

**The Camino de Santiago as a Rite of Passage to  
the Self in Contemporary Society:  
An Autoethnography of the Reintegration Process**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
MA in Philosophy & Sociology  
School of Sociology and Philosophy  
University College Cork, Ireland

October  
2013

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## Table of Contents

<b>Preface</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>vi</b>
<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>vii</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Structure of Dissertation</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>Chapter 1: The Context of Our Postmodern Condition</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>Postmodernity</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Understanding the Postmodern Subject</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>Chapter 2: Postmodern Life and the Camino: An Autoethnography</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>Postmodern Me</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>My Camino</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>Chapter 3: Literature Review</b> .....	<b>31</b>
<b>The Contemporary Camino de Santiago</b> .....	<b>34</b>
<b>The Camino as a Postmodern Pilgrimage</b> .....	<b>37</b>
<b>Pilgrimage as a Rites of Passage</b> .....	<b>40</b>
<b>Communitas</b> .....	<b>42</b>
<b>Returning Home and Reintegration</b> .....	<b>43</b>
<b>Chapter 4: Autoethnographic Research of The Reintegration Process</b> .....	<b>46</b>
<b>The Process of Returning to Home</b> .....	<b>49</b>
<b>Explaining the experience</b> .....	<b>54</b>
<b>Reintegration</b> .....	<b>57</b>
<b>The Importance of Self-Reflection</b> .....	<b>58</b>
<b>The Tools for Successful Reintegration</b> .....	<b>61</b>
<b>Chapter 5: Reflexivity and Autoethnography</b> .....	<b>67</b>
<b>Talking and Writing as therapeutic</b> .....	<b>70</b>
<b>Chapter 6: Thoughts and Conclusions</b> .....	<b>73</b>
<b>Reintegration</b> .....	<b>74</b>
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>77</b>
<b>The Continuing Journey</b> .....	<b>77</b>
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>79</b>

## Preface

Get up, walk, eat, walk, sleep, walk, talk.....freedom.

To feel the first fresh rays of the early morning sun,  
Lick the back of your neck.  
To feel like it's shining just for you,  
In a world that's sleeping

And then, that same day  
To see the sun descend down in front of your toes,  
As you follow its path around the earth,  
Walking westwards,  
Through a part of this earth we call "Spain".

Borders and place names  
Begin to lose their meaning,  
After a month of following  
That bright light in the sky.

It's an ancient feeling that engulfs you,  
The moment you realise  
That hundreds and thousands of pilgrims  
Have walked this very path,  
Westwards.

From all over Europe (and now the world)  
Pilgrims walk towards the Atlantic,  
That vast expanse of blue nothingness,  
The end of the world, Finis Terra.  
For them, it was the end  
But for me, it was the beginning.

Many stroll, walk and pace  
Through this space,  
That we, for some reason, call "Spain".  
The concept of place names,  
And idea of ownership of land,  
Eluded me further

How can we say we own this patch?  
It has been here for thousands of years before  
And will be for many more,  
And I, am just a visitor.  
We all are, and were, and will be.  
These thoughts swam in my mind,

As I walked towards the sea.

31 days, 6 hours a day, 900km in total,  
Give or take the extra few at night,  
When I made the mistake  
of drinking those extra pints.

But there are no mistakes,  
Only lessons.

It's a time for the body and mind,  
Therapeutic.  
A graceful meander  
Through one's tasteful and tasteless thoughts.

From all over the world people flock,  
To this place we call "Spain"  
In order... to walk.

Some, for their religion,  
But most, in spite of it,  
Drawn by the image of a simpler life  
Or to get away from a poorly picked husband or wife,  
Without the distraction of a box in the corner,  
Or a phone, a persona.  
Just space.  
Just us and the road.  
In this place, we call Spain.

"It's escapism! It's Idealism!"  
But then again it isn't.  
It's more.  
It's an opportunity to at least see the door,  
To the more beautiful world our hearts tell us is possible  
But our heads can't yet get around,  
A chance to see it, and hear it,  
To touch it, feel the earth.  
A new common ground.

Eat. Sleep. Walk.  
For a month.  
Some even take longer,  
I mean, I met one guy that walked from Hungary,  
Fuck me! That's far.  
What's here, that's not at home?

"So did you find yourself?"  
Was the derisory question I got at home.  
I shrugged it off with a laugh,

But I didn't know the answer,  
And I still don't.

But I know I'm closer,  
Closer than when I never allowed  
Those pertinent questions to form in my mind,  
But silenced them with alcohol,  
Like the rest of my kind.

With each kilometre my mind shed baggage,  
The weight of the world slowly lifted,  
My attitude gradually shifted,  
A renewed faith in humanity,  
I saw giving and openness,  
I saw a new reality.

I connected with people from all over the world  
And saw our common features,  
Our need and yearning for love,  
Our ability to become healers and teachers.

But that final moment at the Atlantic,  
Was inevitably anti-climactic.  
The dread of going home,  
To work and to college,  
But those feelings were lightened,  
By my newfound knowledge.

I learnt that joy is in living life as a journey,  
Learning as you go,  
To more easily flow, to the beat of the universe  
We are free to just go.

The Camino de Santiago,  
A journey within,  
Towards the sea, and towards ourselves.  
To feel the pain in your feet, and in your soul,  
To heal it with those that you meet  
In that place we call "Spain"  
That space within, that is whole.

Brian Kingston, 2013

## Acknowledgements

This thesis is a culmination of the last two years of my life, which has been a turbulent process of self-discovery. Each person that I have come in contact with has had some affect on the creation of this thesis and the creation of the person I am today. For these reasons, I am truly grateful to all, especially to my extended family and close friends, who have been a constant source of support and guidance to me.

This thesis was made possible by my parents. I thank my mother Alison, for her infinite love and patience with me, as I emerge into adulthood. I also thank her for her precise editing skills, which were vital for the completing of this thesis. Thanks to my father Ian, who with his wisdom and constant compassion, has been a great guide, providing me with a tangible example of what it is to be a loving, caring man. Thanks to my sister sally, in being a solid voice of clarity for me throughout the process of writing this thesis, and throughout my life.

I thank Kieran Keohane, for exposing me to a language with which I could finally speak about the world, a language with which I have found my voice. I also thank him for giving me the space to discover my own path with this thesis. I thank Tom Smith, for his inspirational passion to change the world, and for his constant ability to engage in long, deep conversations in times of personal doubt and uncertainty. Thanks to my uncle Alan, for his spiritual guidance and constant support. Thank to Courtney, for taking the time to give me her insightful thoughts about my writing.

## Abstract

*This thesis is an autoethnographical account of my experience of the Camino de Santiago in Northwest Spain, undertaken as a rite of passage to find my authentic self in a world where I felt lost. The Camino consistently proves to be 'one of the most important experiences in people's lives' (Frey, 1998) in providing a space for self-discovery and transformation. To fully understand such a phenomenon, and its' rising popularity in our contemporary context, it is important to understand how one transfers their experience back into their daily lives. Using the anthropological model of pilgrimage as a rite of passage, I focus on the third and final stage of a rite of passage: the reintegration/reaggregation stage. I discuss the process of returning home with seven pilgrims, one year after completing their respective journeys, and compare their stories with my own autoethnographical account of returning home. This comes from a motivation that is both academic and personal. Academically I want to add to contribute to the understanding of the subject of the return from the Camino, a section of the journey that has been largely neglected in the literature. Personally, to understand how one can carry the profound and life changing experiences of the Camino, into life at home.*

## Introduction

There is a deep crisis in society as a whole, where the relativisation of any defining religious, political or economic world-view, an increase in individualism and rapid changes in social structures and institutions, create a widespread social malaise, manifesting itself in the individual (Whitely, 2008. Keohane et. Al. 2013). These attitudes separate the self from the social context. They undervalue the importance of socio-historical experiences, traditional beliefs and community ties, resulting in people feeling estranged, alienated, and “lost” (Nikelly, 2006: 68). This creates a huge problem for individuals living in such a world and for the wellbeing of our civilization as a whole.

The “Camino de Santiago” (Camino) or “Way of St. James”, a Christian pilgrimage route that leads to the city of Santiago de Compostella in the northwest of Spain, allows people to encounter a series of meaningful mental, physical, emotional and spiritual experiences, providing the pilgrim with many things that are often lacking in contemporary life. To walk the Camino is often a conscious recognition of these lacks as ‘pilgrims often describe their daily lives and society as dislocating, materialist, and alienating’ (Frey, 2005: 95) For people suffering from these ailments of postmodernity, the Camino ‘acts like a mental sauna, sweating out the stresses of daily life and is functioning as a psychologically therapeutic’ (Rudolph, 2004). Also, the pilgrimage experience engenders physical and mental circumstances in which people experience an existential sense of being authentic to themselves—a sense activated by the actions of the pilgrim (Wang 1999).



In the last few decades the number of pilgrims has risen sharply. In 1995, there were 19,821 pilgrims; in 2000 their numbers had increased to 55,004 and by 2005 more than 90,000 pilgrims undertook the journey to Santiago de Compostella, approximately eighty-four per cent doing it on foot (Peelen and Jansen, 2007: 76). In 2012, 192,488 people arrived in the pilgrim office in Santiago de Compostella, after completing at least one section of the pilgrimage<sup>1</sup>. There is a correlation between the increasing relativisation and widespread disillusion of contemporary life, and the numbers undertaking such a journey.

Last year, as I walked for 35 days from the small town of St. Jean Pied de Port on the Spanish-French boarder, to the Atlantic Ocean 900km away, I realized that I was experiencing something starkly more attractive to me than the world I lived in. It was a time and space where I could discover who I truly was, without the pressures and uncertainties of my life at home. The hours of walking in nature proved to be hugely therapeutic for the anxieties that I was feeling. I had a defined path to follow and a daily purpose. I made strong, meaningful friendships with people from all over the world. Through these relationships I was exposed to many alternative ways of living my life, different from the often shallow and superficial conformity offered by contemporary civilization of the 21st century. I learned of the importance of openness and generosity in leading a happy and fulfilling life. I came to have an acceptance and peace about life and felt a renewed sense of self as I moved through the Spanish countryside. This sense of relief and transformation was a common feeling among those that I met while on my way to Santiago.

In the year since my time walking in Spain, I have come to realize that it was a transformative experience for me. However, on initially returning from my experience, I quickly slipped back into old habits and old thought patterns.

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from the Official Pilgrim's Office website at <http://www.peregrinossantiago.es/esp/wp-content/uploads/informes/peregrinaciones2012.pdf>

My sense of achievement and transformation was not recognized or acknowledged by the society that I reentered, and as time went on, my new sense of self felt increasingly incompatible with life in the “real” world. After a period of intensified feelings of isolation and loneliness, a few months after my return from Spain, I became determined to understand why the Camino had such a profound affect on me, and to understand how I could transfer the happiness and contentment that I felt there, back into a life at home. This has led me to write this thesis, a type of intellectual pilgrimage through anthropology, sociology, psychoanalysis and my own mind that has resulted in a conception of the Camino as a contemporary ‘individual rite of passage’ or ‘a pilgrimage to one’s self’ (Eberhart 2006: 160), an important ritual of self-knowledge lacking in many developed western societies. I focus on the third and final stage of the Camino experience, namely the reintegration stage. This is to add to the work done by Nancy Louis Frey, shedding light onto ‘the question of how pilgrims take their travel experiences home’ a phenomenon ‘fundamental to the holistic understanding of the reanimation of the Camino’ (Frey, 2004: 95)

Here I want to provide a clearer understanding of the reintegration stage of the Camino by using my own personal experience as autoethnography, along with information I gathered from interviewing 7 pilgrims, one year after completing their respective journeys on the Camino. I do this to understand how they experienced adjusting back into their old lives, and compare their experiences with my own. This is to learn more about the experience of reintegration as a whole, and to discover how one can make a smoother transition back to “real life” after the Camino.

## Structure of Dissertation

In Chapter One, I discuss the malaises of contemporary society to help offer a diagnosis of the central problematic issues of our civilization as a whole. I will describe the lack of structure, meaning and connection that many experience in contemporary society and discuss the need the implementation of sources of health for the individual that can help to transform society from a state that is defined by mental, emotional and spiritual suffering, to one of openness, honesty, connection and support similar to reality on the Camino.

In Chapter Two I discuss my own experience on the Camino, giving a personal account of what led me to choose to embark on such a journey and a description of the contentment and sense of self that I felt while in Spain. I also discuss touch on the difficulty I had in coming back to my old life and in trying to integrate my new sense of self at home.

