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# **Liminality as a Space of Self Reflection on El Camino de Santiago del Norte**

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at  
Syracuse University

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Honors Capstone Project in Anthropology

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**Abstract:**

As ancient pilgrimage across Spain, El Camino de Santiago has affected the lives of the pilgrims that travel it for centuries taking on new meanings as it passes through time. Traditionally, scholars maintain that the focus of a pilgrim's journey lies at the final destination, or pilgrimage center in Santiago de Compostela. This project demonstrates, however, that the emphasis should lie on the journey or period of liminality which through concepts of place has created a space for self-reflection and meditation. Analysis of pilgrim interviews within the context of a wide array of scholarly literature in the disciplines of anthropology, religion, and philosophy, demonstrates how walking as a mode of transportation between places creates this unique liminality in our busy world.

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**Introduction:**

One brilliantly sunny afternoon, the Camino provided a picturesque beach setting for a few kilometers to walk down in which I took the opportunity to take off my boots and allow the soft sand to exfoliate my tired, sore feet. Sitting down to eat lunch on a large piece of driftwood on the edge of the beach right outside of a small town called, Noja, I reached into my backpack for food and noticed my scallop shell no longer hung there, only a broken piece of red string remained.

Following the story of St. James, while one hikes across Spain on El Camino de Santiago, pilgrims wear a scallop shell around their neck or on their backpack to denote that they are pilgrims. As I searched around the immediate area looking for it, a British pilgrim couple whom I had met and walked with a bit in the past few days came and ate lunch with me. Defeated from not finding the shell that I brought from Puget Sound in Washington State, I began to eat when a beautiful orange and black butterfly came and landed in the sand near us.

“Look at the colors on that butterfly!” I exclaimed.

The woman, British Pilgrim, smiled and told me on their way there, they found a hurt butterfly who was stuck on his back in the sand. Her husband, John, picked it up and moved the butterfly up, away from the small, crashing waves to a rock. She directed him to put it on another rock with a bit of shade by some reeds so it would not fry in the direct sunlight beating down upon it. When he looked

down in the sand next to that particular rock, he saw a shell that he thought ought to belong to a pilgrim and decided to hold onto it for a bit.

“You wouldn’t happen to be missing your shell, would you?” he asked curiously, looking over at me.

Overcome with joy, I explained that I had lost it recently. He pulled it out and it was, in fact, my shell. Then I stopped and thought about the events that led to its recovery. He picked up *one shell* on a beach that spanned a few kilometers because of a *butterfly*, my shell laid near a *specific rock* and I commented on another *butterfly* which led to the return of a *particular shell*.

This story does not have a unique character on the Camino. Many a time, pilgrims find themselves in situations with extraordinary coincidences bringing certain people together at certain times. It happens so much that a name has formed for them, “Camino Stories.”



\* \* \* \* \*

Walking on El Camino de Santiago for the second time, I interviewed seventeen pilgrims about their experiences regarding places along the entire route and their feelings toward them. The pilgrims with whom I spoke ranged in nationality, age, gender, points of view, and religious and spiritual belief, but were all hiking the same path. Some hiked the entire route from end to end, others hiked a large section of it which constituted several hundred kilometers. These interviews took place on various parts of the Camino because I, too, walked and stayed in constant motion with the pilgrims. I took 29 days to walk from Irún to Santiago de Compostela and three days more to hike to Muxía, a small town on the Atlantic Ocean which most people see as an extension to the Camino, but also

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<sup>1</sup> Personal photo. This sign demonstrates how the symbol of the scallop shell permeates all aspects of the Camino. Not only does a pilgrim wear one on their backpack, but it also guides the pilgrim in the direction of the route.

has great historical significance. This journey of 922 kilometers took place on El Camino de Santiago del Norte between the 11th of May to the 11th of June 2009.

With the information gathered from the pilgrim interviews, I intend to examine the ancient Spanish pilgrimage as a journey of meditation and self-reflection within the anthropological paradigm of a rite of passage. However, unlike Victor Turner and Arnold Van Gennep who have the leading theoretical knowledge on pilgrimage and rites of passage, the emphasis in this study focuses on the liminal stage, or the actual time spent walking from place to place rather than the destination and reintegration point. The fundamental act of walking provides the pilgrim with a space normally not available to get away from everyday life, to think, to clear the mind, and to explore one's sense of self in a different context. In this, the destination, or reintegration point, becomes less prominent and brings interactions with fellow pilgrims and the places in which they occur to the forefront.

Turner examined pilgrimage as a rite of passage which followed three phases developed by Van Gennep in which a person moves; it begins with (1) a separation from the norms of everyday life to (2) a liminal phase in which the person undergoes a process of transformation until (3) the person reincorporates back into their everyday life with a changed status. A well-known theoretical, cultural anthropologist, Victor Turner has advanced anthropology and holds the leading views and basis for interpretation in the study of pilgrimage. A British



anthropologist, Turner has published a plethora of ethnographies on pilgrimage and other symbolic theoretical frameworks not only on pilgrimage but on *communitas* and anti-structure. In terms of pilgrimage, used for this project, Turner is disinclined to describe smaller places or often shrines along the pilgrim routes, and says that they do have some importance, but they really only exist to construct a feeling of religious fervor “so that the final ingress to the holiest shrine of all will be for each pilgrim a momentous matter” (Turner, 1978: 23). Turner refers to the holiest shrine at the end a “pilgrimage center” and

from the standpoint of the believing actor, [it] also represents a ‘threshold,’ a place and moment ‘in and out of time,’ and such an actor...hopes to have the direct experience of the sacred, invisible, or supernatural order either in the material aspect of miraculous healing or in the immaterial aspect of inward transformation of spirit or personality (Turner, 1973:214).

Here, all of the focus rests on the end point of the journey; while the journey has significance, the highest importance remains in the final shrine, in this case, in the cathedral in Santiago de Compostela. This change represents the reincorporation because the pilgrim no longer travels by foot, dirty, hungry, and possibly escaping dangers, but enters the cathedral for mass as churchgoing people often do and gets recognized for his or her accomplishment, reentering the person into society with a changed status. This analysis remains true to the traditional inclination and

purpose of a pilgrimage: for religion, specifically Catholicism in terms of El Camino de Santiago. The route itself does not hold value for religion until the end point is reached by the pilgrim, according to Turner because when the pilgrim reaches “the ‘holy of holies,’ the central shrine, the route becomes increasingly sacralized” because the “many long miles he covers are mainly secular” (Turner, 1973:214) and therefore without much meaning.

It is clear that Turner writes of pilgrimage only in the original and traditional sense: that of religion. El Camino de Santiago has deeply Catholic roots in the Middle Ages, but not all modern pilgrims hold the same motives for walking the path they did one thousand years ago. Some identify with Catholicism, some with Protestantism, some identify a sense of spirituality but not religion, and others identify with neither religion nor spirituality. Turner argues in the early 1970’s that pilgrimage “offers liberation from profane social structures that are symbiotic with a specific religious system, but they do this only in order to intensify the pilgrims attachment to his own religion” (Turner, 1978: 9). I am not arguing that El Camino de Santiago has lost all of its religious intentions, but the pilgrims with whom I spoke emphasize different perspectives than those in the Middle Ages at the founding of the Camino.

Based on data from my interviews, I agree with Van Gennep’s three stages, however, I claim that the second phase, in which a person transforms, creates an environment conducive to extensive self-reflection that matters more

than the final reincorporation. This can occur because El Camino de Santiago has become increasingly open to other religions or to people with no religion and therefore can lessen the impact of the cathedral destination. Pilgrims site other reasons to start a pilgrimage that have changed the focus slightly, and because of this shift they have found a space for self-reflection to gain the inner transformation in a different way. Reliance on the places which pilgrims walk through have an integral part in the space of liminality and the opening of the Camino to many more people in this modern age of the twenty-first century.

Turner also does not acknowledge this paradigm shift in religiosity on El Camino de Santiago. The pilgrimage has opened to accept pilgrims who do not consider themselves religiously inclined or who participate in religious practices other than Catholicism. Some scholars may construe this as secularization, but it represents a mixture of pilgrim religious or nonreligious viewpoints creating this new space of self-reflection as explored by R. Raj and N.D. Morpeth, two Senior Lecturers for the UK center for Events and Tourism Management as well as Leeds Metropolitan University. In the book they edited, they explore the differences between pilgrimage and religious tourism.

This shift also brings the topic of motivation to the forefront where Maslow's psychological theory of the hierarchy of needs demonstrates what the pilgrims seek to gain from their pilgrimage experience. His theory applied to the

liminal stage of pilgrimage provides a compelling way of understanding the moving process of meditation that walking from place to place provides.

These “smaller” places that the traditional literature on pilgrimage, especially the work of Turner, do not always emphasize as highly important take on added importance because the pilgrims come to embody these places and the pilgrims and the places thereby become intertwined in a cycle of constant metamorphosis. Edward S. Casey, a current professor at Stony Brook University in the Department of Philosophy, has produced an essay very valuable to this project in which he provides the analysis of place and space.<sup>2</sup> Casey notes that since the human body can act as a receptor whereby “perceiving bodies are *knowing bodies*, and inseparable from what they know is culture as it imbues and shapes particular places” (Casey, 1996: 34) pilgrims can sense certain energies in places as they move between them on their journey because “part of the power of place, its very dynamism, is found in its encouragement of motion in its midst” (Casey, 1996: 23). One essential part of pilgrimage is the motion involved in walking and the motion of traveling constantly from town to town along a specific route in which others have travelled before them. Staying in one place for more than one night is generally discouraged by other pilgrims with the exceptions of sickness or incredibly horrible blisters, providing an incentive to continue walking.

