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# Prayer of the Body: Located Corporeal Practices on the Lough Derg Pilgrimage, Ireland

Richard Scriven

**Abstract** This chapter considers how embodiment is central to an Irish pilgrimage by situating prayer and ritual as corporeal spatial practice that transforms participants into pilgrims facilitating numinous experiences. Lough Derg, or St Patrick's Purgatory, is a Roman Catholic three-day pilgrimage consisting of cycles of prayers, going barefoot, fasting, and keeping a twenty-four-hour vigil on a lake-island. This tradition reaches back centuries allowing pilgrims to retreat from the world, reflect on life, and encounter spiritual renewal. Ethnographic fieldwork provides an insight into the reality of the pilgrimage, motivations of participants, and the distinct religious and spiritual feelings associated with the site. Meanings and spiritualities become embodied in the pilgrims and emplaced in the site through the practices. The chapter will begin by outlining the nature and features of Lough Derg, followed by an overview of recent research on pilgrimage as embodied spatial practices. An account of the pilgrimage's corporeal practices explores how prayer and performance overlap and entwine on the island. The analysis is enhanced by a selection of interview excerpts demonstrating the motivations and experiences involved.

**Keywords:** Pilgrimage • Embodiment • Performance • Lough Derg

## 1 Beginning

Moving bodies define the Lough Derg pilgrimage. Sets of prayer rituals demand repeated circling and kneeling at features of the site, careful barefoot walking slows everyone down, and moments of stillness enable reflection. The three-day practice consists of specific requirements that each pilgrim completes, including Roman Catholic prayers and liturgical services. Outer physiological journeys, shaped by these enactments and challenges, facilitate inner spiritual ones. An abundance of bodily features serves to highlight the corporal and spatial

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aspects of pilgrimage. This paper considers how embodiments are foundational to delineating the experience as spiritual and emotional qualities are manifest in the pilgrims and the site.

Lough Derg, or St Patrick's Purgatory, is a Roman Catholic three-day pilgrimage that happens during the summer months on a lake-island in the north-west of Ireland. It is a distinctly physical and intricate routine consisting of prayer cycles, going barefoot, fasting, and keeping a twenty-four-hour vigil. The island location provides a break with the outside world creating a liminal context for reflection and mindfulness. Both theologically and conceptually, these practices are generative elements enabling transformative journeys of faith, contemplation, and personal intentions. It helps make more accessible the immateriality and transcendence of the sacred and abstract components of ordinary life.

I examine this process through a geographical phenomenological lens that highlights the multifaceted role of the body interacting with the space. Recent considerations of embodiment and developments in pilgrimage studies are deployed to analytically foreground the corporeal layers in understanding Lough Derg as a case study for other pilgrimages. On the lake-island, each participant is brought into extensive and intimate contact with the island and its history. Within these performances, individuals become pilgrims and the site itself is (re)constructed as a pilgrimage place. The concept of the 'prayer of the body' is explored as a means of understanding how the spiritual/emotional and the incarnate merge in the purposeful practices. Ethnographic observations and interviews with pilgrims illuminate the experiences and purposes to interrogate the nature of embodiment and emplacement at Lough Derg.

The chapter next discusses conceptual appreciations of pilgrimages as embodied journeys with reference to phenomenological and other embodied schools of thought, as well as recent trajectories in pilgrimage studies. A brief overview of Lough Derg and the research process follows. Then, the 'Prayer of the Body' is introduced as an idea within the pilgrimage that unites the physiological and spiritual dimensions in a meaningful journey for each participant. A focus on the barefoot aspect reveals the visceral connections of people and place on the island which crafts reflective moments and group solidarities. Next, the performing pilgrim bodies are explored as manifesting beliefs, intentions, and religious-spiritual and cultural significances. Through these entanglements the substance of the pilgrimage emerges while the participants become pilgrims. I close with some general conclusions and indications of potential research on embodiment and pilgrimage.

