

University of the Free State

Faculty of Humanities;
Centre for Gender and Africa
Studies

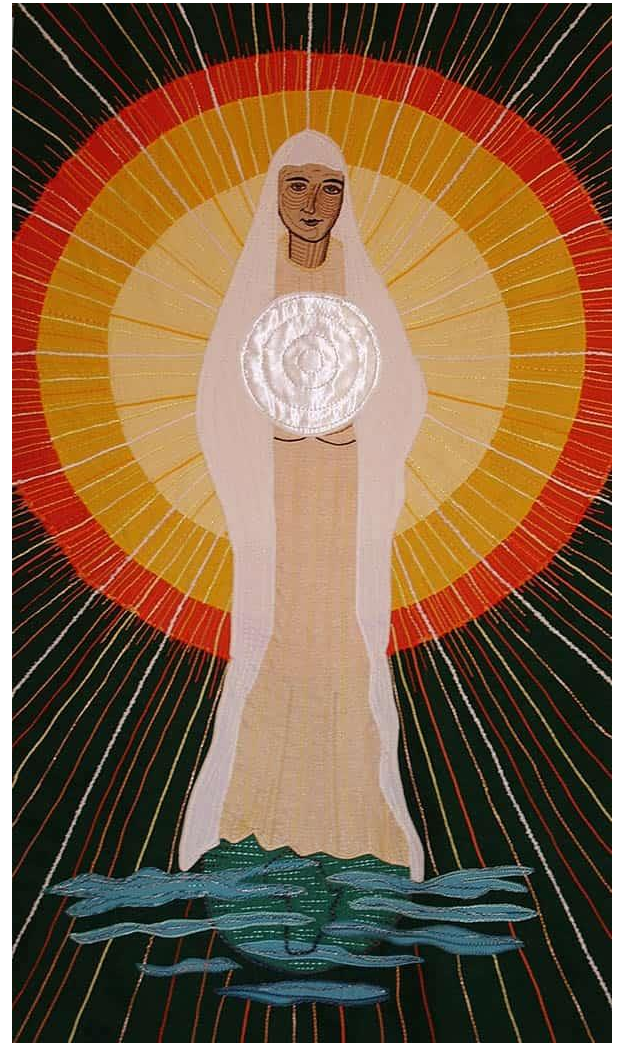
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Date: November 2021

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Title: *Marian shrine pilgrimages: A multi-sited exploration of Ngome, Maseru Farm and Ha Ramabanta*

Declaration

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements in respect of the Master's Degree in **Africa Studies** in the Department of **Gender and Africa Studies** in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Free State.

I Seithati Ramonaheng declare that this dissertation is my own independent work and that it has not previously and is not currently submitted elsewhere for degree purposes.

Seithati Ramonaheng



Bloemfontein

November 2021

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to give my gratitude to the almighty God for the strength and the wisdom He has given me throughout all these years of writing this research. Had it not been for His grace, I wouldn't have made it this far. I would also like to thank the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is my spiritual vessel; for always being by my side through the highs and lows of this research. I am grateful to honour the blessed Virgin Mother by writing about her.

I wish to show my appreciation to my uncle (Fr Raphael Mothe OMI) for all the love and support he has given me from the beginning of my research. He has been my pillar of strength and my rock. I will forever be indebted to him for all that he is to me.

In the same vein, I would like to express my special thanks of gratitude to my mother (Kekeletso Ramonaheng) who has been praying for me, for her prayers kept me going. She always encouraged me not to give up, rather to always stay grounded and remember who my Creator is. I would also like to thank my younger sister (Rebolokiloe Ramonaheng). She believed in me even when I did not believe in myself and she was a friend when I needed one.

I want to render special thanks to my friends who looked up to me in relation to their studies and who always encouraged me to do my best.

The assistance of my key informants and all the other participants is highly appreciated. Without them, this research would have not been possible. I have learned so much from them.

I wish to show my appreciation to the UFS Postgraduate School and the Office for International Affairs for all the assistance I received financially and otherwise.

Lastly, I would like to thank the one person who has guided me throughout my research: my supervisor, Dr du Plooy. She was patient with me and always provided a clear vision. In her I found a supervisor, a mother and a friend. I pray that God bless her in everything she does. She deserves all the best that life has to offer.

Abstract

Pilgrimages take place all over the world for various reasons which range from spirituality to tourism. These are journeys embarked on by a group of people or an individual, stretching from one place to the other. In South Africa, various religions have specific pilgrimages to their designated sacred places. Equally, Catholics have their pilgrimages to Marian shrines; be it where there is a Marian apparition or where there isn't any. The lack of research on Marian pilgrimages instigated this study.

This study focuses on three Marian shrines, each with unique characteristics. They are Ngome Marian shrine, Fatima Ha Ramabanta and Fatima Maseru Farm. Ngome Marian shrine and Fatima Maseru Farm are located in South Africa although in different provinces. Fatima Ha Ramabanta is in Lesotho. There was a Marian apparition in Ngome Marian shrine while, in the two Fatima pilgrimages there are no apparitions. All three sites used for the case studies are sacred to Catholics and often visited by them. Their reasons for embarking on these pilgrimages differ from person to person and are not so general as often believed.

The reasons for going on a are twofold; spiritual and materialistic. The spiritual reasons for going on a pilgrimage for my participants are among others; to be in solitude with the divine mother, to gain spiritual fulfilment, to offer gratitude and express penitence through the sacrament of reconciliation which is known as confessions. On the other hand, the materialistic reasons for going on a pilgrimage include praying for wellness and success. The main reason for going on a Marian pilgrimage for my participants was healing; both materialistic and spiritually.

Water become an important topic in this study. Pilgrims get holy water from the shrine which they use for both domestic and spiritual purposes. These domestic purposes

are bathing, washing and cooking, while the spiritual purposes are cleansing and healing. Rain also played an important role to my participants as they had different interpretations of what it means when it rains at the end of the pilgrimage.

Pilgrims see Mary as the mother and the intercessor whom they run to both in good times. Just as a mother does, Mary protects and takes care of her children especially those who run to her. When a pilgrim is at the Marian shrines, it is important to respect the sacred space at all times.

Key words

Pilgrimages, Marian shrines, Sacred spaces, Virgin Mary, Christianity, Fatima, Ngome, Pilgrims, Rosary, Marian apparition

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and rationale

Places of significance existed and continue to exist for people all around the world. They elicit awe and reverence. The reason for their significance varies. Sometimes they are connected to mystical origins; at times, they are places of remembrance, or from time to time, nature just hypnotises us with her majesty. They become known and acquire gravitas, and because of this, the faithful visit these places for various reasons.

Sacred spaces are often associated with people's search for identity and their role in the cosmic mystery. In these sacred spaces and places, people use all their senses to communicate with the divine being, where their power is known to manifest. For such reasons, Singh (1993: 161) states that "*Man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself and shows itself as something wholly different from the profane.*" It is at such places where the divine presence is felt or where there was a supernatural experience that took place.

Some sites are naturally sacred spaces because of their geographical history, while others were profane and later became holy places. Park (2004:19) says: "*this symbolic process reflects the spiritual characteristics associated with both the physical features and the more profound, abstract implications of delimiting a particular site as sacred.*"

People engage with and move towards the sacred in several ways. One type of engagement and movement towards and within the sacred are known as pilgrimages. It is challenging to discuss pilgrimages across diverse disciplines, as there is no single word in other languages, which is strictly equivalent to the English pilgrimage. Its

meaning differs depending on the context within which it is used. Even within the different religious traditions, there is no one definition of pilgrimage (Eade, 2018: 1).

As a phenomenon, pilgrimage occurs not only in Abrahamic faiths, but is common in the big six religions. In Islam, there are five pillars that are core beliefs and practices in Islam: faith, prayer, almsgiving, fasting, and pilgrimage. As pilgrimage is one of the five pillars, every adult Muslim must go on a pilgrimage to Mecca's Holy City in Saudi Arabia at least once in their lifetime. Millions of Muslims also visit the third most important Muslim shrine named The Dome of the Rock found on the Temple Mount in the Old City in Jerusalem. They passionately believe that it is a place where Prophet Muhammed ascended to heaven (Steil, 2016: 165).

For Hindus, travelling for pilgrimage purposes is particularly important, and this is seen in how up to 40 million Hindus journey from throughout India to the River Ganges. This is the most famous Hindu pilgrimage called the Kumbh Mela (Rana, 2006: 220). Bodh Gaya is the most important pilgrimage site in Buddhism. It is located in Bihar, India and each Buddhist needs to visit this place at least once in their lifetime. Buddhists also journey to Lumbini in Nepal. This is the place of Buddha's birth (Goldberg, 2011: x).

There is also a Shinto pilgrimage to The Kumano Kodo, also known as the "*ancient pilgrimage routes to the three Grand shrines of Kumano: Kumano Hayatama Taisha Grand shrine, Kumano Hongu Taisha Grand shrine and Kumano Nachi Taisha Grand shrine*" (Collins-Kreiner, 2009: 261). These are the ancient pilgrimages in Japan. Different routes across Japan's mountains are used to get to a sacred Shinto site that's home to the Kumano Sanzan shrines. Today, this pilgrimage is taken by Buddhists and Shinto and people who love nature, photographers, and history buffs (Bigg, 2016).

On the other hand, many Jewish pilgrims visit the Western Wall in Jerusalem, a place of prayer and pilgrimage that is sacred to the Jewish people. In Jerusalem, more than 2 million people a year visit this city. It is seen as a sacred destination for Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. For Christians, Jerusalem is a place where the Last Supper, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection of Jesus took place; as a result, they journey on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Collins-Kreiner, 2009: 261). One of the other pilgrimages is the Abraham Path in The Middle East. Pilgrims walk in the paths of Abraham, who is the supposed ancestor of over half of humanity. The journey starts in Turkey, through Egypt, Palestine, Israel, and Jordan. This path is still being developed; as a result, undertaking this journey alone may be tricky. However, it stretches across 2 000 km, and there are plans to expand it further (Bigg, 2016).

Although Islam is considered the fastest growing of the major world religions, Christianity remains the largest with over 2 billion adherents. Broadly speaking, it is estimated that half are Catholics. Protestants, Orthodox and other Christians make up the rest. Pilgrimage is present in all those.

For Catholics, a pilgrimage is more than just travelling to historical sites and viewing religious relics. It is a journey with a deeper and more spiritual meaning (Chua, 2000: 26). A celebrated Catholic pilgrimage is one to the Holy Land, Israel. Both individuals and families visit this place throughout the entire year, and some people even visit this place in large groups such as organisations. Unlike Lourdes, which people visit for healing purposes, pilgrims go to the Holy Land to renew their faith. Catholics make pilgrimages to The Holy Land and Jerusalem to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ (Harrison, 2016). This is the another most visited Catholic Church in the world after St Peter's Basilica in the Vatican (Kronish, 1992: 60). This allows them to re-engage their daily lives as better people with a revived sense of purpose. One such group are

Catholics from Montmartre in Paris. They annually go on a pilgrimage to the Holy places through a schedule arranged to reflect the annual cycle of the liturgy. This is a two-week pilgrimage taken in August every year. The group recites the Lord's Prayer and a series of ten decades of Hail Marys, followed by the reading of the Gospels by the Father (Fr) who is leading that particular pilgrimage. These are the fundamental prayers done when praying the Rosary (Bowman, 1991: 99-115).

Other journeys include visiting shrines of Saints, such as: visiting Avila in Spain to celebrate the lives of St Teresa of Avila and St John on the Cross. Although many saints lived and passed through, the two mentioned are the most celebrated through pilgrimages. Others take the Camino from France or Portugal to Santiago to honour the life of the Apostle St James.

As site destination go, Marian shrines draw many pilgrims. A Marian shrine is a shrine dedicated to the Virgin Mary that marks an apparition or miracle relating to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Such a shrine is regarded as historically strong Marian devotion. Pilgrims then go on a pilgrimage to such as it is significant.

Not only Catholics honour the Virgin Mary. Many non-Catholics and protestants revere her (Tipalti 2016). They believe in Her holiness and perpetual virginity. He states that even Muslims describe her as "*Tahirah*", which means the "*Pure One*". They see her as the holiest human in Islam and as the "*Chosen One among Women*". In the Quran, she is the only woman whose name Maryam is mentioned, and not even Muhammad's mother, wife, or daughters are mentioned in the Quran. This demonstrates how important the Virgin Mary is not only to Catholics, even though a different name is used to describe her.

As for Muhammad's daughters, the name Fatima is used in both religions. In Islamism, Fatima was the daughter of prophet Muhammad and his first wife Khadija. She was also the wife of Ali Abu Talib and the mother of Hasan and Husayn. In Catholicism, Fatima is a Catholic title for the Virgin Mary who is the Mother of Jesus. This was based on the Marian apparitions that occurred in 1977 to three shepherd children (Radford, 2013). This notes an important connection between Islam and Christianity.

Mary plays an essential role in the Catholic Church. Some Marian scholars explain her as a very caring Jewish mother who had and enjoyed a sacred relationship with God. The Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her she would give birth to the Son of the Most High. When the Virgin Mary became pregnant, her betrothed, Joseph, wanted to secretly leave her until the Angel Gabriel visited him in a dream and instructed him not to leave her (Nicolaidis, 2014: 7). As humble as Mary was, she responded, saying, "*Here am I, the servant of the Lord, may it be done to me according to your word*" (Luke, 1: 38). She is seen as the most humble woman because she accepted the calling of being the mother of Jesus.

In the early months of her pregnancy, Mary uttered the following words, which are referred to as the *Magnificat* or the "*Song of Mary*" in the gospel of Luke:

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for He has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant. Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed" (Luke, 1:46-55).

The *Magnificat* is poetic and is now sung at various Catholic services, especially during the Advent season, where we expect the birth of Jesus (Christmas). Because of Mary's role in Catholicism, shrines are devoted to her. Devotees visit these shrines as part of their religious practice and expression.

In most of her shrines, Mary is seen wearing blue and white. The blue symbolises her immaculateness and virginity; the white represents her purity and beauty. Her feet are seen crushing the serpent's head to symbolise her victory over the original sin done by Adam and Eve. The Queenship of Mary expresses the triumph of Mary through her virginity and her Assumption over both evil and human weaknesses (Warner, 1976: 116).

In Figure 1 below, is a picture of the Virgin Mary crushing the serpent's head.



Figure 1 Mary crushing the serpent's head

In the Catholic Church, visits to Marian shrines occur at different times of the calendar and Catholic year. Marian devotions take place in May and October. October is celebrated as the month of Fatima; thus, Catholics are encouraged to pray the Rosary more in this month and even journey to Marian shrines. These October journeys are termed Fatima (Nicolaidis, 2014: 9). Fatima is a name of the Blessed Virgin Mary used by Catholics, which is based on the celebrated Marian apparitions that took place on 13 May 1917. Three shepherd children at the Cova da Iria in Fatima, Portugal,

testified to these apparitions. These children were Lucia Santos (7), Francisco (10), and Jacinta Marto (9). From the month of May through to October 1917, the Lady (Blessed Virgin Mary) appeared and spoke to the children on the 13th day of each month. Globally, Catholics then celebrate Fatima (Radford, 2013).

Spaces where the Virgin Mary had her apparitions, are believed to be miraculous spaces and are marked as essential destinations to visit as pilgrimage sites. The Feast of the Rosary, which is celebrated in October, is part of the Fatima pilgrimage. The different Archdioceses and not just the parish alone celebrate this pilgrimage. During this time, pilgrims journey to a Marian shrine, which is considered a sacred place.

According to the Oxford dictionary (1995: 1094), a shrine is “*a place that is regarded as holy because of its association with a special person or event*”. In Christianity, these shrines refer to active sites dedicated to honouring a saint, sometimes in the event of Jesus' life. However, some of these shrines are located inside or just outside the church within the same churchyard. However, most of them are very separate from the church, regardless of whether they are official or unofficial sites. Examples of official sites include shrines where there were apparitions and where a saint was born, lived, or was buried. Such shrines are considered as spiritually powerful places. Unofficial sites have devotional shrines on the side of the altar or just outside the church, which gives the community or congregation an ongoing devotion to that particular saint (McFarland, 2020).

Catholics believe that shrines are holy places. A Marian shrine is a holy place where there was a Marian apparition. An apparition is an appearance of Jesus, Mary, or one of the saints to someone or a group of people. It is an appearance of a holy person, not their physical presence. It is only the chosen individual(s) who have this encounter,

not everyone. These chosen ones are called visionaries. Apparitions are not part of public revelation, as a result, Catholics are not obliged to believe in any particular apparition. However, the Church does carefully investigate the alleged claims of apparitions (Trigilio Jr and Brighenti, 2021).

The criteria used is based on the following determinations: (a) it is a hoax meaning someone is pretending to see an apparition, whereas the opposite is true; (b) natural causes can explain it; (c) the phenomenon cannot be explained, and there is a lot of unanswered questions that exist; (d) the devil is at work, meaning this supernatural event is not heavenly and is aimed at ridiculing the Catholic faith; (e) it is supernatural and of a heavenly origin meaning the apparition is credible and worthy of the faithful pilgrims (Trigilio Jr and Brighenti, 2021). One can say that thorough investigations are done before an apparition is declared an apparition.

Catholics usually visit Marian shrines for healing purposes and to pray for a specific reason be it material or spiritual. Healing can be both physical, emotional, and mental, and that is the power of the shrine. However, not all shrines should be at a place where an apparition or death initially took place or a place where people are cured miraculously. Shrines hold the power to connect the visitors to the power of the divine or a divine intermediary (Dahlberg, 1991: 30-31).

There are, however, some shrines where neither apparition took place, nor saints lived. They are just the imitation of the original shrines, and they serve the very same purpose, and their location is treated as a sacred space. These are places where visitors go to feel some sense of being and connection with that particular saint. In addition, these shrines bring the presence of saints into the community, which makes

them accessible to the people in the neighbourhood and marks the community as Catholic (College of the Holy Cross, 2018).

Although it is not an obligation, Catholics are encouraged to go on pilgrimages as a devotion to the Virgin Mary. More than 10 million Catholic Christians annually visit Our Lady of Guadalupe Basilica in Mexico (Kronish, 1992: 60-61). One of the most well-known healing pilgrimages for Catholics is one to the shrine at Lourdes, France. This pilgrimage has an average of 25 000 pilgrims between Easter and October. It originates from a series of eighteen Virgin Mary apparitions to a 14-year-old girl in 1858 (Erickson, 2020). Years later, the French Church used her visions and miraculous cures to fight against political and scientific forces.

The visionary of Lourdes was to a young woman from a low-income family. She was slow to learn, struggled to grasp even the shortest Bible verses, and suffered ill health. As a result, she was intellectually, physically, and socially disadvantaged. It was to this young woman and her mother that the Virgin Mary chose to appear, and "*it was her visions which revealed a miraculous spring curative of conditions and diseases which had failed to respond to medical treatment*" (Dahlberg, 1991: 30-31).

Among other Marian pilgrimages that Catholics take, there is a pilgrimage to Queen of the Most Holy Rosary in the United States. Catholics visit the shrine of Our Lady of Good Help that stands humbly yet majestically in a beautiful spot in rural northeast Wisconsin. This shrine is known as "*The Chapel*" by the local inhabitants. It was built after the Queen of Heaven made an apparition to a young Belgian immigrant Adele Brise, in October 1859. Pilgrims have been visiting this place for more than 150 years to seek intercession from the Blessed Virgin Mary. This Marian shrine was granted official Church approval on the 8th of December 2010. On the same note, there is the

shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Southeast Wisconsin. This shrine helps the spiritual needs of those who suffer from poverty in body and soul (Listecki, Ricken and Callahan, 2012: 2).

"It is a place of ceaseless prayer for the corporal and spiritual welfare of God's children, especially those most in need. Faithful to the message of the Blessed Virgin Mary through her appearances on the American continent in 1531 and funded entirely by private donations" (Listecki, Ricken and Callahan, 2012: 3).

"The shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe includes a Pilgrim Centre with café and gift shop, Mother of Good Counsel Votive Candle Chapel, Memorial to the Unborn, Meditation Trail, numerous devotional areas, and the Magnificent shrine Church" (Listecki, Ricken and Callahan, 2012: 3).

Other Marian pilgrimages include Immaculate Conception of Mary and the Assumption of Mary in the Philippines, Our Lady of Fatima in Portugal, Our Lady of Lourdes in France, and many others (Chua, 2000: 26-33). Catholics believe that Marian shrines are sacred spaces; thus, they make pilgrimages to these shrines.

There are twelve feasts of the Virgin Mary that are celebrated in the Catholic Church, which include: Our Lady of Lourdes (11 February), Our Lady of Fatima (13 May), The Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (31 May), The Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary (16 June), Basilica of St Mary (05 August), The Queenship of Mary (22 August), Birth of Mother Mary (08 September), The Holy Name of Mother Mary (12 September), Our Lady of Sorrows (15 September), Our Lady of the Rosary (07 October), The Presentation of Mary (21 November), and Our Lady of Guadalupe (12 December). In addition, there are three Marian Holy-days celebrated annually in the Catholic Church, which are Mary Mother of God (01 January), the Assumption of Mary

(15 August), and the Immaculate Conception of Mary (08 December). The above dates are according to the 2020 Catholic Calendar. As a result, some dates may differ year in and out as not all are fixed dates (Bath, 2003).

The Children of Mary and the Immaculate Conception of Mary sodalities usually celebrate these Feasts and Holy Days. Typically, the fundamental way of celebrating these days would be through praying the Rosary, the Holy Mass, or sometimes going on a retreat. Although they are Marian sodalities, their retreats are separated as each sodality has its rulebook and is organised differently. All members of the congregation are invited to the celebration of these Feasts and Holy Days.

Even though there were Marian apparitions in the other continents, Africa was also graced with Marian apparitions. On the night of April 2nd and 3rd 1968, there was a Marian apparition in the district of Zeitoun in Cairo. A Muslim garage owner saw a woman dressed in all white, bright, and radiant who stood at the roof of the small Coptic Orthodox Church. She was on the edge at the roof top of the Church. In the beginning, he thought someone was at the roof top of the Church and was attempting to commit suicide. The man looked closely and fell on his knees upon realising that it is Maryam, the mother of Jesus (Cochet, 2019).

For Muslims, Mary is Maryam. For a good three years, apparitions followed each other at random intervals. Millions of people would gather in front of the Church to try and catch a glimpse of the Virgin Mary (Cochet, 2019). This is one apparition of its kind because it is cross-religion. It was not only witnessed by Muslims but by Christians also. There is an overlap between Christianity and Islamism and the one example is this one of the mother of Jesus. The first one was seen on page 6 regarding the mentioning of her name in the Quran.

In Kibeho Rwanda, there was another Marian apparition in 1981. The Virgin Mary appeared to a 16-year-old Alphonsine Mumureke. Days later two others (Anathile Mukamazimpa and Marie Mukangango) claimed to have seen the same apparition. They described the Virgin Mary who was warning them of a bloody, apocalyptic, hate-filled conflict that was yet to come in Rwanda. Like with any other apparition, at first, people did not believe them. In 1994 and 1995, there was a genocide between the Hutus and the Tutsis which led to thousands of people being killed, including Marie Mukangango who was killed during the 1995 massacre. This led to the shrine of Our Lady of Sorrows, the Marian sanctuary in Kibeho to become the only Marian apparition in Africa that is recognised by the Vatican (Ferrari, 2021).

There are other pilgrimage places to Marian shrines in Africa which there was no apparition like Our Lady of Africa, Mother of All Graces in Algeria. The shrine of Our Lady of Africa is one complicated figure because there is a strong Catholic presence in Algiers, which was a result of the French colonisation of Algeria in the beginning of 1830. The image of Our Lady of Africa is Black. This is a symbol of the European colonising presence in Africa and the possibility for coexistence and accommodation (Albera, 2015:100). The Black figure of the Virgin Mary creates room for conversation among the African Christians whom some argue that both Jesus and Mary are Black people.

The sacred, pilgrimages, shrines devoted to Mary, the mother of Jesus and hereafter referred to as Marian shrines, as well as their significance for Catholics, are introduced as central to contextualising this study.

1.2 Purpose, Significance, and Objectives of the study

Initially, when I started this study, I thought a pilgrimage was a religious journey full stop. Is that all there is to it? Moreover, is pilgrimage restricted to journeying and spirituality only? The following quote from Greenia (2014) tells us there is so much more to pilgrimages and their studies.

"Pilgrimage studies have emerged in the past few years as a new field of inquiry arching well beyond former definitions that boxed sacred travel into religious or historical paradigms" (Greenia, 2014: 8).

The term pilgrimage was associated with performing rituals at a sacred site or place in its earliest forms. In these times, a pilgrimage was understood as part of the sacred rituals (du Plooy, 2016: 131). Significant journeys across the globe have existed from the earliest times of human existence compared to the noticeably young, 103-year existence of Fatima journeys.

There is a significant gap in the academic study of pilgrimages in Southern Africa. The exceptions are Coplan (2003), Roos (2006) and du Plooy (2016), who worked on South African pilgrimages, while Nthoi (2006) about pilgrimages in Zimbabwe. Both Coplan (2003) and du Plooy (2016) wrote about religious pilgrimages along the South Africa-Lesotho border while Roos (2006) and Nthoi (2006) wrote about both secular and religious pilgrimage. Notwithstanding these, no further systematic study of pilgrimage has been done, not to mention Catholic journeying and particularly not to Marian shrines in Southern Africa. Writings about these Marian shrines (in Southern Africa) are by the Catholic Church itself, including reports and pamphlets but no scientific investigations.

To contribute to the scant body of knowledge, this study will focus on pilgrimages that Catholics take to three Marian shrine destinations to contribute to the body of knowledge. Two of them are Fatima journeys. Fatima Maseru Farm is in the central Free State, South Africa, and Fatima Ha Ramabanta is in the Maseru district of Lesotho. These sacred places are visited in October during the Rosary month even though there were no Marian apparitions. The Ngome Marian shrine, situated in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) South Africa, had a Marian apparition, and this place is visited any time throughout the year. To better understand these pilgrimages, the following objectives are set:

- To **explore** the concept of pilgrimages and how they are undertaken.
- To **document** the experiences of pilgrims to Marian shrines.
- To **discover** the reasons for embarking on pilgrimage journeys to Marian shrines; and
- To **explore** the history of these Marian shrines.

1.3 Chapter Outline

Chapter 1: This is the **Introduction** of my research study. It provides the background and rationale of this study. This is where the foundation is laid. The second part of this section addresses the purposes and objectives. It is through the objectives that one gets an idea of the direction which this study will take.

Chapter 2: This is my **Research process**. The research process consists of my pre-COVID-19 plan, my genesis, and my positionality as a researcher. It furthermore discusses the research design, qualitative approach, my case studies, research participants and sampling. When it comes to the methods and techniques, I discuss

observation and participant observation and interviews. The last two sections of this chapter are the ethical considerations together with the data analysis and interpretation. This chapter will assist my reader in learning how I did the research process.

