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Authors

Mazumdar, Shampa

Mazumdar, Sanjoy

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Religion and place attachment: A study of sacred places

Shampa Mazumdar^a, Sanjoy Mazumdar^{b,*}

^a*Department of Sociology, University of California, Irvine, CA 92697-5100, USA*

^b*School of Social Ecology, University of California, Irvine, CA 92697-7075, USA*

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Abstract

In this paper we claim that religion can play an important role in place attachment and present a conceptualization of it. We provide an understanding of the role of place in the experience of religious place attachment, describing in detail place, design, aesthetics, and special characteristics that facilitate devotion. Next, we describe how attachment to place is learned through the process of socialization involving rituals, use of artifacts, story telling, and place visits. We argue that there is an active socializing component to religious place attachment in addition to the experiential one. We conclude with a brief discussion integrating the complex issues of religion, place, identity, and attachment.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Religion, place attachment, and identity

This paper focuses on how religion fosters place attachment. In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in the study of people's attachment to places (Low & Altman, 1992; Marcus, 1992; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 1993; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996; Hay, 1998). According to Relph (1976:1) "to be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places." Scholars from anthropology, geography, sociology, and environmental psychology have looked at a variety of "significant places" such as, enclaves (Gans, 1962; Rivlin, 1982, 1987; Abrahamson, 1996; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2000), plazas (Low, 1992), homes (Marcus, 1992; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 1993, 1999), and compounds (Pellow, 1992), among others. From these studies we learn that "significant places" provide "stability and security" (Brown & Perkins, 1992), act as "anchors" (Marcus, 1992), and "symbolic life line[s]" (Hummon, 1989), and become "fields of care" (Relph,

1976). They are invested with deep emotional meaning, so much so that collective sentiments strongly resist any attempt to alter the setting (Firey, 1945/1961).

Much of this literature on place attachment, barring a few exceptions (such as Rapoport, 1982; Low, 1992; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 1993; Devine-Wright & Lyons, 1997), has focused on secular places and settings. The role of religion and attachment to sacred spaces and places has largely been ignored, minimized, or marginalized. We feel that the integration of religion into the place attachment literature is necessary and argue for its inclusion, for the following reasons.

First, religion can be important to people and can constitute a significant component of many people's private and public lives, affecting lifestyle choices, such as those related to selection of food, dress, mates, homes, neighborhoods, places of worship, communal gatherings and community participation, among others. The primacy of religion in city and social life was first extensively documented by Fustel de Coulanges (1873) in his study of ancient cities of Greece and Rome. Though Fustel de Coulanges's somewhat deterministic view of religion has been challenged by the forces of secularization scholars have argued that religion and the sacred have not lost their importance in modern society

*Corresponding author. Fax: +1 949 824 8566.

E-mail address: mazumdar@uci.edu (S. Mazumdar).

(Mol, 1976; Yoo, 1999; Warner & Wittner, 1998; Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000; Bowen, 2002). Indeed, the recent revival of religious ideology and nationalism in different contexts and settings from mature nation states to emerging ones to diasporic communities seem to indicate that, far from disappearing, religion continues to define and legitimate social reality. This is manifest in the building of new places of worship; for example, in the United States alone, there has been a dramatic upsurge in new construction by immigrants in the 1990s with estimates of 400 Hindu temples, between 1500 and 2000 Buddhist temples, and 1000 and 1200 mosques and Islamic centers (Warner & Wittner, 1998). However, rather than adopt religious determinism as advocated by Fustel de Coulanges, we suggest that it would be more appropriate to look at “religion as a cultural system” (Geertz, 1966) consisting of:

sacred symbols [which] function to synthesize a people’s ethos—the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood—and their world view—the picture they have of the way things in sheer actuality are, their most comprehensive ideas of order (Geertz, 1966:3).

Second, religion can have a profound influence on people’s relations to place, and on place itself through designs of cities, neighborhoods, homes, and sacred structures. “Religious man”, according to Eliade, (1959:43) “sought to live as near as possible to the center of the world.” This concept of the center is well articulated in Native American landscape and design. Highwater (1981:122), for example, explains:

A ritually defined center, whether the fire at the center of the Plains tipi or the *sipapu* (Earth Navel) within the Pueblo *kiva*, expresses not just a mathematically and architecturally fixed point, but is also taken to be the actual center of the world.

Furthermore, ancient cities were designed to reproduce “the work of the gods” (Eliade, 1959:32; see also Lynch, 1981). The Chinese city is an example:

The traditional form and layout of the Chinese city is the image of the Chinese cosmos, an ordered and consecrated world, set apart by a massive earthen girdle from the contingent world beyond (Tuan, 1974:164).

In like manner, many villages and towns in traditional India were “planned according to a religious symbolism, which governed the layout of wards and streets, the location of temples, monasteries, and village halls...” (Mukherjee, 1940/1961:396). Other examples of religion and city planning come from western cities. According to Mumford (1961), the focal point of the medieval European city was the cathedral with its spire dominating the cityscape indicative of the centrality of religion in

urban life. In describing a Mormon settlement, Sopher (1967:32) writes:

In its later use by certain religious communities, the grid plan may reflect an ideal cosmic plan. The Mormon use of a form of grid in their planned communal settlements, notable for their large square blocks, follows the plans for the City of Zion revealed in the Mormon sacred tradition.

In Israel, Borukhov, Ginsburg, and Werczberger (1979) found that “religious orthodoxy” was a factor in the urban ecology of Tel Aviv.