## **2 Embodied Journeys**

Understanding the geographical nature of pilgrimage necessitates an appreciation for its embodied facets. The Hajj involves the performance of rites across several days around Mecca, while participants in the Shikoku Pilgrimage engage in established practices at each of the temples on the route and Char Dham pilgrimage sites in India are laced with ritual requirements. In these examples and others, the interactions of bodies and places are central to the pilgrimage process. As Harris (2019, p. 85) outlines 'Bodily practices and gestures are theologically and practically important in both Eastern and Western religious traditions.' A focus on these landscape corporeal interfaces reveals not only the experiential dimension of pilgrimage, but its geographical manifestation as a relationship between people and place.

Embodiment became an analytical instrument when geographers engaged with different philosophies to articulate a fuller understanding of how people interact with their environments. Phenomenology, in particular, provides the conceptual language to locate and interrogate individuals as embodied subjects at the centre of geographical experience/meaning (Soren and

Johnson 2012). At an existential level, these approaches posit that we exist in relation to the world and the world in relation to us. Being is inherently corporeal and located. Merleau-Ponty (2002, p. 94) describes the body as “the vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is, for a living creature, to be intervolved in a definite environment”. This position elevates the role of the body as central to being as we come to be by perceiving the world around us (Cresswell 1999). It enables explorations of how “experience is constituted by, and of, place” (Lea 2009, p. 373).

Consideration falls on understanding people as embodied beings who become through interactions with environments, material, and human and non-human actors (Abrahamsson and Simpson 2011). Bodies emerge, for example, as gendered or disabled through performances in conjunction with locations and materials, such as skirt or white cane, respectively (Macpherson 2010). This framework can easily be applied to pilgrimage contexts. We can appreciate how participants develop into pilgrims through the physical components in conjunction with specific locations. They become pilgrims through performance and rituals rooted in landscapes, buildings, and objects.

In these embodied activities between people and places, both “constitutively come into being in this process of physical interaction” (Maddrell and della Dora 2013, p. 1115). The process is inherently and necessarily corporeal. The “human body is the agent, medium, and means of pilgrimage” (Terreault 2019, p. 6). Kapusta’s (2022, p. 182) exploration of the Maya New Year’s pilgrimage presents a similar ontology illustrating how it is innately embodied and emplaced, articulating the ongoing formative interlinks of people and the natural world. Similarly, Vargas (2022, p. 242) illustrates how Latin American pilgrimages involve “deliberate and intentional movements of the body, accompanied by other community members, material objects, and historical and ritual memory”. This understanding is found across pilgrimage studies from valuing the physical role of walking on the Camino de Santiago (Smith 2018) to the range of sensory and corporeal encounters at Mount Kailash in Tibet (Wang et al. 2020).

Through the enactments and rituals, the beliefs and meanings of pilgrimage become embodied in the person as a pilgrim. Martin and Kryst’s (1998) foregrounding of the role of the body in their study of a Marian pilgrimage site in the US illustrates how pilgrims are ritualised in the experiences of the place. Sanctity is felt within the pilgrim emerging through the located practices in a mutual process between self, others, and place. Similarly, Foley (2011) illuminates the imbrications of the physical, spiritual, and therapeutic in practices at Irish holy wells through which the body can take on multiple intersecting roles. Such understandings are reinforced by work in the geographies of religion and spiritualities that locate the body as a focal point for numinous experiences and the generation of sacred spaces (Holloway 2003; Pile et al. 2019).

The pilgrimage as a phenomenological process provides “the catalyst for certain kinds of bodily experiences” (Coleman and Eade 2004, p. 16). The felt, haptic, and performed connections between participants and the material and immaterial creates the meaningful experiences of these places while enabling spiritual and other encounters. Pilgrimage is a reciprocal and fluid process in which the carnalities, struggles, and commitment of corporal travel facilitate personal and spiritual journeys (Frey 1998; Gale et al. 2016; Vistad et al. 2020). Journeys are found to have impactful effects on people as the different strands combine to create distinct experiences (Brumec 2022). This understanding aligns with broader research on the embodied dimensions of walking as an involved and emergent process (Liu 2018; Mason 2020; Rose 2020).

