Experiencing God in a foreign land
Counted, Victor

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Despite the growing literature on religion and place in social-anthropology and history of religions, little is known about how the intersection of religion and place can be interpreted from a psychological framework. This study aims to examine the theoretical and empirical links between religion and place among dispersed people. The overall scope of this book is to explore how people, geographically and emotionally separated from their home countries and loved ones, experience God in foreign lands where they dwell or settle. Historically, the book will draw insights from the narrated experiences of the Israelites in the land of Egypt and their journey through the wilderness, settling in several foreign lands, before establishing themselves in the land of Canaan (Martin, 2015). Of interest is how their journey through the wilderness of strange lands inspires a sense of spirituality and a national religious identity which shaped their very existence up to this day. More so, the book explores how the Judeo-Christian historical underpinning, as well as the contemporary diasporic experiences of African migrants in Dutch Society, reveal how religious and place attachments are generally experienced among dispersed people, thus inspiring a paradigm shift in the understanding of the links between religion and place. Furthermore, empirical applications of the relationship between religion and place are drawn from the cross-sectional data of African migrants (N=175) in Dutch society. The empirical data were used to assess the relationship between religion and place in terms of attachment to God and attachment to Dutch society respectively. Further analysis also examined the migration-related and socio-demographic determinants of religious and place experiences among African diasporas in Dutch society, and the potential moderating effects of these variables.

Drawing broadly on insights from the adult attachment theoretical framework, this book offers alternative theoretical, historical, and empirical contributions to the analysis of the role of place in religion, or religion in place, as an addition to the growing literature on the psychological interpretation of religious behaviour and representations of God in contemporary life. In this study, both place and religion are discussed as objects of attachment and targets for proximity-seeking behaviour,
serving as havens of safety in the presence of danger and secure bases for individual growth. To establish how people-place experiences and aspects of religion meet the defining criteria of an attachment relationship, this study provides theoretical (e.g., biblio-historical and psychological perspectives) and empirical bases for positioning place and religion as significant objects of attachment for adults.

**Attachment, Religion, and Place**

In the last two decades, adult attachment behaviour has been theorised as largely part of the biological function of the internal working model of attachment in which seeking and maintaining proximity with an object of attachment is prioritised (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016; Counted, 2016b; Hall et al., 2009; Sim & Loh, 2003; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). As an important subject central to most monotheistic religions (e.g., Christianity), attachment is prioritised by religious believers when maintaining a personal relationship with God. The attachment component in having a relationship with God connotes an idea that reiterates “the centrality of the emotion of love in people’s perceived relationships with God and in religious belief systems” (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016, p.918). This aspect of the attachment-religion framework affects how people evaluate and experience their spirituality in terms of developing positive attitudes toward God (Wood, Worthington, Exline, Yali, Aten, & McMinn, 2010), proximity to God, turning to God as a response to loss, perceiving God as a safe haven, a secure base (Counted, 2016a, 2016b; Sim & Loh, 2003; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016), or even in terms of divine avoidance and having anxiety about God (Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). Several studies (e.g. Beck & McDonald 2004, Wood et al. 2010, Sim & Loh 2003, Rowatt & Kirkpatrick 2002) suggest that relationship problems with close others within an environmental setting are related to faith development and attachment to God spirituality. Elsewhere (Counted & Miller, 2018; Counted, 2018c), I conceptualised this experience as a kind of ‘caregiving faith’ in which individuals emphasise the importance of needing care and emotional support in their faith experience, thus turning to God as a divine attachment figure. The attachment-religion framework examines how God fulfils the role of a surrogate attachment in terms of believer-God proximity through imaginary trajectories and when perceived as a safe haven in times of distress and a secure base for exploring the broader environment.
Cicirelli (2004) proposed that adults may develop attachment bonds with a protective and invisible figure such as ‘God’, in a different way from children who are yet to develop mature cognitive capacities. Furthermore, exploration of a geographic place may take a somehow similar pattern, in that topical objects like environmental ensembles and people-in-place may fulfil the attachment relationship role in addition to, or instead of, God (Scannell & Gifford, 2014; Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5). This is largely the function of the maturational aspect of cognitive development in adults, which infants do not have (Luna et al. 2004). This maturation in terms of attachment to God and attachment to place is due to the increased cognitive ability among older children and adults in general when carrying out tasks which are usually immature during the early years of life such as processing speed (the time it takes a person to do a mental task), voluntary response suppression (the ability to filter out distracters in order to choose a course of action), and working memory (Hale, 1990; Diamond & Goldman-Rakic, 1989; Fischer et al. 1997; Luna et al. 2004). These cognitive abilities enable them to maintain proximity with imaginary or visual religious and geographical objects by the mere knowledge of their whereabouts, with the aim of attaining a sense of felt security which appears to be the goal of adult attachment (Sroufe & Waters, 1977).