Religion and religious values affect not only the layout of cities, but also the use of land (through planting of particular trees and vegetation), the orientation of streets and buildings, the structure of neighborhoods, and the designs of homes, places of worship, cemeteries, and gardens (Sopher, 1967; McDannell, 1986; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 1993, 1999, 2004).¹

Third, for the believer, places in religion help in the learning of identity and the self. In this Mead’s (1934) analysis is particularly significant. For Mead (1934) the self emerges through the process of role taking. An individual first learns to take on the role of significant others, such as parents and teachers, and then later internalizes the values of the generalized other, such as the group or community. Scholars such as Rochberg-Halton (1984) have argued that in Mead’s concept of the generalized other not only people but objects and artifacts also can have the “power” to act as “role models.”² This argument has found support among others, as well. For Proshansky, Fabian, and Kaminoff (1983:57) “the development of self identity is not restricted to making distinctions between oneself and significant others, but extends with no less importance to objects and things, and the very spaces and places in which they are found.” To them, place identity represents a “sub-structure of the self-identity of the person consisting of broadly conceived cognitions about the physical world in which the individual lives” (Proshansky et al., 1983:59). It is “a complex cognitive structure which is characterized by a host of attitudes, values, thoughts, beliefs, meanings, and behavior tendencies” (Proshansky et al., 1983:62).³

A person’s religious self can be linked to places and spaces significant to his/her religion. In sacred places a

¹We have cited here only a few relevant works. For a detailed review see Eliade (1959), Shukla (1995/1960), Sopher (1967), Tuan (1974), Lynch (1981).

²According to Rochberg-Halton (1984:339), “the importance of a role model in Mead’s perspective lies in its representativeness as a sign, and an inanimate doll can symbolize the role of mother or father to a child just as an animate person can... In other words, objects can objectify the self”.

³Definitions are also provided by Feldman (1990), Low (1992), and Brown and Perkins (1992), among others.

believer experiences religion, participates in significant life cycle rites, and interacts with significant religious others, such as high priests, rabbis and so on, as well as the generalized religious other represented by the community of believers (Mead, 1934). All of the above issues are significant in understanding religious place attachment.

How does religion affect people's attachment to places? This is the primary question for this paper. We argue that place can be an integral part of religion and religion can in turn play an important role in the development of place attachment. To provide an understanding of this, in this exploratory study, we draw on Hinduism, Judaism, and Islam, with occasional examples from Buddhism, Catholicism, and Sikhism.⁴

This paper is based primarily on information derived from secondary sources, including ethnographies, sociological literature, biographies, first-hand written accounts of pilgrimage, historical writings, as well as review of magazines and newspapers for more recent happenings.

2. How religion affects people's attachment to places

We present a conceptual model for understanding the complex connections between religion, place, identity, and attachment. In this model, we see three major components that act on each other (Fig. 1).

Place is acknowledged as an important component of the model. These places can be small or micro spaces, such as homes, home altars and shrines (Mazumdar, in press; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 1993, 1994; McDannell, 1986), and gravesites. These may be macro spaces such as entire cities (Jerusalem, Banaras, Mecca, Amritsar), or large regions that may include parts of or whole nations (e.g. the land of Israel for Jews). They can be places in nature, such as a mountain, hill, lake, river, or rock or remote rural site. They can be human made structures, such as temples, synagogues, or mosques, monumental or small and innocuous (see also Bowen, 2002). Significance of places can be due to the qualities of the place or "place centered sacredness" (Eade & Sallnow 2000:7) or due to persons or "person centered sacredness" (Eade & Sallnow 2000:7). As Bowen (2002:223) points out, "a religious place may be conceived as an origin point for a prophet or people; as a place where gods or spirits reside; or as a spot where a notable event occurred." Religion endows these places with symbolic meaning which not only helps differentiate them from ordinary spaces, but through their geography, design or architectural aesthetics have the capacity to also foster attachment, devotion, spirituality, and a certain "disposition", "ethos", and "worldview"

(Geertz, 1966) in its believers, and in some instances in others as well.

Religious socialization is a second important component of the model. Here the emphasis is on how religious place attachment is taught and learned through mechanisms such as ritual, story, text, drama, experience, and pilgrimage.

The model also includes the individual and collective component of religious place attachment. Collective attachment can be fostered through a congregational focus and mandated collective prayers. Acting as collectives, persons can develop strong attachment to places religions considers significant or a place that the collective feels is significant. For example, a shrine may be especially significant to a group because of special happenings there. Similarly, individual persons also can develop special individual attachment to religious places. Individuals may have a particularly strong attachment to a particular place or structure more than others in that religion or that collective, and in some instances the attachment may be less intense or non-existent for an individual. Environmental psychologists have paid a great deal of attention to individual preferences and behavior. Here the reference is not to an individual's personal choices but that which is affected by religion.

In this paper we discuss in detail the first two components. Space does not permit us to take up the third component, but it can form the subject of a future study.

2.1. Religion, place attachment, and place characteristics

In this section we focus on a few significant places in religion. Fig. 2 provides an overview of place components important in the religions examined, though some examples from the few religions not examined in detail are also included.

2.1.1. Sacred cities

Many religions (Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, and Sikhism, among others) have invested specific cities with sacred characteristics. They are often described as centers of the earth (Eliade, 1959; Eck, 1982), and places of creation, devotion, and power.

For the believer, the place itself can be an important part of identity formation. Jerusalem is one such place. "The air over Jerusalem is saturated with prayers" (Elon, 1989:62 quoting Amichai, 1967). Jews who come to Jerusalem have "felt" its "awe and wonder", because they believed "God dwelt in Jerusalem..." (Elon, 1989:118). Here they are "transported mysteriously to become contemporaneous with God" (Elon, 1989:118). Many touch, pray, and weep at the Western Wall, the ruins of which have come to symbolize the "centrality of

⁴The choice of these three religions was mainly due to knowledge.