Outer journeys are appreciated as facilitating mental, emotional and spiritual journeys (Maddrell 2013). On one level the physiological interaction of person and terrain is a generator of positive experiences through contact with nature and the pilgrimage milieu (Chang et al.

2020; Harris 2019) which recognises the health-fostering and self-therapeutic aspects (Eade 2017; Jørgensen et al. 2020). While they also form a structure for spiritual growth and renewal through the beliefs of participants and cultural contexts (Favraud 2022; Lois-González et al. 2016; Scriven 2018). These considerations also allow for appreciations of the diverse reasons people participate in contemporary pilgrimages (Farias et al. 2019; Wu et al. 2019).

A distinct understanding of pilgrimage is articulated by foregrounding the body. Examinations of the interactions of people and place through embodiment by geographers enable an appreciation for the rich interlinks between individuals, as corporal entities, and their surroundings. On pilgrimage trails, participants become pilgrims and landscapes become spiritual spaces in embodied practices through and with places, objects, and other people. The three-day Lough Derg pilgrimage presents a layered case study to help illustrate these processes.

### **3 Lough Derg**

Lough Derg is a pilgrimage in County Donegal, in the northwest of Ireland. The main activity associated with the sites is a three-day pilgrimage which is completed during the summer. It follows a centuries-old practice which combines retreating from everyday concerns, fasting, keeping a twenty-four-hour vigil, being barefoot and completing a series of prayer stations. The lake-island which creates a natural barrier between pilgrims and the world, is entirely devoted to the pilgrimage with the layout and structures facilitating the pilgrimage.

It is believed St Patrick spent time on the island during his evangelising mission in the fifth century. There he retreated into a cave for the liturgical season of Lent, during which he was granted a vision of purgatory and hell. His disciple, St Davog, then set up a pilgrimage of fasting and prayer in imitation centring on the belief that Patrick's vision had marked the location as a numinous place. The modern pilgrimage is rooted in this tradition in a format that can be dated from the sixteenth century (Cunningham and Gillespie 2004). More recently, reflecting generally changes in the beliefs and discourse on pilgrimage, it is presented as a spiritual retreat rather than an arduous penitential undertaking. It is currently being defined as providing "a kind of breathing space in which people can calmly explore and reflect on where they find themselves in their lives at that moment in time" (Lough Derg 2022).

Pilgrims begin their journey by fasting before arriving with only one meal each day of bread or oatcakes with tea, coffee, or water. Once on the island, participants go barefoot and begin a series of prayer stations involving circling features of the site reciting prayers, including the ruined remains of monastic huts on rocky ground. That night a twenty-four-hour vigil is kept with the group of pilgrims saying prayers throughout, and into the following day. There are Roman Catholic masses and other liturgical services also. On the third morning, pilgrims leave for home while maintaining their fast for the rest of the day.

Lough Derg has been explored as a liminal and ascetic experience (Smith 2019; Taylor and Hickey 2015; Turner and Turner 1978). People sacrifice and disengage from the world in a unique way on the lake-island. In these enactments, people experience intimate, social, and spiritual episodes of meaning which gives them strength, helps them express concerns, and revitalises their faith (McGettigan and Griffin 2012; Scriven 2018). Religion and spirituality are not vague concepts here; they are performed realities, practiced by believing people. The aesthetics and conditions immerse the participants in circumstances which have monastic and Celtic qualities giving the pilgrimage an otherworldly character.