**Diaspora, Religion, and Place**

Over the past few decades, there has been an increasing amount of literature exploring the term “diaspora” for gaining deeper insight in the dynamics of relationship experiences with God in foreign lands among migrant populations (e.g., Adogame, 2013; Counted, Possamai, McAuliffe, Meade, 2018; Counted, 2018a; Counted, 2019; Ukah, 2016; Ter Haar, 2008, 2009; Vertovec, 2000). The phenomenon concerns decolonisation, increased immigration, global communication and mobility of dispersed populations. This also involves a whole range of transnational phenomena that encourage multi-local attachments, globalisation, displacement, and settlement of people within and across countries (Cohen, 1999; Counted, 2019). Recently, many studies have appeared on diaspora religion and often deal with religious transnationalism and experiences in foreign countries where diasporic religion is presented as socio-cultural beliefs and practices for interacting with both micro-level and macro-level structures of transnationality and decolonization among dispersed communities (Adogame, 2013; Geertz, 1993; Schuler, 2008; Ukah, 2016; Ter Haar,
My study builds on these to shed light on the links between religious and place experiences of people of the diaspora in a ‘foreign’ country.

Place is an important term in understanding the role of religion in the diaspora, since geographical settings are central to the formation of diaspora religion, identity, and sense of belonging in host countries. In a conceptual analysis of diaspora religion elsewhere (Counted, 2019), I proposed five methodological frameworks through which to explore African diaspora religions. These frameworks are relevant to the broader discussion on dispersed people and includes the understanding of diaspora religion as (a) a network of support (e.g., Sabar, 2004; Adogame, 2004; Burgess, 2009; Knibbe, 2009), (b) a transnational dynamic (e.g. Okyerefo, 2014; Knibbe, 2009, 2011; Adogame, 2008), (c) a platform for civic engagement and activism (e.g. Adogame, 2004; Sabar, 2008; Burgess, 2009), (d) the basis for developing place bonds and diaspora identity (e.g. Knibbe, 2009, 2011; Sabar, 2008), and (e) an experiential religion in the form of a relationship experience with the sacred (e.g. Sabar, 2004; Van Dijk, 1997). These frameworks give a broader understanding on the concept of diaspora religion in a new place of abode. Diaspora religion plays a vital role in forging diaspora identity and place bonds in foreign lands, encompassing noninstitutionalized aspects of religious activities and participation that resemble experiential religion involving having a sense of spirituality, attachment to God, self-transcendence, among other things (see Counted, 2019).

The interplay of religion and place is prevalent among dispersed populations since their pilgrimage in foreign lands may often draw them into a relationship with the Divine (e.g. Counted, Possamai, McAuliffe, Meade, 2018; Counted & Watts, 2017; Counted, 2018a). This spiritual relationship becomes the source of their identity in the face of the uncertainty of the future (e.g. Counted & Watts, 2017; Counted, Possamai, McAuliffe, Meade, 2018). According to Counted, Possamai et al. (2018), religious attachment plays a vital role in a diaspora context among dispersed populations who, though geographically separated from their homelands and loved ones, may turn to the Divine or a religious figure for direction, protection, and identity while navigating their new abode. Turning to God in the face of socio-cultural challenges (e.g., racism, marginalization, migrant-job mismatch, etc.) thus becomes a necessity for dispersed migrants to regain their sense of self and meaning in a world where they are perceived as ‘outsiders’ and ‘aliens’. Developing a sense of identity or belonging in a foreign land may be dependent on the nature of the relationship that religiously attached
individuals have with the Divine, in such a way that they explore their new environment from the broader framework of their secure base with God. The Divine may also play a central role in their emotion regulation strategy since they are likely to turn to God for security and protection in moments of perceived dangers regarding their status as ‘immigrants’, ‘foreigners’, ‘aliens’, among other stereotypical labels that position dispersed people as ‘outsiders’. It is likely that members of the African diasporas, as well as most dispersed populations, turn to God or turn away from the Divine as their object of attachment, one assuring them a sense of hope and security as they navigate the challenges of migration.