In Chapter Three I discuss the Camino as a rite of passage and use the work anthropologists Victor Turner and Arnold Van Gennep to formulate the Camino as a self-imposed rite of passage to the self. Here, I give an account of the importance anthropology and sociology places on rituals and rites of passage as structures that create sources of identity for individuals and show the need for the implementation of such mechanisms in our society.

In Chapter Four I present the findings of my research, focusing on both my own experience and the experience of those I interviewed, how they were transformed by the experience and how their lives were affected on returning home.

In Chapter Five I explain my reasons for using my own personal narrative and unstructured interviews as autoethnography. I discuss how the experience of writing this thesis has led me to integrate my new sense of self into my life at home and how it has helped me to better understand the

experience of the Camino as a whole, both in my personal life and as a cultural phenomenon.

In Chapter Six I discuss the conclusions of my research and show how the Camino can be used as a rite of passage to the self for the individual living in contemporary civilization. I show how this is only the case if one is successful in integrating the experience into one's life as a whole, something that can prove to be a difficult task for most pilgrims' return home. Here I emphasize the importance of integrating the individual's new sense of self with their old life, and the importance of creating an environment of people and activities that fosters that new sense of self. I discuss the various aspects of my life that I have changed in an attempt to do this, citing the completion of this thesis as a large part of the process.

## Chapter 1

### The Context of Our Postmodern Condition

We have bigger houses but smaller families;  
More conveniences, but less time.  
We have more degrees but less sense;  
More knowledge but less judgment;  
More experts, but more problems;  
More medicines but less healthiness.  
We've been all the way to the moon and back,  
But have trouble in crossing the street to meet our new neighbour.  
We built more computers to hold more copies than ever,  
But have less real communication;  
We have become long on quantity,  
But short on quality.  
These are times of fast foods but slow digestion;  
Tall men but short characters;  
Steep profits but shallow relationships.  
It's a time when there is much in the window,  
But nothing in the room. –Authorship unknown<sup>2</sup>

As I write this, there is a widespread recognition that as a civilization, we cannot continue in the direction that we are going. Ecologically,

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<sup>2 2</sup> From Sacred Economics by Charles Eisenstein (Free Online)  
<http://sacred-economics.com/sacred-economics-chapter-7-the-crisis-of-civilization/>

economically, socially and spiritually, we are living through a time of major transition. We have seen the desolation of our planet's natural processes and the sudden collapse of our economic system. We are witnessing a widespread dissatisfaction with our governments in our western developed societies and with the very democratic system that puts them into power. Zurkin (1991) describes our current situation of restructuring as one of liminality, writing how neither deindustrialization nor postindustrialism explains the current dynamic economic and social changes (Bettis, 1996). Zurkin drew from the work of Victor Turner (1976) and Arnold van Gennep who applied the term liminality to a particular transitional period during rites of passage in premodern groups. Turner argued that the liminal period was an "interstructural stage" in which individuals or groups gave up one social stage but had yet to enter the new prescribed social state and adopt its accompanying responsibilities and perspective (Bettis, 1996: 108). The concept of a liminal situation can also be applied to entire societies that are going through a crisis or a "collapse of order" (Thomassen 2009: 19). Liminal periods that affect society as a whole, the future (what comes after the liminal period) is completely unknown, and there is no "ceremony master" who has gone through the process before and that can lead people out of it (Thomassen 2009: 22).

Many social theorists have suggested that it is these changes associated with transition into a postmodern, contemporary era which are taking a heavy toll on the population's mental health (Whitely, 2008: 352). This deep uncertainty with the status quo has led many to question the way that we live our lives. This era that has been described as "postmodernity" or "high modernity" is a culmination of the development of western society, and represents a breakdown of all that we have held to be true for so long. These truths include beliefs about religion, economics, social justice and politics

among others. Postmodernity is a realisation of the shortcomings of our old narratives about; where we came from, who we are, and what it is to live a meaningful life. To live in such times is to be provided with a space to transcend our old stories, and to discover who we are and where we want to go as a society. To do this we must first understand what is going on and accept it, only then can we act to transcend it.

## Postmodernity

*“The meaning systems that enable individuals to give personal meaning to their lives have been destabilized” (Margry, 2008: 34).*

Jean-Francois Lyotard, who was one of the first to identify the phenomenon of the postmodern subject (Lyotard, 1986), used the term ‘postmodern’ to describe an era characterized by the exhaustion and disappearance of the grand narratives of legitimation in society, especially of religious and political narratives (Dufour, 2008: 14). Today it appears that people are encountering fewer and fewer external prohibitions and concrete meaning-giving structures, which in the past were transmitted with the help of traditional authorities like that of the father, state, or church leaders, etc. (Salecl, 2005: 1140).

This is where we can make a distinction between what could be called modernity and postmodernity. Within modernity, dominant social institutions placed restrictions on the individual and enforced a moral code that created a symbolic order in which individuals could place themselves. This would have

commonly been a religious institution or a political institution. Postmodernity is defined by the disillusion of these meaning-giving institutions, which can be seen with the disintegration of religious and social institutions in western society. These complaints very much concern people's troubles with what Lacanian psychoanalysis calls the Big Other—a symbolic order that we are born into and which consist not only of institutions and culture, but primarily of language that shapes our social sphere. It is Lacanian common sense that the Big Other does not exist today, which means that the symbolic order we live in is not coherent, but rather marked by lacks, i.e., inconsistent (Salecl – Worries limitless world). We have reached an era which has seen the dissolution, or even the disappearance, of the forces on which 'classical modernity' was based, the existence of great dominant ideologies (Dufour: 2008: 14). This is the condition of society in postmodernity.

Our political and banking institutions are no exception to this relativisation of truth and uncertainty of worldviews. The boom in housing prices, in the Us, the UK and beyond, can be understood primarily in terms of how postmodernity is increasingly characterized by major transition and liquescence (Bauman, 2000) and permanent liminality (Szakolczai, 2000) where neo-liberal globalization is an intensification and acceleration of these collective historical experiences (Keohane, 2011: 70).

Issues of secularization are very much a part of this picture. The removal of religious institutional authority, and the subsequent questioning of religious belief, has left a gulf in conceptions of fundamental personal identity that postmodern currents see as repairable with any 'truth' applicable (Norman, 2004: 46). There is an abundance of choice of religions, which is a symptom of a relativized society, where the individual has an almost unlimited abundance of alternatives, reducing the meaningfulness of any one ideology.



*'The unending play of surfaces discloses the ineradicable duplicity of knowledge, shiftiness of truth, and undesirability of value. Freely floating signs cannot be tied down to any single meaning [so] everything is radically relative.'* (Taylor, 1984:16).

Giddens notes this condition of postmodernity when he writes 'to act in, to engage with, a world of plural choices is to opt for alternatives, given that the signposts established by tradition now are blank' (Giddens, 1990: 82). This opens up the limits of possibility, which results in many feeling lost and isolated. We, as a people, are left with 'inventing a symbolic structure which we presuppose will alleviate our anxiety in front of the abyss of choice' (Salecl, 1005: 1145). The subject living in postmodernity views much contemporary religious belief and practice as being constitutive of particular lifestyle sectors, which individuals can combine with others that might be quite unrelated, even for the individual who combines them (Mellor, 1993: 116).

In dealing with this lack of faith or spirituality, it is also recognized that to revert back to the old stories of some of the world's most dominant religions is not a viable option. This is encountered when one recognizes the vast amount of atrocities that have been justified on the grounds of these institutions. We are left in a space devoid of ideological underpinnings, with few legitimate places to turn. A gap in our worldview exists in the gulf between the neo-atheism of scientific thought and that of traditional religions. This amounts to tiring disputes between scientific-minded atheists like Richard Dawkins and the declining traditions of Christianity, Islam, Judaism etc. This gap amounts to a spiritual lack in our society that reduces myth and traditional belief to the classrooms of religious study departments in universities. This amounts to a lack that contributes to the detriment of our civilization as a whole. Many fail to understand that "A man is not complete when he lives in a

world of statistical truth”<sup>3</sup>. From the perspective of psychoanalysis these factors amounts to an “empty self”, a hallmark of postmodern society, devoid of meaningful content and connections, a self that is filled up by consumerism and other activities specific to postmodernity (Whitely, 2008: 354).

## Understanding the Postmodern Subject

*“It is a need that we all feel in different ways: as an anxiety endemic to modern life, as a near-universal feeling of meaninglessness, as a relentless ennui from which we can only ever be temporarily distracted, as a pervasive superficiality and phoniness. It is a feeling that something is missing. Some people call it a hole in the soul.”*

*(Eisenstein, 2007: 33)*

Giddens describes the lack of structure and meaning of contemporary society as amounting to a loss of traditional narratives and meaning-giving structures. These are things that are so important for the identity formation of the individual. Tradition for Giddens is:

*‘a means of handling time and space, which inserts any particular activity or experience within the continuity of the past, present and future, these in turn being structures by recurrent social practices’ (Giddens, 1990: 37).*

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<sup>3</sup> Carl Jung from the 1957 interviews with Richard I. Evans)  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RfB56ErylIM>

Having suffered the death of self, history, and God, the postmodern subject is left in a social vacuum, without guidance or support by any organic collective (McHugh, 1984). Where the traditional religious and social contexts are no longer present or functioning, or are barely so, significant existential insecurities can develop, and people will look for alternatives. This is why postmodernity's new subjects are such easy targets for an apparatus as powerful as the market, which can invade and take over their lives thanks to its ability to control our day-to-day time and space such as the invasion of images through television, films, games, internet etc. (Dufour, 2008: 85?) The docility with which these new subjects allow themselves to be tempted by commercial brands and wear their logos is an accurate reflection of a new servitude (Dufour, 2008:85).

Taylor describes the problems that individuals can experience by writing of 'a kind of "naussee" before this meaningless world'; 'some people sense a terrible flatness in the everyday, and this experience has been identified particularly with commercial, industrial, or consumer society' (Taylor, 2007: 208). Several value surveys that have indicated that the subjectivation of life and an increasing feeling of insecurity are widely occurring processes in contemporary Western society (Halman et al. 2005: 60- 73). This is caused by a lack of meaningful social institutions, which individuals once relied on for identity formation. A rapid transformation of culture and lack of a defining symbolic order, amounts to a postmodern world where many individuals are left to their own devices to come up with, and define, a meaning to their lives (Whitely, 2008: 352).

One significant effect, as Jameson describes it, is the loss of a genuine experience of historicity. This point is developed particularly by way of contrast with the earlier "modern" consciousness of history (Strauss, 1997: 365). The absence of a lived experience of historical change, can then create

a “fragmentation of the subject” (Jameson, 1984: 63). This situation occurring within society as a whole can create a malaise that manifests itself in the individual, creating a subject that suffers from ‘depthlessness’, a rejection of anything beyond or behind images (Strauss, 1997: 363). Without defining meaning and dominant social institutions, life can degenerate into an unauthentic existence of isolation, narcissism and self-indulgence. These realities occurring within contemporary society have a large effect on the individual, creating symptoms such as depression, addiction, stress and identity crises (Keohane and Petersen et. al, 2013: 1). Contemporary western society could be characterized as an important but fearful time of chaos, lostness, and “fallow emptiness”.

In light of this view of the world, it is important to address ways in which we can create more meaning in our lives and create a space where we can learn to reconnect with ourselves, with our fellow humans and with the wider natural world. The Camino de Santiago provides a space where we can experience that sense of connection and meaning that we are so lacking in contemporary life. The following chapter is a description of my own experience of the Camino, and how it provided me with this meaningful purpose and space to discover a new sense of self.

## Chapter 2

### Postmodern Life and the Camino: An Autoethnography

*"It is time for a departure, even if there is no place to go".*

*Tennessee Williams*

This previous chapter and the critique of our contemporary civilization resonated with me as I researched this thesis. The feelings of impending meaninglessness and lack of direction in life that is very close to what I was experiencing before I decided to go on the Camino. In this chapter I explain the mindset that led me to choose to walk the Camino and discuss my experiences while in Spain. I do this to tie in the contextualisation of our contemporary ailments, described in the last chapter, with a description of my own personal experience of uncertainty and dissatisfaction in a postmodern context. I describe how the Camino provided me with as a space for reflection and discovery in such a transitory time in my life, and in our society as a whole.

## Postmodern Me

*"I increasingly gained the conviction that not only am I living in a deeply pathological environment, but I am not being given the intellectual instruments that would enable me to understand the nature of the situation" (Szakolczai, 2013).*

The time before deciding to walk the Camino was one defined by uncertainty and anxiety. I was coming up to my final year exams in university and had no idea where my life was going. I was studying philosophy and sociology and had, as a result, began to look at life differently than many of my friends and family. I began to question the foundations of our world more and more and was exposed to the injustice, inconsistency and lack of authenticity in many aspects of contemporary life. I recognised that my country was experiencing another wave of mass emigration and high unemployment, amounting to a crises that encompassed our political, economic, social and religious institutions.

