

THE CROAGH PATRICK PILGRIMAGE: IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND
SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE AT IRELAND'S HOLY MOUNTAIN

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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The Reek Sunday Pilgrimage at Croagh Patrick in County Mayo, Ireland is a syncretic event that incorporates official Catholic religious narratives of Saint Patrick, folk narratives of the site's Celtic pagan significance, local histories of the Great Irish Famine of the 19th century and personal narratives with a physical engagement with the landscape to create a spiritual experience. The pilgrimage serves as a performative event that allows participants to formulate and perform alternative spiritualities and identities, blurring the distinctions between pilgrim and tourist, sacred and profane. An emerging tradition at Croagh Patrick illustrates this by emphasizing the historical and national significance of the famine villages along the ancient pilgrimage path, the *Tochar Phadraig*, embracing these sites, and pilgrimage to them, as sacred.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Every year, on the last Sunday of July, an official pilgrimage is held to the Catholic holy mountain, Croagh Patrick, in County Mayo, Ireland. Croagh is the anglicized version of the Irish word *cruach*, which means ‘conical mountain’ ‘stack’, or ‘stacked up hill’ while Patrick refers to Saint Patrick, who once visited the mountain (Hughes 18). Pilgrims walk the ancient pilgrimage trail, or begin at the mountain’s base and climb to each of three penance stations, performing penitential prayers on the way to the summit of the mountain. At the top, confession and the Eucharist are offered at a small chapel and pilgrims rest and enjoy the spectacular views of Clew Bay and the surrounding area. Archaeological evidence and local beliefs suggest that there was a pre-Christian tradition of pilgrimage to this site, the Catholic pilgrimage being its latest manifestation.

Reek Sunday, as it is called because reek is the Hiberno-English word for ‘rick’ or ‘stack’ (Hughes 18), is not the only day on which pilgrims and travelers visit the site. During the open season from May to October, locals, Irish and foreign tourists, pilgrims and hikers from all over come to climb or see the mountain. Each of these visitors is attracted to the mountain for a variety of reasons, but it is clear that Croagh Patrick possesses a quality that has continued to make it a site of special spiritual relevance since the Neolithic era. Scattered across the surrounding landscape, particularly along the twenty-two mile pilgrimage trail, are natural and manmade sites with associated folk narratives that link them with a pre-Christian Celtic pagan past as well as more recent

times, especially the famine era. These legends and historical narratives are incorporated into the pilgrimage in more or less direct ways (passed on by word of mouth, published in materials about the site) and inform the way that visitors to the mountain interact with the site and create meaning through that interaction.

Rationale and Points of Analysis

While the Catholic legend of St. Patrick's forty day fast on the mountain may be the official reason for the popular pilgrimage to the Reek (or Croagh Patrick) and its status as a sacred site, my research suggests that the natural environment, direct participation with the landscape through walking and climbing, and personal and community narratives are essential to the sacredness of the pilgrimage and the sense of spirituality that pilgrims experience. Furthermore, I have found that many visitors to the Reek, Catholic pilgrims or otherwise, come to the mountain to connect with an Irish identity or nature itself. By climbing Croagh Patrick or walking the pilgrim trail individuals become pilgrims for a time in search of spiritual communion with many forms of the sacred through narrative and an encounter with the landscape.

In this study I will consider how the pilgrimage is a performance through which natural and manmade landscapes interact with community folklore and personal narratives in order to construct spiritual experiences, conceptions of the sacred and individual and group identities. My inquiry will follow three primary research questions:

1. How does the natural landscape, and embodied interaction with it, inform the spiritual experiences of pilgrims at this site?

2. How do the three factors of embodied engagement with place, folk practices and narratives, and personal narrative contribute to the spiritual significance of the site as well as the formation of pilgrim and sacred identities?
3. In what ways do these identities fall outside the official formulation of the pilgrimage, thus becoming alternative formulations of ‘pilgrim’ and ‘sacred’ in an emergent vernacular religious tradition, complicating the dichotomies of pilgrim/tourist and sacred/profane?

There are two primary objectives I have in doing this research. First, through an investigation into the ways in which people create their own pilgrimages and spiritual experiences through nature and narrative I aim to contribute on a broader level to the literature on place and spirituality and the role that embodiment at natural sites plays in religion and personal or vernacular religion, which may function along with, or outside of organized religion. Secondly, through this study I aim to contribute to the emerging conversation concerning the relationship between pilgrimage and tourism, reexamining the categories of ‘pilgrim’, ‘tourist’, ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’.

Literature Review

In my research of Croagh Patrick’s pilgrimage tradition I have mined sources and texts concerning the site’s history and folklore, the anthropology of pilgrimage and tourism, ‘lived religion’ and embodiment, as well as folklore scholarship addressing narrative, performance and folk groups. In addition to this literature I also draw from my own ethnographic study of the pilgrimage based on my participation as an ethnographer/tourist/pilgrim and my conversations with other participants.

Croagh Patrick's History and Folklore

Peter Harbison, Harry Hughes, Ballintubber Abbey and T. J. Westrop provide information on the historical background of the site as a place of pilgrimage as well as local folk narratives about the mountain and pilgrims' path. Ballintubber Abbey's publications in particular are a rich source of folk traditions associated with the contemporary pilgrimage and the folkloric significance of the surrounding landscape, serving as a compilation of folk stories and histories of numerous (more than one hundred) specific sites along the path. Christiaan Corlett's archeological study of Croagh Patrick and the surrounding landscape and Maire MacNeill's research of the local folk narratives and traditions that associate the mountain with Celtic pagan celebrations of the Celtic god Lugh provide persuasive evidence that the pilgrimage along the *Tochar Phadraig*, the twenty-two mile pilgrims' trail, has prehistoric spiritual significance that currently informs the site's significance and associations.

Mary Caheny's and Linda Lehrhaupt's brief ethnographies of Reek Sunday provide useful accounts of the pilgrimage, which, supplemented with individual accounts of the pilgrimage (Croke; D'Alessandro) begin to illustrate the experience of encountering the mountain and interacting with those who participate in the event. However, for my research I thought it best to produce my own ethnography in order to consider more pilgrims' experiences and make an account of the pilgrimage along the *Tochar Phadriag*, which was not addressed in the ethnographies that I reviewed. It is this data that I retrieved through my own participation in the pilgrimage that primarily informs my research and analysis.

Anthropology of Pilgrimage and Tourism

Alan Morinis offers a comprehensive structure with which to understand pilgrimage as both an individual and communal event, emphasizing the role of the journey and the significance of the transformation as the journey's goal (8). Judith Adler, Luigi Tomasi and Nelson H.H. Graburn similarly consider the significance of the journey in their analysis of pilgrimage and tourism, suggesting that pilgrimage and tourism are fundamentally similar while Erik Cohen argues that these phenomena are two diametrically opposed social movements (Cohen 48). Meanwhile, Ellen Badone highlights parallels between the experiences of pilgrims, tourists and ethnographers arguing that both pilgrimage and tourism are attempts to construct a cosmology to make sense of the world (181).

As an ethnographer who has collected much of her data for this project through participant observation, while also having a personal connection with the site, my involvement in the pilgrimage potentially provides me with three layers of interpretive lenses (pilgrim, tourist, and ethnographer) through which I will be developing my analysis. Badone's suggestion that ethnography can be a means to perform and create identity has led me to consider my own autoethnographic experience of the pilgrimage as an important and valid contribution to my research. Autoethnography integrates ethnography with personal story, using experience to gain insight into aspects of the larger culture. Its adherents promote self-reflection, understanding of multi-cultural others, and narrative writing (Chang; Davis & Ellis; Behar).

‘Lived Religion’ and Embodiment

While Philip Sheldrake explains that through incarnation, the divine manifests itself in material form, and the material form mediates an interaction between humans and the divine (43), Bron Taylor and A. W. Sanford illustrate how the divine can be experienced through interaction with natural landscapes using Robert Orsi’s concept of ‘lived religion’ rituals that are incorporated into everyday practices of life (Orsi 6). Embodiment and the body play an important role in the performance of ‘lived religion’ rituals. In “Performing the Divine” Kathryn Rountree argues that pilgrims embody the divine when interacting with sacred sites (101). Through mutual inscription of the pilgrim and the site, and the material link, or *tirtha*, that the site provides between past and present, ethereal and material worlds, the embodied experience of the pilgrim is the basis for her spiritual experience at the site. However, such an experience is not limited to the self-identified pilgrim. Tourists also go on journeys to destinations that may act as *tirthas* for them. The line between the tourist and pilgrim can be blurry, and what I will investigate in my own research is the place where these two identities intersect when interacting with nature at a sacred site. If travel is always some form of an attempt to “satisfy the need to know both mundane reality and celestial mystery” (Tomasi 1), then it seems that what constitutes the sacred has been multifarious throughout time, and similarly the pilgrim has always been an ambiguous character.

Folk Narratives and Folk Groups

The role of folk narratives in the creation of meaning during pilgrimage is elucidated by the works of Linda Degh and John D. Niles, who argue that narratives

posses important social functions, acting variously as entertainment, means of initiation, enculturation, instruction about community history or the creation of social cohesion. These functions are particularly important in the creation of the folk group, “any group of people who share vernacular contacts that become the basis for expressive, culture-based communications... and that the expressive communications have thus become the educative matrix in which children of the group –or newcomers to it –are brought up” (Toelken 56). In my study I will argue that the pilgrims at Croagh Patrick constitute a folk group that performs and evaluates the performance of pilgrimage.

Complicating the pilgrimage event is what I identify as an emerging vernacular religious tradition that is based not only on the official Catholic or pre-Christian significances of the mountain and its landscape, but on the historical sites along the *Tochar Phadraig* pilgrimage route associated with the Irish Great Famine of the nineteenth century. While the pilgrimage is organized by a Catholic abbey and has a clear Catholic identity, my experience on the pilgrimage suggests members of the pilgrim folk group embrace multiple pilgrim and sacred identities.

Methodology

My research began on my first visit to Croagh Patrick in 2004 on a tour of Ireland with my mother. After only reading a short description of the site I was enamored and knew that I would need to visit the mountain and climb to its summit. Upon my first climb I experienced an elation and connection with the site that led me back to County Mayo in 2007 to attend an archaeological field school at which I researched documents examining the archaeological evidence of the pre-Christian significance of the mountain

and the surrounding area. In the summer of 2009 I returned to County Mayo to conduct ethnographic research on the pilgrimage from July 8th through August 8th, specifically focusing on Reek Sunday, July 26th, the official day of pilgrimage, also known locally as “Croagh Patrick for the Irish”.

During the first two weeks of my stay I was accompanied by my brother, Alec. We stayed in a hostel on Achill Island, an hour bus ride Northwest of Westport, where the mountain is located. My plans to make bi-weekly trips to the mountain to conduct and record interviews with visitors at the site were complicated by rain and a limited bus schedule. Consequently, I conducted informal interviews with travelers and locals at the hostel in which we were staying, inquiring into their interactions with the mountain. Our two trips to the mountain afforded me the opportunity to document visitors to the mountain, and I conducted brief, informal (without recording equipment) interviews with participants. I discovered that, while most pilgrims were very social and willing to interact with strangers, the formal interviewing methodology that I had intended to use for my research was inappropriate for the atmosphere. The few people I attempted to interview with a recording device were not comfortable with my request, despite being inclined to conversation. The only exceptions to this were a couple from Scotland in their mid-twenties, who were back-packing around Ireland, and my brother, whom I interviewed about his experiences climbing the mountain. I used my fieldnotes to record my many informal conversations with participants.

At the end of the second week we traveled to Galway for a few days, my brother departed, and I returned to Westport with my mother, Ann Swartz, a professor of nursing at the Pennsylvania State University, and her colleague, Libby Tisdell, a professor of

adult education at the Pennsylvania State University. Tisdell was conducting interviews with adult educators. At this time I was reformulating my research approach, which previously anticipated would rely heavily on recorded interviews. Luckily, our bed and breakfast hostess, GERALYN Ruddy, was eager to hear about my research and provided me with contact information for Ballintubber Abbey, which runs four guided pilgrimages along the ancient twenty-two mile pilgrim's path (*Tochar Phadraig*) each summer. Breakfast conversations with GERALYN and other guests gave me insight into how a local family interacted with the mountain and why Irish from Dublin and elsewhere were inclined to travel to climb the mountain for Reek Sunday.

At this point I had determined that sustained interaction and conversation with visitors to the mountain would be more beneficial than attempting any more recorded interviews. With GERALYN's help we arranged to join the forty-five Ballintubber pilgrims on Reek Sunday, which would afford me the opportunity to build rapport with several pilgrims and hold informal, conversational interviews with a number of people throughout the day's walk, to be noted throughout the walk and recorded in my fieldnotes at the end of the pilgrimage. My method of research also included the observations of and conversations with my mother and Libby, who participated in the pilgrimage.

I found this mode of interviewing much more fruitful because it appeared to be more acceptable to the group and because it became a collaborative process and allowed me to participate more as a member of the group, rather than an outsider/documenter. As a participant observer, rather than a clearly defined researcher, the event could mostly remain in its "natural" setting" (Finnegan 76), not disrupted by my presence. This also enabled me to utilize feminist interviewing techniques such as Kathryn Anderson's and

Dana C. Jack's "three ways of listening" which allowed the individuals I was speaking with to control the conversation/interview while I listened to their moral language, meta-statements and the logic of their narratives. This process informed my understanding of their perspectives and allowed me to ask follow-up questions that they would be comfortable with and respond to (19). Conversations begun with one person were supplemented by others who fell in and then out of step with me, and perspectives could be elaborated on throughout the day as experience and time affected them. The obvious drawback to this method was that no conversation could be recorded verbatim, and all were subject to my own interpretation and memory, creating what Katherine Borland refers to as a "second-level narrative" (63). As the ethnographer Ruth Behar acknowledges, "Our fieldnotes become palimpsests, useless unless plumbed for forgotten revelatory moments, unexpressed longings, and the wounds of regret. ... We continue our labor through introspection" (9). Inspired by this approach, I also chose to incorporate autoethnography into my research process, in order to acknowledge the role that my own experience has played in my interpretation of the pilgrimage.

On the day following Reek Sunday, I focused my efforts on compiling and reviewing my fieldnotes with my mother and Libby, and continued some informal interviews about experiences with Croagh Patrick as we traveled around the west of Ireland before departing from Dublin. At this time I also reviewed the published materials on the pilgrimage that I had found in Westport and in the Ballintubber Abbey gift shop. Upon my return to the United States I continued to write my ethnography of the pilgrimage; reviewed fieldnotes, photographs and video footage; began to transcribe the interviews that I had recorded; and continued conversations about the experience with

my mother and Libby. These conversations resulted in a co-authored paper on the pilgrimage as transformative learning, which was presented at the Adult Education Research Conference in June, 2010 and published in the conference proceedings.

Thesis Overview

This thesis is organized into six chapters, beginning with this introductory chapter. The second chapter, *The Role of Syncretic Traditions and the Embodied Site in Croagh Patrick's Spiritual Significance*, explains the pre-Christian Celtic pagan and Catholic folklore and traditions associated with the Croagh Patrick site and the role their syncretic relationship plays in the current pilgrimage. The third chapter, *Pilgrimage as Performance*, reviews anthropological theories on pilgrimage as well as performance theories in order to analyze the pilgrimage as a performance for both individuals and communities. The fourth chapter, *Personal and Community Narratives of the Pilgrimage*, addresses how religious legends, folk stories, vernacular histories and personal narratives are used to create spiritual significance on the pilgrimage and designate the landscape as sacred. The fifth chapter, *Pilgrim, Tourist and Ethnographer Identities*, considers theories of tourism and pilgrimage and the categorization of tourist, pilgrim and ethnographer identities, suggesting a reformulation of these identities structured by the concept of folk groups. The sixth chapter, *Conclusions*, outlines the findings of this research and suggests possibilities for future study.

CHAPTER II

THE ROLE OF SYNCRETIC TRADITIONS AND THE EMBODIED SITE IN CROAGH PATRICK'S SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE

The last Sunday of July is the traditional day of pilgrimage to the Catholic holy mountain, Croagh Patrick. Situated in Co. Mayo, Ireland, the Reek, as it is known by locals, looks out onto Clew bay, which opens into the Atlantic Ocean on the West coast of Ireland. On this special day, people hike the path to the Reek's summit, some stopping to pray at the penance stations along the way, others complicating the journey by trekking up in bare feet, and still others just coming out for a fine hike. Whatever the reason, the climbing of Croagh Patrick has had Christian significance since at least 1113 C.E., the year for which the Annals of Loch Ce' provide the first documentation of pilgrims to the site (Harbison 69).

