Chapter 9

A cascade of parallel processes: re-evaluating the psychological links between religion and place

The aim of this book was to theorize and operationalize the relationship between religious and place attachment in a Diaspora context, thus exploring the extent to which place experiences are related to the religious attachment of dispersed people in terms of how they experience God in a foreign land. Adult attachment and motivational systems theoretical frameworks were used to address the primary research question which is: “How can we theorize and operationalize the nature of the relationship between religious attachment and place in a Diaspora context?” while also providing support for previous research in the field of psychology of religion. This was realized by examining three secondary research questions, concerning (a) how to psychologically conceptualise the intersection between religion and place in a diaspora context (see Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, and 8); (b) how migration and socio-demographic factors affect place attitudes in a diaspora context (see Chapter 6); and (c) which factors affect seeking and maintaining attachment to God in a diaspora context (see Chapter 8).

In this chapter, I will integrate the discussion of results and the conclusions drawn from previous chapters in order to engage in a conversation on the conceptualisation and operationalisation of the relationship between religious attachment and place in a diaspora context.

Synthesis of findings

Religion and place: theoretical findings

The theoretical studies in chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5, reveal that objects of attachment in the form of a geographic setting and a divine entity play a role in the lives of dispersed people both historically and in contemporary life. Historically, the analysis in chapter 3 on place attachment in the bible shows that the link between religious and place attachments is an ancient phenomenon, one that is the basis of
the Judeo-Christian movement as seen in both the Old and New Testaments. Adults generally develop attachment with visual and imaginary objects that assure a sense of ‘felt security’. Adults who are attached to God experience this security by the mere knowledge of the whereabouts of God due to the mature cognitive abilities in adults over infants (chapter 4; chapter 5).

Attached individuals are most likely to be drawn to more than one object of attachment simultaneously, depending on their motivational drives (e.g. feelings, intentions, emotions etc) that influence what motivational system is activated at a time (chapter 5). The Circle of Place Spirituality (CoPS) model was developed to explain the complexities of the interaction between religion and place, arguing that attached individuals are likely to activate their motivational systems (exploratory-assertion and attachment-affiliation) in the process of experiencing objects of attachment. The exploratory-assertion motivational system, which is the first CoPS function, may be activated when individuals seek to master their broader environment and explore the potential of a particular object of attachment, thus having the function of exploration curiosity. The second motivational system in the CoPS model, attachment-affiliation, may be activated when individuals in distress and in need of a safe haven turn to an object of attachment for emotional connection and to satisfy the need of attachment (chapter 5). The CoPS model is quite complex: there is no one direction for interpreting motivational drives since the attachment and exploration drives could be active simultaneously and are difficult to analyse.

Brulin and Granqvist (2018) in their commentary on the circle of place spirituality, acknowledging the place of place within the attachment-religion framework while also raising conceptual concerns regarding attachment to place as a representation of adult attachment behaviour. They state that there are substantial dissimilarities between people’s attachment to places and their attachment to God, arguing that the attachment construct generally applies to the latter, but not the former. Brulin and Granqvist seem to have missed the point of the CoPS model, which emphasises that humans, unlike nonhuman animals, are able to create artificial ways of getting safety. They create ways of activating the same neural pathways, thereby satisfying (sort of) their needs. That is, religion, place, drugs, and porn all co-opt predetermined motivational systems. It seems right to say that God is a created source of security in the same way that places serve as places of safety as well. In times of need, people go home, for example. But Brulin and Granqvist are
astute in pointing out that it is unclear if we are attached to a place or the place has been associated with some person who provided us with a sense of safety which I believe has been covered in the environmental psychology literature on place attachment for over four decades (Low & Altman, 1992; Scannell & Gifford, 2014). Theological and philosophical literature also illuminates how places are meaningful anthropomorphised domains of inquiry (Bartholomew, 2011). The idea that there are instinctual drives might still be right but most importantly there are good reasons to expect that motivational systems and the attachment behavioural system will evolve to lead us into making choices that align with needs for safety. And some people are wired towards safety or sex more (e.g., the Dark Triad leads to a bias against safety and towards sex).