The economy did seem to be slowly picking itself back up after the major financial collapse in 2008 but I, like many others, had now been exposed to the misguided way we were living our lives. This time coincided with taking classes on social injustice in college and learning about the vast levels of inequality and inherent injustice ingrained in our global economy. I learnt how a large part of our wealth and comfort in the west is dependant on the exploitation and subjugation of those in poorer nations. This was true for the clothes I wore, the coffee I drank, the Smartphone that I adored and the petrol that fuelled my car. There seemed to be no escape from the corrupt system I inhabited, where even my desires were formulated by the

manipulation of large corporations through clever marketing campaigns and manufactured social trends.

The feelings of guilt and debilitation in the face of these large-scale injustices was further fuelled by the being exposed to popular subculture documentaries like *Zeitgeist* (2007), which explained the corruption and deception of organised religion, *The Inside Job* (2010), which exposed the deceit and fictions that caused the collapse of our economic system. I also came across *Food, inc.* (2008), which explained the insidious nature of the large-scale food industry that promotes the consumption of mass-produced, chemically induced foods, causing large portions of the globe to become obese and unwell. Feelings of insignificance and powerlessness in the face of all of this corruption was compounded by seeing *The Shock Doctrine* (2009), which gave a description of the corruption and power structures behind neo-liberal capitalist politics. Very few people that I met were concerned about these issues, citing issues in their own lives that they deemed to take a priority. I understood this, but could not come to terms with how I could go on living life normally in such a world.

Through this time I went about my life as normal as possible, partaking in the heavy drinking culture that is a defining feature of college campuses and adhering to the accepted form of social interaction, which amounted to gathering in a dark room with too many people and dancing. I had given up playing rugby around that time, tired of the overt and often feigned masculinity, where anger and fear of failure was encouraged in the team that I was playing in. Rugby was something I had played all my life and it had defined me as a person. It was something that took up most of my time and provided me with an identity and group of friends. But I had grown to dread training and matches, and even socializing with my teammates. I had completely stopped enjoying it. I saw all of things I was missing out on

because of the time commitments. I wanted to be in plays, join debating clubs, learn another language. But couldn't fully commit to anything other than rugby. I ended up finally quitting in my final year in college, after suffering a timely concussion.

Even though it was a relief quitting, I had a tough time adjusting to life without it. It was not the life I had imagined. I came to realize the anxiety that I was feeling before games and training sessions, was the cause of something deeper than performance anxiety. My sense of self came into severe questioning when I didn't have rugby to attach myself to. I felt a stranger to life without rugby, but also felt that a life playing rugby was something close to a nightmare. I knew it would bring back all of those feelings of inadequacy and dread that had come with feeling a obligation, enforced by my family and social spheres, to play this sport that I was good at, but had very little interest in. Without rugby, I was free of the structure of training twice a day, five days a week, but this left a void in my life that I wasn't able to fill. Life had little meaning and structure outside of this sport and I couldn't find my place in the world without it, but knew that going back was also not an option. Coming to the end of my undergraduate degree all I could see was the abyss of life ahead, devoid of meaning and purpose.

The rest of the year was spent studying for exams and worrying about my future. Anxiety and worry about what I was now going to do with my life set in. These feelings amounted to a sense of worthlessness and meaninglessness. I felt like I had nothing to offer the world, and that a world of such misguidance and corruption was a world I didn't want to be part of. Without a meaningful sense of self, having given up playing rugby, I was left floundering to find a sense of purpose. I didn't want to enter into a job that I didn't find rewarding and there were no signposts that directed me away from such an existence. Most people I came in contact with lived for the weekend



and spent Monday to Friday trapped into doing something that they didn't like. My Dad was a notable exception to this rule, but I didn't feel I had the ability to do what he did, without years of experience. There were no support structures that allowed me to understand my situation and I felt completely lost and isolated. The college councilor tried to prescribe me with medication to "get me through this time until after your exams", my friends seemed content with such lives, and my parents, in all of their loving effort, didn't know what to do. I felt I had nowhere to turn and nowhere to be myself, I was floundering in an abyss of uncertainty and couldn't find anything to hang on to.

The only way out of this situation of personal and political upheaval was to follow the footsteps of Christopher McCandless, the man at the centre of the popular book and film *Into the Wild*. McCandless, a college graduate, frustrated with all of the corruption and hypocrisies of life in 90's America, leaves his home in search for an authentic life in the wilderness in Alaska. This story has now become famous among contemporary travellers and is the 21st century's *On the Road*, a story similar in its discontents of mainstream life, a journey in search for something more. For me, such an escape this seemed like the only answer, there didn't seem to be any other way out of it all.

In deciding to walk the Camino, I went in search of something more, of a life that had meaning, of a place where I, and my relationships could feel authentic. I consciously decided to walk to Camino in order to search for something that I felt was missing in my life. I was attracted by the structure and a direction it provided, I would have a meaning and a purpose to my day. This contrasted the life I felt I was living in postmodernity, where we have no grounding moral, political or spiritual direction. The civilization I inhabited, in a

western liberal democracy, felt like it produced people with no direction, a condition similar to what Taylor calls a 'wanderer'. This is in Taylor's terms; 'to saunter and to wander or travel about aimlessly and unprofitably. The wanderer moves to and fro with neither fixed course nor certain end' (Taylor, 1984:150). I felt very much a product of such a society, with no structure or meaning to guide me and become overwhelming and lead to my decision to walk the Camino. I made a conscious decision to stop being a wanderer, and start having a purpose, hoping I would find it in the space and solitude that the Camino offered. I was excited about meeting people who had no pre-conceived ideas about me, I felt like it would be an environment that fostered self-reflection and personal understanding. It was my attempt to move away from the meaninglessness of everyday life and towards a place where I would have a structure, where I would have time for myself, without the pressures of everyday life.

## My Camino

*"In my case, Pilgrim's Progress consisted in my having to climb down a thousand ladders until I could reach out my hand to the little clod of earth that I am."*  
(Carl Gustav Jung)<sup>4</sup>

I heard about the Camino de Santiago from a friend in college and it drew me in immediately. Around this time, I was studying for my final year exams and had just inherited about two thousand Euros from my grandfather. He had been confined to a wheelchair for the last years of his life, and this

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted in a footnote in Jun's 11 Feb 'to letter to Freud in Letters, ed Adler, vol 1, p 19. McGuire, William (1994). The Freud/Jung Letters. Princeton University Press

seemed like a perfect way to commemorate his loss, and give me a space to gather myself, in such a time of personal uncertainty. The Camino also represented an opportunity for me to break away from contemporary society and my old identity, without the pressures and pre-conceived ideas of people that thought they knew me.

I walked the Camino in the summer of 2012, where I walked from St. Jean Pied de Port to Santiago de Compostella in Galicia, and then on the Atlantic Ocean (a popular tradition among pilgrims that don't have strong ties to the Christian aspect of the Camino). After only a few days, I realized that the structure and coherence of the well-marked path of "the Camino" was a stark contrast to the uncertainty and limitlessness of contemporary life. I had a purpose and structure to my day that centered on getting to the next town or village, following the yellow arrows directing my way. This gave my day a meaning, something I felt I didn't have at home. It was a place where the day-to-day achievements were tangible and the measurements were clear. The structure of time was flexible, which meant that I did what I wanted, when I wanted, without feeling obliged to please anybody, or adhere to what would normally be considered as "productive" or "useful".

The minute I arrived at the departure gate in Dublin, I met two women who were clearly pilgrims, wearing backpacks and walking shoes. They had been to the Camino before, and offered to help me to get to St. Jean Pied de Port. This was the first example of the kindness and trust that exists amongst pilgrims, a feature of the Camino that has had a lasting effect of me as a person. We walked together for the first day, and from then, I felt as if I belonged. After a few days, I realized that in walking this route, I was accompanied by hundreds of fellow travelers; from all over the world that each followed the path marked by the yellow arrows. Many people that I met were going through difficult times at home and had come to Spain in search of answers. This varied from people who had lost their jobs or were finishing

relationships, to people who had recently experienced the loss of a loved one or were dealing with a newly discovered illness. Many had undertaken the journey as a therapeutic retreat from the fast pace of everyday life, in an attempt to experience the slower, simpler existence of walking. I learnt that many people's motives for undertaking such a journey was multilayered, and evolves over the course of the journey (Frey, 2004: 91). I came to realize that I had entered into a community of people that had taken this journey to overcome some sort of difficulty in their lives back home. It was a special place, where openness and generosity were abundant, and meaningful connections were easy to make. There was a special feeling of being able to completely open up to people in a short time after meeting them because each of us shared a recognition of our own struggles.

Often, I learnt of a malaise with contemporary life, a sense that the progress and pace of modernity lacked something that made many feel like they themselves lacked. These stories were shared with me while walking on long stretches of the path or while sharing a meal. I found that I was not alone, that people in many other countries were experiencing similar discontents to myself. The strong connections that I made with people, proved to be a stark contrast to the relationships that I had formed at home and the sense of belonging and understanding was something that my everyday life didn't provide. It was amazing to discover what it was like to walk with a complete stranger for hours at a time, connected by a shared journey, forming a unique connection that life at home often failed to offer. Frey writes how these are aspects of pilgrimage that are continually valued by pilgrims.

*"Important experiences from the pilgrim include 'having "real" face-to-face, meaningful contacts, experiencing the "genuineness" of the rural people, feeling less materialistic, learning to live with less yet feeling enriched, valuing one's body and its achievements, and being in contact with nature" (Frey, 2004: 95).*

In this sense the Camino can be seen as something that provided me, an individual living in postmodern and uncertain times, with a sense of meaning and connection that I had never before felt. While on the Camino, I began to write about my experience in a journal, where I used a mixture of poetry and prose igniting a creativity in me that I always knew was under the surface. I became more open and honest, which led to me creating friendships on a level that I had never experienced before. I felt accepted for who I was. These are aspects of life that I am only starting to recreate in my life at home, one year on from my journey. I was also healthy and fit as a result of walking six hours a day and eating fresh, local foods. It was a time of great personal reflection, where I was able to think about the aspects of my life back home that I needed to heal, and built up courage to let go of old resentments and fears. I also encountered a sense of connection with what you could call spirituality. I came to have a reverence for the natural world and an appreciation for meditation and silence. As I moved through Spain, I came to feel an inner peace where I learned to accept life in all of its beautiful uncertainty.

After returning home, these feelings slowly faded, an experience that I discuss at length in chapter four. This led me to research more about the Camino and to understand more about the experience that I had in a wider context sociologically. I wanted to discover what it is about the Camino that provides such a healthy and beautiful atmosphere, both internally and externally. I wanted to know why it has been so difficult to implement the mindset and lifestyle that I found there into my life back home and if others had experienced such difficulty. I learnt how research in this area has been largely neglected and moved to fill in some of the gaps in the contemporary conceptions of the Camino.

The next chapter consists a literature review of what I found in my research for this thesis, and contains a conceptualisation of the Camino as a ritual that can provide a space for someone to find his or her authentic selves. I offer this as an antidote to the malaises of contemporary life, and a method where one can find their authentic selves amongst the uncertainty of our postmodern world. To do this, I draw on the work of Victor Turner and Arnold van Gennep, along some contemporary theorists of the Camino. I then focus on the final stage of a rite of passage, the reintegration stage, and show the space that needs to be filled in contemporary studies of the Camino as a rite of passage.

## Chapter 3

### Literature Review

*What we are seeking.....is nothing less than our lost wholeness*

*(Eisenstein, 2007: 33)*

*...the overcoming of the pathology of contemporary society involves the  
searching subject, and the manner of searching as an anamnesis.*

*We must seek clarity in ourselves, look for every sign of clarity in others, and  
reinforce whatever is sane.*

*(Thomassen, 2013: 57)*

The social conditions of postmodernity render us in a space where we are not automatically provided with a symbolic structure that allows us to find meaning. The postmodern subject, defined by a sense of lack within a pathological contemporary society, has full responsibility to find their own source of meaning in the world, a void that often gets filled with what is fed to us by mixture of large corporations and celebrities. The collective, whether that be the state, nation, class, factory, family that underpinned the modernist project, has now been taken over by the individual as the trademark of post modernity. This freedom from limits and social ties has been found to bring about many social malaises. The price of this can result in a loss of direction, as the postmodern subject experiences this new subjective condition, a condition that we do not yet fully understand (Dufour, 2008: 15). This creates a situation where the postmodern subject is exposed to mental disorders

associated with depression and anxiety, where feelings of sadness, fatigue and the inability to act affect the individual. It is precisely in these times that a desire for existential support and guidance in personal life is more emphatically needed.

