

Pilgrimage Practices: Embodied mobilities of pilgrims in Ireland

Richard Scriven

Department of Geography, University College Cork

Introduction

My research engages with **pilgrimage practices** in contemporary Ireland as **embodied mobilities**. I will look at practices at traditional, religious-spiritual sites; primarily, a selection of holy wells in the Cork- Kerry area and Croagh Patrick.

The recent '**mobilities turn**' offers new possibilities for the study of pilgrimage. Treating pilgrimage as an embodied mobility allows for research that is focused on movement as a geographical concept. The active nature of pilgrimage means that both subjects (pilgrims) and spaces (sacred places/ landscapes) can be seen to be defined by and to emerge through their interactions with each other.

In theoretical and methodological terms, I am eager to engage with pilgrimage in terms of both its **representational** (meanings, symbols) and **practical/nonrepresentational** (experiences, beliefs, the sensual) natures. This research process aims to further understandings of pilgrimage practices and discussions regarding the **geographies of mobilities**.

Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage is one of the most prominent and ancient religious and cultural phenomena in the world. It is characterised by **movement** (journeys, performances and rituals); **spatiality** (sacred places and routes); **meaning** (belief, faith, secular/cultural motivations); and, **embodiment** (corporeal practices, lived and sensuous experiences).

Geographies of Mobilities

The **geographies of mobilities** offer new opportunities for research, by placing movement at the centre of analysis (Adey 2009; Cresswell 2010; Cresswell & Merriman 2011; Jensen 2009). Mobility is defined in terms of '**meaningful movement**': physical motion that is invested with meaning (Cresswell 2006).

Aspects of Mobility: Cresswell (2006; 2010) proposes three aspects of mobility to assist in the study of mobility within geography.

Movement: Physical movement as the raw material of mobility. (e.g., walking as a physical activity).

Representation: Interpretation and representation imbues motion with different meanings (e.g., Walking as recreation, exercise or recovery)

Practice: Mobilities are practiced and embodied. This emphasises the experienced, sensual and nonrepresentational nature of the activities. (e.g., walking as laboured, relaxing or having a spring in your step).



Above: A pilgrim at St Gobnait's Grave during the rounds on the feast day, 2012 (Photo R Scriven)



Below: Votive offerings at St Gobnait's Grave, Ballyvourney, Cork. (Photo R Scriven)

Photos, clockwise, from right:

1. A pilgrim praying with rosary beads during the rounds at Ballyvourney on St Gobnait's Feast Day (11th Feb) 2012 (Photo R Scriven);
2. Taking and drinking water from the holy well at 'The City' (Cathair Crobh Dearg), Rathmore, Kerry on the Pattern Day (first Sunday in May) 2012, (Photo R Scriven);
3. Pilgrims on Croagh Patrick, on Reek Sunday, 2012 (Photo R Scriven).

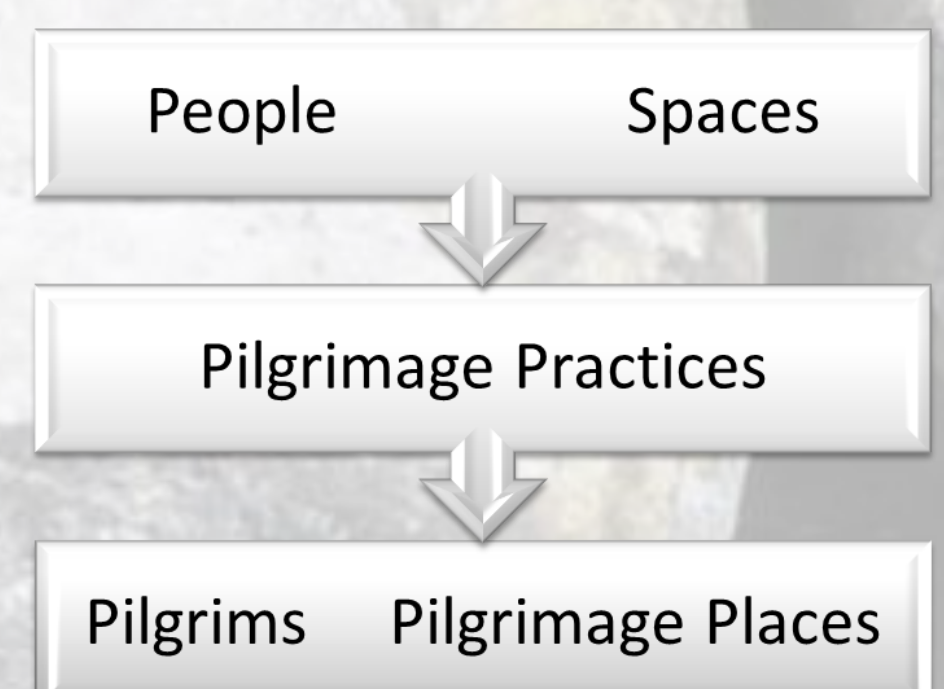


Pilgrimage as Mobility

The discussions within the emerging geographies of mobilities have much to offer the study of pilgrimage. My approach to pilgrimage sees it as a **mobility** that defines both the participants and the places.

In its **movements** (walking a route, ritualistic performances); its **representations** (religious/spiritual beliefs, cultural context), and its **practice** (embodied activity, corporeal performances) pilgrimage defines both the participants and the spaces involved.

Through the act of pilgrimage, people become pilgrims and locations become pilgrimage places.



Methods

A Mobility Ethnography

I am adopting a 'mobility ethnography' as a means of studying **pilgrimage as mobility** in terms of its movements, representations and practices, as they are happening in place and in their cultural and religious/spiritual context.

This approach is informed by the trend of using ethnography in geographic studies, especially in terms of examining mobility (Crang and Cook 2007; Jensen 2009; Morton 2005).

My approach has three main components:

- **Observing and recording:** participant observation including, fieldnotes, mapping movements, audio recording, photography and video recording.
- **Asking/conversing and gathering:** interviews, both on-site interviews and follow-up semi-structured interviews, and the gathering of visual and documentary materials.
- **Understanding and (re)presenting:** analysing, making sense, writing-up and presenting – including audio-visual recordings.

Case Studies

The research will be based on five holy wells in the Cork/Kerry region and Croagh Patrick, Co. Mayo



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Contact: 102087081@student.ucc.ie Twitter: @RichardScriven