Chapter 3: This is the **Literature review**. The Turner's have contributed significantly to the study of pilgrimages, as a result, this becomes the introduction of this chapter. Subsequent too that, is the characteristics of *communitas*. The next section discusses sacred spaces: the definition of sacred spaces, varieties of the sacred, dos, don'ts at the sacred space, and lastly, the African Traditional Religions and the Catholic Church. The last part of the literature review is the pilgrimage phenomena. It is a discussion on what pilgrimage is and all the surrounding components.

Chapter 4: Through an eye of a pilgrim and a researcher: In this chapter, I present all the data from my participants via interviews and participant observation and analyse the data using different themes. These themes are: Physical vs Radio pilgrimage, *communitas* at a youth pilgrimage, liminality and transformation, faith can move mountains and reflections on the Maseru Farm pilgrimage. My data will be unpacked using ethnographic scenes.

Chapter 5: Generating new knowledge: Unlike chapter 4, this chapter is the voice of my participants. It is not through the pilgrim, rather a researcher who wants to generate new information. It is also divided into themes: Mary, our spiritual vessel, going on a pilgrimage, a walking library, the Tabernacle of the Most High and COVID-19 and the effects on pilgrims.

Chapter 6: This is the **concluding chapter** of my research. In this chapter, I discuss what I have done by summarising my findings and drawing conclusions that are

inclusive of the study's challenges, limitations, and value. Lastly, I conclude by making recommendations for further studies.

Chapter 2: Research process

2.1 Introduction

The research process is the heart of research, meaning without it, research is as good as not conducted at all. The aim of this chapter which details the research process is to provide a guide to the decision-making processes from the inception of the study, across the data collection, through to the analysis and eventual presentation of findings.

This chapter is divided into different sections. The first is where I introduce the commencement of my journey in conducting this study. It is comprised of my genesis and positionality. In these sections, I introduce how I decided to write about pilgrimages to Marian shrines and what my role is in this study. The second part of this section is the research design in which I discuss the qualitative approach, case study in terms of my sacred sites, my research participants, and sampling. The third section of my research process discusses the techniques of data collection I used. These methods are observation, participant observation, and interviews. The last two sections of the chapter are the ethical considerations and the data analysis and interpretation.

My Genesis

I first registered my MPhil in May 2018 intending to understand how traditional healers connect with their divine in valleys, caves, and mountains in Lesotho depending on the different callings they have. I had in mind the Kome and Malimong caves, which are heritage sites. It was in the Kome and Malimong caves where it is said that the Cannibals used to hide when King Moshoeshe I, founder of the Basotho Nation,

journeyed from Menkhoaneng to Thaba Bosiu. It was these very same cannibals that it is believed to have consumed the grandfather of King Moshoeshoe I, Peete. This then resulted in Peete not having a grave to purify (Ricard, 1993).

During my first consultation with my supervisor, we decided to rather take a different route in terms of the journeys to be documented. This decision was influenced by the fact that it might be challenging to get ‘*in depth*’ information about traditional healers because I for one am not called to be a traditional healer. As this is a sacred journey, being an outsider would not be fruitful for this type of study.

We then decided to rather explore journeys that Catholics take to Marian shrines. I remembered that in October, Catholics embark on Fatima journeys. I also remembered that in KwaZulu-Natal (Ngome), there was a Marian apparition. Right there and then, we had a clearer picture of the route my research was to take. We decided to discover the reasons for embarking on the Ngome pilgrimage and the two Fatima journeys. The former in the Maseru Archdiocese, and the latter in the Bloemfontein Archdiocese.

As a Catholic myself, I am also a pilgrim who journeys to the Marian shrines mentioned earlier. In October, congregants would go on a pilgrimage to a Marian shrine. I journeyed with both the Archdioceses because I study in Bloemfontein while my home is Lesotho. Both these Archdioceses would also journey to Ngome from time to time and because I spend most of my time in Bloemfontein, I journeyed with the Bloemfontein Archdiocese to Ngome. This study was then a perfect platform for me to explore why Catholics journey to these shrines and document their experiences at these sacred spaces.

I first started exploring the concept of “*pilgrimage*” through reading different study materials such as the works of among others; Victor Turner (1973), Victor and Edith Turner (1978) and John Eade (1991 & 2006). It was through the reading of the varied materials that I understood better the concept of pilgrimages.

I believe that my relation to the Turners’ work stemmed from me being a pilgrim to a Marian shrine although it was a different shrine, from which they wrote. The order or proceedings of things sounded remarkably familiar although I learned a thing or two about other pilgrimages, which were a bit different from how things were conducted at the Ngome Marian shrine. One cannot write about pilgrimages without referring to the works of Victor and Edith Turner as a point of departure because they both write a lot about pilgrimages. It is for such a reason that a lot of Victor Turner’s work will be cited in this research.

Positionality and Reflexivity

“Reflexivity is a strategy which helps to ensure that the over involvement of the researcher is not a threat to the credibility of the study” (Chilisa, 2012: 168). In the context of this study, reflexivity refers to how I as the researcher, my background influences my perceptions, experiences, interpretations, and report findings because I am the main instrument for data collection. Reflecting on my own identity and the role I play in this research assists me in learning about and acknowledging my own biases. I understand that it is almost impossible to be 100% objective in every aspect of my research however, objectivity is what I strive for. As an insider to this study, my voice will be heard but so will the experiences of my participants be documented. It is important to know where I stand in this study to avoid imposing my way of life on my participants (Fink, 2014).

I am a Catholic youth who is part of the Children of Mary (*Bana ba Maria*) sodality. I joined this sodality in 2012 intending to live my life according to the virtues of the Virgin Mary being purity, humility, patience, and love. This is a girls' only sodality. We wear white dresses, which must be below the knee, a blue robe that must be wrapped around the waist, a white barrette on the head, and sometimes a blue cape around the shoulders. The cape differs from region to region; some regions wear it while others do not. The Figures below (Figure 2 & 3) show Seithati in her church attire both without a cape and with a cape.



Figure 2 Seithati without cape



Figure 3 Seithati with a cape

It is customary for this sodality to celebrate all Marian Feasts and Holy-Days in the Church and even be at the forefront together with that of the Immaculate Conception of Mary (*Kemolo e se nang Sekodi ya Maria*). The Immaculate Conception of Mary is a sodality for both men and women married or not. Women in this sodality wear sky blue dresses with a sky-blue cloak and a navy-blue hat. Men, on the other hand, wear black trousers, white shirts, and sky-blue sash that run across the shoulder from the

left to the waist on the right. It is one of the sodalities in the church that does not have extremely strict rules unlike others. The St Anne sodality for example is strictly for married women, and once you divorce, your membership becomes terminated from the sodality.

Back to my positionality and reflexivity. Ever since I become part of the Children of Mary sodality, I have been journeying to these Fatima places. Upon reflection, I realise that I journeyed because it was mandatory for members of my sodality and because I wanted to meet my old friends who go to different churches. Then, it was more of a responsibility and for leisure than anything else. This changed in 2018 when I began with this research study.

I began to dig deeper within me to understand what journeying to Marian shrines means to me. It was through these reflections and engaging with different people that I learned that our reasons differ from person to person even though we go to the same place with the same group. This also inspired me to learn more about my participants and their experiences of pilgrimaging.

2.2 Research Design

Qualitative Approach

I use a qualitative research approach to complete this research study because of its appropriateness to the nature of my topic. Applying a qualitative approach for my research is advantageous for the following reasons: (a) helping me to learn about the lives of pilgrims under real-world circumstances as we journey together to these sacred spaces, (b) representing the true perspectives of these pilgrims and (c) using

different sources such as the books, articles and the experiences of pilgrims to gather evidence and not only rely on one person's information to draw up conclusions (Yin, 2011: 7-8). It is through fieldwork and participating in pilgrimages that I explore with my research participants what journeying to Marian shrines means to them.

Qualitative research studies human behaviour from the social actors themselves. The local or emic perspective is significant within a qualitative approach, it is important to describe and understand. The actions of the pilgrim-participants are described in detail. The aim is to make thick descriptions. In order to fully understand those actions of the pilgrims, I explore their beliefs, history, and context. Instead of constructing them in retrospect, as a qualitative researcher, I study events as they occur (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 270-283).

Fieldwork is the heart of research in anthropology as it intensively explores the lifeways of the people. There are diverse ways to conduct fieldwork, which include life histories, cinematography, interviewing, and taking census data, mapping space, questionnaires, surveys, and participant observation (Nanda & Warms, 2014: 31). In this study, I make use of the most relevant ones for my study which are interviews and participant observation. These methods aid me in achieving maximum results in my quest to get in-depth information regarding the significance of Marian pilgrimages to Catholics.

There were a few steps that I needed to take into consideration when preparing for my fieldwork. Firstly, it was important to establish what the main research questions are to avoid deviating from my study. These research question(s) gave me a clear direction and served as a guide that assisted me in sticking to the main purpose of my study during fieldwork. Secondly, I read material from the previous scholars to identify

what the gap in the literature is (Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 1999: 69). Having identified the gap in the literature became the birth of my study because, without it, I would not have found a reason to conduct this study.

It is furthermore important to know what the limitations are for future scholars who wish to further engage on the subject. The more there are studies to conduct, the more there are gaps to fill in for future scholars and vice versa. The limitations for this research are addressed in the last chapter of this study for the future development of studies on Marian pilgrimages be it by me or other scholars (Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 1999: 69).

To complete my research, I use ethnographic methods, which helped me to learn about how people behave and the different ways in which they make meaning of their daily lives (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999:1). The concept of ethnography is typically used to explain a product of research and a research process. In the research process, I interacted face to face with my participants in the pilgrimage community while using the different data collection methods (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999:1). Nevertheless, I am not claiming that the end result of my research is an ethnography since it does not rely on extended fieldwork as it is classically required. Methods and techniques of data collection that I used were informal and are semi-structured interviews and participant observation.

Case Study

A case study is a research method that is quite common in social science research. It is based on an in-depth investigation of a single individual, group, or event. Case studies may be descriptive or explanatory depending on their nature (Babbie &

Mouton, 2001: 283). This study focuses on three case studies, which are discussed in this section.

Ngome Marian shrine is found in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) in South Africa. The Blessed Virgin Mary chose this place through her apparitions to Sister (Sr) Renolda May where she announced herself as: "*Mary, the Tabernacle of the Most High.*" Sr Renolda was a Benedictine nun born on the 21st of October 1901 in Germany (Ngome WordPress, 2009). The Blessed Virgin made ten apparitions to Sr Renolda where she told her that she wants to have a shrine where seven streams meet. Sr Renolda did nothing but spread the word, and there was Ngome Marian shrine with everything just as the Blessed Virgin wanted it (NgomeWordPress, 2009). Today, hundreds of people from all over South Africa and across the continent, Catholic and non-Catholic visit Ngome for various reasons which include tourism, praying, healing, etc.

Fatima Maseru Farm is between Tweespruit and Excelsior in the Free State. The Archdiocese of Bloemfontein celebrates their Fatima here. There was no apparition, it was just a space chosen to be sacred and it is visited by the entire Bloemfontein Archdiocese in October annually. Fatima Ha Ramabanta is a place chosen by the Archdiocese of Maseru (Lesotho) to celebrate their Fatima. It is in a place called Ha Ramabanta, not very far from Semonkong. There was also no apparition at this place, but it was chosen as a sacred place to celebrate the month of the Rosary.

With Fatima Ha Ramabanta, the Fatima pilgrimage is divided into two parts: one for the youth and the other for the older congregants. As a youth myself, I can only attend the pilgrimage of the youth which is the one that is documented in this research.

Research Participants

My key participants are eleven congregants in the Catholic Church. I say key because there are other participants whom I had conversations throughout the study just to get their experience on journeying to Marian shrines.

My key participants differ in terms of the sodalities they are part of and their Archdioceses. Some are from Maseru, while others from Bloemfontein. All these participants have differences and similarities both obvious (e.g., age, ethnicity, social class) and not obvious (e.g., political affiliation, educational qualifications, marital status). I included marital status as not obvious because, in Lesotho, most people are customarily married as a result, they do not wear rings on their left hand's ring fingers.

In Maseru, my participants are members of the Catholic youth between the ages of 16 and 35. They are part of different youth sodalities in Lesotho, which include among others: Children of Mary, St Stephens, Seminarians, Lesotho Catholic Youth Movement- (LCYM), and others do not belong to any sodality. These research participants were chosen because of their activeness in journeying to Fatima Ha Ramabanta. Some were my acquaintances because we are all members of the youth while some were close to me to a point of being identified as my friends. It is for such reason that I explained to them the importance of transparency and representativeness in this study.

As members of the youth, everyone is busy with a thing or two in their personal lives be it studying, employed, self-employed, or unemployed. Most of them come from middle and low-class families. This is seen in the standard of living. All these participants are Basotho, and most are not married with no dependents. For some

youth sodalities, once you get married or have a child, you can no longer be part of it. Some sodalities like LCYM do not have such strict rules that terminate the membership of members once they get married. Nonetheless, with or without the rules, we are all under the same umbrella of the youth in the Maseru Archdiocese despite our differences.

Comparatively, in Bloemfontein, my research participants are older. Their age group ranges above 34. They include among others: Fathers, Nuns, members of St Cecilia, members of the Immaculate Conception, and Friends of the Oblates. This is because of the dynamics in the different Archdioceses. These dynamics involve the lack of youth participation in Church activities by the youth.

When it comes to gender, many of my participants are females. This is because, in my observation, it is the females who journey mostly to these sacred places. Most of the males in the church are not affiliated with any sodality; as a result, they do not fully take part in such journeys. As an insider to this study, I have an affiliation with most of these participants. This affiliation has been established before the commencement of this study, as we are all congregants in the Catholic Church. It is due to this affiliation that research participants were purposefully selected.

Table 1: Below is a table that illustrates my key participants

Males	5
Females	6
Youth	4
Non-youth	7
Sodalities	8
Non-Sodalities	3

Table 1 Illustration of key participants

Sampling

Sampling is defined as the process of selecting observations (Taherdoost, 2016: 19). There are different stages to take into consideration when deciding on the sampling method. Firstly, the researcher needs to define who the targeted population is so that it will not be a problem selecting it. In this study, my targeted population is Catholics who journey to the Marian shrines. Secondly, the researcher must choose a suitable sampling technique for their study, which results in getting maximum results (Taherdoost, 2016: 18-20).

For this study, non-probability sampling is the most suitable sampling method to use. Non-probability sampling “is defined as a sampling technique in which the researcher selects samples based on the subjective judgment of the researcher rather than random selection” (Taherdoost, 2016: 22-23). It is with the non-probability sampling that my participants are purposefully selected to partake in my study because of the

value they add. The purpose of choosing specific participants is ensuring that I as the researcher yield the most relevant information about my topic of study (Yin, 2011: 88). There are different types of non-probability sampling, namely: quota sampling, snowball sampling, convenience sampling, and purposive/judgemental sampling (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 166-183). From the above-given examples, I use purposive and snowball sampling for the completion of this study.

Purposive sampling is strategically used by deliberately selecting participants to provide essential information that otherwise could not have been found from others. As a researcher, I must select my sample based on my knowledge of the community that I am studying hence these pilgrims are chosen. This is simply based on my judgment as a researcher and the purpose of my study. One advantage of this sampling technique is that it is convenient, low-cost, not time-consuming, and perfect for exploratory research design. The disadvantage however to using this sampling technique is that it does not allow room for generalization (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 166-183).

It is noteworthy that when I purposefully select my participants, I avoid biases and select even those who will have differing views from other participants. It was a challenge not to be biased in the selection of my participants because most of them I am affiliated in one way or the other. When it concerned differing views, I did not know what their perceptions were on different things until I had conversations with them. I chose relevant participants, who are pilgrims journeying to the Marian shrines discussed in this study (Yin, 2011: 88).

Snowball sampling is collecting data from some participants and asking them to provide the information needed to locate other members of the community whom they

know and believe would be of great input to the study. Snowball is important as it assisted me, the researcher in getting more data, which I otherwise would have not accessed without the assistance of the identified participants. It was advantageous to use this technique because it increased my sample size and estimated rare characteristics. However, it was time-consuming, as I first needed to get hold of the referred participant. I used my uncle as a link between me and that participant because it would have taken a much longer period had I tried to get hold of him myself. One other disadvantage of the snowball is the lack of corporation. Even after referrals, participants may choose not to participate in the study. Fortunately, enough for me, this was not the case. My participant was willing and corporative (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 166-183).

2.3 Methods and techniques of data collection

Observation and Participant Observation

“Participant observation is a field technique that involves gathering cultural data by observing people’s behaviour and participating in their lives” (Nanda & Warms, 2014: 31). There are diverse types of observable data, which include a physical location, time duration, language behaviour, expressive movement, and exterior physical signs (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 293). It is my responsibility to pay detailed attention while observing the pilgrim-participants. In this study, I am both a participant and an observer, which makes me a participant-observer.

I not only observed the research participants, but I also engaged actively in the activities of my research participants. Ethnographic methods are a research approach

in which the researcher observes people in their cultural setting and how they interact with each other in both their social environment and everyday life (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999:1).

Participation and observation take place inter-changeably throughout the pilgrimage. It is also very possible to actively participate while observing and vice versa. This not only adds an element of richness to the information generated but also cements the relationship between me and the participants, as rapport is built.

Conducting my study means, I, not only observe and ask questions, however, I also participate as much as possible in both the everyday life and the social life of the community I am studying which are Catholics who journey to these Marian shrines. This means not only will I observe what my participants are doing, but I will also participate in “*most*” of their activities. The reason I say most is that I believe some activities would take place at the same time; as a result, I can only participate in one at a time while I observe others. This observation is not only on how the activities are carried out and make them feel but also on the interaction amongst the participants themselves.

As a researcher, I am expected to adapt in all circumstances be it favourable or not. I needed to be comfortable with discomfort and *do as the Romans do when in Rome*. This became practical when COVID -19 hit and there were not physical pilgrimages done. I had to adapt to the new normal and go on a radio pilgrimage. Even with interviews, I had to improvise and conduct some via call not face to face. I accumulated information by immersing myself with the pilgrims and observing how they interact with each other during and after the pilgrimage. I needed to participate as much as possible in the activities of the pilgrims with whom I am journeying (Nanda & Warms, 2014: 31).

Through the rapport built, I become one with the pilgrim community that I am studying (Neuman, 2006: 378). Becoming one with the community means doing what they do; in the context of my research, becoming one means journeying with my participants and following their pilgrimage programme. It is through being there and participating in the everyday activities that I understand my participants better (Nanda & Warmas, 2014: 31).

I mostly use the participant observation technique when we are at the sacred spaces as it is the most appropriate. I cannot be interviewing people while they are busy praying, meditating, or having moments with the divine. The appropriateness of this tool comes in when one considers the timing when to do what and how to do it. It is important to respect the participants' privacy in such moments hence it is more appropriate to observe rather than to interview. Interviews take place when my participants are free because I do not want to disturb them as they are journeying and praying. The taking of pictures and videos, happens throughout the fieldwork and gathering of data. All this happens with the consent of my participants.

There are skills that I must learn and master in order to be a participant-observer. Among the other skills, I need to fit in by actively noticing actions of the pilgrims in the field as they occur, being able to converse with participants informally and to take record details of the events. It is important to reproduce practical data from memory, particularly through "*the ability to observe and write simultaneously and be able to predict what might happen in the future just by the look on people's faces*" (De Walt & De Walt, 2002: 17).

This can be challenging at times especially if I am is not a flexible researcher who is able to multitask in terms of listening, speaking, and writing at the same time.

Sometimes it becomes difficult to write as in some cultures it is seen as a sign of disrespect to be busy (writing) while someone is talking to you. This is where the researcher now needs to know in depth the type of community, they are studying to understand their customs and culture. One wrong move from the researcher, especially on matters relating to appropriate behaviour could taint the good relationship that has already been built.

It is important to apply ethnographic tools of participant observation and interviewing with intellectual depth in order to be confronted face to face with my assumptions. Throughout the process of doing research especially fieldwork, I became both challenged and changed in reflective ways as I had to put aside my biases and become as objective as I could possibly be. Since I engaged with the pilgrim community, it challenged me to get out of my comfort zone and reflect on my own personal life. This then gave me a unique perspective from how I initially viewed things. The researcher's outlook on how things "*ought*" to be becomes challenged and they see things from a wider perspective (Campbell & Lassiter, 2015: 2).

There are advantages to using participant observation, which include that there is a rapport build between the researcher and the people in that community as they journey to the sacred space, becomes part of the pilgrim programme during the pilgrimage and journeys back together with the pilgrims. This then creates a certain level of trust, which makes it easier for me to get as much information as possible. I also gathered information without verbally communicating with my participants as I could see how they interacted and responded to each other. This then bridged the gap between the expectation and the actual behaviour of the participants (Nanda & Warmas, 2014: 31).

Having journeyed with my participants to Ngome in May 2019, we spend more than ten hours together on the road; as a result, some slept while others were awake. Similarly, I journeyed to Ha Ramabanta and Maseru Farm with the pilgrims and together we had a feel of the pilgrimage. We worked together from the day of departure until we returned. This then bridged the gap between my expectations and the actual behaviour of my participants (Nanda & Warms, 2014: 31). The observations I did were in 2019 when I journeyed to these Marian shrines as both a pilgrim and as a researcher. I, unfortunately, could not go on a pilgrimage in 2020 due to the Corona Virus Pandemic.

Participant observation gives me, the researcher, as much and deep data as possible which will add immense value to the study. I cannot manipulate or change what happens in the field of choice and this is a good sign. My results therefore cannot be manipulated to get certain outcomes that meet my expectations. This then justified the genuineness of participant observation. Manipulating the results gives the researcher the desired but not the truthful outcome. Participant observation is then the most accurate technique, which gives me the most authentic results.

As the coin has two sides, and so does participant observation have disadvantages. Firstly, the sample size is not more than 50 participants. This made it difficult for me to conclude if the findings represent the broader community or not. Secondly, it was not easy for me to record the conversations, as sometimes the recording devices are expensive. Instead of buying a recording device, I used my mobile phone. Mobile phones run out of battery and storage is usually full. As I prepared for my interviews, I cleared all the unnecessary data which consumed a lot on my storage. Equally, my phone was fully charged before I could conduct any interview. This was to avoid

experiencing any storage or battery problem. As a back-up plan, I had my power-bank fully charged just in case I ran out of battery on my mobile phone.

It could also be argued that not all research is funded; hence, it becomes convenient for the researcher to work with what they have instead of purchasing a costly recording device, especially for a self-funded researcher like myself. This then forces the researcher to use their mobile phones or write down the data gathered. This act of writing is known as taking field notes. It is very costly to do participant observation because, at times, the research requires the researcher to stay longer in their field-site than they had predicted (Nanda & Warms, 2014: 31). This is often the result of not getting enough or in-depth data, or circumstances force you to stay for an extended period. Fortunately, for my study, I did not have to stay longer.

Interviews

This research started pre-COVID 19 and there was a detailed plan on how the study was to be conducted. This plan included going on pilgrimages to these sacred spaces with my participants as they journey, conducting face-to-face interviews with them, observing pilgrims at the sacred space, and even having informal conversations with some of the pilgrims. Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, I had to make some adjustments to how my data was to be gathered. I had telephone interviews, and some were done through WhatsApp video calls. This was to observe the social distancing to avoid the spread of the Coronavirus. However, there were some interviews that were conducted face to face.

To complete this study, I also use semi-structured interviews and open-ended informal conversations. Interviews help me in expanding my knowledge of areas in which I lack

information. They (interviews) require that a researcher needs to think logically and have excellent communication skills. Despite the type of interview that the researcher wants to conduct, there are a few guidelines that he/she needs to follow. As an interviewer, I need to keep in mind how the questions I ask relate to my research questions. It is of great importance for me to notice that the interviewee is still on the right track with the questions I ask, and if not, I, as the interviewer need to reintroduce my topic or explain the question further without giving any leading answers to my interviewee. I as the interviewer also need to know when to pursue new ideas during the interview and when not to (Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 1999: 122).

My interviews are categorised into semi-structured, and unstructured interviews. Because it is challenging to conduct interviews at sacred spaces as both Fathers and pilgrims are usually busy; I had to schedule a different timeslot to conduct semi-structured interviews with them. Besides the tightness of the programme at the sacred place, the outbreak of the COVID -19 pandemic forced my research to rely mostly on interviews.

There are two types of questions to ask, namely: open-ended and closed-ended questions. With open-ended questions, the participant provides his or her answer to the question asked by the researcher. On the other hand, with closed-ended questions, the participant is given a list of options to select and answer from. Although closed-ended questions make it easier for the researcher to process, this study used open-ended questions because they gave me in-depth information regarding pilgrimages to these Marian shrines (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 232-264).

I had to avoid double-barrelled questions and thus ask relevant questions only which spoke to my research question (*why do pilgrims journey to these Marian shrines?*).

There are different ways to conduct interviews being: face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, and self-administered questionnaires. Primarily, this study used face-to-face interviews, however, due to the unforeseen circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic; I could not meet some of my participants face to face. We maintained self-isolation and had telephonic interviews with other participants. Face-to-face interviews are the most common type of interviews and are very much appropriate for my study because it allows me to get in-depth information from my participants as it is easier to have follow-ups. These follow-ups were needed when I did not understand my participant's response. Most importantly, face to face interviews helped me notice the facial expressions and non-verbal communication techniques of my participants (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 232-264).

There are basic rules for face-to-face interviews. Firstly, the researcher needs to be able to speak the home language of the participants. It is for this reason that my interviews were conducted in Sesotho and English to accommodate my participants. Each participant would state which language they preferred, and we would converse in it. I must however add that transcribing interviews that were conducted in Sesotho was time consuming. Secondly, the interview should take place in a place where the participant is comfortable and feels secure. To ensure my participant's comfortability and safety, I asked them to send me the location of where they would like us to meet, and I went there. Two of them preferred coming to my place while most of them, I went to their preferred locations. Thirdly, the interviewer must be able to listen attentively and be quick to make notes of what the interviewee said. I wrote notes even though I was recording the interviews. This helps me to compare the notes I had written to the recording in case there was something that I missed (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 232-264).

The semi-structured interviews were scheduled in advance between the myself and my participants. This type of interview is set around a group of predetermined open-ended questions, and other questions will develop between the dialogue taking place between the interviewer and the interviewee. Semi-structured interviews usually take between 30 minutes or more as they are a conversation-like type of interview. They are the most common and actively used type of interviews in qualitative research. They can occur either with an individual or in a group. My semi-structured interviews occurred with individuals except with Ntate and Mme Memane where the three of us were having a conversation. It is with these interviews that I accumulated in-depth information through digging deeper into the social and personal matters surrounding the topic of journeying to Marian shrines. It is for this reason and others that I used semi-structured interviews (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006: 315-317).

