

ARTICLE

Rethinking Space and Place as Loci for Polyphonic Consciousness: A Case for a Spirituality of Inclusivity

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Abstract

The need to rethink space and place is relevant for the flourishing of all persons, especially as it pertains to markers defining both religious and secular persons. This work argues for the place of a spirituality of inclusivity that allows for the instantiation of identities that are open to otherness, whether religious or secular. For such a spirituality to take hold on the imagination of all, especially of those who embrace a religious tradition, a deliberate probing of the politics of space and place cannot be avoided. Such probing calls for an embrace of identities that are always open to otherness. In other words, self-understanding calls always for other-understanding. This work centers insights from Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty to argue its conclusions.

Keywords

identity, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, other-understanding, pilgrimage, politics of space and place, polyphonic consciousness, self-understanding, spirituality of inclusivity

Introduction

The human person is a being defined by sociality as a primary condition of being human in the world. However, to be a social being is not something that is abstract. It is a praxis of being that is fundamentally grounded in an embodiment that is oriented towards the concrete realities playing out in space and place. Consequently, embodiment allows for the production of space and place, and reciprocally, space and place define the contours of embodiment from which the consciousness of the self as a subject-in-relation arises. As Amanda Card argues, “bodies are research tools. They can be put to work in concert with other sources to explore the past. Bodies are also *ARCHIVES*. They are of the world, (re)created within the same contexts as the objects they use, the places they inhabit, and the times in which they live.”¹ Even collective institutions that have their own persona, such as religious traditions, fall within the matrix of space and place as the locus for their attainment of self-awareness. The spaces and places within which such traditions operate reveal something about the traditions just as the traditions also reveal something about such spaces and places. In other words, spaces and places are sites of interrogation that reveal markers of social identities. Consequently, an appeal to insularity as the locus for self-awareness by religious traditions is a false one; simply because there is always a surplus of meaning, presence, and claim inherent in such spaces and places, which offer the traditions a claim to embodying surplus of meanings, presence, and claim that also bond them to both the spaces and places and every other reality that are present in such spaces and places. One can thus conclude that religious traditions are themselves sites of encounters that go beyond the domain of the sense of self that they uphold. The mere fact that identity is always identity in relation to the other grounds identity as always a linkage to that which is beyond it. To claim that I am a Christian is to also make the claim that my identity orients me towards a horizon that is beyond my identity. Jussi Backman notes this well in their close reading of Aristotle and Plato on identity when he writes, “identity can only unify something if that thing has first become in some sense differentiated. Self-identity cannot be a simple undifferentiated equality; as unity, as a coming together with oneself, identity involves a relation to oneself and thus a certain distance from oneself.”²

- 1 Amanda Card, “Body and Embodiment,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Reenactment Studies: Key Terms in the Field. First Edition*, eds. Vanessa Agnew, Jonathan Lamb, and Julianne Tomann (New York: Routledge, 2020), 30.
- 2 Jussi Backman, *Complicated Presence: Heidegger and the Postmetaphysical Unity of Being* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2015), 217.

A fundamental question that this essay attempts to address is this: How does the relationship between space and place allow for holding in place both unity and difference in the articulation of social identities, especially those that pertain to religion? Thus, grounding this work in a Heideggerian consciousness³ and insights from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, this essay will explore how a rethinking of space and place can birth forth a polyphonic consciousness that can serve as the locus for the praxis of a spirituality of inclusivity.⁴ To do this well, this essay will offer a robust understanding of what a spirituality of inclusivity means for our times and how it can serve in the praxes of encounters that focus not only on religious traditions but on the context of secularism as well. In this work, I am making the claim that the rethinking of space and place is possible and needed for the contemporary era. In fact, one can conclude that this work best reflects the insight articulated by Michael Keith and Steve Pile when they argue that “new spaces of resistance are being opened up, where our ‘place’ (in all its meanings) is considered fundamentally important to our perspective, our location in the world, and our right and ability to challenge dominant discourses of power.”⁵

The Politics of Space and Place in Western Consciousness: A Culture of Erasures and the Possibility of Hospitality

Contemporary society is defined by the politics of space and place. This is

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- 3 It is worth noting that this work is not making a general claim that only through a Heideggerian lens can discourses on space and place be engaged. Rather, this work offers a particular reading of Heideggerian thought on the subject.
 - 4 It is proper to note the following since this work appropriates insights from Martin Heidegger. The fact that Heidegger embraced Nazism at the expense of German Jews who were the target of racist policies cannot be ignored in the engagement of Heideggerian thought. I engage his insights in this work with a consciousness of that history (For a critique of Heidegger and his affiliation with Nazism, see, Richard Wolin, *Heidegger in Ruins: Between Philosophy and Ideology* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2022)). Appropriating Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s insight that is engaged later in this work, one could argue that Heidegger’s appeal to an exclusionary memory that defined the reality of Nazism is conditioned by the two-pronged bias inherent in such memory. First, the memory of Germany was one stripped of the rich contributions of German Jews historically. Second, the era of Nazism also produced a cultural space and place that was conditioned by bias which also shaped the reconstruction of such historical memory on what constitutes a German and Germany as well.
 - 5 Michael Keith and Steve Pile, *Place and the Politics of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 6.