There is evidence that Croagh Patrick contained special sacred significance to the inhabitants of the region before St. Patrick became associated with it, and this previous history inflects subsequent traditions so that they are not exclusively Christian, but an amalgamation of ideologies that articulate the pilgrimage's sacred significance. In this chapter I will provide a review of the legend of St. Patrick and his stay on the mountain, archaeological surveys of the site, traditions of the current pilgrimage and accounts of traditions and beliefs of the Celtic and pre-Christian inhabitants of Ireland. I will then consider the effect these traditions have had on the ways in which Celtic pagan, Catholic, and modern cultures have found meaning in the mountain, how these various cultures and traditions have influenced one another to create a syncretic system of traditions at the

site, and ultimately why humans--Christian, pagan or otherwise--are drawn to such natural monuments as Croagh Patrick and find them spiritually inspiring.

Syncretism has come to be viewed with some scrutiny or ambivalence in the social sciences, based on objections that the term is pejorative- presupposing the existence of “pure” traditional forms and deriding their mixture as an expression of power, differentiation and social control. Anthropologist and historian Charles Stewart argues that the term syncretism can still be useful in the study of religions if its history of usage is taken into consideration and its meaning is reappropriated in order to “set the ethnographic study of cultural mixture on new tracks” (C. Stewart 40). For the implementation of an anthropology of syncretism, Stewart offers a broad definition of the term: “the combination of elements from two or more different religious traditions within a specified frame. This much founds a consistent starting point. We can establish that two or more different traditions are involved, and what the relevant frame is, either on the basis of what the actors involved say, or on the basis of our own analytical reasoning, as long as we clearly indicate when we are taking which perspective” (C. Stewart 58). It is this approach to syncretism that I use in my research.

When Victor and Edith Turner studied pilgrimage in Christian cultures they identified four types of pilgrimage. The first two occur in all of the historical religions while the second two are associated solely with Christianity; prototypical, archaic, medieval and modern. Archaic pilgrimages “bear quite evident traces of syncretism with older religious beliefs and symbols” (Turner & Turner 18). Croagh Patrick is one example of archaic pilgrimage. For an in depth understanding of this particular pilgrimage they direct the reader to Maire MacNeill’s “fascinating study of Irish

Christian syncretism, *The Festival of Lughnasa* (1962)” (106). It is in this work that MacNeill studies Irish popular custom, traditional sites of celebration and legend to provide new information on the Celtic pagan festival of Lughnasa and Celtic religion. Her concluding argument is that the Reek Sunday pilgrimage, among other summer festivals, are survivals of the ancient festival of Lughnasa. Mary Nolan’s geographic study of pilgrimage confirms that Irish pilgrimage has stronger pre-Christian roots than other European pilgrimages, with thirty-four percent (34%) of the island’s shrines likely to have been ancient Celtic pagan religious centers (432).

Sacredness of the Mountain

The official basis for the current Catholic pilgrimage to the Reek is the legendary association that the mountain has with St. Patrick. The most popular story that links the saint with the site tells of the forty days and nights he spent on the mountaintop in 441 A.D. fasting and praying, all the while being beset by black birds and demons. He is ultimately victorious and having survived the hardship he wins heavenly blessings for Ireland and rids the island of snakes or demons. There are many variants of this core story (Harbison 67; Westropp 189; Caheny 33; Corlett 9), but the consistent and essential elements are the length and nature of St. Patrick’s stay on the summit, the appearance of black birds, and the banishment of serpents from Ireland. By making pilgrimage to the site of this encounter a pilgrim could commemorate the triumph of Christianity and the victorious saint and gain special blessings either by physically encountering places the holy man had been, such as St. Patrick’s chair or St. Patrick’s bed (along the pilgrimage

trail and on the summit, respectively), or by fulfilling tasks of pilgrimage stipulated by the Catholic Church.

A very subtle, though important aspect of the legend is the location of this heroic and pious episode. Why does this monumental event happen on this particular mountain? Of course, one possibility is that it is an arbitrary choice, either by St. Patrick himself historically or by the performers of the narrative as it has been transmitted through time. However, the obvious resonance that the natural monument has had with pilgrims over centuries implies that there is indeed a special significance intrinsic to the site. Daithi O hOgain asserts that humans have a natural tendency to identify areas in their environment that possess a numinous significance and that they delineate these places as sacred and distinguish them from the profane (O hOgain 6).

The Reek itself is a striking geographical figure. Rising in a stunning conical form above the surrounding landscape, it is an imposing sight that draws the eye and heart. The mountain does seem to possess a numinous significance in its physical presentation; its symmetrical form, surprising height compared to surrounding land features, proximity to a large body of water, and mist covered summit all conspire to give an ethereal impression of its situation. In primal Celtic cosmology reality is believed to consist of three overlapping worlds or aspects: the sky world, earth world and underworld. The relationship between these worlds can be represented by three vertical and partially overlapping circles, in which the middle circle (the earth world) consists of three zones, the upper and lower of which are influenced by the sky and underworlds, respectively (Stewart 47).

This symbolic pattern, known as the Chthonic Pattern (Figure 1), emphasizes the importance of the liminal spaces between each of these worlds as they are manifested in nature. Therefore, a mountaintop could be viewed as an especially liminal space between the sky and earth worlds, the disorientating and cloaking mist serving to increase a sense of liminality. Or, the proximity of a body of water could connote a connection to the underworld. Furthermore, the situation of a body of water and a mountain in one landscape would incorporate all three worlds of the chthonic pattern, making the entire region a site of sacred power and potential access to other worlds. The liminal spaces of this continuum are considered the most spiritually potent regions in this worldview, so the summit of the Reek would have superior significance as a liminal space (Stewart 46).



Figure 1: A Visual Representation of the Chthonic Pattern.

In the Celtic and pre-Christian perspective Croagh Patrick possesses attributes that would endow it with special spiritual significance. This significance is not limited to a Celtic pagan worldview. The association of mountaintops with the divine or otherworldly also existed within the minds of medieval Christian pilgrims for whom “high mountain slopes were imagined as a cloud-wreathed borderland between the

physical and the spiritual universe” (Corlett 21). Additionally, in his work on desert and mountain spirituality, Belden Lane argues that early desert Christians were drawn to desert-mountain landscapes which they perceived as symbolic of their conception of God, the ideal human self and the discipline required to join the two, and that generally “Mountain and desert territory connects people symbolically, if not literally, to places of ascent (or places of expanse)” (Lane 38). Clearly there is a common connection that humans from different cultures and eras make between mountains and spirituality that St. Patrick or the narrators of his legend must also have been aware of and effected by.

Pre-Christian and Catholic Syncretic Traditions

While considering a mountain’s summit to be sacred could be a universal human inclination, this particular summit has a pre-Christian and Celtic pagan significance that St. Patrick’s stay on the mountain may have intended to confront rather than participate in. Over the course of time these traditions have come to influence one another in a syncretic relationship, merging them into a single tradition and asserting an underlying unity between their different cosmologies.

Pre-Christian Sacred Landscape and Ritual Movement

In an archaeological review of Croagh Patrick and the surrounding region, Christiaan Corlett demonstrates that there are numerous archaeological features that indicate that the mountain is part of a prehistoric, pre-Christian ritual landscape. The presence of man-made tombs, cairns, standing stones and ritual ponds with clear views of the Reek indicate that these constructions were made with the mountain in mind. The

structures are all ritual structures, as well, further indicating that they comprise a united pre-historic ritual complex. Corlett argues, “monuments of construed eternity formed a ritual landscape of construed eternity, which in turn was focused around a mountain of more definite eternity” (Corlett 19). That is to say, while the mountain inspires awe and represents the eternal and unchanging in the landscape, it also inspires a desire in humans to participate in the eternal, leading to the creation of manmade monuments to eternity, such as burial cairns and standing stones, and an entire ritual landscape that reinforces the mountain’s symbolic significance. By encountering these monuments in the ritual landscape, one can encounter that which the mountain symbolizes.

A similar engagement with place can be seen in the Aboriginal ritual of traversing the desert landscape of central Australia along song-lines while singing ancestral songs in order to recreate every characteristic of the land. In both of these traditions, the landscape is perceived through a *habitus*, or “ritualized way of perceiving reality” (Lane 10). The unique *habitus* of each of the communities that inhabit the ritual landscapes gains its significance from the landscape in which it occurs, while simultaneously giving significance to that landscape. So it is that the songs that the Aboriginal pilgrim sings are inspired by the physical features along the song-lines, while also providing those features their reality. For the pre-Christian Irish community that inhabited and ritualized the Croagh Patrick landscape, the ritual monuments around Croagh Patrick were similarly inspired by the particularities of the environment while also making its sacred status a reality.

One of the most fascinating of the ritual monuments around Croagh Patrick is the Boheh stone, which displays pre-historic rock art and is located at a significant position

in relation to the Reek. The ancient pilgrimage trail, the *Tochar Phadraig*, runs from Ballintubber abbey in the east to the summit of the mountain, and along this trail there are three prominent stones, one of which is the Boheh stone. There is speculation that this track was originally a pre-Christian pilgrimage route that was Christianized when the mountain became associated with St. Patrick. The potentially sacred and ritual link that exists between the stone and the mountain is that it is from this stone that one can view the ‘rolling sun spectacle’ on April 18th and August 24th. On these days, one could stand at the stone and as the sun set see the sun appear to roll from the mountain’s summit down its profile and into the bay. The combination of rock art, the stone’s situation on a path leading to Croagh Patrick, and its association with the sun indicate the strong possibility that there is a constructed relationship between all of these features, and that they are ultimately directed towards a ritual treatment of the sun (Corlett 17).

The association of the Reek with sun worship is also supported by more recent traditions involving the time and manner of the Christian pilgrimage. In her ethnographic study of the pilgrimage of Croagh Patrick in 1973, Mary Caheny notes that the tradition of holding the official pilgrimage at night ended in 1968, possibly on account of young men and women “jarring all night and getting up to no good on the mountainside” (Caheny 39). Caheny also explains that for at least the last five hundred seventy-seven years the official day for pilgrimage has been the last Sunday of July, or, in the Irish Celtic calendar, Lughnasa, the celebration of the god Lugh. This festival is a celebration of the first fruits of the harvest, as well as the general fertility of the earth brought forth by the necessary union of Lugh and the goddess of the land or abundance. The name Lugh means ‘light’ or ‘shining’ in Irish, and the god is associated with the triumph of

light over darkness, which could easily be connected with the rising and setting of the sun (Stewart 116-7). Furthermore, an association with the sun is appropriate for a god involved with the fertility of the earth, since the sun is a necessary agent in the growing of crops and the time of year for planting is when the days become longer and the sun is increasingly visible. The climbing of the Reek by night, and doing so at the time of the festival of Lughnasa, suggests a relationship between the mountain and the sun.

Witnessing the sunrise after a night climb would be a very appropriate way to celebrate Lugh's triumph over darkness and the festival of Lughnasa. One could even consider the rowdiness of the young men and women who once climbed the mountainside at night a continuation of the traditional celebration of fertility.

If, as Corlett speculates, there was a prehistoric tradition of pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick which incorporated a viewing of the 'sun rolling spectacle' at the Boheh stone, the pilgrims would reach the summit long after the sun had set, and similarly would be on top of the mountain to see the sun rise a few hours later (Corlett 17). However, since the 'rolling sun spectacle' occurs on August 24th, rather than in the beginning of the month, the relationship of such a pilgrimage with Lughnasa, celebrated at the end of July, is not entirely direct. This discrepancy does not diminish the strong associations that have already been shown between the sun and the Reek, but may even indicate that the mountain served as a continuous center of sun worship, instead of only being acknowledged once a year at the celebration of Lughnasa. The presence of a standing stone complex in the northeast portion of the ritual landscape from which one can view the 'rolling sun spectacle', this time occurring on December 21st, further indicates that the

Reek was understood in prehistoric times to have a relationship with the sun throughout the year (Corlett 12).

Catholicism's Engagement and the Seeds of Syncretism

As a pre-Christian center of sun worship, the Reek would have been an ideal place for St. Patrick to journey in order to consecrate it to Christianity, either historically or in narrative. There is evidence that sun worship was of great concern for the Catholic Church during the time of the saint's evangelizing, and Patrick himself apparently found reason enough to address and eradicate it. In his Confession he states, "For this sun which we see rises daily for us at His command, but it will never reign nor its splendor endure; no, all that worship it shall be doomed to dreadful punishment. But we who believe in and worship the true Sun, Christ, who will never perish – nor will anyone who has done His will but he will abide for ever just as Christ abides for ever" (Hood 53). It is conceivable that St. Patrick came to the Reek in order to confront that god that was in competition with his own, and his ultimate expulsion of the serpents could easily be understood, and is often interpreted, as the expulsion of paganism from Ireland (Caheny 33).

However, by engaging with the site, St. Patrick and Catholicism have become enmeshed in the continuing folk traditions concerning the mountain, and though he brings to it a new Christian significance, his legend and the pilgrimage that it inspires still participate in cultural traditions that have connections to pre-Christian meanings. Instead of becoming an entirely Christian experience, Croagh Patrick, through St. Patrick, becomes a source of syncretic tradition where rituals address both Christian, Celtic pagan

and folk beliefs. One such example is encountered shortly after setting out on the *tochar*. In the middle of ‘Hynes’ field the pilgrim comes across a holy well reputed to cure blindness. While pilgrims have been known to stop here, scoop water from the well to bless themselves, and leave a token in return, the well is still associated with Druidic pagan practices, as many holy wells are in Ireland.

In the narratives of St. Patrick’s stay on the mountain we also see examples of syncretism. In the legends, the appearance of hostile black birds is a constant motif found in the narrative’s variations. This consistency implies that the black birds themselves play an important and symbolic role in the story that would not be satisfactorily conveyed by the use of another flock of pests or a different tribulation. The birds are variously described as “demon birds” (Corlett 9; Harbison 67) and “black birds” (Westropp 189; Caheny 33). O hOgain explains that within the Irish druidic culture there is evidence that birds were a means of divination and heralds of omens, particularly the raven, “who has generally been regarded as portending misfortune” (75). Additionally, in Celtic mythology ravens and crows are associated with the Morrigan, the triple goddess who fuses the power of fertility and war (Stewart 80). As black and ominous birds, ravens and crows fit the description of the type of bird that attacked St. Patrick on the mountain. With a distinctly Celtic pagan association, the role of the birds as the antagonists in the legend could serve as symbolically representing the Celtic pagan religion as St. Patrick’s adversary on the mountain, and his ultimate victory over the birds representing his victory over that rival religious and world -view. Though the legend does not make this explicit, it would appear that the traditional connotations of the birds

still exist in folk belief since the bird motif has not been altered, implying that the ‘black demon birds’ continue to have some significance to narrators and listeners alike.

It is interesting to note that while St. Patrick is victorious in dispelling the birds, the Christian legend incorporates and acknowledges elements of Celtic pagan or folk belief into its Christian message. The legend embraces the significance of the ravens as birds of misfortune, making them a suitable antagonist for St. Patrick. By using another bird with more positive or benign connotations, the legend would not have the same resonance in the folk consciousness because it would not be building on pre-existing cultural knowledge. Instead of imposing a completely foreign system of cultural narrative symbols, the legend incorporates folk beliefs and constructs a new worldview out of syncretic combination.

The syncretic use of pre-Christian belief creates a new Christian meaning in one version of the saint’s battle with the birds, in which the black birds are countered by white birds that an angel arranges around the summit to protect Patrick (Caheny 33). In this case there is a clear reference to light triumphing over darkness. This reference is significant on its own, but coupled with the location of this divine intervention (a mountain associated with sun worship) it is clear that the Christian legend is actively participating in the lore of the location, using it to identify itself with the strong sense of consequence that the site has, and then converting it to a Christianized meaning. By not completely abandoning the previous significance of the site, but adapting it, the legend of St. Patrick becomes more accessible to those who already have a relationship to the Reek, and clearly the Reek comes to be understood and appreciated in an altered and more specifically Christian way.

The usurpation or modification of these and other pre-Christian beliefs and associations was an effective way for Christians to increase their influence and increase the exposure of Christianity in Ireland. Eventually, by incorporating themes with special pre-Christian meanings, (such as the sun, light or black birds) into Christian legends of St. Patrick, those themes came to take on specifically Christian connotations. In the case of the black birds or ravens, druidic lore gave them a connotation with misfortune but they were not manifestations of misfortune, they only portended omens. However, in the Christian legend the birds are demonized as well as the three-fold goddess associated with them, linking both with Satan and evil in a dichotomized Christian worldview.