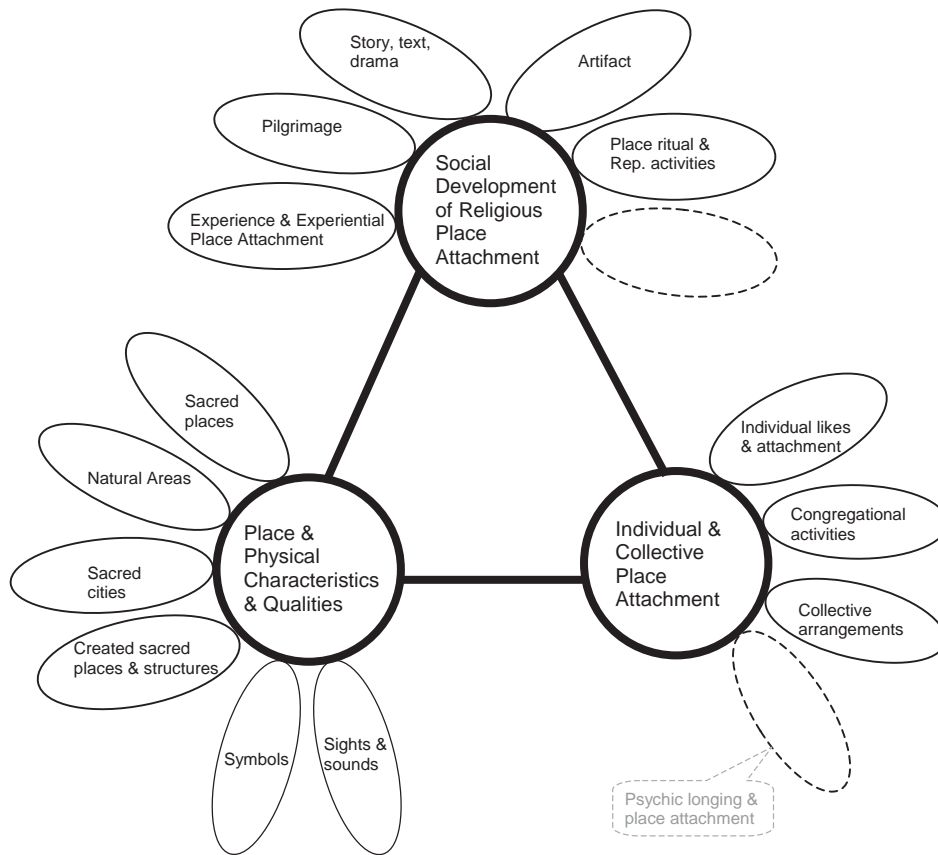


Fig. 1. Religious place attachment: a model. Broken line ellipses indicate possibilities not discussed in the paper. Lighter fonts indicate probable titles of areas for those ellipses.

RELIGION	Hinduism	Judaism	Islam	Buddhism	Catholicism	Sikhism
SACRED PLACES						
Sacred cities	Banaras Mathura	Jerusalem	Mecca Medina	Budh Gaya, Sarnath	Rome Jerusalem	Amritsar
Sacred structures	roadside shrines temples	Wailing Wall, synagogues	mosques roadside shrines	temples, stupas, monasteries	cathedrals, churches, monasteries, shrines	Golden Temple, gurudwaras
Sacred burial sites	no burial sites	tombs of religious personages	tombs of religious personages			
Sacred places in nature	all of nature (esp. mountains, rivers, lakes)	specific places made significant due to special events	specific places made significant by special events	mountains, rivers, lily ponds	sites of healing waters/miracles/ visions of Virgin Mary (e.g. Lourdes)	

Fig. 2. Religion and place: some examples. Note: The list of religions is not exhaustive. A few examples are considered. Not shaded are the religions focused on, shaded are religions not focused on.

Jerusalem in Jewish consciousness” (Kollek & Eisner, 1990:20). Here,

Worshippers write prayers and pleas and hopes on little pieces of paper and push them between the stones,...(Hazleton, 1986:89).

Some are overcome with emotion.

I would go down to the Wall again with Ilana... and I would watch with horror and respect as Ilana touched those smooth stones, polished by millions of heads and hands and fingertips over the centuries, and began to wail. The sound was primordial, animal like, terrifying... a sound that would break the heart of angels...(Hazleton, 1986:88).

Banaras too, has special place qualities. Located in the northward bend of the sacred river Ganges, and facing the rising sun (Putman, 1978), Banaras is the dwelling place of the Hindu god Shiva. “The very stones of Kashi are Shiva” claims a popular saying (quoted in Bowen, 2002:239).

Here the supreme god has taken up permanent residence... Shiva dwells not only in the city’s great temples, but in the very ground and substance of the place itself (Eck, 1982:31).

In Mecca, a Muslim finds places significant in the life and actions of the Prophet and to Islam. Located there is the *Kaaba*, a “large cubic structure... draped in gold-bordered black silk cloth... the centerpoint of the religious world for Muslims” (Bowen, 2002:228), the well of Zamzam which marked the spot where Mecca was later built (Bowen, 2002:232), and the plains of Arafat where the Prophet preached his last sermon.

Sacred cities are bestowed with special properties due to the quality of air, light, and water, unique sights and sounds, and the presence of sacred structures and artifacts. Some have commented on the quality of air and the special light of Jerusalem. Saul Bellow (1976:10) writes:

We step into the street and my friend David Shahar, ... takes a deep breath and advises me to do the same. The air, the very air is thought to be nourishing in Jerusalem, the sages themselves said so. I am prepared to believe it. I know that it must have special properties... This atmosphere makes the American commonplace “out of the world” true enough to give your soul a start...