particularly true with the reality of the nation-state that has defined how the global community articulates its identity. As Nick Hopkins and John Dixon rightly note, “place and space play a central part in the ways that large-scale and abstract social categories such as ‘nation,’ ‘class,’ and ‘race’ impact on lived experience and are reproduced through it.”⁶ Yet, the political claim to space and place by either an individual or a collective group of people, whether defined by a shared historicity or linguistic markers, or even agreed-upon ambitions to pursue a collective goal, tends to be seen not as a discourse of the abstract; rather, it is most often understood as real and definitive. This bias for realness and definitiveness often produces what Edward Relph calls, “insidedness and outsidedness.” However, this label is oriented towards the phenomenology of place. One must ask, what about space? There can be no place without first the instantiation of space. Yet, space, if it is to be understood phenomenologically, cannot be without meaning or a lack of intentionality. The mere fact that space has an intricate relationship with language—to be spoken of already evokes a type of intentionality or meaning. The fact that space is part of discourse means that it draws humans into an experiential connection.⁷ By this, I mean that space exudes a phenomenology of connection that is grounded in sociality. To speak of space is to ground experience. This is because the places where we live out our lives are themselves made possible by the opening that space exudes. Hence, Relph articulates different modes of spatial experiences, whether “instinctive, bodily, and immediate—for example, pragmatic space, perceptual space, and existential space” or “special experience that are more cerebral, ideal, and intangible—for example, planning space, cognitive space, and abstract space.”⁸ These modes of spatial experience are intricately connected and instantiate the holistic existence of beings, humans included. But space is also linked to place. In other words, to speak of place is to also instantiate space. No place exists without a spatial context. Both space and place are within the discourse of language and thus hold captive the human imagination. They are not void or empty. As Relph points out, “space is not void or an isometric plane or a kind of container that holds places.”⁹ Just as

6 Nick Hopkins and John Dixon, “Space, Place, and Identity: Issues for Political Psychology,” *Political Psychology*, vol. 27, no. 2 (2006): 174.

7 See Elizabeth Keating, “Discourse, Space, and Place,” in *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis. Second Edition, volume 1*, eds. Deborah Tannen, Heidi E. Hamilton, and Deborah Schiffrin (Oxford, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2018), 244–261.

8 David Seamon and Jacob Sowers, “Place and Placelessness, Edward Relph,” in *Key Texts in Human Geography*, eds. P. Hubbard, R. Kitchen, and G. Vallentine (London: Sage, 2008), 44. See also, Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976).

9 Seamon and Sowers, “Place and Placelessness, Edward Relph,” 44.

place is experienced by humans so also is space.¹⁰ These are necessary markers defining the human condition.¹¹ The focus of this work is not to pursue in detail the differences between space and place. Rather, the focus is on how the human condition is shaped by them while affirming their intricate connections. As already noted, there is no place unless there is space, and space is the grounding for place.

Though Relph argues that human experience, as it pertains to place, produces either “existential insideness,” which is the “unselfconscious and authentic experience of place as central to existence” or existential *outsideness*, which produces “inauthentic experience of place,” the notions of insideness and outsideness evoke modes of relationality.¹² While the former may evoke a sense of being at home and belonging, the latter also evokes a relational connection but not as having a sense of being at home but as one who is connected to those who claim it as their home—a connection that exudes the experience of being an outsider. As Hopkins and Dixon note, space and place have an “impact on who is allowed to be where, they affect how people are included or excluded from public spaces, and they shape ways in which people relate to each other.”¹³ The fear of change and an insistence on the familiar tends to drive the politics of exclusion have come to define the claim to spaces and places in human history, especially for those who are able to muster the geopolitical tools (narratives, cultural memories, religious, political, and economic resources) to lay claim to such spaces and places.¹⁴ It ought to be stated though that even exclusion instantiates a type of relationality. In this case, it is not one of intimacy or inclusion. Rather, it is one of exclusion. One who excludes has been held captive by the existential condition of the one who is excluded. Stated simply, if I decide to prevent someone from entering my house because I do not want them to share the space and place with me, their embodied existence has held me captive. Rather than focus on other things, I am held captive by the reality of their proximity, which I want to ensure does not become part of the intimacy playing out in my house. This is particularly true as it pertains to the geopolitics shaping urban cities, where even the strategic attempt to produce

10 Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 9.

11 Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 1.

12 Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 142.

13 Hopkins and Dixon, “Space, Place, and Identity: Issues for Political Psychology,” 174.

14 For a treatment on the politics of space and place playing out in a neighborhood of East Jerusalem that supports the claim being made here, see, Marik Shtern and Haim Yacobi, “The Urban Geopolitics of Neighboring: Conflict, Encounter and Class in Jerusalem’s Settlement/Neighborhood,” *Urban Geography*, vol. 40, no. 4 (2018): 467–487.

an apartheid system of exclusion still locates the other in proximity with the one initiating the exclusion. The proximity of the other, even if it is an exclusionary closeness, always holds the instigator captive, at least in the domain of their cognitive focus. By this I mean that the mere fact that one is thinking of ways to produce an exclusionary society shows that their intended victims have held their imagination captive. Salma AbdulMagied states this well when she writes, “the idea of ‘Othering’ exists because of the existence of others in the society, where the people exist together. The other is not someone that is not part of us but is someone or a group of people that are intentionally being situated outside the society.”¹⁵ In other words, on a very basic level, proximity is a relational grounding both for the subject and the one being otherized. As Bruce B. Janz rightly observes, “place often designates uniqueness, in a romantic sense, but in fact even those unique places are aggregates, productions that have constituent parts.”¹⁶ These constituent parts are not alleys of exclusion. Rather, they are pathways of connections that transcend the domain of insularity. Furthermore, they validate a polyphonic turn as it pertains to discourses on identity.