The historical St. Patrick's avid campaign against the solar religion that he found in Ireland led him to emphasize in his teachings the difference between the physical light of the sun and the divine light of heaven. He became so well known among his contemporaries for this that legends developed about him which incorporated these teachings regarding the sun, and ultimately they came to use sun and light imagery to illustrate his triumph over paganism. This can be seen in the Croagh Patrick legend, as well as other legends such as the confrontation of St. Patrick and the king Laoghaire of Tara over the Paschal fire. In this legend St. Patrick shows through a contest with the king's druid that his source of light, physically and spiritually, is greater than that which the druids possess (O hOgain 193). As in the Croagh Patrick legend, this narrative demonstrates a triumph in the form of light, but the saint makes it explicit that his light is not of this world, is not associated with the sun, but comes from the supreme Christian God of all. Over time the symbols of light and the sun remained important in Irish culture, but like the ravens, they are reinterpreted to have Christianized meanings.

Celtic Pagan / Christian Syncretism in Contemporary Ritual

The syncretic relationship of Croagh Patrick's Christian and pre-Christian traditions not only manifest in the legends, but are also in the active traditions of the modern-day pilgrimage. As mentioned above, until 1968 the local tradition was to climb the mountain at night, and for the last five hundred seventy-nine years the official pilgrimage has been held around the time of the Celtic pagan festival of Lughnasa, both examples alluding to a relationship with sun worship. Other traditions that perhaps more subtly reference pre-Christian origins persist today as well. The primary example is the tradition of praying at the three penance stations along the route to the summit. At each station the pilgrim is supposed to pray a specific number of 'Paters', 'Aves', and 'Creeds', and upon reaching the summit, if the chapel is open, the pilgrim should attend confession and communion (Caheny 37). What is particularly striking about the penance stations is that each one is a Neolithic cairn. These particular cairns are most likely burial cairns and are situated on the mountain at points that imply that they are ritually significant (Corlett 11). As the pilgrims recite their prayers they proceed to walk in a circle around the cairn (Caheny 36). The circumambulation of a site in a right-hand direction is considered an ancient Irish ritual practice and an activity specifically done around enclosures housing the dead. By circling the site it is sectioned off from the surrounding area and elevated to a higher, more sacred status (O hOgain 27 and 211).

In this case, what role is the circumambulation serving? Is it merely reinforcing the sacred Christian status of the pilgrimage by physically setting apart certain areas where a relationship can be forged with God through penance and prayer? Or is this the remnant of an ancient tradition of honoring the pre-historic tombs that simply has not

‘died out’? To assert that only one interpretation is true is to neglect the real influence that the many traditions related to the Reek have upon one another in a syncretic relationship. Though some traditions may appear to be purely Christian, their previous meanings are evident even today, as in the case of the cairns. Obviously these cairns are of ancient origin, and their Christian significance is a more recent development. The fact that they are included in the current pilgrimage signifies that their importance to pilgrims has remained consistent, even as the interpretation of the site has changed. By continuing to circumambulate the cairns pilgrims are acknowledging the intrinsic importance of the structures and their pre-Christian significance as represented in current folk belief, all the while adding a new, Christianized significance to them.

Like the cairns, the entire experience of the pilgrimage of Croagh Patrick is an example of syncretism. The site as a whole has not been reinterpreted to have a solely Christian connotation but is an amalgamation of traditions based on Christian, Celtic pagan, and perhaps simply human ideology. These traditions are sometimes inspired by the same sentiment but are articulated through narratives in a different way and lead to the site’s designation as sacred. A medieval Christian pilgrim may feel closer to God in his Heaven on the summit of a mountain, a pagan may feel close to the sky world of the Chthonic pattern in the liminal space of a mountain top, and a human without any particular religious affiliation may experience some sense of ‘spirituality’ simply by viewing an arresting landscape from the Reek’s peak.

The Embodied Site

The various syncretic traditions considered above highlight the enduring significance of the Reek as a spiritual center, change as those traditions may. As Lane suggests, “to ‘dwell’ in a place creatively over an extended period of time is to conduct oneself according to a custom or habit that draws meaning from the particularities of the environment” (9). The creation of pre-Christian and Christian traditions, rituals, legends and monuments have all been inspired by the landscape and the landscape-informed *habitus* of its peoples indicating that at the heart of the sacred landscape and its spiritual significance remains the physical site of Croagh Patrick itself.

The combined legends, locations, and cultural significances of the mountain and *tochar* create a sense of place out of a space in the landscape, identifying the mountain and trail as particular and therefore sacred because “particularity lies at the heart of incarnational faith” (Sheldrake 43). Through incarnation, the divine manifests itself in material form, and the material form mediates an interaction between humans and the divine, locating Morinis’ concept of a pilgrim’s ‘salvation’ in a physical place. Examples of individuals seeking communion with the divine through its incarnation in nature can be seen in Bron Taylor’s work on ‘Soul Surfing’ and A.W. Sanford’s work on whitewater kayaking and spirituality. These aquatic vernacular religions use water as a means to encounter the divine through the experience of a sense of unity, immensity, and sometimes terror when physically confronted with overwhelming natural phenomena. In the case of surfing, engaging with an incarnation heightens the spiritual experience through a sense of immediacy, as well as risk.

Sanford elaborates upon Robert Orsi's concept of 'lived religion', which argues that religion "cannot be neatly separated from the other practices of everyday life" (Orsi 6), to formulate religion as ritual and belief that "performs its work amidst the messiness of life, at the junctures of bliss, pain, ecstasy, fear, and life and death" (Sanford 876). It is through this theoretical lens of lived religion that Sanford examines the spiritual aspects of whitewater kayaking, which can often be dangerous. He argues that in Western popular culture, religion emphasizes the mystical, ethical and sublime, rather than life's ambiguities and its more violent, ugly and terrifying aspects. 'Lived religion' embraces the sense of spirituality and sacrality that can be found in these more fearsome or gritty experiences that are an inescapable part of life (Sanford 885).

By locating a spiritual practice in the material and natural world, divine qualities such as immensity and violence are experienced literally and not simply metaphorically. The embodied encounter with these qualities informs the spirituality of the performer of the ritual practice, whether it is whitewater kayaking or climbing a mountain on pilgrimage. As in the case of Sanford and Taylor's work, interaction with a natural and dynamic environment is central to the Croagh Patrick pilgrimage. The uneven, rocky and sometimes treacherous path, as well as the sites along the way, serve as incarnations of the sacred that can be physically encountered by the pilgrim. The sense of danger that appears to inform much of the kayaking experience has a place in the pilgrimage as well. Though the average time it takes to reach the summit from the mountain's base is only one and one-half to three hours, the climb is steep and uneven, and there is always a possibility of being consumed in disorienting mist. The climb is daunting, if not outright dangerous, and it may be telling that one of the popular stories recounted about the

mountain is that thirty pilgrims were struck and killed by lightning while fasting on the summit. Furthermore, if a pilgrim is to take the twenty-two mile pilgrimage trail, she may encounter livestock, bogs, rain, and will likely lose her way several times. Croagh Patrick's spiritual significance lies partly in its participation in Rudolph Otto's concept of the sacred as the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, or the terrifying and fascinating mystery, because its weather is unpredictable, its climb often leads to stumbles, falls and bruises and it is located in "nature" and therefore outside of man's control. As Lane observes, "In wild places, terror and growth-toward-wholeness walk hand in hand" (37). While the Croagh Patrick pilgrimage may not usually be characterized as terrifying, it is most definitely a challenge, and with any challenge comes risk and the potential for failure, two things that can inspire anxiety at the very least. But success is also a possibility when a risk is embraced, and success in terms of a pilgrimage is ultimately transformation of some kind.

As discussed above, a special relationship between *habitus* and habitat can be seen at work at Croagh Patrick, making the spiritual significance of the site a reality. Through the syncretism of Catholic and pre-Christian Celtic traditions at the Reek, one can see the various approaches and interpretations that different cultures have created in order to articulate and relate to the numinous experience that the mountain and its surrounding landscape inspire. This numinous experience is encountered and reinforced through physical interaction with the particular physical features of the landscape. In the next chapter, I will consider how Croagh Patrick's history as a pre-Christian and Catholic sacred site has been used to formulate associated identities through the performance of

pilgrimage, as well as investigate an emerging pilgrimage tradition and identity based on the site's relationship to Irish national history.

CHAPTER III

PILGRIMAGE AS PERFORMANCE

In this chapter I will be integrating theories of pilgrimage and performance in order to examine how the Croagh Patrick pilgrimage facilitates personal and communal transformation through the processes of *redressive action* (Turner 9) and *definitional ceremonies* (Myerhoff 234-5). While the performance of pilgrimage provides an opportunity for pilgrims to formulate individual identities through definitional ceremonies, the national context in which the pilgrimage occurs situates the event within in a cycle of *social drama* (Turner 9) giving people the opportunity to reinterpret and redefine identity on the national level.

Theoretical Background

First, I will provide a brief overview of the theoretical perspectives on pilgrimage put forth by anthropologists Alan Morinis and Victor Turner and the theories of performance articulated by Richard Bauman, Edward Scheffelin, and Victor Turner in order to investigate how the Croagh Patrick pilgrimage as a performance event leads to transformation and the creation of individual and community identities, and ultimately creates a cultural reality.

Anthropological Perspectives on Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage, very loosely defined, is a journey towards a goal or destination. This destination can be exterior or interior, literal or metaphorical, material or spiritual, however, it will always be the location at which the ideal is situated (Morinis 3). Alan

Morinis argues that while pilgrimage does have important social implications, such as the creation and reinforcement of collective ideals of national, regional, ethnic, or religious identities, its significance must also be considered on the level of personal experience: “In many cases, pilgrimage was found to be a highly individualistic practice in which a person sought to establish direct contact with his deity, in contrast to the group event emphasized by Turner” (8).

Morinis offers an alternative emphasis of pilgrimage to that of Victor Turner, who formulates the pilgrimage structure according to Arnold Van Gennep’s *les rites de passage*. In *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* Turner & Turner argue pilgrimage is a type of rite of passage, partaking of the stages of such a rite that van Gennep outlines: the separation stage, liminal stage and incorporation stage. It is through the liminal stage in particular that an individual experiences a sense of *communitas*, or a deep sense of community that Turner emphasizes as a key aspect of pilgrimage. Morinis, however, seeks to consider the personal, rather than the communal experience. He therefore suggests a two-pronged approach to pilgrimage study: the analysis of both structure and personal experience (10). In my experience, participants approached the journey along the *Tochar Phadraig* as both an individual and a communal event. Some pilgrims, such as Morris, an English professor from Dublin, attempted to cultivate an atmosphere of introspection by walking silently and often apart from others. However, Father Fahey and Sarah, a volunteer from the abbey, underscored the pilgrimage’s communal significance by approaching the event as tradition-bearers to the participants and examples of compassion, keeping an eye out for straggling pilgrims and giving them

rides in their cars, providing snacks and water along the route, and dispensing words of wisdom about the pilgrimage experience.

The goal of the journey, whatever its structure, is to move from the familiar to the other, or “from the fixed place of the home to the fixed place of the ideal” (Morinis 26). By locating the ideal in Otherness it is located outside of time and space, so that the emphasis of pilgrimage is on the collapse of time and space through the journey’s breach of ordinary time cycles and place, therefore making the ideal accessible. Through such a collapse “all time is collapsed into an eternal moment in which perfection overcomes the incompleteness of mundane lived time. This is salvation” (Morinis 27). Salvation is the ultimate goal of the pilgrim and can be either transformation and transcendence into the ideal, or the “earthly acquisition of solutions to the powerlessness, discomfort, and weakness of an afflicted life” (Morinis 27). My investigation will concentrate on the transformative aspect of pilgrimage and how this transformation comes about through the performative acts of pilgrims.

Performance Theory

Richard Baumann suggests that verbal art is a type of performance, and that “in artistic performance of this kind, there is something going on in the communicative interchange which says to the auditor, ‘interpret what I say in some special sense; do not take it to mean what the words alone, taken literally, would convey” (Baumann 292). Similarly, pilgrimage is communicative, articulating through practice the values and intentions of the pilgrims. Just as telling a joke requires a non-literal performance frame in order to convey its full meaning, in my observations of the Croagh Patrick pilgrimage I

found that the actions of the pilgrims were communicative in that they were practiced within a specific context which lent those actions specific meaning. Edward Schieffelin defines practice as that aspect “of human life and activity which is structured largely through unquestioned, unthought habit, through which human beings normally carry out the business of living in everyday life and in important strategic situations” and which “forms the shape of the unthought behavioral regularities of a cultural world” (Schieffelin 199). He states that the relationship between performance and practice is that “performance embodies the expressive dimension of the strategic articulation of practice” (Schieffelin 199). Therefore, the practices engaged in during pilgrimage are done with a heightened state of consciousness with the strategic intention that they will not be interpreted literally, but rather in a special sense. While the mountain and the *tochar* are available to be climbed at other points in the year, and pilgrims may do so, Reek Sunday and the guided pilgrimage from Ballintubber Abbey have gained a heightened significance for participants, transforming the potentially mundane activity of hiking or walking into a meaningful journey of pilgrimage.

In order to interpret the expression as anything other than literal, it is necessary to apply to the event the appropriate *interpretive frame*, which can be invoked or shifted through meta -communicative acts called *keying* (Bauman 292-5). On Reek Sunday, the literal frame of a hike or walk about the Croagh Patrick site is shifted to another interpretive frame, that of pilgrimage, which lends specific meaning to the activities of walking or hiking, and is summoned by *keyed* actions as subtle as traveling with intention, or as marked as climbing in bare feet. Four key aspects that Baumann offers with which to interpret the performance frame are performance roles; interaction between

performer and audience; evaluation; and the “emergent quality of performance” (302). If “language is a means through which social realities are intersubjectively constituted and communicated” (Bauman 304), then the communicative and emergent qualities of performance provide a means through which new social structures and realities may develop as performers reinterpret their practice in each performance. In this chapter I will examine how reinterpretation and social reality construction occur at the communal level through the pilgrimage.

Victor Turner argues that such social structures and realities are created in a process of cultural performance called *social drama* (“Are There Universals” 9). Ritual and its cousin, theater, reflect the stages of this social process: Breach, Crisis, and Redressive Action, culminating in either Restoration or Schism. Because “most social dramas contain... some means of *public reflexivity* in their redressive processes” (Turner, “Are There Universals” 9) such an event can become a purposefully “definitional ceremony”, or a performance of “collective self-definitions specifically intended to proclaim an interpretation to an audience not otherwise available” (Myerhoff 234-5). Pilgrimage as a ritual performance would be located in the liminal space of the Redressive Action stage, where it could address any Breach and Crisis in the performance context (in this case, the performance context would need to be expanded beyond the pilgrimage itself to include the personal, religious, or even national context in which the performance of pilgrimage is taking place). It is the emergent quality of performance that allows pilgrimage to be a definitional ceremony in which participants can address their cultural context and create identities, values and social structures, while it is ritual’s relationship to social drama that positions this negotiation in a social context, and thus

creates a social reality. Ireland has a specific past that includes a relationship with Catholicism, colonial oppression and national famine. The Croagh Patrick pilgrimage is situated within a cycle of national social drama as a means to redress negative aspects of Ireland's history and reinterpret its identity and social reality, meanwhile serving as a personal definitional ceremony for pilgrims on the individual level.

Intersecting Aspects of Pilgrimage Performance

In order to investigate the performative aspects and forms of cultural construction found in Irish pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick, it is important to consider how the pilgrimage exhibits the key aspects of performance: the roles of performer and audience, interaction between performers and their audience, the means of evaluating the performance, and the individual and social transformations that the emergent quality of performance manifests in the "definitional ceremony." Consideration of these aspects is integrated throughout the following sections.

Caheny's Account of Reek Sunday Ascent from Murrisk

While there is evidence that the pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick has roots in a pre-Christian pilgrimage associated with the Celtic god Lugh, the contemporary tradition is based upon Christian associations. The pilgrimage was first documented in 1113 A.D. (Harbison 69), and has continued until the present day. The current pilgrimage begins as early as sunrise on the last Sunday in July. Pilgrims gather at the foot of the mountain nearby the ruins of Murrisk Abbey. Vendors selling food, souvenirs and necessary walking sticks are passed before reaching a statue of St. Patrick, erected in 1949, marking

the start of the pilgrimage trail. The climb to the summit is roughly three miles, but the path is rough and steep and covered in loose and sliding stones, so that the length of time to reach the summit ranges from an hour and a half to three hours.