Elsewhere, he writes that:

...I too feel the light of Jerusalem has purifying powers and filters the blood and thoughts; I don’t forbid myself the reflection that “light may be the outer garment of God” (Bellow, 1976:93).

Banaras is imbued with the sights and sounds of Hinduism. From the funeral pyres at Manikarnika Ghat, to the soft chants of “Hare Krishna Hare Rama, Hare Rama Hare Krishna” (Putman, 1978) to the numerous temples, to ritual purification in the Ganges, the Hindu vision of life and death is embodied here (see also Hertel & Humes, 1993).

In all of the cities described above, religion mediates their physical, historic, and symbolic qualities, and in so doing connects people to religion and place.

2.1.2. Sacred structures

In religion, sacred structures are places of prayer, veneration, meditation, and education. Through their design, décor, and aesthetics, they help bring a person closer to religious ideals, spirituality, community, and place. Ranging from ornate structures, and simple roadside shrines, to remote gravesites, and tranquil monasteries, they celebrate the sacred, inspire awe, and evoke reverence. Some religious structures are built to replicate the cosmos, representing not only an “*imago mundi*” but also an “earthly reproduction of a transcendent model” (Eliade, 1959:58). Smith (1978:18) provides one such example:

The central towering pyramid of the temple at Cambodia’s Angkor Wat was conceived as a magic mountain that ran through both heaven and earth—as cosmic axis—held the world stable and in place. It’s design repeated heaven. It’s moat mirrored the heavenly ocean... As pilgrims crossed the temple’s rainbow bridge (rainbows often symbolized the arch from heaven to earth) they believed they were stepping into heaven on earth. They felt they were likely to find gods there too, for gods would feel at home in a place so closely patterned after their own abode.

The architectural design and physical elements of the built structure can transport the believer to a different place and reality, enabling him/her, as Smith (1978) points out, to experientially find heaven on earth.

Sacred structures can also foster communal bonds. Places of worship in some religions, most notably Judaism and Islam, are significant primarily as “places of assembly” (Sopher, 1967). Mosques and synagogues are built with the congregation in mind and the provision of spacious prayer halls is an important requirement in their design. “In these religions, only the community can provide the proper context of worship, and it is this which invests synagogue and mosque with their sanctity” (Sopher, 1967:28). In the *jumma masjids* (Friday mosques), the community of male believers gathers for the Friday noon prayers, the required congregational prayers for males. Standing together, shoulder to shoulder, they align their prayer mats in the direction of Mecca; in unison they bow,

kneel, prostrate themselves, following closely the actions of the prayer leader. Praying together in unison represents a re-affirmation of commitment not only to religion but to the religious community as well.

The Hindu temple in contrast to mosques and synagogues is designed to be a “house of god” (Sopher, 1967). Hindus are not required to go to a temple; nor are they mandated to pray at a particular time and place with the religious collective. Going to a temple is an individual’s choice, and represents a spiritual quest, with the design of the temple facilitating this personal journey and “visitation” or communion with one’s god. In a south Indian Hindu temple for example, one steps into the temple through a series of gateways, elaborately decorated with “innumerable sculptures of deities, kings, celestial beings, demons, dancers and animals all representing the manifold universe” (Ramaswamy & Ramaswamy, 1993:151). Leaving behind the material, the believer enters another domain; as he/she approaches the inner sanctuary *garba-griha* (“womb chamber”) the space gets narrower and darker. Enshrined in this sacred-sanctorum is the resident deity of the temple, dimly outlined by the flame from a brass lamp. Here at the end of the journey, the believer “sees” or has *darsan* of the Lord (Ramaswamy & Ramaswamy, 1993; see also Eck, 1981).

Furthermore, places of worship with their distinctive physical elements, “summon” the believer “with symbols” (Smith, 1978:17). The *torii* or “ceremonial gateway” of Shinto shrines “divides the sacred precincts from the ordinary world” (Clarke, 1993:196). The graceful minarets of the mosque beckon Muslims to prayer (Delaney, 1990), the calligraphic inscriptions serve as visual reminders of the Quranic teachings, and the *mihrab* (prayer niche) orients them in the direction of Mecca.

Architectural design of symbols and artifacts also teach what is important to religion. The division of prayer space into male-female sections in Muslim mosques and orthodox Jewish synagogues informs the believer of the importance of gender separation in prayer; the lack of statues, paintings, and sculptures in mosques teaches about the Quranic prohibition against animal and human representation; the presence of the consecrated fire in Zoroastrian temples is a re-affirmation of the sanctity of fire; the placement of the Sikh holy text the *Guru Granth Sahib* on an elevated platform under an elaborately decorated canopy expresses the high status given to this book as the eternal teacher (*guru*) (see Fig. 3 for a chart providing brief descriptions).

Finally, the design features of sacred structures can instill an inner tranquility and peace, by providing an oasis of spiritual calm in a frenzied world. This is done through selection of location (in remote areas near nature, such as mountains, lakes, and rivers), planting of

trees, flowers, and shrubs, use of water (fountains, fish ponds), designs of spaces, and furnishings (such as rugs, prayer mats), or lack of it through a barren simplicity, and so on. The gardens of Zen Buddhist monasteries, “often no more than rocks and raked sand,” help capture the “rhythms of natural landscape of mountains, sea and space” and “are useful aids to meditation” (Clarke, 1993:162). A visitor to a sanctuary in Morocco describes the peaceful ambience in the following way:

... the silence, the rugs, and the clean mats, which are nicely arranged... the sound of the fountain in the silence. An enormous silence where the sound of water is as fragile as thread. I stay there hours, sometimes whole days (Mernissi, 1989:112–113).