New paths of discovery are responses to these insecurities, which have resulted from letting go of churches and other old narratives. Giddens emphasizes that despite the difficulties and doubts engendered by postmodernity, its reflexivity can also be radically enabling to postmodern persons. Emphasizing that neither individuals nor groups are merely passive in the face of constraining social forces, he argues that the reflexivity of modernity offers us many new, liberating opportunities (Mellor, 1993: 115).

*“on a collective as well as an individual plane ... there are massive areas of collective appropriation consequent on the increased reflexivity of social life (Giddens, 1992: 21)*

Postmodern life can be disturbing, but it can also offer a world of unparalleled opportunity. Reflexivity allows us to explore the appropriate new possibilities. We are not only affected by contemporary reflexivity, but we can also constructively participate in it (Mellor, 1993: 115). Pilgrimage can provide an adequate space for reflexivity, where the individual encounters the time and the space away from their usual surroundings to question and contemplate their lives and social environments.

The postmodern subject must realize that it is in their best interest to become ‘a pitiless censor of oneself’ (Zizek, 2004). In a situation without a defining symbolic order, the subject, as we have seen, can be rendered in crisis. This crisis can be subverted by the imposition of a self-imposed structure of limits that supply the subject with a renewed sense of meaning. The contemporary subject is thus not only self-creator, but also his or her own



"prohibitor". Today the subject sets his or her own limits (Salecl, 2005). In this precise sense, a truly enlightened "mature" human being is a subject who no longer needs a master, but who can fully assume the heavy burden of defining his own limitations. This basic Kantian (and also Hegelian) lesson was put very clearly by Chesterton:

*"Every act of will is an act of self-limitation. To desire action is to desire limitation. In that sense every act is an act of self-sacrifice." (Chesterson, 2004).*

It is the setting of a firm limit, which is actually liberating, and it is the very absence of a firm limit, which is experienced as suffocating. (Chesterson, 2004 and Zizek, 2007). Hervieu-Léger (1999) concurs with this in her book about pilgrims, namely that due to major insecurities, the meaning systems that enable individuals to give personal meaning to their lives, have been destabilized (Margry, 2008) and that pilgrimage can offer a tangible support in such times. Traditionally, pilgrimage was something that was undertaken within early modernity as a source of greater meaning and connection with the divine. Contemporary pilgrimage is a search for something secularly similar, an opportunity to partake in something in order to become closer to oneself. In this way it combats postmodern society's fragmented subject, defined by a "fallow emptiness" and lack of meaning. Pilgrimage is a mechanism for the regeneration of the limits that one lacks in postmodern society and fosters experiences that are described in different ways: as transformations, enlightenment, life-changing events, and consciousness-changing events (Digance, 2003 and 2006). These limit-giving experiences are provided on the journey to spiritual place, within a symbolic structure that offers an existential solace for the postmodern subject in the face of the abyss of contemporary life. The Camino de Santiago in Spain, is a pilgrimage that has been providing this for an increasing number of people in recent decades.

## The Contemporary Camino de Santiago

*“Solvitur ambulando”*

*(It is solved by walking)*

The name: “The Camino”, now generally refers to The French Way. The majority of people begin in a small town on the French-Spanish border of St. Jean Pied de Port and make their way over the Pyrenees and through the north of Spain, passing through the major cities of Pamplona, Burgos, Leon and finally Santiago de Compostella. This is because it is, and was in previous times, the most popular route, for its infrastructure of pilgrims’ refuges (hospitals, or hospices) and cities, as well as monasteries, hermitages, and churches (Frey, 1998: Intro). As a transit pilgrimage, the Santiago pilgrimage is sometimes even spread across several years or vacations, with one stage of the whole journey being completed at a time. (Margry, 2008: 24). As motivations have changed, so have the diverse range of people from different backgrounds who do it. Non-Catholics, agnostics, atheists, and even seekers of esoteric knowledge go side by side with Catholics and Protestants (Frey, 1998: Intro). ‘In many cases making the pilgrimage becomes for participants one of the most important experiences of their lives’ (Frey, 1998: intro).

Pilgrims generally walk or cycle towards Santiago, following one of the designated routes from many different places around Spain and Europe. Whereas formerly the journey was a necessary evil, nowadays it is seen as ‘tradition’ or as pilgrimage heritage, and more and more frequently a pilgrimage is only seen as a ‘real’ pilgrimage if it is completed on foot (Margry, 2008: 26). The fact that people choose to walk, is an interesting phenomenon,

considering the 800km that takes about one month to walk, can be completed in about 8 hours by car. While this is not the invention of a tradition, it is a reinvention of the meaning of a tradition. The motivation for undertaking the pilgrimage by walking is “not just devotional (an instrumental purpose), but in choosing to go in a non-modern way, pilgrims make statements about their society and their values. Broadly speaking, these values include an appreciation for nature and physical effort, a rejection of materialism, an interest in, or nostalgia for the past (especially medieval), a search for inner meaning, an attraction to meaningful human relationships, and solitude. (Frey, 1998)

The Camino is a meaningful and multidimensional framework that offers a structured, defined space where one is provided with the freedom to reflect and discuss their lives. In this sense, speaking of the Camino experience includes the total infrastructure of the journey, that is the road, the yellow arrows that mark the route, the pilgrim hostels, the pilgrim’s menu in the restaurants and bars at the side of the road, and the volunteers who take care of pilgrims with medical and emotional support (Peelen and Jansen, 2007: 80). Pilgrims find structure within the symbolic order of pilgrimage and use it as a self-imposed limit, contrary to the limitless nature of postmodernity. In our contemporary age, pilgrimage is one possible healing and therapeutic resource from which people can choose (Peelen and Jansen, 2007). The Camino can be compared with Geoffrey White’s (2005) concept of ‘emotive institutions’ that are ‘culturally constituted activities within which understandings of self as well as social identities and relations are enacted and defined’ (White, 2005: 243). The Camino offers pilgrims a social context in which they find space to express their problems and search for possible solutions to issues that they are experiencing in their lives.

The space that is found while walking provides time to reflect and think

about one's life. The communal aspect of the journey deconstructs regular social statuses, which means that there is a greater opportunity for connection with others than there is in the various layers of postmodernity. The Camino provides a community that is a unique feature of the journey and is a suitable antidote to the loss of connection that one may experience within the contemporary world. Going on pilgrimage is recognition that 'a healthy life implies a meaningful life, as it is only those acts which human beings can accept as meaningful, in which he participates with his own being, instead of simply 'going through the motions', that can give the kind of satisfaction that is necessary for health and happiness (Szokolczai, 2012: 33).

The postmodern secular pilgrimage provides this for the postmodern subject, with a unique space for connection and knowledge of oneself. Pilgrims come in close contact with their emotional and physical selves. This included looking after one's feet, ensuring that one eats decent diet, keeping hydrated, and regulating the pace of walking, all to prevent injury and possible sickness. Being a pilgrim amounts to being present with oneself while walking. These various pilgrimage experiences engender physical and mental circumstances in which people experience an existential sense of being authentic to themselves—a sense activated by the actions of the pilgrim (Wang 1999).

## The Camino as a Postmodern Pilgrimage

*“Santiago has been discovered and reinvented by spiritual seekers and lovers of cultural history and tranquility. For many walkers the journey along the Camino, the ‘transit’ as I would call it, has become an individual rite of passage or ‘a pilgrimage to one’s self’*  
(Eberhart, 2006: 160).

The Camino de Santiago as a contemporary Pilgrimage can be seen as a self-imposed rite of passage that can provide the subject with a sense of meaning and personal authenticity, walking within the symbolic order provided by the Camino. The self-enforced hardship of the pilgrimage creates, Rudolph argues, an “enormous silence and solitude” (Rudolph, 2004). This, he argues, results in a feeling of timelessness. The change from everyday “fast” life to the literal walking pace of the pilgrimage “acts like a mental sauna, sweating out the stresses of daily life” and is functioning as psychologically therapeutic (Rudolph, 2004). Turner (1982) applies this model of change to the elliptical journey of Christian pilgrimage. They identify pilgrimage as a transitional state, not just as a break with but a reversal of one’s prior state. They argue that Christian pilgrimage subverts and potentially transforms rather than reinforces the dominant social order (Maguire, 2008).

This is similar to the reality of postmodern pilgrimage on the Camino, where pilgrims subvert the norms of society by rejecting regular forms of transport and choose to go on foot. It is difficult to distinguish between pilgrimages of the past and today’s tourism: both phenomena may be motivated by a desire for an experience that will ultimately add more meaning to life. Contemporary pilgrimage can be viewed as a search for something

secularly similar than religious pilgrimage; it is an opportunity to partake in something in order to become closer to oneself. Although the numbers of people doing the Camino have greatly increased recently, the motivations for undertaking this journey are changing. The Camino can be (among many other things) a union with nature, a vacation, an escape from the drudgery of the everyday, a spiritual path to the self and humankind, a social reunion, or a personal testing ground (Frey, 1998: Intro). Individuals are said to have come to Santiago in search of personal transformation and fulfillment and out of 'the necessity of many people to satisfy their spiritual arena, to express their religious sentiments, or to fulfill processes of intellectual and personal growth, to seek out knowledge and wisdom' (Badone and Roseman et. Al, 2004: 80).

Cohen (1979) argued that while tourists travel away from the centers of their societies in search of authentic experiences, the pilgrim's journey is toward the center of his or her world in search of reality and spiritual identity (Cohen: 1979). Spirituality does not necessarily mean believing in God or in a god, but refers to the yearning for a human wholeness, and, therefore, it looks out for methods to achieve this aim (Eberhart, 2011: 5). This search parallels the progressive "disenchantment of the world" (Weber, 1920: 94), with neither a Centre nor an Other of any great primeval, mystical significance and the search for something with more meaning. This postmodern search can be construed as a search for authenticity in a world that is heavily relativised. Pilgrims do not necessarily come to be in touch with any specific divinity but they come to be in the energies of the sacred places and by being in these places to understand themselves more clearly and to see their role in the world. (Bowman, 2008: 244)

In 1973, MacCannell, was among the first to characterize tourism as a quest for the "authentic" and representing the pilgrimage of modern man as

one of those existential experiences (MacCannell, 1973). Pilgrimage goes beneath the surface of modern tourism. Wang (1999) suggests that this approach relies on the meaning ascribed to the term “authenticity” by existentialist philosophers such as Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Sartre, and Camus. This suggests that the ways in which existential authenticity is experienced in the context of pilgrimage can be divided into intra-personal authenticity (i.e., when one’s feelings of being true to oneself are not related to others) and inter-personal authenticity (i.e., when one’s feelings of being true to oneself are directly related to others). In this context, authenticity is seen as an ontological mode of being that does not depend on any given quality inherent in any object. (Belhassen, 2008). Pilgrimage in this sense is the “inward transformation of spirit and personality” (Turner, 1973: 214) or as the source of miraculous healing and rejuvenation. The modal experience of the ideal type of the pilgrim is “existential”, an experience of re-creation, revitalization, grace, and exaltation (Cohen, 1992).

This undertaking of pilgrimage is ‘spiritual not in the sense of being religious but in the sense of having to do with the spirit’ (Rudolph, 2004). Such journeys are, for Rudolph, ‘better sensed than defined’, feelings that he describes as not “New Age” or necessarily religious in context but spiritual somehow.

*“You might not believe it like myself, you might not understand it, but the feeling is there, no matter what you think” (Rudolph, 2004).*

He sites interviews with pilgrims that speak of the freedom from the everyday obsessions with time that they experienced whilst on the pilgrimage, and the difficulties they imagine in explaining to their friends how ‘liberating and uplifting’ it was.

## Pilgrimage as a Rites of Passage

*Pilgrimage is born of desire....the desire is for solution to problems of all kinds that arise within the human situation. (Morinis, 1992)*

*"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 & Turner, 1978: 30).*

In *Les Rites de Passage* (1909), Arnold van Gennep argued that 'regeneration' was the law of life, and that it was accomplished through rites of passage, which have three major phases. The first is the separation phase, when the individual or group is removed from a previous state. The second is the transition phase or the liminal phase, a social limbo where the individual may develop a close bond (*communitas*) with other group members. The final stage is the reintegration or reaggregation stage, where the person returns on the completion of the rite and is recognized by society as having a renewed social status (Barton, 2007). Van Gennep wrote that the

*'life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another... a man's life comes to be made up of a succession of stages with similar ends and beginnings' (Van Gennep, 1909/1960, p. 2-3).*

Van Gennep noted that, whilst the content of social transitions varied from society to society, a characteristic of social transitions was that their form or pattern was universal, calling this process of transition a 'rite of passage'. A



rite of passage may be defined as an event in which an individual passes from one condition of life experience into another, from one stage of life, or state of social status, to a more advanced one (Van Gennep, 1960). Ritual is crucial in signifying important personal life events, or life crises, and is often represented by a rite of passage (Barton, 2007).