A recent report by CBS Netherlands Statistics (2016) expects about 0.5% growth in the estimated number of people in Dutch society (about 16.9 million as of 2015). Statistics Netherlands attributes this growth to the 202,647 migrants registered at a Dutch municipality within the past two decades, with an expected number of about 20,000 newly arrived migrants each year (Netherlands Statistics, 2016). Other reports show that 1.3% of the inhabitants in the Netherlands comes from sub-Saharan Africa, thus a significant population mix from which to generate knowledge to inform policy and practice. Although the statistics on the migration of Africans to the Netherlands parallel with the growing trend on migration across other parts of western Europe (e.g., De Haas, 2008; Gemmeke, 2013; Van Hear, 1998), little is known about how African diasporas in these regions are experiencing their new place of abode as an object of attachment and the role their religion or spirituality plays as an attachment experience in the process of their settlement and integration, despite the increasingly anti-migrant climate across Europe (Gemmeke, 2013).

The links between religion and place among dispersed people have great implication for migration, and the analytical potential of this relationship is yet to be fully realized (Mendoza & Moren-Alegret, 2012). Therefore, the migration experience of foreigners of African background to the Netherlands requires a closer look, such that one considers how this group of people develops their sense of place in Dutch society and maintains a relationship with God simultaneously. Religious experiences of African diasporas can be a complex phenomenon since they can be strongly influenced by culture (e.g., Dutch individualism vs. African collectivism), pre- and post-migration factors (e.g., immigration status, skilled vs. unskilled migrants), and settlement experiences (e.g., racism, discrimination and past and present biographies). Besides, studies looking at religious experiences of African diasporas rarely examine their place
attitudes or migration and socio-demographic factors influencing these experiences. Thus, in this book, I hope to address this gap by examining the theoretical and empirical links between religion and place among dispersed people.

**Research Questions and Aims**

Therefore, this study addresses the primary research question: **“How can we theorize and operationalize the relationship between religious attachment and place in a diaspora context?”** Essentially, I seek to understand how dispersed people experience God in a foreign land and the factors accounting for these experiences. This primary research question will be examined by investigating the following secondary questions:

(a) how can we psychologically conceptualise the intersection between religion and place in a diaspora context? (see Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, and 8)

(b) how do migration and socio-demographic factors affect place attitudes in a diaspora context? (see Chapter 6)

(c) which factors affect seeking and maintaining attachment to God in a diaspora context? (see Chapter 7)

As a hook to streamline the various arguments and address the research objectives, this study draws on the colloquial expression, “Experiencing God in a Foreign Land,” and what it might mean historically, experientially, psychologically, and theoretically. Why would “experiencing” God in a foreign land matter? What could it mean to “experience” God? In the contemporary world, does the phrase even make sense as individuals are increasingly turning away from institutionalised religion and making their way in the world independent of their religious affiliation?

This study is interdisciplinary in nature, exploring the relationship between concepts (attachment to God and place attachment) from two different fields: psychology of religion and environmental psychology. The study first aims to contribute to the attachment-religion framework in the psychology of religion, developed by Lee Kirkpatrick, and further strengthened by contributions from Pehr Granqvist. Second, the study will help in gaining insights into the dynamics of place among dispersed people, thus contributing to the fields of environmental psychology and place studies.
Definition of Terms

**Attachment to God.** This term is used in this study to describe how individuals are drawn to a Divine entity as an attachment figure in times of distress, and for exploring their own identity and growth, through a personal relationship with God who is seen as wiser and stronger (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016). Attachment to God is a main concept in the psychology of religion literature and is used interchangeably with the concept of religious attachment since people are also drawn to the idea of religion as an object of attachment.

**Place attachment.** The concept of place attachment is used in the context of this study to refer to the positive emotional bond between an individual and a place (Low & Altman, 1992). However, there are instances of negative place attachment which can be symptomatic of psychopathology and the fear of losing one’s bond with a significant place through expressing protests (e.g., anti-migrant attitudes, nationalist ideas) and despair (Chapters 2 & 6; Counted, 2019). Place attachment is mostly influenced by people’s personal experiences.

**Dispersed people.** This term is used in this study to refer to diaspora populations scattered in a faraway geographical location where they are perceived as ‘outsiders’ and non-natives. Migration, war conflicts, economic reasons, educational purposes, and employment opportunities can lead to the mass dispersions of a population.