In Mary Caheny's 1978 account of the pilgrimage, she joins an Irish Catholic woman, Sabina, as she makes the climb. Caheny emphasizes that Sabina is making the pilgrimage barefoot, a tradition that a small fraction of pilgrims uphold, but which she interprets as an act of penance for some, and a form of "one-up-manship" (37) for others. Caheny joined other pilgrims at each of the three ancient cairns that serve as penitential stations along the route, reciting the appropriate prayers during circumambulation of each cairn. Upon reaching the summit, the pilgrims gathered together for a service in the small chapel that had been built in 1905 for pilgrims to give confession and celebrate the Eucharist after completing the pilgrimage. On this particular Reek Sunday, the official day of pilgrimage, Mass was said on the summit continually, one service being performed in Irish. While Caheny notes that there were a number of tourists among the pilgrims, she ultimately emphasizes the religious tenor of the climb, concluding that "penance, requests, prayer, honour of Saint Patrick were the main reasons why people went on the Pilgrimage" (41).

In her analysis, Caheny speculates about the significance of the pilgrimage and its components. She interprets the pilgrimage in terms of Van Gennep's rites of passage 'separation phase' in which "the pilgrim after a period of trial enters into a new existence" (42), which would result in the release from sin and the revival of faith. This transformation is suggested to occur because of a removal from the pilgrim's everyday life, and only after the transformation can the pilgrim reintegrate with society. Caheny

also proposes that the pilgrimage has a transformative power because “the pilgrim initiates and follows in Christ’s footsteps, and Saint Patrick’s” (42). In addition to its transformative powers, Caheny interprets the Catholic doctrine of the Communion of Saints (as manifested in the granting of indulgences and the offering of prayers for loved ones living and dead while on pilgrimage) as an expression of “sentiments of solidarity” (43) which she associates with the *communitas* phase of Van Gennep’s rites of passage, considering the mountain itself a symbol of Irish Catholicism and national identity among the community of pilgrims and Irish citizens.

Caheny briefly touches on a performance analysis of the pilgrimage when she mentions the pilgrims’ imitation of St. Patrick and Christ by climbing the mountain and enduring hardship along the way, but she does not elaborate on how this imitation can be transformative. From a performance perspective, all of the actions of the pilgrims are potentially performance and can be interpreted in the context of a performance. In this sense, the pilgrims are not simply climbing a mountain- they are intentionally expressing something through the action of climbing the mountain. Transformation can occur not only because the pilgrim is removed from her ordinary context on the pilgrimage, but because the pilgrimage provides a performance context in which she can perform the identity she desires to cultivate. This performance is not an imitation, but is a creative act of identity, reinforced by the interaction with the performer’s audience and their evaluation of her performance.

My Findings from the Reek Sunday *Tochar Phadraig* Pilgrimage

In her account of her experience on the pilgrimage, my mother, Ann Swartz, noted that for her a transformation into a state of compassion occurred at an embodied level, initially performed through the body during pilgrimage, and then relived through the body afterward,

When I returned home I felt tremendous peace and noticed that whenever I began to think or feel anything slightly negative, my body would reject this, and supply instead the visual memory of the Croagh, along with a feeling of openness around the top of my head. ... I was surprised by the compassion it brought to some places where I had been less than charitable (Johnson, Swartz & Tisdell 4).

This experience of transformation is not simply an imitation of an idealized compassionate pilgrim or saint, but rather a transformation of perspective of oneself and others that occurs on a physical level, where the identity is literally embodied. In this case, evaluation and reinforcement by the 'audience' was found in conversations with fellow pilgrims about their shared experiences embodying their transformations as pilgrims walking the *tochar*.

Early in my pilgrimage along the *Tochar Phadraig* I walked with a man named Paddy, who I came to think of as Old Paddy, being the oldest of two Paddy's on the trip, and we fell into conversation about approaches to the pilgrimage. I told him of my experience with a *volksmarching* group in Eugene, and that walking in a group, at least as a recreation and not as a pilgrimage, seemed to allow the members of the club to form a community of friends that kept them feeling connected to one another and the community that they lived in, as well as inspiring them to remain active. Since many of the members

of this group were retired, these were aspects of their lives that did not come so easily as when they were younger or had their lives structured by a career. On the other hand, walking alone provided more of an opportunity to contemplate without distractions.

“What do you think each has to offer?” I asked him. He was thoughtful for a few moments, and then suggested that while walking alone does offer the opportunity to contemplate on your own, walking with others allows you the opportunity to converse with others about those things that you may be thinking about, with the possibility of deepening your understanding through other people’s perspectives, like we were doing at the moment. Additionally, traveling with others gives one the opportunity to assist others, or even be assisted by them, which on a pilgrimage can be a type of spiritual experience.

These two options can also be understood as different potentials for performance, the one facilitating individual transformation through introspection and meditation, the other encouraging a transcendence of self through compassionate acts and consideration of alternative perspectives, possibly leading to spiritual insights. The position of the audience in these different performance contexts is also different. For the solitary pilgrim, performer and audience are one, with the evaluation and validation occurring within the individual. The pilgrim walking amongst other pilgrims may perceive an audience both internally and externally, affecting her performance accordingly.

The roles of performer and audience member are less clearly defined in pilgrimage than in a theatrical performance because the pilgrim’s audience is located as much inside herself as outside. Reinforcement occurs when the pilgrim recognizes that others are acting similarly to her (circumambulating at penitential stations, climbing

barefoot, attending mass and confession at the summit) and for similar reasons.

Edward Schieffelin explains that in order for a performance to be successful in creating a shared social reality the audience and performer must have shared assumptions about the significance of the performance and what comprises a successful performance so that the two roles mutually construct their social reality (717). The official Catholic Church has acknowledged Croagh Patrick as a pilgrimage site and grants indulgences for those who complete the penance stations of the official pilgrimage, the details of which have been published and are available at the site. This official acknowledgement provides reinforcement from the official Catholic community and offers clear evaluative criteria for pilgrims to apply to their own performance and others'. There are also unofficial and folkloric customs that pilgrims may use to evaluate their performances, such as whether or not one climbs the mountain at night, climbs with a staff, follows the ancient twenty-two mile pilgrim path, the *Tochar Phadraig*, to the summit, or climbs barefoot. As Caheny mentions, while the pilgrim Sabina climbed humbly without shoes, other barefoot pilgrims appeared to be competing in a game of one-up-manship, and Linda Lehrhaupt notes in her study of Irish pilgrimage that "barefoot penitents have a sobering effect on other pilgrims, who are visibly affected when they see them. Their act is both a private devotion and a public display that intensifies others' experience" (Lehrhaupt 53). Clearly there is a performative aspect to this tradition, which can be used to express something about the pilgrim's serious pursuit of penance to herself, to God, or to other pilgrims.

Repeated participation in the *Tochar Phadraig* pilgrimage offers a lens for a deeper understanding of this performative aspect. Old Paddy's relationship with the

pilgrimage appears to be based on identification with the compassionate aspects of the pilgrim and building the pilgrim community. Despite being in his late seventies, he has attempted to go on pilgrimage every year, however this was the first year he worried about being able to finish the pilgrimage. As possibly the oldest pilgrim there, and as familiar with the pilgrimage as Father Fahey, he acted as tradition bearer and actively shared the tradition with others. He was very interested in keeping the pilgrimage going by introducing new pilgrims to it, as he had done with Morris and Mary and her husband, and he was happy to see me, a young American, interested in the pilgrimage as well.

The Classics professor I met on the trail had participated in the pilgrimage regularly, and his wife, a nurse, had also gone a few times. She talked in depth with my mother about families, genealogy and heritage, while her husband discussed with me the classics and the importance of teaching Irish history and language. As we approached the summit they both made a point to assist my mother along the trail and make sure she was doing well, distracting her with conversation. Like Paddy, compassion and assistance seemed to characterize their approach to pilgrimage, as well as an emphasis on Irish identity.

For much of the middle portion of the trail I walked with Mary, an Irish school counselor, who also taught community classes on spirituality, and her husband. They had joined in the pilgrimage for the last few years, also making trips to travel along the Camino de Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage in Spain. Mary had been particularly interested in history and cultures of the towns along the pilgrimage and how they had influenced one another throughout time. Mary's husband was well informed about the significance of certain places along the *tochar*, particularly the Boheh stone's history, and

explained their histories to us as we walked. Pilgrimage was clearly something they were interested in and enjoyed participating in together, and we discussed the experience of pilgrims past and present. While we did not explicitly discuss our own spiritual inclinations, their interests suggested that the history of the pilgrimage and those who had travelled the path before was an important aspect of the pilgrimage that they were interested in identifying with.

At the start of the pilgrimage I walked with Anne and Martina, two friends from the Castlebar parish in their forties who had taken part in the pilgrimage before. Sharing the pilgrimage appeared to be part of their friendship, and they took a very social approach to the endeavor, vocally looking forward to a visit to the pub at the end, greeting obstacles with an enthusiastic sense of humor and talking endlessly. Martina recounted for us how when she was younger she had gone to St. Patrick's Purgatory at Lough Derg to fast and pray for three days. However, instead of speaking of a personal or transformative experience, she described how uncomfortable and boring it was spending long hours without food or sleep, repeating the same prayers. Though she herself did not find that experience spiritually illuminating, she could understand how sleep and food deprivation could create an altered state of consciousness and ecstasy in saints and those who emulated them, though, she joked, she knew of other more enjoyable ways of altering her state of consciousness.

She and Anne laughed at this, but Anne was clearly interested in the Lough Derg pilgrimage, which she had never known Martina had experienced, and wanted to go on the pilgrimage as well, "just to see for myself". Martina explained that she had gone a long time ago (when she was a young adult) as a penance, and that her cousins at the time

had a contract with the pilgrimage site to make the oatcakes that the pilgrims received as their meager rations with black tea. This was a very lucrative contract for a bakery to have because the pilgrimage site was very popular, providing consistent business for the bakery. However, Martina claimed, this was the main reason she even considered going on the pilgrimage, because she knew that the oatcakes her cousins were making were heavy on the butter and had a little sugar in them, so that when tea and bread rations were served, she knew that they would be more filling than the alternative dry toast, and that she would be able to make it through the three days. Now that her cousins no longer had the baking contract, she was not sure if she would care to try the whole three days again on just toast and tea, but Anne insisted that she would like to go give it a try, and Martina replied that it was a possibility.

Pilgrimage for Anne and Martina seemed at once a nuisance and an opportunity for laughs and amusement, as they cracked jokes and told humorous stories throughout the day. On the one hand they appeared irreverent, however they had chosen to go on this pilgrimage and had done so before, and appeared to be enjoying themselves, in contrast to Martina's markedly un-transformative experience on the Lough Derg pilgrimage. Interestingly, Anne showed interest in trying the Lough Derg pilgrimage herself, and they both discussed the possibility of trying the Camino de Santiago de Compostela in Spain as well. Pilgrimage, to Croagh Patrick and more generally, seemed to be an opportunity to identify with their Catholic identity, which they simultaneously poked fun at and wished to explore.

Communal Performance, National Identity and Ethnic Solidarity

While pilgrims are performing their own religious identities, the pilgrimage also serves as a performance of communal identity. Families climb together, as well as congregations and other groups, to create solidarity among themselves and to form a unified identity. Geralyn, our B&B hostess in Westport, had climbed the mountain and participated in the pilgrimage from Murrisk with her family since she was a young girl, and now climbed with her sister while her brother, a tri-athlete, runs the mountain. Geralyn's other guests during our stay were a mother and daughter team and two brothers who were also there to climb the mountain with their families, the parents introducing their children to their first climb. Later, as we travelled to Galway and Sligo, our B&B hosts, shopkeepers, a pony cart driver, all knew of the pilgrimage of Murrisk and had participated in it at least once, indicating that at least in the Connacht area in the West the pilgrimage is a significant experience for that community, particularly among families.

Pilgrims to Croagh Patrick further develop this sense of community during the pilgrimage through "continual exchanges take place, ... in which they trade advice, jokes, and bits of wisdom" (Lehrhaupt 50). One joke that came up repeatedly among pilgrims was to ask strangers on the path what brought them to the Reek, the reply being that they were looking for their lost sheep. I never fully understood the significance of this exchange, but it seemed to serve as a traditional greeting, and an acknowledgement of a communal good-humored approach to the pilgrimage's difficulties. A tourist visiting the mountain during the pilgrimage wrote of his experience, "Someone on the downward climb yodeled my way, 'Only an hour to go.' ... Two other climbers trekked back down past us after reaching the summit. These two, actually walking barefoot, shouted words

of encouragement” (D’Alessandro 1). During my most recent pilgrimage experience the group I was travelling with constantly was on the look-out for those who were struggling, taking turns to walk with those pilgrims and offering encouragement and physical support. On an earlier trip I encountered several strangers who offered advice and encouragement as they passed, and I participated in the larger pilgrim community by sharing water with some tired pilgrims who had none. In all of these accounts pilgrims show an investment in the success of their companions as well as strangers, implying that a sense of *communitas* was born out of the endeavor, as well as an identification with the compassion of the ideal pilgrim.

The performances of national, ethnic, and religious identity are inextricable in the pilgrimage because Irish Catholicism has been used as a symbol of nationalist identity since the time that the Republic of Ireland struggled for autonomy from British colonial rule. To be Irish is not necessarily to be Catholic; however, by persisting in their faith, Irish Catholics demonstrated resistance to British imperialism, imposed through parliament and the Anglican Church, using Catholicism as a means to perform their ethnic identity that they did not want subsumed by their colonizers. The Irish Nationalist movement adopted similar tactics in its performance of national identity in order to successfully argue on the world stage for recognition as a unique nation worthy of self-governance. This history influences the pilgrims’ performance at Croagh Patrick in several ways.

In his 1727 treatise on the folly of Irish pilgrimage, the protestant reverend John Richardson marvels at the Catholics’ insistence on traveling to sacred sites, even when it has been outlawed by British parliament,

Notwithstanding this, pilgrimage is continued as much as ever: when any superstitious place is defaced or demolished, they repair it, and seem to be more inclined to resort to it than formerly. They account it meritorious to adhere obstinately to a practice prohibited by “heretics” and if any punishment be inflicted upon them for it, they believe they suffer for righteousness sake (Richardson, x-xi).

Richardson is suggesting that pilgrimage had become a performance of Irish Catholic rebellion, though it is unclear whether he recognizes the pilgrims’ agency as rebels, or sees the Irish as thoughtlessly following papist and folkloric tradition. Not only did the persistent pilgrimages reiterate an unsubdued Irish Catholic identity, but they also served as a connection to previous Catholic martyrs who suffered “for righteousness sake”. Just as climbing Croagh Patrick can be understood as performing the divine actions of St. Patrick, Christ, Elijah or Moses in order to instill divine qualities in oneself, so, too, can submitting to civil punishment for a religious cause be understood as the performance of the divine suffering of martyred saints in order to cultivate similar virtue. In this way, the colonized Irish pilgrims used pilgrimage to simultaneously perform their ethnic, national and personal and public religious identities. In the contemporary pilgrimage these identities continue to play a significant role. Throughout the day my mother had two conversations with pilgrims who were interested in her ethnic identity and beliefs and how they had brought her to the pilgrimage, suggesting that these were significant factors in their own experience of Reek Sunday.

Enduring punishment for participating in pilgrimage is no longer an issue for contemporary Irish Pilgrims, however the hardships undergone on pilgrimage, such as

climbing a mountain barefoot, still allow pilgrims to identify with the saints. These hardships also provide a means to identify with Ireland's history of colonial suppression, "Possibly the compulsion to participate in [a] harsh pilgrimage relates to a need to identify with suffering and dispossession as Irish historical fact, at the same time seeking compensation in spiritual repossession" (Dewsnap 53). A sense of community with Ireland past and present is experienced while on pilgrimage by embodying the travails that the country has endured. This conscious performance of suffering also creates a sense of community with other Irish Catholic pilgrims who share the same past. The Irish identity being performed is one of collective perseverance against hardship.

Sacred Connection with the Ancients

Other pilgrimage activities at Croagh Patrick can be understood as performing and identifying with a different Irish past. Essential to the pilgrimage is the circumambulation of the three penitential stations while reciting prescribed prayers. This rounding ritual has been interpreted by many to be a Celtic pagan ritual that was adopted by Christianity as the island was converted to the new religion. Michael Carroll suggests in his study of the ritual at Irish holy wells and pilgrimage sites that "when ordinary Catholics performed these rituals, and when their priests assigned the rituals as penance, they all experienced a sense of affinity with a distinctively Irish tradition of penitential pilgrimage that was over a thousand years old and impeccably Catholic" (Carroll 44). Though Carroll questions and ultimately rejects the assumption that these rounding rituals were indeed of Celtic origin, it is important that popular belief links the two, and

that pilgrims may consider themselves to be performing a ritual that ancient Irish Celts and Catholics once performed.