In addition to the motivational systems approach in chapter 5, I also proposed a different CoPS thesis by arguing that the relationship between religion and place can be understood as the function of the correspondence and compensation models of attachment processes (chapter 4). In other words, attached individuals may either compensate for a previous insecure relationship by turning to a new relationship for secure attachment or transfer the internal working models of previous attachments onto a new relationship with a surrogate attachment (chapters 4, 7, and 8). Theoretically, both the attachment theory and motivational systems theory support the possibility of a link between place and religion, in so far that both constructs are conceptualised as objects of attachment.

**Religion and place: empirical findings**

**Factors associated with place attitudes**
Chapter 6 reports on predictors related to the place experiences of the African diaspora in Dutch society. In particular, length of stay (especially among long-term residents), region of residence in multicultural or metropolitan areas, host country’s language proficiency, age differences (particularly among older people aged 46–55 years), gender differences, region or country of origin, and educational background emerged as determinants of place attitudes among African migrants in Dutch society. Results reveal that region/place of residence was related to dependence on Dutch society, suggesting that such place dependency was stronger among African residents in the Western Netherlands (metropolitan cities, socially cohesive communities) than those in the Northern Netherlands (countryside, less socially cohesive region).
Region of origin was also associated with dependence on Dutch society, with African migrants from Western Africa having stronger levels of dependency on Dutch society compared to those from Central Africa.

In addition, Dutch language proficiency was associated with dependence on the Netherlands, with migrants with a little knowledge of Dutch showing lesser dependency on their host community than those who can speak Dutch fluently. Age differences were also related to attachment to and dependence on Dutch society among older adults (aged between 46–55 years) compared to younger people. Another important predictor of place experience was the length of stay of migrants, with results showing that long-term African residents (more than 5 years) had stronger attachment to and dependence on Dutch society than short-term residents (less than 5 years). The same was revealed of educational background, which was associated with attachment to Dutch society, with African residents with a tertiary educational background having weaker attachment compared to those with only a high school education or no educational qualification. Study results also show that female migrants were less likely to depend on Dutch society compared to their male counterparts.

It may be concluded that migration and sociodemographic factors are important variables for discussing the place experiences of dispersed people of African background in Dutch society. Results show that place of residence, region of origin, Dutch language proficiency, length of stay, age differences, gender, and educational background were all significant predictors of place attitudes among African migrants. Most importantly, these factors affect place attitudes for several reasons. For example, the weak sense of place among educated African migrants is likely to be a result of the education-occupation mismatch and economic disadvantage in an international labour market where race and ethnicity matter.

**Predictors of seeking attachment to God**

As shown in chapter 8, 89% of the study participants (N=175) displayed a strong level of attachment to God, thus developing proximity to God and perceiving God as a safe haven and secure base. Seeking attachment to God emerged as an important theme for understanding African transnational spirituality, with region of residence, and the interaction effects of length of stay and religious background, predicting the sense of spirituality of African migrants. African migrants in Western parts of the
Netherlands, compared to those in Northern regions, had a secure attachment to God in terms of perceiving God as a response to separation, secure base, developing proximity to God, and having positive attitudes toward God. This result corroborates literature suggesting a link between adult attachment processes and perceptions of geographical conditions of one’s place of residence (Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2004; Rentfrow, Jokela, & Lamb, 2015; Rentfrow, 2014).

Study results also show that although length of stay is not directly related to seeking attachment to God, I found evidence for a significant length of stay and religious background interaction effect in predicting attachment to God. Hence, participants’ religious background moderates the link between length of stay and attachment to God among migrants of African background in the Netherlands. The interactive effect results suggest two interesting trends. First, indicating that newly-arrived (below 5 years) religiously affiliated migrants scored higher on secure attachment to God and positive attitudes toward God compared to long-term religiously affiliated migrants. Second, it suggests that length of stay may not be directly related to seeking attachment to God, but contingent on participants’ religious background affiliation (especially among those that are religiously affiliated).