Furthermore, what is most relevant to space and place is that they offer the grounding for all that can be said to define the human person as a being oriented towards sociality as well as the embrace or rejection of experiences that define human identity(ies). In other words, to speak of human identity is to ground oneself within the domain of relationality. But what type of relationality is one articulating here? Martin Heidegger calls attention to the politics of identity when he reflects on two notions of identity that exude from the framework of belonging together.¹⁷ One involves an “emphasis [on] the unity of the together over belonging—that is, we give emphasis to the unity of that which belongs.”¹⁸ The other centers the emphasis on “belonging—the relation between—that allows for the unity of the together.”¹⁹ While the former stresses autonomy, the latter stresses relationality that goes beyond itself into the domain of difference. Western consciousness of identity is primarily shaped by the focus on unity. As Jeff

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- 15 Salma AbdulMagied, “Othering, Identity and Recognition: The Social Exclusion of the Constructed ‘Other,’” *Future Journal of Social Science*, vol. 1, issue 1 (2022): 113.
 - 16 Bruce B. Janz, *Philosophy in An African Place* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2009), 14.
 - 17 Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 23–41.
 - 18 Jeff Malpas, “Rethinking Dwelling: Heidegger and the Question of Place,” *jeffmalpas.com*, 2013, 7, <https://jeffmalpas.com/wp-content/uploads/Rethinking-Dwelling-Heidegger-and-the-Questi.pdf>.
 - 19 Malpas, “Rethinking Dwelling: Heidegger and the Question of Place,” 7.

Malpas notes, identity in western consciousness is primarily about unity, which is “paradigmatically understood on the model of *numerical* unity, and so as indeed exclusive of any difference and as apart from that which is different.”²⁰ When such turn to unity is rigidified, it becomes the grounding of violence towards that which has been judged to be different or alien to the content of that which constitutes such unity.

Also worth noting is the fact that all identities are themselves shaped by the politics of space and place. This includes so-called individual identities. Importantly, the conceptualization of space and place as a condition for grounding identity(ies) stresses “the idea that our sense of who we are is fundamentally social and based upon our identification with various social group memberships.”²¹ Thus, “many social identities incorporate a spatial dimension.”²² For example, “national identities are typically spatialised...and reproduced through boundary-making practices. So too, religious identities frequently involve the sacralisation of space and are reproduced through a series of spatialised practices involving rituals of pilgrimage and purification.”²³ The politics of space and place speaks to the tension that exists between a sense of homeness and homelessness and the negotiations that are employed to define these. Too often, society is conditioned to think of being at home as evoking a sense of completeness—after all, one is familiar with such a world. Hence, attachment to a place is seen as something favorable to the human person in their praxis of identity construction.²⁴ With this in mind, a sense of loss is “associated with relocation.”²⁵ This idea is incomplete. While attachment to a place may evoke a sense of being at home, it does not mean that such a world exudes completeness. What is considered home is always a site of pilgrimage that flows into other places as well. In other words, to call a place home is to evoke a sense of openness to other places. Thus, home becomes a pilgrimage site of self-discovery not as an insular project but as a continuum of connections with other places which offer pointers to a richer sense of self as well. This is because identity exudes relationality, not in a closed manner, but in the open and closed dynamics that identity emanates. As Janz notes,

20 Malpas, “Rethinking Dwelling: Heidegger and the Question of Place,” 8.

21 Hopkins and Dixon, “Space, Place, and Identity: Issues for Political Psychology,” 176.

22 Hopkins and Dixon, “Space, Place, and Identity: Issues for Political Psychology,” 176.

23 Hopkins and Dixon, “Space, Place, and Identity: Issues for Political Psychology,” 176.

24 Janz, *Philosophy in An African Place*, 16.

25 Hopkins and Dixon, “Space, Place, and Identity: Issues for Political Psychology,” 175.

“place resists the homogenization of culture” or of identity.²⁶ Hence, “place must remain both an irreducible other to the self, and a constitutive part of the self...”²⁷ Accounting for the other allows for the instantiation to a polyphonic consciousness that allows for the going beyond the insular domain.

Again, place does not exude a static identity but a dynamic identity. Stated succinctly, identity evokes concentric circles of connections. Most often religious traditions and secular societies tend to focus more on the innermost ring within the concentric circles and ignore the other outer rings. For example, a Catholic is understood to be a member of the Catholic Church who has received baptism and embraces the tenets of the Catholic Church. But their identity as a Catholic is not solely defined by these acts of belonging. For them not to be considered as a member of a cult, their sense of identity demands that they expand their relational contacts with members of other religious traditions and even the secular world itself. The *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium* states this well when it articulates a concentric circle of belonging that goes beyond the concrete ritual acts of becoming a member of the Catholic Church.²⁸ Even in the case of cultic belonging, the concentric circles are still there even when the demand to relate outside of the cultic circle may be frowned upon. No one can exist insularly. The same can be said of religious traditions. Thus, any discourse on religious identity ought to also instantiate a turn to otherness which offers an opportunity to instantiate multiple voices, insights, and negotiated horizons that reveal the content of the markers shaping what is appropriated as a religious identity. To engage these complex realities, an embrace of a polyphonic consciousness is expected. Polyphonic consciousness speaks to a refusal to simplify that which is complex and to hold in place the tensions that arise as one attempt to articulate a sense of self, religious or secular.