The three penitential stations of the mountain appear to be pre-historic cairns situated in a ritualistic manner on the slopes of the mountain (Corlett 11), and an archaeological excavation in 1994 also uncovered the remnants of a ring fort on the summit, indicating its ancient significance (Excavation Findings). Research has also been done by Christiaan Corlett and Maire MacNeill on the relationship between the pilgrimage and the Celtic pagan festival Lughnasa. As this information has become available to the public, interpretations of the site have come to include and promote these Celtic pre-Christian associations. Even the official description of Croagh Patrick on its visitor center's website has come to represent the pilgrimage as having Celtic pre-Christian roots, "The tradition of pilgrimage to this holy mountain stretches back over 5,000 years from the Stone Age to the present day without interruption" (The Holy Mountain). These historical links to Celtic pagan Ireland position the significance of the mountain in a distinctly Celtic Catholicism.

From an embodiment perspective, the performance of an ancient ritual in a sacred place is in a sense the 'remembering' of all the sacred significances that the landscape and ritual have had through time. For the pilgrims the rounding rituals "are creative, symbolic performances of the connection they feel with the ancient communities", serving as "a means of claiming a spiritual heritage, emphasizing and embodying a shared... identity" (Rountree 104). However, I would argue with Rountree that these actions are not simply symbolic because the pilgrims physically inhabit the ritual actions and sacred landscape in an effort to connect with their past and the divine. Their

performance is not imitative or metaphorical, but a transformation of self through definitional action. Their location in a space imbued with sacred significance allows for the ritual to be effective, but the performance itself allows the pilgrim to identify as a member of a Celtic and Christian community.

Blending Many Identities

These multiple identities that the pilgrimage allows the pilgrim to cultivate (individual, collective, religious, ethnic, national, etc.) can become the basis for a social reality when the greater community embraces the performance. If it is true that circumambulation at Irish Catholic holy sites is not a survival from ancient Celtic rituals, then the significance of the ritual was ‘invented’ through performance. The investment of audience and performer transformed its significance into a social reality, simultaneously defining the ritual as Irish, and interpreting its performance as a performance of a distinct cultural identity. As Caheny notes in her analysis, there is a sense at Croagh Patrick that pilgrims are performing their Irishness as much as their religious identities (47), but their performance is not only cultivating an Irish identity in themselves, it is also creating the greater social reality of what it is to be Irish. Irishness in this case is located in a shared Irish history that is both symbolically and physically present on the pilgrimage in the form of sites with pre-Christian, Catholic and national (particularly those related to the Great Famine) significance. While Catholicism remains an important aspect of Irish identity, religion appears to be of decreasing significance in the country, even at this religious pilgrimage. As a fellow pilgrim who did the pilgrimage annually told me, over the years religion in general has become less popular

in Ireland. He suspected that most pilgrims that day were not there for religious reasons, such as penance or indulgences, however, he thought that spirituality could still play a role in the pilgrimage for many. Perhaps it was with the idea of indulgences in mind that Father Fahey waited for us at the end of the pilgrimage to award us with a certificate for having completed the *Tochar Phadraig*; rather than being an official receipt from the Catholic church for our accomplishment, the certificate served as recognition of the individual and communal experience and its myriad spiritual significances not limited to the official Catholic one.

The association of the pilgrimage with a national history, and an Irish identity that is based on that history, has been strengthened recently (in 1997) through the construction of a National Famine Monument located in Murrisk where the popular pilgrimage begins, as well as the identification of numerous famine villages that dot the landscape of the longer pilgrimage path, the *Tochar Phadraig*. As religion becomes less of a common denominator among pilgrims to Croagh Patrick this particular aspect of Irish national history is increasing in its spiritual significance for pilgrims to the site. This is a spirituality not solely based on an encounter with the divine, but rather an encounter with a community, past, present and future. In the next chapter I will investigate how pre-Christian, Catholic and famine sites along the *Tochar Phadraig* have acquired syncretic sacred significance through the narratives associated with them, constituting an emerging vernacular religious tradition.

CHAPTER IV

PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY NARRATIVES OF THE PILGRIMAGE

In this chapter I will consider the multiple narratives, both community and personal, that surround the pilgrimage and are used to make sense of the event as a spiritual experience. Religious legends, vernacular-historical stories and personal accounts of the pilgrimage and the landscape in which it occurs play a prominent role in the pilgrimage, not least because they articulate the site's sacred significance. These narratives also serve as a conduit through which the pilgrim can engage with the physical site in order to have a transformative and spiritual experience.

Setting the Stage

My own personal narrative has played a large role in my research, causing me to question whether my ethnography of the pilgrimage is more of an autoethnography, since I cannot separate my experience of the pilgrimage and my personal relationship with the mountain from my analysis. Judith Stacey raises doubts about the clear positionality (emic vs. etic, objective vs. subjective) of the ethnographer noting that within the researcher there is a tension between being an authentic participant and an exploitative researcher(115). Ultimately, it is from the researcher's perspective, as structured by her objectives, interpretations and voice that the ethnography is written, despite any attempt at mutuality in the researcher/researched relationship. Ethnography, she argues, is "not cultural reportage, but cultural construction, and always a construction of self as well as of the other" (115). I have approached my research of Croagh Patrick as much out of an interest to understand my own relationship with the mountain as to understand others',

placing me in a dual position as both participant and observer. Additionally, my pilgrim status is complicated by the fact that I am not entirely Catholic (though I did grow up for a time in the Catholic church) and I am not Irish (though my family does claim Scots-Irish heritage and a hint of Anglo-Irish). Arriving at Ballintubber Abbey on Reek Sunday with the intention of collecting data for research may place me squarely in the researcher camp, but what to make of my affection for the mountain, my previous, non-research related trips to it, and my genuine interest in going on pilgrimage? My first experience climbing Croagh Patrick has fundamentally shaped how I understand the pilgrimage and the landscape and my personal narrative of that experience is the lens through which I have had to interpret data.

The Participant's (Pre-Observer) Narrative

The summer after my freshman year of college my mother and I took a long-awaited trip to Ireland. We planned to tour the Republic and Northern Ireland by car for two weeks, and had several earmarked guidebooks describing the numerous sites that we intended to visit. And we had a plan. A detailed itinerary that determined where we were going to stay each night, which roads we would take to which sites and at what hour-o'clock. We spent an inordinate amount of time looking at burial cairns and court cairns and raised earth under which cairns were likely to be found, and we created a story for ourselves of the island and the people that once constructed these massive monuments.

In the second week of our trip we arrived at Westport in Co. Mayo, where we were to climb the Irish holy mountain, Croagh Patrick. That day it was raining, but from

a bridge on the southwestern edge of town we could see Croagh Patrick rise up in the distance like a perfect equilateral triangle, its top covered in cloud and rain. The mountain, in my opinion, was intoxicating to look at, even in that grey and dimming landscape, and as we headed back to our room for the night I was thrilled and nervous about climbing its steep and rocky three mile ascent, for which, I had read, one needed a walking stick in order not to stumble or slide back on fellow climbers. I had also read that Croagh Patrick, or the Reek, as locals referred to it, was the site of a pre-Christian pilgrimage that had gained Catholic significance when St. Patrick came to fast and battle with demons on its summit for forty days and nights. In honor of St. Patrick's victory at the site, every last Sunday of July thousands and sometimes tens of thousands of pilgrims come to make the climb, and unnumbered others, like my mother and I, come between the months of March and October to make their own private pilgrimages. I fell asleep thinking of the mountain.

The next morning we awoke to more rain, and ate a large breakfast to get us through the climb. The car was packed as we drove out of town and towards the mountain, our plan being to climb, eat, and then head south to Galway, our next destination. Driving along the quay at the foot of the mountain range a small panic started to grow in my stomach as the rain came down harder and the rolling land became greyer and almost indistinguishable from the water. At the visitor center at the base of the mountain my fears were confirmed; climbing had been cancelled for the day due to bad weather. One climber had required rescue by helicopter earlier and they were no longer allowing anyone else to go up (I wondered what 'allow' might mean in this context and what procedures could be used to prevent me from climbing). There was

nothing for us to do but continue down the road towards Galway and watch Croagh Patrick's outline completely disappear into the mist.

That was when I began to cry. Embarrassing tears that were uncontrollable and inexplicable. I needed to climb this mountain, a mountain that I had only read about briefly but had felt connected to since first laying eyes on it. There was something there, in the climb, on the summit, among the rocks and heather and bog that covered the mountain's shoulders, something that I needed to encounter and I simply couldn't be satisfied until I did. It was in the middle of my incomprehensible tears that my mother and I reformulated our plan. We would arrive in Galway that night, and the next morning, weather permitting, we would drive back up to Westport and have another go at climbing the mountain. I went to sleep praying for sunshine.

The next morning the sun did shine, and we did drive back to Westport for our second attempt. A man had set up a stand selling and renting walking sticks and we took our time picking out the perfect one to aid in navigating the loose and tumbling boulders. It took us two and a half hours to reach the top, the final leg being the hardest, longest and steepest. But once on the summit the view of the quay and the green landscape spreading out around it greeted us as if it were the reward we had been struggling towards. I didn't know what I had been expecting, whether I had hoped to meet St. Patrick somewhere along the route, or connect with my Irish heritage, or just feel satisfaction from climbing a mountain with a pretty view. When I arrived at the top, I didn't experience any of these things in particular, or maybe all of them a little bit. I simply felt that I was truly *there*, not just on a mountain, but on, or perhaps *with* Croagh Patrick. The climb and the summit had felt outside of time and place, disconnected from

the experiences of the rest of our trip, or from the larger context of the summer between my freshman and sophomore years of college.

I have returned several times to climb Croagh Patrick, and each encounter is different in its particulars but constant in its overall effect: the sense of being in an eternal but very particular place, a touchstone that encompasses geological, anthropological and individual time. My relationship to Croagh Patrick is still something I cannot fully articulate or understand, which has compelled me to investigate it as well as the pilgrimage tradition that has been associated with it for thousands of years. Clearly the particular physical landscape of the site is essential to its significance, for me and for other pilgrims. But the land at sacred sites also acts as a repository for individuals' stories, creating bonds between them and the physical landscape as well as creating the experiential reality of the site for each individual. And, of course, there are communal stories that are associated with sacred sites, stories that everyone knows, that perhaps no single person created, and that serve, in addition to personal narratives, to define the experience of individuals' interactions with the landscape. The physical site provides access to all of these narratives that have developed over time, which in turn inform one's experience of the site and allow access to different registers of time (geological, historical, personal).

Landscape and Spirituality

The terms 'spirituality' and 'landscape' can be interpreted in a number of ways; to clarify my use of them I will briefly explain what I mean by each. My use of the term 'landscape' is comprehensive, referring to both the naturally occurring land formations

(such as the mountain and the quay) and the communities and manmade features (such as paved roads, homes, farms and pastures) that are encountered along the pilgrimage route, or that can be seen from the mountain summit. Croagh Patrick is located in a particular geographic position and community, however, the ancient pilgrimage, the *Tochar Phadraig*, from Ballintubber Abbey stretches 22 miles, and there are other pilgrimage paths that run from the mountain to the Atlantic coast in the West and into Connemara in the South. The lands and communities that these paths cross can all be considered part of the landscape through their association with the mountain because they all influence the significance of the site through their own associated narratives and cultural significances.

Very loosely defined, ‘spiritual experience’ refers here to the experience of moving from everyday reality, or the mundane, into a deeper archetypal realm. This understanding is drawn from the concept of sacred landscapes articulated by the Jungian psychotherapist Jean Shinoda Bolen. ‘Movement’ is meant both physically and metaphorically because it is through the embodied encounter with a site that a pilgrim can encounter or move into a different realm of reality. ‘Spiritual experience’ can also refer to a series of elisions that Kathryn Rountree notes in her analysis of Neo-Pagan embodiment at sacred sites, “in the course of visiting a sacred place a series of elisions occurs: of time and place, of ancient and modern [peoples], of human bodies and the earth’s body, of memory and healing” (Rountree 105). These elisions are particularly relevant in spirituality that is based on identification with a community’s history rather than a divine source. During my examination of the narratives associated with the Croagh Patrick pilgrimage, histories of local communities, particularly in relation to the Great

Famine, emerged as major aspects of the site's significance in addition to pre-Christian and Catholic associations. Later in this chapter I will demonstrate how these narratives constitute the basis of an emerging vernacular religious tradition based on pilgrimage to these historical sites.

Narrative

Narrative is essential to the relationship between landscape and spiritual experience because narratives give a particular landscape its significance: "The concept of 'place' refers not simply to geographical location but also to a dialectical relationship between environment and human narrative. 'Place' is any space that has the capacity to be remembered and to evoke what is most precious" (Sheldrake 43). The narratives associated with the Croagh Patrick landscape contribute to its status as a sacred site because "every encounter of the sacred is rooted in a place, a socio-spatial context that is rich in myth and symbol" (Sheldrake 54). However, for a landscape to be considered sacred it is not enough for it to be considered 'place' rather than 'space'. Lawrence Buell offers a useful definition of sacred spaces: "Place is associatively thick, space thin, except for sublime 'spaces' set apart as 'sacred' and therefore both infinitely resonant and at one remove from the quotidian idiosyncratic intimacies that go with 'place'" (63). The Irish Catholic, historical and folk narratives that are associated with the Croagh Patrick landscape contribute to its particularity as place, but the landscape retains an element of abstraction as a sacred space, allowing the opportunity to transcend its 'mundane' narratives into 'a deeper archetypal realm'.

This liminal quality of sacred space, or its ambiguous status between ‘place’ and ‘space’, allows community narratives to become a form of “collective memory” that is “materialized in landscape” (Sheldrake 54). In this way, the landscape acts as a material link to the archetypal, or spiritual realm that a pilgrim can physically engage with, bringing a physical and temporal reality to the narrative: “[W]alking over a site ‘is like a story, a series of events for which the land acts as a mnemonic... To travel across such a landscape is to remember it into being, it is sedimented with human significances’” (Rountree 102). This process of ‘remembering into being’ is an apt description of the Croagh Patrick pilgrimage experience, particularly the pilgrimage along the *Tochar Phadraig*, where people and events from the past are continually invoked through narrative. Through this remembering process the pilgrims claim these narratives as their own so that they become informed by the pilgrims’ personal narratives and produce a unique interpretation of the pilgrimage’s significance based on individual experience.

Considering the role of narrative from a folkloric perspective, Linda Degh defines the function of folk legends as primarily a means to educate members of the community in which they are told, “The legend explains an extraordinary phenomenon or a memorable event, it communicates traditional learning and knowledge to the young and the uninitiated, it advises people how to act in critical situations and warns them against doing the wrong thing” (74). John Niles elaborates on this concept, identifying six main functions of oral literature: the *ludic*, or narrative’s entertainment aspect; the *sapiential*, in which knowing is translated into telling; the *normative*, with its emphasis on enculturation and transmission of the culture’s moral priorities; the *constitutive*, in which narrative “constitutes a parallel version of reality that helps make the world intelligible

and navigable” (77); the *adaptive*- “Even after their first reasons for existence have evaporated, such works continue to help constitute the historical present as they are appropriated into the consciousness of people born into subsequent generations” (87); and the *socially cohesive*, which constructs group identity and at times plays a crucial role in the invention of ethnicity (73-90).

The legends and historical narratives associated with the pilgrimage landscape can be understood to be multiply significant for Croagh Patrick pilgrims if their functional roles are taken into consideration, particularly the socially cohesive. Niles notes that

...One of the primary functions of oral narrative is to keep alive the memory of people who have gone before. By this phrase I mean to refer not to the fictive people in the narratives in question, but rather to the flesh-and-blood human beings who are indelibly associated with a song or story in one’s mind. The fellowship of song that sustains a viable oral tradition and is invoked by it, in turn, consists not only of the men and women who gather together at one another’s elbows, mugs in hand. It includes the spirits of the dead, who may temporarily reside with the living as long as the singer or storyteller holds forth. Scholars have long noted this connection between the dead, who may temporarily reside with the living as long as the singer or storyteller holds forth (82).

