Summary

Background, aim, and set-up

Place events characterised by violence and the lived experience of human violation and marginalisation create a sense of insecurity. This makes individuals in these places to turn to spiritual coping resources through a relationship experience with the sacred, reading or meditating on religious texts, prayer, and a commitment to other religious activities. These spiritual coping mechanisms provide a sense of felt security, emotional meaning, resilience, and hope in a difficult place. Despite the growing literature on the link between religion and place in social-anthropological and theological studies, little is known on how the intersection of religion and place can be interpreted from a psychological perspective. Drawing broadly on insights from psychological theories, this study offers alternative theoretical contributions to the analysis of the role of religion in experiencing, and living in, a place, as an addition to the growing literature on the psychological interpretation of religious behaviour and representations. In this study, both place and religion are conceptualised as objects of attachment for maintaining proximity, and as symbolic objects serving as a haven of safety in the presence of danger and a secure base 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, attachment, and motivational systems) perspectives and empirical data for positioning place and religion as significant objects of attachment in a diaspora context (Judaeo-Christian and Dutch). Thus, the aim of this study is to understand how dispersed people experience objects of attachment in the form of religion and place and what the psychological and migration factors accounting for these experiences are.

The relationship between religion and place in a diaspora context is a psychological phenomenon, involving attachment processes and how the individual’s experiences in a host country influence their sense of spirituality through seeking and maintaining attachment to God. This relationship was explored by focusing on theoretical, historical, and empirical perspectives. First, an exploration of the link
between religion and place was drawn from psychological perspectives (e.g. adult attachment, motivational systems), as presented in Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5. In these chapters, religion and place were conceptualised as objects of attachment having unique enduring effects on individuals drawn to them or motivated to explore them. This is consistent with literature about the relation between attachment and religion (e.g. attachment to God) on the one hand and environment and behaviour (e.g. attachment to place) on the other hand. Second, in Chapter 3, the intersection of religion and place was explored from a historical lens in the narrative of dispersed people in foreign lands, both in biblical history and as seen in the Jewish exodus chronicle. It was shown that dispersed people in historical times were drawn to objects of attachment in their times of distress and for their individual and collective identity formation. Third, empirical studies were conducted using cross-sectional data on 175 members of the African diaspora communities in the Netherlands. We tested for (a) the migration-related and socio-demographic determinants of place attitudes (Chapter 6), (b) the relationship between religion and place (Chapter 7), and (c) the role of length of stay, religious background, and region of residence in relation to seeking attachment to God in a foreign land (Chapter 8).

Research Questions
The main research question informing the study, as presented in Chapter 1, was:
“How can we theorize and operationalize the relationship between religious attachment and place in a diaspora context in order to understand how dispersed people experience God in a foreign land and the factors accounting for these experiences?” Secondary research questions were:

(a) how can we psychologically conceptualise the intersection of religion and place in a diaspora context?

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

(c) what factors affect seeking and maintaining attachment to God in a diaspora context?

Theory
In the psychology of religion literature, religion is conceptualised as an attachment experience involving how the relationship experience with others influence the individual’s religious behaviour and representations. Religious
experience and devotion to God could arise because of one's migration experience and relationship problems with important people in one's life. Both may lead to a relationship with a Divine entity who is then perceived as a surrogate attachment figure. Adult attachment theory is used to understand the meanings of place in terms of how people relate to the social and environmental conditions of a place as they form a positive emotional bond with such a setting. In other words, places become more than geographic locations with concrete features: they are dynamic contexts of social interaction that activate affective bonds. This perspective has been discussed in recent years as 'sense of place', 'place identity', 'place dependence', 'insideness', and 'rootedness.' These concepts position place as an important psychological locus of human interaction based on its functional value as a desired object of attachment. Adults develop attachment to anthropomorphized objects such as geographical places and Divine entities due to their increased cognitive abilities compared to children. In most cases, they develop this imaginary attachment by the mere knowledge of the whereabouts of the object of attachment. This kind of emotional attachment is the window to exploring aspects of religious representations and behaviour that are developed in the context of a geographic place. This conceptual window was discussed in part I of the study (e.g., Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5) in terms of exploring how certain experiences in a place trigger devotion to God and how spiritual struggles influence exploration of places.

