ, a feminist theologian, historian, and popular author on the Goddess movement. Christ’s recent work argues for a move beyond dualistic framing of patriarchal men dominating women and nature, to a more integral system that better addresses the challenges of the climate crisis, global inequalities, and geopolitical tensions (Christ, 2016, p.214–215). Adding to this aim, she later asks us to question Jungian terms of masculine and feminine to describe human capacities. She writes:

Jung is to be applauded for recognising that Western culture suffered from an excess of what he called the rational masculine and needed a new infusion of what he called the intuitive and embodied feminine. But he should be criticised for requiring men to call their feelings or even their embodiment their ‘feminine’ side, and women to call our rationality and capacity to assert ourselves as ‘masculine’. What is required instead is a theory of human personhood in which thinking and feeling are understood to be human capacities, in which both male and female are understood to be embodied, and in which all beings, including male and female human beings, are understood to be related and interdependent in the web of life (Christ, 2019, p. 22).

I closely examine a more relational and integral approach to language in Chapter 4 of this study, as a consequence of data that revealed challenges to the problematic nature of using gendered language and dualistic categorisation such as ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ to describe human personhood.

3. Understanding and conducting pilgrimage in place

What do I mean by ‘relational pilgrimage’?

Building on the last section's discussion about reimagining an improved relationship between humanity and nature, it is necessary to understand the relational concept of living as a pilgrim in place to contextualise the ways *peregrinas* in this research regard their pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela as being a continuum. As Whitehead (2019) has shown, relational forms of belonging involve using a holistic framework, such as that utilized by Whitehead when she studied a variety of pilgrimage encounters at Glastonbury. She writes:

These entanglements are not dualistic, but evenly and relationally distributed between individual experiences, ideas, place, time of day, people, and things. The connection to Glastonbury and the Goddess in the land is not only co-inspired between individual devotees and place; but conglomerate (Whitehead, 2019. p.223).

Thus, Whitehead's work usefully supports instances in this research where *peregrinas* imagine belonging in relationship to each other through various means, such as PIP, the broader community of pilgrims to Camino de Santiago, and various temporalities, things, and places. Together, these substantiate an imaginary form of belonging in place, which is enabled through various lived practices and the idea of living pilgrimage as continuum.

Walking a virtual pilgrimage as a continuum

As outlined in Chapter 1 (and forthcoming Chapter 3), the *peregrinas* in this research were recruited from a virtual Facebook community known as Pilgrimage in Place (PIP) that was formed during the Covid-19 pandemic. PIP's ethos is based on an award-winning documentary directed by the creator of PIP, Annie O'Neil, called *Phil's Camino*, which is about one man's virtual pilgrimage journey (*Phil's Camino*, 2016). I examine *Phil's Camino* in detail in Chapter 5.

Theologian and art historian Professor Kathryn Barush dedicated a chapter of her recent book *Imaging Pilgrimage: Art as Embodied Experience* to Volker's experience of virtual pilgrimage. She positions such examples as an emergent area of enquiry into material culture that utilizes certain artistic elements to evoke a pilgrimage experience wherever someone lives (Barush, 2021, p. 2, 17). By emulating Volker's example, *peregrinas* detail their own experiences of virtual pilgrimage in Chapter 5 of this research. Barush's work is useful to situate their evocation of the

actual Camino as an embodied and ongoing experience that relies on certain forms of material culture to enable it. The forms of material culture the *peregrinas* have used are detailed in Chapter 6, the final ethnographic chapter in this research.

This concept of walking a virtual pilgrimage – an ongoing commitment to continuing a pilgrimage experience while confined by the Covid-19 pandemic – is integral to the PIP members who have participated in this study. *Peregrinas* in this study use certain objects to form an imaginary route of the actual Camino over their local environment. This concept of pilgrimage involves a non-linear understanding of pilgrimage, where pilgrims do not separate the experience of pilgrimage from their everyday life.

Victor Turner's work is significant to this thesis, particularly his understanding of Western pilgrimage as a process of three ritualised stages that involve a separation from everyday life in a linear trajectory from an entry to end point. Turner also contributed the term 'liminoid' to distinguish Western pilgrimages from cross-cultural pilgrimages that result in a permanent change to a pilgrim's social status, whereas Western pilgrims can revert to earlier social status once they return home from the pilgrimage route (Turner & Turner, 1978, p.18).

While Turner's description is accurate for many Western pilgrims, it is not representative of how the *peregrinas* in this study expressed understanding their pilgrimage experience. The *peregrinas*' experience is more akin to John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow's work, insofar as Eade and Sallnow also acknowledge Turner's linear understanding of Western pilgrimage as valid for some, yet not all, pilgrims. They suggest linear pilgrimage could be better understood as being one of many competing discourses that inform the temporality of pilgrimage (Eade & Sallnow, 1991, p. 5). This claim is supported by anthropologist Nancy Frey's work on pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela, where she observes some pilgrims regard their arrival in Santiago as the start of their pilgrimage, and not an end point (Frey, 1998, p. 9).

Moreover, there are similarities between the PIP *peregrinas* in this study and Jill Dubisch's work on a Marian shrine in Tinos, Greece. Dubisch observed that pilgrims she studied in Tinos did not remove themselves, even temporarily, from their everyday social milieu (1995, p.95). Dubisch's observation supports Coleman's and Frey's suggestions to move beyond using Turner's 'liminoid' theory as a paradigmatic

approach to *all* Western pilgrimage. Dubisch's work provides contextual support for the everyday nature of the PIP *peregrinas* understanding of pilgrimage. For instance, the *peregrinas* in this study did not separate their Camino from their daily lives, not even during pandemic isolation. Correspondingly, the *peregrinas*' lived experience of pilgrimage as continuum can be situated in a dynamic and growing field of pilgrimage study focusing on experiential understandings, a bricolage of lived, material, and visual experiences (Coleman & Eade 2004; Dubisch 1995; Frey 1998). The notion of continuing pilgrimage, building step upon step, involves a process of imagining one place over another, and one time over another, in a simultaneous movement that evokes pilgrimage for *peregrinas* in this study during the time of Covid-19.

Merging temporalities with pilgrimage in place

By now it should be clear that my research has revealed distinctive ways *peregrinas* regard the temporal aspects of pilgrimage, drawing on both Coleman's and Frey's understandings. In Frey's case, she concentrates specifically on the Christian Western pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, while Coleman brings in Sufi understandings of pilgrimage as both a circuitous concept and metaphor for life itself, readily embodied in either/all place, person, and object (Frey 1998; Coleman & Eade, 2004, p.68). Adding to this, Barush uses object elicitation to provide examples of material culture pilgrims have collected from previous pilgrimages which they employ to continue their pilgrimage once they move away from the physical site of a pilgrimage destination (Barush, 2021, p.5).

Similarly, as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6, the PIP community often features photographs of material evocations and creative rituals that utilise objects carried home from a physical pilgrimage to engender a sense of ongoing pilgrimage in daily life. I have used Coleman's approach to pilgrimage as a metaphor for life to accommodate the personal categorisations of time, space, and movement from the *peregrinas* within this study. As he writes, 'I hope to show there are many ways to move, just as there are many ways to be modern' (Coleman & Eade, 2004, p.68).

To better understand the unique ways *peregrinas* in this study move to enact their pilgrimage requires support from other scholars' work on the use of materiality and ritual to evoke their pilgrimage in place. How exactly do they evoke a virtual link

to Santiago de Compostela? I now explore research that is useful to this concept in the final section of this review.

4. Materiality and creative ritual: examining linkage to place

Interpretive tools for enacting nature-based spiritual ecology and energy discourse

Anthropologist Anna Fedele's work on Mary Magdalene pilgrims in the south of France has been of utmost significance to the development of this thesis. Her work focuses on the creative ritualisation and alternative pilgrimage methods that pilgrims use to engage with Mary Magdalene at official Catholic sites in the south of France (Fedele, 2013). As such, her findings mirror an emphasis on pilgrimage interpretations of Mary Magdalene, broadly understood as being feminine divine while not being limited to a single interpretation. Rather, Fedele's work focuses on the different interpretations of Catholic statues, as well as the use of what she refers to as 'nature-based' pilgrimage discourse. Nature-based themes are interwoven with other interpretations of this research in ethnographic chapters 4, 5, and 6 of this study. Fedele's work is useful because it can support understandings where the sacred feminine of the Camino is interpreted as being the Earth itself, and as such requiring a reclamation that honours this principle in nature. Fedele writes:

What these pilgrims wanted was to restore what they identified as a hidden part of Christianity, which according to them had been removed from Christianity but had been an authentic part of its origins. They believed it could be reintegrated by reclaiming the Sacred Feminine and the theories and rituals associated with it (Fedele, 2013, p. 16).

Fedele further offers another important similarity between her findings and my own in what she refers to as 'energy discourse' (2013, p. 18). Fedele identifies this as being foundational to understanding the ways Mary Magdalene pilgrims describe their lived practices, and how they partnered this discourse with various forms of ritual creativity. Some understanding of 'energy discourse' as a key thematic approach is necessary within this research as the *peregrinas*' narratives are replete with notions of 'feminine energy', 'feminine divine energy' and/or 'Camino energy'.

The use of home altars, prayer gardens, and labyrinths

Recognising multiple interpretations of sacred feminine and other holy figures is an important part of pilgrimage studies, especially when viewed through the lens of lived religious interpretation. Such interpretations will be discussed further in Chapter 4, which deals with formative interpretations, and in Chapter 6, which deals with the ways *peregrinas* use material means to assist their interpretations of lived religious practices. Multiple interpretations are also ambiguous and distinct from dominant patriarchal discourse. Indeed, research presented in this study has found that ambiguity is embedded into pilgrimage-based rituals.

Kay Turner's work on the use of home altars is extensive, and I have used it throughout Chapter 6 to explore the use and relationship *peregrinas* give to materiality. Turner's work also notes the potency some pilgrims attribute to items on their home altars, such as her study on multivalent religiosities creative usage that encompasses embodiment, ritual, healing, aesthetic value, and relationality. She writes,

The home altar exists at a point of intersection between art and religion where the sacred is apprehended in a woman's imagined relationship with the Divine (Turner, 1999, p. 27).

As Chapter 6 will show, Kay Turner's mention of a point of intersection is useful for understanding how home altars, labyrinths, and prayer gardens were all constructed during the time of Covid-19 to evoke an experience of living as a pilgrim in place.

The reciprocity between objects, art, and pilgrimage

As discussed, Kay Turner's work (1999) has examined the tactile and imagined relationship between pilgrimage devotees and certain objects. Her findings detail how, in some instances, the relationship is not simply a matter of venerating an object. Rather for some pilgrims the object contains spirit, a form of presence (p. 115). Her scholarship on this is significant for this research, as it enables a better understanding of the distinct ways *peregrinas* in this study relate to material objects, which is detailed in Chapter 6. For example, for some *peregrinas* this involves a linkage of spirit as Turner describes and for others it does not.

These examples of lived religious practice supplement my questions about whether the unique positionality of cosmological understandings of sacred feminine or feminine aspects from the Camino can be readily accommodated in modernity's rationalist interpretations of religion. Fedele concurs with this when she writes,

Neopagan movements such as neo shamanism and feminist spirituality deserve to be studied with the same detachment and scrupulous attention as other religious movements, and with careful attention for the range of differences existing among them (Fedele, 2013, p. 26).

Kathryn Rountree's work studying how Goddess pilgrims enacted a Stonehenge solstice ritual through Zoom when the Covid-19 pandemic prevented them from visiting the actual site supports Fedele's call to reimagine how we understand connectivity between place, object, and person. As Rountree notes, 'the duality of here/there, along with the distinction between imagined and material places, are also much less stable than we might have thought' (Rountree, 2021, p. 21). Rountree's observation helps to position *peregrinas*' understanding of material evocations, which will be examined in detail in Chapter 6. Her observation about previously understood markers of being 'in place' helps to position ways *peregrinas* in this research collaborated and created new understandings of simultaneous pilgrimage to mitigate isolation during the Covid-19 pandemic.

5. Concluding thoughts

This chapter has addressed the core literature on which the findings in this thesis have been built and analysed. It has aimed to demonstrate how and why this research is situated in the contemporary pilgrimage sphere, contextualised as a digital ethnographic exploration of alternative pilgrimage that studies whether or not pilgrims are engaging with the feminine divine or sacred feminine aspects of the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage. To achieve this, I organised the chapter into four themes that outline the dynamic and alternative pilgrimage practices this research features in chapters 4, 5, and 6. I began by outlining the contemporary field of pilgrimage studies, covering its growth in recent years, and suggested where the findings of this research can be positioned. Next, I offered scholarly works that support understanding of religious studies on the sacred feminine, feminist spirituality, and feminist aspects of

pilgrimage that are presented in *peregrina* narratives, stemming from this research's use of feminine divine as an organising principle. I followed this with works that have assisted my framing of non-linear understandings of pilgrimage that present in the research findings. Lastly, I ended with a section that outlines works I drew on to better understand my findings about *peregrinas* use of materiality and creative ritual as tools that helped them to enact pilgrimage in place. Overall, this review incorporates literature that supports the circuitous nature of the *peregrinas*' storied narratives, which move fluidly back and forth from initial encounters, localised home environments, and the pilgrimage destination of Santiago de Compostela. I now offer further context of the methods that I employed before introducing the accounts in three ethnographic chapters.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter considers the methods I used in this research, evaluating how and why these were employed, and embeds them within earlier research that informed its methodological design. It begins with a brief outline of how this research journey evolved, tracing a trajectory that involved a redesign because of the Covid-19 pandemic's restrictions on fieldwork, which led to my identification of the PIP community as a suitable field site for participant recruitment, and I chart the methods used to obtain these participants. I follow this with details about the interview and follow-up procedures I employed. Then I situate these processes in the scholarly pool they were informed by to create a phenomenological and qualitative research project. Next, I provide a section on the ethical requirements of this research. Lastly, I end this chapter with an introduction to the research participants, the *peregrinas*, whose storied narratives feature in the following three ethnographic chapters.

1. A divergent research story

In June 2021, the Covid-19 pandemic prevented my plans to travel from Aotearoa New Zealand to Spain to conduct fieldwork on the Camino in Estella, in northern Spain. At that time, there were indications that international travel might resume early the following year, so I delayed my fieldwork in the hope I could leave for Spain in April 2022. Estella seemed worth the wait. It is in the heart of Navarra in northern Spain and a short drive to Iglesia Santa Maria de Eunate, the church I mentioned in Chapter 1 as being formative to this topic. Estella is also a close neighbour to Viana, a township with magnificent examples of Hispanic Renaissance architecture, and host to the annual fiesta of Mary Magdalene and Saint James, mentioned in this thesis. It is also the burial place of the notorious Cesare Borgia, whose political connections influenced the construction of the monumental Iglesia de Santa Maria de Viana⁷, which features a high altar dedicated to Mary Magdalene at the rear of the church (see Figure 7 below). Considering these points and the networks I had established in the decade since my first Camino, Estella seemed like the ideal place to base myself for a

⁷Iglesia de Santa Maria de Viana: <https://visitnavarra.info/visitnavarra/en/iglesia-de-santa-maria-de-viana/>

month, volunteering at an *albergue*⁸, cleaning, gardening, and cooking for and with pilgrims and *hospitaleras*⁹. I imagined such a field site would present opportunities for a research project focused on exploring the ways that pilgrims engage with the sacred feminine on the Camino de Santiago.

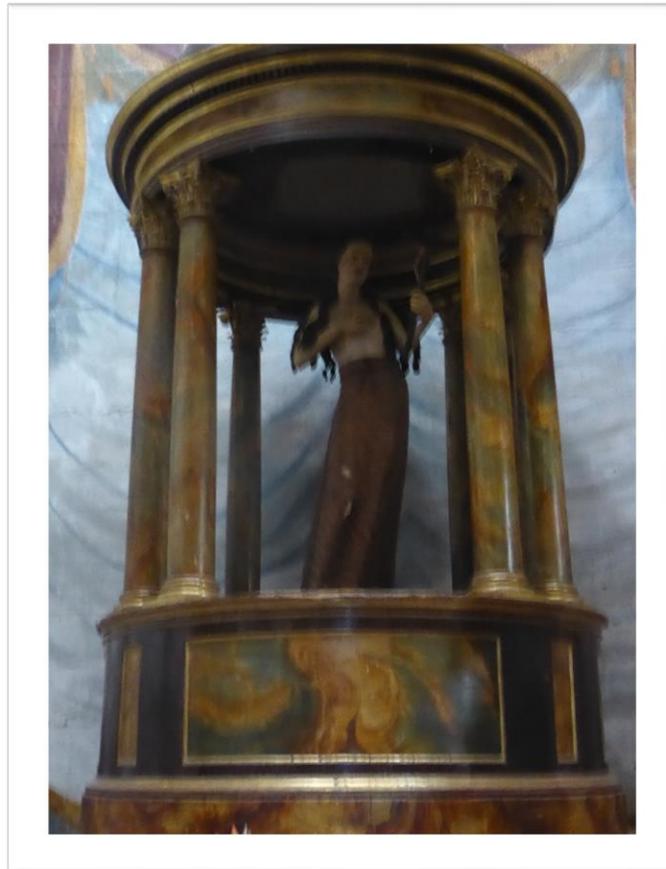


Figure 7: Saint Mary Magdalene, Iglesia de Santa Maria de Viana, Navarra, 2022. Image author's own.