These semi-structured interviews are based on my observation of the participants' behaviour or reaction during the proceedings of the pilgrimage. As it is unstructured, the flow of our conversations is determined by the responses I receive from the questions asked. This often leads to the participants narrating stories of pilgrimages they took and the value of those sacred spaces to their spiritual being.

DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006: 315-316) believe no interview can be regarded as strictly unstructured, however; others are somewhat unstructured and are more or less guided conversations. These unstructured interviews originate from anthropologists while using their ethnographic traditions. Ethnographers make use of participant observation and they record field notes while they observe the activities of the community, they are studying either overtly or covertly. One way to have an unstructured interview is to identify key informants whom you interview on an ongoing

basis while you keep on taking notes and observing. These key informants are selected based on their knowledge, role, and willingness to provide information to the researcher, be it through mentoring or translating.

Interviews have become the primary source of collecting my data because of the pandemic we are faced with. There were no physical pilgrimages to these three sacred sites ever since March 2020 when the national lockdown was declared by the president. It is for this reason that there was no one to observe. As a result, these interviews were not face to face only as I had anticipated, I had to conduct some telephonically through phone calls and WhatsApp video calls. This experience had taught me to always have more than one method of conducting data, as participant observation alone during this pandemic was not possible. I ensured that in conducting my interviews, both face to face and telephonically, I take into consideration ethical conduct so that I do not in any way infringe upon the rights of my participants or make them uncomfortable.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

Wherever there is an interaction between people, ethical issues arise due to the potential for conflict of interest. In most cases, ethics is associated with doing what is right or doing what is wrong. According to the Webster New World College Dictionary (2018), ethics is defined as “*conforming to the standards of conduct of a given profession or group*”. What is seen as morals and ethics in our everyday life is generally an agreement between members of that group. It is of significant importance to know what the community considers ethical and unethical especially as a social researcher. If you want to do social scientific research, it is imperative to be aware of

the general agreements among researchers regarding what is appropriate and what is not appropriate (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 520).

A researcher cannot work with people and not take into consideration ethics. It is particularly important that researchers introduce themselves and make their research participants mindful of their human rights. In the past that researchers were not open and honest with their research participants regarding the real reasons behind conducting that particular study. Researcher does not have a right to force anyone to participate in their research study (Glicken, 2003: 175). Some critical ethical agreements need to be taken into considerations in social research. These agreements need to be explained and written in the research information page in such a way that the participant would understand. In cases where the participant does not understand, it is the researcher's responsibility to explain.

Participation needs to be voluntary. No participant should be forced to partake in research, as this is an ethical practice. It is the researcher's responsibility to ensure that there will be no harm that happens to the participants. Harm can either be physical or otherwise. Non-physical harm of participants may be revealing information that may embarrass them or endanger their lives, friendships, jobs, and families. Researchers should not deceive participants about who they are and what their true intentions are with the study. Researchers also need to reveal any other partnerships they have formed in conducting their research as it (partnership) may have an impact on the participants (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 521-526).

The researcher is ethically obliged to ensure the discretion of information shared and how they will protect the privacy of their participants. This means *"keeping information strictly confidential from anyone else in the field and not disguising the names of the*

participants. It is the researcher's responsibility to build trust and rapport with the participants" (Neuman, 2006: 413). Anonymity in research means the researcher cannot identify a given response with a given respondent. Confidentiality, on the other hand, means a researcher can identify a given person's responses but essentially promises not to do so publicly (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 521-526).

My participants voluntarily take part in this study, and evidence of such is in the consent form, which I provided them with to read. They must sign a consent form to agree to take part in this study. Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, we avoided physical contact. As a result, my participants gave their consent via email, call recorder, and via WhatsApp. I am obliged to read the contents of the consent form to them and clarify where there is a need before we start our interviews. As this is a voluntary study, my participants understand that they will not be remunerated in any form for their participation.

If at any point, they do not feel comfortable participating in the study, they are more than welcome to let me know and even choose to withdraw from taking part in this research study. There will be no harm of any kind to my participants, and that is ensured in the predetermined questions, which lead to the flow of our conversation. I must also ask for permission to record our discussions, be it through writing or tape-recording. These recordings will be saved in a secured folder. For participants who do not wish to be identified by their name, I make use of pseudonyms. Regarding pictures and videos, I only use pictures of participants who gave me consent.

2.5 Data Analysis and Interpretation

According to Polit & Beck (2008: 69), data analysis is a process of splitting data into smaller and controllable parts. This is done with the intention to find answers that are meaningful to the research questions and those that speak to the research objectives. Data analysis is also done to disseminate the research findings. Data analysis is similarly described by Marshall and Rossman (1999: 150) as a process of structuring the amount of data that has been collected. This process is perceived as unclear in the beginning and time-consuming, however, it is a fascinating and creative process. On the other hand, Cohen et al (2007:461) describe data analysis as the process of making sense of the research from the participant's point of view. This is taking into consideration their opinions, patterns, themes, categories, similarities, and differences. For as much as different wording is used, all the above explanations of data analysis are similar.

It is in this section that the data I gathered using qualitative research methods is analysed and interpreted. According to Gibbs (2007:1), qualitative data analysis is a process, in which collected qualitative data is transformed. This is done by using analytic procedures converting this data into a clear, understandable, trustworthy, and original analysis. According to Scott and Usher (2011:89), a typical qualitative analysis approach involves organizing field notes, observations, and interview records. This analysis is done using the similar words or phrases participants used repeatedly. This helps to develop a pattern and makes the analysis clearer.

There are diverse ways to analyse data however, there are certain skills, which the researcher needs to acquire. These skills include problems solving, patience, and critical thinking. Throughout the conducting of the research, the researcher learns and

improves on these skills. This is because data analysis requires a lot of time invested in it (Akinyoade, 2013: 4).

After conducting my interviews, I had to sit and replay the recordings of the interviews repeatedly. This helped me to make notes where I had lacked clarity in order to have follow-ups with my participants. I was fortunate enough to have participants who were willing to clarify for me where I did not understand. These follow-ups were done through WhatsApp texts and voice notes. It was through this entire process that I improved on my patience, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills. In analysing my data, I had to often go back to my aims and objectives to check if my data speaks directly to the aims and objectives or not. I then identified similar themes and patterns to help me classify my data accordingly. Data analysis is one key components in research. When the analysis is weak, the results become inaccurate which hinders the authenticity of the research. It is imperative to choose the data analysis methods carefully to ensure that the findings are insightful and actionable.

2.6 Conclusion

As alluded earlier that the research process is the heart of research, this research study would not have been possible without this chapter. It served as a guide through which the reader understands the conception of this study and my positionality as a researcher. Furthermore, the qualitative research design was discussed in depth looking at the three case studies and their sacred sites. In addition, the choice of participants and the sampling methods used were also deliberated. Once the researcher identifies the participants, it is of great importance to get into detail on how the data was collected that is why I used interviews and participant observation. None

of these collected data would be possible if ethical considerations were not made a top priority. When all was done, I had to analyse and interpret my data using themes.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

The literature review is an important section of a dissertation. In the literature review, I, integrate what other scholars have written about pilgrimages and sacred spaces. This literature review is divided into different sections. The first section is the contribution of the Turners to the studies of pilgrimage. This section is followed by the characteristics of *communitas*. The second sacred spaces; in this section, I define the term sacred spaces and discuss the varieties of the sacred. There are certain ways in which pilgrims need to conduct themselves when they are at the sacred space hence, I also discuss the dos and don'ts at the sacred place. and lastly, I engage the African Traditional Religions and the Catholic Church.

The third section of the literature review discusses the pilgrimage phenomena. It is also divided into different subsections, which are: the contested definition of the term pilgrimage and the four elements of pilgrimage being person, place, text, and movement. Furthermore, I engage on what makes pilgrimage and how is it classified. I also look into the seven aspects of pilgrimage while comparing the formal and popular pilgrimage.

3.2 The Turners' contribution to studies of pilgrimage

Pilgrimage is a period of transitioning where pilgrims move from a pre-liminal, through a liminal, and post-liminal phase. This liminality is two-fold; it can be experienced by an individual who journeys on a pilgrimage and it can also be experienced collectively by *communitas* who are journeying on a pilgrimage. Like many other scholars of

pilgrimage, Victor Turner has studied pilgrimages in the context of historical religion, which Turner refers to as textual religion (Turner, 1969: 87). This is why pilgrimage studies in religion have been based on individual pilgrims' historical documents and life histories. For this reason, in Turners' first writing *The Ritual Process*, (1969) pilgrimage was grounded on historical documents and his personal experience of the sacred places he had visited. Therefore, it was essential for both Edith and Victor Turner to understand pilgrimage by asking institutional, not individual, questions.

Nthoi (2006: 10) disagrees with Turner. He highlights that Turner's weakness was in ignoring the importance of individual pilgrim's motives in large numbers. He explains that singling out one reason for going on a pilgrimage and using it as a universal reason is unsound. I fully concur with Nthoi (2006: 10) in this regard. As a scholar, one does not look at one side of the coin and decide. It is essential to look at all the aspects involved to avoid making misinformed decisions and to avoid being biased.

Individuals need to leave their everyday lives when embarking on a pilgrimage, although this is not necessarily evident to pilgrims. This means exiting the profane and entering into the sacred. When the individual returns to the mundane, it is believed that they have grown spiritually (Eade and Coleman, 2004: 3).

Collins-Kreiner (2009: 439) emphasises the above point by stating that there needs to be a transition from the profane into a sacred place over a certain period of time for a pilgrimage to take place. This transformation needs to draw boundaries that define where the profane time and space make way for the sacred realm. Eade and Coleman, (2004:3) and Collins-Kreiner, (2009: 439) simply agree with Turner (1978:14) that one cannot go on a pilgrimage and return the same or without having made a spiritual step

forward. If one has to leave their everyday life, it means the pilgrimage centre can either be found within; or set out there (Turner, 1973:191).

Collins-Kreiner (2009: 439) presents that among many social ideas that Turner introduced, there was that of liminality, which directed the study of pilgrimage into a new direction like rites of passage. It has an initiatory character (Macclancy, 1994:33). When one embarks on a pilgrimage, there is a high possibility of personal transformation; as a result, the journey is oriented towards the unknown future. Each step one takes away from what they are familiar with is towards the unfamiliar place, which allows for uncertain experiences. Beckstead (2010:387) warns however that if the destination (sacred space) is too familiar, it lacks the capacity to immerse the pilgrim into a different world.

Turner (1973: 191) emphasises the fact that pilgrimage is a liminal phenomenon. Liminality is a period of transitioning or in between phase, of a rite of passage. In this period/phase, the pilgrim's social status or rank becomes unimportant. The pilgrim dresses according to the set standards, follows the programme as everyone else and shows obedience and humility. While on a pilgrimage, everyone is on the same level. There is no director, police, nun, teacher, etc. (Turner, 1973:192-195). For Turner, the purpose of going on a pilgrimage is for the foundation of what he calls *communitas*.

"According to the Turners, communitas refers to a specific group dynamic which takes place in an assembly of pilgrims" (Collins-Kreiner, 2009: 439). For a temporary period, these pilgrims are equal because they are integrated for the purpose of journeying to a sacred place. They become one community as they find themselves eating, sleeping, and journeying together. These acts boil down to brother- or sisterhood, humility, and love where they feel they are one. No one's social status matters at this

point as they are on the same level. The concept of *communitas* is important as it places emphasis on equality, commensality, and impartiality.

However, Sallnow (1991: 165) and Morinis (1992: 86) discount the universal occurrence of the *communitas* experience at the pilgrimage centre. They believe that granted that pilgrims journey, eat, and sleep together; however, their experiences are likely to differ based on the fact that before they are pilgrims, they are individuals who come from different backgrounds (Nthoi, 2006: 70-71). These differences might lead to conflict amongst the pilgrims as they view things from different perspectives. The conflict can either be internal or external, which will eventually affect the larger population of pilgrims. The internal conflict at a pilgrimage includes one's feelings or character being in contradiction with the religious belief. On the other hand, external conflict at a pilgrimage are clashes between or among pilgrims.

3.3 Sacred Spaces

Definition of sacred spaces

Different formal and informal belief systems have identified places that they regard as sacred or holy. Believers often go on pilgrimages to these places for several reasons. In the case of formal belief systems, the religious authorities then have the responsibility to protect these places for the future benefit of the coming generations. Some places are sacred spaces because a saint or religious leader lived, died, or was born in them. Other places were profane and later became significant. This symbolic process reflects the spiritual characteristics of physical features and the more profound, abstract implications of delimiting a particular site as sacred. Sacred space

is defined as any space or area dedicated to a sacred purpose. This sacred purpose includes among other things; getting holy water, confessions, and the sacramental (Park, 2004: 19) and for the purpose of this study, pilgrimages.

Varieties of the Sacred

Religions express the sacred differently through space and time. There is enough evidence from different regions that the notion of sacred space is long-lived and deep-rooted. Early pagan peoples defined sacred space differently to control where people went, what they did, and how they did it (Park, 2004: 20). Different religions have implicitly and explicitly defined a theological definition that locates the religious identity within the sacred space. Despite the fact that sacred space refers to the physical boundaries, it is conceptual rather than physical (Barker, 1989: 157). There are diverse types of locations of the sacred (see Table 2), which include: the cosmic location, the global location, the national location, the local location, the biological lineage, the religious lineage, the cultural location, the individual location, the location of inner space, and the virtual location (Barker, 1989: 158-163). According to Barker, these locations can be external or internal, depending on the type of pilgrimage one undertakes. These locations also depend on the reasons for visiting them, whether for spiritual or tourism reasons.

The sacred can also be divided into different types (see Table 3): the personal sacred, the civil sacred, the religious sacred, and the spiritual sacred. Whereas personal sacred and civil sacred are identified with the natural dimension, the religious sacred and spiritual are referred to as the supernatural. The types of sacred associated with the natural dimension are not relevant to this study; hence, I do not discuss them in-

depth. The religious sacred relates to church buildings, rituals, temples, moral boundaries, and authorities. On the other hand, the spiritual sacred represents an individual's freedom, well-being, and harmony with oneself and nature. Institutional religion cannot operate without spirituality. However, spirituality operates perfectly fine without religion, which is associated with traditions (Post, Nel, and van Beek, 2014: 2-4). The pilgrimages to Marian shrines in the context of this study are supernatural in their nature as they are both religious and spiritual.

Barker (1989) distinguishes ten locations of the sacred, while Post, Nel, and van Beek (2014) believe there are four types of sacred. See table 2 below for the locations of the sacred as identified by Barker (158-163).

<u>Locations of the Sacred</u>
Cosmic location
Global location
National location
Local location
Cultural location
Individual location
Virtual location
Biological lineage
Religious lineage
Location of inner space

Table 2 Locations of the Sacred

Below is Table 3 that groups the four types of sacred by dividing them to two primary categories according to Post, Nel, and van Beek, (2014: 2-4).

<u>Types of sacred</u>	
Personal sacred	Natural dimension
Civic sacred	
Religious sacred	Supernatural dimension
Spiritual sacred	

Table 3 Types of sacred and categories

Dos and Don'ts at the Sacred space

In his PhD titled *Sacred Spaces and Sacred Places*, Simmins (2011: 41-44) states that: depending on one's belief system, there are specific ways in which one is expected to behave. Some of these dos and don'ts are similar, while others differ vastly. For example, in Buddhism, the Buddhists need to remove their shoes from their feet when entering a sacred space. They are also not permitted to eat fish or meat, and lastly, they do not have to feel obliged to bow to the shrine. On the other hand, Hindus also must remove the shoes from their feet as they are not permitted to enter the inner sanctum with them, and they are not allowed to wear short pants or dresses and leather.

In the Islamic Mosque, Muslims are not allowed to raise their voices, and they need to sit on the floor and take off their shoes. In the Jewish Synagogues, Jews are not allowed to take photos or use their mobile phones. They should not bring food into the

Synagogues, married women need to cover their heads, and the sitting arrangement is divided - men on one side, and women on the other. Christians need to maintain silence at the sacred place; men need to take off their headgear as a sign of respect, and the use of the camera must be discreet (Simmins, 2011: 41-44).

Looking at how society conducts their lifestyles, one would ask if it is possible for people today to experience this same awe at the sacred space deemed by tradition to be holy. One would also ask if these spaces are associated with the human presence or if nature can speak to us unmediated by human intervention (Simmins, 2011: 43).

African Traditional Religions (ATR) and the Catholic Church

One cannot talk about sacred spaces without talking about African Traditional Religions (ATR). The believers of ATR think and experience African forefathers and mothers from previous generations. As much as there are other religions in Africa, ATR is found in all the indigenous groups, especially those who still live according to their traditional ways. However, there is no universal route to ATR, as there are different similarities between Africa's traditional beliefs. There is, however, no founder of the ATR as it has evolved through different centuries in Africa. There is also no sacred book or scripture; as a result, it is not documented. Instead, it is written in the people's hearts, history, and experiences and is passed through word of mouth (Bonsu, 2016: 112).

ATR is often described as animism, paganism, and fetishism. For this reason, since the evangelisation in Africa, ATR has not been in the good books of the Catholic Church and other Christian denominations (Sourou, 2014: 142). However, there have not been accusations of ATR being deceptive or false. African Traditional Religions

have five essential parts: (a) *beliefs*: in God, spirits, witchcraft, or magic; (b) *practices, ceremonies, and festivals*, which include praying, sacrifices, offerings, rituals; (c) *religious objects and places*, such as Holy places, shrines, mountains, caves; (d) *values and morals*: in truth, justice, love, respect; (e) *religious officials*, being priests, rainmakers, ritual elders.

These five essential parts of ATR are related to some in Christianity, especially Catholicism, because we believe in God, have ceremonies which we call Feasts, visit holy places like the ones documented in this research and many others such as the pilgrimage to Medjugorje and the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes. Christians have sets of values and morals that are guided by the ten commandments as set out in the bible and lastly, we have religious officials. The main point in ATR is the belief and worship of ancestors. It is these ancestors who act as mediators between humans and the Supreme Being. The same happens to us Catholics who believe the Virgin Mary, the Saints, Angels and Jesus are intercessors between us human beings and the God. Where ancestors dwell differs. Some are in caves, waters, or trees. Agreed upon ways to communicate with ancestors are through sacrifices using meat, the blood of an animal, and homemade beer (Bonsu, 2016: 114-117). In the history of religion, a sacrifice is done and interpreted in different ways depending upon the purpose of the ritual performed. For example, when the beer is poured on the ground, Africans communicate with their ancestors asking for blessings, good fortune, or sometimes showing gratitude. Practitioners of ATR beliefs among African groupings remain loyal to their ancestors, and their loyalty is expressed through their rituals. Africans are notoriously religious; they perform their beliefs by slaughtering animals, pouring traditional beer on the ground, or dancing (Buitendag and Manganyi, 2013: 1-7).

The question is: how do ATR and Christianity integrate? ATR is accommodated mostly in African Initiated Churches (AIC). Congregants in AIC remain Christian without losing their African identity, e.g., the Zion Christian Church (ZCC). ZCC, founded by Engenas Lekganyane after receiving a revelation from God, is based in South Africa and is one of the largest AIC with millions of congregations spread across many Africa countries and its headquarters are in Limpopo. What integrates it ATR and Christianity in this example: As much as it is Christian, it practises indigenous African music rhythm and dance as part of its worship. For instance, changing the rhythm of Western hymns into African rhythm and singing with the inclusion of hands clapping and singing in spiritual trance. Annually, millions of their congregations go on a pilgrimage during Easter weekend in Moria (also known as the Zion City) in Limpopo, South Africa. Congregants of the ZCC always wear the small, distinctive green felt and metal ZCC star badge. African Traditional Religions still exercise a strong influence over Africans, who are naturally religious (Buitendag and Manganyi, 2013: 1-7).

What distinguishes Africans from other races is the rituals they perform. These rituals include, among others: the cult of death, passage to adulthood and relations with the spirits. Africans are also rooted in their dances, music, and prayers. The Catholic Church does not reject anything that is true and holy to the ATR; instead, the Church acknowledges the integration of these African dances and music in the Church, especially during the celebration of holy mass where Catholics would beat the drums, use musical instruments and dance. This gave birth to a blossoming of choirs in the Catholic Church (Sourou, 2014: 147). The church understood better the words of St Augustine that *“he who sings prays twice.”*

“The Catholic Church more than realised that to want to separate the African man from his religious universe, from his religious roots was to replant a tree without its roots”

(Sourou, 2014: 147). This is because the African was born, lived, grew, and died in a religious cosmos and the handover of this to Christ was particularly delicate. Pope John Paul II stated that the "*adherents of African traditional religion should therefore be treated with great respect and esteem, and all inaccurate and disrespectful language should be avoided*" (Sourou, 2014: 147). It is important for African Christians to distinguish what is good in their spiritual roots and to make peace with them. Pope John Paul II further added that "*it was only in this way that faith could become culture and touch all the sectors of life in Africa, since a faith that does not become culture is not fully accepted, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived*" (Sourou, 2014: 148).

The relationship between the ATR and the Catholic Church has evolved significantly from when the missionaries first settled in Africa. It is through dialogues, research and inculturation that unity in Christianity and ATR can be achieved. Christians, especially Catholics, would benefit from this unity, especially after years of being resistant to it. To enrich the spirituality of this continent, African Christians can and must be African and Christian. This means we should continue going to our sacred places, believing in divinity, and celebrating our ceremonies.

3.4 Pilgrimages

Defining the term pilgrimage

It is no longer easy to answer what pilgrimage is as opposed to in the past, and this is because there is no universally accepted definition of the term pilgrimage. This section is dedicated to unpacking the pilgrimage phenomenon. It is evident that depending on one's field of study; one's definition differs, however, there will be some similarities in

definitions. These similarities will assist me in formulating a working definition that will be relevant to my study.

Stoddard (1997: 42) agrees with Greenia (2014:8) that it is not surprising that there is no universally accepted definition of pilgrimage due to its complexity. Sykes (1982: 776) defines pilgrimage as a journey to a sacred place as an act of religious devotion. Although this is a dictionary definition, it is evident that it is defined from a religious perspective. According to Brandon (1970: 501), pilgrimage involves three main aspects being a sacred place, the reason for the attraction of individuals to that specific sacred place, and the reason behind embarking on that particular journey, be it for the material benefit or spiritual reasons. From the above definitions of pilgrimage, the one common feature despite the field of study is that it is a journey to a sacred space.

On the other hand, Roos (2006: 5-7) emphasises the importance of finding a pilgrimage definition that is not based on a particular faith or one that is not in contradiction with the faith-based pilgrimages. She further mentions that pilgrimage involves journeying in many different ways, be it physical motion or those that are not. Similarly, to the last part of Roos' belief in pilgrimage, Edith Turner specifically calls pilgrimage a kinetic ritual. She believes pilgrimages involve physical motion (Turner & Turner, 1978: xiii). This physical motion may be internal or external. Internal movement could be in a form of spiritual upliftment while external movement is traveling from one place to the other.

It is no doubt that pilgrimage is one popular concept in both society and religion. Pilgrimage is also featured in all religions in the world, particularly the most common five religions. The religions have high percentages of adherents namely: Islamism (22.5%), Christianity (32.8%), Buddhism (7.2%), Hinduism (13.8%), and Judaism

(0.2%) (Collins-Kreiner, 2009: 437). Pilgrimage is defined as *"a journey resulting from religious causes, externally to a holy site, and internally for spiritual purposes and internal understanding"* (Barber, 1993: 1). Equally, Stoddard's defines pilgrimage as *"an event consisting of longer than local journeys by numerous persons to a sacred place as an act of spiritual devotion"* (Stoddard, 1997: 49). Thus, according to Barber (1993:1) and Stoddard (1997:49), pilgrimage is a sacred journey. My definition of what I thought pilgrimage is when I started this study is closer to this definition, but the question remains; is that all there is to it?

Eade and Albera (2016:1) disagree with Barber (1993: 1) and Stoddard (1997: 49), and instead, they emphasise that pilgrimage is associated with religious beliefs and non-religious beliefs, such as visiting natural heritage sites, including Mount Kailash Kora in China and Rila in Bulgaria. This conception brings up a conversation about secular pilgrimage.

The term secular pilgrimage is used often; however, there are many internal contradictions, which are rarely solved or explained in the study of pilgrimages (Margry, 2018: 15). Hyde and Harman (2011: 33) believe that more research needs to be conducted pertaining to the meaning of tourists' travel to understand their motivations and experiences. They agree that secular pilgrimage is essential, although it is under-researched in the tourism industry. Hyde and Harman (2011: 33) conclude by saying that in religious pilgrimages, motives are well documented and clearly stated, whereas little is known of the motives for secular pilgrimage.

Nthoi (2006: 12), on the other hand, brings in a very different perspective into the definition of pilgrimage. According to him, pilgrimage can be defined as looking into the services and goods offered at a sacred place and what initially attracts pilgrims to

this place. He further states that ideas people have when they visit such places ultimately make them what they are. Nthoi's (2006:12) definition of pilgrimage agrees with what Hyde and Harman (2011:33) said regarding tourists' motives and experiences in a secular pilgrimage that the motives are not well documented as opposed to religious pilgrimages.

On the other side of things, Turner and Turner (1978:14) believe that pilgrimage is rooted in the fact that it involves a journey from one place to the other and returns as transformed beings. This journey is from home to the sacred place, and often they do not return home as they were when they left. This change could be both spiritual and physical or either of the two.

To complete this study, my working definition of pilgrimage draws on: that of Turner and Turner (1978: 14) and Nthoi (2006:12). I define pilgrimage as a journey from one place (home) to another (sacred place) where pilgrims return as transformed beings. There are goods and services offered to pilgrims at these sacred places, which attracts them to this sacred place.

Elements and motives for going on a pilgrimage

My formulation of the above definition is primarily influenced by the four elements and reasons one considers when talking about pilgrimage: person, text, movement, and place. For pilgrimages to occur, there need to be *persons* undertaking this journey; these persons are called pilgrims. Despite their reasons for going on a pilgrimage, anyone who visits a pilgrimage site is a pilgrim (Stoddard, 1997: 46). In contrast, du Plooy (2016: 135) underlines that there is no consensus about what constitutes a pilgrim. She further explains this by saying that although secular journeying may not

be religious, it could be sacred, transformational, and meaningful. It is for this reason that it is considered a pilgrimage.