On another note, because humans are not just social beings, but are creatures of language, space and place serve as the grounding of meaning within the domain of discourse (language). In other words, to use language, one needs community, a sense of familiarity that allows for reciprocity of meaning when a word is spoken. Yet, language, if it is to serve the purpose of giving meaning to the human condition, must of itself be open so that new words and new negotiations of meaning can be appropriated. This opening is grounded in a turn to difference. Thus, one can conclude that

26 Janz, *Philosophy in An African Place*, 20.

27 Janz, *Philosophy in An African Place*, 20.

28 Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium* November 21, 1964, sec. 14–16, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

being at home is not insular. It must necessarily be oriented towards difference that exists beyond the parameters of the familiar. This understanding applies to religious traditions and their doctrinal appropriations, along with the modes of ritualizing the doctrines. They ought to always have an opening to engage and dialogue with those who are not part of that tradition. In other words, religious traditions cannot operate as though they are the only ones existing in the spaces and places they occupy. They ought to ground their beliefs in a praxis of doctrinal hospitality because God is always a God of hospitality and transcendence. In transcendence, God overcomes all forms of insularity that traditions may want to employ to reduce God to an idol of theirs. As Malpas notes, while reading Heidegger closely, “identity is never just a matter of the self-sameness of the thing, but always directs us towards the thing in its relationality—the thing as it both *gathers* and is itself *gathered*—and in this way identity is understood as determined by *being* rather than that which determines or founds *being*.”²⁹ This means that identity is dynamic, that is, understood “as something that is constantly being worked out, *and* as encompassing an essential difference and differentiation. Moreover, the difference at issue here is not the difference of two self-same entities that already stand apart from one another, but a difference that itself arises only in and through an essential relatedness.”³⁰

As it pertains to religious beliefs and even theological and ritualistic praxes within faith traditions, the claim to purity of faith ought to be queried because purity itself is a claim grounded in a myth. If religions exist in social spaces and their contents arise from the social worlds of existence, then its contents cannot be said to be pure without any influence from external forces. Even the claim to a pure culture is a problematic claim. As Janz notes, it pertains to scholars who uphold an African pure culture as the site for retrieving an African philosophy: “not only is the location of purity a problematic issue, the access to purity is as well.”³¹ Moving beyond the discourse on purity, one ought to note that “the multiple interactions among the different religions have created different religious self-understandings among their affiliates.”³² Even when affiliates participate in religious rituals, they bring to bear their nuanced beliefs that have been shaped sociologically by their interactions with other realities outside of the boundaries of their

29 Malpas, “Rethinking Dwelling: Heidegger and the Question of Place,” 8.

30 Malpas, “Rethinking Dwelling: Heidegger and the Question of Place,” 9.

31 Janz, *Philosophy in An African Place*, 124.

32 SimonMary Asese Ahiokhai, “Interreligious Living: A Personalistic/Sociological Approach to Religious Pluralism,” *International Journal of African Catholicism*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2011): 18.

religious traditions. Thus, if religious tradition is to be understood as a place, it is definitely a site of multiple places that produce a tapestry of identities, which the affiliates embrace even when they claim to uphold a doctrinal proposition.

The Other as an Invitation to Reimagine Space and Place through a Spirituality of Inclusivity

How can such complexities and simplicities that play out in space and place be embraced by religious traditions and their adherents? To address this question, I offer insights into what I have termed a spirituality of inclusivity. A spirituality of inclusivity takes seriously complexities and insists on putting the good of the other at the center of religious imagination and not the sin of the other. As Robert Draper notes in his article for *National Geographic* on the uniqueness of the pontificate of Pope Francis, “what he will do is return the church to its true doctrine—the one it has forgotten, the one that puts man back in the center. For too long, the church put sin in the center.”³³ To put the goodness of the other within one’s understanding of God is exactly what Pope Francis describes in the following words: “how nice that brothers are united, that brothers pray together. How nice to see that nobody negotiates their history on the path of faith—that we are diverse but that we want to be, and are already beginning to be, a reconciled diversity.”³⁴ Goodness is not an abstract virtue. It is lived out through concrete actions that play out within space and place by embodied beings. In the context of this essay, it is that of religious and non-religious persons. If this is the case, then goodness must be oriented towards an openness to the other who is not just the recipient of the good act but also the embodied instantiation of the possibility for the performance of such an act. Thus, a spirituality of inclusivity takes seriously the other, religious or secular, as a graced medium of awakening of one to become virtuous through performance of good acts. Rather than consider the other as deficient of the grace of God or the right to exist within such a space and place, a spirituality of inclusivity looks upon the other as a gift, a bearer of God’s message to be good, and the embodied symbol for the enactment of a covenantal commitment to embody an altruistic love for the other by one. This approach is not grounded in a

33 Robert Draper, “Will the Pope Change the Vatican? Or Will the Vatican Change the Pope?” *National Geographic*, August 2015, 59.

34 Robert Draper, “Will the Pope Change the Vatican? Or Will the Vatican Change the Pope?” *BishopAccountability.org*, <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/2015/07/will-the-pope-change-the-vatican-or-will-the-vatican-change-the-pope/>.

naivete. Rather, it involves a deep understanding of the human condition as saturated with possibilities for goodness and evil and a deliberate choice to focus on the good side. This does not mean that the bad side is not addressed. That can be the ingredient for transformative dialogue among all parties, instantiating mutual conversion.