The psychological exploration of the link between religion and place led to an understanding of place as a multidimensional construct involving three main domains: attachment to physical and non-physical elements; dependence on activities/events; and identity or character of a place. These domains were conceptualised in terms of affect, behaviour, and cognition – the ABC of place attitudes – in Chapter 2. This understanding led to the analysis of biblical place events in Chapter 3, showing how biblical places were related to the spiritual experiences of the Israelites who were stranded in a 'foreign land'. Chapter 3 suggests that place-related spirituality is not only a contemporary experience but also an ancient phenomenon shaping the foundation of Christian theology. In Chapter 4, a theory of place spirituality was developed using the compensation and correspondence models of the attachment-religion framework, thus describing place spirituality as the attachment bond established between an individual, a place, and a
Divine entity, in such a way that one’s attachment to God becomes the by-product of their experiences in a place. In Chapter 5, a motivational systems approach to place spirituality was developed to explore how place is theoretically related to religious attachment. It is argued that both attachment to God and exploration of place are shaped by two motivational drives (attachment affiliation and exploration curiosity), thus enabling individuals to identify which object to engage based on their intentions, feelings, needs, motives, and instinct. However, the end-goal of such a motivational task is to achieve attachment-affiliation and exploration curiosity, which are the two main goals of engaging with, or exploring, a place of significance or a Divine entity, for relationship.

**Empirical Research**

*Set-up of the empirical study*

The above-mentioned theoretical framework was tested in the empirical studies in Chapters 6, 7, and 8 on a cross-sectional sample of 175 participants – African migrants – in the Northern and Western parts of the Netherlands. Survey data were collected using a snowball sampling procedure from November 2015 until April 2016. Participants were recruited through referrals by community leaders within existing African community structures/spaces in Northern and Western regions of the Netherlands. These leaders informed their respective communities/groups about the study and a date for the data collection was arranged during one of their events. Participants were involved in different events organised by student, religious, and community leaders. On arrival at these events, members of the respective groups and communities were told that the study was looking at how their relationship experience with God was helping them in dealing with issues of belonging, identity, and migration in the Netherlands. Interested members were invited to complete the survey questionnaire. A total of 353 participants responded to the initial invitation but only 175 participants returned their completed surveys either on the spot, face-to-face, at another meeting, or via PostNL to the university address. Demographical data of the participants were the following: 67% of the participants were residents of cities in Western parts of the Netherlands; 59% of the participants have lived in the Netherlands for more than 5 years and the rest less than 5 years (41%); 52% were female; and 82% of the total sample spoke Dutch or had a little knowledge of the language. Most of the participants were young adults with 72% of
them between 18 to 45 years old and the remaining over 45. In the total sample, 56% had completed tertiary education while the rest (44%) only had high school or less education. Majority of the participants (51%) were married, 43% single, and 6% either divorced, widowed, or separated. In terms of their religious background, 94% of the participants were Christian, while 4% Muslim, 1% African traditional religious practitioners, and 1% identified their religion as ‘other.’