2.2. Religion, place attachment, and socialization

While the characteristics of place itself can inspire and cultivate devotion, spirituality, community, and tranquility, a person’s connection to place is not solely reliant on the qualities of place and can also be learned through the process of religious socialization. In this, significant religious others, such as parents, educators, and peers along with the larger community of believers, can play an important role in identity formation, teaching through prayers and rituals, stories and symbols, as well as through personal experience of the place. The focus of this section will be on religious socialization and the role of ritual, artifacts, story telling, and the experience of place in the learning of place attachment.

2.2.1. Place ritual

We define place rituals as a series of acts through which places in religion are repeatedly invoked, their sacredness re-affirmed and a person’s identification with place solidified. According to Geertz (1968:100),

For the overwhelming majority of the religious in any population... engagement in some form of ritualized traffic with sacred symbols is the major mechanism by which they come not only to encounter a world view but actually to adopt it, to internalize it as part of their personality.

Place rituals can play a significant role in this “internalization” process. In this capacity, place rituals act as “reminders” (Berger, 1967) informing and transforming the believer. “Reminders” can take the form of daily prayers and/or special occasion invocations. This is particularly evident in Judaism. For Jews in diaspora, physically dispersed and separated from their sacred places, engagement in place ritual was a significant mechanism through which distant places were made central and kept active in their worldview, ethos, and consciousness. Jerusalem was lost but not forgotten.







RELIGION CHARACTERISTICS OF SACRED STRUCTURES	Hinduism	Judaism	Islam	Buddhism	Catholicism	Sikhism
Height	<i>shikhara</i>		minaret		spires	
Sounds	temple bells	ram's horn	<i>muezzin's</i> call to prayer 5 times a day	gong, bells	church bells	
Direction	East	Jerusalem	Mecca			
Symbols	<i>Om</i>	Star of David	crescent moon	<i>Dharma</i> wheel	cross	<i>Khanda</i>
						
Focal Point	<i>garba-griha</i>	Ark (torah)	<i>qibla</i> wall	altar	altar	<i>Guru Granth Sahib</i>
Furnishings	bare floors	pews	carpeted or bare floors	bare floors	pews	bare floors
Human Representations	statues, sculptures, paintings included	disallowed	disallowed	statues	statues	pictures of <i>gurus</i>

Fig. 3. Religion and characteristics of sacred structures: some examples. Note: The list of religions is not exhaustive. A few examples are considered. Not shaded are the religions focused on, shaded are religions not focused on.

The mention of Jerusalem was obligatory in all the statutory prayers... The most important of the many references is the 14th blessing of the daily *Amidah* which is entirely devoted to Jerusalem. It begins “And to Jerusalem Thy city return in mercy... rebuild it soon in our days” and concludes, “Blessed art thou, O Lord, who buildest Jerusalem” (Hallamish, 1973:292).

Several Jewish services, such as those for Passover and Yom Kippur, end with the saying, “Next year in Jerusalem”.

Similarly, place rituals permeate the daily lives of Muslims. Reminders to Mecca are an important component of daily prayer. Whether in a mosque or at home, in the workplace or in the dormitory, in Saudi Arabia or in China, Muslims turn to Mecca in prayer. In setting out the arrangement of beds, Mecca plays a role.

Care is taken by them to ensure that their feet are not turned toward Mecca, the most sacred of Muslim spaces. Some Muslim immigrants in the US, for example, try to orient their beds in a way that the head, and not the feet, point toward Mecca (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004). In death too, a person's head and not his/her feet must face Mecca. Plots in cemeteries are aligned with this in mind (Richardson, 1985; Leonard, 1989-90).

2.2.2. Place artifacts

Artifacts are important teaching devices; they act as visual reminders and provide a more tangible, physical connection to place. They remind through depiction of the sacred and are found in homes as well as in public sacred spaces. Murals, paintings, photographs, replicas, sculptures express the physical and symbolic properties of the sacred. They thus serve as “visual texts” creating

and defining religious reality (Eck, 1981). Hindu homes have paintings, pictures, and replicas of famous Hindu temples, such as the Minakshi temple in Madurai, the Sun Temple in Konarak, the Jagannath temple in Puri, and the Venkateshwara temple in Tirupati. Other artifacts include sealed jars of water from Ganges in Banaras, as well as brass lamps, prayer beads, among others.

Similarly, artifacts are used in some Jewish homes and synagogues to make Jerusalem ever present in the consciousness of the Jewish people. The following are two examples:

The rabbis developed elaborate rules and rituals to keep Jerusalem alive in the memory of the exile. No home was to be without a *zecher lakhurban* (reminder of the destruction)—that is, a piece of wall left unfinished or without paint, and a plaque, often with a sketch of the Western Wall, indicating the direction of prayer (Elon, 1989:36).

Miller, spiritual leader of the Reform temple for 18 years, wanted to do something special that would create a greater bond, a tangible link, between the 600 family congregation and Jerusalem. Inspired by the words of the Hasidic Rabbi Naftali, he thought of a sculpture of Jerusalem “to which we could add our own bricks”. The result is the “Joy of Jerusalem Wall” now in place in the temple’s sanctuary ... The sculpture, 14 feet high and 24 feet wide, is done in marble of different colors and depicts the city of Jerusalem. Prominent are the Western Wall (“Wailing Wall”) and the arch that represents the Temple of Jerusalem ... In one corner of Bat Yahm’s Wall of Joy are two tablets shaped in the form of the tablets of the 10 Commandments. They are made of Jerusalem stone quarried in Israel (Loos, 1995:B20).