A spirituality of inclusivity insists on embracing otherness in its mediating power of instantiating abundant life for all within and outside spaces and places of religious praxes. It insists that such spaces and places are media of connections and never of exclusions. Heidegger argues that

Space means a place cleared or freed for settlement and lodging. A space is something that has been made room for, something that is cleared and free, namely within a boundary. A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing. That is why the concept is that of *horismos*, that is, the horizon, the boundary. Space is in essence that for which room has been made, that which is let into its bounds... *Accordingly, spaces receive their being from places and not from 'space.'*³⁵

Heidegger's insights on the connection between space and place offers an opportunity for a critical engagement with how religious traditions currently understand the relevance of space and place in their articulation of their sense of self and their religious praxes as well. Most often, the imagination of sacred spaces and places offers an opposing dualism as though there can be no connection between the opposing realities. As Aslam Farouk-Alli observes, "one of the most outstanding characteristics of the production of sacred space is the ensuing distinction that is inevitably made between the sacred and the profane. These boundaries of demarcation introduce the dimension of opposition; not only between the sacred and the profane, but also between foreign and familiar, hostile and secure. Our sacred world, or cosmos, is thus in opposition to the wild, dangerous and chaotic forces of the profane world surrounding us."³⁶ It is this oppositional claim that defines the sacred as opposed to the profane that ought to be critiqued to allow for a richer understanding. As Farouk-Alli notes while

35 Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 154.

36 Aslam Farouk-Alli, "A Qur'anic Perspective and Analysis of the Concept of Sacred Space in Islam," *Journal for the Study of Religion*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2002): 64. See also, Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1959), 29.

reading Mircea Eliade's work, *The Sacred and the Profane*, closely, humans become "aware of the sacred as a result of it manifesting itself, or showing itself as something wholly different from the profane."³⁷ Yet, even in this manifestation, the sacred does not obliterate the profane. Rather, it grounds itself within it. Or at best in proximity to the profane. Drawing from Heidegger's thinking, the sacred, in this context, anchors itself within the profane as a type of boundary-making phenomenon. Yet, such boundary does not offer an opposition in a manner that does not allow for an intermingling. Rather, the sacred needs the profane for it to manifest itself and for it to be seen and interacted with. Stated differently, though this process of manifestation is "something mysterious and of a wholly different order," it is "a reality that does not belong to our world but that is manifested in objects that are an integral part of our natural 'profane' world."³⁸ A similar thought process is accounted for in the works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Though, not using the language of sacred and profane, Merleau-Ponty calls attention to how "we are enmeshed in the world, which, simultaneously, is enmeshed in us."³⁹ Stated differently, "inside and outside are inseparable. The world is wholly inside, and I am wholly outside myself."⁴⁰ Merleau-Ponty calls attention to the phenomenology of perception and by so doing, helps shed light on how space and place play a role in the unpacking of our understanding of embodiment. Or stated differently, "my body is the fabric into which all objects are woven, and it is, at least in relation to the perceived world, the general instrument of my 'comprehension.'"⁴¹ In other words, what we perceive, we are already in relation to it. This possibility of being in relation only occurs because of spatiality and the grounding of our embodiment in place(s).⁴² As Merleau-Ponty notes, "the world must not exist around us as a system of objects whose synthesis we perform, but rather as an open ensemble of things

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- 37 Farouk-Alli, "A Qur'anic Perspective and Analysis of the Concept of Sacred Space in Islam," 65.
- 38 Farouk-Alli, "A Qur'anic Perspective and Analysis of the Concept of Sacred Space in Islam," 65. See also, Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 11.
- 39 David Seamon, "Merleau-Ponty, Environmental Embodiment, and Place: Implications for Architecture and Placemaking," in *Embodied Awareness of Space: Body, Agency and Current Practice*, eds. Christos Kakalis and David Boyd (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 97.
- 40 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Humanities Press, 1962), 407.
- 41 Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 235.
- 42 See Lara M. Mitias, "The Place of the Body in the Phenomenology of Place: Edward Casey and Nishida Kitaro," in *Philosophies of Place: An Intercultural Conversation*, eds. Peter D. Hershock and Roger T. Ames (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2019), 302–317.

toward which we project ourselves. The ‘movement that generates space’ does not display the trajectory from some metaphysical point without a place in the world, but rather from a certain here toward a certain there, which, moreover, are in principle substitutable.”⁴³

A major point ought to be highlighted from the insights above. Religious and secular memories of spaces and places ought to be critiqued to ensure that the identities derived from remembering spaces and places where the body, individual and collective, derives its identity(ies). The nostalgia of space and place that tends to define both the secular and religious world must be evaluated to ensure that it does not lead to a false understanding of the intimate connections between the profane and the sacred. Why is this approach necessary, one may ask? In response to this question, I turn again to Merleau-Ponty as my interlocutor. He argues that “memory is consciousness of the past, which we cannot derive from the present, nor even from ‘former presents’...Memory constructs or deploys the past.”⁴⁴ Merleau-Ponty makes a nuanced statement as it pertains to the retrieval of memory that is relevant to the argument being made here. Noting the fact that there arise “obstacles” when consciousness attempts to retrieve the past, he argues that “if there are obstacles, this is because there is a *hyle* of the past, therefore because the past is not only that which I construct. The whole constituting apparatus is reconstruction, and there has to be another presence to me of the past on which the construction is measured. Construction is that without which there is no past for me, but not that through which the past is past for me.”⁴⁵