**African diaspora.** This phrase is used in this study as a post-colonial construct referring to the networks and communities of Africans living in host countries through voluntary migration as opposed to the colonial definition of the concept in the context of trans-Atlantic slave trade (Diakite & Hucks, 2013; Knibbe, 2009). The term ‘African migrants’ has been used interchangeably in this study with the phrase African diaspora.

**Religious transnationalism.** The usage of the term religious transnationalism in this study focuses on religious experiences of dispersed people as they interact with their home countries from the diaspora and how their lived experience is shaped by their personal relationship experience with God. Religious transnationalism refers to how religious practices and experiences in a host country interact with both micro-level and macro-level structures of migration and decolonization (Chapters 7 & 8; Geertz, 1993; Schuler, 2008).
**Place.** In this study, place is not just a physical space, but involves beliefs, emotions and commitments that individuals have toward a geographical setting. Place experiences are also conceptualised as affective, behavioural, and cognitive attitudes that the individual have toward a place (Chapter 3).

**Religion and/or Spirituality (RS).** These two terms are used interchangeably in this study (though they differ significantly) to refer to how people are drawn to God as an attachment figure when in distress or explore their broader environment from the secure base of their relationship with God (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016). In other words, RS is conceptualised as a psychological phenomenon associated with subjective experiences, internal working models, and personal biographies. This definition is consistent with Watts (2017) observation of a shift in the definition of RS aspects of experiential and personal faith rather than its conservative and cultural expressions. Hence, this aspect of RS involves personality patterns, mental processes, emotional-cognitive representations of self, others, and the Divine, among other psychodynamic attributes.

**Place spirituality.** This term is coined for the purposes of this study for exploring and explaining the intersection of religious and place attachment. It is used in this study to highlight the role of spirituality in a place or how one’s experiences in a place can shape their sense of connection to the sacred or a Divine entity (e.g., Chapters 4 & 5).

**Methodology**

Recognising that experiencing God can be an existential and relational phenomenon over time and space, I first explored the theoretical prospects of the links between religion and place from several theoretical lenses such as attachment theory, motivational systems theory, and the Judeo-Christian perspective. A biblical-theological analysis and a literature review were employed in developing the theoretical links between religion and place, thus helping in critiquing, assessing, and summarising the body of literature in biblical history, adult attachment theory, and motivational systems theory exploring the links between religion and place.

This was followed by empirical applications of the theories in a cross-sectional survey which was conducted between November 2015 and April 2016 to assess the nature of the relationship between spiritual connectedness and sense of place attitudes among people of the African diaspora in Northern and Western Netherlands. A
snowball sampling approach was employed for recruiting study participants from existing community structures through referrals by community leaders. Renzaho and colleagues (2006, 2009, 2014) conducted a series of studies in which the viability of using the snowball sampling technique was examined among migrants of African background. They recommended the snowball technique for research on African migrants because they are hard-to-reach population often excluded in mainstream research due to the difficulties associated with accessing them. This sample is referred to as a hard-to-reach migrant population because of the social constraints (e.g. language barriers, documentation, accessible contact information, etc) and characteristics (e.g. mobility, unwillingness to trust researchers) that hinder access to them. These challenges impair migrants’ willingness to partake in answering survey questions (Agadjanian & Zotoya, 2012). This can also be due to the lack of sampling frames available from existing registers and difficulties associated with reaching documented and undocumented migrants who are always on the move. As a result, it is almost impossible to obtain a representative probabilistic sample of migrants, especially since they are more mobile than natives (Reichel & Morales, 2017). The necessary contact information needed for identifying and contacting a representative sub-population of African migrants in the Netherlands was out of reach, thus making the population group a hard-to-reach population.