A pilgrimage has been defined as “a journey resulting from religious causes, externally to a holy site, and internally for spiritual purposes and internal understanding” (Barber, 1993, p. 1). Today, pilgrimage can be defined differently, as a traditional religious or modern secular journey, with individual meaning taking more of a central role in the experience of the pilgrim (Kreiner, 2009: 440). One of the key distinguishing factors of pilgrimage is that it is formed out of the desire for some form of change and the belief that this can be found at the pilgrimage site (Turner, 1993: 22). The revolutionary work of Victor and Edith Turner in 1978 led scholars to define pilgrimage as that time and space in which people travel through (and to) literal, cultural, and emotional margins; the Turners use the flexible term “liminality” to define the pilgrimage experience. Pilgrimages are “liminal” phenomena or threshold experiences. This is a time defined by uncertainty, where there is space for reflection and creativity. These are experiences where one is in a type of limbo of space and time, a “betwixt and between” state. The liminal time represents huge potentiality for transformation and renewal, where there is a complete stripping of old norms, viewpoints and values, opening space for new ideas and identities. In such a liminal space on pilgrimage, pilgrims exhibit in their social relations, the quality of *communitas*; and this quality, which is long-established in pilgrimages, becomes articulated in some measure with the environing social structure through their social organization (Turner, 1973: 192).

## Communitas

Turner's (1982) view was that during a rite of passage, and particularly during the transition phase, social identity became ambiguous, and individuals found themselves living outside the normal organisation and values of their social system. During the transition phase of the rite of passage, individuals formed a unique relationship with other initiates. This fellowship, sharing, or 'communitas', has its own structure, although its purpose is anti-structural. People undertaking pilgrimage as rite of passage become actors that share a common bond that unites them throughout their journey (Norman, 2004: 5). By this, Turner (1982) meant that communitas prevailed when normal social community did not (Barton, 2007).

*'Unmediated relationships not governed by social norms and regulations may be accessible when individuals are out of everyday social contexts' (Milena, 2008).*

This didn't feel like they fitted in with what the regular, fast-paced world offered. The more I travelled, the more I felt a sense of connection and belonging with these people. But I also felt a connection to the place that I had found within myself through the pace of walking. All of these factors contributed to a grounded sense of self within me, a type of reunification with what I felt was always inside me, but was never allowed to show itself in my normal life. I felt I was finally at one with my authentic self. I exercised everyday, I had regular meaningful connections with long, deep conversations and light-hearted fun, I wrote almost everyday and felt I could express this newfound authentic self.

## Returning Home and Reintegration

*“Reaggregation, or reintegration, as a central part of rites of passage, is essentially ignored.” (Frey, 2004)*

The third and final stage of a rite of passage is the reintegration or reaggregation stage. In this stage, the self is led back into society, transformed to greater consciousness but also molded to a socially appropriate form (Morinis, 1985: 170). This phase is a critically important time after a period of liminality when personal, interpersonal, and communal integration of renewed identity must occur. It is during this time that the transformative value of the liminal phase begins to take shape (Texter and Mariscotti, 1994: 327). The heightened self-awareness induced by pain, and time to one's self, the sharp consciousness of the peak experience, fades, as the individual merges back into society, in a new role (Morinis, 1985: 171). Hence, ritual enactment by the community that one reinters is especially vital during the reintegration phase following a major crisis. This is a ritual to communicate the fact that the individual is irreversibly different from the time before the rite (Texter and Mariscotti, 1994: 327).

In Contemporary rites of passage like the Camino, there are no significant rituals that mark this transformation for the individual. This is a result of the Camino having been undertaken as a self-imposed rite of passage that is not part of the recognized structure of our postmodern society. Individuals then, often experience a sense of dissolution and isolation after their return from Spain. This is a symptom of the lack of ritual structure in postmodernity, the structure that once existed with strong social institutions is no longer a reality. Giddens confirms this lack of significant rituals to mark transformative experiences.

*“The lifespan becomes structured around ‘open experience thresholds’, rather than ritualized passages. Ritual itself is an external referent and the absence of ritual in modern social conditions removes an important psychological support from the individual and affects his capacity to cope with major transitions in life, such as birth adolescence, marriage and death. In modern society however, each phase of transition tends to turn into an identity crisis”*

*(Giddens, 1991, p.148).*

Nancy Louis Frey, arguably the most regarded anthropologist of the contemporary Camino experience, writes that ‘the return home is a vastly neglected part of the experience by both pilgrims and researchers’. (Frey, 2004). The analysis of researchers appear to begin and end with the process of journeying to the destination, rather than to focus on the reincorporation of travelers into their social groups at home (Frey, 2004). Frey writes how both academics’ and travelers’ narratives of journeys on pilgrimage or travel experience, is usually treated in isolation and bracketed between the departure from home and the return, as if there were no continuity between the experiences (Frey, 2004). This is a hugely important stage of the journey where one can incorporate their new sense of self back into their old social environment. Morinis, writes:

*““The return to the everyday is a component of almost every pilgrimage. While the sacred place is the source of the power and salvation, it is at home once again that the effects of power are incorporated into life and what salvation is gained is confirmed. The return journey and the reincorporation of the pilgrim into social life are the test of the pilgrimage. Has there been change? Will it last?”*

*(Morinis, 1992: 27)*

The reintegration stage is the part of the journey where all of the revelations and transformative features of one’s new self is solidified.

*“It is in the ordinary, everyday relationships of home ... that the healing value of ritual can be most profoundly experienced” (Texter and Mariscotti, 1994: 327).*

These are aspects of a rite of passage that do not exist for pilgrims returning from the Camino. The postmodern pilgrim, unlike someone who comes of age in other social groups, does not accomplish a recognized permanent change of state or social status on his or her return home. This can result in the individual feeling estranged and alienated as their new sense of self is not recognized or reinforced by the society that they return to. This was something I experienced on returning home and didn't understand why until researching for this thesis.

This amounted to a realization that a recognized reintegration process is what was missing from my Camino experience. This was what caused me to feel so isolated and frustrated on returning home. As I have shown above, this part of the journey is also neglected in contemporary research of the Camino. This led me to recounting my own experience of my attempted reintegration, accompanied by the accounts of seven other pilgrims. By documenting some experiences of the return leg of the journey, I would provide some insight into the experience of reintegration. Then, by postulating methods for how one can successfully integrate back into society, I would provide the blueprints for other pilgrims on their return home. The following chapter describes my own independent research into the process of reintegration after the Camino, representing an attempt to add to the literature on this process. I document the difficulties that this reintegration process brings and offer ways that one can successfully transfer the wellbeing and sense of connection found on the Camino into one's everyday life.

## Chapter 4

### Autoethnographic Research of The Reintegration Process

*I am irreversibly different  
The extent of which, I'm still discovering.  
Those that know me are only beginning to realise  
The importance of the Camino,  
In my souls' uncovering.*

*(Brian Kingston, 2013)*

*"For me, it was so transformative and I was so curious as to why it was. I  
walked away from it so different. And I was like: "why?"*

*(David, quoted from our interview in July 2013)*

In light of the information that I gathered from the literature review in the previous chapter, I realised that a focus on the reintegration process was vital. In this chapter I focus on a description of my own reintegration process after returning home from the Camino, complimenting it with information that I gathered from seven pilgrims, one year after completing their journeys through Spain. I met each of the interviewees while on my own journey and had kept occasional contact with them throughout the past year after returning home. I already had established connections with each person and had established a high level of trust, which I cherish in my personal life and for the relevance of this thesis. These proved to be extremely valuable relationships in conducting the research as 'Most ethnographic studies are carried out by people who are outsiders, so for them the key problem is access' (Gillham,

2008: 42). This was not a problem for me as each interviewee was happy to be involved and get a chance to discuss their pilgrimage with a fellow pilgrim.

We were able to talk with on the same level, an invaluable connection which fostered authentic stories and narratives of each experience. We spoke the same language, the language of pilgrims. This meant that I was conducting participant observation in a true sense.

*'Most of what is described as participant observation is not so, in the sense that the researcher is not a normal part of the group being observed. Fully participant observation can only be carried out by an insider: someone who already belongs to the group being researched. (Gillham, 2008: 39)*

The pilgrims I interviewed, were aged between 18 and 40, and were from a range of countries, with a variety of different professions, representing the widespread influence of the Camino. The interview process was a journey to discover their experience of returning home after the Camino, with a view to understanding how one can successfully integrate their transformative experience had on the Camino into life at home.

To fully understand their experiences, I loosely structured the interview questions similar to the chronological experience of the Camino. First focusing on how they heard about the Camino, why they decided to do it and their experiences while in Spain. Then, most importantly for this thesis, I focused on their return home. I asked them about the period immediately after returning home and discussed my own experience with them to see if they had similar experiences. I wanted to understand if they had attempted to integrate the Camino into their lives, and understand the various levels of success and failure that they had in doing this. To find out about their return home, I loosely structured my interviews around three following questions:

*How did you feel when you got home?*

*Did/Do others understand your experience?*

*How has the Camino affected your life one year after completing it?*

My loosely structured interview technique fostered authentic self-reflection for each pilgrim and a safe space for open discussion and relaxed conversation. My interview technique was open and reflexive, giving the interviewees a chance to actively contribute to the intellectual development and direction of my thesis as a whole. This proved to be a collaborative experience, where their answers and insights provided me with the arrows in which to direct my conclusions. The information from these interviews/discussions are divided into three general sections, all wound around my own autoethnographical experience of returning home. The first section focuses on the experience of returning home and difficulty in adjusting to life in contemporary society. The second section concentrates on the difficulty of relaying the experience to those close to each of us on returning home. The third section discusses the effect the Camino has had on their lives, and if they have actively changed their lives since returning home. I wanted to find out how one can integrate themselves into their respective world.



## The Process of Returning to Home

For me, returning home proved extremely difficult. There was no longer the everyday act of walking in my life and I no longer had an enjoyable, structured daily routine that I shared with other people. Frey writes how “the sense of direction and purpose felt so strongly during the journey may be lost at home when the yellow arrows of the Camino no longer indicate the way (Frey, 1998). The world felt like it was moving too fast and in an infinite number of directions, with very few people stopping to reflect on what they were doing with their lives and why they were doing it. A busy lunchtime in the centre of my university or city, personified this, where everybody rushed from class to class or shop to shop, in a myriad of directions. This took time to get used to, and the pace of life was far too fast for me for a while, not having travelled by anything other than my own two feet for a month.

Relationships felt superficial and everyday social interactions felt less meaningful and often quite shallow, when compared to the connections that I made on the Camino. I felt as if I had witnessed a world of authenticity and direction, where life was slower and conversations were longer.

Coming home was a shock, and adjusting to life proved to be a difficult process. I returned to college, determined to create a new life for myself but found that people still talked to me as if I was the same person than when I had left. The gap between who I felt I had become, and who others saw me as, was big and I didn't have any tools to close such a gap. This amounted to me feeling increasingly isolated and frustrated in the months after coming home. I didn't know where to direct these feelings, as my family and friends were being as supportive as they new how, but it was not enough. I had emerged from Spain with a greater sense of self-knowledge and

understanding than I had when I left. I valued myself as an open, intelligent person, who was confident to talk to anybody. I was returning back to Ireland a new man, ready to begin a new chapter of my life, where I would be more creative, confident and open, more generous and giving. But I came back home and realized that integrating this new me was harder than I had expected.

People were not as ready to be open in the 'real' world and were less inclined to share their personal experiences or reflect on life. There was no longer a shared goal or destination. I found it difficult to relate to others in a meaningful way. I had come back into a face-paced world, defined by lack of free time, lack of meaning and lack of connection. I didn't understand what was happening and tried to integrate back into the world as best I could. But nothing felt the same, everything felt less authentic somehow.

In attempting to understand these experiences, I asked those that I interviewed to describe their initial return period and discover if they had had similar experiences. My first interviewee Mark, a psychology PhD student and freelance journalist, expressed similar feelings of disconnection after returning home:

*"...its difficult to talk in these terms, without sounding like an absolute asshole. But, you will understand what I'm saying. I felt a profound sense of separateness. And it was, it's hard to articulate it, but I almost felt like, this was how an alien would feel if he was to wear human skin and walk among them." (Mark)*

Here, it is clear that he doesn't want to sound as if he thinks of himself as more enlightened than the people on the street but that he feels different and alienated from others. It was in situations where he previously wouldn't have felt so uncomfortable or out of place. Here he describes his first night back in Dublin, where he walked through a main street and witnessed the city

in full swing on a Saturday night.