One can conclude from Merleau-Ponty’s insight on memory that the reconstruction of memory evokes the instantiation of a two-pronged bias. First, what is experienced and which becomes part of the *hyle* is mediated by the bias of embodied perception both of the experience and the space and place where the experience occurs. Second, the retrieval of the content of the *hyle*, which entails a reconstruction based on the present experiences that necessitate a turn to memory is also grounded in bias which is linked to the content of the space and place as well. Thus, memory is always linked to the content of bias coded in space and place. Even though Merleau-Ponty does not use the language of bias, it can be deduced from his discourse on memory. As he notes in the following: “since the past is that which has been

43 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 407.

44 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Institution and Passivity. Course Notes from the Collège de France (1954–1955)*, trans. Leonard Lawlor and Heath Massey (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2010), 193.

45 Merleau-Ponty, *Institution and Passivity*, 193.

present, we cannot comprehend the modalization *has been*, the index of the past, if we conceive of the present badly. [Yet, we must] not conceive of the present as a picture (impressed in me or grasped by synopsis)—Especially insofar as what happens, the present, is not a picture. It is a variation of my grasp, a deviation of my anchorings.”⁴⁶ In other words, what I grasp of the present, which becomes the content of the past, is mediated by the totality of the social conditions and modalities of sense making that I deploy and which is also conditioned by the politics of space and place as well. Stated simply, the grasping of the present is conditioned by the social bias shaping my present condition as a being grounded in space and place. This is the first instantiation of bias that produces what is referred to as the deposit of memory. The attempt to retrieve the content of memory is further mediated by a bias that is produced through the reconstruction due to the present reality playing out in space and place. What is reconstructed becomes a biased reconstruction.

Furthermore, to differentiate a memory is to also account for the “integration of the multiple levels of awareness that occur through the process of self-differentiation [that] instantiates a link to otherness.”⁴⁷ In this case, it is those whose memories of the past that must also be accounted for within the retrieval of memory itself. Consequently, a spirituality of inclusivity does not deny the reality of difference. After all, it is only through difference that we come to articulate our subjective (individual and collective that is distinct from those of others) identity. Rather, such a spirituality exudes an embrace of difference that is oriented towards unity. It is a spirituality that grounds itself not in certitude but in openness to possibilities because all knowledge of the self and of the other that are within the domain of memory are themselves conditioned by bias and thus incomplete of the surplus reality from which the pruning that bias makes possible.

The reconstruction of memory is not outside of the deployment of bias that conditions how shared spaces and places are understood. This is because the project of memory is done by embodied beings whose senses that are relevant for the act of perception are themselves held captive by the meanings that have been coded into those shared spaces. With this in mind, one can thus conclude that the memory of the other or of oneself reveals also something about the memory of shared spaces and places.

46 Merleau-Ponty, *Institution and Passivity*, 193.

47 SimonMary Asese Aihiokhai, “Black Bodies as Sacraments of Disruption: Reimagining the Human Person in an Era of Marginalization,” *Religions*, vol. 16, article 385 (2025): 13.

Furthermore, “in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological account of perception, human beings are not first subjects who then determine and define the object before them, nor is that object a mute, fully determinate thing that only then imposes itself upon experiencers. Rather, through bodily perception, we immediately engage with and are aware of the thing because it immediately and mutually engages *with us* to offer a reciprocating, pre-reflective sensibility and signification.”⁴⁸ Stated differently, “this simultaneous entwinement is the only way we and these objects exist for one another.”⁴⁹ With this in mind, one can thus argue that

the place where the Jew settles (whether in the land or Israel or in the diaspora) can never be a totality. Jewish faith defies centrality and the ‘skewing through’ of heaven earth and underworld in one axis mundi. The place is meant as a medium for the sacred only so far as it does not become the sacred’s substitute....While the place is indispensable, the true sacred center is in the common faith of the people given in the Book. They are at once the People of the Land and the People of the Book.

Consequently, the notion of place is built on Resistance—advocating the essential distance between the people and their land. Accordingly, importance is laid on leaving as a counterpoint to arrival, on exit to resist nativity (the taken for grantedness of place), and on presence as but a trace of absence.⁵⁰

If Zali Gurevitch’s and Gideon Aran’s insights are to be taken seriously, it means then that memory of spaces and places and the identities they evoke ought to be queried rigorously to allow for shedding light on the erasures that are coded into such memories. Gurevitch and Aran do this when they call attention to an exegetical reading of Exodus 25:8—“And let them make a sanctuary that I may dwell among them.”⁵¹ As they note, “the making of the Temple is not intended for the dwelling of God. The verse seems to divert itself at the last word from its expected routine course. Rather than the anticipated ‘in it’ it surprises us with ‘among them’”. This conspicuous

48 Seamon, “Merleau-Ponty, Environmental Embodiment, and Place: Implications for Architecture and Placemaking,” 99. See also Fred Evans, “Chiasm and Flesh,” in *Merleau-Ponty: Key Concepts*, eds. Rosalyn Diprose and Jack Reynolds (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 185.