Texts may be written or told. These texts assist pilgrims in guiding what happens at a sacred space or providing direction on how to get to that place (Eade and Sallnow, 1991: 9). The unwritten texts include communication from invisible powers whom it is believed provide blessings. These invisible powers are ancestors, supernatural powers, or the divine, and it is crucial to have borders between the seen and the unseen realms of reality (Hellman, 2019: 56). In the context of this study, it is the unwritten texts that take precedence. This is seen in how my pilgrims connect with God, the Virgin Mary, and the angels when they are at these sacred places. The unwritten texts also include oral tradition where information is shared through word of mouth from one generation to the other.

The third element of pilgrimage is *movement*. This is the movement of persons from one place to the other. However, there is a debate on the minimum distance required for the movement to be termed as one element of pilgrimage. Stoddard (1997: 43) believes that if all movements to sacred spaces, regardless of how short they are, are elements of pilgrimages, then one does not need to worry about the distance travelled. This movement could also be internal and not necessarily physical. Internal movement can be in the form of meditation or spiritual upliftment. The unfortunate part about internal movement is that it cannot be seen with our naked eyes, it is rather felt.

It is pretty evident that reasons for embarking on a pilgrimage differ from person to person. Although they may visit the same sacred place, their reasons are likely to vary. A pilgrimage needs to be to a specific *place*, site, or location (du Plooy, 2016: 133). This place is usually regarded as sacred. However, Stoddard (1997: 46) emphasises

the difficulty in saying which place is sacred and which one is not. This is because there is no inherent characteristic at a place or site that reveals its divine attributes.

Although there may be one purpose for the entire group to embark on a pilgrimage, there is a high possibility that individually, pilgrims have their own personal reasons for embarking on that particular pilgrimage. Collins-Kreiner (2009: 439) believes that pilgrims undertake pilgrimages to sacred spaces to execute essential religious duties, to be religiously worthy, to make vows, or to improve their chances of salvation. Other reasons include inner peace, spiritual fulfilment, faith exploration, personal fulfilment, religious participation, and congregational togetherness. Collins-Kreiner's (2009:439) point of reference is sacred even though his work and speciality is from a Geography perspective. It is quite interesting to learn that scholars do not only use their field of study when writing about pilgrimages. Could there be other scholars who are using this approach except him? We will learn more about that as the study unfolds.

According to du Plooy (2016: 133-134), reasons for embarking on a pilgrimage include healing and performing rituals, sight-seeing, religious purposes, or sometimes it is just obligatory. Roos (2006: 5-7) also emphasises the healing part. She argues it is not only the physical healing that makes people visit pilgrimage sites but also spiritual healing which makes participants whole again. Roos (2006:5-7) further argues that going on a pilgrimage may also be a calling for some people. That is when one would say, "*something made me go*" or "*I felt I had no choice*" (Roos: 2006: 5-7). Nthoi (2006: 84) further emphasises that by stating, "*Pilgrims undertake pilgrimage because there is a reason to seek communion with the pilgrimage deity*" (Nthoi, 2006: 84). This calling phenomenon to pilgrimages is often challenging to explain to the next person because it is very personal and only felt by that particular person.

Stoddard (1997: 56) gives some of the reasons people take religious pilgrimages. These reasons include: (a) requesting a favour, (b) to offer gratitude, (c) to fulfil a vow, (d) to express penitence, (e) to meet an obligation, (f) to gain merit and salvation.

Nthoi (2006: 84-85) further agrees with Stoddard (1997:56). However, he divides these motivations into two: spiritual motivations and materialistic motivations. According to Nthoi (2006: 84-85), spiritual motivations include finding salvation, seeking penance, good health and requesting strength. Materialistic motivations include the desire for wealth and power. As stated above that according to Nthoi (2006:85), reasons for embarking on pilgrimages may either be for spiritual or materialistic purposes. This brings into discussion the difference between pilgrimage and tourism, which comes down to one's reasons for undertaking that journey. The same journey for one person may be a pilgrimage, while for another, it may be tourism (Collins-Kreiner, 2009: 441).

The term pilgrimage is often used in a spiritual context to describe a journey to either a shrine or a sacred place. In contrast to that, tourism is associated with a journey one generally takes for pleasure; however, tourists can still journey for spiritual reasons (Collins-Kreiner, 2009: 441).

Nicolaidis (2016: 14) states that religion and tourism are complementary concepts and are closely related. However, Eade and Albera (2016: 12) bring into conversation the concept of religious tourism. They allude that religious tourism can be better understood as new practices that transform modern-day religion, such as pilgrimages to Jerusalem or the Vatican for Christians and the Hajj to Mecca for Muslims. Religious tourism will be discussed further in the formal and popular pilgrimage section.

What makes a pilgrimage a pilgrimage, and how is it classified?

Du Plooy (2016), Stoddard (1997) and the Turners (1978) emphasise the importance of the characteristics of pilgrimage. The previous section discussed the motives and elements of pilgrimage. There are similarities between the motives, elements, characteristics, and classifications of pilgrimages.

The first characteristic of pilgrimage is *place*. This is similar to one of the elements of pilgrimage which were discussed in the previous section. According to du Plooy (2016:147), a pilgrimage journey must be to a site, place, or space. However, the sacrality of this place becomes difficult to identify because there is no inherent characteristic at a place or site which makes it divine (Stoddard: 1997: 46). Secondly, there should be a *purpose* or mission for undertaking that particular journey. It is clear that everyone has a purpose when journeying, although the reasons might differ from person to person, as already stated in the motives sections.

Thirdly, it should be a *lengthy* and challenging journey. Du Plooy (2016: 147) agrees with the Turners (1978: xiii) that a pilgrimage centre needs to be out there and to an unfamiliar place. However, the pilgrimage can be spiritually lengthy and difficult especially when a pilgrim has so much inner work to do. Similarly, it can also be difficult even if it is to a familiar place. Lastly, it should be *transformative*. Once again, du Plooy (2016:147) agrees with the Turners (1978: 14) that pilgrimage is a transformative process where one returns as a changed being.

Likewise, Stoddard (1997, 57) has classified pilgrimages into seven categories that directly speak to the elements and characteristics. For example, pilgrims are often obligated to travel a long distance. The first classification is the *length of the journey*, be it a local, national, or international journey. The second classification is the

frequency of the pilgrimage event, whether it occurs annually, seasonally, or rarely. The third one revolves around the *pilgrimage route* taken, and the fourth one is the *pilgrimage centre's location*. This location is usually not within where pilgrims reside. The fifth one is the *importance of pilgrimage*. Be it in a group or individually, pilgrims always have a motive for journeying, which makes their pilgrimage important. The sixth is the *motivation of pilgrims*. Pilgrims need to be motivated to be part of the pilgrimage and not feel forced. Lastly, Stoddard (1997: 57) talks about the *characteristics of the pilgrims*. Depending on the pilgrimage, there are often set standards or rules that pilgrims need to abide by before journeying, including the dress code. In addition, codes of conduct apply during the journey, and certain pilgrims may need to comply with rules upon their return.

Seven characteristics of pilgrimages

According to Greenia (2014: 18-23), there are seven complementary aspects to consider when talking about pilgrimages. The first one is about the *belief in the transcendent*. This implies that there is a greater or higher power than the individual themselves and his or her community. This belief in a higher power is one of the pillars of both the ATR and Christianity. The second aspect has to do with the *engines of memory*. "*Bands of travellers find much of their essential camaraderie in the assurance that they will agree on fundamental principles and beliefs, a moral convergence which produces an unaccustomed tranquillity and trust among travellers who are otherwise strangers*" (Greenia 2014: 20).

The third aspect revolves around the *ability to resist time itself*. This is when pilgrims choose to live temporarily beyond time by following the pilgrimage programme and not

even being aware of time. It usually happens sub-consciously where pilgrims are so immersed in the pilgrimage that at point, not even time matters. The fourth aspect is the *surrender of self*. Pilgrimage requires one to surrender individualism in order to participate as a pilgrim actively. The spirit of oneness is what guides us. One's social status, profession, gender, etc., does not matter.

The fifth aspect revolves around *performance without pretence*. One needs to put aside their social roles when they embark on a pilgrimage as they have boundaries on how one should dress, speak, or interact with others. These social roles include being a mother, a nurse, a nun, etc. The sixth aspect is *body-centred enterprise*. "*The physical gesture writ large and choreographed on a finite terrain that emulates the cosmos*" (Greenia 2014: 22). Finally, the seventh aspect is *the incompleteness of the pilgrimages*. Pilgrims are never satisfied and often feel like they have not exhausted their experience; they feel like they can still do more.

Formal and Popular pilgrimage

There are several ways in which types of pilgrimages are classified. For example, Collins-Kreiner (2009: 439), classifies them into two types, namely: the formal and the popular pilgrimage. Margry (2018: 30) and du Plooy (2016: 136-137) classified them as secular and religious. On the other hand, Roos (2006: 82) identifies the types of pilgrimage as pilgrimage of veneration, pilgrimage of penitential, pilgrimage of barter and pilgrimage of healing. For the purpose of this study, I use the classifications of Collins-Kreiner (2009), Margry (2018) and du Plooy (2006) interchangeably where formal and religious pilgrimages are to those to centres where the emphasis is put on religious activities, while popular and secular pilgrimages are not too specific religious sites.

Du Plooy (2016: 135-139) classifies pilgrimages into two: religious and secular pilgrimages. Terminologies used by her and Collins- Kreiner (2009: 439) are different; however, the meanings and explanations remain the same. Du Plooy (2016: 135-139) states that although secular pilgrimage may not be religious, it could be sacred. It is for this reason that secular pilgrimages can be seen as non-confessional pilgrimages. She emphasises that religious pilgrimages are specifically for and to religious destinations. She further makes an example of the pilgrimage to Lourdes in France. This type of journeying is taken at a certain period of time and usually by a group of people.

In the formal and religious pilgrimages, the rituals performed in those centres are formal and, as such, there are protocols observed when performed. More often than not, this type of pilgrimage's primary purpose is to improve the chances of salvation and gain religious merit. The popular and secular pilgrimage on the other hand is the opposite of formal pilgrimages. These types of pilgrimages are non-religious and non-denominational.

The travel and tourism sector has been dominant in benefitting from pilgrimage destinations globally. These are not just those organised by religious establishments, such as Mecca, Amritsar, Varanasi, and Lourdes. There are also places associated with different cults usually categorised as new age, alternative or spiritual. At times, some are classed as death and suffering journeys, such as military cemeteries in Flanders and Gallipoli or the death camps in Poland and with celebrities, such as Elvis Presley and Jim Morrison. The relationship between tourism and pilgrimage has resulted in the development of new religious and non-religious sites. It also created new routes and the development of traditional routes such as the Camino to Santiago de Compostela (Eade, 2020: 1-2).

Eade and Albera (2016: 12) talk about the concept of religious tourism, which is the visits to important religious places. Pilgrims travel to these places to meet both their spiritual and religious needs. The very most common form of religious tourism includes visits to religious shrines such as to The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, Kumano shrine in Japan, Holy Hill - Basilica and National shrine of Mary in the United States, etc. (Rot, Mikinac, and Bogdan, 2014: 81). The question that remains unanswered then becomes, is religious tourism a form of pilgrimage, or is pilgrimage a form of religious tourism? The answer is that pilgrimage is an umbrella term used to define travelling to sacred places for varied reasons; as a result, religious tourism is a form of pilgrimage.

3.5 Conclusion

The concept of pilgrimage was discussed, looking into the elements, classification, types of pilgrimage and what Victor Turner says about liminality and communitas. Its definition is very much contested; hence I formulated one that is accommodating to the contents of my research study. The definition which I formulated has similarities with definitions from other scholars. Most importantly, this definition has the important components of pilgrimage being transformation, place, movement, and person.

The Virgin Mary plays a crucial role in religious tourism. However, there is not much written about Marian Shrines in Southern Africa, which makes this study significant the way it is. It is essential that pilgrims respect and honour the sacred spaces.

Chapter 4: Through an eye of a pilgrim and a researcher

4.1 Introduction

After collecting data from my participants through informal conversations, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation, I realised I had answered all my research aims and objectives. When I conducted my interviews, the questions I asked were also formulated in a way that does not deviate from my primary purpose for conducting this study: to understand why pilgrims journey to these Marian Shrines. These interviews spoke directly to the material I had in the literature review and research process.

The first aim was to explore the concept of pilgrimages and how they are undertaken. This was achieved in the literature review where I discussed pilgrimage as a phenomenon and further analysed the elements of pilgrimage, the characteristics, and the classification of pilgrimages. The second aim was to document the experiences of pilgrims who undertake pilgrimages to Marian Shrines. These experiences were gathered through interviews, informal conversations, observation, and participant observation. Lastly, these experiences were analysed and interpreted using different themes that I formulated.

The third aim was to discover the reasons for embarking on pilgrimage journeys to Marian Shrines. This was done in a two-fold manner: firstly, pilgrimage studies literature was reviewed in order to discover why pilgrims in general journey to sacred spaces, and this was completed using academic books, journals, and articles. The second part in discovering why pilgrims journey to Marian Shrines was achieved primarily through the conversations I had with my research participants as part of

formal and informal interviews. In these conversations, I wanted to understand why they journey to these specific Marian Shrines.

The fourth and last aim of this study was to explore the history of these Marian Shrines. This was achieved through the section on Marian Shrines in the literature. Here I discussed the different Marian shrines, their formation/apparition and the pilgrimages taken to these shrines. The information about the three shrines was obtained from the literature as well as from research participants.

In my previous chapters, I defined pilgrimage as a journey from one place (home) to another (sacred place) where pilgrims return as transformed beings. There are goods and services offered to pilgrims at these sacred places, which often attract them to these sacred places. Going on a pilgrimage is different from waking up and going to Church every Sunday because it usually requires intense preparation. Instead, pilgrims go to an identified sacred space, which is often a distant place. From the observations and conversations, one can conclude that this definition speaks directly to my research participants. They leave their everyday life to get to the sacred space for a specific reason and return feeling different, especially spiritually. Speaking of going to a faraway place and spiritual transformation, Edith Turner in Turner and Turner (1978: xiii) calls pilgrimage a kinetic ritual. This simply means it involves movement, be it physical, emotional, spiritual, or otherwise, which is equally a transformation of a pilgrim.

The analysis and interpretation of the data collection are discussed in the next sections of this chapter using different themes. Looking at the nature of my study, analysing my data and interpreting it through themes is the best way to present my data to the reader to make it understandable. These themes were identified looking at the data which

was collected and the data in the literature review. The following sections discuss the data through my eye as a pilgrim and as a researcher.

4.2 Physical versus Radio Pilgrimage: Where is the temple?

Due to the global Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 – 2021, border posts between Lesotho and South Africa were often closed during the more severe levels of lockdown, and there were no church gatherings during such times. As a result, the Archdiocese of Maseru had a radio pilgrimage to Ngome Marian shrine through Radio Maria Lesotho on 18th July 2020 from 8:00-20:00. Radio Maria is a Catholic parish radio station founded in 1983. Listeners across Africa and even beyond tune in. Radio Maria Lesotho is one of the many Radio Maria stations, and it broadcasts in Sesotho. For this reason, Basotho feel like they are in the Church even during these challenging times of Covid-19 as they have daily Mass and different prayers. Over and above everything, they get to learn about the functionality of the Church through various programmes.

Radio Maria Lesotho celebrates Mass every morning at 10:00, an event I seldom missed. On one good morning, before the Mass began, the radio presenter announced that there will be a pilgrimage to Ngome via Radio Maria, and she read all the details pertaining to the pilgrimage. I heard this announcement exactly two weeks before the actual day of the pilgrimage. That was a eureka moment for me as I quickly jumped and told my mother about it. I explained to her why I am so excited and how this pilgrimage could and would benefit my study. I decided that I would be part of this pilgrimage both as a researcher and as a pilgrim. It was almost a year since I last

journeyed to Ngome. She then said she would like to join the pilgrimage because she has never been on one before.

I could not believe my ears when she said she would like to participate in this pilgrimage. This is because my mother is Catholic; however, she does not go to Church. She always complains about the unfavourable weather whenever I asked that we go to Church together. Either it was too hot or too cold for her. Equally, she has never been to Ngome before, but to my surprise, she wanted to journey with me on this day. In my observation, my mother's reaction speaks to what Roos (2006: 7) said about going on a pilgrimage that it is more of a calling; hence one would say, "*something made me go*". Knowing her as someone who always has excuses not to go to Church or attend any pilgrim, something definitely made her attend this pilgrimage. It could have been the fact that she wanted to support me, or there may have been a spiritual reason for her to attend this radio pilgrim.

In our pre-liminal stage, my mother and I both agreed to prepare for this pilgrimage by praying the Sacred Heart of Jesus Novena and placing our intentions. We believe it is through the Sacred Heart of Jesus that our intentions and prayers will come true. Most people do the St Jude Novena because he is a patron saint for desperate cases and lost causes. It was during this pre-liminal stage that we prepared for the journey we were about to embark on. We entered a separation stage, and this was seen in our Novena prayer. We did the Novena together every night at 20:00, nine days leading up to the radio pilgrimage. As the number 9 symbolises perfection and completion, so is the number of days to pray a Novena.

Come the day of the pilgrimage; we were mentally and spiritually ready for this journeying. This was seen in how we were preparing ourselves that morning. We woke

up earlier that Saturday to clean the house and prepare breakfast. We agreed to set up an altar in her bedroom to avoid disturbances from other family members who would not join us. We covered her headboard with a white cloth and placed two candles on it together with the bible, the prayer book, and my sodality book. Between the candles, we placed a white plastic cross and two rosaries next to it. The one Rosary was snow-white while the other was sky blue. My mother was equally excited about this pilgrimage just as I was, and we both did not know what to expect, mainly because she had never attended a pilgrimage before, and I had never attended a radio pilgrimage before. As Beckstead (2010: 387) said, when one journeys on a pilgrimage, the journey is oriented towards an unknown future.

In the studio, there was a group of fewer than 15 pilgrims gathered. These pilgrims are part of the Maseru Archdiocese committee that organises the Ngome pilgrimage. They were people from various sodalities within the Church, such as the Immaculate Conception of Mary, St Anne, and Priests. They were leading this pilgrimage during different sections according to the programme. The pilgrims who were listening to this pilgrimage and journeying spiritually from their homes were asked to have their Rosary, bible, and any other Catholic book of their choice. The pilgrimage was not a physical one, rather a spiritual one via radio Maria. Two to three people (pilgrims) at a time were leading the pilgrimage to guide the listener-pilgrims at home.

As the people in the studio were leading, the pilgrims had to visualise and spiritualise everything as it happened. We visualised our arrival at the Church carrying our bags, and everyone was excited about going on this pilgrimage. Initially, pilgrims were asked to dress in their Sesotho attire (*Seshweshwe*, *Seanamarena*, *Mokorotlo*) as it was the theme for the day. *Seshweshwe* is a printed, dyed cotton fabric used in Southern Africa, particularly in Lesotho, to design traditional dresses and formal shirts.

Seanamarena is a sought-after Basotho blanket. The word Seanamarena means "to swear by the Chiefs'." Seanamarena has a collection of different famous "poone" (maize) design with its corncob motif.

In the Basotho culture, the corncob is a symbol of fertility and wealth. Mokorotlo is a traditional sweet-grass woven Basotho hat that appears on the Lesotho national flag and Lesotho license plates. The design of this traditional hat is believed to be inspired by the conical mountain called Mount Qiloane. Seanamarena, Mokorotlo and Seshweshwe are worn on special Basotho celebrations such as weddings, traditional feasts, or distinctive church gatherings.

Figure 4 below shows Seithati wearing her Basotho blanket and a Basotho hat.

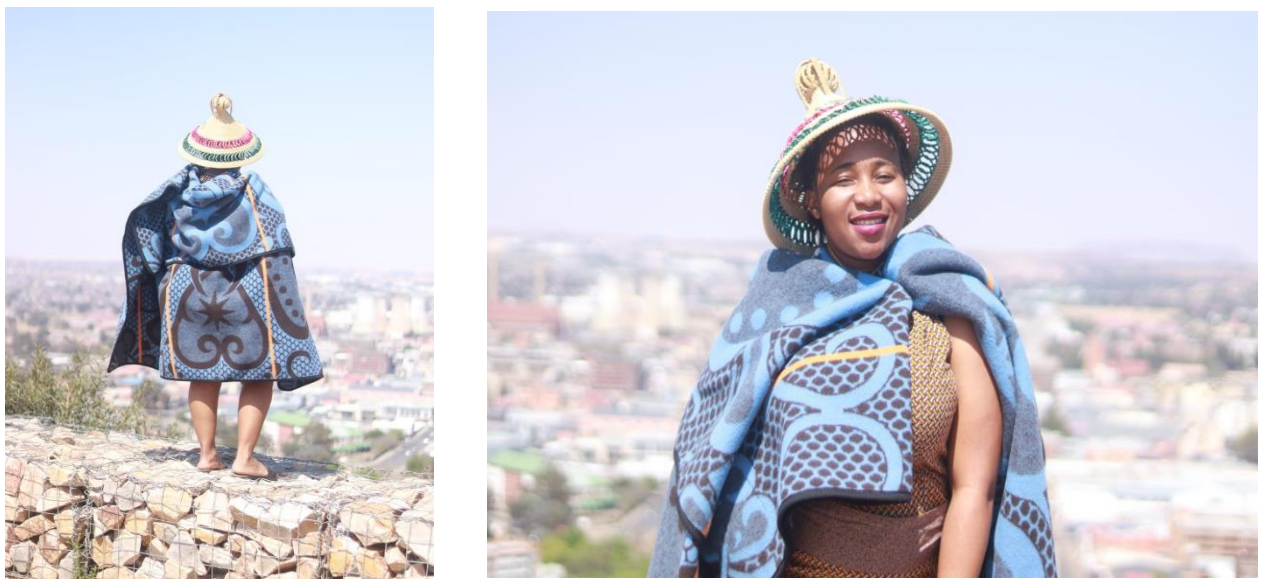


Figure 4 Seithati wrapped in her Seanamarena and Mokorotlo

My mother and I were just dressed in our comfortable clothes, not necessarily the Sesotho attire. My traditional attire was in Bloemfontein because that is where I reside on a full-time basis. My mother wore her casual clothes because in between the breaks of the pilgrimage, she went to take care of her crops and feed her chickens. As much

as she was entirely devoted to this pilgrimage, she still had to take care of some of her daily activities. She has a unique way in which she waters her crops and feeds her chickens. As a result, she prefers doing it herself. The reason for this is because she breeds and sells broiler chickens, so she takes care of them in a particular manner.

Is it really possible to leave the everyday life and enter into the sacred? Can a pilgrim just for that day not do anything that is part of their everyday life and only focus on the journeying? I do not think so. Spiritually and mentally, yes, one can condition themselves that they are journeying however, there are other things that exist in an everyday life that still need to take place like quenching my thirst, eating, my mother watering her crops, feeding her chickens and something as simple as breathing. The everyday life still needs to continue besides one going on a pilgrimage.

Back to the studio, visually, we (pilgrims) arrived at the Church, the transport arrived, and we got in the minibuses. Just before we drove off, we prayed for a safe pilgrimage. Stoddard (1997: 46) and du Plooy (2016: 135) talk about persons being an element of pilgrimage. Here we see people (pilgrims) journeying visually to Ngome. There is also movement that comes into conversation. The only difference is that this movement is not physical however, it is spiritual. As Stoddard (1997: 43) had alluded, movement can also be internal and not necessarily physical.

We then drove off and started singing Marian hymns. When we got to the border post, we got out to get our passports stamped, and we continued journeying. Along the way, we were praying the Rosary with all its five decades and four mysteries and singing the Marian hymns. One mystery of the Rosary takes about 20-30 minutes. My mother was holding the snow-white Rosary sitting on the edge of her bed with a pillow supporting her back. In contrast, I held the blue Rosary and was kneeling. The Rosary

prayer is exceedingly long, mainly because we prayed all the four mysteries, so she cannot kneel for an extremely long time since she is in her early sixties.

We prayed out loud together with the pilgrims in the studio. During this time, both her and I were concentrating on the beads of the Rosary and praying. When it comes to singing the hymns, I had to assist my mother in locating them in the hymn book while I sang them from my heart. As I am in the Children of Mary sodality, it is normal for me to sing the hymns from the heart. While we sang, we both stood up and danced to the tune of the Marian hymns. This dancing talks to what Edith Turner in Turner and Turner (1978: xiii) call a kinetic ritual. We were actively using our energy.

When the hymns got to the chorus that said "*Laudate Mariam*," which translates "*we praise Mary*," we both raised up our arms and swung them side-ways. We were smiling as we sang *Laudate Mariam*; it was as if the Virgin Mary is with us, and we can see her in the room. In between the singing and praying, the vehicle would stop at different towns for a comfort break. Taking a comfort break is one of the activities that happen in our everyday lives, so it is not possible to entirely leave our everyday lives.

During these breaks, the radio presenter would ask the pilgrims to call and say how they feel about the pilgrimage. Most pilgrims called to say they have never physically been to Ngome; however, they are excited about this pilgrimage. In the words of one caller, she said, "*ke thabile hona hoo ke sa tsebeng ke iketseng*", which means "*I am overjoyed*." The other one called and said "*Re ditabarnakele*" meaning "*we are the tabernacles*." She was using the words of the Virgin Mary, who said we should address her as the Tabernacle of the Most High.

When Stoddard (1997: 57) classifies pilgrimage, he says there should be a route taken. When going to Ngome, we must first stop by Inkamana. We then got to

Inkamana. Physically, it takes about 6 hours to get to Inkamana; however, spiritually, we got there in less than 3 hours. Inkamana is a place where Sister Renolda lived when the Virgin Mother visited her in a series of apparitions. We got out of the vehicle and went to greet the Virgin Mary at her statue. Figure 4 below shows a Marian shrine in Inkamana. It is customary to go to the shrine and greet the Virgin Mary using different prayers.



Figure 5 Virgin Mary in Inkamana

We did the Hail Mary prayer and the Lord's Prayer.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

We then proceeded to the Church, where we celebrated the Holy Mass. My mother was still seated on her bed by this time, and I was sitting on the chair. We both celebrated the Holy Mass in silence because we know and understand its significance.

When the Mass ended, the programme director explained to us that the next phase is where pilgrims will go into the chapel to see the tomb of Jesus. I explained to my mother what the tomb of Jesus looked like in the chapel. I even showed her some pictures that I had taken previously when I went on this pilgrimage.

In this chapel, we each had to make our individual prayers reflecting on the pain felt by Jesus when He died for our sins on the cross. These individual prayers were done by touching the body of Jesus and bowing down to it while praying. Similarly, it is during this time that some pilgrims become emotional and end up crying while praying. At this point, seeing how emotional people get when they pray and touch the body of Jesus, it is evident that this is a formal/religious pilgrimage.

Collins-Kreiner (200: 439) and du Plooy (2009: 137) a formal/religious pilgrimage as one where emphasis is put on religious activities. The act of praying to the body of Jesus is religious to us Catholics and to the Christian population at large. In the same breath, reasons for this pilgrimage are also evident. They range from religious participation, spiritual fulfilment, finding salvation, seeking penance, offering gratitude, and fulfilling a vow.