2. Switching field sites

As I waited for the Covid-19 pandemic to end, I noticed a private Facebook forum called Pilgrimage in Place, the PIP community. The PIP group's remit was based on continuing pilgrimage wherever you lived, which appealed to me when I couldn't get to Estella. Intrigued, I discovered that its membership constituted pilgrims who met regularly on Zoom meetings to imaginatively map official Camino routes over their local environments, as well as to share photographs, anecdotes, and book and movie recommendations with each other while Covid-19 travel restrictions prohibited international travel. I joined the group and participated in many of the group's

⁸ *albergue* – traditional pilgrim hostel

⁹ *hospitalera* – traditional pilgrim host

activities. Come February 2022, I started considering PIP as a potential site to recruit participants for this research project. I researched how the group had been developed, who was responsible for the page's administration, and how best to contact them to explore the feasibility of using the site to recruit participants.

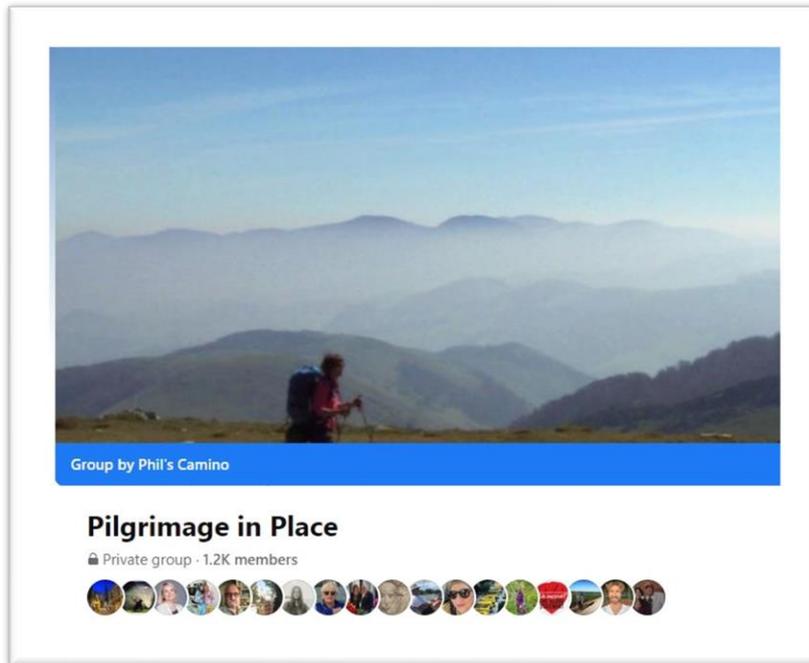


Figure 7: Pilgrimage in Place (PIP) private Facebook forum. Image author's own.

3. Obtaining permissions

I approached Annie O'Neil, the page's creator and administrator, to explain my idea for research and establish if she was interested in seeing the recruitment notice. She kindly agreed to review a copy of the information sheet and a link to the Prezi audio visual presentation¹⁰ I hoped to advertise onto the PIP forum. After considering these, Annie raised some questions and we met on Zoom to discuss them before she agreed to my posting the advertisement. Moreover, this meeting was helpful as Annie suggested edits that helped me achieve the inclusive approach that I wished to extend to *all* members of the PIP community.

Once I posted the notice, the response was rapid. Within forty-eight hours, six people had registered their interest. I sent each an information sheet (see Appendix I), which outlined the research. I declared my positionality as both *peregrina* and researcher at

¹⁰ **Let Her Be** – audiovisual recruitment notice presentation:
<https://prezi.com/v/view/CrGJ9n7iLwgz3XB8erq9/>

the start of the notice, inviting people to ‘walk with me’ on a research journey to explore the ways that pilgrims hold space¹¹ for feminine divine sites along the Camino de Santiago during the time of Covid-19.

My positionality placed me in a potentially compromising position. I was both an outsider and an insider, and I was aware it was impossible for me to neatly separate one role from the other as I worked on this study. There are ethical implications with this positionality, and I will discuss these in more detail later in this chapter. Suffice to say, I evaluated these before I approached Annie O’Neil about the research project.

The information sheet provided respondents with two options: to meet with me by Zoom, either privately or in a group situation. I wrote, ‘Here you can get to know me and my research plans better and ask me any questions before deciding whether or not to be part of this project.’ All respondents chose a private meeting. As I made these appointments, I explained the meeting was designed to mimic meeting each other at a pilgrim table after a long day walking on the Camino. I borrowed this concept from PIP’s global Zoom meetings. Just like on the actual Camino, interested parties could join me to walk across this research journey or not.

4. Qualitative interview strategies

It transpired that all six *peregrinas* who registered their interest agreed to participate in this research. The interviews were conducted between May and November 2022. I employed a semi-structured approach to allow for the *peregrinas*’ story-based narratives to emerge. Each interview began with a broad-brush approach, where I invited participants to ‘go backwards to come forward’ to their first Camino encounters with whatever they considered to be ‘feminine divine’ or ‘feminine aspects’, if they had done so. And, if not, to go back to whatever initial Camino encounters they considered meaningful in relation to this research topic. As the interviews progressed, I repeatedly reassured the *peregrinas* that for the purpose of this research they didn’t have to conform to any definition of ‘feminine divine’, rather I wanted to know how they understood the term themselves. This approach

¹¹ ‘hold space’ – a term PIP pilgrims use to imagine their own and other’s Camino de Santiago pilgrimage official routes over their local environments and everyday lived practice, using various means of alternative pilgrimage and creative ritual

worked well, as it created space for the *peregrinas* to express any discomfort they held around the use of gender-based discourse. This is examined in more detail in Chapter 4.

Adding to this, I repeatedly reminded each *peregrina* that they could refuse to answer any question, and that they could stop the Zoom recording at any time. I also encouraged them to tell me if my notion of an open question did not seem that way to them. This semi-structured approach allowed the *peregrinas*' narratives to organically shape the parameters of the discussion and express the meanings they attributed to particular aspects of the Camino.

Once the *peregrinas*' initial encounters were outlined, I asked if they had any objects that they continue to use to evoke the Camino and/or feminine divine. At times, *peregrinas* spoke of objects as significant rather than being sacred, and I adapted my interview language to suit how they framed places as meaningful associations, religiously, spiritually, or experientially. I also invited them to share any photographs as an example of what they were describing to me that they would be comfortable including in this thesis. These object elicitation will be examined thoroughly in Chapter 6, where I explore material practices.

As the interviews progressed, and where the dialogue presented appropriate opportunities, I asked the *peregrinas* to let me know if, or how, they would like to describe themselves in terms of being spiritual, agnostic, religious, or otherwise. As I ended the interviews, I promised them that they would receive a written transcript of the entire interview with the opportunity to edit, omit, or add any changes to the interview discussion *before* I began any analysis from the data. I also asked them to let me know what pseudonyms they would like to use to protect their identities. Three *peregrinas* preferred not to use a pseudonym, which I discuss further in the ethics section. Lastly, I thanked them for their generous contribution to the research and assured them of secure storage of their data at all times.

5. Post-interview responses and ongoing relationships

Four *peregrinas* made minor changes to their transcripts, such as place names, and corrections to things I had misheard, such as 'rugs' instead of 'dogs'. One *peregrina* preferred not to read her transcript and confirmed she was happy for me to proceed.

Another provided a conscientious and detailed edit where she omitted sections that she was concerned might identify people she had spoken about.

I have maintained a relationship with all six *peregrinas*, including advising them that I was taking the opportunity to walk the Camino Frances route once again, during August and September 2022. They gave me their blessing for this Camino, and some of them followed my journey on social media. During the writing-up process of the work, I have offered each *peregrina* the opportunity to read the three ethnographic chapters in advance of submission. I explained to them this was a pre-submission courtesy, intended as an opportunity for them to make comments but not an editorial review process.

6. Sorting the data

Once the transcripts were returned to me, I had over 40,000 words to consider. It was challenging to decide what to include in the scope of a master's thesis of 30,000 words. As I read each transcript repeatedly, I colour-coded emergent themes that revealed comparisons and contrasts between the *peregrinas*. Once this process was completed, I retyped the emergent themes to further imbue the participants' narrative context into my understanding, much like I did with article reading notes before finalising a thematic basis for the research. As a starting point, I extracted data that revealed the *peregrinas*' responses to the recruitment notice usage of 'feminine divine' to ascertain their particular responses to and interpretations of this term, in relation to their Camino de Santiago encounters.

7. Designing a digital ethnography

As mentioned, I switched my fieldwork to an entirely digital ethnography in February 2022. I began exploring this method by researching a specialist's work on digital ethnography. Daniel Miller is a professor of material culture at the Department of Anthropology, University College of London. My discovery of Miller coincided with my growing involvement in the PIP community. It had occurred to me that while the Covid-19 pandemic isolation was tedious and held no false equivalence for anyone involved in it, I could also see that it was giving PIP members time for deep reflection on both their inner and outer pilgrimage experiences. Investigating Miller's popular YouTube video 'How to Conduct Ethnography during Social Isolation', I was particularly impacted by his argument that anthropologists should avoid polemic

framing of digital versus more standard fieldwork, and instead concentrate on the specific contextual milieu their particular research is situated in, and apply a committed ethnographic holism to this (Miller, 2020). In this respect, Miller's approach to digital ethnography argues that anthropologists play an important role in incorporating the wider context of people's everyday lives surrounding their digital involvement (Miller, 2018, p. 4). I have adopted these principles as foundational to contextualising the PIP community's role in the *peregrinas'* ongoing sense of pilgrimage throughout this study.

That is not to suggest these principles of digital ethnography apply only at times when travel restrictions prohibit overseas fieldwork. Miller's work on digital anthropology well preceded the Covid-19 pandemic, evidenced by his editorial role with Heather A. Horst in a collected volume of essays exploring the rise of digital culture (Horst & Miller, 2012). As well as co-editing this volume, Miller wrote one of its chapters, dedicating it to social networking sites (SNS). He writes:

If my argument is correct then the importance of SNS is not the unprecedented brave new world they open up, but their inherent conservatism, which helps to bring back the intense social relationships and the interconnectedness between what had become separated-out fields of sociality (Miller, 2012, p. 159).

This quote correlates to the interpersonal subjectivity that PIP presents to its members, where Covid-19 isolation is considered as a form of separating pilgrims from the actual pilgrimage route. To facilitate a holistic framework, I have relied on a qualitative framework that includes a sensory phenomenological approach, drawing upon both storied narratives and object elicitation, and I now provide methodological frameworks for each of these.

8. The use of storied narratives and 'impressionist tales'

When anthropologist Jill Dubisch was compiling her ethnographic work on Marian pilgrims to Tinos, Greece, she observed certain practices, such as demonic possession, that she found difficult to accommodate in academic discourse that focuses on the etic, purely observable, and rational aspects of ethnographic work. This led her to extend her ethnographic work into the parameters of an impressionist tale. In other words, an

impressionist tale is one that acknowledges the researcher's role as instrumental *within* narrative, an actor in the construction of the narrative. She explains:

It places the ethnographer in the scene she is observing and shows the mutual dependency of observer and observed, constituting what Tedlock (1991) has called a 'narrative ethnography'. Since one of the aims of my own ethnography is never to let the observed and observer drift too far apart, it seemed appropriate to open my discussion with an impressionist's tale (Dubisch, 1995, p.119).

I adopted her approach for this research because what Dubisch describes as an impressionist tale suits the context of PIP community, of which I too am a member. In this sense, the data can be sustained as a free possibility within the broad and accepting realms of relative interpretation and sensual phenomenology.

Anna Fedele, who featured in the review of literature, also identified a storied methodological approach in her work with Mary Magdalene pilgrims. Using her example, this study emulates the Camino itself with findings offering multi-layered, personal accounts that bring personal theories and pilgrimage encounters to the table. And, as Fedele notes, these accounts are a product of interpretation with past construction (Fedele, 2013, p. 24). Thus, my approach places *peregrinas*' voices at the forefront to better assist understandings of their particular pilgrimage milieu.

9. Visual ethnography and object elicitation

There are instances in this study where narrative descriptions and analysis about creative ritualisation and material culture are supplemented with visual ethnography. Using visual ethnography provided a means to better demonstrate the multisensory ways in which *peregrinas* self-identify as pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela in their daily lives, such as wearing particular clothes and jewellery. Adding to this, some *peregrinas* revealed creative ritualised spaces like home labyrinths or certain sites from the actual trail, for example. The cultural context that visual anthropology provides extends textual descriptions as a means of visually demonstrating how and why certain cultural influences are interwoven with lived pilgrimage practices (Barush, 2021; Schwartz, 1989; Becker, 1974; Pink, 2006).

Peregrinas in this research supplied photographic examples of jewellery items, religious statues, and sacred sites that are instrumental to their experience of ongoing pilgrimage. Further, Kay Turner's work refers to the particular economic model of gifting that home altars represent, a reciprocal gift of offering and receipt between human and divine (1999, p. 107).

Visual ethnographers argue there are multiple ways a single image can be interpreted, and ethnographic merit is arrived at by embedding these images within ethnographic discussion that contextualises a participant's understanding of the image (Pink, 2006, p. 21). I have endeavoured to do this in a way that informs both ethnographic engagement and curiosity throughout the three ethnographic chapters, and particularly in Chapter 6.

It is for similar reasons that I have supplemented the photographs in this study with personal images that I took while journeying on three Caminos. In using both my own and the *peregrinas*' photos, I acknowledge Bourdieu's key point that rather than being a random act, a photograph reveals how the photographer makes sense of their world – quite literally how they choose to accentuate certain aspects of it (Bourdieu, et al., 1990). Using visual ethnographic methods in this research has helped to determine why and how certain things are used as material evocation and why these are significant to *peregrinas* in this study.

10. Ethical considerations

As there were no ethical concerns identified in the research design, a Low Risk Notification was made to Massey University's Human Ethics Committee. None of the research concerned children as participants, and the details of the research process were supplied to all intending participants in an information sheet. I did not enter into any qualitative interviews until written consent was obtained from six *peregrinas*. These forms were distributed by scanning and emailing the documents to *peregrinas*.

Insider positionality

In this research, I locate myself as being both an outsider while conducting research and I unavoidably remain a pilgrim, a *peregrina* who considers pilgrimage a constant in my life, living in Aotearoa New Zealand. This translates to me working as a

researcher making conscious effort to mitigate bias at the same time as I recognise some bias will unconsciously be at work in all the work I do for this study. Accordingly, I reminded the *peregrinas* about the double role I inhabit throughout our Zoom meetings.

Anonymity and privacy

While I have revealed the recruitment site as the PIP community, I have not revealed any aspects of PIP that are not available in the public domain of Facebook. I do not envisage any controversy occurring from this research yet should any arise from the publication of this thesis I have explained to each participant that a pseudonym was recommended to protect their anonymity. Three *peregrinas* chose to use pseudonyms, and Beebe, Joanne, and Shoshana preferred to use their real names because they consider their research contributions already publicly available through their work.

Recruitment filters

The recruitment notice was open to any PIP member and did not discriminate on the basis of age, ethnicity, or gender.

Let Her Be Peregrinas

		
<p>Bridey</p> <p>New Zealander Walked Camino Frances Artist and Interpretive Dance Teacher Identifies as Christian.</p>		<p>Joanne</p> <p>Australian Walked numerous pilgrimages including to Santiago de Compostela. Has worked as a hospitalera on the Camino. Catholic upbringing, prefers no fixed religious identity.</p>

		
<p>Beebe</p> <p>US American. Walked various Caminos. Travel writer and Anthropologist Identifies as Nature Mystic.</p>		<p>Lucie</p> <p>French Walked Camino Frances Foreign Language Teacher Identifies as Spiritual/Feminist Activist</p>

		
<p>Sylvie</p> <p>US American Walked Black Madonna Pilgrimage Incorporating Camino routes Animal scientist. Identifies as Pagan.</p>		<p>Shoshana</p> <p>US American. Walked various Caminos. Clinical Psychologist, Emeritus professor, Camino author. Identifies as Atheist.</p>

Demographics

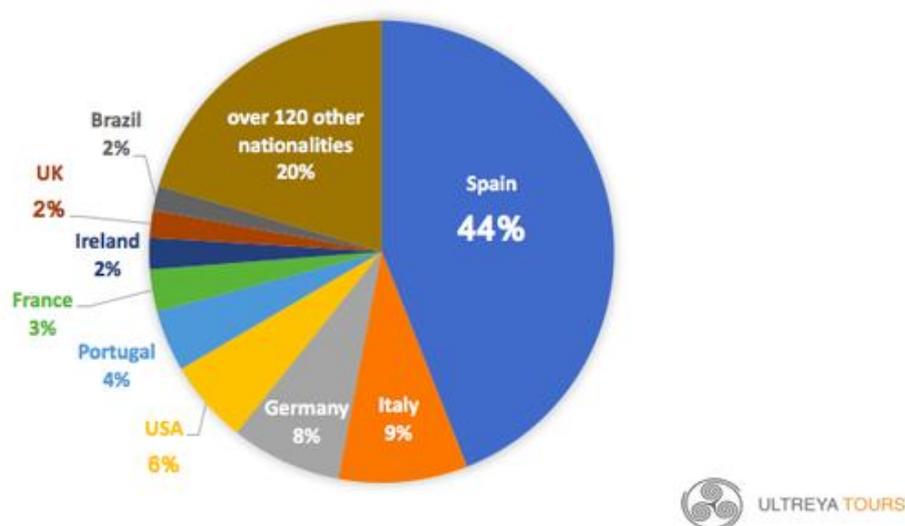
The peregrinas in this study represent five people with European ethnicity, and one with US/Iranian heritage, who live in four different countries. They range in age from forty to sixty two years. (All images, author's own)

11. Introducing the *peregrinas*

The above chart provides an introductory overview of the six *peregrinas* who have participated in this study. It is not my intention to suggest any homogeneity or proportionality to non-Spanish people who make a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, as the following graph demonstrates:

Data gathered from the Pilgrim Office 's website
oficinadelperegrino.com/en/statistics/

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN OF PILGRIMS IN 2017



Nor does the fact that six women participated intend any suggestion of gender bias within this study – although I do note no men responded. What this study does represent is the particular interpretations of six individuals who were recruited from the PIP community forum for this research.