Renzaho and colleagues (2006, 2009, 2014) concluded that African migrants may be reached and better represented in research only through recommendation from existing community leaders or structures. Snowball sampling enables the researcher to locate minority populations through such community referrals and is a much-needed technique for addressing the knowledge gap that cannot be generated by mainstream research. Before the data collection, I toured around Western and Northern regions of the Netherlands to participate in different cultural, student, and religious events organised by community leaders, most of whom have been in contact with me and have been informed about the study. Community leaders informed their people about the study, and a date for the data collection was arranged. On arrival at the community events, I was asked to explain the study to members of the community. They were told that the study was exploring how their relationship with God was related to their engagement with the Netherlands. Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire (Appendix A) containing demographic information, the Sense of Place Scale by Jorgensen and Stedman (2001), the Attachment to God Scale by Rowatt and
Kirkpatrick (2002), the Attachment to God Measure by Sim and Loh (2003) and the Attitudes toward God Scale by Wood et al. (2010). A total of 353 participants responded to the invitation (collecting copies of the surveys) to participate in the study, but only 175 participants returned their completed surveys either on the spot, face-to-face, at another meeting, or via PostNL to my university mailbox/address. The participants for this study had been residents of cities in Northern (33.3%) and Western (66.7%) parts of the Netherlands. 58.9% of the participants have lived in the Netherlands for more than 5 years and 41.1% less than 5 years. Roughly half (52%) were female, and 81.9% of the total sample spoke Dutch or had a little knowledge of the language. 72.4% of the participants were aged between 18 to 45 years old with the remaining over 45. In the total sample, 56.3% had completed tertiary education (compared to 43.7% with high school or less education), 50.6% were married, 43.1% single, 6.3% either divorced, widowed, or separated. Most of the participants (94.2%) were Christian, while 3.5% Muslim, 1.2% African traditional religious followers, and 1.2% identified their religion as other.

Data analyses were conducted using STATA (version 13) and SPSS (version 23). Descriptive statistics were calculated to estimate the average mean scores of study variables and univariate, multivariate, and moderation analyses were calculated using various methods of regression analyses to estimate the relationship between religion and place variables in relation to migration and socio-demographic factors, with significance set at p<. 0.05. Before the preliminary analyses, I examined the themes theoretically and historically, covering existing literature in the field and exploring the possible theoretical links between religion and place.

**Thesis Outline**

**Part I. Theoretical Background**

Part 1 provides a review of the literature on religion and place as objects of attachment, providing a background for the subsequent studies on the topic. Chapter 2 explores the multidimensionality of people-place experiences and relationships, involving emotional attachment to the natural elements of a place (environmental ensemble or the place dimension), cognitive development in the form of place identity (genius loci or the person dimension), and behavioural commitment or dependence on activities and resources of a place (people-in-place or the process dimension). This perspective on place theory draws insights from environmental psychology (Scannell
& Gifford, 2010), place phenomenology (Seaman, 2012, 2014) and human geography (Low & Altman, 1992), sketching a multidimensional model of people-place relationship experiences. This multidimensional model was considered appropriate to engage in a discourse on place. This concept analysis aims at illuminating the meaning of place and the different “places” to which people are drawn, thus developing a holistic model for understanding the various attributes and perceptions of people-place relationships and experiences.

Although place attachment is a notable feature of contemporary life, biblical accounts suggest that it is also an ancient phenomenon. For example, chapter 3 offers a biblical-historical perspective on the role of sacred spaces in religious life, by providing an account of place attachment in the bible and giving insight into the implications of approaching biblical settings in terms of place attachment theory (Counted & Watts, 2017). Place attachment theory, as a framework for examining people-place relationships in environmental psychology, was used to provide an additional psychological approach to interpreting biblical-historical events and how certain places in the bible have afforded certain attachment advantages to those drawn to them. This makes place attachment an important topic for a relational theology that affirms two key ideas: how God affects his creatures and how creatures affect God in space and time. In the Old Testament, place attachment can be seen in the identity and nation building of the Israelites, a dispersed people, who experienced God in several biblical places such as Mount Sinai, Canaan, and Jerusalem. Although the experiences of Jesus Christ in Galilee and Jerusalem provide a blueprint for place attachment in the New Testament, the understanding of place attachment among the New Testament Church and early Christians took a trans-spatial turn as an embodied phenomenon, suggesting that Christianity, to some extent, may transcend place attachment.