Figure 5 below shows Portia touching the body of Jesus on his feet while praying. Permission was granted from Portia to use this picture in this research.



Figure 6 The tomb of Jesus in Inkamana

By this time, the mood was that of adoration both in the studio and at home. The religious hymns that were being played were slow and harmonious, which automatically tuned you as a pilgrim into silence. Personally, I was reflecting on my life and praying for inner healing. My eyes were closed, and I could see myself enter the chapel, kneel down beside the tomb, and pray. My mother never shared with me what she was reflecting on, and I never asked either, because this was quite personal. She, however, shared with me that this was an intense experience for her and that she left all her burdens on the tomb. A hymn played at the end of this session, then we were told that we are going back into the vehicle, and all roads lead to Ngome as Inkamana is the first stop for pilgrims who are journeying to Ngome.

The one difference I spotted as someone who has physically been to Ngome more than once was that after the session in the tomb, pilgrims were not taken to the graveyard where Sister Renolda was buried. In the physical pilgrimage, we went to her grave. Walking to sister Renolda's grave is a 15-20 minutes' walk still in Inkamana,

and this walk is done reciting the Rosary prayers. When we get to the grave, a brief history is given about who Sister Renolda is and her encounters with the Virgin Mary. This history was given by one of the members of the Friends of Ngome movement who was also a fellow pilgrim with us. Eade and Sallnow (1991:9) talk about texts as an element of pilgrimage. They indicate that these texts may be written or told and here we see the Friends of Ngome giving us pilgrims the history of Sister Renolda and her encounters with the Virgin Mary. These are the told texts which Eade and Sallnow (1991:9) were referring to.

Sister Renolda's grave has different rosaries draped over the simple cross headstone because pilgrims would go and leave their rosaries there as a gift to Sister Renolda. Firstly, there was a prayer we did praying for Ngome to be recognised by the Vatican as an International shrine and secondly, for Sister Renolda to be made a Saint. There are different procedures and criteria that need to be followed for a shrine to be recognised by the Vatican. The procedures and criteria were discussed on page 58 of this research paper. After the prayers, pilgrims would individually touch the gravestone and have their personal prayers and petitions.

Figure 6 below show the different gifts which the pilgrims presented to Sr Renolda's gravestone. These gifts range from rosaries to flowers. Figure 7 below shows the gifts and the pilgrims touching the grave of Sr Renolda as they have their individual prayers. The faces of those pilgrims were cropped-out because permission was not granted to use them.



Figure 7 Sr Renolda's grave with gifts



Figure 8 Pilgrims praying at Sr Renolda's grave

In addition, Inkamana has an office where pilgrims can go buy the different sacramental. Some pilgrims buy rosaries, scapulars, rings, incense, salt etc. I remember the last time I bought three pictures: one of Pope Francis, the second one is of the Virgin Mary, and the third one is that of Sister Renolda. I placed them on the wall of my bedroom in Bloemfontein, and I love them so much. I have a special relationship with Mother Mary. I often have conversations with her looking at her image on my wall.

Only after all the purchasing, pilgrims back to their vehicles, and vehicles leave Inkamana for Ngome, the pilgrimage continues. On the radio pilgrimage, however, the radio presenter played Marian hymns and allowed the callers to phone in to have a short conversation about how they were feeling about the pilgrimage. My mother and

I were having a conversation at this point about what was coming up for us. She expressed that this pilgrimage is an uphill journey. In her own words, she said, "*leeto lena le moepa, lea nyolosetsa.*" She further said:

"kea ipotsa ha le le boima re le nka ka moya, na le boima ha kae ha motho a ikisa ka mmele."

This simply means she wonders if it is this heavy over the radio, what now when it is a physical pilgrimage. Du Plooy (2016: 147) and the Turners (1978: xiii) agreed that pilgrimage need to be challenging. This is the challenge that my mother was experiencing, and it was a spiritual challenge for her. I am no expert of challenges, however, I can only how she was feeling being someone who hardly ever goes to Church and as someone who has never been on a pilgrimage before. After the intense session in the tomb, one cannot help but think of how challenging this was for her.

We were singing to the hymns and clapping our hands in between our conversations and the phone calls kept coming through in the studio. We, however, did not call the radio station. Pilgrims who called said that although they have not physically taken this pilgrimage, they feel as though they have been there before. Some called and said this is reflective for them because they have journeyed physically, and they could easily picture everything as it was narrated. One caller said:

"Nna se ke tswa Ngome ka makgetlo mme ha bo Mme ntse ba toloka diketsahalo, ke hopola hantle hore sebaka seo se jwang le hore ke ne ke ikutlwa jwang ka tsatsi leo."

The above words when translated mean she has been to Ngome a couple of times physically and as the program directors are narrating the proceedings, she remembers clearly how that place looks like and how she felt when she was journeying. These

were the same views I felt too, as someone who has been to Ngome a couple of times. I was also able to spot differences between the physical and the radio pilgrimage.

Since it was during lunch hours, my mother then stepped out of the room to feed her chickens and get them some water. During this time, calls kept coming through in the station, and pilgrims were conversing with the presenter. The researcher in me did not leave the room, not that I had any reason to go outside anyway. Instead, I kept documenting the highlights of this pilgrimage. I was making my notes and reflections both for my research and personal reasons. The pilgrims who were leading this pilgrimage in the studio were on a lunch break, and it was only the radio presenter on air. My mother then walked in with our lunch, which was being prepared by my cousin-sister, who was not part of the pilgrimage. During our lunch, my mother was telling me that two of her chickens look ill. They don't eat like the others, so she put them aside and prepared some home remedy for them.

About 30 minutes later, the presenter announced that we are approaching Ngome, and we should get ready to greet the Virgin Mary. I showed my mother the pictures of what Ngome looks like, and for someone who loves nature, she was immediately drawn to this place. I explained to her where the shrine is and that it needs to be respected. My mother then said as someone who is often ill, she would heal instantly if she stayed in Ngome. Put in her own words, she said: "*kore motho ha ka dula Ngome a ka fola hang hang.*" This means that she saw Ngome as a place of healing for her. I also told her that when the Virgin Mary appeared to Sister Renolda, she said she should be addressed as The Tabernacle of the Most High. For this reason, at Ngome, Mary is referred to as The Tabernacle of the Most High. Du Plooy (2016: 147), Brnadon (1970: 501) and Stoddard (1997: 46) made it clear that a pilgrimage must be to a place, site, or space. Ngome in this context is place, particularly a sacred space.

Figure 8 below shows an entry sign to Ngome. It is the first sign that one sees as they enter the environment.



Figure 9 Entry to Ngome

We arrived in Ngome and the program director asked that we prepare ourselves to greet Mother Mary. The environment here is very welcoming and already sets the tone of what this place is. There is so much tranquility that one can even hear the sounds of the birds chirping and the gentle swishing sound of green leaves in the trees. Moving on, all pilgrims had to kneel down to greet the Virgin Mary, who is referred to as Mary, the Tabernacle of the Most High. It is required that pilgrims greet the Tabernacle of the Most High at the shrine when they arrive in Ngome. For this reason, we were getting ready to go greet the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Figure 9 below shows the Ngome Marian shrine which we were kneeling in front of as we were holding our rosaries.



Figure 10 The Ngome Marian Shrine

My mother put a cushion on the floor and kneeled on it, holding the Rosary. I also pulled the square floor mat below my knees and held my Rosary. In a series of ten Hail Mary prayers kneeling down, pilgrims greeted the Tabernacle of the Most High. We prayed ten Hail Marys because the number ten represents one decade in the Rosary prayers. The Rosary has five decades and four mysteries. With every Hail Mary we did, we shuffled on our knees closer to the shrine holding our rosaries as we move our fingers across the beads of the Rosary. In the house, my mother and I came closer to the altar, which we created. Every Hail Mary prayer was reflective, and towards the 8th, one could feel the discomfort on our knees.

My mother was still kneeling down; however, as she moved closer to the altar, she leaned against the wardrobe. Part of her wanted to stand up, but she equally wanted to have a full experience of this pilgrimage. After the 10th Hail Mary, she stood up and said,

"leeto lena ntse le ba boima le ho feta", which translates "this pilgrimage continues to go uphill."

She further continued to say,

"ho khumama hona ho nkimela mmeleng le moyeng," which also translates that: "the kneeling down was heavy both physically and spiritually."

What she meant is that physically the kneeling down was putting a strain on her, and spiritually, it is an uphill journey. She then said she is too old to be kneeling down for this long. The long period she was referring to was 4-5 minutes. I, however, understood where she was coming from, given her underlying health problems and the fact that she is in her 60s. I must say, her kneeling down and praying the Hail Marys for 5 minutes was very profound for me. It reminded me of what Victor Turner (1973:192) said about *communitas*. These are the dynamics that take place in an assembly of pilgrims. *Communitas* put emphasis on equality and impartiality. Despite her health problems and age, my mother did what we were all asked to do; she knelt down. For that period of time, she zoned out of the physical and tapped into the spiritual realm. Her health status did not matter at that moment, as she became one with us all who were kneeling down.

The programme continued, and pilgrims went to the Church to learn about the Eucharist, Marian apparitions in Africa, and the five pillars given by Mary. Both my mother and I found these teachings unbelievably valuable. I already knew about Marian apparitions in Africa, such as Our Lady of Kibeho in Rwanda, Our Lady of Zeitoun; however, I learned about the importance of the Eucharist and the pillars given by Mary. Furthermore, I learned that the Eucharist, which is the blood and the body of Christ, must be taken with uttermost purity. We should not receive the body and the

blood of Christ if we are not pure: instead, we should go for confessions first so that Jesus can dwell in a clean heart. An example was made that you clean your house thoroughly when someone important to you is visiting you. In this case, the house is my heart, so I must receive the Eucharist with a clean heart.

We were now heading towards the end of the programme, but who goes to Ngome without going to the spring to get holy water? The next item on the programme was that we, radio-pilgrims, should make our way to the spring to get the holy water. Water is important both in the African context and in Christianity, particularly for us Catholics. We use water for varied reasons, which, when interpreted, comes down to cleansing and healing. Water gives us life, be it through rain watering the land, us drinking it, cleaning, washing, and bathing with it.

The programme director asked the pilgrims to draw themselves water and put it on the altar. When the radio presenter played hymns, I went to the tap to draw water in a five-litre bucket and put it below the dressing table, which was our altar for the day. We visualised walking down to the spring while praying the Rosary. I was kneeling down when I prayed the Rosary while my mother was sitting on her bed with a pillow supporting her back. We were both holding our rosaries, praying using our fingers across the beads and my eyes were closed. In a physical pilgrimage, we walk down to the spring in two rows on a narrow-paved path for a good 20 minutes holding our rosaries and praying the Rosary. The one difference with the praying of the Rosary is that physically, we pray the seven-sorrows of Mary Rosary not the standard Rosary that is usually prayed.

When we get to the entrance of the spring, we were told to be silent and maintain the silence as we draw the water. There is a written text on pilgrims maintaining silence at

the spring. As Simmins (2011; 41-44) said, every belief system has expectations on how pilgrims should conduct themselves at a sacred space. In this case, we see silence being the order of the day. Back to the radio pilgrimage, when we got to the entrance of the spring, which is fenced and has a small gate, we had to be silent and draw water. The silence is a sign of respect for this sacred space. By this time, my mother and I were silent. I was still kneeling down, and she was still sitting on the bed.

Figure 10 is the entrance of the spring where pilgrims are asked to always maintain silence. Figure 11 is Seithati and Joalane getting water from the spring. Joalane has consented to using her picture in this research.



Figure 11 Entrace to the springs



Figure 12 Seithati collecting water from Ngome springs

After the water was collected, everyone carries their own water. Each pilgrim needs to carry their own water in a physical pilgrimage, whether 5-litres or 20 litres; one carries one's own water. On the way back to the Ngome Marian Shrine, pilgrims carry their own water, praying the fourteen Stations of the Cross. The main purpose of carrying

your own water and praying the Stations of the Cross is to reflect on the pain Jesus felt when he was crucified and died for our sins. The reflection of the pain is felt through the heaviness of the water one is carrying. In my case with my mother, the water was in the bucket still on the floor, and I was still kneeling down while she was sitting on the bed throughout the praying of the Stations of the Cross.

I was personally challenged during the Stations of the Cross, and they were heavy on me. This was when I was reflecting on my life in depth and praying for the strength that Jesus had when he was carrying that cross. More than anything, I was praying that God helps me learn to turn a blind eye on things sent to destroy my peace, just like Jesus turned a blind eye on the insults he was getting. At this moment, inner peace because my primary reason for this pilgrimage.

Figure 12 below is one of the Stations of the Cross. The Stations of the Cross are a series of images depicting Jesus Christ on the day of His Crucifixion and they are followed by prayers.



Figure 13 The station of the cross

The holy water is used for several reasons: drinking, adding it to the bathwater, sprinkling it around the house, or giving it to the sick. We mix the holy water with the blessed salt at home and use them together for all the above reasons. We believe the holy water cures the illness, be it physical or emotional. This, however, does not mean we do not go see the General Practitioner when we have physical illnesses, we do. We however believe in the spiritual power of the holy water. As we Catholics always say, "*faith is a mystery.*" This simply means it defeats human understanding.

The Virgin Mary is the mother of the Church because she gave birth to the son of God. Of all women, God trusted her to carry the child Jesus in her womb. Here in Ngome, she blesses us with the holy water, which we use for various purposes. Water purifies all the uncleanness on one's body and around the house. We believe it has so much power that when one drinks or baths with it, they are likely to have a blessed and joyful day. We also use it to protect ourselves from the evil spirits that roam around.

One time when I physically went to Ngome, I poured my holy water in a 1, 5 litres bottle. When I got home, I put it in the kitchen and left it there for days. I was going to start a Sacred Heart Novena and drink the water for 9 consecutive days while I pray that Novena. There were specific things I wanted to achieve through this prayer while using the Ngome water. As indicated earlier, we use water for different purposes, and I wanted to achieve something, and I believed I would achieve it because of the deep faith I have.

One day when I was cooking, I realised the bottle was empty, and when I asked, someone used the water to cook. I've never been so angry in my life because that water was so special to me. I had my own intentions with the water and did not want it to finish so fast or vanish just like that. Seeing that bottle empty really hurt me. I felt like a part of me was taken away from me, and it took me quite some time to recover from the hurt. On the bright side of things, the water was used to cook the food we ate so I believe it still served its purpose because it indirectly went down my throat.

Back to this pilgrimage, at the end of the praying of the Stations of the Cross, still holding the water, pilgrims went back to the grotto to wave goodbye to the Tabernacle of the Most High. Then, we prayed the We Fly to Thy Patronage prayer. After that prayer, pilgrims carried their water back to the vehicle, and I stood up and sat on the chair. Generally, during a physical pilgrimage, pilgrims take the water to the vehicle and go to the repository to buy rosaries, candles, rings or any other sacramental. Nthoi (2006: 12) defines pilgrimage looking at the goods and services that are offered at the sacred place. We see pilgrims on a physical journey going to buy the sacramental which play a significant role to them and their journeying.

In the studio, the programme director asked all the pilgrims at home to put the sacramental they have on the altar. These sacramental include candles, rings, rosaries, scapulars, statues of saints, medals, crucifix, salt, or incense. Soon after that, the priest in the studio blessed the sacramental and the water. Sacramental are blessed so that we can use them as the sacred signs which bear a resemblance to the sacraments. I did not at any point doubt the blessings of the sacramental at a distance as this was a radio pilgrimage, so I visualised and spiritualised the blessing as though it was physical one.

After that, everyone got back to the vehicle and drove back to Maseru. The drive back to Maseru was not at all guided, which then marked the end of our pilgrimage. Even in a physical pilgrimage, once we return back to the vehicles, the programme is concluded as everyone is usually very exhausted, and some immediately sleep while others switch their phones on to communicate with their loved ones. Instead of sleeping, I would be on my phone updating my family on the pilgrimage and how it was. I would also send them pictures that I took.

Pilgrims called the radio station to give positive feedback on their experience of the Ngome radio pilgrimage. My mother was also excited that she was part of this pilgrimage and told me she could even visualise everything as it happened; she felt as if she was physically in Ngome. I could see her face lighten up as she talked, and her energy was different from how it was in the morning. She even promised that as soon as everything goes back to normal and we are able to journey physically, she is going to Ngome to experience it and give thanks to God for the life of the Virgin Mary. In their definition of pilgrimage, the Turners (1978:14), Eade and Coleman (2004: 3), and Collins-Kreiner (2009: 439) highlighted that pilgrims return as transformed beings.

My mother was transformed more especially spiritually. She was even glowing when we reflected on this pilgrimage.

When the pilgrimage ended, my mother and I had a short conversation about why she does not go to Church, and in her few words, she said:

"Seithati, kereke ke pelo ya hao, ke wena kereke." She further explained, "Ha hona thuso ya ho apara seaparo ka Sontaha o ya kerekeng empa o se na pelo e hlwekileng. Ntho e nngwe le e nngwe e qala ka pelong."

The above words, when translated, mean:

"Seithati, the Church is your heart, you are the Church. There is no use wearing the church attire every Sunday going to Church, yet you do not have a clean and pure heart; everything starts and ends in your heart."

My mother does not go to Church because she feels her heart is the Church. She believes this is reflected in her acts of kindness and service in her community; the love she shows and shares with others and giving to the less fortunate. For her, all the above sum up the life of a true Christian and she does not need a building ("*church*") to show that she has a relationship with God. Her pure heart is all she needs.

After this pilgrimage and conversation with my mother, I understood better the scripture that my body is the temple of the Lord. The first book of Corinthians 6:19 says,

"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? Therefore, you are not your own."

The big question for this section, however, is, where is the temple? Is it the physical church building, or is it the temple of one's heart? In the Gospel of John 2:19-22, Jesus answered the Jews saying,

"Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days. But, they replied, it has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days."

However, the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken. If the body is the temple, then pilgrimages can be non-physical, just like with the radio pilgrimage.

A second radio pilgrimage was arranged for the 14th November 2020. The Marian Movement for Priests organised a pilgrimage to Ngome through Radio Maria Lesotho. I attended this pilgrimage as an observer because I only knew about it two days before the pilgrimage, so I did not prepare myself spiritually. As a result, I was just listening to the radio while carrying on with my daily duties as it was Saturday. The programme was similar to that which I attended on the 18th July 2020. I must say, I did not at all feel it. I don't know if it was because I was not part of it or if the pilgrimage itself was not as spiritual as it should be. Pilgrims did call the studio to say they enjoyed the pilgrimage; however, I did not. Me not enjoying this pilgrimage does not nullify its spiritual impact on pilgrims.

This then confirms what the Turners (1978: xiii) said about pilgrimage being a kinetic ritual. It also verifies one of the four elements of pilgrimage identified by Stoddard (1997: 46) and du Plooy (2016: 147,) where they identified movement as one of the elements. In this context, the movement is the spiritual movement where pilgrims

transition and are no longer people they were before the pilgrimage started. By the end of this pilgrimage, pilgrims made a spiritual step forward, I however did not. I strongly believe it is because of my lack of preparation.

4.3 *Communitas* at the Youth pilgrimage

It was one sunny Saturday morning with a cold breeze when the Catholic youth in the Maseru Archdiocese was physically journeying to Fatima Ha Ramabanta in October 2019 to celebrate the Marian Pilgrimage. I was journeying with the Assumption Roman Catholic Mission youth as this was a youth pilgrimage.

In several apparitions such as the Marian apparition in Lourdes 1858, Our Lady of Fátima 1917, Our Lady of Kibeho 1981, Mary appeared holding a Rosary and asked that we continue to pray the Rosary. October is the Month of the Rosary in the Catholic Church. For Catholics, the Rosary is the most powerful prayer to God through His mother, Mary. The Rosary is a round chain with beads where each bead represents a particular prayer. These prayers include the sign of the cross, the Apostle's Creed, the Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary, Glory be and Hail Queen. There was, however, no apparition in Ha Ramabanta; the place was just chosen as it was a perfect imitation of Our Lady of Fatima which is in Portugal in remembrance of the Fatima apparition.

The Assumption Roman Catholic Mission youth was dominated by the Children of Mary sodality (*Bana ba Maria*). There were more than thirty of us in a 60-seater bus which was organised to transport everyone to Ha Ramabanta. Among other sodalities that were present were St Stephens (Altar Servers) and LCYM. Each sodality was wearing their church attire. St Stephens wear red shirts, black pants and gold ties,

while LCYM wear black and white. The bus was set to leave at 6H00; however, it left an hour later due to many people arriving late. They call it African time!

While waiting for the other people to arrive, pilgrims were standing outside the bus carrying their bags, and some had their camp chairs. In the bags, pilgrims had food, snacks, a hymnbook, and a fleece blanket for those who did not have a camp chair. Others were taking pictures with fellow pilgrims and updating their different social media platforms such as WhatsApp stories, Facebook, and Instagram. The youth was extremely happy and looking forward to this pilgrimage. It reminded me of my high school days when we used to take school trips. Everyone would be overjoyed. I on the other hand was not taking many pictures like others; instead, I was standing on the far left of the buses with one lady who was soon to get married, and we were having an informal conversation about why she felt it was the right time to get married.

Figure 13 below shows the two buses that were going to transport us from Assumption to Ha Ramabanta.



Figure 14 Buses at Roman Catholic Mission

After some time, we were called to come closer to the bus. One of the organisers was holding an A4 page with a list of all people who paid, both present and not present.

When one's name was called, we had to go inside the bus. Pilgrims were excited and ran straight to the backseat of the bus with their friends, just like in the olden days during school trips. Everyone knew that the backseat is for naughty learners who love singing. Anyway, the bus was not full when it left Assumption, so arrangements were made with other churches to pick up some pilgrims at different bus stations. The organisers of the pilgrimage were busy with phone calls arranging with different coordinators for pick up points of other pilgrims. In Ha Ramabanta, the programme was set to start at 9H00.

When the bus left Assumption, pilgrims started singing Marian Hymns and praying the Rosary with all its four mysteries: Mystery of sorrow, Mystery of joy, Mystery of glory, and the Luminous Mystery. The mood for the pilgrimage was already set through the singing of the Marian Hymns in very slow keys and the praying of the Rosary repeatedly until the bus arrived in Ha Ramabanta. One could already feel that this is not just any other pilgrimage, it is a Marian pilgrimage. This was felt because the name of everyone's lips as we were praying was Mary, Mother of God.

There was no time to converse with friends, take pictures, or press the phone as everyone held their Rosary, bowed their heads, and prayed. One could just see by the look given to those who were whispering to each other that what they were doing was inappropriate at that time. This then made me wonder why does it bother or make others uncomfortable what the next person does? Is Christianity not teaching us not to judge one another? I believe they were given a reprimanding look because their whispering disturbed the other pilgrims who were praying. The disapproval of Sallnow (1991: 165), Nthoi (2006: 70-71), and Morinis (1992: 86) on the universal occurrence of *communitas* is seen here already where some pilgrims are praying while others are whispering. Yes, we are on the same journey, but our experiences are likely to differ.

Anyway, along the way, the bus stopped to take youth from other Catholic Churches. When we got to Maseru, we took 14 more people who were the congregants of St Louis. They were all members of the LCYM congregation. The last stop was the National University of Lesotho (NUL), where students who go to Assumption but study at NUL were waiting just outside the main gate. I take this to be part of the oneness that Victor Turner (1973) talks about. We are all journeying to Fatima; we become a united front. There was no time to greet their friends when they got in as everyone was concentrating and reflecting on the Rosary prayer. Turner (1973: 193) further talks about pilgrims following the pilgrimage programme as everyone else. We see this when more pilgrims join in on the bus, and instead of coming with their own agenda, they join the praying of the Rosary. The bus was so full that some pilgrims were even standing.

We got to a place called Lekhalong, where we had to get off the bus. Once again, we see the pilgrimage route, which Stoddard (1997: 57) identified as one of the classifications of pilgrimage. There were already a lot of buses and minibuses parked on the side of the road. We finished the last mystery of the Rosary then we got off the bus to join the troops of pilgrims who had already started praying the Rosary at 9H00. We arrived just after the starting time. Lekhalong is about three kilometres away from Ha Ramabanta. Pilgrims were holding their rosaries and praying. While praying, we were walking towards Ha Ramabanta via the main road that snaked through the hilly landscape of the southwestern part of Lesotho.

Figure 14 below is an image of the different troops as they were walking towards Ha Ramabanta praying the Rosary.



Figure 15 Troops of pilgrims walking to Ha Ramabanta

These troops of pilgrims were divided into separate groups so that whoever was leading the Rosary would be audible even to the person in the last row of the troop. On average, there were more than 60 pilgrims per group. When we arrived, there were already seven troops in front of us. The groups were randomly divided and not categorised by sodality. As this was a youth pilgrimage to the Marian Shrine, it comprised different youth groups/sodalities within the Catholic Church: Children of Mary, St Stephens, LCYM, Masolenyane a Kriste Morena, Makhabunyane a Jesu Kriste. Different Catholic schools around the Maseru Archdiocese were also present in their school uniforms. In our midst, we had seminarians from St Augustine's Major Seminary who are referred to as Brothers. Brothers are young men who are in training to become Catholic priests. There were sixteen Catholic priests (Fathers) with the Bishop of the Maseru Diocese.

Besides praying the Rosary, we were singing Marian hymns. With each group, there was either a Father, a Seminarian or a Nun who was responsible for coordinating and guiding the proceedings. They also helped with keeping order on the road for traffic to

freely flow. While we walked for about 3km, we were just occupying one lane of the winding, and the cars were passing in the other lane. One could see that some drivers were shocked to see us because they were driving slowly while some even took pictures.

The sun was out and hot. Some of us had opened our umbrellas as we walked. Others had their bottles of water to drink and stay hydrated. Just like in the bus, there were no discussions, but everyone was holding their Rosary and praying. It was at this point that the presence of the Holy Spirit was felt. As Singh (1993: 161) stated, we become aware of the sacred because it shows itself as something wholly different from the profane. We feel the divine presence, and we cannot describe this type of feeling; however, you just feel different. Something just takes control of your spirit, and you cannot help but go with it. This is one of those euphoric moments that are beyond human understanding.

While approaching the Ha Ramabanta Marian shrine gate, the way pilgrims prayed became stronger and louder. The way we sang also became stronger and louder. Our smiles were also as wide as the Lesotho Mountains. The level of excitement in pilgrims increased, and this was seen from the glow on many of the faces. The praying of the Rosary became louder, and so did the singing as if we wanted the Virgin Mary to hear from afar that we were coming. It was like one of those moments where one is greeting their loved one from a distance with one's highest level of excitement. For the first time ever, I saw the Catholic youth in Ha Ramabanta for a minute or two transform into a different level which is beyond my explanation. We were happy to see Mary, Mother of the Church.