As the *peregrina* chart demonstrates, the *peregrinas* in this study work in a variety of fields. In reflection of the privilege of conducting a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, it is notable that more than one participant expressed employment precarity and financial difficulty during their pilgrimage. In contrast, other *peregrinas*, including myself, readily acknowledge privileged circumstances, and this has been further reflected in my experiences walking three Camino routes. While I mostly encountered privileged people like me who can afford to travel across the globe and take extended leave from paid work to make their pilgrimage, I have also encountered homeless and unemployed people, and, in 2022, Ukrainian refugees.

12. Concluding thoughts

This research has relied upon the digital ethnographic methods outlined in this chapter to perform an anthropological and religious study of the Camino de Santiago, situated in the field of contemporary Western pilgrimage studies. The data touched on in this methodology chapter is further elaborated on in the following chapters 4, 5, and 6. These chapters feature *peregrinas*' own words and photographic elicitation, together with my analysis, to deepen this research journey's exploration of the significance (or not) of the feminine divine on the Saint James Way to Santiago de Compostela.

Chapter 4

Initial Encounters: Locating the sacred feminine and feminine aspects along the Camino de Santiago

Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards.

— Søren Kierkegaard

Through digital ethnographic accounts, this chapter focuses on and reveals how *peregrinas* engage with the concept of feminine divine and/or feminine aspects of sacred and public spaces found on the Camino de Santiago. It explores *peregrinas*' personal understandings, by first locating Camino encounters that were instrumental in their responding to a research project recruitment advertisement that used the language of feminine divine as its organising principle. The accounts relayed here about *peregrinas*' encounters begin to reveal the ways that individual Camino encounters have informed their everyday lives as pilgrims in place. I begin this chapter with accounts revealing the level of visibility *peregrinas* attributed to the sacred feminine during their Caminos. Then I move onto examining examples of nature-based feminine divine associations, followed by an omnipresent understanding of the feminine divine, and one account where significance is tethered to a perception of historic connection to earlier women pilgrims. After this, I compare discussions by *peregrinas* about binary approaches to gender-based discourse, and present findings about the impact of the patriarchy on their Camino experiences. Lastly, I offer concluding thoughts to synthesize this chapter's findings with pre-pandemic experiences, providing a springboard that enables better understanding about how and why specific pilgrimage practices have emerged during the time of Covid-19.

1. Initial Camino encounters

I have outlined how the term 'feminine divine' is used within this research. However, I acknowledge this is only one definition for a term with many possible interpretations. In the interest of establishing what feminine divine means to each *peregrina*, I started the interviews with a semi-structured question asking them to describe significant and formative Camino encounters that may or may not have incorporated feminine divine aspects, depending how *they* defined that term. I begin with Lucie, who described one

village in Galicia as deeply meaningful for her, and how after walking 700 kilometres from St Jean Pied-de-Port in France, she noticed a lack of statues on the Camino Frances that represented women.

Exploring feminine visibility alongside significant encounters

O’Cebreiro is a mountainous village where pilgrims arrive after completing a taxing climb up out of the Valcarce valley from the province of Castille y Leon into Galicia, the regional home of Santiago de Compostela. Galicia is an early Celtic province, romantically swathed in bands of mist that, thanks to its high altitude and western alignment, are particularly noticeable in O’Cebreiro. Lucie told me why it was significant to her.

Lucie: When I think of the Camino, the first place that comes to mind is O’Cebreiro. I remember the day I got there, it was slightly cloudy, and then the sun came out. And then I got into the small village – within about five or ten minutes I walked into that church. And what I went through there was amazing. The Priest asked me to read a pilgrim blessing in French. And I did not expect what happened. I got really moved, and then could not leave, so I went back to him five times. I have a very special connection with this Priest ... After I finished the Camino, I went back to O’Cebreiro where I lived [nearby] at Vega del Varcace for two months [...]

I guess I saw her before – that statue at the entrance, when you are just getting into O’Cebreiro, and there is that statue of the pilgrim woman. And of course, being a feminist and being aware of how invisible women have become, like not only on the Camino but like through history, through every single part of society. And I remember thinking, ‘Well, it must be the second woman or second female statue I have actually seen since the beginning of this Camino – and then I was taken away from that thought because the spiritual experience was so strong in the church. That was definitely the most powerful thing I lived on the Camino.

Thinking back to my own experience of O’Cebreiro, I recall my plaits were dripping when I hobbled into the village for the first time in 2012 and revered its

panoramic position between two provinces. We had no accommodation organised for the night but met a gentlewoman who took us in and gave us an ancient stone-walled room adjacent to the church Lucie mentions above.

Iglesia de Santa Maria Real is the oldest pre-Romanesque church associated with the Camino, dating from the ninth century (Brierley, 2022, p.232). I was not surprised Lucie was impressed by O’Cebreiro. However, it did surprise me when she revealed that she thought women were invisible on the Camino, because from my perspective there seemed to be statues of women everywhere. In thinking back, the numerous statues I observed all carried a religious association. Lucie’s observation was accurate as far as there are few non-religious statues of women on the Camino. Pleasingly, during my second visit to O’Cebreiro in 2022, we discovered the recently placed peregrina statue, exactly as Lucie describes it, greeting every pilgrim as they enter Galicia. On this occasion we waited until dusk when my Camino buddy, Tim, captured the images in figures 9 and 10 (below) showing the peregrina statue and church Lucie discusses.

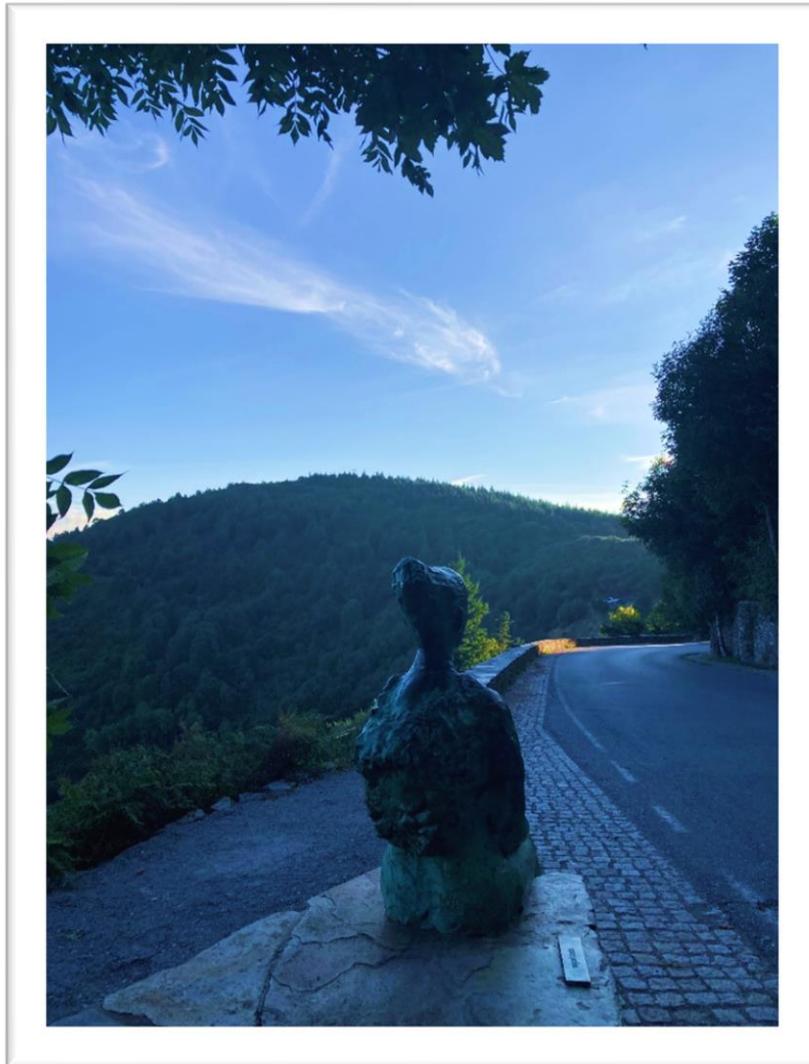


Figure 8: *Peregrina* statue, O’Cebreiro, 2022. Image credit: Tim Davis, used with permission.

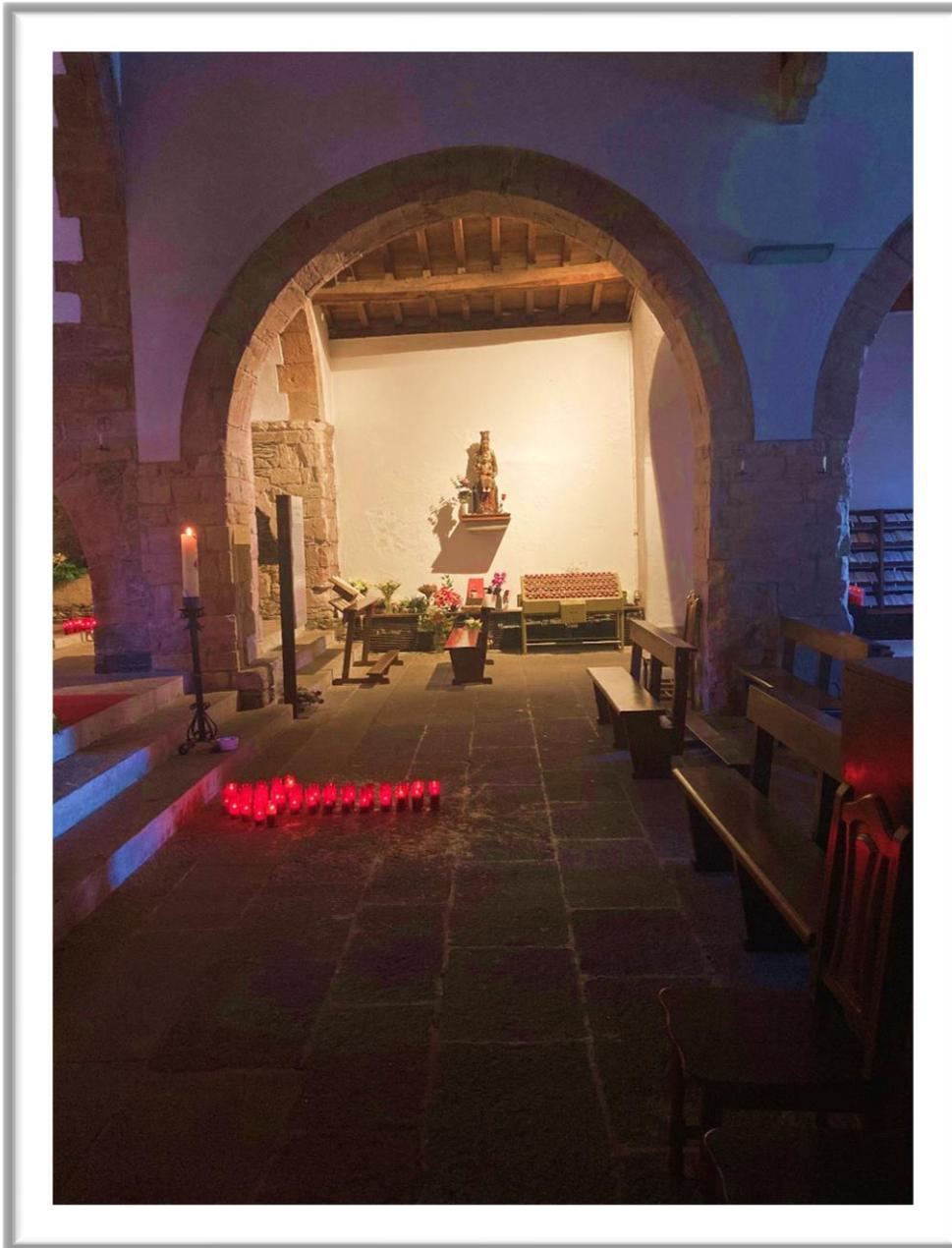


Figure 9: Iglesia de Santa Maria Real, O'ebreiro, 2022. Image credit: Tim Davis, used with permission.

Lucie discussed with me how the *peregrina* statue at O'ebreiro represents a whole community of pilgrims, past and present, who identify as women and have made their way to Santiago de Compostela across centuries. This stands in contrast with many religious and civic statues on the Camino, which represent mostly white male individuals, potentially conveying ideals of hierarchy and power to observers. I suggest that civic representations like the *peregrina* sculpture provide an opportunity to reimagine more equitable access extending to sociopolitical and economic spheres across society.

Shoshana also discussed the varying degrees of visibility she associated with feminine aspects from her first Camino during her interview. After I told Shoshana how much I enjoyed her memoir, *Cancer, Kintsugi, Camino: A Memoir* (Kerewsky, 2022), Shoshana told me that she was raised in an atheistic culturally Jewish family. She also explained that she used her pilgrimage as an opportunity to experiment with Christian meaning, without relying on any belief in the divine to establish her understandings. She said:

Shoshana: So, as I was walking the Camino I went into some churches, and I looked at some chapels. I wasn't seeking Marys, for example. I wasn't thinking, 'I want to make sure that I see evidence of Marianism.' At the same time, I became more and more engaged with Saint Agatha and looking for representations of Saint Agatha. And that of course makes sense for me as a person who had her breasts excised. And I didn't find Saint Agatha because I got very distracted in Burgos and Astorga – particularly by demons, masculine demons with breasts, and thinking about the appropriation of the feminine.

And so, I kind of forgot to look for Agatha in Astorga.

Catherine: Yes.

Shoshana: But I was really aware of the scallop shells. You know we have rods and circles? We have the omphalos, the lingam, and the yoni. And we see the world in those genitally, gendered ways. I was really aware of these, and where did the scallop shells look like scallop shells? And evoke the feminine for me? Like, you know, Aphrodite on the foam? And when had they been so stylised as to no longer appear feminine?

And I would say that, since I have got home, I have done a lot more thinking about Saint Agatha.

I think the scallop shells that actually look something like a shell feel like they are the locus for the feminine Camino energy, for me.

Both Burgos and Astorga are cities along the Camino Frances route that contain architecturally famous buildings, such as the Gothic Catholic cathedral in Burgos, and the Gaudí Palace in Astorga. Saint Agatha is a Catholic saint who was martyred after

having her breasts excised. Shoshana was interested in locating depictions of Saint Agatha because she had undergone a bilateral mastectomy before she completed her first Camino. Despite not locating Saint Agatha on her first Camino, Shoshana found her during a second Camino, which she completed in May 2022 (see Figure 11).

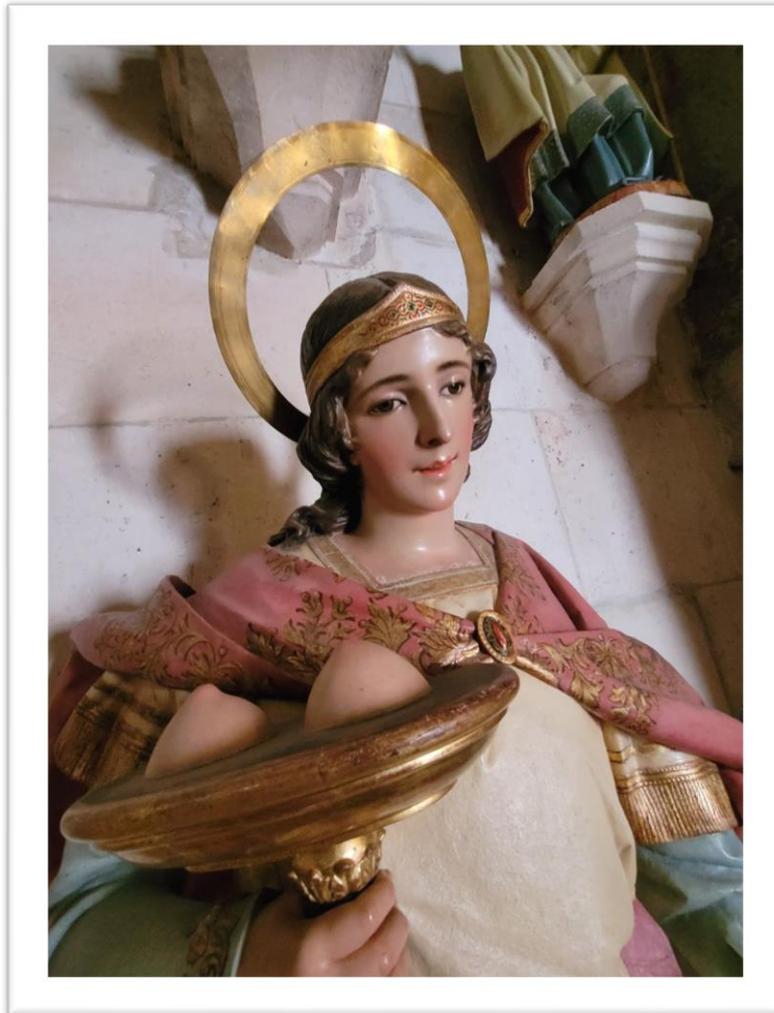


Figure 10: Saint Agatha, Camino Frances route, 2022. Image credit: S. D. Kerewsky, used with permission.