49 Evans, “Chiasm and Flesh,” 186.

50 Zali Gurevitch and Gideon Aran, “Never in Place: Eliade and Judaic Sacred Space,” *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 39e Année, no. 87 (1994): 137.

51 Gurevitch and Aran, “Never in Place,” 139.

diversion indicates in a very concise way the idea of the temple—that it only symbolizes faith, and thus it is not cosmology as such but a dialectic of cosmology and anthropology. A place must be built, but the dwelling of God is among the people.”⁵² If the dwelling of God is with the people, then wherever the people are located, God dwells with them. Theologically, the transcendence of God means that no one space or place can contain the divine exclusively. While the transcendent God can only be encountered within the concreteness of space and place, such an encounter is not fixed or tied to just one place. Many spaces and places open up for such an encounter if such a God must retain its transcendence. Hence, King Solomon declares on the occasion of the dedication the Temple: “Behold the heaven and heaven of heaven cannot contain thee, how much less this house that I have built” (1 Kings 8:27).⁵³

Reflecting on the politics of space and place in Islam, one also notices how Mecca holds captive the social imagination of Muslims. For some, Mecca serves as the center of the universe. Consequently, the “Ka’bah was the first house of worship built on earth.”⁵⁴ For others, it simply refers to an interfaith consciousness because it is understood as “the first house of worship for people of the scripture i.e. Muslims, Christians and Jews.”⁵⁵ Also worth noting is the fact that in Islam, the praxis of pilgrimage offers a pathway for understanding who a Muslim is, an identity that opens itself up to understanding how God is both encountered in spaces and places and also transcends those spaces and places. The Hajj (pilgrimage) reflects a Muslim’s response to the call of God. As the Muslim embarks on pilgrimage, he/she offers prayers to God, the same that is also prayed on Mount Arafat with the following refrain: “*Labbayka Allāhumma, Labbayka!* (At your call, O God, Here I come).”⁵⁶ As Isma’īl R. Al-Fārūqī and Imtiyaz Yusuf note, Islamic pilgrimage is a reminder to Muslims of their new identity that goes against exclusivism and classism. Through pilgrimage, Muslims embrace a renewal of the consciousness of their bonds with all humans. They open themselves to the hospitality that comes from others. Just as a pilgrim cannot hold claim to a space or place in an exclusionary manner, Muslims come to see the

52 Gurevitch and Aran, “Never in Place,” 139.

53 Gurevitch and Aran, “Never in Place,” 141.

54 Farouk-Alli, “A Qur’anic Perspective and Analysis of the Concept of Sacred Space in Islam,” 67.

55 Farouk-Alli, “A Qur’anic Perspective and Analysis of the Concept of Sacred Space in Islam,” 67. See also, T. Ibn ‘Ashur, *Tafsir al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir. Volume 4* (Tunisia: Dar al-Tunisia lil-Nashr, 1984), 13.

56 Isma’īl R. Al-Fārūqī and Imtiyaz Yusuf, *Islam: Religion, Practice, Culture & World Order* (London and Washington, D.C.: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2012), 42.

world as the home of all. Rituals surrounding the Hajj evoke in the Muslim's consciousness memories of displacement and the caring hand of God in bringing comfort to those who are homeless.⁵⁷ For example, the journey to "Safa, whence they cover the distance to Marwah at trotting pace seven times (al-Sa'y)" Muslims are "reenacting the experience of Hājar (Hagar), mother of Ismail, in her search for water after she was deposited there with her infant by Ibrāhīm, as he was bound for another migration. Hājar did eventually find water which tradition tells had sprung miraculously under Ismail's little feet. The fountain, called *Ẓamzam*, still gives its water to the pilgrims, many of whom take it in bottles to their distant relatives."⁵⁸ Even with this rich motif of inclusiveness in the meaning given to pilgrimage in Islam, there still exist enduring practices of exclusion. For example, non-Muslims are banned from entering Mecca and Medina.⁵⁹ To address this bias of exclusion, Muslims, just as Jews and Christians, may need to reclaim the motif of exile that is linked closely to pilgrimage and which shapes their religious and cultural histories. Using Marc H. Ellis' insight, these religious traditions are called to be the New Diaspora. For Ellis, New Diaspora entails the resistance to give a name to a multi-pronged nature of a community that is constitutive of exiles from many lands and experiences but who insist on being a people who care in an altruistic manner.⁶⁰ Jews were once exiled and were also migrants as well. In their captivity in Egypt, God chooses to set them free. Jesus was himself an exile fleeing the persecution of Herod with his earthly parents. The early followers of Mohammed and Mohammed himself were exiles fleeing the persecution of the Meccans. With this in mind, a spirituality of inclusivity takes seriously the role of space and place in shaping both the embodiment of members of religious traditions and the traditions themselves and helping to bring to consciousness the content of the identities that are crafted in such a context. Consequently, any idea of the religious self, individual or collective, must "be discovered through an investigation of the places it inhabits."⁶¹ As noted by Malpas while reading

57 Al-Fārūqī and Yusuf, *Islam: Religion, Practice, Culture & World Order*, 40–42.

58 Al-Fārūqī and Yusuf, *Islam: Religion, Practice, Culture & World Order*, 41.

59 Richard Ostling, "An Old Question That's Back in the News: Why Can't Non-Muslims Visit Mecca and Medina?" *Religion Unplugged*, September 23, 2022, <https://religionunplugged.com/news/2022/9/20/an-old-question-thats-back-in-the-news-why-cant-non-muslims-visit-mecca-and-medina>.