At the entrance of the shrine, one is welcomed by a notice board written: "*Welcome to Fatima Marian Shrine.*" This notice board also has an image of the Virgin Mary with three shepherd children to whom she appeared to in Fatima, Portugal. On the left and right sides of the gate hangs the huge white Rosary. Figure 15 below shows the entrance to Fatima Ha Ramabanta where there is a church, a chapel, and the shrine.



Figure 16 Entry to Fatima Ha Ramabanta

When one enters the yard, there are also different white painted stations of the Rosary surrounding the inside of the yard. These stations have different images of the Virgin Mary and are used for confessions, individual prayers and Rosary prayers using the different mysteries. At the centre of this yard are two significant parts about this place. The first one is a shrine of the Virgin Mary and three shepherd children, as seen in Fatima, Portugal. This serves to prove that Fatima Ha Ramabanta is an imitation of the Marian apparition in Fatima, Portugal. The second one is a chapel right behind the shrine. Both the shrine and the chapel are referred to as the Sanctuary.

Figure 16 below is an image of the Sanctuary which shows three shepherd children and Mary, Our Lady of Fatima.

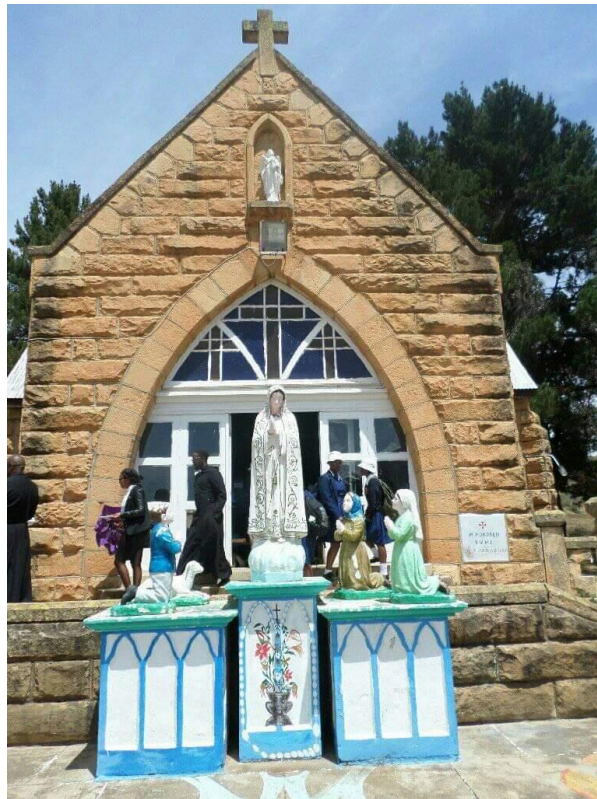


Figure 17 Sanctuary at Ha Ramabanta

Inside the chapel are the statues of Jesus Christ and His Mother, the Virgin Mary. The chapel is very small and can only accommodate not more than thirty people at the time. There are different Marian prayers written on the wall. During the month of the Rosary, the chapel is decorated in blue and white, which are the colours of the Virgin Mary. The altar has the cross of Jesus Christ on it and opposite the altar towards the wall of the chapel is another altar which has the Tabernacle. In this Tabernacle is the "body of Christ." In the Catholic Church, the body of Christ is received during Holy Communion in the proceedings of the Holy Mass. On the sides of the second altar are four boxes. Two of them are petition boxes, and the other two are thanks-giving boxes.

Figure 17 below shows inside the of the chapel. There are two Petition and two Thanks-giving boxes.



Figure 18 Petition and Thanks-giving boxes

Pilgrims are encouraged to write down their petitions and gratitude and place them in those boxes during their free time when they attend the pilgrimage. What I, however, wonder is what happens to those petitions and gratitude letters written? I think the Fathers read them or they just bless then burn them. There are no formal proceedings happening in the chapel on this day; however, pilgrims go inside at any time to pray or meditate by themselves. The same thing happens to the shrine outside the chapel; however, it becomes difficult to pray as there are people outside who are continuously taking pictures. Unfortunately, no one controls the movement at this shrine; hence it becomes a selfie-spot. It is that *"I was here"* moment for pilgrims.

After concluding the Rosary walk from Lekhalong, pilgrims gather in front of the shrine to formally greet the Virgin Mary. This is done through the singing of Marian hymns and praying the Hail Mary prayer.

Hail Mary, full of grace the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus. Holy Mary Mother of God pray for us sinners now and at the Hour of our death, Amen.

It is during this moment that pilgrims sing, beat drums or other instruments and dance to the songs. This is where "Africanness" is seen. Music and dances speak directly to us as a result, we cannot be separate Africans from their roots. One feels the presence of the Virgin Mary in one's heart and goes wherever the spirit leads them; be it raising hands, crying, dancing, etc., it feels like for a moment; I could see pilgrims lose control of themselves and just transform into whatever the spirit dictates, and they just go with the flow.

The Fatima Parish priest welcomes everybody who is present; the Archbishop, priests, seminarians, nuns, and the youth who could have been anywhere else on that Saturday but chose to be part of the Marian pilgrimage to Fatima Ha Ramabanta. The Father then makes announcements on the proceedings of the day and gives a few house rules. Just as every house has rules, and so does sacred spaces at Simmins (2011: 41-44) alluded when discussing the dos and don'ts at a sacred place. These rules include being on time for every item on the programme and putting cell phones on silent. Looking as the Ngome pilgrimage and other pilgrimages, silence is the order of the day when one is on a pilgrimage. This silence gives us pilgrims an opportunity to listen to the divine and to connect to God. Pilgrims are then given a 15–30-minute comfort break before we could start with the confessions.

Confessions is one of the seven sacraments in the Catholic Church. During the confessions times, individuals have one-on-one sessions with the Fathers where they confess their sins. The sacrament of confession is very important for Catholics as a

result, one is encouraged to confess their sins at least once a year. According to the six basic requirements for Catholics, one of them is that Catholics should go to confession annually if not more often or when needed. Confessions can take place any time during the year at one's Church, however, for personal reasons, some people do not prefer confessing their sins to the parish priest, they prefer a different priest.

Back to Ha Ramabanta, Fathers sat under the tree and waited for youth to come individually to confess their sins. It is important that the pilgrim is remorseful and does not repeat the same sins after having confessed them. Silence needs to be maintained by other pilgrims in the queue during the entire confession session while other pilgrims are singing Holy Spirit hymns. After confessing, the priest who acts in "*persona-Christ*" forgives the sins. It is, however, not all sins that the priest can forgive. Some are only forgiven by the bishop, while others by the Pope. Some priests have longer queues of pilgrims who want to confess than others. If one uses logic, they would assume one goes to where there is a shorter queue. This was, however, disputed as I overheard a group of young women discussing who they want to confess to. They had different reasons why they preferred one priest over the other while others preferred the bishop.

Their reasons include, among others, that; priest A is handsome so that they might walk away having left their phone numbers, or that priest B does not know them; as a result, he won't judge them. I found this conversation very disturbing, especially when it involved the priest's looks at a sacred place. Confessions is a holy sacrament which needs to be always respected, and I found it inappropriate that both pilgrims and Fathers use it as an opportunity for relationships. This goes back to the fact that it is not humanly possible to leave the everyday life and enter the sacred. The two can and continue to exist concurrently. It also shows that we cannot have a universal

occurrence of the *communitas* experience, as remarked by Sallnow (1991: 165) and Morrini (1992: 86).

As for those who wanted to confess to the bishop, I did not understand why but I do know that there are some sins that only the bishop can forgive, and Fathers cannot. Such sins include abortion and murder. At the same time, only the Pope can forgive some sins. These sins include breaking the seal of confession and a priest absolving an accomplice in sin. I may say to a certain extent I understand why some people preferred the bishop. It, however, might not have been the exact reason though.

From this conversation, I learned that the motives for confessing sins differ from person to person, which includes, among others, the physical appearance of priests. The other comment also of not wanting to be judged made me wonder if, on an everyday basis, priests discuss what was confessed to them. Is it even acceptable? Where is the confidentiality line then drawn? What should the relationship between the priest and the pilgrim be? Anyway, the confessions lasted for about two hours.

Immediately after the confessions, the Holy Mass began. Towards the end of the Mass, the bishop asked everyone who is writing their external exams to come to the altar to receive blessings. During the blessing of pupils, pilgrims were singing Holy Spirit hymns and Marian hymns. The bishop sprinkled the Holy Water to bless everyone who was present. It was indeed a wonderful ceremony to witness. As soon as the Mass ended, it started to rain. At the end of the Fatima Ha Ramabanta pilgrimage, there are two most important things that happen to show the success of the pilgrimage. The first one is the fact that it must rain.

According to Basotho, rain is a sign that their prayers were heard and will be answered. Rain is interpreted as a blessing, especially after a pilgrimage. Lesotho depends

largely on farming and agriculture so this means that crops will grow now that the rain has touched the ground and there will be prosperity. We also believe the Virgin Mother is happy with our pilgrimage and has blessed it. Secondly, Basotho believe that there needs to be an accident at the end of a pilgrimage. It is believed that there needs to be a sacrifice, and unfortunately, it is with someone's life through an accident. This second believe is, however disputed, and the logical explanation given is that it is raining, therefore, because the roads are curved and slippery, accidents happen. The believe in the rain is also disputed that because the pilgrimage is in October, it is the rainy season, hence it pours most of the days. When something occurs more than once, people tend to make it a belief.

The programme for the day concluded, and everyone made their way to their buses. This was then the perfect opportunity for everyone to meet their friends, exchange numbers, and some were catching up as it had been long since they last saw each other. Youth will always be youth, so I am sure there were many relationships formed there. Looking at the way most people conducted themselves, I agreed with Victor Turner that no matter how sacred a place may be, pilgrims continue with their everyday life, and that is perfectly normal. The rain-blessing was now coming down in buckets. Although the best omen to conclude a pilgrimage, pilgrims nonetheless scurried to the shelter of their vehicles.

Funny enough, the mood had automatically changed from how it was in the morning up until the end of the Holy Mass. Everyone was loud all of a sudden, music was played, and people were dancing. They even took off some important relics from their church attire, such as the Miraculous Medal from the children of Mary. I had expected the total opposite of what was happening. I thought there would be absolute silence as everyone would be reflecting on the happenings of the day. This then made me

wonder as to what the Fatima pilgrimage means to the Maseru Archdiocese. At what point does the pilgrimage end? Is it when the programme for the day concludes? At the end of the day, I had more questions about Marian pilgrimage than I did before. I must admit that this was because I was wearing a researcher hat and a pilgrim hat as a result, I could notice some things which I previously did not notice as a pilgrim.

4.4 Liminality and Transformation

The importance of leaving the everyday life is a common theme in studies of pilgrimaging (Turner 1978:14; Eade and Coleman 2004: 3; Collins-Kreiner 2009: 439). They often-held idea is that pilgrims need to leave their everyday life to enter into the sacred space. Leaving the everyday life is not only physical; however, it can also be spiritual. This transformation of leaving the everyday life is not always very visible that it is seen; however, one feels it. In order for the pilgrimage to take place, pilgrims need to prepare themselves for the transformation of leaving the everyday life and entering into the sacred space (Collins-Kreiner 2009:439). Pilgrims who journey to Marian shrines do Novena prayers; some fast while others pray the Rosary days leading to the pilgrimage.

This transformation takes place as pilgrims prepare themselves for the pilgrimage and during the pilgrimage itself, and for some, it is after the pilgrimage. The problem, however, is those pilgrims do not necessarily know about this transformation. Yes, they are not or at least in the beginning, set out with the goal of transformation. The transformation is a byproduct, a consequence of the pilgrimage actions from the conception of the idea to well after the return. Many transformations are long lasting life changing events. Of course, this is not true for all pilgrims. Some transformations

are temporary, at best. For some pilgrims, transformation is not the consequence of the journey. It was just something that they participated in.

I might draw a parallel with postgraduate students. Many participate or engage just enough to tick the boxes. Many postgraduate students do not truly become changed by the training, the engagement, the process of conducting research, they unconsciously plod along. There is little internalisation, there is superficial struggle with very little true understanding of what they are doing. They do it. They get the certificate after being able to check enough of the boxes.

Back to the pilgrims, they know that they prepare for their pilgrimage before it begins, they journey to a sacred space, and they return having lifted their spirit or feeling a lot better than when they started. Using the Turner three-part phases of ritual, this transitioning period can be called liminality. During this phase, nothing else matters, be it social, economic, or physical status. Pilgrims become one, and this oneness can be understood as *communitas* (Turner 1973:195). This oneness enables pilgrims to experience the sacred as a collective, even while having individualised pilgrim experiences. They journey, eat, and share experiences together. Morrini (1992: 86) and Sallnow (1991: 165) object Turner's view as they allude that there is no universal occurrence of the *communitas* because before they become pilgrims, they are individuals who have diverse backgrounds and experiences.

These scholars: Eade and Coleman (2004: 3), Collins-Kreiner (2009: 439), and Turner (1978:14), agree with Turner (1973:191) that the sacred needs to be separated from the profane. Separating the profane from the sacred has been one debated idea among my research participants as they have vastly different views. These differences are discussed in the subsequent paragraphs.

A pilgrimage is transformative, and pilgrims return having taken a step forward, be it emotionally, spiritually, or of any kind. Despite the type of pilgrimage being undertaken, pilgrims always take a step forward, whether internally or externally. An internal step forward in my study may be spiritual growth and upliftment. In contrast, an external step forward may be healing, or lifetime friendships formed at this sacred place.

My participants had differing views concerning the dress code, food, and relationships at the sacred place. The only thing that they all agreed upon was the inappropriateness of bringing alcohol to the sacred space. They all felt it was disrespectful and should not at all be tolerated. They agreed on the inappropriateness of bringing and consuming alcohol (besides mass wine) at sacred places because they felt it was morally wrong. As a community, it is believed that alcohol is not welcome in a church space or sacred space except for the blood of Christ which is in a form of red wine and consumed during the holy communion.

The appropriateness of the dress code was highly debated. In his PhD titled *sacred spaces and sacred places*, Simmins (2011: 41-44) believes that every belief system has specific ways in which its congregants/pilgrims must conduct themselves. It becomes a lot easier to know where to draw the line if those rules are written down to guide its people. However, we find ourselves in a situation where these rules are not written rather, they are told. This causes problems as they are passed down to different generations. In the next paragraph, we see expectations in a religious perspective being reconciled to those in the African tradition.

Some participants believe females should cover their head, shoulders, and wear dresses below the knee, and should not wear pants when going to the sacred space. On the other hand, males should wear long trousers, long-sleeved shirts and should

not cover their head. According to them, this is a sign of respect. These are the exact expectations of males and females in the African tradition especially where there is a traditional ceremony, a funeral or a ritual that is to be performed. Women must cover their head, shoulders, and knees while males need to wear long trouser and should not cover their head.

In contradiction to that, other participants believe God wants us to come to Him as we are, and the dress code does not in any way mean one is disrespecting the sacred. In fact, as long as those pilgrims are comfortable, it is all that matters. They believe God looks at the purity of one's heart not necessarily, what they are wearing. One participant said,

"What is the use of covering shoulders and knees if your heart is full of hatred, not love." These words reminded me of what my mother said about the temple of the Lord being one's heart. God dwells in the heart.

Speaking of love, six of my key participants believe that intimate relationships at a sacred space are a total no. They believe pilgrims go to the sacred space to pray, not to fall in love and start intimate relationships. For them, starting a relationship is very disrespectful as it makes the sacred space impure. In contrast to that, two of my pilgrims strongly believe in finding love at a sacred space. One of them said, *"God is love, so why not?"* And he smiled. These participants advocate for spreading the love that God has given us. What they, however, do not promote is lust disguised as love.

Once again, we learn that because our pilgrims are individual before pilgrims, their views and experiences are totally different. I partially agree with Turner (1973: 191) that there is a certain level of *communitas* that pilgrims experience, however, I fully agree with Morrini (1992: 86) and Sallnow (1991: 165) that these experiences is not universal.

The other participant said:

"finding love is not disrespectful; how you act upon it might be disrespectful."

The "act" he was referring to was caressing. What these pilgrims promote is introducing each other, exchanging contact details, and even being part of the journey together.

"What a beautiful love story it would be to say, we met on a pilgrimage," he said with a smile.

This then made me conclude that it is not always possible to separate the everyday life from the sacred. Pilgrims still continue with their daily activities, such as pursuing love as though they are not at a sacred space.

Part of everyday life is going to the bathroom, quenching thirst, and eating. Luckily, with the three pilgrimages documented in this study, there are no restrictions regarding what to eat or not to eat. Some pilgrims choose to fast as a preparation for the pilgrimage. Similarly, it is often advised that those who have enough food should share with others who otherwise might not have any. Now this is where *communitas* is at play. The spirit of oneness is seen through the sharing amongst pilgrims.

Pilgrims often go on pilgrimages with their fellow congregations and meet their old friends or family members who go to different Catholic Churches. This is where instead of being part of the pilgrimage programme, they socialise and catch up. One of my participants put it nicely and said:

"They behave as if they are on a picnic. This is totally unacceptable and should not be tolerated. It is one thing to greet each other, but to socialise at a sacred

space is very disrespectful as it derails us from our primary purpose of being here, and it also disturbs other pilgrims," she added.

Turner (1973: 191) puts it nicely to say pilgrims need to follow the set programme as everyone else and they need to show both obedience and humility while they are at the sacred space.

With what has been discussed in this section, it can be concluded that it is not always possible to separate the everyday life from the sacred as pilgrims continue with their day-to-day activities. In my opinion, I believe people can and should carry on with their day-to-day activities at the sacred space as long as they are respecting the sacrality of those spaces. For me, it is of immense importance to respect the sacred space and follow all the rules associated with those spaces. I am however aware that respect is a subjective word. With that said, pilgrims should follow the rules as instructed by the programme director as to what is acceptable and what is not.

Yes, as individuals, what we deem important may differ from one another; therefore, it is essential to familiarise ourselves with the Church's teachings to know what is acceptable and what is not. This will also eliminate the individual biases; It is when such conversations come up that one is reminded of different books titled *Contesting the Sacred* by different scholars (Eade and Sallnow 1991; Nthoi 2006). The sacred is indeed often contested.

4.5 Faith can move mountains

"It all depends on the amount of faith you have." Said one of my participants.

This quote is the exact output I received from my participants when we discussed how they use the water they draw from Ngome and the other sacramental they buy during the different pilgrimages they attend. The other sacramental they use include salt, incense, Rosary, scapula, oil, and candles. The Rosary is used for Marian prayers, and it is a devotion. It is advised that Catholics pray the Rosary every day. The Scapula of Mount Camel is used for protection and worn around the neck like the Rosary. The salt is either added to water for drinking and bathing, or it can be used to chase away evil spirits. Equally, the incense is burned to chase away the evil spirit; it is also burned as an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. The candles are used while praying, and the oil is often used to heal the sick. This oil is applied in one's palms and on the forehead doing the sign of the cross, and we Catholics believe we heal from our illnesses after receiving it.

The water has different uses for different people. Some use it for healing, while others drink it daily or add it to their bathwater. We believe the water protects us from bad spirits and cleanses us. One of my participants said she gave water to someone who had problems in her marriage. She recommended that they actively use the water in the household. This water helped them restore their marriage. Another participant said she knew someone who was barren and drank the Ngome water, who conceived after that. This, according to her, was expected because of the faith she had in the healing power of the Ngome water. There are many stories of how the Holy water has helped different people.

"The best part about the blessed water is that you can refill it with water from the tap; it does not lose its value; it remains Holy water," he said.

Yet another participant said when using these sacramental, pilgrims need to have faith that they will help them. This statement echoes the bible verse that talks about faith moving mountains. In the bible in the gospel of Matthew 17:20, Jesus said to His disciples:

"Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, move from here to there, and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

4.6 Reflections on the Maseru Farm Pilgrimage

The Fatima pilgrimage to Holy Trinity in Maseru Farm takes place in October. This one, unlike the Ha Ramabanta pilgrimage, is for all congregants, not just the youth. Each Church organises its own transport to Maseru Farm. In some churches, you would find that there is no transport organised by the Church, resulting in individuals organising their own transport. I found this very ironic because, for fundraising celebrations such as those for Seminarians, transport is always organised and not just one taxi but a few minibuses.

This unsettles me so much because it paints the Church in a different light and gives the impression that pilgrimages are not a given as much attention as fundraising events. It is an advantage for me to be a congregant in both the Archdiocese of Maseru and the Archdiocese of Bloemfontein, as I can compare how things are done similarly and differently. That was just background information on how things happen in this Archdiocese.

The sodalities of St Cecilia and Sacred Heart organised their own transport because the church executive did not organise any for the congregation. There was still space left, so I travelled in the taxi organised by St Cecilia sodality. When I arrived at Church, most of the members of the two sodalities were already present waiting for transport. There were also two members from the sodality of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. This sodality did not organise their own transport, which was a disappointment to me because this is a Marian pilgrimage; they should be at the forefront of leading by example. One would swear this is a Sacred Heart or St Cecilia pilgrimage. Equally, I was the only youth member present; all the others chose not to attend for reasons known by them. I must, however, say that from my observation, the youth in the Bloemfontein Archdiocese is not highly active in Liturgical matters of the as opposed to the youth in the Maseru Archdiocese.

In previous years, this pilgrimage used to take place at night, but the times were changed to during the day because of the inappropriate behaviour of the youth. Some youth would sit in the buses and not participate in the programme claiming that they are sleepy, while others would be sneaking between the buses flirting and fondling. These pilgrims did not follow the pilgrimage programme; instead, they disrespected the sacred (Turner, 1973:192). This then forced the organisers of the pilgrimage to go back to the drawing board and rethink the suitable times for this pilgrimage because it was not serving its purpose when it took place at night.

With that being said, we were supposed to leave the Church at 7H00 as the services would start at 9H00, and it is a 90-minute drive to Maseru Farm. While waiting for the taxi, everyone was minding their own business. Some were having discussions about previous journeys they had, others were singing while others were on their phones. As I was the only youth who was going on this pilgrimage, I was on my phone for the

most part of the morning. I would have conversations in passing with someone when they ask me something then go back to my phone. In my ideal world, it would be best if while waiting for transport, we prayed the Rosary in preparation for this pilgrimage.

The weather was sunny, and the skies were clear. One had to take an umbrella as we would be seated outside in Fatima. The taxis arrived, we prayed and left at 7H30. Conversations were just random in the taxi between people seated together while others were asleep. The music played by the taxi driver was also just random, and people continued having their different conversations. This felt a lot like a trip than a pilgrimage. As they say when it rains it pours, halfway through our journey, we got a tyre puncture. There was no spare wheel; the driver was making calls to be rescued by other taxi drivers.

We all got out of the taxi and stood by the side of the busy N8 road. When the pilgrims who were also going to Fatima saw us, they stopped and took some people along in their cars. They saw us because we were wearing the Catholic attire of different congregations. One of the cars that stopped was that of one of the Fathers in the Bloemfontein Archdiocese. He took three elderly women, and there was space for one skinny person, and that person was me. The journey felt exceptionally long, and I couldn't wait to get to Maseru Farm. The conversations in the car were about previous pilgrimages and childhood memories. I was sitting quietly and listening because in my Basotho culture, children cannot join conversations with the elders unless they are spoken to. I must, however, say it was interesting to learn about some of the things that took place back in the years.

Eventually, we arrived, and there were so many people already and cars. There were about 7 buses and more than 15 minibuses. There were also about 30 private cars.

When we arrived, the programme had already started at 9H00 with confessions. It was towards the end of confessions as the queues were becoming shorter. With confessions in Maseru Farm, all Fathers are inside the Church sitting at different corners, so it is up to a person which Father they want to confess their sins to. This pilgrimage is dominated by women who are between 35-65. There were also men and very few members of the youth.

Outside the Church, some people were seated on their camp chairs already, while others were already buying the sacramental. There are about three people who normally put their stalls to sell these sacramental. It is usually the same people year in and out and at different Archdiocesan celebrations, not just pilgrimage, who sell these sacramental. They get permission from the Church to sell, and they keep all their profits. This is the one way in which the Church gives back to the congregants.

Many people were happy to see their friends and family members, so they were greeting each other with so much love and hugs. Some people were seated in groups catching up with old friends instead of gathering towards the place where the Mass was to be held. The choir was already practising the different hymns, and the nuns were also seated in their tent already. It was during this moment that my mood was starting to be lifted up, considering the fact that I was quiet all along in the car.

The programme of this pilgrimage take place outside, and there is an altar build which is beautifully decorated in blue and white cloths for the pilgrimage. The programme director then asked everyone to come closer for the Holy Mass celebration. There were 21 Fathers, 1 Bishop and more than 30 nuns from the Archdiocese of Bloemfontein. There were more than a thousand pilgrims who attended this pilgrimage.

Figure 18 below is a procession of the Fathers and the bishop walking towards the altar for the Holy Mass. Figure 19 is an image of more than 30 St Franciscan nuns in a tent. As seen on Figure 19, there is also an ambulance parked all day in case of any emergencies that may require immediate medical attention.



Figure 19 Entrance of the Catholic Father's



Figure 20 St Fransican nuns

The Holy Mass started, and the theme was *"Be strong in faith; the devil attacks families."* We were encouraged to pray together as families, just like the blessed family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. It was quite a powerful sermon we got from the bishop about families. The proceedings of the Holy Mass continued as usual, and everyone seemed to be enjoying it. This was seen by the smiles on their faces as they sang Catholic hymns with so much pride. When the Holy Mass ended, it was around 11H30, and it was already too hot; people had their umbrellas up.

The programme director then let us know that it was time to pray the Rosary, and it was to be led by the men. As the theme for the pilgrimage revolved around families, it was a great direction we took that the most powerful prayer in the Church which is the Rosary is led by the heads of families, men. The choir and the congregation sang Marian Hymns, and we prayed the Rosary. Of all the four Mysteries of the Rosary, we just did one: The Glorious Mystery. To my surprise, there were still people who did not know the Rosary prayers, including some men who were leading the Rosary. It was really disappointing for me.

It takes me back to what I said at the beginning of this conversation that emphasis is never put on the spiritual wellbeing of the congregants. The Rosary prayers are considerably basic prayers that every Catholic should know, but it is not the case. These are prayers we learn during the Catechism classes as we learn the Doctrine of the Church before we receive our Eucharistic and Confirmation sacraments. We are also taught to pray the Rosary every day in our homes during these Catechism classes. I really found this very alarming that we are Catholics who have received the first four and for some five sacraments of the Church, yet we do not know basic prayers.