I adopted an ethnographic framework to examine pilgrim experiences on Lough Derg by combining participant-observation and interviews, both during and after the three-days. This approach draws on a strand of studies that prioritise direct engagements with the experiences of pilgrimage (Frey 1998; Maddrell 2013; Maddrell and della Dora 2013; Jørgensen et al. 2020). Detailed observations and photographs of the practices present across the three-day pilgrimage offer an avenue to locating the embodiments, while insights are gained by using the interview conversations to reflect on the different aspects. A located account of the site's corporeal and experiential dimensions is assembled using these different methods. They enable understanding centred in individual and collective bodily interactions between people and place.

## **4 Prayer of the Body**

Bodies are fundamental to the Lough Derg pilgrimage. It is lived in the performance of rituals, struggling with the physiological effects of sleep loss, and overcoming pangs of hunger. In both activity and inactivity, over the three days, the corporeal asserts itself. This creates the experience as each aspect impacts pilgrims to enable spiritual and emotional encounters. The 'prayer of the body' is integral to the merging of these elements. The body is the prayer of Lough Derg.

The physical aspects are underscored by the shrine policy that "Pilgrims must be fit and able to walk and kneel unaided. Pilgrims must be able to fast and endure twenty-four hours without sleep" (Lough Derg 2022). While different and nuanced understandings are presented, including acknowledgements of the struggles involved, the pilgrimage nonetheless consists of centuries-old practices that are to be followed. This seemingly uncompromising stance, especially to contemporary sensibilities and awareness, is seen as preserving the authenticity and heritage of the site. Also, in recent decades the shrine has run one day retreats as an alternative.

Observing the events, the place is animated by the mobility of pilgrim bodies. Individually and collectively, they are performing the ritualised practices as countless Our Fathers, Hail Marys, and the Apostles' Creeds are recited in combination with sets of kneeling and walking (Fig. 1). These actions imbue the movements with significances beyond mere motion or repetition of specific formal prayers (Maddrell and Scriven 2016). Similar to centres such as Mecca or Lourdes, or Orthodox Christian shrines (della Dora 2012), it is the performances and encounters at the site, rather than the site itself which are of significance. Although happening on a confined scale these 'journeys' are nonetheless multifaceted, consisting of embodied spatial practices that immerse beliefs, performers and locations (Gale et al. 2016; Vistad et al. 2020). The place is felt at the rhythm of the pilgrimage.



**Fig. 1** Prayer Stations: Pilgrims perform the ‘penitential beds’ as part of the prayer rituals involving kneeling and circling each round ruin and the cross inside several times reciting specific prayers. In this practice, the tradition and intentions of the pilgrimage become embodied in the participants and their interaction with the island features (Source: Author)

My understanding of these features was enriched by insights from the experiences pilgrims shared with me. The meaning they encountered and generated expanded the rituals and gestures into components of more significant journeys. The priest who was in charge of the pilgrimage for over twenty years, Monsignor Richard Mohan explained his perspective of the practices:

There are prayers said while doing these things. But, it's the doing these things I think are important and it's praying with the body; because, the fasting is more than just not having food, it's, it's making a statement. The, the keeping awake, staying awake...the vigil, that in itself is a big, big effort, and that, that's a statement to make.

He moves the emphasis away from prescriptive performance. To be a pilgrim is more than the performance of activities and gestures that could be done anywhere else. The prayer of the body is performed. Prayer, usually defined in terms of an act associated with stillness and the quiet or silent reciting of words in Roman Catholic traditions, becomes something more. Its character and components are broadened to encompass the different performances of the pilgrimage. There is no distinction between thought and practice, between devotion and mobility. As Russell (2004, p. 250) describes, prayer “is defined not by its form but by its intention”. Pilgrims, in all they do on the island, are performing the prayer of the body.

These themes also arose in discussions with research participants who were in the middle of their pilgrimage. Intrinsic tensions in the prayer of the body illustrate how the different forces

and practices at work were reconciled in the performance. Joe provides insight when explaining his feelings at the beginning of a station:

Starting off all of those Hail Marys and Our Fathers, and knowing you've got countless number... Your brain is thinking I've got to get to the end of this and you want to get to the end as quick as possible, but then you want to do it, you want to do it the proper way because that's why you came here and you know that [pause] somehow, there's a gain in this.