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<sup>2</sup> He has also worked in psychoanalytic theory and produced several books and other articles on the philosophy of place (Stony Brook University).

The history of El Camino de Santiago, the creation of the cathedral in Santiago de Compostela, and the perceived sense of ancientness has a profound effect upon the reasons for beginning a pilgrimage as well as the time spent walking. According to the story of St. James, he traveled to Spain to spread Christianity but Herod Agrippa killed him in AD 44 and not long after, some followers took his body and set it to sea where it came to Galicia (Davies and Cole, 2006: 2). Locals buried him and his location was forgotten until the AD 800s when only small communities of Christianity survived under Muslim rule (Davies and Cole, 2006: 2). The Moors had control of the majority of the Iberian Peninsula including parts of modern day France and the Catholic forces tried to push them back to Africa.

As the story goes, Don Ramiro I and a small group of Christian warriors were in danger of defeat by a stronger Moslem force at Clavijo in 844.

The battle turned in their favor when a knight, mounted on a great horse appeared on the field and began to push the Moors back...it was assumed that the unknown champion was none other than Saint James whose relics had been discovered a few years earlier (Nolan & Nolan, 1989: 276).

The location of St. James' bones embodied the Saint to that place making it holy and hereby bringing divinity down to earth where it can use the form of a body in shaping place. This story gained power when the Catholics used the image of St.

James to rally troops against the Moors and more importantly, to create a pilgrimage which would effectively bring a steady wave of Catholics into northern Spain recolonizing and Christianizing it (Nolan & Nolan, 1989: 107).

The pilgrimage also linked the Iberian Peninsula back to the rest of Western Europe culturally and commercially (Raj & Morpeth, 2007: 157). St. James as “matamoros” represents one image of him killing the Moors on his horse, while the other image depicts a pilgrim carrying a staff, gourd, and a *scallop shell* walking peacefully (Nolan & Nolan, 1989: 187). Because pilgrimage changes dynamically with economic circumstances, political shifts, and new waves of people, during the Renaissance pilgrimages became more about an individual’s interactions with the embodiment of divinity (Nolan & Nolan, 1989: 97). This has morphed into a resurgence in modern times because “the idea of place sanctity reaching back through millennia to times before Christianity spread throughout Europe has popular appeal” (Nolan & Nolan, 1989: 301).<sup>3</sup> It has also sparked the idea that people need to step outside of urban life and enter nature (Nolan & Nolan, 1989: 303), which would allow them time and space to reflect, which comes together in places along the route. Not only a voluntary route, “in the High Middle Ages, especially when the Church became strongly structured, pilgrimage was incorporated into its penitential system, and was even prescribed

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<sup>3</sup> Such an example would include the plethora of books and travel diaries published within the last fifteen to twenty years including a very famous book by a German comedian which has created a large surge in the number of German pilgrims, Hape Kerkeling’s *I’m off then: Losing and Finding Myself on the Camino de Santiago*.

as punishment for secular crimes” (Turner, 1978:232) whereby the Church meant to reform their minds to prevent their committing future crimes as well as to give the criminals a strong push toward becoming more religious.

Since the reconquest of Spain, eight routes stretch from various parts of Spain to the city of Santiago de Compostela and the cathedral: El Camino Francés, El Camino del Norte, El Camino Aragonés, El Camino Primitivo, El Camino Vasco, El Camino Sandbars, El Camino Portugués, El Camino de Madrid, and La Via de la Plata. From Santiago de Compostela, a smaller route exists that continues west out of the city to the Sea for three more days of walking of 90 kilometers where the last day has a split to go to Fisterra or Muxía, two towns on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean (Eroski). The oldest, most traditional route is El Camino Francés, but the other routes have steadily grown, especially in the twentieth century. Four routes also run through France and converge in St. Jean Pied de Port, the beginning town on the Camino Francés. For this project, I do not use them because my focus remains on those routes specifically in Spain. The popular idea of starting the pilgrimage within Europe is that one begins their pilgrimage on the doorstep of their home and walks to the closest route to Santiago de Compostela. Now, most pilgrims travel by way of plane, car, bus, or train to the “beginning” town along the route they wish to walk. The map below depicts the basic outlines of all the different Caminos de Santiago within Spain.



Like the variety of routes, a variety of pilgrim nationalities exist. Pilgrims come from all over the world and speak many different languages. I conducted fifteen of the interviews in English, but two were conducted in Spanish. Of the interviews in English, only four interviewees were native English speakers. I did not correct the grammar of the non-English speakers because I believe that it adds to the multi-lingual atmosphere of the Camino de Santiago in which pilgrims interact with each other. I, like many other pilgrims, found many ways to communicate with others. Sometimes a common language existed, other times it did not. At different times of interaction, it is not uncommon to hear one person speaking Italian slowly and another speaking Spanish slowly. Accompanied by a

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<sup>4</sup> Map from: <http://peregrinacompostelana.blogspot.com>



handful of gestures, the two people managed some form of communication.

Separated by nationality, I interviewed nine Germans, two Spaniards, two Englishmen, one Irishman, one Dutchman, one Swede, and one Frenchman for this project.

## **El Camino del Norte vs. El Camino Francés**

Alex: “It was first, that I wanted to walk the seaside and I heard that the Camino Francés is quite overcrowded and that’s why I chose this one, because I wanted to be alone, try to be alone to try to find myself or to be with myself.” (interview, May 21, 2009)

A delicate balance exists in generating the space provided by a pilgrimage such as El Camino de Santiago in which one steps away from the normal world and enters a new, liminal world. The liminal world of pilgrimage should have enough pilgrims that interactions and conversations occur, but not so many that it becomes overcrowded and the pilgrims cannot find the space to reflect. The ability to find this space of self-reflection is essential to pilgrimage today where the mode of walking creates the meditative manner of the experience that relies less on religion. For this reason, many of the pilgrims that I interviewed decided to hike El Camino de Santiago del Norte, a relatively popular alternative to the main route, El Camino Francés.

In the interviews, I specifically asked why the pilgrims chose the alternative route because from my personal experience, I know that the Camino Francés is overcrowded. I remember waking up at 4 o’clock in the morning to try to beat some of the Spanish heat, but also to get a space in an albergue, or pilgrim hostel. Several times, I would come to an albergue as early as three or four p.m. in the afternoon and a one hundred bed albergue would not have any spots left. At that point, a pilgrim has the option of walking to the next albergue, often

several kilometers further, or getting a more expensive hotel room in which they would separate themselves from other pilgrims for the night.

Out of the seventeen pilgrims I interviewed, eleven of them had already hiked El Camino Francés. Two main reasons surfaced as to the reason these people chose El Camino del Norte, besides the different landscape, over the main route: that the Camino Francés was overcrowded and/or they had completed the Camino Francés and wanted to hike a different route. The six pilgrims who chose to hike El Camino del Norte for their first Camino all said that they had heard about the overcrowding and did not want to walk under those conditions.

Because many pilgrims now use the pilgrimage as a string of places to self-reflect and allow themselves a time with much less stress than the everyday world, the overcrowded Camino Francés presents a paradox in that the pilgrimage should not have high stress levels, but the amount of people creates the same stress in a different setting. If one has to wake up at four a.m. to walk more quickly to the day's end point, it decreases the effectiveness of walking as a form of self-reflection and meditation because "slowing down denotes the practice of moving with care and deliberation through the day to minimize the stress caused by hurry and time pressures" (Flinders, 2010:42). This marks the movement of people from the traditional route to an alternate as well as the movement away, but not totally separate, from the religious intentions of the pilgrimage.

In daily life outside of the Camino, getting less sleep can exacerbate stress in one's life and Pablo tells that he

[C]hose El Camino de Santiago del Norte because I heard that Camino Francés is very crowded, a lot a people walk the Camino Francés and you have to wake up very early. That's a problem for me because I sleep often very long and um yeah, that's why I'm on this one, there are not too much peoples and a lot of possibilities to sleep (interview, June 5, 2009).

Pablo told me that many times he would not even wake up until nine or ten in the morning, then have a relaxing breakfast and begin walking. This contrasts with the four a.m. wake up on the Camino Francés where many people skip breakfast or have to walk up to six kilometers before eating in the morning because they want to walk before the small bars open in order to get a bed that night. Lovisa echoed Pablo's thoughts saying, "I heard that on the Camino Francés there are so many people you have to get up like 5 o'clock to get a place in the albergue and I'm really tired in the mornings plus I didn't feel like walking with the whole wide world, so I chose this one" (interview, May 25, 2009). Lovisa describes her journey as a relaxing, slow paced walk in which she wakes up around ten a.m. and walks

[M]aybe like 8 kilometers or 5 and I sit down. Well, I stop a lot to take photos or say hello to all the animals along the way. Yeah, and then I

have a drink somewhere along the way, maybe half way, and something to eat, maybe tortilla. Lot of tortilla. And then I continue walking and well, when I get to where I'm planning to stay, well most of the days I went out to dinner (interview, May 25th, 2009).

Lovisa consciously practices this walk of mindfulness which "is about trusting that you are already where you need to be, and you are already the way you need to be" (Jazaieri 2010:17-18) because she chose the route with less people so she could walk in peaceful relaxation.

### **A note on Landscape**

“I am a friend of nature and all my power, I get from nature, my whole life”  
-Wulf (interview, June 4, 2009)

Many pilgrims cite the landscape of the Camino as an important factor in their decision to choose El Camino de Santiago del Norte. The landscape covered by mountains next to the sea with lovely beaches brings to mind warm, positive feelings. Approaching a map and seeing that the route contains these features demonstrates a sense of geography, but until they begin walking, the pilgrims do not experience the landscape because “we are in a landscape only by grace of bodily being there” (Casey, 1996: 49n24).

