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Event Running and Pilgrimage: A Comparative Case Study

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Janice Poltrick-Donato’s ‘Event Running and Pilgrimage’ links pilgrimage with the trials and triumphs of the amateur event runner. She demonstrates the statistical and existential parallels between the two practices, and shows how the suffering and accomplishments of running are experienced by some runners as a form of secular pilgrimage, a ‘journey to the self.’

Key Words: pilgrimage, event running, communitas, Camino, marathon, the zone, flow, gender, rite of passage, journey pilgrimage, destination pilgrimage

Introduction

Amateur event running has seen significant and steady growth over the past thirty years, and particularly over the last decade. This rise in event running is concurrent with the increasing popularity of walking the Camino, the pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. Popularly known simply as the Camino, the pilgrimage to Santiago can be identified as a journey pilgrimage as opposed to a destination pilgrimage. That is, for most pilgrims, ‘the journey is the thing.’

Between 2000 and 2011, the one hundred most popular American road races showed a 330 per cent increase in the number of runners who finished the half and full marathon. In the same time period, the Camino also saw a 330 per cent increase in the number of finishers.

Is this a coincidence? The popular embrace of both amateur event running and pilgrimage is witness to the primal experience of bodily movement and its ability to integrate physical, psychological, and spiritual aspects of the human person. This article explores the relationships and parallels between these two movement paradigms, with a particular emphasis on the Turnelian notion of *communitas* and its connection to Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of ‘flow,’ also known in athletic circles as being ‘in the zone.’ I will also examine the discourses common to the two practices, including the place of pain and suffering, conflicts between personal and communal goals, and forms of attestation of accomplishment.

### Increasing Overlaps between Event Running and Walking the Camino

The areas of intersection and overlap between event running and journey pilgrimage have been expanding over the last few years as their relative spectra of inclusion increases. This is related to two factors. First, the Camino attracts and welcomes pilgrims who claim a host of motivations: religious, spiritual, secular, physical, and touristic. Second, event running is also becoming democratized and inclusive, opening to a broader range of running abilities, including walking.

The two phenomena bear certain similarities in their recent historical trajectories. In North America, marathon running was initially brought to public attention when the American Frank Shorter won the gold medal in 1972 at the Munich Olympics. His acclaimed win, and the release of James Fixx’s 1977 bestseller, *The Complete Book of Running*, are credited with the so-called ‘First Running Boom,’ which tended to attract younger, elite, and predominantly male athletes. John Stanton, founder of the Running Room, North America’s largest specialty running and walking retailer, describes the runners of that era as ‘Baby Boomers with type A personalities’ and differentiates them from the runners of the ‘Second Running Boom’ which started gaining momentum in the 1990s, and

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2. When I refer to amateur event running, I am focusing on the half and full marathon, rather than the shorter distances, as these two challenging events bear positive comparison with the Camino.

which continues to flourish. This new generation of athletes is more likely to be running for health and fitness, with the focus on participation, not competition. Many of these runners are also Baby Boomers, but now several decades older and concerned with actively resisting the encroachments of age through a lifestyle practice of running and walking, with the added motivation of half and full marathons as challenging but achievable goals. Second Boom[4] runners have also discovered the value of training in groups, adding an important social and community dimension to a sport that was once considered solitary and individualistic.[5]

The Camino, similarly, has been radically transformed since the mid-twentieth century. The 1,200 year-old pilgrimage route passed out of popular usage for centuries, but experienced a reanimation after the Second World War as a traditional destinalional journey, with the emphasis on the sacred shrine at Santiago. However, contemporary practices of pilgrimage have been shifting the emphasis from the holy place to the transformational journey. In her study of pilgrimage on the Camino, Nancy Frey explains:

The reanimation took an unexpected turn in the 1980s and 1990s when the act of making the pilgrimage as a long-distance physical journey . . . became popular on a wide scale.[6]

For many pilgrims, the route itself has become the holy place - the axis mundi, the goal as well as the place of transformation.[7] Austrian pilgrimage scholar Helmut Eberhart reiterates this shifting motivation:

Whereas before the mid-twentieth century the Cathedral of Santiago was the pilgrimage destination in the classical sense, it is now largely the other way around: the pilgrimage in the sense of a spiritual journey has become the rationale.[8]

In recent years, running events have been selling, even as the numbers of places have been increased. Stanton explains that

one of the major contributing factors is the entrance of women . . . In the 1980s the sport of running was about 80 per cent male, 20 per cent female. Today women dominate the sport.[9]

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4. Some observers believe there is actually a Third Running Boom underway, due to huge increases in participation in 5 k ‘fun runs’ which focus on trendy and family-centered community events, with the goal of non-competitive sociability and fitness (runningusa.org/state-of-sport-nontraditional?returnTo=annual-reports).