The unease between the awareness of the sheer volume of prayers that are awaiting completion and the desire to do things 'the proper way' is resolved through the value placed on the pilgrimage that is then mobilised in the believing and practicing body. This guiding belief ensures he is not an agency-less passenger whose purpose was to verbalise a list of prayers, but rather is an active believing pilgrim who is corporeally articulating faith and intentions. Barriers between the bodily and spiritual, and the practice and prayer, are broken down and replaced with an involved milieu in which the material and numinous entwine in these performances. There is a very purposeful act that gives physical form to the prayer. It is in the very doing that the prayers are made manifest: the body is the prayer.

Although sometimes portrayed as the antithesis of the spiritual, the bodily is also frequently the means through which spiritual enlightenment progress is achieved. Across many pilgrimages, the effort and concentration involved in the performance is understood as a central pillar of the process (Favraud 2022; Smith 2018). Within the Christian tradition, the physical element is relevant as can be linked with the suffering of Christ and the saints (Harris 2019). While, Wang et al. (2020) illustrate how physical exertion is connected with spiritual growth at Mount Kailash. Through the corporeal requirements they overcome physical limits to develop a sense of identity and belonging. These elements are comparably found in Lough Derg as participants become pilgrims.

Conditions that facilitate reflection are crafted in the practices as different feelings arise. The site is experienced as the combination of physiological challenges and faith affirming moments. Another research participant, Mary, outlined the pilgrimage as provided the time, space, and mind-set to contemplate larger issues and nourish her faith:

Yeah, it helped me in that I was doing something... maybe family or things if there was something that was threatening to go wrong or whatever. It was an opportunity to prayer and reflect, and do a bit of penance. Certainly, you'd say well it mightn't do any good, but it's not going to do any harm, but I think that it does good, I think that it's a positive thing to do, and I'd recommend it, yeah.

She articulates the reflective nature of her pilgrimage which takes a traditional form of revitalising personal faith. The deliberately slower pace of the site combined with the practices, give her time to reflect and pray in a more rewarding and resonant way. This aligns with broader traditions when pilgrims "intentionally submit themselves to bodily and psychic dislocation and dispossession... and they journey with and toward other bodies, desiring self-transcendence in and through their bodies" (Terreault 2019, p. 6). Belief and spirituality are reaffirmed in these visceral and intense moments. The enlacing of the physical and metaphysical aspects contributes to these meaningful and transformative encounters. Pilgrims experience their faith in distinct ways that reinforce the role that it plays in their lives.

While watching the pilgrims, the movements and gestures of prayerful performance are palpable. There is a purposeful and reverent nature to their micro-mobilities on this small enclave. Insights and conclusions from the interviews reveal the interior aspects, highlighting both the unseen struggles of hunger and sleep deprivation, and the larger contemplations. Each physical exercise and physiological register present spiritual and emotional resonances.



Sanctity is felt within the pilgrim emerging through the located practices in a mutual process between self, others, and place (Martin and Kryst 1998). This is an inherently embodied process as each of the participants becomes a pilgrim through the enactments. Not only is the pilgrimage manifest in their performances, but it is lived and understood in themselves. The prayer of the body, then, is about the relationality between these features, as it is corporeal and spiritual, embodied and emplaced, practiced and thought.

## **5 Praying Barefoot**

Participants remove their shoes on the island, it is one of the clearest indicators of the status of pilgrim. The space is known through the feet as contours and textures of the site are directly felt in prayers, rituals, and liturgies. It is a simple embodied action that incarnates not only beliefs, but also generates very distinct experiences. The unusual feeling of being barefoot shapes interactions with the island, which obviously become more tactile as pilgrims encounter different grains with each step. Individual feelings of connectivity facilitate personal reflexivity and the emergence of solidarities (Fig.2).