**Relationship between religion and place**

As shown in chapter 7, there is a positive relationship between attachment to God and attachment to Dutch society, in that higher score of religious attachment was related to higher scores of place attachment. The positive relationship between attachment to God and place attachment supports the attachment correspondence model and the CoPS exploratory-assertion motivational model, thus indicating that migrants’ relationship with God was a secure base from which they explored and engaged with their society. This result suggests that religiously attached African migrants are likely to experience place as an object of attachment without necessarily substituting one for the other.

The moderation analyses results support the moderating role of attachment to God on the relationship between negative place experiences (e.g., racial discrimination, place insecurity) and dimensions of place (e.g., place attachment, place identity). African migrants with high level of attachment to God developed a more positive attachment to Dutch society (PA) despite their experiences of racial discrimination compared to those with low level of attachment. In addition, feeling unsafe in Dutch
society was negatively associated with place identity among those with low level of AG as opposed to migrants with high level of AG. The moderation results support the role of spirituality in promoting sense of place and managing negative place experiences. This result suggests that African migrants who have developed attachment to Dutch society, despite experiencing racial discrimination, may be coping with the effects of migration due to their secure base in God, from whom they explore the challenges of living in a foreign land.

Although there was a correlation between attachment to God and attachment to Dutch society, I am tempted to believe that there are reasons why attachment to God did not predict other domains of place such as identity of, and dependence on, Dutch society. It could be that African migrants in Dutch society are only drawn to the Dutch environment and not intrinsically drawn to the activities/events and identity of the place. This is likely to be the case, because having a place identity could discourage devotion to God since the Netherlands is known to be a secular society. The same argument can be made with regard to place dependence, since activities and events in a secular society could easily turn one away from devoting to God. What is clear, however, is that attachment to God is important for my research population of migrants, regardless of whether or not they have a sense of place; for most of them, God does provide them with an assurance of hope, comfort, and security. The attachment-religion framework (e.g., Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016) helps us to understand how the believer-God relationship involves aspects of spiritual interconnectedness and connection to the sacred in which the religious behaviour of the believer is more of a fluid, deinstitutionalized phenomenon. Regardless of the individual’s religious faith, attachment to the sacred is a very common experience for most people who are drawn to nature or the universe as a springboard of their spiritual connection, irrespective of their religious or non-religious background.

The above findings corroborate previous findings suggesting the role of religion in place (e.g., Kamitsis & Francis, 2013; Brulin et al. 2018). Brulin and colleagues concluded that place is a significant context when studying psychological functions of religion, as it affects religious schematicity and priming effects. My findings also confirm literature on attachment to God among geographically and emotionally separated adults who engage in imaginary surrogate relationships in the absence of loved ones (Cicirelli, 2004; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016). More so, it
corroborates studies in place attachment literature proposing that positive bonds can be formed with topographical objects such as spatial settings, natural environments, and residential neighbourhood (e.g., Low & Altman, 1992; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001; Scannell & Gifford, 2014, 2017).

**Religion and Place: A Cascade of Parallel Processes**

To further synthesize and discuss the theoretical and empirical findings, I will use Moore’s (2007) framework of parallel processes, in which he speculated about the nature and the neurobiology of attachment development. Moore argues that relationship experiences play a central role in people’s developmental processes and well-being, thus having a significant effect on the individual’s ability to function well in relation to their objects of attachment. According to Moore, relationships are both a focus of intervention and the means through which the attached individual finds meaning in the world because relationships matter and affect other relationships, thus forming a cascade of parallel processes and commonalities at every level. Essentially, Moore's framework helps to put the findings into perspective, showing how adult attachment processes involving a geographical place and a Divine entity are interwoven at both micro and macro levels, thus affecting each other in a cascade of parallel processes. This framework is used as a metaphor/image, not as an additional theory, to understand how different attachment processes may be linked —encompassing both the correspondence and compensation models of attachment.