Landscape represents a specific type of place in which pilgrims pass through on their journey. Noted places, which pilgrims identify as landscapes associated with El Camino del Norte include, “cliffs and beaches” (interview, Alex, May 21, 2009), “the coast” (interview, Denise, June 4, 2009), “the sea” (interview, Young Man, June 1, 2009), and the “mountains” (interview, Martin, June 5, 2009). Many pilgrims expressed awe and enjoyment when speaking about the views or glimpses of the sea that they got that day or other days. It brought a smile to all of their faces as they thought back on what they were thinking as they came upon a particular landscape and their interactions with that particular place. Throughout the journey, pilgrims experience these places and discover what is “intrinsic to the holding operation of place [which] is *keeping*”

whereby the “places gather things in their midst...experiences and histories”

(Casey: 1996: 25). These places gather pilgrims and represent arenas for thought and self-reflection.

Chosen for its positive connotations and relaxing qualities, the landscape of the sea to the right and the mountains to the left as one walks west creates a space conducive to mindful thinking. It also provides a sense of direction where one walks west giving the pilgrim control of their lives. One could argue that pilgrimage fits directly into what the “major religions and spiritual traditions have developed [as] specific principles and techniques to help their members assimilate contemplative perspectives and behaviors aimed at fostering a fuller experience of wisdom, wholeness, and enlightenment” (Plante, 2010: 2). The landscape sets the tone on which meditation and self-reflection can occur.

Here are examples of landscapes mentioned as important factors in the experience of El Camino del Norte:



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<sup>5</sup> This personal photo is a view taken from the albergue in Zumaya. It depicts the view of the sea that many pilgrims cite as a reason to walk this particular camino.

<sup>6</sup> Another personal photo taken to depict one of many beaches that the Camino del Norte passes through and many pilgrims enjoy.





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<sup>7</sup> A personal photo taken to show the “green tunnel” aspect where one can walk breathing fresh air and follow the yellow flechas, or arrows that mark the way along with scallop shells.

## **The Clearing of the Mind**

“That’s it, that’s a good way for me to get distance from the normal life or the life in Western Europe.”

-Alex (interview, May 21, 2009)

“My aim is to get clear with my life, because I am a police man and I’m working with junkies all day and, umm, so you must have some time to get clear in your head, in your mind, so I use this way for this.”

-Wulf (interview, June 4, 2009)

Many pilgrims find that having the ability and space to clear one’s mind is a very important element in deciding to hike El Camino de Santiago, so important that it can constitute one of the primary motivations for going. The idea of separating oneself for a given amount of time from the “real world” of work, university, family, friends, and obligations, to travel an ancient pilgrimage route in which a variety of hardships will occur. Ancient pilgrims faced threats from wolves and bandits (Davis and Cole, 2006: 3), while modern pilgrims face food poisoning, aching bodies, and nasty foot blisters.

In leaving their normal lives and entering into the world of pilgrimage, the pilgrims have entered the first of van Gennep’s stages: separation. The pilgrims physically leave their social environments to enter a space outside of their normal lives. Televisions, computers, a plethora of clothing, kitchen appliances, and vehicles stay behind. Here, no one connects to the internet and has 24/7 news access to the events taking place on the other side of the world nor do they spend

their free time shopping on Amazon or searching for a job on craigslist. All the pilgrims carry with them fits into a backpack and they feel the weight of their possessions on their bodies. No large suitcases, no laptop computers, no one to drive things around, just what comes by the pilgrim's own means. Physically, mentally, and socially the pilgrims become separated from normalcy.

Our world is filled with stress - get coffee, start work at 8am, lunch meeting at 12pm, executive meeting at 3pm, kick boxing class at 5pm, dinner date at 7pm, television program at 10pm or class schedules which involve going to class at 10am, having a ten minute lunch break while running to the next class, meet with a professor, go to a part time job, etc.. Then no one can forget about paying the rent, paying off the student loans, the grocery bill, the car insurance, filling up the gas tank, and the list stretches out endlessly. Many people do not even have time for stress relieving activities such as mindfulness, a technique which includes stopping everything for just a few minutes, listening to your breath, regulating it to a steady pace, and allowing things to happen naturally (Jazaieri and Shapiro, 2010: 18, 20). Lovisa describes a common thread in pilgrim thinking where,

the society we live in where people buy everything that they see and this, what matters is how much money you have or what you have in your house or which car you have and I think that was one of the reasons, I

wanted to escape that and live with the clothes in my small backpack (interview, May 25, 2009).

A clear mind can provide opportunities to reflect on what has happened recently or over the course of one's life. Away from the materialism described by Lovisa, Martin echoed a similar sentiment when he said, that he wanted "to become some steps away from my normal life" (interview, June 5, 2009). Pilgrims do not have large "to do" lists to get through and can have a more simple existence for the time being. Apart from all of the distractions, the Camino provides a string of places to think clearly while walking between them.

Expressed mostly by pilgrims under the age of 30 years old, but not limited to, is the possibility to reach an understanding of oneself as a person. Lovisa, 23, falls under this category when she says, "I've had this strong feeling that I have to do it...it's a way of getting to know myself better" (interview, May 25, 2009). She also said, "I have a lot of questions, but I don't even know the questions yet, and I think and am hoping that at the end of the Camino, I will have the answers to the questions that I have not figured out yet" (interview, May 25, 2009). Likewise, Martin, 28, expressed, "I hope for myself to think over myself to becoming sure of myself, of my life" (interview, June 5, 2009). Alex, 29, also spoke in similar terms, "I wanted...to try to find myself or to be with myself"

(interview, May 21, 2009). A British Pilgrim, reflecting on previous Caminos that she had completed, said it “taught me a lot about myself, that first route” (interview, May 17, 2009). Many a time in the real world, people become too busy to discover who they really are or want to be; pilgrims seek to live simply in order to have a space to discover, to learn, to become more open to all kinds of possibilities offered by the Camino.

In many cases, pilgrims described a life jolting event before they left for the Camino over which they needed time to reflect and acknowledge. A meaningful space and time to reflect on an unexpected or life-changing event often does not seem adequate when so many other things surround a person pulling them in several directions and separating their attention. Many pilgrims mentioned the death of someone dear to them where the experience of that person’s death affected them greatly and they did not find adequate time to reflect in their day-to-day lives. James mentions, “I came on it first because, when I started, it was three, four years after my late partner died and I think I was ready to do this thing and I started doing it in memory of her” (interview, May 15, 2009). A British Pilgrim tells of a similar experience saying, “Initially my motivation was because I wanted time away from family and work. My sister was very ill at the time and I wanted to be somewhere away where I had time to think about our lives together and um, just reflect on things in general” (interview,

May 17, 2009). Her sister did pass away, but the Camino provided an important space for her. A third woman, Denise walked with two close friends, one of whose grandmother has just died and while Denise can tell her friend feels sad she says, “I think it might help her to just to, yeah to be here and she doesn’t have to worry about anything, so she has her head free for that” (interview, June 4, 2009).

Other life jolting events have prompted reasons to go on a pilgrimage in order to clear the mind as well. Alex tells that the events that led him to the Camino were twofold, occurring very close together, “my crashed PhD project [chuckles] and the meeting with the wife of my best friend actually. Yes, and she told me about it and her experiences [on the Camino]” (interview, May 21, 2009). His life drastically changed when he no longer participated in a doctoral program and a conversation about El Camino de Santiago which pushed him to go on his own journey. Without knowing where to go next and the pressures of finding a job and paying rent hovered over him, he needed a space in which to think about his life and where he wanted to go next. In another case, a Young Man said, “I came to know that I have to go on the 1st of July to go to the army for nine months. It’s a rule in Germany, so, I said to myself, I have to do this Camino before” (interview, June 1, 2009). Before entering into the army, he had time to think and clear his mind in advance of this looming life-changing event. The

Camino provided the requisite space in which he could parse out what he found important and come to a new mindset that would fit with his next job. On a different note, Lovisa received news that she was accepted into a three year acting school program and had wanted to walk the Camino for three years already; she knew that if she did not hike the Camino now, she would have to wait another three years still (interview, May 25, 2009). Lovisa's life-changing event, unlike many, is positive, but before entering a dream opportunity, she wanted time to reflect on herself and the society in which she lives.

These pilgrims all see pilgrimage, specifically El Camino de Santiago, as a way to relieve stress and to think, especially those who faced a life jolting experience. Manuel and Stortz argue that pilgrimage "treats a specific form of stress, suffering, and it addresses three common characteristics of people facing loss: denial, isolation, and the need for control" (2010: 225). Pilgrims who find themselves in this situation take an active approach to alleviating the mental pressures plaguing their daily lives by employing the meditative use of pilgrimage as a journey of self-reflection. With many fewer possessions, they can more easily take control of their lives, their mind, and their bodies as they learn to live simply, thereby reducing stress. They will not face isolation because it is very likely that other pilgrims find themselves in a similar situation. Pilgrims move through a large process of self-reflection together. Also, a large part of creating

the space for meditation consists of the pilgrims giving up everything but the essential things that they carry on their backs, allowing them to open themselves to experience the movement between places on their journey and interactions with fellow pilgrims (Manuel and Stortz, 2010: 239).

Part of the new emphasis on the use of the Camino de Santiago as a mechanism to clear the mind and relieve stress comes from its increasing secularization. While the Camino still holds intrinsically religious values and traditions, it has become far more open to all religions or, the lack of religion. As Morpeth cites Eade, “pilgrimage routes are increasingly becoming secularized, with the explicit promotion of routes for tourism, leisure, and cultural engagement” (Eade as quoted in Morpeth, 2007: 156); as in the case of the Camino, as of 1987, the Council of Europe has placed it on the European Cultural Itinerary because of its long historical significance (Morpeth, 2007: 158).