The removal of footwear, an artificial barrier attached to “feet in order to enhance their effectiveness in specific tasks and conditions”, opens up senses to more engaged and purposeful interactions with the terrain (Ingold 2004, p. 331). Every placing of the foot is a corporeally rich meeting of individual person and world which has intrinsic sensory aspects that facilitate spiritual sensations. As Maddrell and della Dora (2013, p. 1107) outline in such practices “the body of the pilgrim becomes itself a permeable surface inscribed by the time–space marks of pilgrimage, whether ritual markings or blistered feet”. Every step becomes a more conscious act, which is perceived more vividly: the awkward rocks of the penitential beds, the paths warmed in the afternoon sun, and the polished wooden floors of the church. Feet are pilgrim feet in the meeting of body and place.



**Fig. 2** Kneeling at St Patrick's Cross: barefoot pilgrims pause in prayer as part of the traditional practice. At Lough Derg, the feet become a connective medium bringing participants into direct contact with the substance of the place and all who have visited here before them (Source: Author)

Meaning and substance readily intermix in these encounters. There is an imbrication of features as the surfaces become porous with material and incorporeal substances of the island and person intertwining and cultivating new emotional and spiritual encounters. One of the research participants, Ger comments on how the removal of shoes is a stimulating experience for him:

I love the bare feet. And I really do, I really love it. It doesn't matter what the weather is like because, I really, I feel free, once I take my shoes and socks off. I really feel connected, just kind of earthed and free, and I don't know, that really does something for me.

It is an enriching experience that has distinct meaningful dimensions. It is liberating and connecting, it is physical but also numinous. Ger can verbalise some of the affects and sensations, while also acknowledging that there are more undefined, and perhaps undefinable, elements. Similarly, Mark puts considerable emphasis on the role and power of being barefoot during our interview:

It's simply about connecting with the earth: it's an old Irish, say Celtic if you want, I think it's more human. You know, as basic way of connecting with the earth, it really is ashes to ashes, dust to dust; and it grounds you...

The act becomes a connective encounter through which the corporeal senses lead him to a more fundamental sense of being human. In connecting with the ground, that is being

grounded, he occupies a more contemplative state. It is both corporeal and incarnate: the pilgrim is viscerally present, but also more-than remaining open to and experiencing spiritual immanences. This corresponds with anthropological works that describe footwear as modern, typically western products that artificially insulate people from their surroundings, creating the bifurcations of human and natural, self and surroundings (Ingold 2004). In contrast, being barefoot is phenomenological as pilgrim and place not only meet but intertwine. The practice is a distinct act of pilgrimage in which an embodied interaction with the environment facilitates numinous episodes.

The immediacy and directness of contact with the surfaces of Lough Derg evoke considerations of other pilgrims, especially those of previous pilgrimages. The exposition of skin on the substance of the island combines with the timeless quality of the practice. It connects each of the pilgrims participating together in the present and with past pilgrims who walked the same paths reaching back decades and potentially centuries. This corresponds with the assurances that such sites offer as links to the past with different stories and traditions amassing over centuries (Dunn-Hensley 2018).

Solidarities are fostered in going barefoot. Conversations with pilgrims described it as a social leveler, something which cuts across backgrounds and classes, rendering all equally shoe-less. Lough Derg is an individual and shared journey as it is performed with others going through the same conditions. In this way, bare feet align with the concept of *communitas* in pilgrimage studies – a recognition of the fellowship generated among participants (Turner and Turner 1978). While the idea has been critiqued (Maddrell 2013), it nonetheless touches on the shared bonds people feel at Lough Derg. Experiences of being barefoot together are shared and mutually appreciated in the spiritual context of the pilgrimage, enabling pilgrims to appreciate more than just as a physical action but a meaningful exercise of expression and potentially a movement “toward a mystical *communitas*” (Russell 2004, p. 238).