5. Evidence for, and one of the consequences of, this inclusivity of less experienced runners in the Second Running Boom can be seen in slowing mean race times. RunningUSA’s annual Marathon Report for 2014 shows an increase of forty-four minutes for men, and an increase in thirty-eight minutes for women completing the marathon since 1980 (runningusa.org/marathon-report-2015?returnTo=annual-reports).


While pilgrims are usually identified and acknowledged as spiritual seekers, runners may also view their practice as having spiritual and transcendent potential, especially in a culture that accepts and celebrates a broadening definition of spirituality. Sara Terreault describes contemporary spirituality as comprising the growth of the self and the self’s relationship to others, to the world, and for some, to God. Spirituality today is about self-integration and self-transcendence in the quest for identity, meaning, and belonging.\(^{12}\)

George Sheehan, popularly known as the runners’ philosopher,\(^ {13}\) elucidates the spiritual side of running:

> The distance runner is mysteriously reconciling the separation of body and mind, of pain and pleasure, of the conscious and the unconscious. He is repairing the rent, and healing the wound in his divided self. He has found a way to make the ordinary extraordinary; the commonplace unique; the everyday eternal . . . Running is a

The Camino, also traditionally (and still currently) dominated by male Spanish pilgrims, is evidencing a shift towards a growing percentage of women. For example, in the last ten years, the proportion of women to men has been increasing steadily, from 41% in 2005 to 47% in 2015.\(^ {10}\)

Not only has there been a change in and expansion to the traditional running demographic, but growing numbers of walkers are challenging themselves to accomplish half and full marathon distances. Many races now have a walking category, making walking an increasingly popular and accessible race variation for the average athlete. Stanton explains the attraction:

> Walking has emerged out of the running revolution. As the number one exercise in North America, it is both social and personal. Walking . . . can be a life-altering experience . . . an empowering combination of commitment and hard work leading to triumph, celebration, and camaraderie.\(^ {11}\)

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10. (http://peregrinossantiago.es/eng/services-for-pilgrims/informes-estadisticos/).
monastery; a retreat; a place to commune with God and yourself, a place for psychological and spiritual renewal.\[14\]

**Case Study**

To illustrate connections between long-distance running and journey pilgrimage, I draw from a case study involving an athletic community called the Rogue Runners and Walkers, based in an affluent suburb on the Island of Montreal, in Quebec. The Rogues claim to run for fitness, health, fun, camaraderie, personal growth, and development. Members range in age from thirty-seven to sixty-two, with an average age of over fifty. Of the forty members, thirty-one are women, nine are men. For the most part they are educated professionals. This demographic corresponds with what Nancy Frey has observed on the Camino. Pilgrims tend to be middleclass, educated, white, urban. . . [and] are attracted to the pilgrimage as both an inner and outer journey . . . rather than having a religious motive, [they] are often on the road for a host of cultural, spiritual, athletic, and personal reasons.\[15\]

The Rogues include a wide spectrum of runners. They consider themselves a ‘family,’ having shared many challenges and celebrations in their five-year history. They started as a running group, but have expanded to long-distance walking and extended wilderness hiking. These activities share common discourses and parallel demands, challenges, and hardships mitigated through community.

The idea of pilgrimage has subsequently piqued the imagination of many Rogues. Seven members have already walked the Camino and others are planning pilgrimages in Quebec and on the Appalachian Trail in the eastern USA. Among them, these seven Rogue pilgrims have run over twenty marathons and innumerable half-marathons. For many of the Rogues, pilgrimage has been appropriated as another achievable physical goal that offers opportunity for travel and the possibility of personal transformation.

Jackie and Ed

As Jackie explains:

Running taught me that the impossible is possible. After my marathon, it was ‘well, what do I do next?’ The Camino was a huge adventure, but the fact that I was a runner and physically fit meant that I could do it!

Jackie and Ed embody direct links between contemporary event running and the Camino. Jackie walked the Camino in 2013. She explains her motivations:

After the kids left home, I decided to do ‘something selfish’ and give myself a fiftieth birthday present - to go off by myself for five weeks and reflect on the next part of my life. To reset the gauges, to come to terms with myself and where I fit in by spending time alone.