Allowing the secular to mix with the sacred in a traditionally religious setting has encouraged those with other reasons to make a pilgrimage to Santiago, like clearing the mind through meditative methods, many of which derive from Eastern religions. However, Morpeth also cites Lane in saying that secularity also provides a “typology of trails linked to users seeking ‘escapism’, leisure...education, health and fitness...” (Lane as quoted in Morpeth, 2007: 155), which can become reasons for a simple vacation.



Turner does not account for any form of secularization of formal pilgrimage routes such as El Camino de Santiago. He starts to delve into the possibility, but then holds that the religious reasons stay the main motivation when he says that pilgrimage “offers liberation from profane social structures that are symbiotic with a specific religious system, but they do this only in order to intensify the pilgrims attachment to his own religion” (9). Some pilgrims do become intensely more religious, such as Hape Kerkling, the German Comedian who hiked and wrote a book on his experience which became the number one selling book in Germany for quite some time. In fact, many German pilgrims mentioned him in my interviews with them. However, many pilgrims may not come away more religious. Phil stated that he did not consider himself religious, he did not think he had any religious experiences at all, and he’s “not really interested in Santiago” (interview, May 23, 2009) yet this was his fourth time on the Camino. When asked whether he thought of himself as religious, Martin replied, “not really religious, I’m Protestant...in the beginning it was only the Catholic way, but I think it’s not a problem” (interview, June 5th, 2009) demonstrating that the Camino has opened itself to more than just Catholicism. When asked the same question, Pablo stated, “Yeah, no, I’m sorry, I don’t believe in god,” (interview, June 5, 2009) which shows a large secularization in that a disbelief in god can be accepted on a traditionally religious pilgrimage. Finally,

Eddy, who describes 'personal Caminos' as a necessary way of clearing the mind, depicts the reality of the lives of monks that he has met,

In the beginning of course it was religious, and it's still religious, but when you see that all the churches are closed, and that you have to pay to get in, emm, I've seen, I've been in two monasteries to sleep, one I fled away because I went down, because I said there in the monastery, I feel like that. And they're under, and in a normal life, I feel like life because it was like a relic, not something from this world anymore. In the second one, the link between the monastery life and the life we know, the link wasn't there. At 8, 8 and a quarter, you ask your dinner and its been, its that way, at 9, 9:30 and you're not always finished and there the monk stands and he closes the door and so we had to go over the wall to get in (interview, May 27, 2009).

The reality of Spanish life, even on the Camino, has a late dinner in which many restaurants will not even begin to take orders and serve food until 8 or 9 p.m.

which means dinner will also last for a minimum of an hour after that as well. He continues,

They were very friendly, but at 9:30, he stood there, he closed the door, and here we hadn't finished eating. So, I believe yeah, at 4 o'clock in the morning, they are praying and singing, but in relation with normal life, it

isn't there anymore. I ask myself more and more, before I have always been a religious person, but, what are they doing there that they even don't know what happens down under? Do they know what life is? They do their something, and when they don't know what life is, maybe they should come down to know what life is, I think they should do things better than they do now...I think the life of those monks, with all respect what they do, but they live on their own, on a library tower on everything they know, with all respect, I think they don't know what happens in the world. And they pray for their own goodness and for the goodness of the world perhaps, but they don't know the world anymore and that's, that's a problem. But they are monks, but even then when they live apart, totally apart, and they don't know what happens, really, then they live in a totally isolated, small world from which you must ask must they really longer exist? They may be very hard words, but what is the meaning of such a life? Is the world getting better from that? No, we had to climb the wall to get in (interview May 27, 2009).

That wall separates the monks and the religious tradition of the Camino from the outside reality of the rest of the world like it always did, but now, it also separates itself from the lives of the pilgrims. With these experiences, an attachment to an ancient tradition with which one can no longer identify seems stretched and secularized, at least to an extent. Fewer people than before would come away

from the experience profoundly more religious than when they started walking.

While Turner is correct in saying that, “pilgrimage provides a carefully structured, highly valued route to a liminal world where the ideal is felt to be real, where the tainted social persona may be cleansed and renewed” (Turner, 1978: 30), the pilgrim may be cleansed in a different manner than before by using the pilgrimage as a place to self-reflect.

### **Walking as Meditation**

“When I was, felt, for the first time that I am walking and that I am and that my body is here. When I felt my body while walking.”

-Alex (interview, May 21, 2009)

“[It’s] just getting the benefit of the walk, getting strength in your legs, fresh air in your lungs.”

-John (interview, May 17, 2009)

“If I walk from my house, a thousand kilometers to Berlin or what I do here, a thousand kilometers to Santiago, that’s not the same. And the thousand to Berlin or anywhere else, you can do that, just as some other walking, but the Camino de Santiago is different, it has another meaning, and then you see the people, also who aren’t very strong, that they can do more than they usually can, so they are stronger.”

-Eddy (interview, May 27, 2009)

Moving between places constitutes an essential and imperative part of making a pilgrimage whereby on El Camino de Santiago, most pilgrims travel by foot. Many pilgrims sense special energies in places that they pass through in the liminal stage of van Gennep’s three stages of a rite of passage. These places have a power that, “consists of gathering these lives and things, each with its own space and time, into one arena of common engagement” (Casey, 1996: 26). Pilgrims sense this power as an energy because as Steven Feld points out, “as place is sensed, senses are placed; as places make sense, senses make place” (Feld as quoted in Casey, 1996: 18). The ancient pilgrims have molded and shaped the places along the route and modern pilgrims sense those shapes and change them with their own presence. The act of walking and moving through places created

what van Gennep called a threshold which is “inextricably place-bound” (Casey, 1996: 40).

However, unlike traditional literature on power places, the Camino provides an interesting paradox. While the destination of Santiago de Compostela acts as a known power place, many of the places where pilgrims sense a special energy elsewhere remain very individual, they may depend on the weather, and they may depend on other pilgrims, people, or even solitude in the experience of finding the place. A large scope of small power places may exist for various pilgrims: a beach, a seaside view, the mountains soaring upward, Roman ruins<sup>8</sup>, a small church, the architecture of a particular building, a representation of St. James, and many others. Many pilgrims find that they feel specific energies surrounding a place when they hike alone and more in tune with their emotions, while others find them with a significant other or hiking partner. Sometimes while walking one passes a place where he or she feels an energy but a cold downpour prevents the pilgrim from stopping in order to not become cold and hypothermic. Or, on the other hand, the sun could scorch down on a




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<sup>8</sup> The associated personal photo depicts ancient Roman ruins encountered at the beginning of El Camino de Santiago de Norte, hidden and unused in the woods.

pilgrim's back and neck to the point of dehydration and she or he cannot afford to stop in the sun for long even if he or she feels a particular energy because she or he happens not to have much water.

El Camino de Santiago also provides the act of walking which makes it possible for the pilgrims to sense different energies in places that may seem small and insignificant to others or to Victor Turner who focuses on the destination as the source of power. Turner's emphasis on major shrines, such as that in Santiago de Compostela, rests upon "a magnetic effect on the whole communications and transportation system, charging with sacredness many of its features, and fostering the construction of sacred and secular edifices to serve the needs of the human stream passing through it" (Turner, 1978: 233-234). Moving away from the shrine and into the liminality of the pilgrimage, walking provides the space for self-reflection and meditation where "we are intentionally bringing awareness to each step we take" (Jazaieri and Shapiro, 2010: 24) and "through practicing walking mindfully, you are teaching yourself to walk through life more wakefully" (Jazaieri and Shapiro, 2010: 25) thus reducing the stress of the normal world. Thereby passing through places of energy by means of walking represents the figurative recharging of a person's internal batteries, diminishing the level of stress.

Walking on dirt paths through the woods, cart roads through farmlands, or steps which have been worn down in the middle over centuries makes it seem as a British Pilgrim said, "that you were walking the way that thousands of medieval

people had walked” (interview, May 17, 2009). It represents a feeling that other people have walked the same way and interacted with the same places. Many times one will walk on old Roman roads built centuries ago, some more intact than others. Those steps, often found near churches or very old towns, have the centers and the edges worn down in the stone where centuries of pilgrims have walked making it softer and smoother. Pilgrims sense that those places on the Camino have collected energies from the people that have passed through them all hiking in the same direction. Many pilgrims find strength that so many others have completed the same pilgrimage as they work their way across Spain.

Many times, when pilgrims feel a special energy, they take a break to soak it in because on the Camino, there is sometimes time to pause, weather providing.

Martin describes that his breaks usually last:

between one cigarette, so that’s around about 10 minutes to when it’s a really good place, for example a few days before I was sitting near a Middle Age bridge with really old trees and the light was shimmering through the leaves, it looked really good. I also thought a little energy was around, so I sit more, eat more, look more, and think more, so it was one and half hours (interview, June 5, 2009).

Martin found a place individually that spoke to him in some way intrinsically and he remembered this place very distinctly because it touched him in a way that he



found important in discussing his time on the Camino de Santiago. Turner would have overlooked this place that Martin described completely not only because this bridge is not the pilgrimage destination, but it has no extrinsic religious purpose. By stopping, enjoying the place, taking in its energy, giving some of his own energy, and mentioning this place to me in an interview proves its importance in his pilgrimage experience. This dynamism speaks to how places become created through people. The act of stopping created a bond or an interaction between him and the bridge: he took some energy so to speak from the bridge, but he also gave some back, changing it just slightly like others before him. Because he walked to this small place, his mind had opened to sensing the energy without the plague of normal daily obligations and mental pressures. This place would not have had the same effect if he drove there or if he had not struggled at least a little to get there. Driving or flying does not have the same therapeutic effect. He also feels a sense to walk primarily alone because as he notes:

sometimes I need the time to umm to see and feel the nature or the landscape around. That's why I'm making the Camino alone. Traveling together, you, you're a little in your own world—you're not open to the world, some things you don't see (interview, June 5, 2009).