Embedded Narratives on the Day of the *Tochar Phaidrag* Pilgrimage

In the case of the narratives associated with the pilgrimage route, the characters ranged from mythic, to religious, to historical, but for a number of the pilgrims I spoke with the stories seemed to touch on individual and national memories of home,

community, religion, land and national history. Those who had gone before were not necessarily those who had been known personally, but those with whom the pilgrims could identify, either as a pilgrim, or a Catholic, or a native of the county, or an Irish person.

During my participation in the pilgrimage I observed Niles' six narrative functions at play in the conversations among participants, and combined with participants' personal experience narratives they were very influential in the construction of the pilgrims' individual and communal identity, the designation of the landscape as a sacred site and the spiritual experience of the pilgrimage. While personal experience narratives are "always responses of some sort to the ongoing interaction" and "to the nature of the social setting as mutually recognized by the participants" (Allen 240), they are more than simply 'appropriate' stories. As a narrative form, the personal experience narrative requires strategic execution through a series of narration choices in order to shape the story into something greater than a news account- "so that the telling of the experience in that particular form will indicate to the audience some of the meaning of the original experience for the narrator, his or her attitude toward why it is being recounted at this point in the conversation" (Allen 241). The personal experience narrative is thus a rhetorical device that can be used to construct meaning, both individual and social.

As pilgrims conversed with me and each other, many stories were told; about sites along the path, the history of the pilgrimage, personal histories, and previous pilgrimage experiences at Croagh Patrick and elsewhere. This exchange of stories was entertaining, of course, and a means to distract from the discomfort of walking through bog and rain.

But it was also a means of processing the experience as it was being experienced. The significance of the pilgrimage for each narrator could be examined explicitly and implicitly through questions like “do you prefer walking in a group, or alone?” or “did you grow up in Castlebar?” and stories about last year’s Reek Sunday or a previous pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago de Compostela.

The Tochar Phadraig Pilgrimage

In the summer of 2009 I traveled to Co. Mayo to conduct research on the Croagh Patrick pilgrimage, and on July 26th, Reek Sunday, took part in a twenty-two mile trek from Ballintubber Abbey to the mountain along an ancient pilgrimage trail, the *Tochar Phadraig*. This particular pilgrimage is not one that the majority of pilgrims take part in on Reek Sunday; traditionally one begins at the base of the mountain in Murrisk and climbs directly to the summit. However, archaeological evidence and local lore suggest that the *Tochar Phadraig* has been a pilgrimage route since pre-Christian times, and during the heyday of Irish Catholic pilgrimage the abbeys of Ballintubber and Murrisk devoted facilities to the numerous pilgrims that traveled between the two sites on their journey. The pilgrimage along the *Tochar Phadraig* is coordinated by Ballintubber Abbey and Father Frank Fahey and occurs four times each summer, with one trip always scheduled for Reek Sunday.

Often the group consists of twenty to forty people, and on the day of my pilgrimage there were around forty-five pilgrims, about as many women as men. Mostly the pilgrims were between forty and sixty-five years old, though there were a number of pilgrims in their twenties and thirties and one much older pilgrim, Old Paddy, who was in

his seventies. It was clear that Old Paddy was a tradition bearer, having gone on the pilgrimage annually and immediately taking us Americans under his wing to fill us in on the rules of the pilgrim. While the pilgrimage is open to anyone, regardless of religion or nationality, the majority of the pilgrims proved to be either from the local parish or originally from western Ireland, and were either practicing Catholics or of Catholic heritage. It appeared that there was only one other woman who was not an Irish citizen in the group, aside from myself, my mother, Ann Swartz, and her colleague, Libby Tisdell, an Irish-American Catholic, who were joining me at the end of my research trip. What united everyone, however, was a similar intention to experience the ancient pilgrimage trail; that is, to physically engage with the rugged landscape connected to Croagh Patrick, its surrounding communities, and the ancient history of the pilgrimage.

Through my participation in the pilgrimage I found that many of the narratives the *tochar* invoked were the history and folklore associated with the communities and pre-Christian sites around the trail, and not exclusively the religious narrative of St. Patrick's encounter with the mountain. The *tochar* 'trail guide', *Tochar Phadraig: A Pilgrim's Progress*, compiled and published by Ballintubber Abbey, presents in impressive detail the numerous archaeological sites and land forms along the path and the local history and lore (both secular and sacred) associated with them. The guide is available in bookstores near Croagh Patrick and was available for purchase at the abbey. Additionally, all the pilgrims were provided with a free abridged version of the guide in the form of a 2x3" booklet, and the path itself was regularly marked with small placards referring to various sites' historical significance.

My conversations with pilgrims demonstrated how encountering these sites and their history, as well as their own personal narratives informed or contributed to their spiritual experiences. Over the course of the journey three narratives and their associated sites proved to be especially significant in the pilgrimage experience along the *tochar*: the history of Ballintubber Abbey and its pilgrimage hostel, Dancora; history and community narratives about the Great Famine of the nineteenth century; and lore concerning the Boheh stone.

Dancora

The pilgrimage began in the parking lot of the abbey, where we all gathered in the light rain after a briefing by Father Fahey. The abbey itself was a combination of ruin and reconstruction and the grounds consisted of ancient and recent graves, artwork and buildings. As we were divided into four walking groups we approached the ruins of Dancora and the first stile, or gate, that marked the way of the *tochar*. The free booklet given to each pilgrim explains, “This is the Hostel where pilgrims washed their feet as they returned from Croagh Patrick. It is known locally as ‘Dancora’, perhaps derived from ‘Dabhach an Chora’ or ‘the bath of the just or the righteous’ (Ballintubber Abbey A). The guidebook expands upon this with local lore, “One of the promises God made to St. Patrick was that ‘before the end of the world there will come water from the place where the pilgrims washed their feet’” (Ballintubber Teamwork 2).

As we stood before the ruins, Father Fahey explained to the group Dancora’s history and significance, and called upon all of us to identify with those pilgrims of the past who had once come to the very same site and washed their feet upon returning from

the difficult journey on which we were about to embark. Their intentions, he said, were the same as ours: to transform ourselves or some aspect of our lives. One tradition of the current pilgrimage is to choose a rough stone from the area around Dancora and carry it to Croagh Patrick to exchange it with a smooth stone from the summit. According to Father Fahey this was meant to symbolize the transformation that we, like past pilgrims, were to undergo, as well as serve as a performance of pilgrim identity that further connected us with a timeless community. It appeared that most of the pilgrims took this tradition to heart and as a group we spent a minute shuffling around looking for appropriately rough stones to begin our journey. Later on our trek several pilgrims commented to me on this goal of transformation on pilgrimage as a significant aspect of the event for them, and my own mother took great care to choose her rough and smooth stones with thoughtful intention.

Not only did these narratives conjure up an imaginative context for the group's pilgrimage experience, they set up a relationship with the landscape that allowed the ruins and the rough stones the pilgrims were holding to become material links between the past and present. By physically engaging with the Dancora site pilgrims could 'remember' the narrative associated with it 'into being', allowing them to connect with pilgrims of the past and embody the spiritual dedication that they represent. The spiritual experience of walking the *tochar* began with a communion with ancient pilgrims and their past that the liminal nature of the sacred landscape facilitated.

Famine Villages and Sites

As we walked we followed the *tochar* through pastures and over fences, down paved roads and into bogs. Along the way we were confronted with signposts marking sites where villages decimated by the famine once stood or where famine victims were buried in unmarked graves. The guidebook indicated even more sites associated with stories about struggles to obtain food and community conflicts that arose as the famine persisted. At Derryhondra the pilgrim's booklet reads, "Here are famine graves. Some small primitive headstones are still visible. Three thousand people, out of a parish population of seven thousand, died in the famine in the mid-nineteenth century. A white dove is supposed to be seen here" (Ballintubber Abbey O). The guidebook explains the relevance of the dove, "The white dove, whether myth or fact, was a symbol of their souls in grace or their guardian angels" (Ballintubber Teamwork 15). Further down the *tochar*, at an intersection of two paved roads is the Battlement,

The place where the local people attacked a consignment of meal passing here in famine times. One of the soldiers guarding it was killed and is buried in the hollow called 'Log an tSaighdiura.' Another woman was so hungry that she ate the meal raw and then drank water from the river. She died as a result. The Aille river flows nearby (Ballintubber Abbey P).

At each site the reality of life and death during the famine became physically manifest in the landscape as the narratives described what took place there in the past. The two narratives above explicitly make a connection with the contemporary pilgrim's experience and the past famine community by invoking two aspects of the landscape that have endured through time: the legendary dove and the Aille river. The site of the

starving woman's death near the Aille river provides a material link to the reality of Ireland during the famine years that is likely removed from the pilgrim's personal experience. While the woman and the famine are no longer present, the river continues to exist, so that the river can become another liminal space that allows past and present worlds to meet. The dove, while not a land feature, can still be seen as a feature of the landscape because of its association with the place Derryhondra. Whether a pilgrim sees the dove or not, the possibility of seeing it provides another material link to the past, with the added spiritual significance of the bird's association with the sacred (as a soul of the dead or an angel).

While the narratives and site of Dancora provided an opportunity for contemporary pilgrims to identify with ancient pilgrims, the famine narratives and sites allowed for the spiritual experience of identifying with the local or Irish past. Two of the pilgrims that I walked with were a mother and her twelve year-old son from Dublin who had heard of the annual pilgrimage and had decided to experience it themselves. She had been drawn to hike the *tochar* rather than the traditional path from Murrisk because she was interested in the history associated with the path, especially the effect that the famine had had on the local community. In order to complete the twenty-two mile trail in one day we had to move quickly, so there was little time to read the historical placards at the sites we encountered, which she lamented, but she planned to return with her husband and son to hike the trail again, taking time to read about each historical site along the way. In this case, the pilgrimage was directed by a desire to interact with an Irish or Great Famine narrative, rather than the official Catholic narrative of the site, and this was a desire shared by many of the pilgrims. Through an encounter with these sites, pilgrims

were not performing the identities of those affected by the famine, as they performed the identities of ancient pilgrims at Dancora. Rather, they were able to integrate the identities of the famine victims into their own, identifying with a collective Irish history and identity.

Boheh Stone

Hours passed and the *tochar* drew us closer to the mountain. We had traversed three quarters of the path when we all stopped to gather at the Boheh stone where Father Fahey was to perform the Mass. The Boheh stone is currently located in the backyard of a home in a small neighborhood, but it retains its distinctive features and its Celtic pagan, Christian and local significances. That the stone has been associated with the sacred for centuries, despite changes in culture and community, likely stems from the rolling sun spectacle that can be seen from this natural rock outcropping. Before trees and shrubs grew up around the site, one could stand at the Boheh stone and see an unbroken view of Croagh Patrick, and around the evenings of April 18th and August 24th the sun would appear to roll from the summit of the mountain down its northern shoulder and into the quay as it set (Corlett 12). The stone is notable for the rock art that it displays, which local belief attributes to druidic peoples,

Just before the first stile of this stage is the rock of Boheh. This was an old druidic stone which was probably used as a mass rock by St. Patrick. There are ‘drill holes’ on this rock... These drill holes may well have been ‘fire’ holes... or they may have been ‘food’ holes where offerings of grain were made to the gods. The circles inscribed on the stone by the druidic peoples show that it was also

associated with the worship of the sun. Local people say that the circles were inscribed by St. Patrick's bell. It is thought that this stone may have been also used by local chieftains as a coronation seat. An inscribed cross is also to be found near the smaller of the six circles (Ballintubber Teamwork 72).

The overlapping pre-Christian and Christian histories of the *tochar* are most evident at the Boheh stone, where they physically collide on the rock face as druidic circles coexist with a Christian cross. Locally it is believed that before St. Patrick's arrival the mountain was associated with Lugh, the god of light and sun, and that pilgrims used the *tochar* to travel to the mountain to celebrate the late summer festival of Lughnasa

In ancient times, Croagh Patrick, was known as Cruachan Garbrois or Cruachan Aigle, called after Aigle, who in mythology killed Ciara, daughter of Lugh. Lugh was a god, one of the Tuatha de Dannan at the mythological battle of Moytura. On the first of August the 'festival of Lughnasa' was held in many places in pagan Ireland, this mountain being one of them. The Pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick now takes place on the Sunday before the festival of Lughnasa. (Ballintubber Abbey XX- YY).

Standing around the Boheh stone in the rain, we recognized that the significance of its art, history, and situation in the landscape was still compelling to many of the pilgrims, including myself. The downpour prevented us from having mass on the alter of the Boheh stone, but it was telling that the pilgrimage was organized to once again merge Celtic pagan and Christian tradition, past and present, through a natural, material site. As some pilgrims began to head down the *tochar*, I continued to linger with a few other

pilgrims I had fallen in with, Mary and her husband. Mary's husband recounted the history of the stone for us, which included its use as a penal altar, or secret altar during the period of Catholic suppression, but eventually we found ourselves silently examining, or simply contemplating the outcropping.

I thought it significant that this stone, covered in ancient rock art and associated locally with the druids, would be the place at which pilgrims were to celebrate mass, as well as decide whether they would continue on to the summit or go over the mountain's shoulder and continue down the other side to the pub. It seemed that this tradition was at least as old as this particular form of group pilgrimage organized through Ballintubber Abbey, if not carried over from an older tradition of using the Boheh stone as an altar. I wondered if the mass tradition was an attempt to fully convert the stone's significance to a Catholic one, or, if its incorporation into the Christian event through masses and the cross inscribed on it are an attempt to ground the current significance in an already existing tradition, validating its new significance.

The fact that the rock art remains and has not been removed or covered over seems to testify that the Boheh stone's past is still valued. Father Fahey suggested that perhaps the image of the Celtic cross was the incorporation of the spiral image that can be found carved at Celtic ritual sites across Ireland, and the Roman cross. Such syncretism of these two cultural symbols, rather than a full reinterpretation of one by the other, indicates a cultural syncretism that continues today as the two cultural traditions inform the current pilgrimage tradition of the *Tochar Phadraig*.

Pilgrims Merging with Landscape and Narrative

While the Boheh stone offered an opportunity to engage with a physical landmark that pilgrims of the past had encountered and a symbol of two major narratives of the pilgrimage, its unique situation also inspired identification with the landscape itself. The act of continuous walking for a day over a changing landscape, through fog, rain, wind and brief sunshine served at first to create a sense of camaraderie among the pilgrims, then quiet introspection, and finally, a sense of communion with the land itself. Walking brought about an experience of boundlessness that Rountree compares with Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi's 'flow' state because a pilgrim can come to lose herself in her movement within the landscape, leading to a temporary loss of ego and an experience of transcendence and intense closeness (108).

The narratives of the Boheh stone and their relationship to the larger narrative of the pilgrimage serve as a catalyst for an already ongoing elision of earth and human bodies. The stone, like the mountain, is a concentrated center of significance materialized in the landscape, but rather than narratives giving significance to land features or natural phenomena, these sites reveal that it is their physical existence on which the significance of those narratives are based. There would be no narratives about the Boheh stone if it were not a notable rock outcropping from which one can witness the rolling sun spectacle, and there would be no narratives favoring Croagh Patrick above all the other hills and mountains in the area if the Reek was not as physically distinct as it is. The natural phenomena are at once the inspiration for the pilgrimage, and a means to engage with the sense of spirituality that they inspire.

At the Boheh stone the pilgrim is able to physically engage with a concentrated version of that landscape that she has become a part of over the last several hours, coming into contact with pre-Christian and Christian pilgrims that have passed this way, the communities that have inhabited the area, and the natural features and phenomena that make up the sacred landscape. Her individual experience transcends everyday reality and her identity elides with that of ancient pilgrims, local communities and the landscape of the *tochar*. The ascent of the Reek is the final site of these elisions of past and present, human and earth, when the pilgrim is finally a part of that land feature that had only been a distant part of the landscape while walking the trail. In reaching the summit, the pilgrim merges with the landscape; it is no longer located as separate and in the distance but encompasses her. Finally here at the epicenter of the sacred landscape, the pilgrim also merges with the narratives that have been associated with the pilgrimage, becoming one of those past pilgrims encountered through the sites and narratives she had passed along her way.