Shoshana also used an expression of ‘Camino energy’ (as mentioned in chapters 1 & 2), when she describes how she understood the locus of feminine energy on the Camino as being contained in scallop shells, adding that she needed them to face ‘the right way up’ to experience this energy. For instance, when Shoshana mentions ‘Aphrodite on the foam’, she is referring to Sandro Botticelli’s *The Birth of Venus*, which Botticelli painted between 1485–1486 (see Figure 12).



Figure 11: *The Birth of Venus*, Sandro Botticelli. Source: Wikicommons.

Sacred feminine as nature-based pilgrimage encounters

The Camino Frances is the most popular pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela. However, as mentioned in the introduction, there are numerous routes that cross Europe heading towards this pilgrimage destination. The Via Podiensis, or Chemine de Compostelle, route, for instance, begins in the Auvergne region of France in the township of Le Puy-en-Velay. This township is famous for both its Black Madonna and its volcanic geography, as shown in figures 13 and 14 below.



Figure 12: *La Vierge Noir Marie*, Catholic cathedral Le Puy-en-Velay, 2022. Image credit: Tim Davis, used with permission.



Figure 13: Le Puy-en-Velay. Image features the Romanesque Catholic cathedral (centre right) that houses the Black Madonna Sylvie describes. Author's own image.

During her interview, Sylvie told me why the Black Madonna of Le Puy was significant to her.

Sylvie: I was on a Black Madonna pilgrimage in Auvergne, in many ways closely connected to the Camino, where we also met the Madonna of Le Puy [see figures 13 and 14]. And She was amazing. And, oh my gosh! What a story she has!

Catherine: Yes.

Sylvie: And I thought, 'My gosh! This is all connected.' And you know that feeling of 'Oh yeah! I see! It's all the same!?' It's all kind of like one journey. I loved all of those coincidences and little serendipity things that would come up ... and I have kept that goal of getting to Santiago for, I think, it is at least a decade now.

Catherine: Can you give some examples of these coincidences?

Sylvie: You might think this is far-fetched because I am a Pagan. I have felt a calling to a particular Goddess in my religious tradition. And She is kind of like, I would never have chosen Her for myself, but I felt She chose me.

I started having all these dreams about Her, and I was finding things about Her everywhere I turned. Okay! I get the message. I am going to find out who you are and learn more about you. And this Goddess, Her name is Oshun¹². She is from Africa. And part of the diaspora – so She is in Cuba too. So, I was looking at different aspects of Oshun in Cuba. And then the very next picture was the Black Madonna of Le Puy, and I am like, ‘Okay, and She is on – wait, wait, that’s the Camino!’ And so, it’s like all of this connection and interrelatedness!

Catherine: Yeah, yeah. You know academics sometimes frame what you just described as syncretism, a kind of integration of beliefs, but I would like to know your thoughts?

Sylvie: Yeah? Where my mind goes is simpler than that. It’s deeper. It’s like going way down into the roots of the sacred feminine, because She is in so many places. She is common to us. She is a thing that we hold together.

Catherine: Yeah, yeah.

Sylvie: You know, not academic. She is here! And that’s where we get the connection with the Camino – we are praying with our feet, right? You know about the Yoruba? You dance your Goddess or your Goddess dances you. And it got to the point where She was actually dictating to me in my dreams. And so, I have this connection to Her, Oshun – as the Black Madonna basically.

Catherine: And Oshun was integral to you visiting Le Puy’s Black Madonna?

¹² **Oshun** – A Yoruba Orisha (deity) with south-western Nigerian origins. Oshun is commonly regarded as a river Goddess, often associated with water, fertility, and other attributes outlined here: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Oshun>.

Sylvie: Yes.

Sylvie's account informs me that her reason for being on a Black Madonna pilgrimage came before she left her home country, the United States, and was built from a line of research she conducted after experiencing a series of dreams that she understood as direct instructions from the African Yoruba Goddess Oshun. Her experiences suggest there are myriad reasons for undertaking a pilgrimage to Santiago beyond the dominant Christian narrative.

Sylvie provides such an example for this research and allows scope for fluid and multifaceted understandings of the sacred feminine to emerge from pilgrimage discourse, as well as levels of ambiguity and mystery that accompany pilgrimage associations. At the same time, accommodating various interpretations without contesting difference between groups highlights commonalities that can be framed as relational concepts of being, such as Sylvie's example of things being 'all connected'.

Beebe's account of encountering multiple Marian representations is from yet another Camino route that travels across northern Spain's dramatic coastline towards Santiago de Compostela. Beebe told me how it impacted her significantly.

Beebe: I was on the Camino del Norte route when I first encountered the feminine divine on the Camino, when I was in the town of Llanes, up in Asturias.

There are more churches devoted to Mary than to any other holy figure. And, on the Camino, it is especially rich in Marian lore, but part of the Camino – the beauty of the Camino is it's preserved not only this, this rich medieval Christian culture, that is devoted to Mary and Saint James, but also has preserved pre-Christian practices. That's when I really started noticing how the churches, especially on the Camino, have these earlier stories of having been a Pagan site, that was then taken over, Christianised. And that transfer of power was from one feminine divine to another.

You know, it was the first place of an Earth Goddess, and now of Mary. And I just fell more deeply in love with this whole reality. And that is

one of the reasons I keep going back. You know, where in the Western world did you get to have this experience?

Figure 15 below shows a religious depiction that Beebe told me was prevalent on walls throughout Llanes, emulating the icon of La Virgen de la Guía, which is situated in the town's hermitage, Ermita de Virgen Guía.

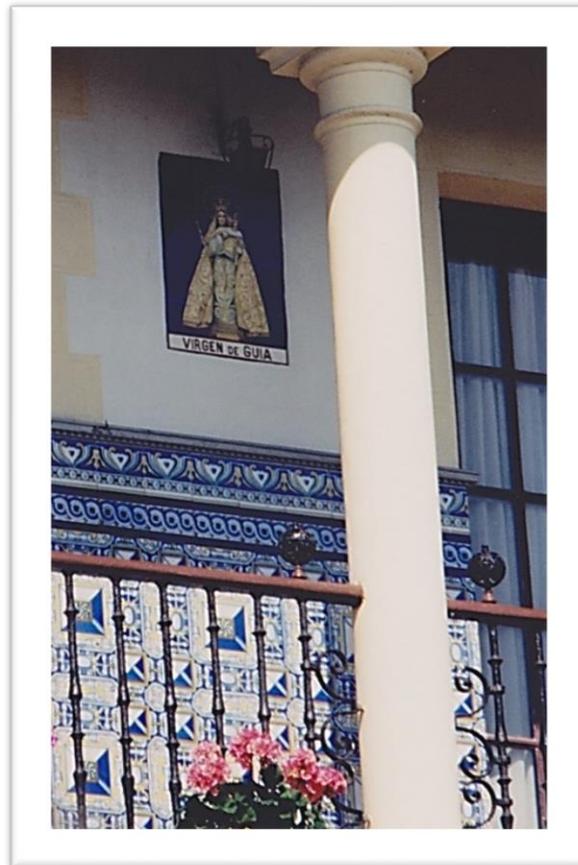


Figure 15: La Guía icon, Llanes. Image credit: Beebe Bahrami, used with permission.

When Beebe mentions that there are more churches devoted to Mary than any other holy figure on the Camino, she draws upon years of working as a travel writer and anthropologist in Spain and France (Bahrami, 2009; 2019; 2022). When she asked me ‘Where else in the Western world did you get to have this encounter?’, I told her I had asked myself a similar question after visiting the church Iglesia Santa Maria de Eunate during my first Camino, mentioned in this thesis. The prevalence and feminine-centric placement of holy figures along the Camino compared with other churches Beebe and I have encountered in Anglo/US settings has had an impact on both of us.

These findings suggest the prevalence of feminine holy figures – which Beebe frames as a transfer of power – has symbolic, metaphorical, and sociopolitical impacts on the people observing the figures. Whitehead’s work on the Virgin of Alcala also supports Beebe’s mention of transferring feminine divine power, as one of her participants explained she could easily liken the veneration of the Virgin to renditions of ancient Goddesses, or even to Hindu murti, tracing a long line of history from Marian veneration (Whitehead, 2013, p. 36).

Lucie’s, Shoshana’s, Sylvie’s, and Beebe’s accounts have begun to reveal why these *peregrinas* were drawn to this study. Their accounts also provide contrast. For example, Lucie’s attention was drawn to a statue commemorating a woman pilgrim, which she understood as highlighting the invisibility of women in other public places on the Camino. Shoshana expressed her interest in how people see the world in genitally gendered ways, and how this informed her preference for scallop shells facing ‘the right way up’. Both these accounts reflect secular findings. On the other hand, both Sylvie and Beebe were drawn to sacred feminine holy figures, and they have provided broader religious understandings of the multiplicities of various Marys on the Camino, and also elsewhere in Sylvie’s case. I now look at responses from the remaining two *peregrinas*.

Understanding feminine divine as an omnipresence

When I interviewed Joanne, she extended feminine divine interpretation beyond a single site or holy figure when she said:

Joanne: I think that feminine energy is everywhere. There are definitely some sacred spaces that are more enhanced. I believe the feminine energy is part of who you are, over the times of that first pilgrimage, knowing how much it touched me.

It more than touched me. It embodied me. Or I embodied it.

I am very interested in ley lines, the energies of particular sacred sites, and having experienced the impact of Lourdes¹³, Medjugorje¹⁴, I can't deny that these are such powerful places that open up a portal for healing and transformation. I guess since Lourdes I have this deep love and respect and adoration for Mother Mary.

I feel like I bounce between spirituality – it's an aspect of understanding who we are, that we have a masculine and feminine side of us. And I believe that there has been a lot of damage through history from the patriarchy of the Catholic institution that has damaged the collective psyche of humanity.

I just believe in God. Do I need a label for that?

Joanne regards feminine energy as being present everywhere – not only within humans but part of everything in nature. This suggests an inter-relational way of being. Further, while Joanne understands this energy as being all encompassing, she also qualifies how she has noticed some places embody more 'Camino energy' for her than others. Importantly, Joanne's description incorporates both material and spiritual understandings as she employs masculine and feminine aspects as a psychological aid for understanding the human condition. For her, this is a tool for 'understanding who we are'. Likewise, Bridey also understood the entire Camino as being significant.

Locating Camino balance and a place of belonging

Bridey held a considered pause before answering my question, and told me:

Bridey: I probably had lots of places that really resonated. It was more like a sense of the whole thing. I walked most of it on my own, and I think that probably enabled me to embed myself more in the sense of being there [...]

I mentioned the other day about outside Porto Marin, the 2,400-year-old village [Castro de Castromaior], and how that connected a lot of things

¹³ **Lourdes** – A Marian pilgrimage site, famous for a series of Marian apparitions and purported healing abilities from a sacred spring. Lourdes is also on the La Voie Due Piemont Pyreeneen, a French route to Santiago de Compostela. <https://www.csj.org.uk/chemin-du-piemont-pyreeneen>

¹⁴ **Medjugorje** – A Marian pilgrimage site near a small village in Bosnia-Herzegovina <https://www.medjugorje.org/>

for me in my head. It connects a lot with things like my basket making. I just got a sense of being part of a long chain of humanity. And being a woman, using my hands to craft something. There was something about being in places that people had been for an enormous amount of time. That to me felt like quite a connection. That is, a kind of space that I can imagine woman sitting around a fire. Or with some other people that they lived with and creating things ... It definitely feels like there is a link that you can sense from having visited those places.

I was intrigued when Bridey mentioned the Iron Age village of Castro de Castromaior, the remains of which can be seen in Figure 15. She told me how I might have missed seeing it in 2012.

Bridey: It was tucked up, away from the main trail of people, especially at that stage of the Camino. A stream of ants walking past, a kind of constant.

Catherine: Yes?

Bridey: [...] It was very nest-like and nestled in there. It had a very good feel to it ... those lovely round stones, everything just fits, finds its place, and it's a balance.

There was something about the Camino – about finding balance.



Figure 14: Castro de Castromaior, Porto Marin, Galicia. Photo credit: Bridey, used with permission.

Bridey has detailed how her sense of connection was influenced by the sight of pilgrims passing her by, beneath the site of Castro de Castromaior. To use her words, Bridey compared them to ‘a stream of ants [...] a kind of constant’. This description evokes the multi-sensory impact she experienced at this site, as a link to earlier women who inhabited the site. In other words, a deep and embodied sense of experiencing place and pilgrim identity that Bridey described as having ‘a very good feel to it’. This correlates to Joanne’s mention, previously in this chapter, of experiencing stronger energy at some Marian sites than others during her pilgrimages. For instance, when Joanne said, ‘I think that feminine energy is everywhere. There are definitely some sacred places that are more enhanced.’

2. Multi-perspectival terms of engagement and exploring patriarchal impact

Lastly, this chapter explores the discomfort some *peregrinas* raised with the term ‘feminine divine’, based on its potential for binary understandings of gender and problematic social constructs that accompany such interpretations. Lucie explained these implications here:

Lucie: I am no longer comfortable with that term feminine divine or sacred feminine, because the implication that there is either, like there is something in the world that is considered masculine, or we also hear in spiritual or personal development contexts that we have a feminine part in us, or a masculine part in us.

In becoming a feminist, I have to disagree with these terms, because when we say feminine it is always something that is welcoming, that is soft, and this is gentle, and that is whatever. And masculine is, like, strong and solid and whatever.

No, I don't agree with this anymore, because we are not limited to that. And even if we have these two parts, they are social constructs. Because of course gentleness when you have been forced to stay home and comply with all the rules, and you have to sneak out of things a lot of the time because it's the only way to safely get out of them. Well of course you have to be soft and gentler and all of that. But when you have been made to think that you do not have feelings, and that you have to make war, because that's how your country is going to be sustained, or that's what makes like a true 'Man', you know?

Catherine: Yeah. Yes.

Lucie: It's very frustrating for me because feminism is complex, like a lot more than people make it out to be. So, when I disagree with this term, I feel like a lot of the time I am not fully understood ...

So, maybe there are two aspects of people? But let's not call them masculine or feminine because we are missing out on a depth in us, with things that have been defining us as social, as human beings for centuries.

It's simpler, and it's more complex at the same time, I think.

I observed that Lucie's account about simplicity and complexity came close to echoing a paradox which Sylvie raised earlier in this chapter when she said, 'Where my mind goes is simpler than that. It's deeper.' Although Sylvie was referring to her interpretation of a sacred feminine statue, rather than gender roles. And yet, Lucie's

last comment about the risk of binary language usage could suggest a commonality between them insofar as they are each concerned about overlooking a depth of humanity by contesting one form of language usage in Lucie's case, or one belief system over another in Sylvie's case.

In my experiences on the Camino, I have encountered pilgrims who are interested in seeking a broader understanding of other's meanings, such as Shoshana outlined earlier in this chapter. It was not uncommon to find people who used a religious basis to establish better understandings, and plenty who did not. Indeed, as a term 'pilgrim' is a good example of non-binary language because the term describes *all* people who self-identify as pilgrims, regardless of gender, religious identity, or any other socially constructed index. In and of itself, 'pilgrim' can be considered an inclusive term. Such reflection and findings align with the work of Christ, who questions the need for further consideration to be given to enable language to evolve into a fuller embrace of humanity, beyond binary terminology like masculine or feminine (Christ, 2019, p. 22).

Shoshana presented another example of the implications of using gendered discourse when she told me about the impact of patriarchal theological discourse on her worldview.

Shoshana: The feminine in Judaism – which is kind of Canaanite and pre-Canaanite feminine deities, has been so suppressed or consumed by the masculine characteristics of the deity that it doesn't occur to me to go looking for the feminine, even though I have several statuettes of Ashtoreth¹⁵ and Ashera¹⁶, and I have written about Lilith¹⁷. And Judaism talks about the Shekinah, which is the feminine aspect of God, maybe split off from God to go into exile with the Jewish people? But maybe God's wife?

Catherine: Yeah? That's super interesting.

Shoshana: I will say, I tried out praying, which is not something I have ever done except for going into a Synagogue. I prefer to pray in Hebrew or Latin so that I don't get enraged by the content.

Catherine: Ha-ha!

Shoshana: I realised afterward, although I didn't realise at the time, that I was praying to masculine deities. I was not saying 'Goddess let me put one foot in front of the other' or 'Mother Mary save me'. And I thought it was really interesting that I got sucked into my culture in that way, and that I didn't notice I had at the time.

In this narrative, although she doesn't state it in this way, Shoshana's professional expertise as a clinical psychologist sheds light on the unconscious cultural shaping that dominant religious discourse can produce, such as influencing what people observe and what they do not. Shoshana's observations also correlate with Lucie's comments earlier in this chapter about the invisibility of women in public spaces.