In discussing the barefoot aspects of Lough Derg, Tiernan (2000, p. 29) comments on how “these very feet are propelling us towards eternity as we make our stations – a fruitful subject for meditation”. He indicates the significance attached to this practice. More than being an occasionally challenging and even penitential exercise, it involves rich interplays of the embodied pilgrims and world which produces spiritual and emotional encounters, as well as shared conditions. Through the naked foot the pilgrims are “fundamentally and continually ‘in touch’ with our surroundings” (Ingold 2004, p. 330), and within these moments they are equally attuned to their fellow pilgrims and open to spirituality, community, and ethereality.

## 6 Corporeal Encounters

Pilgrimages bring bodies and places together to entwine creating distinct experiences. Crossing the lake, pilgrims enter into a located relationship as the site is felt through the enactments and features of the three-days. It captures the liminality of a temporary monastic type life (Fig. 3). It is the tangible expression of withdrawing from the world, fasting, and keeping vigil. The textures become intimately known in prayer and walking barefoot (Maddrell and Scriven 2016). Lough Derg presents a particular manifestation of this relationship found in many pilgrimages. Research has conceptualised such activities as a constellation of interacting features in which the performing body takes a central role linking locations, objects, and other actors all occurring within the affective environment of the cultural context (Vargas 2022). This appreciation foregrounds the interplay between participants and environment as the

foundation of many pilgrimages (Damari and Mansfeld 2016; Scriven 2014) as a multifaceted and sensory experience (Cianca 2019).



**Fig. 3** Reflecting: Pilgrims sit out on the second day as they keep their vigil. Some sit in quietness while others chat with their fellow participants. The lake-island is valued as enabling people to withdraw from everyday demands and consider aspects of their lives and faith (Source: Author)

At every stage there are meanings and reflective moments induced through the embodied activities. Each step or placing a hand on a cross takes on a significance. Individuals bring their own motivations, beliefs, and histories to the journey which are refracted through the encounters with the island and fellow participants. Claire, a pilgrim I talked with, explains that she completed the pilgrimage in thanksgiving. This traditional reason allows the person to express gratitude and connect with the divine:

Lough Derg was a place to get close to God and to say thanks, and to show, you know, to make a sacrifice that showed that you were thankful...I think you always find something that you are grateful for and that you say, "Do you know what, you know, I'm really pleased that worked out and I need to say thanks for that."

Significantly, Lough Derg provides an architecture for the expression and exploration of these intentions. It allows emotional abstractions to be channelled through religious enactments. Claire and other's performances are laced with personal concerns for family, well-being, and life events. The physical and the spiritual intermix in her actions. The transcendent is made immanent as feelings and beliefs become embodied through circumstances of the pilgrimage. This aligns with Wang et al.'s (2020, p. 7) discussion of pilgrimage as an "amicable

interaction between pilgrims and the environment evokes a sense of belonging” with the location being “a peaceful and harmonious place where they can reflect and meditate”.

It is through an embodied state that the research participants perceive Lough Derg in a process that produces the practices and meanings involved. Pilgrims are in a performed, liminal state of being in which rituals, beliefs, and experiences become incarnated in the pilgrims themselves. The physical journeys are fundamentally connected to the spiritual counterparts as the process flows and merges together. Faith, larger emotional intentions, and even connections with the divine become embodied, rather than being transcendent abstractions (Klingorová 2020; Pile et al. 2019). The gaps between the everyday material world and the spiritual are reduced on pilgrimage as belief or a looser desire to commune with ethereal presences is experienced. Lough Derg and other pilgrimages provide a framework to develop and nourish faith through both a combination of physical requirements and cultural context. The openness to the location facilitates these types of journeys as ranging from firm Roman Catholics to those with a disposition to the spiritual and people with motivations only they know.