Jackie’s focus was clearly on the journey, and she considered Santiago a kind of finish line. Not getting there would have been like dropping out of a race. It was important for Jackie to do ‘the whole thing,’ while acknowledging that it was an arbitrary distance, like the 42.2 kilometre marathon distance itself. Jackie was diagnosed with arthritis before leaving for Spain and can no longer run. She left her 10k running medal on the Camino, at the Cruz de Ferra (the Iron Cross), where pilgrims traditionally leave a significant, symbolic token. She felt that her competitive running days were over, and along with that, her membership as a Rogue Runner. Since her return to Canada, she has discovered that walking is becoming an important, respected, and competitive option within the running community, as well as among the Rogues. She accomplished her first walking marathon in 2015, and is now leading 10-kilometre and half-marathon walking clinics.

Ed participates in these clinics. He is a college professor and researcher in molecular evolution, as well as a committed Catholic. He cites his motivations as ‘mainly spiritual,’ but also for ‘the adventure, the unknown, meeting people along the way and hearing their stories.’ He is partial to the journey aspect of the Camino, considering it a metaphor for life, and an opportunity for
discovering myself, seeing God and his creation while I walk. Getting to Santiago is not my main goal. It’s important, but not the highlight.

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14. (georgesheehan.com).
Ed recently turned fifty, which for him is 'perfect timing! In the first half you build your life, while the second half is about the search for meaning.'

In 2009, Ed’s first Camino ended in pain and disappointment nine days out from Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, the eastern portal from France into the Pyrenees. He blames ‘his failure’ on a lack of appropriate training, and for his second attempt, he decided to train for nine months prior to departure. Shoudering a loaded backpack, he participated in Jackie’s walking clinics, which culminated in a half-marathon walk. Shortly after, he left for Spain to walk the Camino Frances, the 800-kilometre distance from Saint-Jean to Santiago. Ed managed to walk the entire distance on this second attempt, and was very pleased with his pilgrimage. He is currently training to run his first half-marathon.

**Pilgrimage and Event Running as Rites of Passage**

Victor and Edith Turner posited pilgrimage as a three-stage rite of passage, with phases of separation, transition, and reincorporation, a paradigm that I contend can be extended to event-running. Both pilgrims and event runners separate themselves from their mundane worlds and travel to distant locales to participate in extraordinary and transformative experiences. The transitional stage is associated with a ‘limens,’ or threshold, between ‘what was’ and ‘what will be’ - what theologian Deborah Ross calls ‘a place where the normal does not apply - a crack between worlds,’[16] or as Victor Turner describes it, ‘an instant of pure potentiality when everything trembles in the balance.’[17] Runners literally step over the threshold of the starting line, and enter into the catalytic passage of the bounded unidirectional race course, all of the participants moving toward the same goal. Notably, the Turners construed the model of pilgrimage as a movement away from normative social structures towards the creation of an alternative and

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transitory anti-structure. For them, communitas is the collective experience that may result from the movement from anti-structure through counter-structure to a new way of being.\textsuperscript{[18]} Communitas, then, is a spontaneous and egalitarian sociality characterized by non-hierarchical relationships forged through the fellowship that comes from being ‘comrades-in-arms’ undergoing challenging and meaningful experiences together.\textsuperscript{[19]} This transitory social counter-structure, and the communitas that may spring from it, also emerges in reports of the experiences of event runners. As Dawn declares,

\begin{quote}
The Rogues is the most special group that I have ever belonged to. We’ve overcome challenges and celebrated so many accomplishments together. We’ve evolved from a running group to a social group to a family.
\end{quote}

According to Turnerian theory based on Arnold Van Gennep’s model,\textsuperscript{[20]} rites of passage are transitional, initiatory rituals associated with changes of place, state, and/or social position. Van Gennep identified rites of passage as having three phases: liminaire, préliminaire, and post-liminaire (liminal, preliminal, and postliminal). The marathon route is actually as well as figuratively a liminal space in which the runner travels physically and psychologically from start to finish and from one social state to another. The runner ‘becomes’ a marathoner, with a concomitant change in self-image, and personal and social identity.

Helen:

Running a marathon gives you a sense of confidence and accomplishment. Suddenly you realize that the person you were has more potential than you thought. You can do things you never thought you could do and that carries on into all the other aspects of your life. When I went for an interview for a secretarial job in a high school, one of the deciding factors in me being hired was my marathon experience. Running a marathon changes not only your own self-image but also other peoples’ image of you.