Here, Martin has chosen to separate himself again to reflect upon his experiences on and before the Camino. He takes the individual route to sense power places of

his own that have an effect on him. However, he does enjoy interactions with pilgrims and locals because they represent an essential part of the atmosphere, “There were so many, many, many interesting places. Most of them, for me, the important thing was the good energy around, coming in, and if you could feel this good energy...people or places” (interview, June 5, 2009).

Phil gives a different perspective saying, “I wanna walk. I wanna get out there and do it, you know, there’s something in that, that really gives me, makes me want to do it, gives me energy” (interview, May 23, 2009). Phil experienced walking as a form of meditation, giving him energy from the simple act of moving whereby “empirical research suggests that mindfulness practice [such as walking] has numerous positive effects such as enhancing physical health, increasing spiritual and psychological well-being, and lowering stress” (Jazaieri and Shapiro, 2010: 31). Phil then goes further, describing the energy that the Camino gives him, “I’ve felt very high, naturally, just walking and seeing what I can see and feel what I’m feeling, and I can tell, its happened several times” (interview, May 23, 2009). These smaller instances where he feels a moving energy displace the emphasis on Santiago de Compostela as a power giving situation. Having walked several Caminos, Phil says, “I’m not really interested in Santiago... You know, the cathedral, I visited it once, and the last two times I went there...I didn’t even go in. I didn’t even bother getting my thing, you know,

my certificate” (interview, May 23, 2009). The journey empowered Phil, not the destination. Moreover, Turner presents the walking portion of the pilgrimage in the liminal stage as a large struggle in which one must fear bandits, thieves, robbers and wolves and pays very little, if any, attention to the joys of walking, of physical exercise and its effects on the psyche -- instead, in Turner’s words, one is “betwixt” (1978:2).

Cocuo Visi expresses that, “It [the mountains] gives me a different energy. I feel very good in the mountains” (interview translated by author, May 18, 2009). When speaking of El Camino de Santiago del Norte which has a more mountainous landscape than the traditional Camino Francés, she continues saying, “this is the Camino for me, this, freedom. It means freedom. The mountains mean freedom and it gives you energy” (interview translated by author, May 18, 2009). Mountains or views of mountains represent this special place for her where she finds a comfortable space to reflect away from the normal restrictions of daily life. The places which she senses include the mountains -- not the destination of Santiago de Compostela nor places typically falling under a religious domain such as a church as mentioned by Victor Turner.

The types of energy held by the places along the Camino can also inspire. After pausing to think about which places that he favored thus far, Pablo, a musician replied, “I think for me it’s more the atmosphere. I like different

atmospheres because I try to compose music from the atmosphere and on the Camino very different atmosphere, close to the sea it's very interesting" (interview, June 5, 2009). Pablo senses the energy, or as he terms it, atmosphere, with his ears. By composing music according to the atmospheres he discovers in places along the route and interacts with that place as he locates it. Taking a bit of the energy in the form of music he imprints his own experiences on places. He later describes that "before the Camino I lost some inspirations and now on the Camino I have some new ones in my head and I hope I can use these scenes and write some new songs" (interview, June 5, 2009). Like Martin, Pablo noted that he liked to take breaks from walking in beautiful places, which could also include large towns whereby he stated, "the atmosphere in San Sebastian was beautiful for me. The atmosphere in Santander was terrible for me" because "the speed of the city was too much for me" (interview, June 5th, 2009). He also mentioned one place that had inspired him recently before the interview although he did not remember where along the Camino;

"I don't know where it was, it was important. I think it was about 50 kilometers after Santander. Big building, it was two tubes in the air and it was a very strange atmosphere because umm of the difference between these industrial buildings and the nature around the building. That's yeah, that was interesting" (interview, June 5, 2009).

When most people think of the Camino, they do not think of finding inspiration, a good atmosphere, nor any kind of enlightenment, religious or not, in an industrial center. Walking alone, Pablo came upon this particular place and saw something different, something individual that probably meant nothing to other people, but he sensed it and it imprinted his memory. Like the bridge that Martin took a break at, Pablo found this place to have the atmosphere that he sought because he walked there which provided him with the frame of mind to become a receptor of energy.

## Discovering Needs

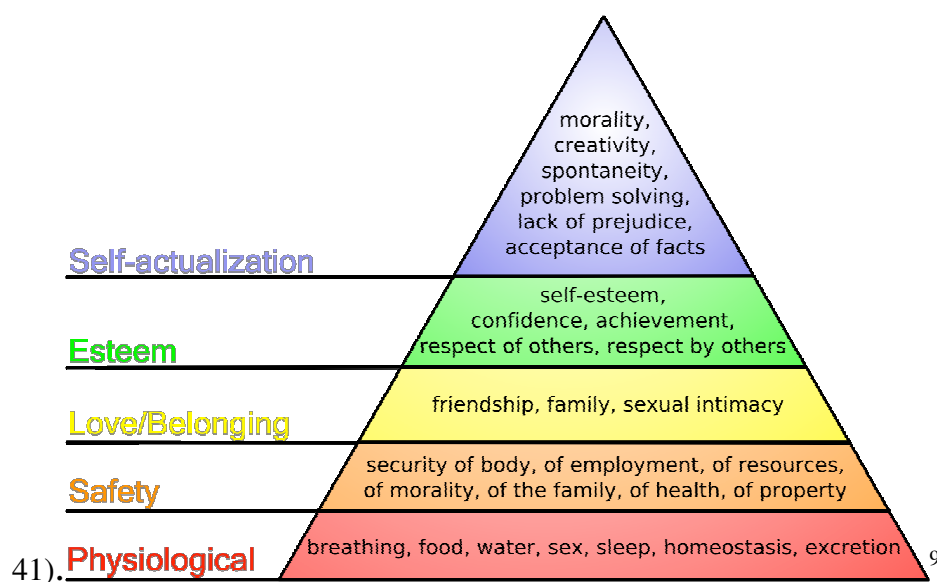
“I sent a lot to [onward] to Santiago, three kilos...I was like I’m never going to use this, never ever”

-Lovisa (interview, May 25, 2009)

Through the meditative journey in the liminal arena of pilgrimage, one discovers the important difference between “want” and “need” that often becomes blurred or blended in society. Once the pilgrim reaches the peaceful state of mind, many reflect on this difference. Throughout the pilgrimage, the items carried in one’s backpack come under constant scrutiny and remain fluid to the needs of the individual pilgrim at various points. For example, during the beginning of the pilgrimage, many parts of the route go through what hikers call a “green tunnel” or a trail that weaves through forests and large trees that cover them and protect them from the sun whereby often times the pilgrim will not need a hat or sunscreen; when the pilgrims begin walking along sunny beaches, the pilgrim may need a hat or sunscreen to avoid sunburn. At the end of the pilgrimage, upon entering Galacia, the pilgrim may not feel the need to carry the hat or sunscreen anymore and give it away or throw it out because they reenter the “green tunnel” and discover the utter downpours characteristic to the province. Without the need of the hat, it is not worth carrying because that hat, although it may not weigh much by itself will become part of the accumulated weight of the

backpack, which will directly affect the health of the feet. Lightening the backpack constitutes one of the best methods of blister prevention.

In the meditative state of walking during a pilgrimage, each individual pilgrim may reflect on what his or her own personal needs really are without the distractions that come in every direction of daily life. Abraham Maslow, a human development psychologist, theorized that all of a person's needs fit into a hierarchy that includes five distinct categories "with the lower-order needs having to be satisfied before people are motivated to satisfy the next need in the hierarchy" (Blackwell, 2007:40-



Every person begins at the bottom level of the hierarchy in the physiological needs. In order to move into the next order of needs, the person must satisfy all

<sup>9</sup> Image from [http://psychology.wikia.com/wiki/Maslow%27s\\_hierarchy\\_of\\_needs](http://psychology.wikia.com/wiki/Maslow%27s_hierarchy_of_needs)

the physiological needs and so forth working his or her way up the figurative pyramid.

In terms of pilgrimage more specifically, this hierarchy also governs a person's motivations in the sense that when the person lacks fulfillment of a need, he or she will have the motivation to seek its fulfillment. Here, "once their lower-order needs have been met, people might be motivated by the need to gain the esteem of their religious community through taking part in a prestigious pilgrimage...to Santiago de Compostela" (Blackwell, 2007:41) and to also gain respect by others for voluntarily putting themselves through the physical and mental hardships involved in foot travel. If the person does not feel the religious inclination, he or she may "feel the need for social integration...[and] may seek to satisfy their social needs by taking part in an organized pilgrimage" (Blackwell, 2007:41). Both individuals seek to satisfy the higher order needs that may prove difficult in daily life. Moreover, "at the highest level of motivation, the experience of pilgrimage itself would be expected to provide the satisfaction of self-actualization needs" (Blackwell, 2007:41) through creating an extended period of meditative self-reflection to understand the pilgrim's individual needs as opposed to the wants that society manufactures to sell products.