Different modalities and registers emanated in the pilgrims interacting with the site. This leads to different threads of meaning, spirituality, and sanctity becoming embodied in the participants and emplaced in the island. It is an encompassing and reinforcing process. People partake in a tradition drawing on the reflective and historical nature of the practices, while also contributing to location. Pilgrims and place dovetail in the pilgrimage. It is immersive with the interweaving of individuals and their surroundings (see Cianca 2019; Maddrell and della Dora 2013). The body, in this context, is the site of human experience and as the producer, and co-product, of sacred space (Kong 2001). As Martin and Kryst (1998, p. 219) demonstrate in their study of a Marian apparition site in Georgia (US), there are blurrings of “different kinds of bodily boundaries: between self and other; spirit and materiality; bodies and places”.

Pilgrims have a strong awareness of these connections as they interact with the island. They feel the site in their feet and pangs of hunger creating deep resonances. It generates a specific time-space framed by a religious-cultural heritage to facilitate personal reflection and spiritual nourishment. Comparably, research on the St Olav Way, Norway reveals how pilgrims had a clear appreciation for the interconnectedness of physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing (Jørgensen et al. 2020). Pilgrimages present particular frameworks for individuals and groups to experience specific places in spiritual/emotional journeys. Sites such as Lough Derg become loaded with these meanings that are felt in the performance while simultaneously being a thread in a larger tradition. Each pilgrim is an embodied participant adding to the texture and substance of the island.

## **6 Closing**

This chapter builds on recent trajectories in geography and pilgrimage studies to illustrate the centrality of embodiment to pilgrim spatial experiences. Lough Derg presents a case study of a ritualised and involved practice where multiple bodily registers are invoked in conjunction with the site. The pilgrimage begins corporeally with fasting even before pilgrims reach the lake. Once on the island, it is three days of further fasting, going barefoot, prayer rituals, keeping vigil, and liturgies. The process enables understanding of how the corporeal, spatial, and spiritual interact and overlap. Phenomenological and related approaches enable the foregrounding of the bodies not just physical presences but as foundational to human

experiences of and with the world. In the case of pilgrimages, this foregrounds how people become pilgrims through embodied located practices.

Pilgrimage exists in the corporeal enactments with places. At Lough Derg, through performance, the embodied aspects of the tradition assert themselves. This pilgrimage is *of* the body. Conceptual distinctions between the prayer and the body are blurred. From this perspective, flows fresh appreciations of how spiritualities, faith, and emotions are embodied. Spirituality moves beyond symbols and words to become manifest and immanent. Outer physical journeys are merged with inner journeys. Prayerful bodies, physical rituals, and visceral interactions with the island generate the pilgrim and pilgrim experience. Different motivations and experiences intermingle among these enactments, which in turn overlap with the island's larger tradition and religious-cultural context. It is a place of Roman Catholic devotion but also an openness to numinous encounters; it is about specific intentions and reflective moments. Crucially, these sentiments and affirmations are intrinsically connected with the body and place. It is an interlaced and continuing process in which the corporeal and material are imbricated with the intangible, ethereal, and sacred.

There are two key points I wish to highlight in concluding. First, examinations of pilgrimages must interrogate the complexities of bodies and physical experiences. My focus on embodiment at Lough Derg illustrated the physiological and challenging segments of the process and the meanings created in the located performance. However, critical studies of the bodily demands engagements with age, gender, capacities, and other socio-political characteristics that inherently impact on how pilgrimages are undertaken and experienced, if at all. Contemporary research on corporeal matters from intersectionality to biopolitics can and must enrich understandings of pilgrimages and comparable phenomena. While some of these connections are being developed there is need for more engagements that deploy contemporary understandings of bodies to pilgrimages. Secondly, both conceptually and practically geographers and others must continue the development of analytical interventions with bodily experiences and sensory aspects. Discussions of categories, such as feelings, spirituality, or abstractions, cannot be divorced from their tangible and lived dimensions. Any research that foregrounds embodiment, needs to insist on recognition of the bodily in social, cultural, and political discourse. These different threads are united in bodies and bodily experiences which generate a diverse range of places and spatial encounters.

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