Communitas: Contested and Recovered

The Turnerian concept of communitas has been the focus of much controversy.\textsuperscript{[21]} Upon publication of the Turners’ seminal Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture (1978), communitas became the foremost anthropological paradigm for theorizing pilgrimage. The paradigm was subsequently contested by John Eade and Michael Sallnow.\textsuperscript{[22]} Writing in the deconstructivist decade of the 1990s, they critiqued communitas as essentially ‘an idealizing discourse about pilgrimage rather than an empirical description of it.’\textsuperscript{[23]} As Simon Coleman states, ‘The Turnerian argument about communitas was rejected by scholars who went looking for it and could not find it in a way they found ethnographically convincing.’\textsuperscript{[24]} Eade later nuanced his critique, acknowledging at least the potential for communitas in the pilgrimage experience, modifying its definition to that of ‘an ideological programme that is only partially and fleetingly realized in practice.’\textsuperscript{[25]} Turner himself acknowledged that the ‘the spontaneity and immediacy of communitas . . . can seldom be sustained for long.’\textsuperscript{[26]}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} Turner and Turner, Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture, xxx.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Arnold van Gennep, The Rites of Passage (transl. Monika V. Vizedom and Gabriele L. Caffée; London: Routledge, 1960 [2004]), 11 ff.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Simon Coleman, ‘Do you believe in Pilgrimage?: Communitas, Contestation, and Beyond.’ Anthropologica Theory 2/3 (2002): 356.
\item \textsuperscript{22} John Eade and Michael Sallnow, eds., Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1991 [revised ed. 2000]).
\item \textsuperscript{23} Coleman, ‘Do you believe in Pilgrimage?’ 357.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Coleman, ‘Do you believe in Pilgrimage?’ 359.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Eade and Sallnow, Contesting the Sacred, p. xiii.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Turner, ‘Liminal to Liminoid, 78.
\end{itemize}
In Edith Turner’s 2012 study *Communitas: The Anthropology of Collective Joy*, she revisits the paradigm. Building on the Turners’ earlier identification of *communitas* as a transcendent experience of mutuality and unity that accompanies but is not restricted to rite of passage experiences,[27] she postulates that *communitas* may arise in relation to a wide spectrum of human activities, including festivals, rituals, and religious practice, and in the experience of music, sport, art, nature and work, as well as in instances of disaster and of revolution.

**Communitas Described**

Victor Turner referred to the experience of spontaneous *communitas*[28] as

*a direct, immediate and total confrontation of human identities . . . [that] has something magical about it. Subjectively there is in it a feeling of endless power . . . [and] a flash of lucid mutual understanding on the existential level . . . Individuals who interact with one another in the mode of spontaneous *communitas* become totally absorbed into a single, synchronized, fluid event.*[29]

While walking the Camino in 2011 with a small group, in my pilgrim journal I wrote of an experience of spontaneous and unexpected *communitas* on the Camino:

*Supper was about to begin, and I had situated myself at the end of one of the long communal trestle tables for supper, comfortably ensconced between Sara and John, when the hospitalero pointed a finger at me and kicked me out from the table to make room for some vegetarians. Grrrrrr . . . I grudgingly made my way to another table, and found myself seated beside Carl, an American from Texas. Suddenly we were engaged in the most intimate and sincere conversation. He seemed almost angelic to me. We talked about why we were there, what we were looking and hoping for, about God, and faith and pilgrimage and how it is that total strangers like us can share meaningful moments almost instantly on the Camino. There is no ice to break; one can just get straight to the heart of the matter.*[30]

One of my Camino companions described another moment of *communitas* that took place through a shared ritual:

*We struck up a conversation with an older woman; a pilgrim from Germany named Ericka. She told us that she walked the Camino because she had recently lost her mother, husband, and sister. We were heartbroken for her. We invited her to attend a small, private service in the tiny stone church behind the albergue. When Ericka arrived, we squeezed her into our pew and gave her a quick hug. Although she did not understand much English I could tell that the invitation to our intimate gathering had spoken to her heart. Tears fell gently down her cheeks when we started singing Dona Nobis Pacem - a Latin hymn that she also knew.*[31]

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28. For a more detailed description of the other forms of *communitas*, ie. ideological and normative, see Turner, ‘Liminal to Liminoid,’ 79–80.
the task at hand, a sense of control, the loss of self-
consciousness, an altered sense of time, and inner
clarity producing immediate feedback. Lastly, flow is
autotelic; that is, intrinsically motivating.\[34\] Victor
Turner connected the subjective experience of
communitas to that of flow.