At one point or another during a pilgrimage, the pilgrim will learn to satisfy each level of needs and in that manner, he or she discovers the difference



between “want” and “need.” Lovisa demonstrates this fluid process in that she describes finding a “menu del día” most nights in a town therefore satisfying the physiological need for food and water. However, here she notes the excess food that she, herself, cannot eat alone. She says that often, the menu del día is not “worth it because there are so many dishes and so big, so I only eat the first dish and then I try the rest” (interview, May 25, 2009). Realizing the excess she then says that she wants to steer away from that practice to eat only what she needs to fill her stomach (interview, May 25, 2009). Lovisa has also experienced having to satisfy the safety order of needs in keeping herself healthy “because I got food poisoning, so strict diet” from a bad tomato whereby she had to stop walking for two days and get her health into good shape (interview, May 25, 2009). To fill her love and belonging needs, Lovisa entered the social aspect of the pilgrimage and has “only walked one day alone...and the rest...with people” (interview, May 25, 2009) whether she speaks with locals or fellow pilgrims. This provides a sense of belonging as she creates friendships; while the locals she may never see again, the pilgrimage acts a fluid, moving community and she will most likely see many of the pilgrims throughout the entire route. The esteem category, she fills by continuing the Camino and persevering through food poisoning to complete the journey in a foreign country. Finally, the reflective space provided by walking the Camino de Santiago has placed her in a very pensive mode in which

she reflects on the idea of “need” and “want” saying, “people that feel the need of having things and owning everything, I think that is just a lack of wisdom of this like universal wisdom and that is what I’m trying to gain, that wisdom”

(interview, May 25, 2009). She continues much further describing that:

the way of thinking [on the Camino], that you don’t need everything and you only need your feet and that’s what will take you somewhere...it’s important for me to just think about my whole life because when you are there, you don’t really question it as much as you do here. I realized that I started questioning a lot of my relationships and because you don’t do that at home in the same way that you do here (interview, May 25, 2009).

From a male’s perspective, Martin provides another example of how the Camino de Santiago has provided him with a space for self-reflection in which he discovers where his personal needs lie. When discussing his daily routine Martin describes how his body needs energy to walk and he likes “to make muesli with yogurt and cereal” for breakfast in the mornings and makes sure he fills his water bottle because “if you have no water -- not a good day” (interview, June 5, 2009).

By eating a hearty breakfast and making sure he fills his water bottle, Martin satisfies his physiological needs and knows from experience that lacking water makes for a miserable time in which higher order needs cannot be met. For safety needs, Martin encountered a very cold, windy, and rainy night in which he “only

had a tent” and he felt too tired to continue so he “stopped somewhere and asked, ‘can I sleep here?’ And they said sure, come in and I could sleep in the dried grass” in the barn (interview, June 5, 2009). Martin had to satisfy his safety need for shelter because on nasty nights, sometimes a tent does not offer enough protection. Through the Camino, Martin has also explored his sense of love and belonging by talking with other pilgrims and discovers, “you can meet people and after one minute, yeah there is a connection, it feels like knowing him or her for a long time” (interview, June 5, 2009) which allows him social interaction among the mobile pilgrim community. When specifically asked about his motivations in hiking, Martin directly stated, “self-esteem, it gives me self-esteem” (interview, June 5, 2009) by proceeding day-by-day on the journey. Through this process, Martin continues thinking and does not talk about material necessities in life but rather the need to:

make the experience that when walking through the world with a smile, the world smiles back at you...but when you go with an angry face walking around, nobody will say hello or anything, so it’s really important to keep a smile. Not only on the Camino, but in normal life (interview, June 5, 2009).

Martin has come to these conclusions by placing himself voluntarily in the liminal and self-reflective world of pilgrimage.

## Social Interactions

“I’d rather stay and talk to people along the way than of 30 or 40 kilometers a day”

-Lovisa (interview, May 25, 2009)

“If we have a good relationship, yeah, then it’s no problem to have silence and only walk. Sometimes it’s beautiful only to walk and don’t talk. But sometimes it’s cool to talk. It’s different.”

-Pablo (interview, June 5, 2009)

An integral part of the pilgrimage experience lays in the social interactions that occur in liminality; as previously noted, overcrowding produces a negative effect in which the ability for walking between places as a space of reflection decreases, therefore, without having too many pilgrims, interactions with others can affect reflections in a positive manner.

Turner posed a concept known as “*communitas*” to explain this phenomenon in which pilgrims bond together during pilgrimage and interact socially. He explains three types of *communitas*:

“(1) *existential* or *spontaneous* *communitas*, the direct, immediate, and total confrontation of human identities which, when it happens, tends to make those experiencing it think of mankind as homogeneous, unstructured, and free community; (2) *normative* *communitas* where, under the influence of time, the need to mobilize and organize resources to keep the members of a group alive and thriving and the necessity for social control among those members in pursuance of these and other

collective goals...; (3) *ideological* *communitas*, which is a label one can apply to a variety of utopian models or blueprints of societies believed by their authors to exemplify or supply the optimal conditions for existential *communitas*” (Turner, 1973:193-194).

Turner uses the paradigm of normative *communitas* to describe the “characteristic social bond among pilgrims and between pilgrims and those who offer them help and hospitality on their holy journey” (Turner, 1973:194). If religious purposes still reigned as the primary reasons to complete a pilgrimage, then the theory of normative *communitas* could apply. However, when people begin pilgrimages with more individual reasons or when those who participate in pilgrimages belong to different religious backgrounds, social control may not be applied for the collective goals of the group or religion. Turner argues differently that “social interaction is not governed by the old rules of social structure...the social takes precedence over the individual at all levels” (Turner, 1978:31). Except that in a liminal space of *self*-reflection, the individual dominates his or her own thoughts but still opens his or her mind to become receptive to the thoughts of others; therefore, normative *communitas* may have applied to El Camino de Santiago in the past, but I argue that it has become less prominent today in so far as many pilgrims do not go to advance their standing within the Catholic Church, with the

possible exception of the Holy Year<sup>10</sup>. While Turner does realize that “pilgrimage is more responsive to social change and popular moods than liturgical ritual, fixed by rubric” (1978:231), he does not mold the theory of normative *communitas* to the times and they apply far better to when “Catholic pilgrimage in the High Middle Ages became an extension, as it were, of the sacrament of penance, an institutionalized means of keeping everyone’s moral state under ecclesiastical control” (1978:233).

The pilgrims that I interviewed all mentioned social interactions as a necessary aspect of the experience, however, none of them ever directly connected these to social control or collective goals other than living together and sharing the experience of pilgrimage. Social interactions during pilgrimage usually occur during three time periods, shifting preferences from person to person: while walking, while eating, and while one relaxes at the end of the day in the albergue.

Some people prefer to leave the time spent walking as more of an individual time, which follows Casey’s theory of place dynamism in which self-reflection and meditation can occur because it has an “encouragement of motion in its midst” (Casey, 1996:23). Despite this urge for independent walking, the

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<sup>10</sup> A “Holy Year” occurs once every seven years when the Day of St. James or July 25th falls on a Sunday. It has been a pilgrim tradition in the past, and still is for those pilgrims who set out on religious terms, to end their pilgrimage in Santiago de Compostela on July 25 in time for Sunday Mass.

pilgrim may seek social interaction while stopped for lunch or for dinner near the albergue with fellow pilgrims. Eddy describes that, “during the day, mostly I eat alone...but in the evening I like to eat together because I think it’s also a social event. I think during the day you are alone, at evening, you are a social being, you want somebody to be around” (interview, May 27, 2009). He found the Camino more beneficial to him to have the time walking as a way to “get the overview and to see what’s important in your life, in your family, in your work, in everything” (interview, May 27, 2009). Eddy explains that while trying to see clearly, “you know that there are the moments that, you know, you want to be alone and you need to be alone, and the moments that also you need to have people around you” (interview, May 27, 2009) which shows the general nature of the human being. When asked if he considered himself religious he paused and then replied, “I think, yes. Yes, deep inside, but not in the way of every week to the church” (interview, May 27, 2009). After completing three Caminos and working through his faith, the experience has not led him to greater churchgoing allegiance, which would not be a greater collective goal of the church in propagating and encouraging people to make pilgrimages.

Another pilgrim, Denise walks with two of her friends and they enjoy talking together while they walk. For her, part of the pilgrimage experience lies in “not [talking about] too heavy stuff, we’re also having fun, just joking and it’s

also a very light atmosphere because you don't have to worry about anything.

You just worry about eating and hiking and sleeping" (interview, June 4, 2009).

When asked why she began a pilgrimage, she responded, "I didn't have any plans at that moment for a holiday or a vacation, so I decided to join" her two friends (interview June 4, 2009). In response to the question of whether or not she considered herself religious, she replied, "I am not very religious" (interview with Denise, June 4, 2009). Here, the theory of normative *communitas* also does not apply well because she mostly interacts with her two friends, other pilgrims at times, and does not work for the greater collective goals of the church community.

In a third example, Wulf specifically mentions the difference between talking with other pilgrims and talking to people in everyday life:

Where do they come from? What are their reasons to go the Camino?

Tricks and tips for the Camino, umm, somebody was, sometimes you have persons, sometimes only kindly conversation, sometimes you meet

somebody that you can talk about serious things. I think that people are

very open, with open hearts on the way. They told about their life, their

opinions, their aims, and this is very interesting, so I can also tell about my aims and my opinions about things so it's very interesting conversation,

very open hearts and open minds along the way. This is different from the



normal situation when you work or when you meet somebody in a bar.

It's different. (interview, June 4, 2009)

Social interactions for Wulf demonstrate that individual needs matter because his manner of finding a space of reflection while walking depends more on interactions with others. He walks with an old friend Walter and normally while walking they, "talk about the past because our sons are the same age and they are school friends and when they were young we went with our boys in the hills, climbing, and trekking and so on" (interview, June 4, 2009). Because they have known each other through many different times, they can help each other reflect.