In Muslim homes and mosques, artifacts are used to remind and solidify connections to sacred places. In some homes in America for example, a *qibla* compass is used to orient the believer in the appropriate direction during prayer and sleeping (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004). Also displayed in homes are pictures of famous mosques, the *Kaaba* in Mecca and in Shi-ite Muslim homes pictures of tombs, such as those of Hussein in Karbela and Ali at Najaf (Qureshi, 1996). In Egypt, Muslim pilgrims returning from pilgrimage to Mecca paint murals on the walls of their homes (Campo, 1987). Others represent the sacred sights of Mecca, such as the *Kaaba* and Arafat through drawings and book illustrations (Metcalf, 1990).

2.2.3. Place, story text, and drama

Place stories, hymns and myths are important components of socialization in some religions. Whether transmitted orally through singing and storytelling or

textually through written literature, they help to teach, explain and clarify place meaning. This is done in a variety of ways.

First, repeated references help establish for the believer the centrality and significance of specific sacred sites.

Second, though some narrate sacred history focusing on important events such as revelations, visions, miracles, birth and death of prophets, completion of architectural monuments and so on, other stories and hymns describe and extol the unique physical, spiritual, supernatural, and cosmic qualities of place. For example, there are several *mahatmyas* (place hymns) dedicated to Banaras (Eck, 1982). One hymn elaborates on the “power” of the place:

There [in Banaras] whatever is sacrificed, chanted, given in charity, or suffered in penance, even in the smallest amount, yields endless fruit because of the power of that place (Trishalsetu 131, quoted in Eck, 1982:35).

Third, place stories keep places alive in the minds of people even when the places themselves have been altered, defaced, or even completely destroyed. Hindu place stories recall the significant events from history such as the destruction of temples, the concealment of sacred icons, the secret worship of deities and the reconstruction of sacred places. Similarly, Jewish place stories re-told repeatedly from one generation to the next were instrumental in keeping Jerusalem alive in the “collective memory”⁵ of its people. The following is one example:

In his memoir, *Kindheit im Exil* (Childhood in Exile) Shmaryahu Levin recounted how the ninth of Ab (the anniversary of the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem) was marked in the 1880s, more than eighteen hundred years after the event, at Swislowitz, a little town near Kiev, where Levin was born. In his mother’s telling of the story, he wrote, there was so much freshness, so much passion, so much personal indignation “that the sense of time was wholly destroyed”; it was as though the Romans had crushed “us,” as though it had been “our” house that they had brutally destroyed, as though “we, our family, our relatives and friends had lived in glorious Jerusalem, and only yesterday the villain Titus had banished us to Swislowitz ...” (Elon, 1989:60–61).

Finally, place stories when enacted through plays allow for the dramatized recreation of a “sacred microcosm” (Bhardwaj, 1973), making it possible for an ordinary spectator to be transformed into a vicarious pilgrim and enabling him/her to “visit,” albeit only

⁵For further details on “collective memory” see Halbwachs (1980).

vicariously, sacred sites, rivers, temples, and cities.⁶ The dramatized production *Ramlila*, based on the Hindu Epic *Ramayana*, is an important example of this; it takes the assembled audience on a pilgrimage to (*tirthasthan*s) significant sacred pilgrimage sites associated with the life and events of the Hindu *avatar*, Ram, traversing the sacred geography of India, from his birthplace in Ayodhya, in the north, to his place of exile and finally to the important battles in Sri Lanka in the south (Schechner, 1993:53–55).

2.2.4. Place experience

Socialization through place visits and pilgrimage can be one of the most intense learning experiences. In pilgrimage, learning through ritual, texts, and story telling synergistically combine so that the experiential sense is heightened. It enables the pilgrim to witness first hand the place qualities described earlier, through the engagement of all the senses. The believer “sees” the sacred sights (temples/churches, relics, icons, monuments); he/she “hears” the sacred sounds (church and temple bells, drum beats, chanting, singing, the call to prayer), “touches” the sacred artifacts (icons, deities, texts); “eats” special food (such as consecrated food); and “smells” specific aromas (incense, fresh flowers) (Eck, 1981:9).⁷

Pilgrimage also makes it possible for the believer to encounter his/her religious past, to walk the very places where prophets, saints, and holy men and women have walked, to pray at the very sites where so many have prayed before. Tala Santos, led a group of Brazilian Christian pilgrims to Jerusalem during Holy Week. Walking the very route taken by Jesus, she says:

My faith became gigantic... we felt Him walking among us (quoted in Mairson, 1996:4).

For Muslims, pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*) commemorates Prophet Muhammad’s pilgrimage to the city which forms the “model for all pilgrimages” (Bowen, 2002:229). It is a religious duty, representing one of the five pillars of Islam, requiring all Muslims to undertake this journey at least once in their lifetime. Once in Mecca, all pilgrims are required to engage in a series of prescribed ritual acts to be performed collectively (Bowen, 2002; Abercrombie, 1978; Campo, 1991). Pilgrims are required to wear special pilgrim’s clothing, circumambulate the *Kaaba* seven times, run back and forth along a street in Mecca, stand together in

the plains of Arafat, stone three pillars at Mina⁸ (Bowen, 2002; Abercrombie, 1978). These actions performed sequentially engage the believer in the sacred geography and history of the place.