¹⁵ **Ashtoreth** – according to the religion of Ishtar/Astarte/Ashtoreth, Ashtoreth is the Goddess of love. See more: Skipwith, G. H. (1906). Ashtoreth, the Goddess of the Zidonians, *Journal of The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 18 (4) 715–738, accessed 12/01/23: <https://doi.org/10.2307/1451082>

¹⁶ **Ashera** – a Canaanite Mother Goddess. See: Day, John, (1986). 'Asherah in the Hebrew Bible and north-west Semitic Literature', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 105 (3) pp. 385–408, accessed 12/01/23: <https://doi.org/10.2307/3260509>

¹⁷ **Lilith** – understood as the first wife of Adam, who refused to be submissive to him. More information: Shapiro, Ann R. (2010). 'The Flight of Lilith: Modern Jewish American Feminist Literature', *Journal of Studies in American Jewish Literature*, vol 29, A special issue in honour of Sarah Blacher Cohen (2010), pp.68–79, accessed 12/01/23: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41206133>

Lucie returned to her reflection about women's invisible representation on the Camino deeper in my interview with her, when she said:

Lucie: [...] And when we chatted you said as a little girl that you wanted to sit next to the female statue because it may have been the first one that you had seen?

Like, for me, that's one step further – for me, when I was a little girl, I didn't even see that there were like, no feminine figures. And that is what invisibility does, does to us, to girls, and what it does to people of colour.

Catherine: Yeah. Yeah.

Lucie: [...] It tells me a lot about how powerful, and how dominated we are with religion, coupled with patriarchy, and how coupled with white supremacy everything else can be.

And don't get me wrong, I think spirituality in religion is very important. I think it is very important to be kind to ourselves. In this world we have a lot of unlearning and undoing to do – but I don't think we will get there if we are not kinder to those who have told us things who are older than us, or kinder to ourselves.

In a similar vein, Joanne expressed her concern about the impact of Catholic patriarchy on what she understood as the collective consciousness of humanity. She explains it here:

Joanne: Every pilgrim is equal on the path; you are not defined or judged by your job, money, or status. This acceptance allowed me to bring my own barriers down and feel safe to share more of myself. The labels are removed.

I said to my friend recently, 'I don't feel like I can call myself Catholic anymore.' I have a whole different belief system now. My faith and devotion is more aligned to honouring the feminine aspects of humanity such as love, forgiveness, and compassion. I am continuously called to pilgrimages where Mother Mary's energy is strong such as Medjugorje

and Lourdes. I believe there has been a lot of damage throughout history from the patriarchal of the Catholic institution that has damaged the psyche, the collective consciousness of humanity.

Here, Joanne explains that she no longer identifies as Catholic and has established an independent belief system centred on Marian devotion in response to what she perceives as harmful aspects of patriarchy within the Catholic institution. She identifies places where Mother Mary's energy is strong for her, such as Marian-centric shrines. This finding can be understood by drawing on Fedele's work on Mary Magdalene pilgrims, where Fedele notes some participants have reintegrated aspects of their earlier Christian background to inform their sacred feminine lived religious practices (Fedele, 2013, p.16).

Lastly, Beebe also expressed cultural concerns about binary gender constructs in relation to the interpretation of holy figures on the Camino and within greater Western society. She told me:

Beebe: There is also something about institutionalising both male and female the way we have institutionalised them into very conventional forms – in the Western world. It's just that we have chosen two genders, and the reality is in the wider world of nature, and life on Earth, there are many life forms that don't conform to just the polar – the bipolar – gender constructs.

You know, I really feel that to speak of the feminine divine we have to speak of the 'masculine divine' because the true, healthy masculine has been as distorted. I mean the beautiful thing about the Camino devoted to Saint James – the Greater – is, to me, he is a representative of the wild masculine. You know?

I mean, he was outspoken. He was unconventional. He was a non-conformist, and the wild masculine was as much targeted as the wild feminine for, you know, not conforming to the more dominant vision of the Church, which was a particular variety of patriarchy.

It was male elites. They were not wild male. [laughs] The wild male was as dangerous as the feminine in any variation. And Saint James is very

much that to me. I mean, he is everywhere to me. He is evoked everywhere on the Camino ... these are the men who fight with the women for equal rights for all.

Catherine: Uh-huh, that's super interesting.

Notably, while Beebe acknowledges that the sacred feminine on the Camino has particular significance for her, she does not occlude the figure of Saint James, who is also very significant to her. Nor does she regard the holy figure of Saint James as representative of Catholic patriarchy. Moreover, by partnering 'divine feminine' with 'wild masculine', her observations provide an example of how people within and without religious institutions can utilise mythical motifs and historic examples to move beyond dominant binary versions of gendered 'male' and 'female', and dominant power structures to better accommodate the myriad ways of seeing and being human.

3. Discussion

By now it should be clear that *peregrinas* responded to a recruitment notice organised around the feminine divine due not only to six unique interpretations, but also broad ways of encompassing human difference and understanding within the context of pilgrimage experiences. For instance, Lucie, Shoshana, and Beebe all expressed that they noticed differing levels of 'feminine' visibility and placement along the Camino routes. These findings on female representation in public spaces draw some parallels with earlier work by Christ, Fedele, Whitehead, and Rountree, who have discussed cultural shaping that results from the positionality of sacred feminine and/or feminine representations in public and political spaces (Christ, 2012, p. 243–244; Fedele, 2013, p. 55–57; Whitehead, 2019, p. 215–220; Rountree 2002, p. 475).

Further, Joanne's, Beebe's, and Sylvie's pilgrimage experiences were informed by sacred feminine interpretations, whereas Lucie, Shoshana, and Bridey took more secular approaches to reveal their interest in responding to a recruitment notice organised around the feminine divine. Each *peregrina* reveals distinct associations and belief systems, and these findings can be understood through Whitehead's work on Glastonbury pilgrims, which reveals similar multiplicities in understandings of pilgrimage (Whitehead, 2019, p. 27). To accommodate such variety equitably, I have

drawn on Fedele's treatment of contemporary Pagan belief systems (Fedele, 2013, p. 26), where she argues that all belief systems deserve to receive the same level of scholarly attention, favouring none over another. For instance, expressing this aligns with Rountree's work arguing that when dismissal or critical opposition to 'Goddess' or 'feminine' spirituality occurs it typically involves characterizing believers as a homogenous group, representing a version of patriarchal constraint (Rountree, 1999, p. 151.)

4. Concluding thoughts

I opened this chapter with an account by two *peregrinas* who commented on the visibility of feminine expressions they observed on the Camino in relation to areas that provided them with formative Camino experiences. Next, the findings reveal contrasting understandings of the sacred feminine through nature-based versions of spirituality. I followed this with an example of an all-encompassing understanding of feminine divine, understood internally as well as externally on the Camino. This was followed by a contrasting interpretation that, while also regarding the entire Camino as being significant, was told through a more abstract spiritual approach, aided by a sense of historic connection to earlier women pilgrims. With six unique perspectives established, I moved to comparing findings the *peregrinas* offered when their narratives revealed discomfort with, and the expression of a sociopolitical will to move beyond, gendered and binary forms of discourse to edify humanity more fully.

This chapter has offered a level of understanding that foundationally informs the next chapter's findings, where I examine what meaning each *peregrina* applies to being a pilgrim in place and living pilgrimage as a continuum during the time of the global Covid-19 pandemic, before examining in Chapter 6 how they use materiality and creative ritual to do so.

Chapter 5

The Constant *Peregrina*: Determining the role of pilgrimage as continuum and living as a pilgrim in place

Where we had thought to travel outward, we shall come to the centre of our own existence. And where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all the world.

— Joseph Campbell

As established, all six *peregrinas* in this study are members of an online community that regards the Camino experience as constituting a continuum in their lives beyond the physical path itself. This chapter aims to determine how *peregrinas* interpret and operationalise this understanding in the practice of their everyday lives. The information in this chapter does not specifically engage with the feminine divine. Rather, as outlined in the introduction, it provides context for understanding how *peregrinas* use creative rituals and materiality, which in turn engage with feminine divine principles and feminist associations as examined in Chapter 6. I begin with examples exploring the ways *peregrinas* imagine and live pilgrimage as continuum in part through the PIP community, and other ways they evoke such practice. I follow these accounts with an exploration of the ways some *peregrinas* have used virtual pilgrimage to evoke a sense of pilgrimage as continuum for themselves and others, exploring how and why this constitutes imagined belonging as a pilgrim in place. Next, I move on to exploring ways in which *peregrinas*' pilgrimage practices were simultaneously curtailed and expanded by Covid-19 pandemic regulations, at the same time as examining how *peregrinas* started to emerge from severe lockdowns during the time of their interviews.

1. Wandering on: exploring the impact of PIP on pilgrimage as continuum

Joining the PIP community provided me with the means to augment earlier understandings I held about living pilgrimage as a continuum in my life. Participating on the forum during the Covid-19 pandemic, I saw the creative and unique ways different members evoked the Camino in their everyday lives. Notably, some pilgrims had been creating and engaging in localised versions of the Santiago de Compostela

pilgrimage prior to the pandemic, while others formulated ongoing pilgrimage experiences as lived practice, drawing from and supplementing examples of this practice on the PIP forum. The next section establishes the various reasons and some ways *peregrinas* in this study have enacted pilgrimage as continuum.

Circuitous understandings of pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela

During their interviews, some *peregrinas* pointed out the notion of continuing pilgrimage began to take root for them at the culmination of their first pilgrimage. For some, this was the official pilgrimage destination of Santiago de Compostela; for others, it was wherever they stopped on a particular route as their circumstances permitted, such as Shoshana walking from Pamplona to Astorga in 2022. Joanne told me what it was like for her:

Joanne: After I came back home, I started researching information on the Camino. I spent many years engrossed in my research [...] During this research, I would read a website or watch a YouTube clip, and I would go, ‘Oh damn! I didn’t go there!’

Catherine: Yeah, yeah.

Joanne: When I went back to the Camino in 2014, Brother One [Joanne’s close companion who she met walking this Camino] and I did *hospitalering*¹⁸ together [...] I wanted to be of service, to be the ‘Lorna’ [a pilgrim who helped Joanne’s injuries] to the Joannes that were struggling as a *hospitalera*. And even with my Camino ‘daughters’ [young women Joanne befriended] on my first Camino I would give them foot massages and I continue to do so in my everyday life here.

Here, Joanne reveals she has helped injured pilgrims, mirroring the help she received herself during her first Camino. She understands this action to be adopting the pilgrimage role of *hospitalering* in her life. Thus, Joanne amalgamated her experience from officially volunteering as a *hospitalera* on the actual Camino into her home life back in Australia. She added:

¹⁸ *hospitalering* – volunteering at a pilgrim *albergue* (hostel); involves hosting, cooking, cleaning, and pastoral care of pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago

Joanne: I created a Camino community in my hometown, offering monthly pilgrim gatherings for six years or so before Covid lockdowns. And so that is another part of how I bring the Camino home into my everyday life. I continue to walk as often as I can. It's the whole point about doing the Camino you bring your new you home.

It can be suggested from this that rather than return back to her 'old life' – or 'old self' – after completing the physical journey, Joanne absorbed the Camino into her being as an ongoing reality. She now considers her Camino experiences as integral to her identity, saying 'you bring your new you home'. These findings reflect an alternative pilgrimage discourse from Turner's idea of pilgrimage, understood as involving a reintegration process and resumption of a pilgrim's former identity once a pilgrim reaches the 'end' destination (Turner & Turner, 1978, p. 18).

I began to grasp this concept myself as I left Santiago's cathedral in 2012, when a local person told me, 'You might leave the Camino, but the Camino will never leave you.' This notion can be better understood with Frey's work (Frey, 1998, p. 9), where she notes that some of her many research participants said they did not regard the city of Santiago as being an end point to their journey. Rather, as Joanne describes it, aspects of pilgrimage practice continued on in their everyday lives, and within themselves.

Lucie also experienced a sense of bringing the pilgrimage back home. Her circumstances differed from other *peregrinas*' travel restrictions in this study because Lucie is French, and she was able to travel to the Camino during 2021. She told me this about that pilgrimage:

Lucie: You asked me if I took some of the Camino home with me earlier on, and that's a very, very important question to me. I was obsessed in the last two weeks of my Camino. I kept asking myself, 'How am I going to bring the Camino home?' I would put things in writing, hear a song, have a conversation, or someone would inspire me. I wrote a list of things I would do when I got back home.

The month after the Camino was terrible. I struggled to eat, to get up, and everything. But after that, it felt like the Camino was there. I started

a job I had never done before. I was healing stuff from previous work experience, and I felt like the Camino was with me in the way...

Not to say that I removed myself from suffering because I didn't, like I am now. It felt like some of that old stuff that needed to go, it went away.

Catherine: In the recruitment notice I mention the concept of pilgrimage as continuum. From what you describe, does it seem like that for you?

Lucie: You know it reminds me of what the Priest in O'Cebreiro said to me, quite a few times: he kept insisting I had to go back. And he said, 'The Camino only starts when you go home. You haven't finished the Camino yet. You haven't gone home.' And I would tell him, 'Home is not home. This is home.' But he would not fall for my mind tricks.

I feel like I need to give you this example ... I actually reached out to my first love to say, 'Look, I am actually going through a tough time. This time are you going to be there for me?'

And he replied yesterday and said, 'You know, I will help you however I can.' So that, for me, that's a pilgrimage. I am not on the Camino anymore, but I am on the Camino, if you know what I mean?

Catherine: Yes, I do know what you mean.

Lucie: It is like this golden line is still there.

Apart from mentioning that she went to the Camino during a 'kind of' Covid-19 period, Lucie does not factor the pandemic into her understanding of ongoing pilgrimage in her life. This suggests the Camino is not always transferable to a certain time period, including a global pandemic. Lucie's difficulty with processing the Camino as ending on her return home correlates with Bridey's experience, which I outline below. What's more, it should become clear from both their quotes how they developed ways to bring the Camino back to their home hearth.

Bridey told me:

Bridey: When I was walking the actual Camino I was really elated, but I wasn't emotional. Does that make sense?

Catherine: Yes, it does.

Bridey: In Santiago de Compostela, I expected to be super excited. To be honest I felt like I had walked into a brick wall. It felt really strange, and not necessarily pleasant. There were lots of reasons why. It probably wasn't the deeply emotional experience I was expecting, but I think that maybe the emotion came later. [...]

I think that the Camino is like this learning experience, but it is not until you come home and take that dive down that you start unpacking all those things that happened.

I will show you something I pulled out before. Did you go to Zabaldika?

Catherine: No, but I love the name already.

Bridey: As you walk into Pamplona you can take two directions, and one of them went up to the monastery of Zabaldika. And they were really friendly and welcoming, and I picked up a copy of *The Beatitudes of the Pilgrim*. It's got ten beatitudes and number four really resonated with me. It says, 'Blessed are you, pilgrim, because you have discovered that the authentic Camino begins when it is completed.'

Bridey went on to offer an example of how this beatitude resonated for her.

Bridey: There were stages of the Camino that I found really difficult. I had absolutely horrendous days of being on my own. But I think that was the invitation to a deeper form of spirituality.

There is that sense it physically stops. And as far as everyone else is concerned when you come back home the journey is over ... I think it is about what is happening on the inside. And I think the Camino opens up a lot of doors for that.

Bridey, Lucie, and Joanne have shared how aspects of the Camino affected their lives as both learning and practical experiences that have impacts and outreach beyond the physical route. Their understandings extend the concept of taking time to

process Camino experiences from the actual trails, and embroils them together with other circumstances that shape their everyday lives.

Adding to this similitude, Lucie described how being on the Camino and coming home was like a ‘golden line’ that continued to be there. This correlates with Bridey’s sensory description of embodiment at the Iron Age site of Castro de Castromaior, where she experienced herself being part of ‘A stream of ants walking past, a kind of constant’ as mentioned in Chapter 4.

Likewise, Sylvie told me about an experience she had while she was researching the Yoruba deity Oshun and Le Puy’s Black Madonna on the internet.

Sylvie: It feels like there is no time. There is no time. All of us, you know, like I read this on the Camino forums where people talk about feeling like they are just part of a continuum. You know, the people are flowing. We are just part of the wave of going, spreading out once you get there. And, to me, it’s all one thing.

It’s like we are our ancestors, and our ancestors are us, and we are the next ones. And we are just this line of people.

Catherine: Not linear then?

Sylvie: Linear? No, no. When I say a line, I don’t really mean from here to there. You know, a spiral?

Here, Sylvie expressly uses the word ‘continuum’ to describe her sense of living pilgrimage in place, and at the same time it correlates to Bridey’s account of feeling linked to other pilgrims across time. All of these examples suggest that the concept of living pilgrimage as a continuum is a non-linear understanding of pilgrimage for these four *peregrinas*. These findings align with Sallnow’s argument that there are many competing discourses about Western pilgrimage, including non-linear interpretations (Eade & Sallnow, 1991, p.5). I will now look at Beebe’s and Shoshana’s findings.