**Relationships matter: the centrality of relationships**

While evidence of the links between religious and place relationships have been shown in previous sections in this chapter, the relational premises and centrality of these relationships require a retrospective look. To do so, I must first examine the centrality of the believer-God and people-place relationships by addressing two questions: (a) to what extent can the data gathered in the study be used as a measure to assess the quality of relationship in adult attachment processes? and (b) do these data support the primary hypothesis of this study, that extended believer-God and people-place relationships as correlates and important lived experience with attachment advantage?

The centrality of relationships is an organising construct that refers to the integration of relationship-based concepts that express a fundamental re-
examination of trends, pressures, and new knowledge systems affecting human relationship processes within the environment (Weston, Ivins, Heffron, & Sweet, 1997). The discussion that follows examines the critical issues in the operationalisation and conceptualisation of the centrality of relationships at the believer-God and people-place levels, as seen in both historical and empirical material. Attachment is central to human development, and it is not just a contemporary practice but also an ancient phenomenon. As argued in chapter 3, biblical history shows that figures in the bible have sought for objects of attachment in times of distress and for identity formation and collective growth. Although biblical place attachment is diverse and varied, the overall findings suggest that place experiences are related to religious experiences in the bible, and these relationships were central for biblical characters. The centrality of such relationships was seen in how biblical figures experienced God in the context of place or drew close to place in their search for God.

Empirical findings in chapters 6, 7, and 8 also suggest the centrality of relationships with objects of attachment among African diasporas. Importantly, the above-average mean scores of believer-God and people-place relationships among African diasporas in the Netherlands suggest that they are turning to the two objects as surrogate attachments. The reason for such attachment affiliations is not quite known, although empirical studies within the attachment theoretical framework (e.g., Richter, 2004; Cozolino, 2006) show that attached individuals turn to a surrogate attachment when they are in distress or to form a secure base from which to shape their identity and explore the world around them. In other words, attachment surrogates become a target for proximity-seeking behaviour for the attached individual as they navigate their day-to-day lives in relation to established meaningful relationships. I am drawn to conclude that relationships matter. Whether it is to God or to place, relationships matter. These attachment processes are meaningful for the individuals experiencing them and validate their sense of being in the world. Relationships are important for individuals both at the micro or macro levels of hierarchical structures: between parents and infants, romantic partners, religious figures and believers, geographic places and residents, teachers and students, mentors and mentees, managers and staff, government agencies and public civil servants. Relationships matter.
Relationships affect other relationships: spirituality promotes sense of place vs place experiences are the product of faith development

An additional insight, based on our study results in chapters 6, 7, and 8, is that relationships affect other relationships. Siegel (2001, 2003) provides an explanation for this in showing that an individual’s attachment experiences with his/her primary attachment figure is related to how they parent their own children. This is further shown in the attachment to God research (Counted, 2016a, 2016b, 2018a; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016) showing that believer-God relationships are related to experiences with important people in one’s lives. Our empirical and theoretical studies (Chapters 3, 4, 5, 7, & 8) suggest that people-place relationships are associated with believer-God relationships, in the sense that what happens in one domain of relationship informs what is happening in the other domain. In other words, the relationship in one attachment domain may be related to the other relationship domain, as seen in the link between religion and place in chapter 7. The correlation between both relationship experiences suggests that (a) spirituality promotes sense of place, or that (b) place experiences are the product of faith development.