*It was like they weren't thinking, in a very real way they kind of looked like animals to me, two guys ran across the road on a red light, some guy beeped his horn and shook the fist and they looked back laughing, and I thought, ewww. You know, him for being angry and them for looking back like idiots, and you know, they thought it was the funniest thing, and you know, I just saw people who I thought were asleep. (Mark)*

Here, Mark describes a situation where he encounters people going about their lives and living in a way that he describes as 'asleep'. It was great talking to him because it gave me a great insight into his feelings and provided me with a reference to discuss my own feelings on returning home. When walking into a large supermarket, or nightclub, I often felt disorientated amongst so many people that I saw as zombies, living their lives without any reflection, and just going through the motions of life. I indulged in feelings of superiority for a while, thinking that I knew something that the vast majority of people didn't. After a while, I began to feel sad and lonely in these places. The more time went on, the more I felt like what I had experienced in Spain was unrealistic and idealistic because it was so far removed and so different to life at home. I developed an intense nostalgia for life on the Camino, where I saw the world I now inhabited like it would never fit into the new view I had of myself. Marie, a Danish sports education student, echoed this sense of detachment and disillusionment to the world after returning home:

*Ye, In the beginning I felt like I was a little crazy because I didn't fit into society. So you know like, my entire life I felt really comfortable being around many people, it felt normal. But in the beginning I was feeling a bit uncomfortable. Like they were living the life that I was living before, not thinking about it. Not making any reflections at all, just living. Maybe for three or four months I felt like that. But now it's more normal. (Laughter). (Marie)*

Here, Marie sites feelings of being different to here peers, and different

to her old self. After returning from the Camino, she began to place importance in the act of reflection about life, and was critical of people who didn't partake in such reflection.

In both these cases, the interviewees express coming home with a newfound knowledge and experience of something that they both believe is not experienced in mainstream society. A sense of detachment and separateness is clearly evident in both accounts, which are stark contrasts to the feelings they expressed while on the Camino. This was a recurring theme in my research. The highs that were experienced on the Camino were contrasted by the stark realities of everyday life and for the majority of those that I interviewed, the weeks and months after returning home proved to be a difficult time.

As time went on, the experience began to feel less and less real for me. I was increasingly frustrated by a sense of disappointment of how the Camino hadn't actually changed the way I lived my life. I had quickly slipped back into old habits and thought patterns but I still felt different, and saw the world differently. When I asked her feelings in the months after the Camino, Frieda, a theatrical property designer from Germany commented:

*You always take something from the Camino but I'm not sure if its still here because it was one year ago. Or its getting less and less over the weeks after the Camino...The first time that you do your shopping, and although its 5 kms away, you walk, this is amazing back home. But then you do it just once. And then you go by car. It doesn't make sense after the Camino. Even if you try to get it back, it's not the Camino.  
(Frieda)*

Here, Frieda expresses how the feelings while on the Camino begin to fade as time moves on back home. She even attempted to physically recreate the act of walking, but failed to integrate it into her life, thinking that her failure to do so amounted to a failure to integrate all aspects of Camino into her life.

This was a common feature amongst those that I researched and I often found that like myself, many of the interviewees found themselves in a profound place of reverting back to their old ways of being, in the months after initially arriving home from Spain. Alex, a recent college graduate from Canada commented:

*“I’ve certainly been to a worse place. I came back with a sense of being ready to deal with a lot of issues that I wanted to deal with. Like at the beginning of fall, I was thinking, I would like to get these things done, to help myself. That was right out of the gate. But it fizzled off... because I came home and all I saw were my parents and the people at work and it was wintertime. It just grinds you down” (Alex)*

Here, its clear that Alex came back from Spain with a sense that he was ready to take on his old self with the intention of improving his life. This quickly faded as he reverted back to an old way of living his life. It became clear that all of the people that I interviewed experienced some level of difficulty in returning home and echoed Alex’s sentiment that the world that one reenters “just grinds you down” to your previous self, and puts all that one has learnt while on pilgrimage to the test.

The difficulty experienced on returning home is compounded when those close to the person don’t fully understand the profound affect the Camino has had on them as a returning pilgrim. A large part of the difficulty of returning home is the fact that many pilgrims describe how very few people at home really understand their experience. The following section elucidates the problem that this causes for individuals returning from the Camino.

## Explaining the experience

*'Despite the positive aspects of retelling, pilgrims repeatedly comment on their inability to transmit the experiences of the Camino on a deep level because "no one really understands' (Frey, 2004)*

*"...everyday is an adventure, potentially surreal, and where feelings so unconnected with modern existence become a part of everyday life.....hardly life-changing in themselves, the vast numbers of these little experiences added up, creating a feeling that wasn't easy to describe to my friends after I returned" (Rudolph, 2004)*

I tried to explain the experience to friends and family but they didn't understand. After the initial couple of conversations with friends and family after such an event, life went back to normal for everybody. This was a jarring experience, where I felt like there was inadequate recognition of what I had just been through. Parents, family, friends, strangers, were captivated for a while, hours maybe, but then went back to their own lives and worries.

People often viewed the Camino as just an unusual holiday and an indulgence in a long walk in a different country. This felt like a trivializing of what was a cathartic, profound experience, reducing it to a mere extended walking holiday. Amongst those that I interviewed, there was a common thread of the indignity in answering seemingly innocuous questions that undermined this profound event in people's lives. This deep and meaningful event in our lives, led us to connect with others in an authentic and untrammelled way. The social space that the Camino provided, along with the

soporific act of walking, provided an alternative to bars, nightclubs etc. which mainstream society offers to us as a means of social interactions while on holiday. In retrospect this feels a bit embarrassing to be describing, and feels self-centered (and probably was) but it does speak to the extent of which I felt different on arrival home, and the lack of understanding or recognition I encountered. In my myopic view of my newfound self, I was amazed to find that I wasn't being recognized for my achievements

Tom, a pharmacist from Scotland, sympathized with my feelings, saying

*"That's the way I was, no one gets it!" (Tom).*

Relaying the unique space that the Camino provided proved to be very difficult for all those that I interviewed, as few of them felt like they had relevant experiences in contemporary society that they could use to relate to others of this special time in their lives. Frieda commented:

*If you now talk with people about the Camino, Its like...I think I am just annoying them because I say, "Oh ye I met those guys and we were talking about this, and this beautiful church and we were walking and walking and all the blisters...." It just "Ok Frieda, I don't care" (Frieda)*

There was a sense of frustration here that was common among my interviewees. Pilgrims tend to return from the Camino with a renewed sense of the world and themselves within it, and come back attempting to share the experience with those back home. But inevitably, it falls on deaf ears to most people that are talked to. Mark also expressed this when I told him about my own experience.

*"That's a good point. I mean, that reminds me of how I blanched a little bit last year when people talked about "my holiday"...I didn't want to sound like a an asshole, but it wasn't a holiday (Mark)*

Pilgrims' accounts of other people understanding the experience proved to be an important aspect in my research, as it is an important part of the integration process. How does one explain all of the amazing conversations, comfortable silences, scenery, sense of freedom and connection at the same time felt while walking the Camino? David, a business graduate working for a large computing corporation, explained to me about how he only described the Camino properly to people that "really seemed interested" (David). This amounted to him saving his "real" explanation of the Camino, to those who he believed would take the time and be open enough to attempt to understand his experience. Marie did something similar, saying that

*"Ye. I chose the people I wanted to share my experiences with. I only told people who I new would understand me about all the things that I experienced. Like, (to) all my other friends, I said it was nice and how it worked. Like where I slept and the people I met and showed some pictures. I didn't tell them what I felt and stuff like that. My parents were really great to talk with. (Marie).*

Here I found that the most successful people in integrating their experience were the ones who understood that not everybody was going to understand what they had been through, and to cherish the people that did understand. On learning this, I realized that it was an important part of my journey to transfer an authentic account of my experience only to those close to me and those who are actually interested. This meant that I no longer felt the need to have to explain to everyone who I came across of this transformative experience. This has come as a huge sense of relief, and I now hold the knowledge and wisdom of this experience within me, expressing it through the way I live my life. I tell people of the Camino's importance in my life only when I feel that they really want to hear about it. It has brought a greater sense of peace within me, knowing that the experience is real and that



I don't have to depend on the direct validation of others to reinforce it. But how do I allow the Camino experience to live through me? I answer this question in the next section, and attempt to understand how the feelings experienced on the Camino lasted with each pilgrim.

## Reintegration

An Incorporation of the person that I felt I was on the Camino and adjusting life to the new person I felt I was, proved to be a difficult. Assimilating this sense of self has been process of discovery, and it has been a journey to discover who it is that I am relation to the world that I inhabit.

On coming home, I did not see myself as a pilgrim but I was also not fully part of the world that I was reentering. I felt as if I was the philosopher leaving Plato's cave and returning to bring the news to those trapped inside of it. The people inside didn't understand, and I couldn't convince anyone that they should live their lives differently. I also knew that this was home, and that the world outside of the cave was not where I belonged. I slipped back into the thought patterns and habits of those that I lived among and it was detrimental to my newfound sense of self. The enduring challenge has been to integrate my self into this world, while still being integral to myself. Marie talked about her time after the Camino and describes a period of darkness in coming home in an inability to integrate the highs of the Camino into her life and the people around her at home in Denmark.

*I think I was a bit depressed when I got home. And I think all that philosophy can make you think too much about things. Just like the vegetarian thing, I read a lot about it, I feel like I couldn't do anything to have an impact or to make the world a better place (Marie)*

Here, Marie expresses how the Camino experience can result in the person having a sense of disillusionment with life after returning home from the Camino, a dangerous state for one's well being. Mark commented that such feelings experienced by many after the Camino, if adhered to for too long, could result in people becoming lost to the Camino, believing that the Camino is where they belong. Any pilgrims end up yearning for the sense of self and connection that they felt while on the Camino, and detrimentally to themselves, believe that the Camino is the only place they can be themselves.

*I think you know, I do hear about, like some people who, in a metaphorical way, did get lost out there, even if they came home, in some sense they never did. And in that sense they are almost, its possible to be a casualty of the Camino. And I suppose you know, how do you figure out when its stops being a good thing and starts being detrimental? (Mark)*

With this in mind, I realised the importance of understanding how people could successfully integrate their sense of selves into their respective worlds, and how to prevent The Camino from becoming a “detrimental” experience to one's sense of self. I developed a motivation to understand this process, and explain it, with the intention of helping others to understand their reintegration process after a life-changing event such as the Camino.

### **The Importance of Self-Reflection**

These past few months, as I have come to fervently focus on this thesis, I have experienced a great level of satisfaction in terms of integrating my sense of self. The motivation for this thesis is to help understand the benefits of the Camino in one's process of emergence. In focusing on the reintegration process, I am contributing to the Camino experience by warning

others of the pitfalls in returning from the Camino. This goes for many other life-changing events that people experience, like returning from travelling or living abroad. This process of creativity has given meaning and purpose to my day. I have extended this creativity by writing and performing poetry and in doing so, I surround myself with people who are not afraid to be themselves, reinforcing each others' uniqueness. I have also begun to work for two charities that help young people all over the world, in an effort to ease the existential anxieties in others, drawing on my own experience of learning to overcome them. The space that the Camino provided me with, allowed me to see these positive aspects of myself. I now see where I can make an impact on the world in a positive way. My sense of self in our world is transition is becoming more solid, and continues to strengthen as time goes on. I work in a job that I like, and I make a conscious effort to heal any relationship that needs healing, whether that is with myself or with the people close to me, recognizing that these are essential elements to living a fulfilling life.

These processes are simple, but are not easy. It has taken time for people to change their perceptions of me, which has come with a realization that for this to happen, I must first change the perception that I have of myself. This has taken the best part of a year to understand and continues to be a daily challenge. The sense of self and self-worth that I feel now as a result of all of these actions, were preceded by a period of darkness in the immediate months after the Camino, where I didn't have the tools to speak about what I was feeling, and felt that nobody would understand me. After experiencing an immense transformation on the Camino, I am now in the process of discovering who I am in relation to our contemporary world. The last year has been a process where I have often overly indulged in this process, becoming self-absorbed and often self-important, looking at others as if they will never understand. My experience on the Camino helps to remind me not to do this, and has been an important tool in not becoming part of the cliché of the often

self-centred 'New Age' traditions. Mark comments on this, saying that:

*The Camino can help you to help to be aware of those pitfalls; I think there is such a difference between getting to know yourself and being rapped up in yourself. (Mark)*

With this quote as a constant reminder, I embarked upon the writing of this thesis and with this at the back of my head. In saying that, the self-reflection element of this thesis is a huge part of my integration, and I now see that an understanding of the experience is an important part of the journey. Individuals must be able to come to some understanding of how the Camino has changed them, as there are no signposts for this in the society that one reenters.