2. Identity and belonging as pilgrim in place during Covid-19 lockdowns

Sharing virtual pilgrimages to Santiago on the PIP forum

Beebe and Shoshana joined hundreds of other pilgrims on the PIP forum who were unable to travel to Spain, or anywhere else in Europe, to walk the Camino. Adding to this, both of them have co-hosted global Zoom meetings between PIP members and worked together to help promote the idea of undertaking virtual pilgrimages towards Santiago, from wherever a PIP member lived. Beebe told me about her involvement:

Beebe: I mean, we began PIP when we couldn't go on physical pilgrimage to the Camino. One of the first things I did, I measured the length of my office, and, you know, figured out, multiplied that so it would equal a mile. And then every day I would do many miles just pacing my office.

You know, this was severe lockdown. We didn't know what we were dealing with. And I just thought, 'You know, I am going to walk the Camino anyway.' And every day, I mapped this onto the Camino and I made my way across the Camino Frances. It actually deepened the pilgrimage to me because I realise you can walk 500 miles to Santiago and it won't be any more than two miles from your own home.

I remember seeing guided virtual pilgrimages on the PIP forum like Beebe describes. I was in awe of these pilgrims' discipline in such confined circumstances. In Aotearoa New Zealand, we enjoyed long periods of no community transmission and where I live, in Wānaka, there were few lockdowns during the Covid-19 pandemic. I observed members joining with a virtual guide as they 'walked' together, covering specific distances in their home environments that aligned with official Camino guidebook sections. As well as following the guide's own photographs and commentary on the forum, participating members shared photographs from their own locales with the PIP community. This can be understood as using the shared platform of PIP to mimic walking together on the physical Camino trails.

Shoshana explained to me how she led one of PIP's virtual pilgrimages during her period of lockdown in the United States, and what that role meant to her:

Shoshana: I started spending a lot of time saying, 'What's my Camino today?' And so, taking photos of things that I see like bunnies and flowers, but we would also do these kinds of virtual tours of the Camino

and people would post their virtual photos from where they were on the Camino.

And I found that really enjoyable and I had a really strong sense of community. More so than when I was actually on the Camino probably because we were stuck in our boxes of light and magic together, rather than moving, so walking more quickly.

Catherine: That's a great way of putting it.

Shoshana: I brought three of the Camino guidebooks to Portugal, and I took the PIP group up the coastal route and a detour on the central route in order to go to Fatima. It doesn't feel like I have stopped walking the Camino because I kept walking actually, physically, and imaginatively.

And in relation to the Camino, writing a book still felt like being on the Camino in lots of ways, in terms of, 'This is painful, and I don't know why I commit myself to doing this!'

Catherine: Ha-ha! Yeah, all of those.

Shoshana: I just assume that for at least several years, if not the rest of my life, it's going to be an ongoing metaphor, but more than a metaphor.

Towards the end of the interview Shoshana added this about ongoing pilgrimage:

Shoshana: I feel like since walking the Camino there's a way in which I am walking in both worlds simultaneously. It doesn't feel like I am not on the Camino. I am just not doing the Camino where you walk in one direction.

Phil's Camino

The genius for such virtual pilgrimage practice within the PIP community was inspired by one man's story – a story that occurred before the Covid-19 pandemic. Phil Volker had planned to walk the Camino Frances to Santiago de Compostela when he received a diagnosis of Stage IV cancer. Realising it was unlikely he would ever make his pilgrimage to Spain, Phil decided to walk the Camino Frances route at his home on Vashon Island, Seattle. He marked out certain distances around his land to create a

measurable circuit. Then he walked these distances, day after day, mimicking the Camino de Santiago at home, for the entire 800 kilometres of the Camino Frances route. For instance, for day one Phil walked the same distance as walking from St Jean Pied-de-Port, France, to Roncesvalles, Spain.

Word of mouth about ‘Phil’s Camino’ grew, and, unbidden, people came from all over the world to support Phil as he walked his Camino, section by section, in Seattle. One of these people was Annie O’Neil, the founder of the PIP community and director of the award-winning documentary about Phil’s story, *Phil’s Camino* (2016). As well as documenting Phil’s pilgrimage in Seattle, the film reveals how a reprieve in Phil’s cancer management made it possible for him to travel to Spain. Phil Volker achieved his goal of walking the 800 kilometres to Santiago de Compostela. In and of itself, then, the documentary has provided not only the inspiration for PIP members to conduct virtual, non-linear pilgrimages that simultaneously invoke the physical Camino route, but also inspiration for cancer sufferers to navigate their cancer journeys however best they can within their particular confines (*Phil’s Camino*, 2016). The documentary poster features below in Figure 16.

to help mitigate the isolation of pandemic restrictions, and they shared this with other members. The ethos of PIP can also be understood through Barush's work exploring the phenomenon of Phil's Camino as a continuation of pilgrimage in her work *Imaging Pilgrimage* (Barush, 2021, p. 48). Barush notes that both Volker and Annie O'Neil regarded Phil's Vashon Island Camino not as a replica but a continuum of the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela.

There are other examples of similar adaptations made during the pandemic, such as the man who completed a full marathon in his Paris apartment during severe lockdown (Associated Press, 2022, p. 1). These examples of virtual pilgrimage reveal emerging ways people have coped with confinement, by managing to cover significant distance in severe lockdown while at the same time reimagining the boundaries of place. Such adaptations can be situated alongside Kathryn Rountree's work studying how Goddess pilgrims enacted a Stonehenge solstice ritual through Zoom meetings during the pandemic (Rountree, 2021, p. 21). As Rountree notes, 'the duality of here/there, along with the distinction between imagined and material places, are also much less stable than we might have thought' (p. 48–49). Further examples exist in Whitehead's work (2019, p. 23), where she examines Glastonbury Goddess pilgrims' examples of deep connection to place and situated these in Johnson's framework of imagined belonging.

3. Emergence: examining ways peregrinas responded to the easing of pandemic restrictions

The interviews for this research were conducted between May and December 2022, when pandemic restrictions were beginning to ease and *peregrinas* were able to return to the Camino. Shoshana travelled back to Spain in May, walking the Camino Frances towards Santiago de Compostela, from Pamplona to Astorga. While she was there, she shared images with me from the journey and told me she was enjoying noticing more female aspects in civic and religious representations on this Camino since participating in this research. Beebe also returned to walk some of the Camino Frances mid-year. Sylvie is planning to walk the Via Podiensis route from Le Puy in July of 2023. Lucie is intending to walk the Via de la Plata route to Santiago de Compostela in August 2023. The last time I spoke to the southern hemisphere *peregrinas*, Joanne and Bridey

were longing to return to the physical route, while continuing their pilgrimage in place practices at home.

4. Concluding thoughts

This chapter's findings began with ethnographic accounts of *peregrinas* interpreting pilgrimage as a continuum in their everyday lives. It then revealed ways that some *peregrinas* have conducted virtual pilgrimages as part of their membership within the PIP community to evoke an imagined sense of belonging to the Camino during Covid-19 lockdowns. These virtual pilgrimages are lived examples of the daily practice of pilgrimage in place. I followed this with an outline of *Phil's Camino*, a formative documentary that led to the creation of the PIP community to celebrate virtual pilgrimage. Last, I followed this with a brief outline of the *peregrinas*' responses to my question asking how, or if, alternative forms of pilgrimage were extended, created, or are still evolving as the *peregrinas*' lives emerged from pandemic travel restrictions. Principally, this chapter works in accord with the research topic by revealing the implications of understanding pilgrimage as continuum, a concept that presented as a central theme in the research data. At the same time, it has provided sympathetic context for the particular temporal and mimetic interpretations *peregrinas* apply to their use of materiality and creative ritual to evoke pilgrimage in place, which I examine in detail in the following chapter.

Chapter 6

The Material *Peregrina*: Determining the roles of materiality and creative ritual while living pilgrimage as continuum

*And so, too, in an open world, the creeping entanglements of life will
always and inevitably triumph over our attempts to box them in.*

— Tim Ingold¹⁹

This chapter adds a material dimension to the research and explores how pilgrimage in place is facilitated and maintained through both ritual creativity and the Camino-inspired materialities that *peregrinas* have bought, crafted, and displayed within their homes. This builds on the previous two chapters, which informed understanding about how and why certain associations were meaningful to *peregrinas* as they continued to navigate a semblance of Camino pilgrimage during the times of Covid-19. This chapter therefore focuses on determining what material practices *peregrinas* do to evoke the Camino in their daily lives – as such it is an assemblage of the materiality *peregrinas* have used, together with an account of rituals they have created and employed, as a form of pilgrimage. Focusing on these activities and what they can suggest for anthropological studies of religion and contemporary pilgrimage studies, I re-engage with the notion of ‘Camino energy’ (introduced in Chapter 1 and discussed in Chapter 4C), and how this is utilised and put into practice. This is followed by accounts of the ritual and material culture *peregrinas* apply to their use of home altars, labyrinths, prayer gardens, craft works, and jewellery. The chapter aims to show the integral roles of materiality *peregrinas* have created to evoke the feminine divine, place, community, and belonging while living remotely from the physical Camino.

1. Exploring the linkage between pilgrimage and place

Understanding the use of ‘Camino energy’ discourse

¹⁹ Ingold, Tim. (2008):1809. Bindings Against Boundaries: Entanglements of Life in an Open World. *Journal of Environment and Planning* (40) 1796-1810.

In both this and Chapter 4 there are numerous examples of *peregrinas* referring to the energy of the Camino feminine divine, or ‘feminine energy’ from the Camino. It is also evidenced in the accounts below: energy discourse on the Camino presented as embodied experiences that are understood to occur at different levels of intensity in certain places, from certain objects, on and off the Camino routes. This discourse in part draws on Anna Fedele’s synergic work with Mary Magdalene pilgrims in the south of France, whose findings expressed instances where her participants embodied higher levels of energy at some sacred sites than others (Fedele, 2013, p.18). Fedele developed the term ‘energy discourse’ because her pilgrim accounts were replete with it.

The implications of Fedele’s notion of energy discourse can be applied to the objects displayed on home altars of the *peregrinas*, and other forms of materiality featured throughout this chapter. Such tools play primary roles in the evocation, creation, and maintenance of pilgrimage in place. I begin with examples from Joanne, whose account expressly names certain things she has curated on her home altar to manifest pilgrimage in her home, in her daily life. Our conversation about Joanne’s home environment began with me asking her about the photography I noticed during our Zoom interview.

Catherine: Joanne, you have beautiful photographs behind you. Can you tell me about any things you relate to, or use to re-enact a pilgrimage as continuum sense, home in Australia?

Joanne: Covid has done a reset for me. I have been spending a lot of time at home, making my home a much more beautiful place to be in.

I have spent a lot of time, energy, and resources going back to the Camino or going to sacred travel. And I guess that Covid had allowed me to look around, look at my present moment, and think what do I want to change? And so, from room to room, I have been changing it, giving it some love from what it had been.

I created a home altar and prayer garden which manifested organically over the past few years. I am happy to share photographs of them.

The altar [see Figure 17] includes the middle photo of Jesus that was in my bedroom as a child and pictures of two Marys: Mother Mary and Mary Magdalene.



Figure 16: Joanne's home altar. Image credit: J. Cashman, used with permission.

Joanne's altar is brightly lit and carefully crafted to provide a sacred space that is an evocative centre for reflection and prayer in her home, and reflects the deep devotion she spoke about having for Mother Mary (as found in Chapter 4). In the account provided here, Joanne discusses how she applies a personalised version of feminine spirituality to her home altar by incorporating the Catholic iconography she has retained as being meaningful from her childhood. Through her own words, Joanne describes how she understands the feminine aspect of humanity as being unconditional acceptance, and expressive of love and compassion. Once again, this practice aligns closely with Fedele's work on energy discourse in terms of embodied energy. At the same time, it aligns closely with Fedele's work explaining how Mary Magdalene pilgrims felt they were actively reclaiming and promoting 'true' aspects of the feminine divine that have been continually distorted by patriarchal oppression (2013, p. 16).

Joanne's altar also features a variety of objects, including the ubiquitous scallop shell traditionally carried by pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostela. Joanne understands these items as more than images, as they evocatively and tangibly link her self and homeplace to the Camino. The objects convey meanings for Joanne from other instances in her life too, such as the childhood associations she mentions in the above narrative. Thus, her creation of this altar provides a ready vehicle to help create pilgrimage directly in her life, in place, in Australia. Such usage corresponds with early work by Kay Turner, who discusses home altar assemblages as reaching beyond symbolism and material matter to provide a real sense of place and spiritual engagement to devotees (Turner, 1999, p. 115). The purpose that Joanne gives for her home altar practices are also supported by Spretnak's discussion on Marian representations within home spaces as a primary basis for lived religion and devotional practice (Spretnak, 2004, p. 121). Joanne's altar is evidence of tangible expressions of place that can be understood as evocative tools for drawing upon a sense of remote place, directly into home and hearth situations.

Beebe also told me about her home altar, and how this evokes her pilgrimage in place.

Beebe: I evoke the divine in many ways, and, to me, nature is the ultimate divine. So, throughout my home I have things that speak to the natural world, and the human, male and female, divine world. I have lots of natural elements, feathers, rocks, and shells (scallop, of course) that speak to me. They have energy and remind me of our interwoven nature.

But I also have an altar in my home. And it is right next to where I write. And on that altar, I have two icons of Mary. One from Our Lady of Rocamadour²⁰, that I purchased when I was in Rocamadour. And one of Our Lady of Montserrat²¹, from when I was in Montserrat. I have an image of Saint James. A little granite statue of Saint James. I also have

²⁰ Rocamadour – a famous Marian sanctuary sacred to the Black Madonna of Rocamadour and a variant of the Via Podiensis route to Santiago de Compostela. See: <https://www.chemins-compostelle.com/en/roca>

²¹ Montserrat – another famous sanctuary to the Black Madonna of Montserrat, and also one of many pilgrimage routes to Santiago de Compostela. See: <https://www.csj.org.uk/camino-catalan>.

Kuan Yin²² and the Buddha. Plus, a ceramic goose from Sarlat²³ and a seahorse I found dried on the beach.

From what Beebe describes here, her altar has some Camino religious associations, and, like Joanne's, it also contains elements from her travels that she considers spiritually meaningful. In part, both Beebe and Joanne have drawn feminine divine associations from their home altar usage, and both altars feature the ubiquitous symbolism of scallop shells with the Camino. This suggests personally ascribed meanings have been applied to their home altar assemblages. As such, they draw upon multifaceted spiritual influences. Further, these practices, engagements, and evocative influences have led them to create an autonomous version of spirituality, which is manifested in certain ways to bring their pilgrimage home with them. Whitehead's work aligns with these findings where it frames such personal interpretations as going beyond superficial visibility to demonstrate personal relationship with objects (Whitehead, 2013, p. 149). I also compare these findings with Kay Turner's work on the circulatory nature of material accumulation, insofar as home altar items evoke pilgrimage and home destination in a simultaneous fashion that can be understood through particular home altar aesthetics (Turner, 1999, p. 109).

Reflecting on my role as a *peregrina*, my home altar (see Figure 18) provides another example of an assemblage with various holy figures from different faiths, such as Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Mayan Tree of Life, naturally shed antlers, a miraculous Marian medal I got in Le Puy, and other associations. To me, these figures not only evoke 'Camino energy' but represent a conduit between places that mitigates geographical distance between spiritually significant destinations in my life. It seems appropriate that my home altar also serves as the mantelpiece to our home fireplace, where many stories are told. Because of the altar's position, some visitors ask about the objects they notice there, and some apply their own stories of association to them, especially Camino ones. In this way, it can be suggested that the objects continue to 'move'. Their influence is dynamic, moving through and beyond my personal associations. This observation is supported by the work of anthropologist Veena Das on the revelatory nature that can be interpreted between persons and things, and which

²² Kuan Yin (Guan Yin) – Chinese Bodhisattva, Goddess of compassion. See: https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/Chinese_Customs/Guan_Yin.htm

²³ Sarlat – a township in the Perigord/Dordogne region of France. See: <https://www.perigord.com/en/listings/villes-et-villages/sarlat/>

is particular to the life worlds that people associate with specific things (Das, 2014, p. 292–293). I would add that such associations are extended by the evolving stories that specifically curated home altars entail, and suggest home altars can be understood as creative works in progress.



Figure 17: Author's home altar. Image author's own.

The winding paths: creative outdoor evocations of pilgrimage in place

Earlier in this chapter, Joanne mentioned she created a prayer garden, which she told me she recently moved in order to see it from her kitchen window. She happily provided this image below (Figure 19).



Figure 18: Joanne’s Australian-based prayer garden. Image credit: J. Cashman, used with permission.

Similar to some *peregrinas*’ home altars, Joanne’s prayer garden provides visible evidence of the relationship she has formed with a range of Marian figures from various places, including from the Camino. For example, her prayer garden hosts a statue of Our Lady of Lourdes, who Joanne mentioned as being particularly meaningful to her. Joanne’s prayer garden reveals the mobile nature of Marian iconography, and how specific it can be for individual pilgrims. Dubisch’s work on *The Many Faces of Mary* has framed this capacity for mobility as objects that are strongly attached, but not confined to, pilgrimage sites (Dubisch, 2009, p.232). As we see evidenced in the *peregrinas*’ accounts within this study, the same could be said about Joanne’s and Bridey’s interpretations of ‘Camino energy’ being experienced everywhere on and beyond the pilgrimage route, as mentioned in Chapter 4. Further,

throughout their accounts the *peregrinas* provided examples of their evocation of Camino energy as they live at home, as pilgrims in place through the instrumentality of PIP, and between others in quotidian life.