Main Findings

In chapter 6, the predictors of place experiences were examined, and several migration and socio-demographic factors were identified as predictors of place attitudes involving developing identity of, attachment to, and dependence on Dutch society. Particularly, the region of residence of African migrants in the Netherlands was positively related to dependence on Dutch society, with migrants in Western Netherlands having stronger behavioural dependence on place (e.g. turning to learning institutions and activities in the Netherlands) compared to those in the Northern region. Language proficiency was inversely associated with behavioural dependence on resources in Dutch society among African migrants with a little knowledge of Dutch compared to those who could speak Dutch fluently. Older migrants of African background (aged 46–55 years) were more likely to develop both attachment to and dependence on Dutch society compared to their younger counterparts (aged 18–25 years). Level of attachment to Dutch society was significantly lower for participants with a tertiary education background compared to those with a high school education or less educational achievement. However, our study did not account for the countries where the participants acquired their educational qualifications. Level of dependence on Dutch society was lower in females than males, and migrants from Western Africa had stronger levels of such place dependence than those from Central Africa.

In Chapter 7, the role of spirituality in a ‘foreign’ place was examined and empirical results showed evidence for the relationship between religion and place. This link was first seen in the positive relationship between attachment to God and attachment to Dutch society, controlling for educational background, country of origin, age difference, and length of stay. The finding of a direct relationship between attachment to God and place attachment suggests that participants’ spiritual attachment may be a form of secure base from which they explored their broader environment. Furthermore, the moderating role of seeking attachment to God was
examined in the relationship between negative place experiences (involving feelings of place insecurity, racial discrimination, and anxiety about life in Dutch society) and dimensions of place attitudes. Using multiple regression analysis, the interactive effects results support the moderating effect of seeking attachment to God in the link between negative place experiences and developing attachment to Dutch society. The interaction term between negative place experiences and seeking attachment to God was significant for two dependent variables: place attachment and place identity. Interestingly, racial discrimination was positively related to place attachment among securely attached individuals (i.e. those with high levels of attachment to God) but non-significant among insecurely attached individuals with low levels of attachment to God. On the other hand, among insecurely attached individuals with low levels of attachment to God, there was a negative relationship between feeling unsafe in the Netherlands and developing Dutch identity, but this relationship was non-significant among securely attached migrants with high levels of attachment to God. Hence, while insecurely attached migrants (low AG) embraced the Dutch lifestyle/identity as a mechanism for mitigating their own feelings of insecurity in the Netherlands, securely attachment migrants (high AG) turned more to God to manage their experiences of racial discrimination.

In Chapter 8, the interaction effects between length of stay and religious background on seeking attachment to God were further examined. It was found that both length of stay and region of origin predicted seeking attachment to God, with results revealing that migrants in socially cohesive communities in Western Netherlands, compared to those in less socially cohesive areas in the Northern region, developed a correspondence attachment as they sought a relationship with God even though they were socially connected with important people in their lives in the region. Although there was no direct relationship between length of stay and seeking attachment to God, there was a significant interaction effect between length of stay and religious background in predicting religious attachment behaviour. Thus, the religious background of African migrants in Dutch society moderates the link between their length of stay and seeking attachment to God. Based on the moderation results, it was found that among people with a religious affiliation, there was a negative relationship between length of stay and seeking attachment to God, and no significant link was found between length of stay and seeking attachment among those without a religious affiliation.
Conclusion

Finally, Chapter 9 discussed the findings of the study in relation to believer-God and people-place relationships which were experiences that affect each other, thus having a flow-on effect in the daily lives of dispersed people. The emphasis of this thesis, however, is not on whether the mentioned underlying factors trigger attachment to place, or to God, but on the question if the direction of that effect is likely to predict another parallel effect. The relationship between religious and place attachment leads to further insight into the complex dynamics of adult relationship experiences that are important for our day-to-day life, flowing from one relationship onto another in a cascade of parallel processes. Study implications were also discussed in relation to African transnational spirituality, which has been conceptualised in psychological perspective.

In summary, the study proposes a theory of place spirituality, highlighting the role of spirituality in promoting social belonging through increased place attachment among those on the margins of society. Understanding the nature of these relationship processes, to place and to God, are relevant for both research and practice. Individuals and communities working with dispersed people need a more sophisticated understanding of their relationship experiences with objects of attachment in order to promote and formulate effective integration and migration policies for dispersed people of all race and culture.