Communitas has something of a flow quality . . .
. It may arise, and often does arise, spontaneously and unanticipated . . . Flow . . .
seems to be one of the ways in which structure
may be transformed or ‘liquefied’ into
communitas.\[35\]

Edith Turner also connects communitas with
Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of flow and the zone, and
insists that it is through narratives that such
experiences are best understood.\[36\] She utilizes the
subjective experiences of flow or being in the zone
(concepts that are well researched and recognized in
the sports realm\[37\]) to illuminate the concept of
communitas, and using \textit{unio mystica} as a synonym. She
describes both communitas and flow as key, interior
experiences of alignment when everything suddenly
clicks into place. It is an unpredictable experience
that ‘comes when it wills.’\[38\]

\textit{It flourishes where there is a mutual purpose, a
mutual experience . . . a point something like an
electrical circuit comes alive throughout the
group - suddenly there, in everybody - and we
act as one person.}\[39\]

She specifically parallels communitas and flow by
using an example from the world of running when she
describes the technique of 2004 Olympic Marathoner
Brazilian Vanderlei de Lima:

\textit{Everyone could see he was ‘on a cloud.’ His
running gait was perfect, set to go forever in
true alignment. It was magical.}\[40\]

Running is an activity that may result in both flow and
communitas. Committed athletes who are engaged in a
prolonged run, report experiencing flow, also known as

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32. Turner, ‘Liminal to Liminoid,’ 90. \\
33. Turner, ‘Liminal to Liminoid,’ 89. \\
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34. Christy Martinez and Crista Scott, ‘In Search of the
Meaning of Happiness through Flow and Spirituality,’
The International Journal of Health, Wellness, and
35. Turner, ‘Liminal to Liminoid,’ 89.
36. Edith Turner, Communitas: The Anthropology of
Collective Joy (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012),
49.
37. (athleticinsight.com/Vol1Iss3/Empirical_Zone.htm)
38. Turner, Communitas, 51.
39. Turner, Communitas, 211.
the ‘runner’s high’ or being ‘in the zone.’ Multiple runners may experience flow together, especially when they are running in unison, when the shared rhythm seems to pull each runner along effortlessly. There may be a sense of communitas among runners during a big event as thousands together pursue their individual yet common goal. The Rogues describe a sense of communitas, exhilaration, and celebration after events. Karen expresses this rich diversity of personal and communal motivations for her running:

> I run because of personal concerns with health and ageing, plus the camaraderie, the travel, the medal! Running clears my head, it relieves stress; it makes depression flee. That physical contact of feet on pavement - it’s rhythmic, basic, out in nature. As meditation - flow - it brings me into the present moment.

Victor Turner describes the experience of communitas as having something magical about it, a word that Rogues Bill and Sylvie echo in vivid accounts of flow experiences. Bill, Raeann, and Helen relate the nature of flow to an experience of transcendence and spirituality. Note the parallels in vocabulary between academic discussions of flow and communitas, and runners’ descriptions of their subjective experiences.

**Sylvie:**

> There is a moment in a run that is like floating in the air. Such inner peace! I am so happy. It’s beautiful: wind in my hair, everything working together. It’s magical! That’s why I run!

**Bill:**

> I’m not religious at all, but I have had runs where I was running along and all of a sudden my whole world slowed down and I was at one with my surroundings. It was Zen, like a trance; it was magical! I was in the zone. I could have run all day. Raeann and I didn’t speak, but we were both experiencing it together. There was a feeling of clarity; the fog lifted. It was the most beautiful run of my whole life. It doesn’t happen all the time, but when it does kick in, it’s something very special.

**Raeann** spoke of the same experience (unconsciously expressing Edith’s concept of alignment):

> Everything clicked. It was weird; spiritual; when everything comes together. It’s almost like you’re on drugs!

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41. (athleticinsight.com/Vol1Iss3/Empirical_Zone.htm)
42. This communitas-building experience has been personally noted by the author and other Rogue runners.
43. Turner, ‘Liminal to Liminoid,’ 79.
44. Frey, Pilgrim Stories, 79.
There are many other shared discourses and parallels between journey pilgrimages and event running, such as the ‘alone versus together’ dynamic, the place of pain and suffering, common rituals and garb, and the significance of material tokens of accomplishment.

Mundane conflicts, competing ideas, and discrepant discourses are also common to pilgrimage, as Eade and Sallnow point out in *Contesting the Sacred* (1991).