Chapter 4 looks at the interplay of place and religion as significant objects in the lives of people. Place is theorized as people-place relationships while religion is discussed in terms of religious attachment aspects of the believer-God relationship. After exploring theories of place attachment and attachment to God, chapter 4 aims to integrate both theories in order to understand the shifting interplay between place and God as important objects of attachment in the lives of religious believers. This theoretical exploration led to the coining of ‘place spirituality’, a theoretical model for exploring the dynamics of relationship between place attachment and attachment-religion connections (Chapter 4; Counted, 2018b; Counted & Watts, 2017). In asking
the question "How do biological and psychological mechanisms influence religious behaviour in a place?", chapter 4 uses John Bowlby's attachment theory to examine place spirituality as the interplay of exploration of place and attachment to a religious figure. It is first argued that the experience of place spirituality can satisfy the criteria of an attachment relationship. Second, I propose that the maturation of attachment development due to increased cognitive abilities in adults can serve as the building block for developing place spirituality in which the individual is seen in a circular movement pattern to and from an object of attachment (e.g., place, God, etc.). Third, relational paradigms for understanding the shifting interplay of exploration of place and attachment to God are discussed, as is the theme of place spirituality.

To further explore the intersection of place attachment and attachment to God, chapter 5 examines the extent to which the motivational systems theory of Lichtenberg (1988; 1989; 1998) can help us understand the depth of the relationship between religion and place. This chapter is a sequel to the previous chapter, and an attempt to look at the individual's interaction with place and God using a psychoanalytic motivational systems approach. It argues that the interplay between the two concepts is based on two motivational drives: attachment-affiliation and exploratory-assertion. It is argued that these two drives enhance the perception of the object of attachment as either a safe haven for attachment affiliation or a secure base for exploration curiosity. Furthermore, this chapter draws on the ‘circle of security model’ developed by developmental psychologists Marvin, Cooper, Hoffman, and Powell (2002) to conceptualise the interplay between religion and place as ‘The circle of place spirituality’ (CoPS). CoPS is a supplementary attachment-religion model in which the behaviour of a religious believer is depicted in a circular pattern of movement that begins and ends with the object of attachment such as a place or a divine entity, serving the function of a surrogate attachment. Though the CoPS model has been critiqued in a recent publication by Brulin and Granqvist (2018), chapter 5 contends that the attachment and exploration motivational drives are the driving forces responsible for the engagement with objects of attachment and are the systems through which the interplay of the exploration and attachment drives can be adequately understood by the CoPS model.
Part II. Empirical Applications

Part 2 reports on a cross-sectional survey with 175 African diaspora participants in the Netherlands and examines the nature of the relationships between place attachment and attachment to God in the context of the Dutch society using descriptive analyses, correlational analyses, and hierarchical multiple regression analyses. The participants for this study were residents of cities in Northern and Western parts of the Netherlands (33.3% and 66.7% respectively). 58.9% of the participants have lived in the Netherlands for more than 5 years and 41.1% less than 5 years. In terms of countries of origin, 36% were from Ghana, 20.6% Nigeria, 1.1% Burundi, 2.9% Cameroun, 2.3% Congo, 1.7% Eritrea, 0.6% Gambia, 1.7% Kenya, 0.6% Lesotho, 3.4% Sierra Leone, 2.3% South Africa, 0.6% Sudan, 2.3% Tanzania, 2.9% Uganda, 1.1% Zambia, 1.7% Zimbabwe, 0.6% Angola, 0.6 Botswana, and 17.1% did not identify their countries of birth or nationalities. Roughly half (52%) were female, and 81.9% of the total sample spoke Dutch or had a little knowledge of the language. 72.4% of the participants were aged between 18 to 45 years old with the remaining over 45. In the total sample, 56.3% had completed tertiary education (compared to 43.7% with high school or less education), 50.6% were married, 43.1% single, 6.3% either divorced, widowed, or separated. Most of the participants (94.2%) were Christian, while 3.5% Muslim, 1.2% African traditional religious followers, and 1.2% identified their religion as other.

In other to further apply and explore the theoretical propositions offered in chapters 2 - 5, I examined the migration and socio-demographic factors associated with developing sense of place among a dispersed community in a post-colonial era: the African diaspora. This empirical study is reported on in chapter 6, showing migration and socio-demographic factors related to developing attachment towards a specific geographic setting among the African diaspora. African individuals within the Netherlands were recruited for this study. Results are carefully discussed in relation to the role of migration and demographic factors such as length of stay, region of residence, host country’s language proficiency, age differences, gender differences, region or country of origin, and educational background as potential predictors of people-place relationships among the African diaspora in Dutch society.