### **A Note on Tourism**

“I’m a little afraid of this Camino tourism and I think there are a lot of dilemmas on the Camino and I think everybody has the right to walk to Camino, but maybe sometimes there is lacking respect of the people walking there, the people living there maybe and the other way around as well. I don’t know, I think there are dilemmas about that and yeah, I’m excited, but afraid on the other hand as well.”

-Alex (interview, May 21, 2009)

With a plethora of people from many different backgrounds, nationalities, and religions hiking El Camino de Santiago, a growing debate has emerged over if pilgrimage has become a new form of tourism. While tourism commonly pertains to secular vacation, pilgrimage traditionally was reserved for the religiously inclined. Currently, many scholars are trying to make a “reassessment of the increasing linkages and interconnections between shared sacred and secular spaces on a global stage” (Raj, 2007:1) where “Urry viewed the search for new tourist products as disillusionment with mass tourism products and ‘contemporary consumerism’” (Raj, 2007:6) and therefore, mass tourism has begun seeking new markets.

However, classifying the difference has become difficult because sometimes individuals blur the lines. Griffen quotes Wiederkehr in saying,

a pilgrimage is a ritual journey with a hallowed purpose. Every step along the way has meaning. The pilgrim knows that the journey will be difficult

and that life-giving challenge will emerge. A pilgrimage is not a vacation: it is a transformational journey...healing takes place...on return from the pilgrimage, life is seen with different eyes (Griffen, 2007:18)

Griffen and Wiederkehr loosely define tourism in contrast: a vacation. Blackwell defines tourism by the official definition of the World Tourism Organization as “The activities of persons traveling to, and staying in, places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business, or other purposes” (2007:36). However, Griffen introduces a third category to the juxtaposition: religious tourism, defined as those “who intentionally travel for reasons related to religion or spirituality in their quest for meaning...irrespective of the range of motives, destinations and manifestations of their experience” (Griffen, 2007:17).

While scholars such as Griffen and Wiederkehr grapple with trying to define people along a pilgrimage as pilgrims, tourists, or religious tourists, people continue walking the ancient route, blurring the lines between sacred and secular. Blackwell provides more clarity on the matter where “the distinguishing feature of pilgrimage is that it incorporates religious involvement *into a journey*” (2007: 38). This appears to demonstrate the main difference between pilgrimage and religious tourism; it is the idea of the pilgrimage as a journey instead of travel to particular and popular religious landmarks, usually not by foot. Furthermore,

“pilgrimage should mediate between the natural and the cultural world and, at the same time, between the natural and the supernatural world” (Blackwell, 2007:39) which religious tourism does not accomplish. Unlike religious tourism, pilgrimage “can be considered to be a ritual as well as incorporating ritualistic elements” (Blackwell, 2007:39) such as a rite of passage with a prolonged liminal period.

Often, a pilgrim may not fully understand their transformation during liminality until they reincorporate back into their everyday lives and therefore, sometimes, the pilgrims who do not set out to clear their minds or with spiritual intentions can realize them later. In this case, they may still be considered pilgrims because they undertake the journey. It should be noted that within this structure, “the very complex nature of pilgrimage, incorporating but not limited to religious motivation” (Bhardwaj, 1997:6) can allow more people to enter into the experience. Finally, there is “no universally accepted definition” (Stoddard, 1997:42) of pilgrimage which has allowed it to change and grow with new interpretations.

### **The Sacred, the Secular, and Somewhere in Between**

“The interplay between spirituality and earthiness, between piety and commerce, between the sacred and the profane appears wherever we turn.”

-(Richardson, 1997:v)

El Camino de Santiago today has become a combination of the sacred and the secular due to the intentions of the pilgrims moving through it. Pilgrimages by various people “may range from a focus on activities at a particular place, involving a specific religious tradition, to one concerned with the more general characteristics of journeys to sacred places” (Stoddard & Morinis, 1997:xi) or they may include people who are not sure of their religious beliefs. Either way, a pilgrim deals with the dichotomy of “the secular place of home and the distant place of the divine” (Stoddard & Morinis, 1997:x). Even if a pilgrim holds secular beliefs, by setting out on the pilgrimage, he or she will learn a great deal about religion and the tradition of the route; the secular pilgrim still makes a sacrifice of their time and physical effort, especially in the cases of pilgrims attempting to complete the journey in memory of someone who passed away.

Since Casey explains how “place integrates with body as much as body with place” (1996:22), the movement of people through places affects their nature over time. If the nature of the people shifts, so will the nature of the place and thereby a shift in the balance of sacred and secular on the Camino de Santiago. As the Camino becomes more popular, this shift takes place in shorter amounts of time because “to be located, culture has to be *embodied*. Culture is carried into

places by bodies” (Casey, 1996:34). Stoddard & Morinis, like Casey, recognize that, “when movement itself is regarded as a form of worship or sacrifice...distance is no longer regarded as a hinderance to travel, but instead, it becomes an opportunity because movement is something valued” (1997:x). The traditional means of the church to influence how people perceive pilgrimage in recent years has thus decreased, but not dissolved completely.

Osterrieth, who defines pilgrimage as a “quest” follows the same patterns of the rite of passage and its three stages as outlined by Turner following Van Gennep, but she allows for a more secular or religiously unsure paradigm that still fits with the process of transformation by allowing the quest to have existential properties as well as religious properties. She begins by stating that, “in the quest, the subject undergoes trials and tribulations in order to acquire competence and achieve success” whereby, “each trial brings the subject further along in his transformation” (Osterrieth, 1997:28). Furthermore, these hardships, characteristic of pilgrimage show “that one is apt and worthy to hold the new status that will be bestowed. These trials also symbolically represent the death and rebirth process” (Osterrieth, 1997:29). Throughout the pilgrimage, one may encounter many experiences or trials of the profane and/or secular such as feasts held by locals or created by groups of pilgrims after a difficult day’s walk. Secularity may appear most in the commercialism found closer and closer to

Santiago in which merchandise or material objects representing the pilgrimage such as buttons, patches, t-shirts, necklaces, and useless knick-knacks appear for purchase when a main point of the pilgrimage stems from leaving behind material possessions to live a more basic lifestyle in which transformation may occur.

Therefore, the pilgrimage today lies somewhere in between the sacred and the secular which parallels the liminality required to make the space of personal reflection, which so many pilgrims desire as a way to understand themselves and the world. Some years, such as the Holy Year, the emphasis might swing more into the religious arena as religious devotees would more likely begin their pilgrimage regarding traditional means, while other years, the secular intentions of clearing the mind of the rampant consumerism in the ever more globalized world. The between will simultaneously create a greater liminality in that the pilgrims between religiosity and secularity create the space just by being present in the movement on the route (Casey, 1996:22-25). Afterwards, the “transformation [of the pilgrim] was all the more irreversible because it had been tied to an enlarged consciousness of self and of the world stemming from the mundane experience” (Osterrieth, 1997:36).

## **Reaching Santiago de Compostela and a Metaphor for Life**

In pilgrimage literature in general, scholars place a huge emphasis on the destination of the pilgrimage as a power site in which “at the end the pilgrim...is exposed to powerful religious sacra (shrines, images, liturgies, curative waters, ritual circumambulations of holy objects...)” (Turner, 1978:6). The importance of sites such as Santiago de Compostela in religious terms rest in the idea that,

A place often becomes especially holy because it is believed to have been touched by divinity, usually as manifest by events related to the holy persons during their lifetimes or as a result of their heavenly intervention.

In accounts of apparition, the holy person is thought of as actually coming to earth. (Nolan, 1989: 337)

Historically, pilgrims began their pilgrimage because they wanted to worship in places where the divine had appeared. However, because “a fundamental part of the tradition is related to pilgrimage origins, generally expressed in the form of a story explaining how and why the shrine came to be established” (Nolan, 1989:216), a new trend has occurred where people have begun a traditionally Catholic pilgrimage who are not Catholic. This has much to do with new research that indicates

the idea that the Apostle James the Greater ever went on a mission to Iberia is considered doubtful, and the notion that his bones could have



been transferred from the site of his martyrdom...to the northwestern corner of Iberia is generally thought to be a pious legend. (Nolan, 1989:137)

Many pilgrims agree or suspect something happened other than the legend states and that has led to the trend that, “many shrines attract large numbers of people who visit for reasons having little to do with traditional expressions of pilgrimage” (Nolan, 1989:42). That can include starting a pilgrimage to clear the mind, to enjoy the company of other pilgrims, to walk through precious landscapes, to walk a pilgrimage without religious inclinations, or to vacation.

Some pilgrims go so far as to not even enter the cathedral, or the religious epicenter of the pilgrimage. Phil chuckles when I mentioned the cathedral in Santiago and says, “I’m not really interested in Santiago. It’s kind of a weird story. You know, the cathedral, I visited it once, and the last two times I went there, the two other times I went there, I didn’t even go in” (interview, May 23, 2009). Likewise, but not quite so blatantly, when asked about if they would reach Santiago de Compostela, a British Pilgrim with whom I spoke said, “no, not to Santiago because we’ve been to Santiago many other times so we’ll go back home and think about what we’re going to do when we come back...we might go as far as Arzúa” (interview, May 17, 2009) or a town about forty kilometers east

of Santiago. In that town, El Camino de Santiago del Norte reaches and joins the Camino Francés which many pilgrims have said was too crowded.