To further elaborate on the above-mentioned underpinnings, the concept of parallel process is used to gain better insight into the link between religion and place. According to Moore (2007, p.3), parallel processes in social work and infant mental health refer to the way “the relationship between a professional and a client parallels the relationship between the client and the important people in their lives”. In other words, the capacity to relate with God as an attachment figure is supported by the quality of one’s relationship with their environment. This initiates a flow-on effect in which people-place relationships influence believer-God relationships, or believer-God experiences promote people-place experiences, especially among dispersed populations. The framework of parallel processes shows that such flow-on effect goes beyond understanding the link between religion and place, and rather shows that the relationship with one object of attachment (e.g. God) reflects the way one relates to another object (e.g. place).
Relationships form a cascade of parallel processes and share common features

One important insight gained in this study is that relationships in the context of place and religion form a cascade of parallel processes and commonalities which are influenced by the individual’s relational, sociodemographic, and migration contexts. For example, the way individuals relate to their place of attachment parallels the way they relate to God, which parallels the way they relate to the important people in their lives and their communities. To put it differently, the way that the individuals relate to their close others and their local community parallels the way they relate to both God and place, sharing similar features of affective development and advantage.

The notion of cascade parallels simply suggests that attachment relationships at all levels have flow-on effects that extend beyond the immediate object of attachment to the next, and the quality of the relationship will ultimately reflect on the next relationship. However, there are exceptions to this rule, since this might not be evident in all relationships. Firstly, the capacity of the religious individual to relate effectively to God is not solely dependent upon the nature of experiences and social environmental qualities in a place, nor does individuals’ sense of place solely depend on their spiritual struggles when maintaining a relationship with God. As shown in the empirical data in chapter 7 on the positive association between people-place and believer-God relationships, it is likely that attached individuals can be drawn to both place and God independently of what might be happening in each domain of relationship, though both experiences might share common migration and socio-demographic backgrounds. These characteristics involve the normative functions of attachment such as proximity to the object, perceiving the object as a safe haven and a secure base, and perceiving the object as a response to separation. The differences in parallel processes occur in relation to the nature of individual differences in the attachment working model. As we have seen in chapters 4 and 5, certain individuals may be drawn to an object to compensate for an unhealthy attachment, as they seek new relationships to cope with the negative effects of a previous relationship or due to the demands of their motivational drives. Others may be drawn to an object just for exploratory curiosity so as to assess the extent to which such object could be reliable and beneficial to their well-being.
Secondly, another exception to the rule of parallel processes in place spirituality is that the most important forms of relational support often come from physical, human relationships rather than from imaginary objects of attachment. While it is possible that God and place may be perceived as objects of attachment among dispersed populations, the extent of the attachment to these objects is ultimately limited to imaginary and visual extents. Physical contact is essential for the physiological development of all individuals (Cicirelli, 2004). Nonetheless, I have shown in this book that objects of attachment such as ‘place’ and ‘God’ can essentially become informal sources of relational support and extensions of relationship cascades. Further, my study findings indicate that the need for God to support the individual in a diaspora context is significantly dependent upon the nature of support they receive in their place of residence, and the level of support they receive in a place is equally dependent upon the nature of support they get from important people in their lives and the broader network of community they have in those settings.

Another aspect of parallel processes not clearly apparent in the cascade model is that the need to turn to place, or to God, is not only dependent upon the nature of the support one receives but contingent on the individual context (e.g., place of residence, length of stay, religious background, place experiences etc.), as shown in chapters 7 and 8. This exception suggests that the cascade of parallel processes in place spirituality is too simplistic and does not capture all the other factors that influence relationships at different levels. Therefore, it is possible that one’s emotional stability or ability to relate effectively with the object of attachment (e.g. place, God, human figures etc) is partly the product of several other relationship cascades that involve migration experience and socio-demographic profiles. Chapters 6 and 7 show that the additional forms of relationship cascades (e.g., through place of residence, educational background, religious background, length of stay, etc.) still appear to be of significance within the individual and cultural contexts. For example, it was found that cultural aspects of gender predict the individual experience of place, with results showing that women had less sense of place compared to men in a migration context. One explanation would be that women are less inclined to think of themselves as staying permanently in the Netherlands if their children are somewhere else, and this would affect their place attachment. In this context, gender roles influence the nature of people-place relationship in a migration context. Furthermore, study results also suggest that region of residence is of significance to
our cascade model of relationships, particularly in a migration context. For example, individuals living in cities in the Western region of Netherlands (e.g. Amsterdam, Utrecht, Den Haag, Rotterdam etc), known as the ‘melting pots’ of cultures, were more drawn to the Dutch society than those in the northern region of the country with limited social contacts and cohesion. The individual contexts therefore play a crucial role in the way the attached individual relates effectively with the object of attachment.