Pilgrimage in Islam, as a religious requirement, has important implications for place attachment: first, it emphasizes the importance of place particularly those places associated with the Prophet; second, it requires all believers to visit the place and experience its physical qualities; third, subsequently, identification with place becomes an integral part of Muslim identity.

But not all pilgrimages are the same. The experience as well as the motivation to visit can be varied and complex. Though Muslim pilgrimage is mandated and collectivistic, pilgrimage in other religions is neither obligatory nor prescribed (see also Bowen, 2002). Rather, the believer visits sacred sites for individual reasons, ranging from “adoration of the deities or saints who are enshrined at various sacred places, gaining merit for one’s salvation, paying penance for annulment of sin, or praying for the repose of the spirits of the deceased” (Kitagawa, 1992:178–179). The individualistic component can be seen in the Japanese pilgrimage to the island of Shikoku:

The pilgrimage takes the pilgrim to 88 temples devoted to Buddhist worship, as well as to unofficial places for Buddhist worship and many other shrines to spirits. The thousand-mile journey around the island’s circumference, ... takes about two months for the healthy and longer for men and women who are ill. The pilgrimage is always made clockwise. One may begin anywhere and stop when one has reached the initial point, closing the circle. The circle has no beginning or end. ... The purposes of making the pilgrimage is not to earn merit but to purify and better understand oneself. “The path is the goal itself” (Bowen, 2002:238).

Whether the motivations and experience are collectivistic and scripted, emphasizing submission to God, as in Islam, or individualized and personal focusing on self-improvement, as in Japanese Buddhism⁹, pilgrimage itself is a transformative experience for many. For some adherents, it forever links the person with the place. For example, Jews who have gone on pilgrimage to Jerusalem “changed their name upon their return to Europe ... and were hence known as Yerushalmi (Jerusalemite)” (Elon, 1989:127). Similarly, a Muslim who has gone on *hajj* is now honorifically called a *hajji* (for male) or *hajjiya* (for female). Further, a *hajji* may wear a beard, take on a new name, an Arabic one (McDonnell, 1990), and wear white (Bowen, 2002), all

⁶There are other examples of vicarious pilgrimage. According to Bowen (2002) the internet has facilitated “virtual visits”. The experience of vicarious pilgrimage is however not the same as an actual pilgrimage. For the believer visiting the place may still remain the ideal.

⁷Here we use Eck’s (1981) analysis of Hindu worship and the engagement of all the senses as a model for understanding a pilgrim’s experience.

⁸For detailed analysis of Muslim pilgrimage see Bowen (2002).

⁹For detailed analysis of pilgrimage (individual and collective) see Bowen (2002).

indicative of his new transformed status (McDonnell, 1990; Bowen, 2002).

Finally, pilgrimage enables the transference of the sacred from place to pilgrims and thence to other people. Durkheim (1915) also described the sacred as contagious. On their return, pilgrims “share” their sacred contagion with family, friends, and members of the community.¹⁰ A Muslim returning from *hajj* “is seen as the dispenser of *berkat* (blessings) and is feted and visited for several weeks on return” (McDonnell, 1990:120). Hindus touch the feet of persons who have gone on pilgrimage as a sign of respect and humility, even “gathering” of sacred pilgrim dust:

If only one member of a family can make the pilgrimage, others, simply by touching him on his return, will share the *darshan*, the sight that confers a blessing and its holiness (Rau, 1986:248).

Many pilgrims return home with physical/tangible objects (rock, twig, water), which for them, captures the essence of the place or memories of it. They give these to friends and family, and add them to family shrines or other sacred places such as churches. All of the above consequences of pilgrimages can further solidify people’s connection to place. They become treasured mementos and souvenirs and help to memorialize the place in the minds of people.¹¹

3. Concluding discussion

Several themes relevant to the larger literature on place attachment and place identity emerge from this study.

This study establishes the reciprocal relationship between place and religion and shows that religion can foster place attachment and for some people it can become an important component of the attachment they feel to particular places.

Place and place characteristics are significant in religious place attachment. People develop attachment to sacred cities and sacred structures, in addition to natural places (see also Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 1993).

Places could be associated with significant events, such as Gautama Buddha’s enlightenment in Gaya, apparitions of Mary in Lourdes, the birth of prophets and saints, or associated with mythical stories and legends (Bowen, 2002). Such places can help induce in the believer

a certain distinctive set of dispositions, ... moods and motivations, ... moods we lump together under such covering terms as ‘reverential’, ‘solemn’, or ‘worship-

ful’ ... The moods that sacred symbols induce, at different times and in different places range from exultation, to melancholy, from self-confidence to self-pity... (Geertz, 1966:8–11).

The emotions experienced and expressed are in large measure influenced by the characteristics of the place which in turn helps to connect the believer to the place as well as to religion itself. Place then forms an integral component of many religions, and religions can play a large role in the development of place attachment.

In addition, religion not only invests place with symbolic meaning as expressed through its physical location, architectural design, layout and aesthetics, but also actively engages the believer to experience its history and geography.

This study points to the importance of socialization in the development of religious place ties. In this, religious specialists, such as rabbis, *imams*, and priests, as well as non specialized but knowledgeable family elders play important roles in socializing the uninitiated, such as children, into their religion-based place identity (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004). They teach place ritual, valuing of place artifacts, and exposure to experiences of significant places. Stories and myths, dramas and plays, songs and hymns all become important strategies in the teaching of place attachment and identity. The experiential dimension of significant places has been alluded to in the literature. But clearly there is also an active socialization and teaching component to religious place attachment that uses both oral and written traditions to teach and transmit the importance of place.

Religious places can sometimes become the focus of intense place attachment by the collective.