There are no defining rituals provided by the returning pilgrim's social group that can accurately represent the significance of the transformation felt by each pilgrim. A process of self-reflection is an important ritual here, in successfully understanding and integrating one's new sense of self into their world. Here, it becomes important for the individual to recognize this and move to signify the event in their own way, by recognizing that they themselves are responsible for their own recognition as a transformed individual. Michael, a college graduate and incessant traveler said:

*"There was never a point where I thought, 'ok, I've had a revelation.. I can do what I want now'. It was on reflection, it's not really until now, or at some point after, that you are like, yes that happened and the whole experience has had an effect on me." (Michaela)*

This self-reflection is vital to prevent the experience from becoming what Giddens described as "open experience thresholds", (Giddens, 1991: 148), leaving the individual feeling lost and alienated because the encounter a rite of passage without a recognized ritual of reintegration. One must foster a change within themselves, by reflecting and coming to further understanding

of their experience. One must and treat themselves differently, doing the job of what the members of other societies would have done welcoming the post-initiate back into the tribe after a successful rite of passage.

### The Tools for Successful Reintegration

An important aspect of my own integration since my time on the Camino, has been a realization that the Camino is not the answer to my problems, it is the mindset and way of life that I learned while in Spain that is the key to a more fulfilling existence. In being open with the people that I met, and with myself, through long hours of walking, I learned of the importance of honest self reflection. This was a humbling time, where I realized that most of the problems in my life were caused by the way I chose to see the world. I had built up resentment towards my parents and towards any form of authority throughout my life, that resulted in a dissatisfaction that permeated through all of my relationships. The Camino gave me the space to humbly understand the central part I had to play in my own wellbeing and the power I had to create a sense of self and community of people around me that fostered this sense of contentment. The Camino was a space to realize this, and to bring it back into my life. This was accompanied by a realization that the Camino does not solve ones' problems but provides the person with the mindset to deal with them. A similar understanding was commented on by Alex who said:

*"I've come through the experience in a way, that I think sets me up for the next one. It doesn't solve anything but the sort of residual effect of the Camino is that it has prompted me to have the courage to work through things. In a way. But it hasn't necessarily solved them just because I've found insight. It's just an impetus, and that might have happened without the Camino but it (The Camino) has certainly helped." (Alex).*

Here Alex describes how the mindset that he learned on the Camino,

helped him to realize the potential he has for individual transformation. Walking 6 hours a day for a month with strangers, in such an open and generous environment, can motivate the individual to make large changes in their lives after returning, despite the initial feelings of disorientation and disillusion on returning home. Michaela described how she to applies the mindset learned on the Camino into her life back at home

*"I remember getting to London and started applying for 9-5 jobs and got offered an interview, but I promised myself that I would never do ticketing again because it was soul destroying, and the Camino reminds me don't do anything that you don't want to do" (Michaela)*

Michaela shows she had to place her own limits on herself on returning home, restricting herself from applying for jobs that she hates, and attempting to create a life for herself that is more aligned to her as a person. This type of decision takes great personal strength and determination, without the direct support of her peers or social group that in other social structures would have recognised her transformed status. She is left to do this for herself, a difficult process.

The Camino teaches people to align what they do with what they like. The Camino and its' structure provides a safe space where people can be themselves outside of the pressures of the postmodern world that they usually inhabit. It gives them strength to deal with things that before, they believed were insurmountable. The Camino offers people the space to do this. They can do what they like, when they like, whether that means go to the bathroom, eat, sleep, think, and talk. Old social pressures are removed, and true freedom is experienced within the safe confines of the structure of the Camino. Long hours walking teaches one the ancient art of being with oneself. Applying this freedom and comfort to life back home is difficult, but most were determined to transfer it to their lives. Mark talked about what the Camino has shown him to do in his life at home.

*"Ye, and also you know, I think... surrounding yourself with yourself, and being ok with that, for better or fucking worse. You know its like for all of your traits and failings." (Mark)*

The space that the Camino provides with oneself, is a time for the person to become accepting of themselves. This is not a passive acceptance, where one does not seek to improve or solve their problems, but a type of patience with oneself. Mark describes how he now has more patience and is less hard on himself.

*"It (The Camino) kind of unlocks that, (way of thinking) in my head. You know, I mean, I spent a lot of time over the years being sort of ehm... haunted by myself." (Mark)*

Here we can see that the Camino can provide the person with a renewed sense of self to return home and approach life's issues with a different mindset. A successful integration must come from an active process of transformation after the event, and not from thinking that simply walking the Camino will solve their problems. The work is done when one gets home and puts what one has learned on the Camino into practice.

We, as pilgrims, having experienced such an honest and loving atmosphere while on the Camino, need to actively create similar settings in our home lives, where we are the leaders in creating a better world for others and ourselves. David was an inspiration to me while on the Camino. He spoke fluent Spanish, wrote poetry, drew a lot and talked with each person he met with an enthusiasm and interest. He had a great sense of who he was, and was comfortable being that person in front of anybody. He was walking to Santiago after a year of studying in Spain, and was dedicating the trip to his father, who had recently been diagnosed with a condition that meant he would spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair. In my interview with him he told me how openness and honesty with strangers was for talking out one's own

issues. This is a large part of the space that the Camino provides and can be hugely therapeutic for the pilgrim. The openness and honesty experienced on the Camino however must be fostered and created within one's own life at home in order to see lasting benefits of the experience. The creation of this type of outlook on life is the mindset that many learn while on the Camino, and it takes practice to assimilate it into one's life. The real work on oneself and one's life needs to be done on returning home.

*"So at the end, talk to strangers, and they are great, but you have to be able to say everything that you have said to them, to the people that aren't strangers, because they are going to be the people that impact you." (David)*

Here David shows that he learnt from his time on the Camino that living in such an open and honest way is beneficial for his sense of self and wellbeing. In order to transfer those feelings into one's life, one has to recreate it by enacting that sense of openness with those closest to them at home. Only then will the returning be able to feel the sense of clarity that they did while in Spain.

Marie, among all of the people that I interviewed, seems to have had the most profound and visible change in life since completing the Camino. Towards the end of her Camino, she became a vegetarian and started reading books on philosophy and psychology. She now owns her own small, mostly self-sufficient house, growing organic produce. She doesn't claim to have changed though,

*"I don't know, I don't feel different. I think I have other interests, other hobbies" (Marie).*

Her actions however, speak far louder than her words, and she told me that after she came home and became a vegetarian, that her parents also



became vegetarians, I was amazed about how she had transformed her life since the Camino and stuck to many of the life-changing decision that she had made while on the Camino. This is an example of how the Camino can open one's mind up to new points of view and when these points of view are embraced at home, the person's life can change dramatically.

*"Now, (I) just live my life in the best way, knowing that I can make a change. And you know my parents they became vegetarians too, I'm having an impact." (Marie)*

For Marie, the Camino was a space that opened up her world, she returned a vegetarian and with a vastly different outlook on life. She experienced feelings of depression and alienation after initially returning home, more intensely it seemed, than other pilgrims that I interviewed. She overcame many of these feelings with her determination to change her way of life and living more in line with who she wanted to be, having a positive affect on those around her. Michaela also expressed these feelings, and being a person that travels a lot, described herself as becoming more of the person she believes she is in all situation of her life.

*"I do feel like a different person travelling overseas than I am when I am at home. And I think as I get older those two parts of myself will just mesh"(Micheala)*

The above quote expresses the overall sentiment of the reintegration process, which is a process that takes time and is often a challenging for returning pilgrims. The Camino provides a transformative experience, where the individual is allowed to express himself or herself in an honest and open way, a way of life fostered that is not necessarily available in their local settings. It is clear that to create a mindset similar to that felt on the Camino. It is essential to change those aspects of one's life that cause them not to be their authentic selves. This often requires huge changes when returning

home, this is something that many pilgrims are unable to make. This may amount to ending a relationship, changing jobs, moving house, taking up a sport or on a different level, healing old resentments, coming to terms with loss and moving on from old patterns. It is these changes that add up to a successful reintegration of the self that is so often found on the Camino.

A successful reintegration process involves a patient approach to adjusting one's life to fit in with their new sense of self. The reintegration process of the Camino, amounts to a daily practice of letting go of old thought patterns and unhealthy habits, formulating a new sense of purpose in one's life, a useful way to creating a new sense of self. This is a difficult transition that often leaves the individual feeling isolated and alienated from their former peer group. However, integration is possible if one is open to changing the way they live and how they relate to themselves and others. This creates an environment for themselves that is similar to that of the Camino, authenticity and openness and honesty.

Here, it is important to recognize that for myself and for others, reintegration is a continuing process. It is outside of the parameters in this thesis to discuss the effects of the Camino beyond one year afterwards. But as I have indicated in this chapter, one's life can be transformed if certain changes are made to one's life in each person's process of reintegration. In my own experience, I have begun to align what I love with what I do, and have attempted to create a space in the world for myself, that I feel allows me to be as authentic and open as I allowed myself to be on the Camino. There is a long way to go, but I am seeing improvements in my life as the weeks and months go by, recognizing that this reflection of the experience has proved to be cathartic in my understanding of myself, and the Camino as rite of passage to the self.

## Chapter 5 – Reflexivity and Autoethnography

*“Every Human Being is an artist and in the moment of creation, we are at our most sane, most healthy, and most fulfilled. When we share a piece of our vision of the world with others, we are better able to see ourselves, to interact with others, and to make our own choices.”*  
(Rohd,1998: xix)

Autoethnography is an emerging qualitative research method that allows the author to write in a highly personalized style, drawing on his or her experience to extend understanding about a societal phenomenon.

Autoethnography is grounded in postmodern philosophy and is linked to growing debate about reflexivity and voice in social research. The intent of autoethnography is to acknowledge the inextricable link between the personal and the cultural and to make room for nontraditional forms of inquiry and expression (Wall, 2006: 1). Autoethnography can be explained as a form of critical ethnography that describes and analyzes (graphy) personal experiences (auto) in order to bring understanding to cultural phenomena (ethno) (Ellis 2004). The method incorporates the basic tenets of autobiography and ethnography: hence, “as a method, it is both a process and a product (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011: 1) Through autoethnography, the self-reflexive critique upon one’s personality as researcher desires to inspire the readers to critically examine their own standpoints, life experiences and relations with others (Spry, 2001: 711). It is a recognition that these stories are not of some people or culture that is “out there” in the world ready to be analyzed and presented, but they are about ourselves and our relationship with the world around us (Richardson, 1999)

In writing this thesis I have agreed with the methodology that says that 'the more inward one's writing turns, the more its universality becomes salient' (Richardson 2002: 415). By writing themselves into their own work as major characters, autoethnographers have challenged accepted views about silent authorship, where the researcher's voice is not included in the presentation of findings (Charmaz & Mitchell, 1997). My method in writing this thesis as something close to my own personal need to understand pilgrimage draws from van Gennep who wrote,

*'I confess sincerely that... my Rites de passage is like a part of my own flesh, and was the result of a kind of inner illumination that suddenly dispelled a sort of darkness in which I had been floundering for almost ten years' (Belmont, 1979: 58)*

Usually, the autoethnographer does not live through these experiences solely to make them part of a published document; rather, these experiences are assembled using hindsight (Bruner, 1993; Denzin, 1989, Freeman, 2004). In writing, the author also may interview others as well as consult with texts like photographs, journals, and recordings to help with recall (Delany, 2004; Didion, 2005; Goodall, 2006; Herrmann, 2005). The form of autoethnography is nebulous, where I have used my own poetry, personal narrative, interview information and prior studies to complete my work, giving it a multidisciplinary feel.

Most often, autobiographers write about "epiphanies"—remembered moments perceived to have significantly impacted the trajectory of a person's life (Bochner & Ellis, 1992; Couser, 1997; Denzin, 1989), times of existential crises that forced a person to attend to and analyze lived experience (Zaner, 2004), and events after which life does not seem quite the same. While epiphanies are self-claimed phenomena in which one person may consider an experience transformative while another may not, these epiphanies reveal

ways a person could negotiate "intense situations" and "effects that linger—recollections, memories, images, feelings—long after a crucial incident is supposedly finished" (Bochner, 1984: 595). My "revealing" is on how one can integrate the new sense of self found on an experience such as the Camino into their lives.