**Limitations and further studies**

While the Circle of Place Spirituality (CoPS) model developed for exploring the link between religion and place may have provided an alternative perspective for understanding the psychology of place spirituality, it still requires further revision and validation, especially due to the dissimilarities between believer-God and people-place relationship experiences. Some of the conceptual issues with the CoPS model have been addressed by attachment scholars from Stockholm University Sweden as a commentary in the 29th volume of Research for the Social Scientific Study of Religion (Brulin & Granqvist, 2018). The CoPS theoretical model still needs to be tested and supported by empirical studies examining the intersection of religion and place.

Another limitation concerns the recruitment design used for this study: snowballing. This referral technique may have influenced the recruitment of more Christian participants, than those from other religious backgrounds, thus affecting the distribution of data. This makes generalisation harder because African migrants who participated in this study may not be representative of the target sample in the Netherlands. However, leading researchers in African migrants’ study (e.g., Renzaho, Bilal, & Marks, 2013) have examined the viability of using this collection technique for conducting research among the African diaspora, thus concluding that migrants can only be reached through recommendation from existing community structures. Therefore, the snowball approach appears to be the most viable technique for collecting data from a migrant or hard-to-reach population group. Further studies capturing a much broader representative sample of migrants in the Netherlands would help in the generalisation of study results and these studies should also explore how the association between spirituality and place attitudes may vary culture, generation, and regions.
In addition, the reliance on self-reports and cross-sectional data made it difficult to make firm predictions about causation even though the study documents associations between variables. Further studies in this area should replicate these findings using longitudinal designs and examine whether the interactive effects of religious attachment and place attitudes on mental health outcomes among migrants are robust across time. Another limitation of the study is the lack of comparison groups since comparing findings between migrants versus natives, for example, would help in comprehending the extent to which religion plays a role as a moderator for each of the group, thus warranting further studies.

The examination of multiple statistical tests opens the researcher to reasonable critiques about Type I or Type II error inflation, especially given the spurious findings and insufficient cell sizes in some demographics (e.g. region of origin, religious background, age differences). The multiple testing on a relatively small sample which may pose a challenge with regard to the power of the test. Hence, these issues may influence the results, thus not providing a fair test of mean differences and coefficient estimates on measures of place and religion. However, due to the numeric disadvantage of the sample group as a migrant, hard-to-reach population the small sample size may be justified.

The study data did not include experiences in human relationships; such data would have helped in understanding how experiences in human relationship may be predicting religious attachment. In terms of the measures used for this study, I feel that the measure of negative place experiences should be considered as a limitation of this study since it was created through an item asking participants their agreement with three categories of such experiences: racial discrimination, feeling unsafe, and anxiety about the future. This measure may be subjective to participants’ retrospective assessment of their position as migrants in a new place struggling to integrate within the broader Dutch society. Future studies may wish to develop a more nuanced measurement for assessing negative place experiences among migrants.

Lastly, the interactive processes by which place spirituality is formed are still not quite clear and require further investigation, given the role of the individual’s context in terms of personal experience, needs, and situation. This study problem then requires (at least) qualitative research to clearly understand the developmental and interactive processes involved in the relationship between religious attachment
and attachment to Dutch society among migrants of African background, as these are not covered in this study. Further research should focus on investigating the effects of place spirituality on psychological and mental health outcomes in a nationwide sample of migrants or dispersed people.