It is deep in man to love the place where he believes Divinity has walked. To pray there, to tread its earth and touch its stones, may offer him a momentary communion, and the holy sites multiply under his fervour... (Thuborn, 1969:97).

These places are often treated as “collective possessions” by the religious community and constitute an important part of its collective conscience and psyche (Belk, 1992). Jerusalem for the Jews, Mecca for the Muslims, Banaras for the Hindus, Rome for the Catholics, Amritsar for the Sikhs, Bodh Gaya for the Buddhists, are all examples of collective religious possessions. Speaking of the importance of Jerusalem for the Jews, Rabbi Miller remarks:

We consider ourselves people of Jerusalem, no matter where we live. It’s at the center of our consciousness (Loos, 1995:B21).

Such “collective possessions” are fiercely protected and zealously guarded by the collective conscience which strongly resists any attempt to alter, transform, or

¹⁰See also Bowen (2002).

¹¹See also Belk (1992).

dismantle them (see also Firey, 1945/1961). Nations have gone to war over ownership and control of sacred spaces, places, shrines, and landmarks as exemplified by the continued anguish over Jerusalem. New religions have often “appropriated the symbolic power” of existing sacred sites and built their own sacred structures to signify their primacy and territorial control over that area (Friedland & Hecht, 1991:28, Mazumdar, in press). “[T]he siting of early medieval churches on the sacred sanctuaries of pre-Christian Europe, and the Islamic construction of mosques on top of Christian churches and Jewish synagogues” (Friedland & Hecht, 1991:28; see also Sopher, 1967) are examples of this phenomenon. In India, even when mosques were built over Hindu temples, the original temple site did not lose its sacred quality; nor did the people sever their place ties to it. Sometimes, the loss of place (as in the case of Jerusalem for Jews and Muslims) has coalesced and united disparate, diasporic populations leading to a strengthening of place tie and place identity.

Religious place attachment is expressed both at the individual and at the collective level. Sociologists often refer to religion as a group phenomenon (Johnstone, 2001). Sociologically speaking then, religious place attachment is collective behavior. This collective affirmation can be obligatory or voluntary. For example, Muslims are required to go on pilgrimage to Mecca; collective prayers are mandatory for both Muslims and Jews. Hindus are not required to go on pilgrimage, yet do so voluntarily, if possible, such as to Prayag to participate in *Kumbha Mela* (see Bryant, 1994). Through collective ritual, ties to place, community, and religion are formed and transformed.

Religion can also be experienced at a deeply personal level through individual prayers, meditation, and visits to sacred shrines, monasteries, monuments, and memorials. For the individual, experiences in these places can be intensely gratifying leading to inner peace, serenity and tranquility, so much so that a person returns to these places over and over again for spiritual rejuvenation. Even a collective ritual, such as pilgrimage, can be a transformative experience for the individual, leading to a greater clarity and awareness of one’s beliefs, practices, and role in life. Individual experiences and likes and dislikes are likely to vary to some degree from that of the collective, the social, or the cultural. Not every member of a religion can be expected to have the same level of attachment. But, neither are the variations likely to be very marked.

Ties to the sacred provide people with an identification with place which may persist through time and across generations, thus providing a “symbolic lifeline to a continuous sense of identity” (Hummon, 1989:219). This is perhaps due to the “symbolic power” of the sacred, which gives these places a certain degree of permanence enabling them to outlast changes in

political regimes, social upheavals and economic transformation. Commenting on the possible spiritual powers and long-term continuity of sacred sites. Mumford (1961:10) writes:

[they] may have certain “spiritual” or supernatural powers, powers of higher potency and greater duration, of wider cosmic significance, than the ordinary processes of life. And though the human performances may be occasional and temporary, the structure that supports it, whether a paleolithic grotto or a Mayan ceremonial center with its lofty pyramid, will be endowed with a more lasting cosmic image.

A few caveats might help put this paper in perspective. We focused on a few religions with strong emphasis on place, viz. Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism, (Bowen, 2002) with occasional references to Sikhism, Buddhism, and Catholicism. We did not include a detailed analysis of Catholicism or Mormonism, both among the religions with significant place focus, nor of religions in which place does not appear to play a major role, such as in most Protestant denominations (Bowen, 2002).¹² These form useful subjects for future research. Including all religions would have presented a formidable task, far beyond the scope of a single paper. The idea was to develop a model and concepts that might be transferable and useful in studies of place attachment in other religions. Religions vary significantly in their emphases. We expect religions without significant place focus to be different. Within the religions too, not all followers are likely to experience the same degree of place attachment. Generalizing to all religions therefore cannot be made. The mechanisms of religious place attachment described are the major ones we found, but it is possible that others exist especially for religions not studied. Nevertheless, our conceptualization of religious place attachment provides a more refined and variegated sense of place attachment than available in the literature on the subject and will aid future research on the complex issues of religion, people, attachment, and place.

This study revealed the multilayered connections between people, religion, and place, ranging from the geography of the place, to the experiential qualities of “sensing” the sacred in the air, water and, to “doing” the sacred through ritual acts of prayer and purification, and ultimately to “creating” the sacred in the mind, at home, and in places of worship. Attachment to the sacred, forged through visits, rituals, stories, and artifacts, transcend national, racial, and ethnic boundaries. It can link a diverse and dispersed community of believers in a collective bond and citizenship. Through place ties one’s individual identity as a Hindu, Jew,

¹²For detailed analysis of Christian pilgrimage see Eade & Sallnow (2000).

Muslim, or Sikh can connect with consciousness of one's religious collective and one's identity of place, as is associated with such places as Banaras, Jerusalem, Mecca and Amritsar.

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