For Joanne, home altars and prayer gardens are works of spiritual artistry, a harmonious composition for herself and her visitors. These findings correlate with Kay Turner's observation that the relationship between art and religion is strongly tethered to specific home altar compositions by women. As such, they reveal sacred associations and artistic expression (Turner, 1999, p.27). Joanne supplied another example of feminine divine artistic expression which she took of a labyrinth she constructed during a Covid-19 lockdown. She said:

Joanne: You know the labyrinth in my garden? Making the labyrinth was part of my pilgrimage. The labyrinth was used for pilgrimage in medieval times. If you build it with the same sacred geometry, which is a blueprint of all of us, everything that is in the universe is made of the same blueprint of sacred geometry.

I actually placed crystals to anchor the energies of the Star of David, which is also known as a Hexagram. The Star of David is the triangle and the upside-down triangle, which is actually masculine and feminine energies united. Alchemists used it to symbolize the union of opposites, and it is considered by some to be the epitome of 'as above, so below'.

Joanne supplied me additional images to illustrate the sacred geometric²⁴ principles she is discussing in this narrative (see Figure 20), together with a close-up image of the Star of David at the centre of labyrinth (see Figure 21). Sacred geometry draws upon an understanding that relies on an underlying geometric basis to all life. A commonly known example of sacred geometry is the Tree of Life symbol in Mayan culture – and in many other cultures.

²⁴ Sacred Geometry – 'Geometry called "Sacred" is a metaphor for the Ordering of the Universe, the fingerprint of Creation. This is an interdisciplinary study where information is offered on various subjects ranging from aesthetic theory, art history, to quantum mechanics, through symbols, the anthropology of religions, microbiology and cosmology.
<https://revistas.comillas.edu/index.php/pensamiento/article/view/4560>

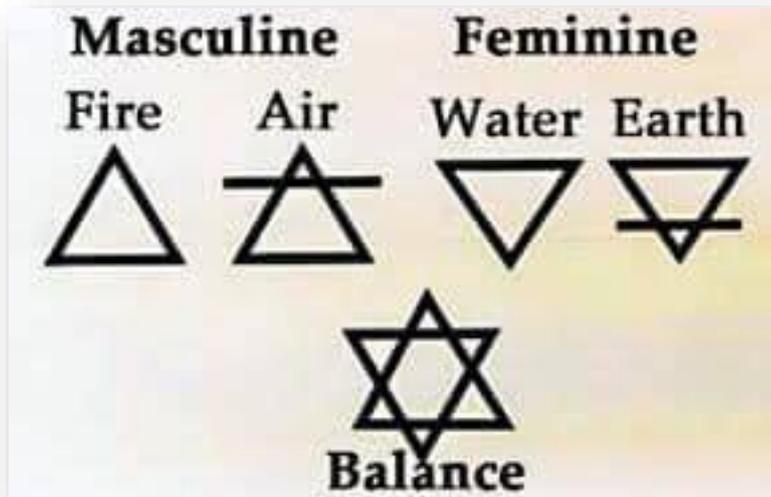


Figure 19: Sacred geometric symbols Joanne incorporated into her labyrinth design. Image credit: J Cashman, used with permission.

Figure 21 below shows a close-up of the red and white thread Joanne describes as anchoring the masculine and feminine energies in her labyrinth.



Figure 20: Joanne's labyrinth, highlighting the Star of David. Image credit: J. Cashman, used with permission.

Another image (Figure 22) reveals the scale of Joanne’s labyrinth in her backyard and shows particular items she mentions in her account, such as the specific placement of certain crystals.



Figure 21: Joanne’s garden labyrinth .Image credit: J. Cashman, used with permission.

Joanne provides a rich description of Camino energy, sacred geometry, and other religious associations she has incorporated into her labyrinth, creating an integrated and carefully considered work of art. During Covid-19 lockdown, she shared an image of this labyrinth with the PIP community as an example of how she was continuing her pilgrimage at home. The detail she revealed in this interview informed me of Joanne’s understanding of and respect for the medieval practice of walking a labyrinth as a form of pilgrimage. It can be suggested that Joanne drew on the medieval practice of labyrinth walking to continue her own practice and share it with others from her home. Joanne has embraced the time of Covid-19 to craft evocations of pilgrimage in her home environment, with a focus on harmonious relationships between person and place. Further, as reflected in the literature review,

these findings from Joanne on gendered symbolism support studies on gender and power insofar as pilgrims are encouraged by witnessing and incorporating symbolic interpretations of women that are politically, spiritually, or socially represented (Rountree, 2002; Whitehead, 2019; Christ, 2012; Fedele, 2013).

Evoking pilgrimage in place through stained glass and digital art

It should now be clear that some *peregrinas* have created material adaptations through artistry, such as home altars, prayer gardens, and labyrinths, to evoke pilgrimage at their places of residence during the Covid-19 pandemic, which they used to continue their pilgrimage journeys. The examples provided so far have included what the *peregrinas* consider to be feminine divine aspects. Not all material expressions of pilgrimage in place concern the feminine divine as the Camino. For some, it is the ‘Camino energy’ that they draw upon as *peregrinas* to create art as a pilgrim in place. I begin with Bridey, who told me this:

Catherine: Bridey, you know the lovely artworks you showed me during our first meeting? How long were you home from the Camino before you created these, and can you tell me again how or if the Camino influenced your creations?

Bridey: It happened really quickly, and it still does. I mean my next piece of stained glass is going to be about the Camino.

I love colour and light. These are like a multi-sensory impact for me, and there is something about crafting these things by hand ... because to me colours hold all these things – colours, light, smell, texture, a lot of meaning and memory for me. I look at the colours and feel quickly immersed in the journey that I had.

I often have that feeling where I am totally exhilarated by surroundings, by the connection to nature. And by the connection to my spirit. I have a strong sense of flying in my chest. Like with the Cruz de Ferro and as you walk down the basin opens up before you. That you were really high, that same experience that comes to me from spirit ... like Joseph Campbell’s talk of following your bliss ... It’s like a tuning into my

body in a physical way but also a spiritual way. I think a big part of the Camino is learning how to tune in to that.

Bridey also told me she feels a strong spiritual affinity with birds, particularly because she experiences such strong embodiment of flying sensations when she engages with nature. She later relayed these meanings into her artwork of the Camino. She added:

Bridey: This stained glass [see Figure 23], shows my spirit bird soaring above the Camino and the hill lines from O’Cebreiro. I think of this as a meditative way of spiralling inward. I am currently working on a wood carving of the Camino too.



Figure 22: Bridey’s O’Cebreiro stained-glass creation. Image credit: Bridey, used with permission.

Bridey has been steadily creating artwork throughout the pandemic. She explains that the Camino is always on her mind but her friends and family who are not pilgrims get tired of hearing about it. She discusses how belonging to the PIP community and talking with me about the Camino are ways she can enjoy sharing her artwork. For instance, she tells me she is keen to read Beebe Bahrami’s 2022 book, *The Way of the Wild Goose: Three Pilgrimages Following Geese, Stars, and Hunches on the Camino de Santiago*, which thematically represents Bird-Goddess associations

from the Camino. Bridey's affinity with birds and her curiosity for Bahrami's interest in Bird-Goddesses on the Camino are akin to the work of Marija Gimbutas on early Goddess culture in northern Spain that focused on the bird Goddess Mari (Gimbutas, 2001, p.123). Gimbuta's work includes regions that incorporate some of the Camino del Norte, which is the route Beebe mentioned as having special significance for her in Chapter 4.

Shoshana also crafted artworks as part of her Camino evocations once she returned home from the physical route. She also wrote a memoir (Kerewsky, 2022), mentioned in Chapter 4, in which she discusses the Camino, her cancer experience, and reflections on the Japanese artform that repairs broken pottery, kintsugi. Shoshana warmly encouraged me to use any material from her book that might be useful to this research. Following this prompt, I mentioned one image from the book I particularly admired (see Figure 24) and she told me this about it:

Catherine: Shoshana, when did you produce some of this lovely work that I saw when we first met on Zoom? Was that during the time of Covid?

Shoshana: Yes, it was. I had been writing toward doing some kind of memoir, but I didn't just want to do this story of my cancer experience. I wanted context around it. And I didn't want it to be linear. And I didn't want it to be a Camino memoir... I wanted it to have both those things. While I was constrained in the house by Covid I did not go out. I still have barely been out.

I had a lot of time on my hands, so that is when I was really working on writing, and also making, making things like stickers and book covers, mugs, finding ways to combine language and either my photographs or graphics in the public domain [see Figure 24].

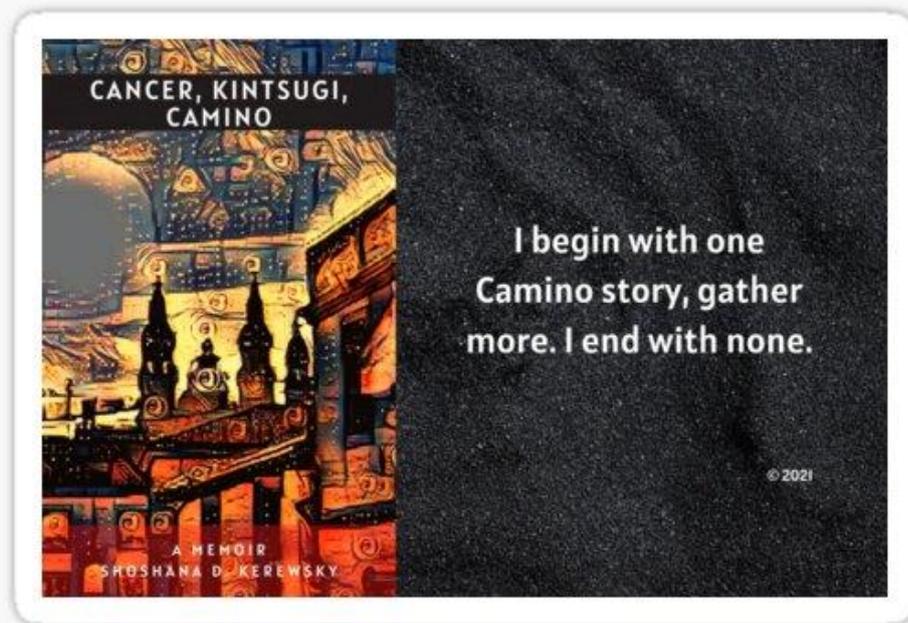


Figure 23: Haiku and cover artwork created by S. D. Kerewsky. Artist's own image, used with permission.

Shoshana: [...] While I was walking the Camino, I was listening among other things to Karen Armstrong's books about the origin of religion ... And her schtick, if I understand it, seems to be, you go and do these things in a symbolic context, rites, and rituals in order to create a controlled anxiety that you then get some kind of relational and symbolic mastery over it. And she sees that as kind of the origins of religion and I would say that fit pretty well with my Camino experience, insofar as an atheist has that experience. So existentially, absolutely.

Shoshana's inner reflection on the source of inspiration for her artwork echoes something Bridey spoke about. Their artwork is tethered to embodied, multi-sensory responses that enable deep understandings to emerge as they were walking the

Camino. A multi-sensorial response allows for creative understandings to incorporate artworks that articulate meaning through colour, imagery, and light as well as text. In other words, their artwork conveys what they felt in ways that transcend language. Comparatively, Bridey's creativity is spiritually based, while Shoshana's is experientially based, yet both perceive the Camino as offering an invitation to them to 'belong to nothing', an open-hearted response to living as a pilgrim in place.

Shoshana also mentions she aimed for her memoir to provide a non-linear context for her readers, preferring it to offer a bricolage of assemblages. In many ways, this captures the notion of living pilgrimage as a continuum because the *peregrina* artwork featured in this chapter spans back and forth from the Camino to pandemic confinement, and weaves across time into the broader milieu of their personal lives and Camino history. This form of embodiment is similar to Barush's work exploring art as a form of pilgrimage, and pilgrimage as a form of art that incorporates the fluid nature of material artistic creations, the meanings pilgrims apply to these and the act of conducting a pilgrimage (Barush, 2021, p. 5). It can be suggested from Bridey's and Shoshana's artwork and reflections that their creations are an extended and tangible continuation of pilgrimage, rather than removed from the physical route.

2. The role of jewellery as touchstone: linking evocative pilgrimage to place and practice

When I asked the *peregrinas* what things they used to evoke pilgrimage in place, some of them mentioned certain pieces of jewellery that were important to their pilgrimage for specific reasons. I begin with Lucie:

Lucie: This a very important thing to me. It's a necklace. I think it was the first thing I saw when I got to Santiago. And it is the Tree of Life. I don't know if you can see it, but there are shells. And another thing is very important to me is this ring I bought in O'Cebreiro. It has got a shell on it too. I really love them! And I got this ring back in Santiago, with 'Ultreia' written on it, and inside it, 'Camino the way', and in French, 'Le Chemin'. So, that is very meaningful.

I don't wear them every day. I like the sort of trinity created by my two rings and a necklace [see Figure 25]. I feel there's something sacred about it, and they definitely feel like pillars to me.



Figure 24: Lucie's 'trinity' jewellery. Image credit: Lucie, used with permission.

Lucie: While I was in O’Cebriero there is a commemoration to the Priest, Elias Valina Sampedro, who created the Camino’s yellow arrow that guides pilgrims throughout the route to Santiago de Compostela. The jewellery shop I went to, Tiendra Grial, was owned by his nephew Jose Manuel Lopez Valina. Elias was the first Camino cartographer and the one who painted the yellow arrows. Jose and he chose the yellow colour in the Pyrenees together, when seeing the long-distance trails there. When considering what colour to use, Jose suggested yellow, and Elias deemed it appropriate because The GR [network of French hiking routes] route didn’t have this colour and it was easily seen during sunrise

and sunset. So, Jose and Elias bought some yellow paint and for ten years they painted the Camino from France to Santiago de Compostela.

And Jose gifted me this ring [bottom right, Figure 25], so for me they are very special and I need to tell this story, to do it justice. That is very important to me because Jose was very important and a big part of why O’Cebreiro was so significant to me, like I already told you earlier. And Jose taught me a valuable lesson. I lost the earrings he gifted me. I felt very ashamed, and I was hard on myself but Jose told me to choose another pair and I felt like it was a lesson for me to trust myself more. I think of this whenever I wear them and keep them safe in this box [see Figure 26].



Figure 25: O’Cebreiro jewellery container. Image credit: Lucie, used with permission.

Likewise, when I asked Bridey a similar question about jewellery, she laughed out loud and told me:

Bridey: I kind of picked things up in a few places. At Ayegui, just outside Estella, there was a forge with a blacksmith. I bought a really simple scallop shell and put it on. And when I was walking out of Burgos there is a tiny little hermitage or something. There was a Catholic nun there and, as people went out, she would put a little gold medallion on them, and she put one on me.

And then I got to Rabanal where they sing the Gregorian chant. I bought a tiny little crucifix which really spoke to me, and then at Castrojeriz I got a little Tau's cross. By the time I walked into Santiago I must have looked like some kind of medieval pilgrim with so many things hanging around my neck. Like my good luck charms, which is funny because I have never really been into that.

I still find if I have something now, that I am going into that I know is going to be challenging for me, I will usually pull out one of my Camino selections [see Figure 27]. They embody some kind of, I don't know, the things you pick up along the Way. The strength you pick up.

I went into town the other day [the city of Auckland] and there are no touchstones there for me. But along the Camino it is like a trail. If you are at all open to experiencing things on a spiritual level, it's going to hit you there on the Camino. It's like a constant something ferrying you into a different plane.

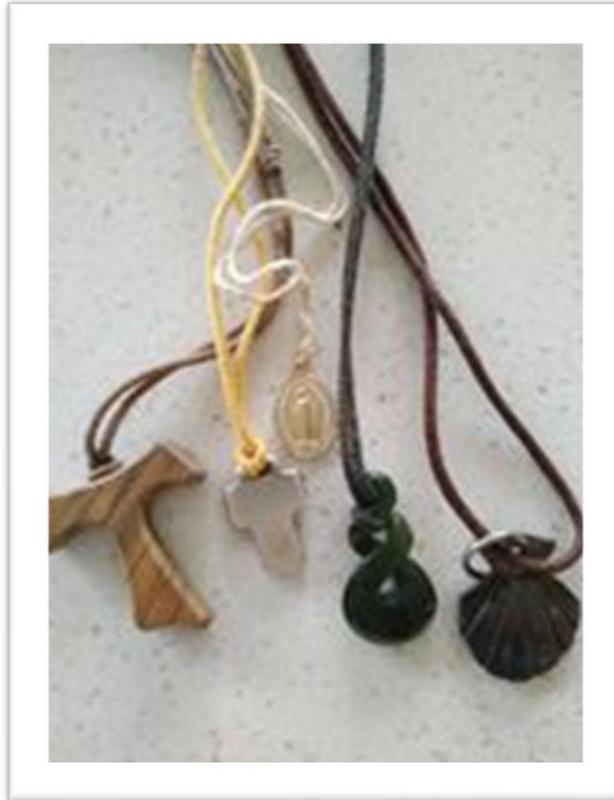


Figure 26: Bridey's jewellery selection. Image credit: Bridey, used with permission.