The Fathers were not part of the Rosary as they had gone for a short break. This was equally another red flag for me as to why they would take their short break during the Rosary prayer, knowing very well the importance of the Rosary in the Church. In their defence, one of the Father's said a Rosary prayer can be led by anyone hence they give the organisers the role to lead it. All the other items on the programme need to be led by an ordained priest. Anyway, when the Fathers returned, the Rosary prayer had already ended, and pilgrims were singing hymns which were led by the choir.

The next item on the program was the teaching on the Sacramental (rosaries, holy oil, holy water, salt, candles, scapular, crucifix, incense, holy Icons, etc.). We were taught about the importance of using our sacramental and the power that lies within them. Examples were made on some of the testimonies people gave upon using the Sacramental. Thus, everyone was encouraged to make use of them accordingly. We were also made aware of the fake Sacramental that people sold in the streets and were encouraged to only buy them in the Church and have them blessed by a Father before we use them. The teachings were quite informative and eye-opening. After the teachings, we started with the Benediction of the blessed sacrament.

Benediction is also referred to as the Rite of Eucharistic Exposition. It is a devotional ceremony where the Bishop, Priest or Deacon blesses the congregation with the Eucharist. It is a specific religious service including the exposition of the Eucharistic host in the monstrance and the blessing of the people with it. The blessing with the Eucharist is preceded by a reasonable time for readings of the word of God, songs, prayers, and a period for silent prayer. It is also interpreted as a form of meditation as there is a time for absolute silence during the benediction. In my parish, we have our benediction on the first Friday of every month, and some parishes have theirs every

Friday while others on the last Sunday of the month after the Mass. The regularity of the benedictions differs.

Back to Maseru Farm, benediction is personally my favourite part of the Maseru Farm pilgrimage. This is the one time I felt the presence of the Holy Spirit even more than during the Holy Mass. I feel as though my prayers are being welcomed by my God. It is during the benediction that I feel the intercession of the Virgin Mother in my life. It is a feeling I run short of words when I describe. There was absolute silence, and the music sang was soft; I hardly even felt the sunburn although my umbrella was closed when the benediction started. This experience of "*being out of time/timelessness*" or in the flow/collective joy is a characteristic of liminality and *communitas* as the title of Edith Turner's (2012) book *Communitas: The Anthropology of Collective Joy*.

We then got to the last section of our programme, which was the blessings. It was divided into three sections. When pilgrims arrived, they bought the sacramental they needed because there is no time in the programme where pilgrims are given a chance to go buy them. It is vital to buy them earlier as the last section of the Fatima programme is the blessing of different Sacramental. The first section was where the water and salt were blessed at the altar. Everyone who had drawn water from the tap and those who bought salt were asked to raise them up as the bishop prayed. There is no sacred water here, rather, we draw water from the tap and the bishop blesses it.

The second section was when the bishop blessed the entire congregation with water. Holy spirit hymns were sung during this time. The bishop leaves the altar with a container of water and an aspergillum. He dips it in the container and moves in rows and sprinkles in the congregants. When one feels the water on their body (arm, head, or face, depending on the angle of the bishop), we do the sign of the cross to accept

the blessings. Just after that, the congregation gathered to receive the holy oil. This oil is called Chrism and is made by blending pure olive oil and balsam. Before use, the oil is blessed by a bishop in a special manner or by a priest recognised by the Holy See.

We then form different queues to receive the holy oil. It was smeared by the Fathers on each person's forehead and in their palms doing the sign of the cross. We are anointed in palms as a sign that we give our hands to God to be used for Him and His glory. We are also anointed on the forehead, which goes back to a number of scriptures such as Psalm 23:5 NIV "*You anoint my head with oil.*" This oil is used for anointing and to heal the sick. Personally, I buy the holy oil as one of my sacramental and mix it with my body lotion. In that way, I walk around with blessings on me. The last section was the blessing of sacramental. Everyone was asked to lift up the sacramental when the bishop prayed for them.

We can see some of the similarities in the programmes of the two Fatima pilgrimages being the blessings sacramental, the blessing with water, the Rosary prayer, the confessions and the singing of Marian hymns. There are however differences between these pilgrimages which include the preparation for the pilgrimage, the activities while journeying, the order of proceedings and the conduct of pilgrims. These similarities and differences will be discussed in depth in the conclusion. After all the blessings, the bishop announced that the Pope's hand-man will be in Bloemfontein on 31st October 2019. As a result, he invited everyone to celebrate the Holy Mass with him at Our Lady of Fatima Roman Catholic Church in Rocklands, Bloemfontein.

In conclusion, the bishop did the concluding prayer and dissolved the congregation. The programme ended at 15H30. The sun was still out, and it was still ridiculously hot.

Instead of going straight to the vehicles, pilgrims were standing in groups conversing with their friends. Some were catching up with their high schools' friends. This was a sad moment for most pilgrims because they had to wave goodbye to their loved ones as the programme had ended. Some pilgrims were only getting a chance to buy sacramental now and they would bump into any father and ask them to bless their sacramental. The nuns were also cleaning the altar and removing the decorated clothes.

There was a long queue of vehicles that were exiting Fatima; one just had to be patient. In the car, the conversations were just gossiping about who did what when. Overall, it was a good pilgrimage to many pilgrims. Despite the programme being the usual activities that are done normally in the Catholic Church, it remains a pilgrimage because we journeyed to a remote place out of our every-Sunday place to go celebrate the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church. The different items on the programme be it confession, Mass, benediction, Rosary, or any item on the programme had a transformation on the pilgrim. Whether the transformation was progressive or regressive is another conversation, bottom line is that there was transformation. Another reason why this was a pilgrimage is that it had all the four elements of the pilgrimage as I discussed them in the literature review being person, place, text and movement.

Chapter 5: Generating new knowledge

5.1 Introduction

After having narrated the experiences of my participants as both a pilgrim and as a researcher, it is important to take myself out of the conversations and put my key participants in the forefront, this is what a good participant observer does. It is for this reason that I am creating new knowledge about Marian Pilgrimages with particular reference to Ngome Marian Shrine, Fatima Ha Ramabanta and Fatima Maseru Farm. This new knowledge is generated from the formal interviews I conducted with my key participants. It was in these interviews that I wanted to understand why they go on these Marian pilgrimages. This chapter is divided into different themes namely, Mary our spiritual vessel, liminality and movement, a walking library, the Tabernacle of the Most High and lastly COVID-19 and effects on pilgrims. These themes address information received from all the interviews I conducted. There were participants who preferred being identified by their real names while for others, I used pseudonyms.

5.2 Mary: Our Spiritual Vessel

As indicated throughout this study, the main objective is to discover the reasons why pilgrims journey to the three shrines which are being discussed in this study. We have also learned from the previous chapters that reasons for journeying differ from person to person. In the Litany of Mary, according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Mary is the spiritual vessel. She is the person into whom grace is infused. I asked my participants how and why they got interested in the life of the Virgin Mary. Everyone

narrated their own experience, which led them to having so much interest in the life of Mary.

My one participant (S'tlhare) said in a calm and soft voice that his interest in the life of Mary started way back as a boy growing up. He saw Mary as his mother. He further explained that he calls on to her in times of need as an intercessor. While he was still in the Seminary (St John Vianney, Pretoria), his research was about the Virgin Mary and her role in the Catholic Church. Another participant (Auntie) said she grew up in the Catholic Church and went to Catholic schools. That was where she joined the *Bana ba Maria* sodality. She has always seen Mary as her mother, and she runs to her to seek refuge. This is the second participant who sees Mary as her mother.

My other participant (Sam) narrated a story to me, saying:

“My relationship with Mary started back in my high school days when one good afternoon during Mass, female learners started having seizures. These learners responded with fear when they were shown the picture of the Virgin Mary.”

That was Sam's first encounter with Mary, and he knew that was home, which is where he has to run to. Her famous picture where she is crushing the serpent's head (Figure 1), that picture assured Sam that *“Mary is above all evil and if we run to her, she will always defeat the evil”*, Sam added. He prays to God, always using Mary to intercede in his prayers.

Forest also shares similar feelings with the above participants about who Mary is to him. He said:

“My relationship with the Virgin Mary is really special. She is my spiritual mother and I run to her in times of need, most of all, I thank her for the protection and interceding when I pray to God.”

He further explained that his favourite hymn is a Marian hymn 73; *A se le Monate*. He said that whenever he is feeling down and lost, he sings it. He also added that equally, when he is happy and grateful, he sings it as it makes him feel closer to her. *“In a nutshell, this hymn makes me complete”* he added.

The frequently used words from my interviews regarding the Virgin Mary are *“mother, run and intercession.”* Sister Mike said:

“Mother Mary is a saint with Immaculate Conception; I run to her every time to ask her to intercede to God for protection, blessings and the grace which I ask in everything I do.”

In our everyday lives, when we are in danger, the first instinct is to run. We run away from the danger towards a safer place. In this section, we see pilgrims running to the Virgin Mary for intercession. Not only in troubled times but in good times also.

An extension on how my participants got interested in the life of Mary was by Mme Motsapi, who said:

“Growing up, I was in the church choir, and I was recruited spiritually by an elderly woman in my church to learn about the life of the Virgin Mary. I have seen miracles through Mary,” she smiled.

Mme Motsapi further added that the famous Marian motto says:

“Mother Mary must be known, loved, respected in the families, communities and worldwide”.

She continued that this motto says it all that Mother Mary needs to be loved and respected worldwide. She is a strong woman who kept her faith when her son was

being crucified. *“I, as a woman, she teaches me to stand firm through all challenges I face”* she concluded.

Because Mary is a spiritual vessel, we run to her as our mother. God chose her to be the mother of Christ, and it is through her intercession, we feel at home when we call to her. Just like in our families, mothers are anchors. We run to our mother in good and troubled times. To go on a Marian Pilgrimage, it is important to first have a relationship with the Virgin Mary.

5.3 Liminality and Movement

My participants told me stories about their Marian pilgrimage experiences. These experiences included how they prepared themselves for the journey, their reasons for going on these pilgrimages, the behaviour of some of the pilgrims at the sacred place and some of the stereotypes attached to these pilgrimages. There were a lot of similarities regarding the topics above.

S'tlhare believes that to get a full experience with the sacred, pilgrims need to prepare themselves for the pilgrimage. He alluded that the more prepared he is, the better his chances of having a valuable experience with the sacred. He further explains valuable experience as:

“being in solitude and zoning-in into the place, feeling the presence of the Virgin Mother, and hearing the Holy Spirit speak to him,” he said.

Singh (1993: 161) emphasised that when pilgrims are at a sacred place, they use all their senses to communicate with the divine. This is where the supernatural experience takes place.

Sam also strongly believes in preparing himself for the pilgrimage before embarking on it. He prepares for this pilgrimage by fasting; however, he does not have a heavy fast where he does not eat at all. Instead, he only eats fruits on the day of the pilgrimage. He does not bring his everyday luxurious food because a pilgrimage alone is a sacrifice. He believes: *“one needs to get out of their comfortable lifestyle when taking such a journey.”* It is for such a reason that he strongly recommends that the phones should be off and far away from our reach. He says:

“We need to leave the city life in the city and focus on the pilgrimage itself and connecting with our divine.”

At this stage, my participants are in a pre-liminal stage. They leave the mundane and enter into the sacred. This phase is, however, not always evident to them (Eade and Coleman, 2004: 3).

Forest’s preparedness revolved around being empty. He said:

“It is important to spiritually prepare for a pilgrimage. This preparation is done by being spiritually empty in order to feed your soul when you are at the sacred space.”

Mme Motsapi also shares the importance of preparing to go on a pilgrimage. She prays the Rosary with other pilgrims using the different mysteries throughout the month of October. She also prays a novena, and each person chooses a novena of their choice depending on their reason for going on this pilgrimage. *“I sometimes pray the St Jude novena or St Michael Archangel novena,”* she said.

Mme Motsei also prepares for a pilgrimage through the praying of the Rosary. She prays the Rosary using its different mysteries in preparation for her pilgrimage. She added saying:

“I have seen miracles upon using the Rosary, which includes people with ill-health being healthy. I have also heard stories about people who were otherwise told that they could not have children, conceiving after using the Rosary with faith.”

One of primary reasons pilgrims go on a pilgrimage to Marian shrines is for healing purposes, especially Our Lady of Lourdes (Bowman, 1991: 99; Nthoi 2006: 84).

Mme Motsei further explained that going on a pilgrimage uplifts her spiritually, and she goes to ask for graces from The Tabernacle of the Most High. When Mme Motsapi talked about her reasons for going on a pilgrimage, I saw her face light up. She said:

“Things change after Ngome. We always ask from God and never reflect on his blessings to give gratitude. I go to Ngome to thank God and the Tabernacle of the Most High.”

She added that she always feels better after confessing her sins to a different Father who does not know her.

“I sometimes have sins that weigh me down, and I feel a lot better after confessing them, it is as though a heavyweight has been lifted off my shoulders”

She concluded by saying: Ngome is a place to find inner peace. Life with the Virgin Mary is remarkable.

“I do not for once doubt my faith as a Catholic. Going to Ngome strengthens my Catholic faith, and I never miss this pilgrimage. It is an intense connection with God” she said.

Collins-Kreiner (2009: 439), Stoddard (1997: 56) and Nthoi (2006: 84) identified spiritual upliftment, seeking penance, and offering gratitude as some of the motives

for going on pilgrimage. We see the above motives being the reasons Mme Motsei goes on a pilgrimage.

S'tlhare's primary reason for going on a pilgrimage is to pray that it becomes a success. I found this remarkably interesting because it is selfless. Most people journey for their personal wealth and success while he journeys for the success of the pilgrimage. He further explained that praying for personal growth is a secondary reason for journeying for him. For Sister Mike, Auntie, Sam, and Forest they go on pilgrimages to pray for their own healing and that of their loved ones. Sister Mike further adds that she goes on a pilgrimage to a Marian shrine because:

"It is very isolated, and I can hear the sounds of nature. It is at this secluded place that one is able to communicate with the Virgin Mary who is the mediator, she mediates between me and God."

Sister Mike becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself and shows itself as something wholly different from the profane. She is able to communicate with the divine being using her senses (Singh, 1993: 161).

There are also stereotypes associated with going on a pilgrimage. Some people believe that for prayers to be heard, there should be rain falling and that there should be an accident along the way as prove that prayers will be answered. When it concerns accidents, my participants shared a similar view that when things happen consecutively, and we do not have answers or explanations, we create our own theories. The roads are curvy with animals and children all over, as a result, accidents do happen. Auntie said: *"after a spiritual journey, God would not want us to lose our lives."* S'tlhare emphasised it further by saying: *God loves us all so much that He even sacrificed His own son to die for our sins."*

However, contrary to accidents, my participants believe rain after a pilgrimage is a blessing from God. They believe among other reasons; we go to pray for rain. October is a farming season and is important to pray for rain. As faith is strong, we not only pray for rain, but we also go on a pilgrimage carrying umbrellas. This is to show that we are hopeful that our prayers are going to be answered. Forest concluded this conversation by comparing the rain to the blood of Jesus which we need. During holy communion, we eat the body of Christ (*sacramental bread*) and we drink the blood of Christ (*in a form of red wine*). The blood of Jesus purifies and cleanses us from all the sins which we have, just like rain cleanses our body and spirit.

In conclusion, there are behaviours of pilgrims which my participants collectively feel are inappropriate and disrespectful to the sacred. This is a concern pertaining to the youth and how they conduct themselves. Some bring alcohol and they do not participate in the programme of the pilgrimage. "*They treat the sacred as though it is a picnic,*" said Sister Mike. In his words, Forest said: "*they behave as if they are going on a school trip.*" From these statements above, it is evident that bringing alcohol is totally disrespectful to the sacred. As Tipalti (2016) said, we honour the Virgin Mary and believe in her holiness and perpetual virginity. Pilgrims should not disrespect the Virgin Mary, but rather, they should afford her the same respect they give their biological mothers. Equally, the sacred place needs to always remain holy and we need to go on a pilgrimage for the right reasons.

5.4 A walking library

It was through my informal conversations about my research with different people that I got to learn about someone who has so much information about Fatima Maseru Farm. In more than five of my conversations, his name came up. I was told he would

answer all the questions I have pertaining to Fatima Maseru Farm. His name is Fr Rakaki, and I call him a walking library. Summarising my interview with him would not do justice to it, as a result, I have decided to present it as it is.

In October 2019, I sent Fr Rakaki an email asking him to be a research participant for my study. He never hesitated and was more than willing to assist. Since then, we never communicated as I was waiting for the ethical clearance from the university. I eventually got my clearance in June 2020 and sent the permission letter to the Bishop, which was then granted. I communicated with *malome* (my uncle) to set an appointment for me to conduct this interview. This is because both Malome and Fr Rakaki are Fathers in the Bloemfontein Archdiocese, as a result, their communication channel is always open, and I would be able to interview him sooner unlike if I had contacted him myself; he may have taken longer to respond.

I was excited about this interview moreover because different people whom I have been communicating with about my study referred me to him. They were all so sure that he would perfectly answer all my questions to my full satisfaction. This method of non-probability sampling is called snowball. This method helps the researcher get more information as she is referred to other participants (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 176).

The three of us met at one of the restaurants in Bloemfontein. He was carrying a file in his hand, and we picked a table to sit. I took out my laptop as he was skimming through the file, looking for a particular document to give to me. Malome then suggested that we continue with the interview, he will help him look for that document. We started off by me reading him the contents of the consent form and explaining it, which he did not have a problem. He, however, laughed about the seriousness of the

consent form. He said it reminded him of the one interview that he participated in, that was when he knew that consent was important.

We started with the interview, and I told him that my biggest problem has always been about the name of the sacred place, which some call Fatima, others call Maseru Farm. He indicated that the farm is called Maseru Farm, the place is called Holy Trinity, and the pilgrimage site is called Fatima Pilgrimage Centre. This place was “*bought by the Bloemfontein Archdiocese from Mr. Champion and is currently maintained by the St Anne sodality,*” he told me.

Continuing, he further said, “*there are people who stay there, and the parish priest gives them the Holy Mass every Sunday.*” Fatima Pilgrimage Centre was identified because there was a need to have a Diocesan pilgrimage. The then Father who was responsible for that place was an Oblate of Mary Immaculate (OMI) who helped identify this place because it was an isolated and quiet place which made it a perfect place for prayer. Currently, there are some families who stay on the farm and they are maintained by the resident priest.

The history of this place, just like the history of African Traditional Religion, is not written anywhere, instead it is in our hearts and is passed through word of mouth (Bonsu, 2016: 112).

As we were in a public space, there were people around us, and some were people we knew who came to greet us while others greeted us from a distance. Fr Rakaki explained:

In principle, the pilgrimage centre is open to anyone to visit irrespective of their denomination. The Catholic Church does not discriminate. In the past, people visited this place anytime, but now they capitalise on the October pilgrimage to

visit this place. The preparation for this pilgrimage is done by the Fatima Committee, which is the committee that organises the pilgrimage. A month before the pilgrimage they communicate with different parishes specifically by devotion, telling them about the devotional prayer for that specific year and other forms of preparation.

Fr Rakaki continued again by saying:

Members of the sodalities need to wear their church attire while other congregants dress appropriately as when they go to church. Pilgrims are always expected to treat this place as Holy ground. There is a challenge to keep order due to large numbers of people especially among the youth, but this place should be treated as Holy. There are, however, no restrictions pertaining to what to eat or not to eat at this place.

Two Fathers passing by came to greet and asked to have a minute with Fr Rakaki. By that time, I was finishing up some of the notes I was writing and the coffee I had brought in my flask. He stood up and went to them, and in less than a minute, he was back. Without losing a beat, Fr Rakaki picked up the conversation:

Different people have different expectations when visiting this place, such as spiritual needs and physical and emotional healing. Most of the healing concerns mending relationships with family members. During the Sacrament of Reconciliation, some get counselling from the priests. Some pilgrims visit this pilgrimage centre because they want prosperity in their lives, while others just want to give thanks to the Lord. Everyone wants a peaceful and harmonious life.

Once again, here, we see the motives for going on a pilgrimage. Healing is at the top of everyone's reasons for going on a Marian Pilgrimage. Nthoi (2000: 84-85) divides the motivations for going on a pilgrimage into spiritual and materialistic. Many of my participant's motives are spiritual than materialistic. They seek salvation, good health, seek penance and to give gratitude.

He continued:

There is no strict Fatima pilgrimage programme; however, each Fatima pilgrimage needs to have the important elements of the church such as the Sacrament of Reconciliation, praying the Rosary, Holy Mass, and devotion. Each diocese has its own programme that speaks to the needs of their congregants. The Fatima committee meets before and after the pilgrimage to strategise and reflect on the preparation of the pilgrimage. They also go back to the parishes to get feedback from them.

In the past, the Bloemfontein Archdiocese used to have their Fatima pilgrimage at night but was later changed to during the day. Malome then interjected to say:

In the beginning, it used to be during the day on the first weekend of October; however, it was changed because it clashed with MACUFE¹. This then resulted in congregants attending MACUFE and not the pilgrimage. It was then changed to the night. Secondly, there also was a lack of discipline among the youth when the pilgrimage used to take place overnight. Thirdly, most people complained that their houses get broken into in their absence while they attended the pilgrimage. The good thing about the night pilgrimages is that there was more

¹ Manguang African Cultural Festival: Takes place in October and talent is showcased through music, art, comedy and sports.

time to do a lot of activities as it started from 18H00 to 06H00 in the morning. So, security and discipline are two of the main reasons why we went back to having a pilgrimage during the day, however, it was moved to the last weekend of the month, not the first.

Responding to my line of questioning about the meaning of the Fatima Maseru Farm pilgrimage, Fr Rakaki explained that:

For Catholic priests in the diocese, this pilgrimage is a time for renewal for us. It is like going to the fountain to drink fresh water for strength. Secondly, it is a time to minister to the people of the Bloemfontein Archdiocese, not only to our parishioners. Thirdly, it is time to celebrate being a family. There is, however, no set of rules that say priests should fast before the pilgrimage, as a result, it depends on an individual.

We had a good laugh again when I asked him why priests take a break or lunch during the praying of the Rosary. His response was so profound because firstly, they consider the health of each other and secondly, they give pilgrims an opportunity to take the lead in church activities. His response was that all the other liturgical activities need to be led by an ordained priest, but the Rosary can be led by anyone. As a result, they take that opportunity to take a break. Most of them are a bit older, 45-plus and have different health conditions, so a break is necessary for them.

In conclusion, Fr Rakaki commented on the rain and accidents. He said that: the accidents have not been part of the Maseru Farm pilgrimage, and normally, when something happens repeatedly, people resort to making it a belief. It is just a coincidence that it rains and in some parts of there are accidents. He also remembered that in the 70s, it used to rain a lot during and after the pilgrimage. It was during this

period that farmers would send their employees with tractors to pray for rain. He emphasized that people go on a pilgrimage for several reasons, and God answers them according to His will. It may be immediately, or it may take time. The interpretations of rain are a result of the pattern that has been taking place, it is not necessarily the Catholic belief.

Our conversation was heading towards the end. Malome was contributing a lot to the conversation also by reminding Fr Rakaki about some of the things. One such reminder was: *“The Fatima committee decided to be creative and bore a hole for water, but the water never came out. This resulted in the committee asking pilgrims to bring their own water to be blessed.”* The two priests who came earlier came back to fetch him for their next meeting. He was happy to have assisted and said he would avail himself should I have any other questions or need clarification. More than anything, he was happy for the uniqueness of my study and said, *“it will be extremely helpful for the diocese moving forward with the Fatima pilgrimage.”* That marked the end of my insightful interview with Fr Rakaki. He is indeed a walking library in the Archdiocese of Bloemfontein.

5.5 The Tabernacle of the Most High

“When Mother Mary appeared to Sr Renolda in a series of apparitions, she said we should call her the Tabernacle of the Most High.” said Ntate Memane. I had an interview with him and his wife, Mme Mamemane, simultaneously. He is one very informed gentleman in the archdiocese on the topic of Ngome and the Virgin Mary.

We were sitting in his living room when Ntate Memane explained to me the difference between a shrine and a grotto. He explained that at Ngome, it is a Marian shrine

because there was a Marian apparition while in Fatima Ha Ramabanta and Fatima Maseru Farm, we have grottoes because there was no Marian apparition. He further explained that a grotto is a man-made cave as a result, both Fatima Ha Ramabanta and Maseru Farm are grottoes, according to him. He explained that they visit Ngome twice a year in May and in October. According to the classification of pilgrimage by Stoddard (1997: 57), the frequency of the pilgrimage is important, be it annually, seasonally, or rarely. May is the month of the Rosary, and October is the month of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, according to the Catholic Church. It is during these two months that everyone is encouraged to pray the Rosary. *“Besides going to Fatima, going on a pilgrimage to Ngome is one way to celebrate the life of the Virgin Mary”* Mme Mamemane said.

They visit Ngome Marian shrine to pray to the Virgin Mary, who identifies herself as the Tabernacle of the Most High. It is at this sacred place that they learn about the Marian apparitions to Sr Renolda May and the life of the Virgin Mary. Ntate explains that: Mary appeared to Sr Renolda in a series of apparitions, telling her she wanted a shrine built for her. *“The Virgin Mary and her son Jesus invite us to be the Tabernacles that surround the Altar of Jesus Christ”* he said. In her 10 apparitions to Sr Renolda, she left her messages which are the following:

“Call me the Tabernacle of the Most High. You too are such a Tabernacle, believe it. I wish to be called upon by this title for the glory of my Son. I wish that more such Tabernacles be prepared. I wish that the altars be surrounded by people praying more frequently. Do not be afraid, make it known. I wish that a shrine be erected for me in the place where seven springs come together. There I let my graces flow in abundance. Many people shall turn to God.”

It was these messages that led to us having the Ngome Marian Shrine. In preparation for this pilgrimage, they pray the Pilgrimage Novena. A Novena is a nine consecutive days' prayer done at the same time every day. In this Novena, they pray for the safety of the journey and for their prayers to be answered. "*This Novena is global and is done across the world in preparation for the pilgrimage.*" he said. In these nine days, they need to make sacrifices² and dwell deeper in prayer as this is a sacred journey to a Holy place. Faith is particularly important, as a result, when praying the Novena, intentions should be dedicated directly to the pilgrimage to Ngome. This Novena can be done individually in households or as a collective of pilgrims; "*fellow prospective pilgrims meet at a commonplace at a particular time at the church or someone's house*" he added.

In this conversation, we see elements of pilgrimage. There are people going on a pilgrimage to a sacred place. There is movement and texts where they learn about the life of the Virgin Mary and her encounters with Sister Renolda. Equally, the preparation for this pilgrimage is clearly stated and so are the motives. With reference to the previous section, these motives are more spiritual than materialistic.