Because “new cycles of pilgrimage florescence begin with a series of adaptive transformations that improve the fit between pilgrimage and a changed socioeconomic, intellectual, and technological order” (Nolan, 1989:84), pilgrims today have found meaning in discovering the Camino as a metaphor for life in their liminal states. It acts as a microcosm of “real” life but on a more basic level and pilgrims can discern patterns, people, and thoughts with more clarity and use this knowledge when they return to their everyday lives. When asked his favorite places along the Camino, Phil stated, “sometimes it’s the combination, everything, the way things come together is just right” (interview, May 23, 2009), which included the right mix of people, food, and places; only when pressed on the question, he mentioned albergues as some of his favorite places.

Moreover, Eddy puts the Camino in a clear context as a metaphor for life. He begins as Phil did when asked about his favorite places, as he explains:

I don’t say anything is better than the other, it’s the combination that makes it. Without refugios, there is no Camino. Without nature, there is no Camino. Without the flechas, there is no Camino. The being together, and certainly to be alone, there is no Camino. So, certainly, it’s the

combination of all those things that make the Camino. For me, you cannot say yes, we now make that #1 and that #2, for me it's the combination and one cannot be without the other. (interview, May 27, 2009)

Here, Eddy sets the liminality of pilgrimage as a whole instead of split into stages within the phase or separated out into different places. Then he says, "I wanted to walk my own Camino and to meet new people and loose new people, that's the Camino. Also just like in life, you meet many people and you loose them, only quicker, you loose them in like 30 days or so instead of in a whole life" (interview, May 27, 2009). A pilgrim may know another pilgrim for a day, three days, a week, two weeks, and then never see them again because one took a slower day or a faster day and the other never caught back up. When one moves through different stages in life, sometimes some friends stay, other times they do not, and other times still, they can reappear. For example, I met Eddy two days before I interviewed him, then I walked around the same pace he did for two more days, giving us a friendship of four days. Then, Eddy decided to take a faster day than I did. I thought I would never see him again until I saw him at a grocery store in Santiago de Compostela a week later. He came into my consciousness for four days and I felt like I had known him for far longer, then he disappeared, and then reappeared for a day, and then I have not seen him since that day.

## **Conclusion and Notes for Further Study**

After completing El Camino de Santiago del Norte, El Camino Francés and interviewing seventeen pilgrims along El Camino del Norte, I have come to the conclusion that the liminal state of pilgrimage holds more importance than the destination itself; this includes the small places along the route, the interactions with other pilgrims, sleeping in a different albergue every night, and most importantly walking the route from small place to small place.

The data which Turner presented represents the more traditional sense of pilgrimage, which does not leave much room for other religions nor space created by the act of walking as one of self-reflection. The focus on the destination and talk of the destination in the interviews proved small because the pilgrims I spoke with continually spoke of experiences during the route with other pilgrims or lesser known places along the path. Part of the reason for this was that I never interviewed anyone in Santiago de Compostela afterwards due to time constraints and it would be impossible for me to catch every person in a large city to see what they thought specifically at the end. Many of the pilgrims who had already hiked other Caminos provided me with information about the cathedral that added onto my own knowledge and experience. Further study would attempt to interview more pilgrims after they reach the cathedral.

Furthermore, it would also be useful to interview more pilgrims on the most traditional route as the Camino del Norte is an alternative route, there might be an underlying emphasis on alternatives to tradition, however, within my experience on the traditional route, I met a plethora of people who walked for non-traditional reasons.

I agree with Turner and Van Gennep's analysis that the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela represents a rite of passage, but I emphasized the liminal phase through the data in the interviews whereby the mode of transportation, a person's own two feet, governed the experiences they had. Different people provided more information on some subjects than others and vice versa. All demonstrated some level of need to escape their everyday lives and become a pilgrim for a time.

Because "pilgrim stories" come through to show experiences best, Lovisa provides an interesting one on how my project affected her directly and positively, but with timing that cannot be explained. When I asked if she had anything to add about her experiences on the Camino, she paused and told me this story:

I have this funny thing actually because I believe that everything happens for a reason. I think, umm, yeah, today, I was out walking and I met a man and he said that he didn't have any money and he had to go to

Salamanca I think it was. Yeah, so, he was begging for money and that's also the thing, I didn't know if I believed him or not and me back home, I would probably go "yeah, have a good day" and I would just keep on walking. Well, I'm not sure if I would have done that or not. That's like what you do, more or less in the regular society. So anyway he got, somebody gave him 10 euros and he needed 14 euros more for the bus. So, and I don't have that much money, plus I had to pay this umm fee at the hospital, so I don't have that much money. I was like, "Should I?" "Or should I not?" and I was like, "I really want to help him." Then I was like "Fuck this, of course I am going to help him." If that were me, I would want that help and I can survive without the 14 and he can obviously not or he's just telling me a lie and that's his karma, you know. So I gave him the 14 euros and I was thinking this will probably come back to me anyway, I don't have to worry about this and now I get 15 euros for the interview. When you asked me, I was like, "This is not true! This is so weird. It's a circle." (interview, May 25, 2009).

**Appendix 1:**

These are the pilgrims interviewed in alphabetical order. I had IRB approval and gave a consent form to each pilgrim before interviewing them. They are listed as what they chose to be represented by on those consent forms when given the option if they wanted to be known by their full name, first name, or a pseudonym of their choice. Several chose pseudonyms and I respected their wishes throughout this capstone project. At the end, a copy of the consent form is attached in full as given during the research.

Alex (male) is German and 29 years old. He hiked from Bilbao to Santiago de Compostela. I interviewed him on May 21st, 2009 in Santander, Spain.

British Pilgrim (female) lives in England and is 61 years old. She hiked from Hendaye to Avilés. I interviewed her on May 17th, 2009 in Pobeña, Spain.

Cocuo Visi (female) is from Spain and is 51 years old. She began with her four friends in Bilbao and hiked to Castañeras. I interviewed her on May 18th, 2009 in Pontarrón, Spain. The interview was conducted in Spanish and all quotations are translated by the author.

Denise (female) is from Germany and is 32 years old. She hiked from Navia to Santiago de Compostela. I interviewed her on June 4th, 2009 in Gontán, Spain.

Eddy (male) is from Belgium and is 56 years old. He hiked from Irún to Santiago de Compostela. In interviewed him on May 27th, 2009 in Sebrayo, Spain.

German Pilgrim (female, daughter) is 24 years old. She hiked with her mother from Santander to Guijón. I interviewed her on May 23rd, 2009 in Comillas, Spain.

German Pilgrim (female, mother) is 45 years old. She hiked with her daughter from Santander to Guijón. I interviewed her on May 23rd, 2009 in Comillas, Spain.

James (male) is Irish who is 63 years old. He hiked from Hondarribia to Santander. I interviewed him on May 15th, 2009 in Guernika, Spain.



John is the husband of British Pilgrim, lives in England, and is 61 years old. He hiked from Hendaye to Avilés. I interviewed him on May 17th, 2009 in Pobeña, Spain.

Laura (female) is from Spain and is 30 years old. She began with her four friends in Bilbao and hiked to Castañeras. I interviewed her on May 18th, 2009 in Pontarrón, Spain. The interview was conducted in Spanish and all quotations are translated by the author.

Lovisa (female) is from Sweden and is 23 years old. She hiked from Santander to Santiago de Compostela. I interviewed her on May 25th, 2009 in Llanes, Spain.

Martin (male) is from Germany and is 28 years old. He bicycled from Augsburg, Germany to Irún, Spain, then hiked from Irún to Santiago de Compostela. I interviewed him on June 5th, 2009 in Baamonde, Spain.

Pablo (male) is from Germany and is 24 years old. He hiked from Irún to Santiago de Compostela. I interviewed him on June 5th, 2009 in Baamonde, Spain.

Phil (male) is from the United States and is 76 years old. He hiked from Santander to San Vicente de la Barquera. I interviewed him on May 23rd, 2009 in Comillas, Spain.

Remi (male) from France and is 71 years old. He planned on hiking from Irún to Santiago de Compostela. I interviewed him on May 13th, 2009 in Deba, Spain.

Wulf (male) is from Germany and is 49 years old. He hiked with Walter from Santander to Santiago and was planning on going to Fisterre. I interviewed him on June 4th, 2009 in Gontán, Spain.

Walter (male) is from Germany and is 55 years old. He hiked with Wulf from Santander to Santiago and was planning on going to Fisterre. I interviewed him on June 4th, 2009 in Gontán, Spain.

Young Man (male) is from Germany and is 21 years old. He hiked from Bilbao to Santiago de Compostela. I interviewed him on June 1st, 2009 in Piñera, Spain.

### Consent Form

My name is Amanda Redpath and I am a student at Syracuse University. My project is to create a short ethnography on place along El Camino de Santiago del Norte. I want to use personal narratives told from pilgrims along the way. I will only use this information for the project, and this is a voluntary interview.

This is your opportunity to tell your story and share your views on El Camino de Santiago the way you see it. The only inconvenience is that it will take a small amount of your time away from the Camino.

I will offer nominal compensation to hear your story. If the interview occurs over a meal, I will offer to pay for the meal for up to 15 Euros or I will pay 15 Euros in cash. If you choose to withdraw from the study before the interview is complete I will offer half of the money for a full interview to compensate for the time and effort spent. If another interview occurs, the same compensation will be offered. If the interview exceeds 45 minutes in length, 5 additional Euros will be offered for every 15 minutes. Please check one of the following:

I will receive the meal \_\_\_\_\_ I will receive the cash \_\_\_\_\_ I decline payment \_\_\_\_\_

Ms. Redpath has my permission to use the information from this interview freely.

\_\_\_\_\_ yes      \_\_\_\_\_ no

I want my name used in publication.

\_\_\_\_\_ yes      \_\_\_\_\_ no

If not, how would you like to be referred to in publication?

\_\_\_\_\_

Print Name \_\_\_\_\_

Place and Date of Birth

\_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date

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