While the Catholic legend of St. Patrick's stay on the mountain is traditionally considered to be the narrative that gives the Reek its spiritual significance, my research of the *Tochar Phadraig* pilgrimage revealed that the vernacular-historical narratives of the mountain and its surrounding landscape played an equal, and sometimes more significant role in the experience of my fellow pilgrims. It could be argued that my emphasis on a small fraction of the Reek Sunday pilgrimage population does not give enough consideration to the experiences of the majority of pilgrims who choose to climb the mountain from Murrisk and who therefore have a different interaction with the landscape and thus a different relationship with the site's narratives. I concede that the pilgrims

who journey along the *Tochar Phadraig* are provided with more opportunities to confront the historical narratives of the landscape because the pilgrimage takes over eight hours to complete (in contrast to the one and a half to three hours required for a climb to the summit) and incorporates more archaeological sites and simply more terrain. However, I believe that the numerous narratives about the mountain (religious, historical, folk and personal) all play a role in each pilgrim's experience, and while they all take turns being ascendant, none of them completely disappear.

“Irishness”

I observed on the pilgrimage that significant emphasis was placed on the historical narrative of the landscape and that an identification with the local community or the greater community of Ireland through communion with that history is a significant component, and for some pilgrims the primary component of the spiritual experience of pilgrimage. This is supported by Caheny in her ethnography of the Reek Sunday pilgrimage from Murrisk, the community at the mountain's base, in which she observes that there is a sense that pilgrims are performing their Irishness as much as their religious identities (43). In the course of my fieldwork, my mother had at least three conversations with different pilgrims who were very interested in whether she had an Irish heritage, and if that was why she was participating in Reek Sunday, suggesting the importance that heritage plays in the event. I argue that the increased emphasis placed on performing a community identity and communing with a local or national community's past on the pilgrimage constitutes this practice as an emergent vernacular religious tradition, defined by Leonard Primiano as a religious practice that gains its

validity from the inner experience and perception of the believer (40). However, this practice lacks the structure of the official Catholic tradition, and as one of my fellow pilgrims said to me, there are likely as many spiritual experiences as there are pilgrims, making this tradition much more fluid.

Echoing Caheny, I was told by several participants that “Reek Sunday is Croagh Patrick for the Irish.” That is, one may climb the mountain at any time of the year, as a number of locals do regularly, however, Reek Sunday is the day when there exists a collective sense of communal Irish identity that draws pilgrims from as far away as Dublin. It is the day that the Irish dedicate to climbing the mountain, and that the ‘tourist’ only happens upon, unless she’s in the line of researching it. But how does one determine who is a pilgrim and who is just a tourist walking the pilgrimage trail? In the next chapter I will use Primiano’s concept of vernacular religion to illustrate how alternative definitions of ‘pilgrim’ and ‘sacred’ can be used to challenge the pilgrim/tourist and sacred/profane dichotomies put forth in tourism literature, as well as interpret the spiritual significance of the Croagh Patrick pilgrimage.

CHAPTER V

PILGRIM, TOURIST AND ETHNOGRAPHER IDENTITIES

As mentioned in the previous chapter, my personal experience with the pilgrimage and the accounts of others have led me to question the neat distinctions between tourist and pilgrim, as well as the identity of the ethnographer and her role on pilgrimage. In this chapter I will investigate how these identity categories have been previously constructed by theorists, consider what these categories offer to our understanding of how individuals create meaning through travel and interaction with place, and suggest ways in which a folkloric perspective can contribute to this discussion.

Beginning with Questions about Identities

Initially, I directed questions of identity and motivation on the pilgrimage were directed at myself: Was I pilgrim when I first climbed the mountain on my two-week tour around Ireland? At that time I had some knowledge of the Catholic history of the site from a guidebook, and despite having never been to it, I was determined to visit Croagh Patrick and not only see it, but climb it. I was surprisingly devastated when the weather prevented my first attempt, and jubilant when I finally climbed the path to the summit, seeing the surrounding landscape from a geographically and metaphysically privileged position as a pilgrim; from this physical and experiential place, Ireland and my experience with it made sense to me. Or was this the experience of a tourist?

When I visited the mountain a second time three years later, I climbed Croagh Patrick with two friends on our day off from digging in archeological trenches. For eight weeks I lived on Achill Island off the west coast of Ireland and would thrill at the sight of

the Reek when I could get the occasional view of it from the tip of the island, if the weather was good. Was I tourist or a pilgrim then, when I anticipated catching glimpses of the mountain and made a point to return to it on my day off? And as I returned to the mountain for a third time, as a graduate student doing fieldwork for her thesis, was my relationship with this now familiar mountain and its pilgrimage solely that of an ethnographer?

Other visitors experience a similar ambiguity. Could the mother and daughter from Dublin, whom we met at breakfast early in the morning during that anxious period before the long *tochar* hike, and who had come to climb on Reek Sunday for their first time ... could they be considered pilgrims if their intentions were not explicitly religious, but rather to bond and experience a national event? Is the local who does not identify as Catholic, or as religious, but who has taken part in the long pilgrimage along the *Tochar Phadraig* before and chooses to do so again on Reek Sunday necessarily a tourist? How should one classify local families with children who regularly climb the mountain throughout the year, or the two friends from Scotland whom I met in a hostel. They came upon the mountain on their holiday and decided to climb barefoot to emulate the pilgrims who had climbed before?

In a review of tourism and pilgrimage literature Erick Cohen identifies two main theoretical positions regarding the relationship between pilgrimage and tourism; one of divergence, which views pilgrimage and tourism as fundamentally different phenomena, and one of convergence, which views them as fundamentally similar (48). In my own experience with pilgrimage and the fluidity of pilgrim, tourist and ethnographer identities, the divergence theory proves too restrictive to accurately address the multiple

and changing subjectivities of the participants. However, the convergence theories of pilgrimage and tourism put forth by Judith Adler, Luigi Tomasi, and Nelson H. H. Graeburn account for the various motivations and significances of travel for the participant. Ultimately I will argue that investigating the experience of travel from a folkloric perspective offers another useful means of determining pilgrim and tourist identities by considering how these identities are determined and made sense of by the participants themselves, individually and as a folk group.

Theoretical Models of Pilgrimage and Tourism

Judith Adler provides a concise summary of the many major ideological themes that the cultural traditions of tourism and pilgrimage share, illustrating how in practice these two traditions may not be so distinct:

affirmations of the moral superiority of ‘nomadism’ over settled life and of minimalist travel disciplines over softer travel modes; discrediting associations of mobility with moral license, idleness, and consumption; identifications of primitive wilderness spaces, defined in opposition to morally corrupt urban spaces, as privileged sites for self-testing, purification, and contact with timeless law; concern with the degradation of salvatory, ‘pure’ spaces by the visitors they draw; worry about the corruption of human attractions, valued for their difference, by contact with the world; claims that cultural practices lose authenticity and become vain as they are modified for show; and criticism of the destabilizing quest for new experience as an expression of idolatry (Adler 46).

Historical Evolution from Pilgrim to Tourist

The sociologist Luigi Tomasi approaches a comparison of pilgrimage and tourism by investigating the shared emphasis on the *journey* as the essential event. Tomasi chronicles the transformation of medieval European pilgrimage into contemporary religious tourism, identifying four main stages in the development: medieval pilgrimage, post-Reformation pilgrimage, the “period of the sentimental traveler” (Tomasi 16) in the nineteenth century, and what he describes as the aim-less journeys and tourism of the twentieth century. He identifies the journey as an activity that is common throughout all four of these stages; however, the form that it takes varies as Europe becomes increasingly secular, capitalistic, democratic and mobile over the centuries. Despite outward changes, Tomasi asserts that the journey’s “meaning is still the same as it was in the past: the typically human desire to seek out the sacred, though what symbolizes or articulates ‘the sacred’ today may be different from the past even at the same site, and may be multivalenced among the many visitors” (Tomasi 20).

Pilgrimage in the Middle Ages of Western Christendom emphasized penitence, expiation, purification and redemption, serving the practical purpose of an investment in the pilgrim’s spiritual life. The large movement of people that pilgrimage inspired ultimately led to “the opening of roads, the building of hospitals, the promotion of markets, and the development of society in general” (Tomasi 9). These developments provided the infrastructure utilized by later forms of pilgrimage and tourism.

After the Reformation, the emphasis of Christian pilgrimage became the personal and spiritual changes that the pilgrim experienced during the journey. These journeys increasingly came to be viewed as diversionary and pleasurable, in contrast to the ascetic

emphasis of the Middle Ages. Travel was not limited to spiritual concerns, but became a means of exploration and research, especially concerning classical culture. Ideas and history developed their own sacred status. “Thus born was the *journey* that transformed social identities, a journey that was the fruit of an increasingly mobile society, a journey untrammelled by purely penitential or expiatory ends and oriented to the enhancement of knowledge” (Tomasi 14).

The period of the Enlightenment saw an increase in secularism and a decrease in mass pilgrimage, however, the nineteenth century heralded a reemergence of an interest in the sacred, which, accompanied by an increase in mobility, cosmopolitanism and leisure time, manifested itself in the ‘sentimental traveler’.

Tomasi argues that the development of modern tourism was largely the result of the “onset of the concept of free time” (Tomasi 17), which often was devoted to secular interests. Journeys needed no longer be constrained by itineraries, and the “aimless journey” heralded the arrival of tourism, for which the destination, rather than the journey, was emphasized. However, he acknowledges that an interest in the sacred still persists in tourism, and it is often difficult to distinguish between the “curious traveler” and the “religious traveler” (Tomasi 19).

In the days before Reek Sunday I climbed the pilgrimage path from Murrisk and spoke with several curious travelers. One Protestant couple from Northern Ireland had driven down for a mini-break from school, having heard of the pilgrimage, and decided to make the climb. Afterwards they said they were happy to have had the experience but that it would be their “first and last time” climbing the mountain. Similarly, an Irish woman resting on the summit told me that she had always wanted to try the pilgrimage

because she had heard of it so often, but after the rocky climb up she was not looking forward to going back down, and that it, too, would be her “first and last time”. The couple I met from Scotland, Blanche and Neil, also came to the mountain out of curiosity after learning about the pilgrimage and that Neil had made the climb as a young child with his family. Yet when they learned about the traditions of pilgrims who had travelled before them, particularly that of walking barefoot, they were inspired to emulate them and “walk their path”, indicating a desire to experience something more than a good climb. For the Protestant couple and the woman in the summit the Croagh Patrick may or may not have been the site of a religious experience, however for Blanche and Neil the distinction between curiosity and an experience of transcendence or communion with something greater is blurred. While they did not arrive with explicit religious intentions, they had created a deeply meaningful experience for themselves and had determined that the site was a place of more-than-mundane significance.

Time Perception and Myth in Distinguishing the Sacred

As Tomasi suggests that there remains a possibility of experiencing the sacred in modern tourism, the anthropologist Nelson H. H. Graburn demonstrates that there is an important connection between the concepts of free time, tourism and the sacred (20-23). Graburn explains that in modern Western society, especially Northern European-derived cultures, time is loosely divided into ‘work-time’ and ‘play’ or ‘free-time’. This division is further articulated by an association between particular places and states of motion, and particular times, so that work-time is linked with *home* or *staying* and play-time with *elsewhere* or *travel*. Additionally, time in this cultural context is similarly divided into

sacred and profane time so that “the regular occurrence of sacred-profane alternations marks important periods of social life or even provides the measure of the passage of time itself” (Graburn 20). An example of the sacred/profane time cycle would be an annual succession of religious festivals that represent temporary shifts from Normal-Profane time and order into Abnormal-Sacred time and order, and then back again.

When the Work/Leisure cycle and Profane/Sacred cycle are integrated, a social construction of time and order is produced that associates the Normal, everyday experience of work with the Profane, and the Abnormal, less-frequent experience of leisure with the Sacred. Thus travel and tourism, by virtue of taking place in Sacred/Abnormal/Leisure time becomes a sacred act; “because the touristic journey lies in the non-ordinary sphere of existence, the goal is symbolically sacred and morally on a higher plane than the regards of the ordinary workaday world” (Graburn 24).

As travel takes place at the sacred point in the time cycle, the objective of travel can also be considered to be sacred if it is understood as a quest to realize a myth, what Graburn refers to as the ‘Holy Grail’: “The Holy Grail is the myth sought on the journey, and the success of a holiday is proportionate to the degree that the myth is realized” (28). Such a conception of tourism is commensurate with Morinis’ formulation of pilgrimage as a journey from the ordinary to the ideal. Essential to both events is a transformation from one’s present state into a realized ideal state through physical (though sometimes metaphorical) movement. Myth plays an important role in both events as the articulation of the ideal that the traveler is seeking, as determined by a particular world-view. For Neil and Blanche the myth consisted of an idealized community of pilgrims, and perhaps

an Ireland of the past, as well, and they travelled the pilgrimage path barefoot in order to transform themselves, if only briefly, into that ideal.

Cohen's Distinction Between the Tourist and Pilgrim

In his analysis of the tourist and pilgrim identities, Erik Cohen critiques this notion and differentiates between the myths and motivations of the pilgrim and tourist and argues that they are diametrically opposed. Assuming a “model of the world ...consisting of a sacred Center, an ordered, hallowed cosmos, and a surrounding dangerous but alluring chaos,” (Cohen 50) he argues that pilgrimage is a movement within this socially constructed space toward the Center, while tourism is an opposite movement toward the Other. While contact with the Center is considered “ultimately legitimate”, contact with the Other is “generally anomic on the social level and defiling on the religious level” (Cohen 51).

According to Cohen, motivation is the key difference between the tourist and the pilgrim because it determines the direction of the traveler's movement. Cohen establishes four modes of the tourist based on motivations for travel that incrementally approach the motivations of the Pilgrim: the diversionary, experiential, experimental, and existential. In all tourist modes the motivations are towards the Other, located in a culture or belief system other than the tourist's own. Even in the case of the existential tourist, whose experience is homologous to that of the pilgrim, she cannot be considered a pilgrim because her structural position is that of an outsider and thus, a tourist: “the pilgrim's center is within his own society or culture, whereas that of the existential tourist is not; rather, the latter transforms a point in the periphery of that world into his elective

center” (Cohen 55). He concludes, “the different modes of tourist experiences express varying degrees of intensity and profundity in which the underlying deep-structural themes are actually experienced and realized by the tourist; they thus embody different stages of the transformation of the Other into an elective center” (Cohen 55).

Rethinking Pilgrim and Tourist Identities

While I agree that it is essential to consider motivation when identifying a traveler as a pilgrim, Cohen’s formulation of the pilgrim is too restrictive and puts too much emphasis on the social context of the travel event, which can too easily become ambiguous. What does it mean that a pilgrim’s sacred center is within her own society? Where are the boundaries between cultures drawn? And what form of culture gets primary consideration when making this distinction? If a traveler lived all her life in the United States and traveled to Ireland to take part in a pilgrimage (officially considered Catholic), would this journey be considered tourism because she does not take part in Irish culture, not having grown up in it? Or let us allow that this traveler has some understanding of her Irish heritage, is this enough to admit her to the culture that claims the pilgrimage as its sacred center? If she were to identify as Catholic, would this identity purchase her a place within the appropriate culture? And are Irish people who are not Catholic precluded from the pilgrimage culture?

Aside from these ambiguities, Cohen’s model is primarily sociological and does not take into account the specificities of an individual’s interaction with a particular site. When he states that existential tourists’ “elective Center” is one “not shared by the co-members of their society of origin” (Cohen 52) he creates an artificial sociological and

geographical boundary, implying that the physical place in which a true pilgrimage (one that includes a movement toward a pilgrim's culture's sacred Center) occurs must somehow be present in the midst of that culture, or in other words, at Home. But where is home?

What I witnessed and experienced on my visits to Croagh Patrick and the pilgrimage on Reek Sunday were individuals traveling varying distances with various motivations to engage with the mountain. However, these motivations often had in common an understanding that to visit the mountain, especially to climb it or to walk the pilgrim path toward it, was to take part in something that transcended that particular time and place. I argue that the commonly held esteem and attraction for the Croagh Patrick site, and an understanding of its transcendent, or sacred quality, forms the basis of a folk group, consisting of members from multiple other 'original' cultures who all hold this perspective. It is the participation in this folk group and its myriad folk religious traditions that determines one's identity as a pilgrim.

In a report for the newspaper the *Irish Independent* the poet Patrick Kavanagh wrote of his pilgrimage to the Reek in 1940,

There is nothing in secular experience to give an idea of this strangely, beautiful excitement of the soul. ...Croagh Patrick is more than a mountain of traditional pilgrimage; it is a symbol of that eternal hill over whose rough sides we must pilgrim in faith that the Light of the Holy Spirit touches the summit. Croagh Patrick is not a place to which tourists may come in pursuit of pleasure. Tonight we seek joy. Pleasure can be bought with the coin of the realm, but joy can be bought only with the coin of the heart (reprinted in Hughes 50).