Ntate Memane's interest in the life of Mother Mary started in 1999 through the Ngome Home of Mercy movement, which he since joined. It was through this movement that he learned about the life of the Virgin Mary, her shrines, and the messages from these shrines. He found Mary's life remarkably interesting hence he went to Johannesburg to study Mariology. Mariology is the study of the Virgin Mary in a theological manner. He attended this course which widened his knowledge and made him love the subject of Mother Mary. He vowed to have a conversation with the Virgin Mary every day of

² Sacrifices: Ntate Memane often fasts as a sacrifice before going on a pilgrimage. This is not a heavy fast where one does not eat at all, rather he skips one meal a day.

his life. To him, she is his refuge, mother, and intercessor. *“The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph cannot be separated. As a result, in my everyday prayers, I invite the Holy Family. My prayers get answered faster when I use Saints as intercessors”* he continued. His prayers include praying for the good health and wealth of the family. His secondary reasons for going on a pilgrimage are materialistic. Materialistic motivations of going on a pilgrimage include praying for wealth (Nthoi, 2006: 84).

Throughout our conversation, Ntate Memane has been the most vocal. During the pilgrimage programme, he has heard some of the testimonies that pilgrims had to give upon visiting the shrine and the using the sacramental they got at the sacred place. These testimonies were influenced by the spiritual motivations pilgrims had when going on a pilgrimage. Many of the testimonies he heard revolved around the healing of the sick. He believes faith is extraordinarily strong, and we ought to believe, for the bible says that *“blessed are those who have not seen and have believed,”* he said.

My conversation with Ntate and Mme Memane continued, and we talked about Ngome water. One thing that every pilgrim gets from Ngome is the Holy water from the seven springs that come together. The pilgrims use the water for different purposes such as bathing, drinking, and sprinkling in the house. The Holy water is drawn in different containers, and obviously, with time, the containers become half-empty. More water from the ordinary tap can be added; however, the value and Holiness of the water cannot be diluted.

According to them, going to draw water from the spring requires pilgrims to pray the Rosary as they walk down to the spring. It is a prayer to Mother Mary to give us water with love. Just before entering the space, pilgrims need to be silent. There have been cases of pilgrims who do not pray the Rosary and do not keep silent as a result, when

they get to the spring, the water does not come out. This was an indication that they did not respect the space and obey the rules. This reminds me of my interview with Mme Motsapi when she told me a story that in 2017, there was a drought in South Africa that resulted in no water. When we got to Ngome, there was no water; however, after intense prayers, in the evening when we went to the spring, there was water. When walking down the spring, we need to pray the Rosary and be as pure as we can be in our hearts. She continued:

“I saw people draw water from the spring, and when this other lady came to draw her water, the water stopped flowing. We were all shocked but continued praying the Rosary. Other people who were behind her came to draw their water, and they got it. However, when she went to draw her water, it wouldn't come out. The priest who was guiding us, then asked her to remove whatever it is she is carrying that she knows is not welcome in this place. She did unfasten the ropes she had on her waist and went back to get water, and she got the water.”

Simmins (2011: 41-44) emphasises the important of respecting the sacred space and maintaining silence at all times. Even in African Traditional Religions, respect for the sacred space is of significant importance (Sourou, 2014: 148).

It is after hearing such testimonies as a Catholic that I wonder when will my day come to have an encounter with the Virgin Mary? Nonetheless, back to Mme and Ntate Memane. After getting the water, pilgrims must carry their containers themselves and walk that steep route making the Stations of the Cross. This is a sacrifice that pilgrims make as they reflect on pain of Jesus Christ as He carried His cross. In the olden days, pilgrims could not ask each other for help to carry water, but with time, that rule was

loosened. Mme Mamemane emphasised that *“the water we carry is voluntary, but the cross Jesus Christ carried was not voluntary.”*

“When pilgrims get home, they need to make sacrifices for as long as they continue using the Holy Water from the spring,” they continued explaining. These sacrifices include praying every day, helping the poor, and visiting the sick and those in prisons. These are not the only sacrifices to make, individuals can choose any as they please. Currently, there are Novena prayers made for Ngome Marian shrine to be recognised as an International Marian Shrine. Both Ntate and Mme Mamemane emphasized that *“pilgrims cannot go to Ngome and return the same.”* Turner (1978: 14) and du Plooy (2016: 147) characterised transformation as particularly important at the end of a pilgrimage. They agree that one cannot go on a pilgrimage and return the same. This transformation can either be external or internal. The former may be good health or wealth while the latter may be spiritual upliftment, salvation and having fulfilled a vow.

5.6 COVID-19 and effects on Pilgrims

It is not a secret that the COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected the pilgrims such that in chapter 4, we learned about the radio pilgrimage as a comprise for the normal pilgrimage that we are used to. My participants were severely affected by this pandemic. Aunty said: *“I doubt we will have a physical pilgrimage, however, let us be grateful to God that we are still alive, many are not.”* Despite everything that is happening, she is still grateful to God for her life. What saddened Sr Mike is that we might not have a normal pilgrimage in 2020 given the COVID 19 restrictions. This really saddens her as she feels a part of her is missing especially now that October was approaching. Mme Motsei is also spiritually affected by COVID 19; however, she listens to Radio Veritas every Sunday for Holy Mass. Radio Veritas is a Catholic radio

station broadcasting to Gauteng in the frequencies 92.7 FM and 576 AM. It broadcasts in different official languages. *“I listen to Holy Mass in Sesotho at 9H00”*, she said.

When I asked Mme Motsapi how COVID 19 has affected her, I saw her face sadden and she said:

“It is harrowing and hurtful. I, however, give thanks to God in all circumstances. I know He (God) knew about this pandemic even before it happened. The irony in all this is that COVID 19 has helped me build a stronger relationship with God. We live hectic lives and often go to church as a routine, but during this pandemic, one is forced to establish a relationship with God. I have to carry my own cross on my shoulders by protecting myself and those around me from this virus. Prayer continues; with or without COVID 19. We may not go to church physically, but our bodies are the temples of the Lord. Someday this virus will come to pass, and we will come out stronger because we stayed safe and strengthened our relationship with God,” she concluded.

Despite the negative effects of this pandemic on my participants' spirituality, they still manage to find a silver lining behind a dark cloud. More than anything, they found ways to still have a relationship with God and stand firm in their Catholic faith.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

6.1 Discussion

Aims and Objectives

This study was conducted primarily to understand why Catholics journey to the three Marian shrines of: Ngome Marian Shrine, Fatima Ha Ramabanta and Fatima Maseru Farm. It would also help me reflect on my own experiences and reasons for journeying. I wanted to achieve four aims and objectives with this research study. Firstly, to explore the concept of pilgrimages and how they are undertaken. Secondly, to document the experiences of pilgrims who go to Marian shrines. Thirdly, to discover the reasons for embracing on pilgrimages to Marian shrines and lastly, to explore the history of these Marian shrines.

Firstly, I wanted to explore the concept of pilgrimages and how they are undertaken. This objective was achieved in the literature review when I discussed the pilgrimage phenomena using information from different scholars such as Victor and Edith Turner (1978), Eade and Sallnow (1991), Nthoi (2006), Roos (2006), du Plooy (2016), Eade and Albera (2016) and other scholars. For example, Roos (2006) wrote about South African pilgrimages and the modern world while focusing on inner journeying. She further explains that pilgrimage is universal and its one important aspect in the people's behaviour. Furthermore, adds that pilgrimage is fluid not rigid. This means that adaptability happens a lot during a pilgrimage. Lastly, she concludes that pilgrimage can only be measured by looking at the motives or purpose for undertaking this inner journey.

Nthoi (2006) wrote about the Mwali Cult of Southern Africa. He concluded that the sacred space is always contested because the formation of the sacred space created by the community. Du Plooy (2016) wrote about pilgrimages to sacred sites in the eastern Free State. She concluded that pilgrimages in the eastern Free State are too broad and complex, as a result, they cannot be bottled within the scope of classical pilgrimage. The Turners in *Image and Pilgrimage* (1978) focused on Christian pilgrimage. They believed in transformation during a pilgrimage. Emphasis was mostly put on losing oneself and having an encounter with other pilgrims (*communitas*).

As pilgrimage is a complex concept to which there is no one definition, I formulated a working definition of the term for the purpose of this study. I described pilgrimage as a journey from one place (home) to another (sacred place) where pilgrims return as transformed beings. This definition was influenced by the different scholars such as: Stoddard (1997), Nthoi (2006), Greenia (2014), the Turners (1978), Barber (1993), Hyde and Harman (2011), and Eade and Albera (2016). They all come from different disciplines and fields of study such as Anthropology, Sociology, Geography and Religion even though there are similarities in how they define pilgrimage.

I must say, I found it remarkably interesting that scholars from different fields defined the term pilgrimage, and there were similarities in those definitions. Hyde and Harman (2011) and Nthoi (2006) believe that when defining pilgrimage, attention is focused on religious pilgrimages as apposed to secular pilgrimages. Equally, Nthoi (2006) and the Turners (1978) put emphasis on pilgrimage being a journey from one place to the other. Stoddard (1997) and Greenia (2014) allude that pilgrimage is a complex concept hence there is no universally accepted definition for it.

Looking at my data from the participants and the literature review, I therefore conclude that there is a relationship. I saw all the four elements of pilgrimage in my study. There were *persons* going on these pilgrimages, they went to a sacred *place*, there was *movement* both physically and spiritually which was in the form of transformation, and lastly, there were *texts* which some were written while others were told. Even in a radio pilgrimage, we saw that all these four elements were presented. I concluded that the three journeys documented in this study are all pilgrimages because besides having the four elements, they have the characteristics, the classifications and the motives for going on pilgrimages. Firstly, my participants went to the sacred sites being Ngome Marian shrine, Fatima Ha Ramabanta or Fatima Maseru Farm. Secondly, each pilgrim had a *purpose* for going on this pilgrimage. These purposes will be discussed in depth when I discuss the third objective of this study. Thirdly, the pilgrimage was *lengthy and difficult*. Even the radio pilgrimage was spiritually heavy on my mother. She even uttered the words “*this pilgrimage is an uphill journey.*” Despite the physical distance of the sacred place, the pilgrimage does become lengthy and difficult on pilgrims. The last characteristic was *transformation*. My participants attested to it that when they return from a pilgrimage, they feel as though something has changed.

When looking at Stoddard’s (1997) classification of pilgrimage, the *length* of the two Fatima pilgrimages was local whereas the Ngome pilgrimage is a national journey. As much as the Fatima journeys are local, the sacred spaces are *located* in a quiet place outside where pilgrims reside. Ngome is also in a remote place where there is solitude. The *frequency* of these pilgrimages differs. The two Fatima pilgrimages occur annually during the month of the Rosary, October while the Ngome pilgrimage occurs seasonally. Going on a pilgrimage is not forced, as a result, pilgrims went on the three Marian shrines to fulfil their own *motives*. Looking at the classifications and

characteristics of pilgrimage, the Ngome Marian shrine, Fatima Ha Ramabanta and Fatima Maseru Farm correspond to these classifications and characteristics.

The second objective was to document the experiences of the pilgrims to Marian shrines. This objective was achieved when I collected my data through observation, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and informal conversations with my participants. This data was presented using the different themes in chapter 4 and in chapter 5. These themes allowed me to present the data in a far more exciting way that is fascinating to read. It was through this objective that I discovered that the experiences of pilgrims differ. Although they go to a similar sacred site, how they feel and what they experience differs significantly, and the researcher must acknowledge every participant's experiences.

One specific thing that came up several times was water: be it holy water or rain. It is clear that water is particularly important to the pilgrims in my study. It is used for various purposes, including healing, purifying one's heart, and even bathing to remove the unpleasant energy. This healing could be the wellbeing, spiritual healing, or emotional healing. Catholics use water and have deep faith in how powerful it is. It is this faith that helps us see the results of using the holy water. One common testimony of using holy water is seen in women who could not bear children but after using the Ngome water, they could conceive. People get healed from the Ngome water like they do when they use water in Lourdes. According to Roos (2006: 43 & 78), water is an important aspect of pilgrimage especially when it is associated with healing like in Lourdes. She further emphasizes that water is a divine component for pilgrims.

Du Plooy (2016: 183) categorises the use of water into two; domestic use and spiritual use. The domestic use includes cooking, bathing, and drinking, while spiritual use

includes baptising and cleansing. Although I did not categorise the use of water the way she did, water is used for similar purposes. Pilgrims in my study used water and set out their intentions which later manifested. This shows the importance of having deep faith in the Virgin Mary and the water she has blessed us with. For domestic purposes, water is used for drinking, bathing, and cooking

The conversation regarding water is twofold. There was also the rains that pours at the end of the pilgrimage. Basotho believe this is a sign that prayers are answered, however, from the interview with Fr Rakaki, we established that this is not a Catholic belief. It rains because October is a rainy season. This rain is, however, good for the growth and fertility of the soil. For this reason, I conclude that rain after a pilgrimage is just coincident. This conclusion does not, nevertheless, dismiss the experience and interpretation of other pilgrims regarding rain.

Another issue relating to the experiences which stood out for me was during the confessions when pilgrims indicated their preference regarding whom to confess their sins to and why. The youth preferred confessing their sins to a handsome priest. The sacrament of reconciliation is meant to bring us sinners closer to God as we confess our sins and repent, as a result, why should the looks of priests matter? Are we even going to confess our sins for the right reasons, or we have ulterior motives? I, therefore, conclude that as sacred as the place may be, human beings will always be human beings and it is not always possible to ignore other things that happen in our everyday life like being physically attracted to someone. In conclusion, leaving the profane and entering the sacred is possible, however, we cannot completely leave the profane.

One last experience that stood out for me was "*enjoying*" the pilgrimage. Enjoyment can be in so many different forms because it is a subjective word. For one person enjoying the pilgrimage means they were in solitude and in-sync with the sacred place as a result, communication with the divine was clear and open. This solitude is what Sr Mike, Jerry and S'tlhare feel is an important aspect for them when going on a Marian pilgrimage. For another person, enjoyment comes in a form of the music sang. People have their favourite hymns like Forest enjoys singing "*A se le monate*." Whenever he sings this hymn especially at a sacred place, he feels complete and closer to the Virgin Mary. On the other hand, enjoying the sacred may be in a form of meeting old friends and family members; seeing certain people just makes the pilgrimage enjoyable to other pilgrims. *Communitas* is achieved in a pilgrimage; however, it does not occur universally and at the same time for everyone as emphasised by Sallnow (1991: 165) and Morinis (1992: 86).

The third objective was to discover the reasons for embarking on pilgrimage journeys to Marian Shrines. Through the interviews conducted, throughout conversations I had and the material I read from the literature review, I discovered why pilgrims journey to these three Marian shrines. These reasons differ from person to person; however, most of their reasons include finding inner peace, spiritual fulfilment, religious participation, personal fulfilment, and for healing. There is not much of a difference between the reasons from my participants and the reasons in the literature.

Nthoi (2006: 84-85) has classified motivations for going on a pilgrimage as spiritual or materialistic. For this reason, one can conclude that embarking on a Marian pilgrimage is more spiritual than materialistic. I use spiritual instead of religious because spirituality is individualistic whereas religiosity is collective. The reasons for going on a pilgrimage depend on an individual and differ from person to person. In

contrast, I can also contest this conclusion by comparing the reasons my participants gave me against the observations I made. If confessions are used for purposes other than confessing and repenting and if the Maseru Farm pilgrimage was moved to the day programme because of the lack of discipline amongst the youth, can we really conclude that reasons for going on a pilgrimage are more spiritual than materialistic?

The last objective was to explore the history of these Marian Shrines. In the research process, I discussed the history of the three case studies. There were no Marian apparitions in the Fatima Ha Ramabanta and Fatima Maseru Farm; however, the two Archdioceses chose those places to have their Fatima pilgrimages there. One of the reasons is that they are not in the village or urban area, but in remote places where spiritual activities can occur. The formation of the Ngome Marian shrine resulted from a series of Marian apparitions to Sister Renolda May. There is however a lot of missing information regarding the ownership of the two Fatima shrines. Even with the Ngome Marian shrine, focus was on the apparition and the visits to the shrine not the other aspects of it.

Research Process

My research process used the appropriate research design and methods together with the techniques of data collection. I used the qualitative approach and exploratory research design. With the nature of my research study, I got to get in-depth information about my participants and how they engage with the sacred. This design enabled me to understand my research participants and their opinions and experiences. Rapport was built with my participants and I which enabled a smooth working relationship.

I also used observation, participant observation, and interviews as my methods and techniques of data collection. Having used these methods and techniques, I engaged with pilgrims both at the sacred space and in their places of comfort. These enabled me to represent the all-rounded findings which I interpreted and presented using themes. I also took into consideration the ethics that come with conducting research. I ensured that I adhered to the ethical standards by getting permission from the Bishops and the research participants before engaging with them.

Literature Review

From the review of the literature, I have come to understand the concept of pilgrimage. Having formulated a working definition for my study, I believe I understand better the concept of pilgrimage and how they are undertaken. The Turners have made a significant contribution to the studies of pilgrimage with specific reference to *communitas* and *liminality*. The turners put emphasis on the fact that pilgrimage is a liminal phenomenon. This means there is a transitioning period, an in-between phase of a rite of passage. The end result of this liminality is transformation. Pilgrims return from the pilgrimage as transformed beings.

When it comes to *communitas*, the Turners (1973), believe that for the period of the pilgrimage, the pilgrims become equal. Pilgrims become one community as they find themselves doing pilgrimage activities together. Sallnow (1991) and Morinis (1992) believe that although pilgrims experience the pilgrimage activities together, their experiences are likely to differ. Each pilgrim is different and therefore cannot have a universal experience of *communitas*.

The Turners also believe that accumulating information from individuals, especially at a sacred place, is not as fruitful, especially if that sacred place attracts a group of

people (Nthoi, 2006: 6-9). I do not agree because it is through the conversations, I had with my participants at the sacred spaces that I accumulated valuable information. These conversations even led to referrals to some of my key informants. There was limited time for these conversations because of the pilgrimage programme, however, it is important to maximise the time in order to get fruitful information.

I agree with Edith Turner in Turner and Turner (1978) that pilgrimage is a kinetic ritual. Pilgrimage involves movement, be it physically or spiritually. I further concur with the Turners (1978) that the roots of pilgrimage involve journeying from one place to the other and return as transformed beings. The transformation can be either be spiritual or physical. The spiritual transformation cannot be seen; however, it is felt by the individual whom it has occurred to. Equally, the spiritual transformation can be felt by those around you when aura changes around them.

I have also come to understand sacred spaces to be any space that is dedicated to a sacred purpose while Marian shrines are shrines dedicated to the Virgin Mary. These shrines are sacred, and they have the power to connect the devotees to the divine or the divine intermediary. Sacred spaces become sacred for varied reasons, from their nature to the apparitions that took place. These sacred spaces are divided into different varieties, and there are acceptable ways to conduct yourself at these places, such as the dress code. There are, however, no restrictions pertaining to the dress code at these Marian shrines, pilgrims just have to dress appropriately.

Pilgrims need to respect rules in order not to defile the holiness of these sacred spaces. We saw in one of the interviews that Mme Motsapi witnessed someone who could not get water from the Ngome spring because of what she was carrying with her. This lady had ropes wrapped around her waist. I believe those ropes were of a different

denomination within Christianity. Equally, bringing alcohol to the sacred place is disrespectful. Pilgrims cannot connect with the divine if they are intoxicated, the same way one would not go to church under the influence of alcohol. Even in African Traditional Religions, the sacred places must remain undefiled.

In the case of Christianity, it is said that the Lord God spoke to Moses, saying, *"put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground"* (Exodus 3:5). This bible verse shows the importance of respecting the sacred space.

Visits to these Marian shrines take place frequently especially between the months of May and October. My participants go on pilgrimages to Marian shrines because they feel connected to her. They believe it is through her intercession that they receive all they ask for. It can then be concluded that this study is indeed valuable, looking at the lack of academic writing about pilgrimages to Marian shrines.

Findings and analysis

After collecting my data, I had to group it into themes in order for me to be able to analyse and interpret it correctly. Looking at my three central themes being sacred spaces, pilgrimages, and Marian shrines, I came up with themes that cut across my methods and data collection techniques. I then analysed my data using ethnographic scenes and interpreted that data simultaneously. Through the categorising of the data, I got to learn so much about my participants and their experiences when they go on a pilgrimage. These experiences had similarities and differences when one compares a physical pilgrimage to a radio pilgrimage.

In the cases both the physical and the radio pilgrimage, pilgrims prepare for this journey with Novena prayers. Secondly, both pilgrimages have the four elements of

pilgrimage being person, text, place, and movement. Thirdly, the programme remained the same and there was water drawn. The one difference I noticed was the pilgrimage route taken. Physically, before pilgrims leave Inkamana, they visit the grave of Sr Renolda; however, in the radio pilgrimage, that was not the case. I suppose this was to save time as the pilgrimage was only scheduled for a certain number of hours on the radio station.

The main reason why this study was conducted was to understand why pilgrims go on pilgrimages to these Marian shrines. Motives are an important way to classify pilgrimages. One cannot go on a pilgrimage without having a motive or purpose for undertaking that journey. In hindsight, I realised I had little understanding of why I journeyed. I journeyed as an obligation for my sodality.

I discovered that Catholics seek healing from the Virgin Mary. This healing is physical and spiritual most of the time and sometimes emotional. My mother, like other pilgrims, prayed for, among other things, her wellbeing during the radio pilgrimage. Some pilgrims prayed for unity in families, while others prayed for inner peace. Being in solitude with the Virgin Mary meant everything to them. It was at this moment that they felt Mother Mary's presence around them.

For some pilgrims, their motives for going on these pilgrimages were materialistic. They prayed for their wealth and success. There is nothing wrong with praying for materialistic gains, at the end of the day, we go on a pilgrimage for a range of reasons. For most of the pilgrims, especially the youth, they went on a pilgrimage for religious participation and congregational togetherness. Just like me in the beginning, I went to fulfil an obligation as a member of the Children of Mary sodality. Going on a pilgrimage also means meeting old friends, family members and acquaintances.

Congregational togetherness was unfortunately not physically possible with the radio pilgrimage. Spiritually, yes, we were together however it was not the same as being together physically.

Because of COVID 19, the Maseru Archdiocese improvised and had a radio pilgrimage to Ngome. This pilgrimage was a success because it had all the four elements of pilgrimage being person, place, text, and movement. The movement was, however, spiritual and not physical. It also had the classification of pilgrimages such as motives, length, and transformation. The radio pilgrimage gave Catholics who have not been to Ngome an experience of what it is like to go on a pilgrimage to Ngome. Pilgrims who journeyed to Ngome were happy and grateful for this experience. The only thing that pilgrims could not physically take home on the day of the radio pilgrimage was the water from the seven springs.

In analysing this data, I developed essential transferrable skills. I learned the importance of time management. Through managing my time correctly, I was able to focus on the notes I had written, the recordings of the interviews, and the content in my literature review. Most of these interviews were informal conversations, and through them, I understood why my participants did and did not do things the way they did. Although the process continues, I can already feel the change in my perception of the Fatima and Ngome pilgrimages

In line with this skill, I had to concentrate and pay attention to every detail of what I was reading through. In the same breath, I learned the importance of adaptability. With the COVID-19 pandemic, I had to make adjustments to how I collected my data. It is through being adaptable that I was able to make necessary adjustments. In making these adjustments, I had to be creative in how I was to present my data.

More than anything, this study has been a reflective journey for me, and it deepened my faith both in the Catholic Church and in the life of the Virgin Mary. Not only did this study deepen my faith, but it also tightened some of the friendships I have within the church. It made me understand their spirituality even more as we interacted during the interviews which I conducted.

6.2 Research limitations and Challenges to the study

The reason this section is titled limitations and challenges is that I distinguish between the two. For the purpose of this study, limitations are those difficulties I encountered which I did not necessarily have control over them. For some limitations, there was partial control; however, for some of them, I had no control at all. In contrast to the limitations, the challenges are the difficulties I encountered, but I had control over them. These challenges were a lot more personal than generic. The following paragraphs will explain how I did not achieve some of the objectives to the fullest, however, given the circumstances, I did my best.

The biggest limitation in my study was the outbreak of COVID- 19 pandemic. Not only did this pandemic affect my study, but it also affected me emotionally and psychologically. It was during the days of the hard lockdown that I felt very lonely and alone. Yes, research is a lonely journey; however, this pandemic worsened me emotionally and psychologically. I had to restructure how I would conduct my study because there were no gatherings in 2020 which made me rely on the information I got when I went on the pilgrimages in 2018 and 2019. Instead of observation and participation being the primary ways of conducting research, I mainly relied on interviews and conversations I had previously.

During my interviews, I had participants who did not consent to recordings which meant that I had to listen attentively and write as fast as possible. Another challenge with the participants was the language. Some preferred to use Sesotho. Translating the responses to English for analysis was time-consuming. I did not have participants who expected remuneration for their participation because I had explained that there would be no remuneration in the consent form. I did not experience any challenges with getting permission from the bishops to conduct my study in their Archdioceses.

Looking at my aims and objectives, the history of Fatima Ha Ramabanta and Fatima Maseru Farm were not fully explored. In my conversations, focus was more on why pilgrims go on pilgrimages to Marian shrines that I neglected the history. This is one objective which was not fully achieved. The history of Ngome Marian shrine only centred around the apparition and the activities performed there. Moving forward, exploring how these Marian shrines ended up belonging to the church.

Lastly, there were times when I lacked motivation and self-confidence in what I was writing. It felt as though I had been doing this research for an exceedingly long time, so much that I end up losing the plot of why I am conducting this study. More often than not, I felt like giving up, especially during the hard lockdown days. I am, however, grateful that I did not feed my insecurities instead; I persevered them until the end. Having written about and practising reflexivity, I had to acknowledge my biases and learn the importance of objectivity. I am glad that I overcame my challenges.

6.3 Recommendations

My most significant recommendation is that young African scholars, whether Catholic or non-Catholic, should be encouraged to write more about Marian shrines in Africa. Young African scholars have an advantage in writing about pilgrimages to Marian shrines in Africa because this topic is under-researched. Together me and them will be building on a body of knowledge on pilgrimages, sacred spaces and Marian shrines. The one advantage is that we do not need to learn our home languages and religion because we are already part of it.

Secondly, I would recommend that further research be done on the seven streams that meet in Ngome. We have learned that the Virgin Mary appeared to Sr Renolda asking that a shrine be erected for her where seven springs meet. It would make a good research paper to dig deeper as to why seven streams? Does the number seven have any hidden meaning looking at how God created the earth in seven days? Lastly, has anyone ever seen those seven streams? Are they man made or natural?

The third and last recommendation would be around having Our Lady of Africa as black. Is this the first step towards decolonializing Christianity and Catholicism in Africa? Can we have the Tabernacle of the Most High as a black Mary? As young African scholars, we need to take pride in being African and Christian because the two co-exist.

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