Bridey speaks directly to the potency of her jewellery, which does more than memorialise various places from the Camino for her. To both her and Lucie, their understandings of their jewellery include the idea of Camino energy, a sacred or spiritual power that has been absorbed from the Camino into the jewellery. A storehouse that can be accessed in times of need. Lucie describes her trinity of jewellery as a pillar she draws strength from. For Bridey, her jewellery epitomises a touchstone. In other words, there is an absorbent quality from the actual Camino that provides wellbeing and personal strength, from the Camino to places where they wish to embody these qualities. Their jewellery is a conduit to the Camino.

Shoshana also told me about how and why she uses certain jewellery.

Shoshana: To associate with your question about after the Camino and during Covid, as it happens, I don't have any Camino jewellery on me at the moment. But when I do therapy with people, or when I go into the university, I generally put on some piece of Camino jewellery. I have a necklace that's just an Azabache circle, and couple of things that have

a kind of scallop shell on them. When I went to get things that would evoke the Camino for me that's what I went for. It wasn't pilgrims with their bindle staff. It wasn't yellow arrows or the Milky Way. It was the representational scallop shells to put on my person in some way.

As a further example of ritual creativity and material mobility, Shoshana told me about a candle-lighting vigil she was intending to perform when she returned to the Camino in May 2022. To inform the context for this vigil, I include Shoshana's mention of her work as a narrative therapist with cancer patients in the below account.

Shoshana: Absolutely, and I will say about normal: once you have had a good, life-threatening cancer experience there isn't a normal. When I take my caseload is people with cancer, and they ask, 'When am I going to get back to normal?' And that is really good to explore because you don't get back to normal. It's kind of a new abnormal that you have your ways to manage.

Catherine: Yes.

Shoshana: One of the differences for this Camino [in May 2022] is that I was seeing this caseload population before I went on the Camino. But in the last two years, six of my clients have died of cancer. And so, I want to think about it. I do want to light candles for them as I walk the Camino. You know? I get to do this, whatever it is. And they don't.

In a way that aligns with the other *peregrinas'* use of jewellery, Shoshana utilised personal jewellery during the pandemic to evoke the Camino while she practised narrative therapy with her cancer patients. Shoshana's example of lighting a candle on the Camino to venerate her patients who died in the previous two years is a form of fluid and mobile ritual creativity. It can be suggested, too, that Shoshana's ritual enactment is a reversal of pilgrims bringing jewellery back home from the Camino, as Shoshana is drawing home evocations on the physical Camino route.

From these findings, I contend that jewellery usage goes beyond evocation. Moving objects to support a ritual or wearing jewellery as a conduit is not a linear trajectory, understood as moving something from one place to another. The relationship between thing and place travels with the *peregrina*, wherever they happen

to be in place, and multiple places can be held ‘in place’ within their understanding. This observation echoes Shoshana’s comment about simultaneously walking a pilgrimage with a *sense of both places* using PIP’s virtual pilgrimage system (see Chapter 5). These findings further concur with Barush’s work on what she frames as ‘transtemporal communitas’, when material objects convey both history and memory (Barush, 2021, p.5). Home, Camino, and life stories converge at the same time, in a circuitous rendering of Camino essence, to create a form of relational efficacy as I now discuss.

3. Concluding thoughts on *peregrinas* usage of materiality as relational efficacy

Starting with home altars, this chapter has demonstrated how various *peregrinas* link the Camino to their home, not only evocatively but as a simultaneous act of pilgrimage between spaces. In a similar pattern to previous chapters – where I described formative Camino encounters in Chapter 4, and ways pilgrims understand pilgrimage as a continuum in Chapter 5 – sometimes these accounts incorporated feminine divine aspects of the Camino and sometimes they did not. Nevertheless, the layered historic nature of the Camino and work by sociologist Arjun Appadurai on the cultural dimensions of globalisation (1997, p.7) and anthropologist Ronald Grimes’s work on rites of passage (2000, p.10) attest to the significance of privileging no lived religious discourse over another in the interest of better understanding a highly interconnected world. Something that even a global shutdown from the pandemic could not curtail.

We can now see from this research that there are myriad ways for pilgrims to evoke the Camino back and forth between actual trail and home, and across history. The *peregrinas* in this study have demonstrated how they do this for not only themselves, but also as a meditative ritual for people they care about.

On my Camino in 2022, I carried a stone on behalf of a friend in New Zealand whose loved one was terminally ill. I laid her stone from home as an offering on the Camino Frances route at the sacred Iron Cross, known as the Cruz de Ferro. Symbolically my friend understood this as travelling with me to this sacred site to obtain its blessings for herself and her beloved. The linkages between pilgrimage and place run deep, and the stories and practices people associate with the Camino de Santiago are as varied as the pebbles, votives, and messages that pilgrims have left for thousands of years at the Cruz de Ferro (see Figure 28). It seems to me that such variety

provides further testament that pilgrimage stories and understandings are worthy of wider scholarly purview, including the sacred feminine along the Camino de Santiago, as part of pilgrimage and religious studies exploring the roles of materiality and creative ritual in lived practices.



Figure 27: The author laying stones at the Cruz de Ferro, Camino Frances route, 2022. Image credit: Tim Davis, used with permission.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

1. Reflection: research origins

When I walked the Camino in 2012 my backpack was maladjusted. I stubbornly refused any pack changes to avoid stressing an old back injury that had required surgery. At that stage of my life, I had no idea that I would find myself writing a thesis exploring the feminine divine on the Camino de Santiago, which involved exploring pilgrimage as continuum. I did know that the church Iglesia de Santa Maria Eunata had a profound and lasting impact on me. I became determined to learn more about what I came to think of as ‘Her’ and the purported sacred geometry that Sofía had mentioned to me when she suggested I detour to this church. My curiosity increased as personal research shifted into an academic trajectory. Like many things from the physical Camino, my ill-fitting backpack seems analogous to life, particularly to the act of writing an ethnography – my data and research pathway did not always fit in ways I imagined they might do.

The following reflection covers the divergent path I took and explores whether or not I would have done some things differently with the benefit of hindsight. I follow this reflection with an overview of the research aims, incorporating the three major themes that emerged from the data to form the ethnographic chapters of this work. Next, from the terms of engagement outlined in the introduction, I extrapolate why and how *peregrinas* engaged in this research’s usage of feminine divine as an organising principle. Last, I locate the contribution this research has made by starting to fill a gap that I identified in scholarly research within the anthropological study of religion and pilgrimage studies on the Camino de Santiago.

2. Advantages and disadvantages of digital ethnography

Waiting eight months for an idealised return to ‘normal’ to conduct ‘proper fieldwork’ taught me how not to ignore ways ‘the Camino’ was actually presenting during the time of Covid-19. Once I made the decision to conduct a digital ethnography, a clear research pathway became obvious. As outlined in Chapter 3, I identified the PIP social media platform as a recruitment site, and engaged digital technology for qualitative interviews with *peregrinas* that revealed specific ways they were continuing to

experience pilgrimage by living as pilgrims in place and how these experiences were informed by the sacred feminine of the Camino de Santiago (or not), during the time of Covid-19.

In some ways, my hesitancy, and the delay to my fieldwork, became an advantage. For, while I delayed, PIP members were developing new ways of adapting their pilgrimage in ways that formed new and different meanings and relationships regarding the role of the Camino in their daily lives. The *peregrinas* in this research used periods of isolation to newly imagine shared and individualised ways to form and process deeply introspective pilgrimage. Adding to this, the interviews in this research provided evidence of how the PIP community was a vehicle for continuing pilgrimage in place.

At the same time, I worked through a real sense of disappointment about losing the opportunity to incorporate lived descriptions in this research, such as attending rituals taking place in ancient sacred sites that I experienced during previous Caminos. And yet it came to pass that the *peregrinas*' narratives provided their own richly descriptive accounts, shining through the data like those stained-glass windows I had become obsessed with at art school, and came to love even more on the Camino.

Conversely, had I been able to travel to Spain for fieldwork, I wonder how I would have managed to interview pilgrims once I was there. For instance, pilgrims have typically walked for five to six hours, and they are tired by day's end. Would they have had the energy to provide me with such in-depth discussions on their pilgrimage experiences? Likely not. Pilgrims also spend just one night in each *albergue*, and my opportunities to build a rapport with them would have been slim. I had planned to mitigate this by including interviews with hostel managers and other Camino service providers if it proved too difficult to capture enough pilgrims' interest 'on the fly', once I had arrived in the field, but they too have little spare time for interviews.

3. What methods would I change?

At times I wished I had realised the Covid-19 pandemic situation earlier and accepted the impossibility of doing actual fieldwork in Estella. Nevertheless, it is arguable that had I not waited, the *peregrinas* in this study would not have had the time to process their Camino experiences as deeply as they have. In fact, I managed to alleviate the

frustration and protracted nature of this research journey, which really riled me at times, by reflecting with deep gratitude on the fortitude of the *peregrinas* who participated in this research. Throughout, they have responded with depth and intimacy, and demonstrated the courage to enact pilgrimage in their lives in ways that benefit not only themselves but others in precarious times.

Moreover, the *peregrinas* in the study have accompanied me during the writing-up process of this thesis, encouraging me with emails and occasional friendship-based Zoom meetings. They also furnished me with extra photographs and narratives as our relationships strengthened and developed trust, across the time they took to reflect on transcripts and chapter drafts that I sent to them. This research has grown into so much more than one digital interview, and what I feared might result in less-personal fieldwork than travelling to the physical Camino might provide, has turned into quite the opposite.

I continued to walk the Camino both physically and imaginatively, processing and changing my analytical approach as time and data provided me with new ways of understanding how *peregrinas* in this study see and be in the world, living pilgrimage in place. I also enrolled in a creative writing course while waiting for travel restrictions to ease, and I wrote this poem based on my encounter with Nuestra Señora de Eunate.

Mother Way

Fealty, still voice, open heart, submit unto thee.

Unto whom, strong men?

Unto myself, healing hold

here with women in the right hemisphere

on the left-hand side of the altar.

Crescent moon, circlet of stars, crimson robe

liminal mother, strengthen still

Queen of Heaven, Queen of Earth,

strong men's

mere housewife,

sheltering hearth,

mere receptacle.

Emulate that or connect with her stars, adopt the circlet.

You can't have it all.

You feel too much,

lies

left-field swoops, body-blow grief, love, mystical salves,

detour mapping, not only me,

above as below,

Intercessor's circle, ground, and cosmos,

never alone.

4. What trusting the Way achieved

I now move onto the three major themes and conclusions I have drawn beneath the mantle of feminine divine as an organising principle in this research. Throughout this work, the findings are organised into three themes that form the ethnographic chapters in this thesis.

Initial Encounters

The semi-structured nature of the interviews reveals not only what was significant and deeply meaningful to the *peregrinas* in this study, but also exactly how they defined and regarded ‘feminine divine’ as a term of engagement. The accounts in this section incorporate the impact of public visibility of women on the Camino and more broadly in society. They also included nature-based and Pagan interpretations of Marian symbolism that do not occlude or contest the masculine symbolism of Saint James. For some *peregrinas*, the feminine divine was understood as an omnipresence, while other *peregrinas* preferred to nominate ‘Camino energy’ as their significant encounter. The commonalities in this section provide evidence of a multi-perspectival sampling from *peregrinas* whose narratives suggest an outward-focused and inclusive desire to embrace the wider community of pilgrims, irrespective of how they self-identify – religiously or otherwise.

The Constant Peregrina

I imagined this work would require context for living pilgrimage in place, but I was surprised when this presented as a major theme within the data, as it revealed no direct reference to feminine divine notions on the Camino. As such, it warranted an entire chapter to examine how six *peregrinas* understood and created ways to continue their pilgrimage experiences under the cloak of the Covid-19 pandemic. These findings revealed circuitous and non-linear approaches to pilgrimage, and they outline the significance of PIP community membership and the ways in which this informed the concept of walking virtual pilgrimages to Santiago de Compostela.

The Material Peregrina

This chapter evidences how *peregrinas* used material means and fashioned creative rituals to continue pilgrimage experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic. Unlike the previous chapter, Chapter 6 provides evidence of myriad and explicit ways that the

feminine divine informed pilgrimage practice for *peregrinas*. The findings were organised around the linkage between Santiago de Compostela and the *peregrinas*' home environments, as well as featuring notions of identity and belonging tethered to the use of 'Camino energy' discourse and material usage of home altars, prayer gardens, labyrinths, artworks, and jewellery. These things informed the study of what *peregrinas* use to live everyday life as pilgrims in place.

Taken together, these findings provide evidence of forms of pilgrimage that occurred during the difficulty of pandemic-imposed curtailments, while at the same time revealing how isolation afforded the *peregrinas* in this study time to expand, reimagine, and create emerging forms of pilgrimage that corresponded to broad experiences within the PIP community, which curates a sense of imagined belonging to place that pilgrims can take home wherever they live and within themselves.

5. Incorporating herstory, multiplicities, and paradox into scholarship on the Saint James Way

This study reveals the discomfort that some *peregrinas* feel with the binary discourse and gendered constructs connoted by feminine (or masculine) divine language to describe aspects of humanity. And, at the same time, it has incorporated evidence of ways harmful and institutionalised patriarchal oppression has had an impact upon *peregrinas*.

This study's exploration of feminine divine notions of pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago has suggested ways in which exploring the Camino's many iterations of the sacred feminine can expand conversations on patriarchy, gender, and binary constructs within pilgrimage – and wider society. It remains my hope this research has gone some way to filling a gap in scholarly research on the Camino de Santiago.

Such hope contains the paradox of using 'feminine divine' as an organising principle to achieve its findings. For now, it is past time Her story – 'herstory' – is incorporated into studies on the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage, the second-most popular pilgrimage route on the planet, to help address systemic changes that have privileged a dominant narrative over other expressions of being human. May the scholarly and popular conversations towards this end continue and be encouraged by

the narratives the *peregrinas* have offered in this work, such as sacred feminine understandings that embrace simplicity with depth.



Figure 28: Mary Magdalene, Via Podiensis route, 2019. Image author's own.

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Appendix 1

Let Her Be: Exploring Ways Pilgrims Continue to Hold Space for Divine Feminine Sites along El Camino de Santiago during the Time of Covid

Information and Invitation

My name is Catherine Davis, I'm a member of the Pilgrimage-In-Place community,¹ who is also a student conducting research as part of the requirement for the completion of a Master of Arts in Social Anthropology, at Massey University.

The project:

During the pandemic, like many of you, I had hoped to pick up the trail to Santiago de Compostela where I left it in Cahors, back in 2019. This was my second pilgrimage, the first occurred in 2012 when I walked the Camino Frances to Finisterre. Instead of completing the Via Podiensis, the isolation of being 'stuck' in place and trawling Camino forums led me to make the liberating discovery of PIP. Since then, my involvement in this community has revealed numerous ways members are continuing their pilgrimage by undertaking diverse inner/outer journeys from their home [in place], during the pandemic.

To better understand how and why pilgrims are doing so, this research will focus specifically on exploring and testing ways pilgrims use sites **that are special to them**, in a divine feminine sense to navigate and engender their everyday lives at this time, with a potent sense of pilgrimage as continuum. This exploration will contribute to scholarly work and broadening understandings about the significance of Divine Feminine sites along the Camino.

The invitation:

I warmly invite you as a fellow member of PIP, to walk with me on this research journey:

To begin, I invite you to meet informally with me and any other members from PIP who share an interest in this research. I will organize this meeting in the PIP pilgrim table tradition, and the meeting will be unrecorded. Here you can get to know me and my research plans better, and ask me any questions before deciding whether or not to be part of the project. This group meeting will be about one hour long. [Alternatively you can meet with just me if you prefer this to a group setting.]

Participants will be recruited for one-on-one informal interviews following this/these meetings. I will conduct and record all interviews myself, asking for your stories, explanations, and experiences of Divine Feminine sites that *are significant to you*, and why/how you continue to hold these close to you during this time of Covid. Interviews will be about one hour long. I will also request a follow up interview.

Use of the information:

I will analyze transcribed interview material and my findings will be disseminated as a Master's thesis, publicly available through Massey Library. Beyond this, there is potential to develop this work further in possible academic journal articles and presentations. Results of the study will be available to everyone who participates in the research.

The information that you provide will be confidential and anonymous:

Any information you provide will be confidential to me as the researcher. Following standard practice. I will keep audio-recordings and transcriptions in a safe and secure place. I will not use real names of participants in any publications or presentations unless you expressly given permission to do so.

Your rights as a potential participant in this research:

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you do decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study at any time;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name and image will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- request your interview transcripts to review and edit;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

You also have the right to ask me switch off audio recording at any time.

You can email me Catherine.Davis.1@uni.massey.ac.nz to register for the preliminary meeting, after which I will organise signed consent forms for your recruitment as/if you wish to join the project.

Thank you very much for your consideration and interest in this research project. I look forward to hearing from you.

Warmly,

Catherine Davis

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher, please contact my Supervisors for this Project:

Associate Professor Robyn Andrews, R.Andrews@massey.ac.nz, +64 6 3569099 extn.83653

Dr Amy Whitehead, A.R.Whitehead@massey.ac.nz, +64 9 4140800 extn 43846

Ethics Statement:

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named in this document are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other than the researcher (s), please contact Professor Craig Johnson, Director (Research Ethics), email humanethics@massey.ac.nz

¹ Pilgrimage in Place – (abbreviated to PIP)