**Broader Implications for Policy and Practice**

This study makes an original contribution to the literature on adult attachment theory, and in particular, to the study of the psychology of religion and social scientific study of religion, as it offers both theoretical and empirical contributions of the psychological links between religion and place. Besides, this book also presents elements for a psychology of African diaspora religion, supplementing the numerous sociological studies in the field. The results from the study have broader implications for migration studies and the scholarly study of the African diaspora. This includes the intersection of politics, practice, and care for African migrants in foreign lands and the consequences of place as a multidimensional construct in such contexts. Since African migrants in Dutch society are likely to seek attachment to God as they navigate or settle in their new place of abode, migration policies targeted at encouraging and strengthening such sense of spirituality should be supported. In a qualitative study elsewhere among the Australian African diaspora in New South Wales (Counted, 2018a), I have argued that migrants’ religious coping domains involving a personal relationship with God are strengthened within the context of a faith community. Perhaps supporting faith communities that offer such spiritual support might help in strengthening migrants’ sense of place, given that our data in chapter 7 show that increased sense of spirituality via attachment to God enhances attachment to place. Additionally, migration-related initiatives targeted at improving sense of place and social cohesion among migrants in less urban areas would be of great importance, since our data show that migrants living in less urban cities in Northern Netherlands had a weaker sense of place than those in metropolitan cities in Western Netherlands. Having the right social environmental atmosphere is important to foster social cohesion and integration among non-natives. This would help migrants and non-natives in those areas to thrive and flourish.
Further Reflections and Conclusion

Reflecting on the phrase ‘experiencing God in a foreign land’ is a complex undertaking. It forces one to think differently about the role of religion in forging individual attitudes toward a geographic place, and its meanings when experiencing God in a place, such that that journeys of spiritual and physical exploration of a place are so closely intertwined that they become two aspects of one journey (Watts, in press). In this study, I have emphasized the important role played by objects of attachment such as ‘place’ and ‘God’ in shaping and managing the individual's environmental and religious behaviour, in such a way that they have a flow-on effect that parallels each other. This was the case when the Israelites, a historical case of a dispersed people, found themselves stranded by the rivers of Babylon where they wailed about their captivity in a foreign land. On the one hand, they found themselves negotiating their identity in a foreign land and struggling with their sense of place, and on the other hand, they were calling upon God to rekindle their faith and give them a sense of comfort and hope amid their afflictions. This is paralleled in the migration experience of African migrants in contemporary Dutch society as they turn to religion in exploring a new place and do, to a lesser or greater degree, form attachment to the Dutch society while maintaining their relationship with God. The nature of this overlap is well-documented in chapters 4 and 5 where I conceptualised how religion and place are related in both problematic and complex ways, suggesting a circle of place spirituality (CoPS) as a theoretical frame. The concept of place spirituality shows either of the three suggested trajectories below in relation to the CoPS model.

Firstly, place spirituality highlights the role of religion in promoting the individual’s experience of a place, involving emotional attachment to a place, developing a place identity, and behavioural commitment to activities and resources in the form of dependence on a place. This multidimensional approach to place means that individuals experiencing God in a particular setting are most likely to deeply explore multiple aspects of place. This could involve exploring their immediate and broader environment either through forming attachment to and identity of the place or being dependent on resources and activities in that place. For example, results from chapter 7 suggest that though African migrants have a secure attachment with God this did not hinder them from exploring the Netherlands by
forming attachment and developing Dutch identity, despite the negative place experiences (e.g. racial discrimination, place insecurity) they encounter in the process of exploring their broader environment. This process may be stimulated by forming an attachment to God who is perceived as a safe haven in times of environmental distress and a secure base from whom to engage the Dutch society. This base of security empowers the attached individual to explore and engage their place of residence boldly, and in the process of such exploration curiosity, an attachment breakthrough may occur in such settings wherein the individual becomes drawn to a dimension of place. Usually, it starts with depending on the activities and resources in a place, which when repeated over a longer period of time can lead to attachment, and as the individual becomes more deeply drawn they begin to develop the identity and adopt the character of the place.