Kavanagh's experience clearly reflects a Catholic understanding of the event, however he beautifully articulates an interpretation of the pilgrimage that transcends its association with a specific religion. He describes the difference between a touristic experience and a pilgrimage experience as a difference in the quality of, and the motivation for, the experience. The tourist is associated with 'mere' pleasure, perhaps aimless leisure and travel, while the pilgrim's pleasure is heightened to the level of joy because of her appreciation of the heightened significance of her endeavor. Heightened significance need not only occur in an explicitly officially religious context, but could arguably occur in 'secular' contexts as well. This would still be in line with Kavanagh's description if one interprets his reference to the secular to mean the mundane, outside of the heightened significance of sacred time and place, rather than simply the non-religious/Catholic.

Kavanagh, like Morinis, locates the determining factor of the pilgrim's identity in individual experience, for only the individual can know if she is in possession of sufficient 'coin of the heart' with which to purchase the joy of pilgrimage. However, both also acknowledge the importance of the community in the experience, "A stroll through the town is a real tonic to bring the fire of religious emotion to the faces of the toughest cynic. Not that the talk in the houses and along the streets is openly pious, but it is humor and light talk against an eternal background – the Faith. Even that big Mayo man talking loudly at the street corner shows the spirit" (Hughes 50). *Communitas* plays a large role in the creation of the pilgrimage atmosphere, especially in the "gloriously singing, laughing climb" (Hughes 51) of Reek Sunday, and results in the creation of a pilgrim folk group. A vivid illustration of this sense of *communitas* was the scene when we stopped for lunch at a small village pub- pilgrims patiently waited in line for the small

bathrooms, shared their lunches with one another, laughingly compared stories of obstacles (especially about getting drenched) and gave advice. Later, at the end of the pilgrimage many gathered again at the pub at the base of the mountain with pilgrims of the shorter route, the crowd overflowing onto the make shift patio and into the gravel lot. While a number of older pilgrims retired to the bus, there was no sense of urgency to hurry the pub-goers to come aboard as it seemed that this group celebration was an important aspect of the experience.

Identity Formation through the Folk Group

As noted in chapter two, the identity of the pilgrim can be performed for oneself, as well as for others, through *keying*, or meaningful and meta-communicative acts that others familiar with the performance can identify. In the case of the Croagh Patrick pilgrimage, fellow pilgrims constitute a folk group within which the pilgrim identity is performed, evaluated and reinforced or discredited. The group will likely be a high context group, so that members will identify and interact with one another through esoteric dynamics such as customs or vocabulary. As an alternative to attempting to determine the pilgrim identity using theoretical models, let us consider how the folk group of Croagh Patrick pilgrims formulates the pilgrim identity.

Interestingly, the Tochar Phadraig guide published by Ballintubber Abbey addresses the distinction between tourist and pilgrim immediately, under the Elements of Pilgrimage section:

There are certain elements of Pilgrimage built into the walk and reminders of these are erected at certain places along the way. They distinguish the ‘Pilgrim’ from the ‘Tourist’.

Faith – Light a candle as a symbol of your faith before setting out. A prayer as you cross stiles.

Penance – No complaining. Instead say “Thanks be to God.”

Community – Include ‘the stranger’ in your group- no ‘cliques’.

Mystery – Silence observed at certain designated parts of Tochar.

Change of Heart – What is the Lord suggesting you must change about yourself?

Celebration – Share your food, your joy, your love and your care (Ballintubber iii).

Many of these elements are reflected in Kavanagh’s account of the pilgrimage and were performed by the pilgrims that I walked with. Other popularly conceived pilgrim activities not mentioned in the *tochar* guide are praying at the stations along the traditional route to the mountain summit, attending mass, confession and/or communion, and walking barefoot. Except for mass and communion, these activities were not undertaken by the pilgrims walking the *Tochar Phadraig*, and even then, only ten or twelve pilgrims took part in the mass since the rest had elected to continue on in an effort to climb to the summit after heavy rain made mass at the traditional site, the Boheh Stone, impossible. Contemplative silence at specified points along the trail took the place of prayer.

On the other hand, many of the elements of Pilgrimage were also exhibited by visitors climbing the Reek on non-pilgrimage days. During each of my four climbs to the

summit I met fellow climbers willing or asking to share water or food, and there was a general mood of good humor and camaraderie, particularly when making the final ascent where it was nearly impossible not to stumble on the large loose boulders that make up the path. At this point especially, strangers were equipped with a laugh, a quick question of concern, and a joke about doing one's penance, rather than complaining (though there was occasionally some of that, too). There were also those individuals who observed the element of silence, whose trip up the mountain appeared to be a more personal and reflective experience. And every once in while there would pass someone walking in bare feet. While this could be interpreted as a sign of devotion (Caheny; Lehrhaupt), I found that for two teenage boys it was simply a personal challenge to see if they could do what pilgrims before them had done, and for a couple from Scotland, it was a way to connect with both pilgrims and a time past.

Various performances of pilgrimage identity were scattered among the many people that I observed and with whom I interacted while climbing the mountain and were rarely, if ever entirely present in any one individual. In fact, it would be impossible to say whether all the elements of a pilgrimage/pilgrim are present or absent in an individual because, as noted by Kavanagh and Morinis, the experience, while manifested in public, is largely internal. Additionally, there could be many more elements of a pilgrim/pilgrimage that have not been identified here and yet are considered essential by some member of the pilgrim folk group. This, then, is the dynamic aspect of folk groups and traditions. There is not a definitive construction of pilgrim or pilgrimage that can identify an individual or an event, yet there is a context within which such an identity can be formulated.

The folk group of pilgrims, and the folk tradition of pilgrimage that they take part in, provide a context within which meaning can be constructed according to structures established by the group and tradition. Common to the elements of a pilgrim/age cited above is the emphasis on community and transformation. Through an acknowledgement of the common structure within which this event was to take place, and relations between individuals were to be conducted, a system for communication and the construction of meaning could be established. In my conversations while walking the *Tochar Phadraig*, I found that among a group that referred to themselves as pilgrims and what they were endeavoring on as pilgrimage, there was an array of interpretations about the significance of the sites along the *tochar*, of the role of the church or Ireland in their experience, and of the meaning of this event in their lives, yet most emphasized the importance of intentionality, and understood the pilgrimage to be an important event in understanding or constructing personal identity, often in terms of Ireland or Catholicism. And as the identity of the pilgrim was shown not to be hard and fast in this setting, it turned out neither was the identity of the Catholic in this liminal and ludic pilgrimage space, for during the brief mass Father Fahey held in the middle of the trail he asked me, a not-quite-Catholic, to hold the holy Eucharist, and afterwards asked why my mother and I had not joined in the usually Catholic-only communion, dismissing our concerns by saying, “Nothing about today is usual”.

The Ethnographer / Autoethnographer

Over the course of the pilgrimage along the *tochar* my own identity and perspective fluctuated between numerous subjectivities. I was the researcher, concerned

that I would not get sufficient data for her thesis; I was the pilgrim, finally returning to a place that held much meaning and importance for me and aware of the gravity of the pilgrimage that I was finally going to take part in; I was the tourist, happy to be exploring a place that was not my 'home'. And I was other things besides: a daughter to my mother; a fellow traveler to her friend, Libby; perhaps also an oddly inquisitive young American woman to pilgrims such as Mary and Old Paddy. Eventually I began posing this riddle to myself: A tourist, a pilgrim and an ethnographer walk into a pilgrimage. Who comes out at the end?

Ellen Badone suggests that by understanding tourism as inhabiting a border zone between cultures where the audience (the tourists) and the performers (the Natives) are mutually performing and creating identities, tourism can be considered along with pilgrimage and ethnography as “a mode of seeing, ... a particular manner of constructing the world” (Badone 181). All three forms of travel concern themselves with constructing a cosmology of the world that the travelers inhabit, as well as locating the “authentic” within that cosmos. Badone defines authenticity as “a culturally and historically situated ideal that is *believed* to exist by individuals or groups of individuals in specific social settings” (Badone 182). The authentic is often located in the Other, so that travel is necessary to obtain it. Anthropology has a history of seeking out “primitive” societies in order to locate “authentic” human customs, untainted by modernity; pilgrims and tourists are searching for “the *perceived* potential for self-renewal” by becoming “physically removed from the structures of everyday social interaction” (Badone 184) and entering into a more “authentic” landscape, such as Nature or foreign cultures.

These three forms of quests also share in a desire to “connect with an enduring entity” or “imagined community” (Badone 184), either through amassing knowledge about humanity, performing ritual to interact with the sacred, or transcending the self and identifying with a timeless heritage. All three individuals, the ethnographer, the pilgrim and the tourist, are attempting to ascribe meaning to experience. As an ethnographer, I have come to make sense of this experience through the compilation and analysis of my pilgrimage data using the theories and accounts compiled by others, resulting in this thesis. As a pilgrim and tourist, I have made sense of my experience by preserving memories of the experience in the form of photographs, souvenirs, journaling and most importantly as an evolving narrative that defines and is defined by how I interact with places that resonate with me. And yet even in my ethnographic product these sense-making activities have played a major role, and in future instances of pilgrim and tourist activities my academic research will be bound to influence how I interpret those experiences as well.

There is no reason to assume that other pilgrims do not similarly experience mutually influential subjectivities as well, and so the distinction between pilgrim and tourist seems best determined by those participants within the folk group and the pilgrimage performance context. At the end of the pilgrimage, as my mother, Libby and I headed toward the bus, Father Fahey met us with a certificate of completion for our pilgrimage, as he had met the other pilgrims before us. There was no question for him, or for my mother or Libby, or any of the others we had walked with that day, that we were pilgrims.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout the previous chapters of this thesis, I employed an ethnographic approach to examine a specific, historic pilgrimage associated with a unique geographic site, Croagh Patrick, in the west of Ireland. By integrating my ethnographic data with theory from anthropology and folklore, I explored elements of embodied connection with the natural environment, religious syncretism, ritual performance, and narrative as these contribute to the constructions of various forms of identity within the folk group of pilgrims. Then I proposed that the patterns of these intersecting elements reveal an emerging vernacular religious practice that challenges the traditional understanding of pilgrim and tourist at this particular site. In this final chapter, I will briefly summarize my findings in relation to my original research questions.

Spiritual Experience Informed by Embodied Interaction with the Landscape

The Reek Sunday pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick was not my first experience with the holy mountain and it has had spiritual significance for me since I first climbed it. It was only on my third trip to Ireland that I finally participated in its official pilgrimage event, yet on my previous climbs it was clear that many of those climbing around me felt the site was significant, demonstrating this by praying at the cairns, leaving behind patterns or initials made with stones on the grassy mountainside, walking bare foot, or sitting contemplatively on the mountain's summit, looking out at the fields and shoreline below.

I do not presume that everyone that climbs the mountain, on Reek Sunday or at another time, views the Reek as sacred or experiences it as a *tirtha*, a material link between past and present, ethereal and material worlds. However, I have demonstrated that the mountain and its landscape has had this significance for people consistently for thousands of years, though the articulation of that significance has changed somewhat through the succession of different cultures. For pre-Christian Celtic pagans the mountain appears to have been associated with the God Lugh and the fertility powers of the sun. Catholicism reinterpreted the mountain's importance to be its relationship with what St. Patrick referred to as the 'true Sun', Jesus Christ, in whose name he came to the mountain to vanquish daemons as well as Ireland's Celtic pagan religious practices. The current pilgrimage incorporates aspects of both of these culture's traditions, and is now incorporating another based on the surrounding community's history, particularly during the Great Famine of the nineteenth century.

Morinis asserts that salvation, by means of transformation or transcendence, is the ultimate goal of pilgrimage (27). As an embodied act, transformation can be understood as the performance of a new or altered identity. By participating in the pilgrimage event, pilgrims are able to formulate and perform identities that are informed by the mountain's various significances. For many of my fellow pilgrims, this performed identity was as a Catholic or a community member, either of the local community (Castlebar, County Mayo, Connacht), or the national Irish one. However, in my own experience, transcendence was not linked to a specific group of people or time, but rather was an experience of what Bolen refers to as a 'deeper archetypal realm' (126). I found evidence

for this type of experience with other pilgrims who were not Irish, and might be considered to be tourists.

Place, Folk Practice and Narrative Contributions to Identity Formation

Narratives play an essential role in the experiences of both performance and transcendence or transformation. Narratives provide one avenue through which the landscape's significance can be articulated, providing a link between the material and the spiritual experience, "[W]alking over a site 'is like a story, a series of events for which the land acts as a mnemonic... To travel across such a landscape is to remember it into being, it is sedimented with human significances'" (Rountree 102). The various stories encountered along the *tochar* ranged from accounts of miracles at holy wells, religious legends of St. Patrick and histories of villages decimated by famine. The sharing of narratives at their associated sites 'remembered' the places and people 'into being', allowing pilgrims to identify with them through the pilgrimage performance, while personal narratives of the pilgrims allowed them to make sense of their experience as it was taking place.

Dominant themes of identification were with previous Christian pilgrims who had followed the *tochar* and past communities that had once inhabited the area around the site, particularly those affected by the Great Famine. As a performative event, the pilgrimage allowed pilgrims to utilize narratives in a 'definitional ceremony' (Myerhoff 234-235) through which participants could address their cultural context and create identities, values and social structures, while the ritual's relationship to a process of 'social drama' (Turner 9) positions this negotiation in a social context, allowing the

construction of a social reality. In the case of the Croagh Patrick pilgrimage, religious (Catholic) and national (Irish) identities and realities were being constructed through the event.

Emergent, Vernacular Religious Tradition

I argue that the incorporation of famine narratives and sites into the pilgrimage constitutes an emergent vernacular religious tradition, based on the definition put forth by Primiano, which emphasizes the personal experience and perception of the believer (40). Religion, in this case, is not predicated on the worship of a deity or adherence to a theology, but rather is an experience of spirituality that is based on an identification with a community's history and is embodied at the sacred place as a series of elisions "of time and place, of ancient and modern [peoples], of human bodies and the earth's body, of memory and healing" (Rountree 105). Pilgrims walking the *Tochar Phadraig* or climbing to the summit from the mountain's base in Murrisk may hold these famine-related sites as sacred regardless of whether they also acknowledge the pre-Christian or Catholic significances of the site as sacred. I found in my own experience of Reek Sunday that for many of my fellow pilgrims all of these associations held significance for them on their pilgrimage.

By designating this emergent tradition as a vernacular religious event I contend that the identity of 'pilgrim' does not only apply to those who identify as participating in the official Catholic pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick, but could be applied to any individual who journeys to the site in order to access the ideal, as defined by them. While Cohen asserts that only the pilgrim's journey is a movement towards a sacred Center, while the

tourist's journey is a movement outward towards chaos and the Other, I argue that the social model Cohen refers to is ambiguous on how to define one's referential social context, and does not take into account the multiple subjectivities present in any pilgrim/tourist (50-51). Rather, it may be more useful to consider how the identities of 'pilgrim' and 'sacred' are defined by those who consider themselves a part of the relevant folk group, that is, the 'pilgrims' themselves.

Implications for Further Research

It is at this point that I see an opportunity for further research and analysis. A major limitation to my ethnographic study of the pilgrimage was that I was unable to conduct extended and recorded interviews with other participants during the twenty-two mile walk. My personal conversations with participants proved very useful, both personally and academically, however I believe a future study would benefit from further elaboration on the personal experiences of pilgrims through formal interviews. The most reasonable time to do this might be after the event while relaxing in the pub, or even at a planned meeting the following day.

As was noted by Old Paddy, religion is becoming less popular in Ireland and Europe, yet the Reek Sunday pilgrimage is still a well-attended event, and the mountain remains busy throughout its open months. I have suggested that some transformation of the site's significance may be underway. This point was underlined when I came across a radio performance of a play, "Everyone's Got a Mountain to Climb", by Irish playwright Dave Duggan, which aired on the Irish radio network, RTE, days after the pilgrimage. The play follows the story of an atheist scientist's experience going on the pilgrimage

after learning she has cancer and how the event becomes a rite of passage for both her and her family. This contemporary play, aired nationally in conjunction with the pilgrimage, is a striking example of how new, non-Catholic frames of interpretation are being applied to the mountain, reinforcing, yet changing, its cultural significance. This raises the question: How might other extended European pilgrimages, such as the Camino de Santiago de Compostela in Spain, be experiencing a change in their significance? In a less religious Europe, what is the significance of such a pilgrimage for the thousands who undertake it annually? Over centuries, pilgrims have undertaken pilgrimage to these sites and others on a journey towards the ultimate goal of transformation. What has transformation meant for pilgrims over the course of time, and what does this indicate about their, and our, visions of reality?

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