Furthermore, the study reported on in chapter 7 was conducted to examine the nature of the relationship between negative place experiences and place attachment, as moderated by attachment to God. This empirical chapter addresses the question:
does religious attachment strengthen the effects of place attachment despite effects of negative place experiences among dispersed African people in Dutch society? This study is particularly relevant for understanding the empirical link between religion and place among the African diaspora in Dutch society, as it focuses on the role of spirituality in terms of attachment to God in promoting sense of place of a dispersed migrant group experiencing God, as their ultimate attachment figure, in a foreign land. Most importantly, the chapter examines the moderating effect of spirituality on the relationship between negative place experiences in and attachment to Dutch society. Several implications are discussed in this chapter in relation to why and how people of the African diaspora in Dutch society rely on God as their secure base.

Finally, factors related to the relationship experiences with God in a foreign land were examined among the African diaspora in Dutch society. This study is reported on in chapter 8, arguing that African migrants are drawn to God to help them navigate the uncertainties of place change, though this form of religious attachment is predicted by region of residence and the interaction effects between length of stay and religious background. This perspective leads to conceptualising African transnational religion as experiential processes involving attachment behavioural patterns, encompassing non-institutionalized religious expressions. Thus, I examined the nature of migrants’ relationship experience with God as an attachment figure in relation to several predictors such as region of residence and length of stay in the Netherlands. Study results from the empirical chapters are carefully discussed, with much of the outcomes discussed in terms of the implications these could have for migration and social integration policies.

Part III. Study Implications and General Discussion

In chapter 9, I discuss the overall implications of the study findings and use Moore’s (2007) theory of parallel processes to synthesize the findings in relation to the psychological links between religious attachment and place attachment. This section of the book also provides a critical appraisal of the research project with reflections on some of the study findings and implications of what has been learned on the intersection of religion and place among dispersed people. The book concludes with an epilogue, more of a personal reflection, of what experiencing God in a foreign land meant to me as a dispersed African who has lived in foreign lands for over a decade of my adult life.
## Overview of thesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapters</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>Part</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>This chapter introduces the scope, aims, methodology, and significance of the study. It also provides the theoretical background of the study.</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Making Sense of Place Attachment: towards a holistic understanding of people-place relationships and experiences.</td>
<td>This chapter reviews literature on place attachment, providing a multidimensional approach to exploring the concept of place in relation to affect (environmental attachment), behaviour (dependency on geographical events, activities, resources), and cognition (forming identity of a place).</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Place Attachment in the Bible: A Judeo-Christian Historical Perspective.</td>
<td>This chapter explores the concept of place attachment and its application in biblical history of the dispersed Israelites in relation to various significant places in the bible.</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Place Spirituality: an attachment perspective.</td>
<td>The chapter conceptualises the relationship between place and religion from an attachment perspective.</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The Circle of Place Spirituality (CoPS): towards an attachment and exploration motivational systems approach in the psychology of religion.</td>
<td>As a sequel to chapter 4, this chapter further examines the relationship between place and religion from the motivational systems theory developed by Joseph D. Lichtenberg.</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Migration and socio-demographic factors associated with sense of place attitudes of sub-Saharan Africans in northern and western Netherlands.</td>
<td>This chapter introduces the empirical part of the study by examining migration-related and socio-demographic determinants of place attitudes among African dispersed populations in Dutch society.</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The role of spiritual</td>
<td>This chapter explores the</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment in strengthening sense of place in a migration context: main and interactive effects</td>
<td>Relationship between place and religious attachment, hypothesizing that spirituality promotes sense of place and helps in managing the effects of negative place experiences among dispersed African populations in Dutch society.</td>
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<td>Length of Stay, Place of Residence, and Seeking Attachment to God in a Foreign Land: the moderating effect of religious background</td>
<td>This chapter provides empirical support for understanding predictors of relationship experiences with God among African dispersed population in the Netherlands, and further analysed the interactive attributes of these predictors.</td>
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<td>Place spirituality as parallel processes: re-evaluating the links between religion and place.</td>
<td>This chapter provides a general discussion and synthesis of study findings, emphasizing the broader implications for the attachment-religion framework and the scholarly study of the psychology of religion. Further studies are also highlighted in comparison to study findings.</td>
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<td>Epilogue.</td>
<td>The Epilogue offers reflections on my personal pilgrimage as a migrant and the place of God in my life as an ultimate attachment figure in the uncertainty of being geographically separated from my home country all through my adult life.</td>
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References


Knibbe, K.E. (2009) 'We did not come here as tenants, but as landlords': Nigerian Pentecostals and the power of maps. *African Diaspora* 2: 133-158.


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part 1

Theoretical Explorations