Secondly, place spirituality also involves understanding how the individual’s experience in a geographic setting could trigger emotional attachment to God who then serves as a significant attachment figure in the face of perceived danger and place uncertainty. This perspective reflects the lived experience of the oppressed, marginalised, and afflicted. Individuals at the margins of society who are attempting to hold onto their cultural identity—experiencing difficulties settling in a new place and often falling between cracks of society or further pressed to the outside—are most likely to turn to something or someone for help. When these people become targets of racism, marginalisation, and oppression, it is expected that they may need to deal with those place difficulties through religious coping and turning to spiritual resources (Counted, 2018a; Counted, Possamai, & Meade, 2018; Pargament, 1997). A psychology of place spirituality therefore examines how seeking and maintaining a relationship with God plays such an important role in the context of place insecurity and socio-cultural inequities experienced by individuals pushed to the margins of society.

Thirdly, and most importantly, place spirituality can be influenced by a range of migration-related and socio-demographic determinants which mirror the individual’s background, identity, and culture. In other words, place spirituality may consist of a cascade of parallel processes in the broader spectrum of relationships. The individual context is key to understanding the formation of place spirituality. For example, a first-generation African living in the diaspora is likely to experience place differently than a second or third generation African who is born in the diaspora.
Most first-generation African migrants are likely not to be particularly concerned with issues of racism because they were not raised in a culture of racial discrimination in their home countries, compared to a second, third or fourth generation African migrant born and raised in a permutated cycle of racism in the diaspora. The individual and cultural contexts of these two groups (first vs second generation migrant) will shape the formation of their place spirituality since their context-informed perceptions of socio-cultural issues are different. The former may be concerned with issues of survival while the latter may be perplexed by the politics of racial identity in a *strange* context where they are considered neither as natives nor as non-natives. The black Europeans and African Americans who have no other place to call home and yet are faced with issues of racism, belonging, and systemic oppression, may serve as an example here.

Place spirituality can also be a two-way street, involving the experiences of natives and non-natives, and the oppressed and the oppressors. In other words, it is not only concerned with the religious experiences of non-natives and the oppressed in a particular geographical setting. It is possible for a native to experience place spirituality based on their own context of fear, anxiety, and uncertainty in the face of economic and political instability. A good example is the violence in the Gaza region. Billig (2006) narrates how the Jewish and Palestinian people in the Gaza region continue to hold on to their religious ideologies and identities despite the hostility in the region, with the hope that someday God would bring them a lasting peace.

Hence, the individual context is key to understanding the complex relationship between religion and place. This is also the case for men and women, who are likely to experience place spirituality differently. For instance, factors that influence believer-God relationships among women are expected to be different for men and their sense of spirituality flows on to the way they experience a place. Several studies (e.g., Barry, Seager, & Brown, 2015; Counted & Moustafa, 2017; Feingold, 1994; Geary, 1998) have shown that women are more likely to develop surrogate attachment than men due to the socialisation of gender roles which positions women as more emotional than men. However, this may not always be the case and may depend on the context of the women involved. For example, Rose, Carrasco, and Charboneau (1998) have argued that in a migrant settlement context, women with young children may have a weaker attachment to place compared to their male counterparts. This weaker attachment to place among women is likely to
overlap with the way they experience God in those places, such that they may be deeply drawn to God in compensation for their weak attachment to place. This is partly because relationships affect other relationships, forming a flow-on effect which represents a cascade of parallel processes. So, the key concern is not whether or not the underlying factors trigger attachment to place, or to God, but the direction of that effect which is likely to predict another parallel effect. Therefore, the psychology of place spirituality recognises the complex dynamics of relationships which are important for our day-to-day life, flowing onto another relationship in a cascade of parallel processes.
References