For pilgrims, unrecognized expectations, judgements over the ‘right’ way to do a pilgrimage, anxiety over accommodations, competition with other pilgrims, and tensions between walking alone or within a group can also be part of the experience. Running events are subject to many of these same issues.

One common conflict involves the question of the solitary versus the communal. As Frey states,

> The pilgrimage provides numerous opportunities to experience solitude or solidarity. In both encounters pilgrims find and test different parts of themselves.

Both moments of flow and of *communitas* may be rare, but they seem to bring about such powerful, visceral, and memorable experiences that they can be deeply meaningful highlights in an overall pilgrim or running experience.

**Pilgrimage and Running: Further Parallels**

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Both moments of flow and of *communitas* may be rare, but they seem to bring about such powerful, visceral, and memorable experiences that they can be deeply meaningful highlights in an overall pilgrim or running experience.
Jackie captures some of this frustration and ambivalence:

Some of the dynamics on the Camino were difficult for me. By the time I wanted to walk alone, we were joined by friends who lived alone and wanted to walk together. In running, you have to discuss these issues ahead of time. If that balance [of alone and together] gets messed up, whether in a running event or on the Camino, you end up feeling guilty and confused.

Discourse about pain, suffering and physical hardship are also common to both practices. The inevitable experience of pain can help create solidarity and mutual support within pilgrim and running communities. Basic physicality, as well as the specific experience of injuries, can stimulate lively and intense discourse.[48] The experience of self-imposed hardship on the physical and psychological level, both on the Camino and in event running, seems to be a necessary catalyst for exploring meaning and developing character, while also building a sense of identity, solidarity, and community. There seems to be a tacit expectation that the degree of challenge is directly proportionate to the degree of transformation. Ross, in her introduction to the Turner’s Image and Pilgrimage, writes of the shared hardship that often accompanies communitas.

The cathartic nature of communitas is . . . encountered alongside the often more demanding aspects of pilgrimage. Experiencing discomfort . . . is part of the liminal nature of pilgrimage.[49]

Runners understand, accept, and even embrace the difficulties and discomforts that will inevitably arise. Louis trained with two other Rogues, Karen and Sue, for a marathon event which entailed a 20-km run together in -33 degree Celsius winter conditions. ‘We knew we would be running in extreme conditions, but we never considered bailing on the run. That is what made it such a bonding experience. I felt exhilarated for days afterwards.’

Both Camino and running events have rites and symbols of belonging and completion. During an event, runners sport an official bib with their name, number, and an electronic timing chip, and receive a medal upon completion. Pilgrims may wear identifying symbols such as the scallop shell, or the yellow Camino arrow, and upon arriving at Santiago are awarded a Compostela, the certificate of completion issued by the official pilgrims’ office. These objects are highly valued, not only as souvenirs, but as material recognition of accomplishment.

**Conclusion**

The primal underlying connection between journey pilgrimages such as the Camino, and half- and full-marathon running, is the exhilarating and transformative nature of movement itself. Journey pilgrims, and event runners and walkers, are using their bodies to reclaim and reinvent their lives, and by so doing implicitly critique pervasive sedentary aspects of our culture that are detrimental to health and well-being. With practices that unite the physical, the personal, the social, and the transcendent, they feel they have created effective mechanisms for holistic human flourishing. The popularity of the Camino and of event-running is linked to a contemporary quest for health, personal growth, and self-discovery. These goals are achieved through interactions with the natural and human environment, and through the purposeful enduring of meaningful hardships, challenges that must be accomplished by the individual but are made

possible with the support of a like-minded community and a committed infrastructure. Protracted movement activities, such as long-distance running and journey pilgrimage, can be life-changing,[50] on both the personal and communal levels.

In my case study, Rogue runner-pilgrims embraced pilgrimage as an athletic and psychological challenge for which they had been prepared through their marathon and half-marathon training. Walking the Camino was a natural extension of the physical, psychological, social, and spiritual values that they had cultivated as runners. Both event runners and journey pilgrims participate in the liminal worlds created by ritual rites of passage, where opportunities for flow and communitas are possible, and where movement itself can be intrinsically motivating, meaningful, and even transcendent.

50. EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) bilateral therapy is a proven psychotherapy technique effective with PTSD. For an application of bilateral therapy to the practice of walking, see Thom Hartmann, Walking Your Blues Away: How to Heal the Mind and Create Emotional Well-Being (Vermont: Park Street Press, 2006).


Bibliography