Here I also ironically adhere to the already explained potential shortcomings of postmodern ethical standards. Dufour writes how

*"We are all so 'free' that not only are we unafraid of putting our private lives on public display; we are forced to do so, thereby indulging in one of the postmodern forms of jouissance. In that respect, it is highly significant that putting private lives on display is now being promoted as the great postmodern standard for literature"* (Dufour, 2008: 76).

Here I am adhering to the cultural standards within postmodernity in the hope to subvert these norms by elucidating their shortcomings for health within the individual. Autoethnography is about being dangerous to the institutions of unequal power structures in society by exposing the roots of the social ills that we represent through our research (Madison 2009: 191).

## Talking and Writing as therapeutic

*“There are two circumstances in which discourses can play a formative role with special ease, when human beings are in a particularly fluid, malleable state: the first is childhood, and the second when one is directly talking about oneself”.*

*(Szakolczai, 2004)*

Writing is a way of knowing, a method of inquiry (Richardson, 2000). Consequently, writing personal stories can be therapeutic for authors as we write to make sense of ourselves and our experiences (Kiesinger, 2002; Poulos, 2008), purge our burdens (Atkinson, 2007), and question canonical stories—conventional, authoritative, and "projective" storylines that "plot" how "ideal social selves" should live (Toloyan, 1987, p.218; Bochner, 2001, 2002). In so doing, we seek to improve and better understand our relationships (Adams, 2006; Wyatt, 2008), reduce prejudice (Ellis, 2002a, 2009), encourage personal responsibility and agency (Pelias, 2000, 2007), raise consciousness and promote cultural change (Ellis, 2002b; Goodall, 2006), and give people a voice that, before writing, they may not have felt they had (Boylorn, 2006; Jago, 2002).

Autoethnography, as method, attempts to disrupt the binary of science and art. Here I was conscious that I tread the lines narrowly between the two disciplines, recognizing the values and shortcomings of both, and the potential shortcomings of not sticking to one discipline. Autoethnographers believe research can be rigorous, theoretical, and analytical and emotional, therapeutic, and inclusive of personal and social phenomena. The questions most important to autoethnographers are: who reads our work, how are they affected by it, and how does it keep a conversation going?

The such process of self-observation might actually add to self-knowledge and facilitate artistic development is only slowly gaining ground (see Gillham and Mcglip, 2007). As well as enhancing practice it also offers the potential to develop a new research methodology, as relevant to the social and natural sciences as it is to the 'subjective' world of the arts (Gillham, 2008: 83).

This led me to create my own form of research in which I mixed my own autoethnography with the stories of seven other people who also completed the Camino, one year before. This proved to be an amazingly informative technique for understanding my own experience, explaining it more accurately, and expanding its relevance. In providing a space for the pilgrims that I interviewed to reflect and discuss their experience. I was attracted to this biographical method of research to take advantage of its beneficial affects on a personal level, and hopefully also to those that I interviewed.

*“Biographical work is a practice that has been developed in (post)modern societies in order to solve some of the main issues of integration and order. Biographical work is a way to orient the individual... in a historical situation when static personal definitions (such as status) or quasi-natural phases of a life-cycle are not sufficient for this purpose. We may not know who we are and what is happening to us, but if we are able to narrate how we became who we are, then we can integrate ourselves, because we can present ourselves as both consistent and contingent. This is an autopoietic process.” (Wolrfam, 2000)*

The process of researching and writing this thesis has proved to be a pilgrimage in itself, allowing me to journey through my thoughts and in the search of an authentic method and narrative, being open and authentic to

myself and allowing the thoughts and words to come in their own time, was similar to the general approach to life taken by many pilgrims while on the Camino. I have found meaning in attempting understanding this phenomenon, in asking others about their experiences and asking their opinions, and in writing about it. I have found purpose in exposing more people to the health benefits that the Camino can offer; especially to those who have experienced the abyss of postmodernity's often shallow, futile offer of what life is meant to be.

This process has been as enlightening about the topic of the Camino as it has about myself. It has been a process of discovery about how I have begun to align what I am passionate about, with what I do. I have come to find greater satisfaction and contentment in my life as a whole as a result of this. My meaning has come to be derived from making a positive impact on the world, by exposing more people to something like the Camino, and by being the warm, open, generous person that my experiences on the Camino fostered within me. I now direct my life in a way that allows me to create wellbeing for myself and for others. This has amounted to getting a job with a charity organization that are working with disadvantaged children in a third world country, giving me the space to somehow making a positive impact on their lives. I also have gotten involved in another organization, one that works with adolescents in my own country to improve mental well being. My integration process has been a process of filling my life with people and activities that create a sense of meaning and well being within me. These are actions that I may not have been exposed to without undertaking something so life changing as the Camino, or as enlightening as writing this thesis. This thesis, has become a valuable source of self-expression for me, infusing it with my own poetry and point of view, and has also created further meaning and purpose to my life in the attempt to leave my own positive, creative impact on the world. It has been a process to both understand my Camino



experience and move to transcend it, doing this through fully understanding how it has affected me and now to move on with my life.

## Chapter 6

### Thoughts and Conclusions

*"I don't believe people are looking for the meaning of life as much as they are looking for the experience of being alive"*  
*Joseph Campbell*

Postmodern life can be disturbing, but it can also offer a world of unparalleled opportunity. Reflexivity allows us to explore the appropriate new possibilities, where we are not only affected by postmodern reflexivity, but we can also constructively participate in it (Mellor, 1993: 115). Even though the meaning systems that give meaning to our lives have been destabilized, we can actively counteract this by embarking on personal journey of discovery, one way of this is through pilgrimage. This is a space where self-reflection is encouraged and where one can come in contact with themselves, a space that is lacking in our postmodern world.

The person can find meaning within the symbolic structure of the Camino and use it as a self-imposed rite of passage to one's authentic self. The liminal space that is found while on the walk provides a space to reflect and think about one's life, deconstructing regular social statuses. This fosters a space for self-reflection without many of the worries that postmodernity brings. Within this space, there is an opportunity for "Communitas", a unique feature of a rite of passage where initiates forms strong bonds with one another, and are provided with a suitable antidote to the loss of connection that one may experience within our contemporary, postmodern world. This is

complimented by the repeated therapeutic act of walking, and long periods in nature. The increased popularity in numbers undertaking the Camino is linked to the lack of meaning and structure in contemporary life, and is an attempt to overcome such lacks.

There is a disconnect between what has conceptually been seen as a rite of passage from the work of Turner and Van Gennep and the contemporary Camino as a rite of passage. Today's Camino is a self-imposed act and is a subversion of the dominant values of society, rather than a tradition rite to be accepted by a society. There are therefore no mechanisms in place that allow for the individual to easily reintegrate their new sense of self back into society. This results in a vital part of a rite of passage to be lacking in the contemporary Camino. The reintegration/reaggregation stage is hugely important in a rite of passage, and is vital for the completion of the experience. The lack of structure of this stage of the journey called for a further understanding of the whole process in general, and led me to take a more in depth look at this final, and possibly most important part, of a rite of passage.

## Reintegration

The reintegration stage is where the initiate, on the returning from completing the rite, is recognized as having attained a greater sense of social status and an increased value within the society they return to. The postmodern pilgrim does not gain this after completing the Camino when they return back to their "normal lives". This can undo the wellbeing and sense of self that was experienced during the Camino, and can render the pilgrim feeling disillusioned and alienated when returning home. This thesis has been a journey to understand how one can integrate their newfound sense of self back into their lives successfully at home, and how one can create their own

integration process after the Camino. I provide the beginnings of a roadmap of how one can successfully integrate the beneficial aspects of the Camino into their lives by a reference to my own journey of reintegration.

In my own experience, walking the way of St. James enabled me to connect to my authentic self, and through that connection, I was able to find a profound connection with all of humanity. This feeling faded with time, but still exists within me, and continues to give me a deep resonance with my being one year after the Camino. I felt a deep sense of bereavement when that sense of connection initially faded on my return home and I have had to make a conscious effort to reconnect with myself on a deeper and more authentic level since those difficult months after the Camino. This was an experience common to all those that I interviewed. The last year has been a reestablishment of the sense of self that I had on the Camino, without relying on the way of life of the Camino, but in creating a new one for myself here at home. This has amounted to aligning my daily activity with what I love to do. To foster my new sense of self, and my creative side, I write and perform poetry, spend time in nature, and have begun to surround myself with life-affirming people who live life passionately and motivate me to do the same. As I encounter more and more people from my old life, I realize that I can become an inspiration for them, showing them that it is possible to radically change one's life in a real and tangible way. I do this with a realization that each action I take, reverberates to those around me, and in this way I can "be the change I want to see in the world (Ghandi)."

In trying to encapsulate how the Camino changed me, I looked at how it changed others, and tried to achieve a further understanding of myself through that process. It was a relief to discover I was not alone in my difficulty returning home, and that all the interviewees had a similar difficulty attempting

to locate themselves after the Camino. The similar and overriding sense from all the pilgrims interviewed was a frustration and annoyance that life felt trivial and mundane after such a transformative and life-changing experience.

The Camino, in providing a lasting revolutionary and transformative moment for each person, and possibly for society as a whole, is dependant on a concrete and real reaggregation process. The person must take time to understand their experience and actively integrate their newfound sense of self back into the lives that they once inhabited. Our postmodern world does not provide a ritual or space where pilgrims can effectively reintegrate their experiences into their lives. Successful reintegration can only be implemented by the individual in creating an open, meaningful environment around themselves at home, creating their own meaningful reintegration rituals through enacting self-imposed changes to their life.

For me, writing this thesis has contributed heavily to my own process of reintegration. In thinking and writing about my experience, I have been more aptly able to understand and integrate the feelings and outlooks that I found on the Camino to my everyday life. Even though during the process of writing, it has often times felt all consuming and never ending, I now feel lucky to have gone through such a transformative and vital experience of self-discovery at such an early age in my life. This time and space to reflect and write on the experience has been a huge part of the process as a whole. I now feel as if I can embark upon life with a newfound sense of self, a newfound purpose as a more grounded individual. In writing this thesis I have come to understand more about myself, and learned the importance of forming strong connections with those around me, and to do my best to make a positive impact unto the world. I do this by exposing more people to a way of life that is alternative to our inherited, passive, consumerist lifestyle and by showing them the

possibility of going in search of more, to deepen one's experience, to go in search of themselves. This has proven to be a challenging and ultimately rewarding experience.

## Conclusion

With confidence I put forward the Camino as a process that can provide a space for many of the things that postmodern society often lacks. Whether that be a connection to nature, to other people, or to their authentic selves, they can discover something new. I do this with a warning however, a warning that tells of the possibility of the painful process of attempting to reintegrate their newfound sense of self back into their own lives. I recommend the Camino as a transformative experience towards finding oneself but always include that we can easily become lost in our efforts to integrate into our lived. One must realise that in truly completing the experience, there is no real "getting back" to our old selves but only a transforming to the new. Ultimately, experiencing something like the Camino is about 'accepting the irreversible changes that have emerged and developing new ways to act and interact' (Texter and Mariscotti, 1994: 331) on returning home.

## The Continuing Journey

*"I think we will come to more realisations as we get older." (David)*

I conclude this study with a recognition it is just one year on from all of our experiences on the Camino. At this stage, I can say that the Camino provided a hugely transformative experience for myself, and for those that I interviewed and that it has been difficult to adjust and assimilate the experience back into our old lives. I have seen some of the important aspects of a successful reintegration process but acknowledge that there are still

many years left to discover how one can successfully achieve true integration of their authentic selves.

My own personal, spiritual and intellectual pilgrimage, does not finish with this thesis, but continues as I live on and continue discovering who I am. I will now be more receptive to the effects that the Camino has on me as a person, and on the people around me. The Camino as a rite of passage to the self is just one example of a mechanism for healing us of our contemporary existential uncertainties and ailments, and I am sure that there are many other journeys, both inner and outer, that people can go on to experience such transformation and personal growth. For these reasons, the last words of this thesis and the points of arrival at the Cathedral in Santiago, or at the Atlantic in Finisterra do not signify an end. These significant milestones actually represent great opportunities for profound new beginnings. With this in mind, I now leave this thesis, and the Camino behind me, and take the wisdom that I gained from them with me on the pilgrimage of life. To signify this point of arrival, I conclude with some wise words from the great Irish poet Seamus Heaney, and take a sigh of relief as I cross this threshold into the next stage of my life.

*“Each point of arrival, whether in one’s poetry or in one’s life, turns out to be a stepping stone, rather than a destination”*

*(Seamus Heaney, Nobel Laureate Speech)*

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