60 Susanne Scholz and Santiago Slabodsky, "Practicing Exile in the New Diaspora as a Jewish Scholar of Conscience: An Interview with Marc H. Ellis," in *The New Diaspora and the Global Prophetic: Engaging the Scholarship of Marc H. Ellis*, eds. Susanne Scholz and Santiago Slabodsky (Lanham/Boulder/New York/London: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2021), 24–25.

61 Jeff Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography. Second Edition* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 6.

Gaston Bachelard's thought closely, "the life of the mind is given form in the places and spaces in which human beings dwell and those places themselves shape and influence human memories, feelings and thoughts. In this way the spaces of inner and outer—of mind and world—are transformed one into the other as inner space is externalized and outer space brought within."⁶²

Pilgrimage, whether within Islam, Christianity, or any religion, offers what Karen Pechilis calls an orientation "towards de-centralization."⁶³ In Victor Turner's words, "...the social mode appropriate to all pilgrimages represents a mutually energizing compromise between structure and *communitas*; in theological language, a 'forgiveness of sins,' where differences are accepted or tolerated rather than aggravated into grounds of aggressive opposition."⁶⁴ Reading Turner closely, Pechilis argues that "in the context of pilgrimage religion anesthetizes the divisiveness of social distinctions. Although a temporary process, the cooperative atmosphere during pilgrimage becomes a "paradigm for other kinds of behavior—ethical, political, etc."⁶⁵ Though Pechilis concludes that pilgrimage focuses on decentering exclusionary modes of being for religious people who embark on such ritual journeys, I argue that the disruptive intentionality is part of the content of the religious imagination. This disruption is similar to what poetry does to the reader. It orients the reader to the poet through the poem itself in such a manner that both find themselves in each other through the mediation of the poem itself. As Bachelard rightly observes within the domain of poetry, poetic "resonances are dispersed on the different planes of our life in the world, while the repercussions invite us to give greater depth to our own existence. In the resonance we hear the poem, in the reverberations we speak it, it is our own. The reverberations bring about a change of being. It is as though the poet's being were our being. The multiplicity of resonances then issues from the reverberation's unity of being...[The] poem possesses us entirely."⁶⁶ For example, Islam grounds itself within what is considered the five pillars of Islam. One of these pillars is Hajj (pilgrimage). It is not meant to have a temporary effect on the psyche of the pilgrim. Rather, it is meant to orient the pilgrim to a spiritual awakening that transcends former modes of being. As Al-Fārūqī and Yusuf rightly note, "since the pilgrim's affirmation of his recognition of God's Creatorship is at

62 Malpas, *Place and Experience*, 6.

63 Karen Pechilis, "To Pilgrimage It," *Journal of Ritual Studies*, vol. 6, no. 2 (1992): 60.

64 Victor W. Turner, "The Center Out There: Pilgrim's Goal," *History of Religions*, vol. 12, no. 3 (1973): 221–222.

65 Pechilis, "To Pilgrimage It," 60. See also, Turner, "The Center Out There: Pilgrim's Goal," 215.

66 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), 7.

once his affirmation of all men's creatureliness and hence equality before God, the pilgrimage is the greatest and most eloquent embodiment of Islam's egalitarianism and universalism."⁶⁷ The pilgrim's consciousness is oriented to the world outside of their familiar context. In other words, the spaces and places transversed by the pilgrim are the holders of the content that brings about the transformation of the pilgrim. Not only is the pilgrim transformed, so also are those who live in such spaces and places as they encounter the pilgrim who is from far away. Each take on perceptions that link them together. The pilgrim's transformation is not complete unless the narration also accounts for those spaces and places that they encounter along the way. In Nigeria, Muslims who go on pilgrimage to Mecca embrace a new title, *Alhaji* (for men) and *Alhaja* (for women) symbolic of a heightened awareness of God's calling and their response to it. This awakening is not grounded solely on an esoteric awareness of one's intimacy with God. Rather, it is demonstrated through the hospitality shown to one by those that one encounters along the way to Mecca. Most often, those who show the pilgrim hospitality are not Muslims themselves. They serve as Allah's viceroys of goodness in the world that is extended to the Muslim. Consequently, the awakening ought to orient the Muslim to embrace fully God's peace and to share that sense of peace with others. Hence, the performance of *zakat* (almsgiving) to those who are less fortunate. The recipients of such almsgiving are not necessarily Muslims. They are all children of God and worthy of dignity and care.

Returning to Heidegger's notion of the link between space and place and identity awareness, one can argue that the place of pilgrimage where the religious one is awakened to an opening to others in a manner that their religious commitment becomes the ground for a rich praxis of hospitality towards others offers also an awareness of seeing spaces not as sources for exclusionary modes of being but as the possibility to articulate a place of welcome for others. This is because the identity that arises from such a space is itself a gift. The awakening is a gift and the product of the hard work of the pilgrim. Pilgrimage is a journey that is saturated with the motif of finding oneself as a being grounded in a higher calling of intimacy with God through taking seriously the realities of the world. What do I mean by this? The pilgrim who embarks on this journey experiences the world around them through their senses. They encounter cultures, peoples, languages, political systems, economic systems, and topographies that are different from those they are familiar with. Yet, the destination of the pilgrim cannot be reached unless through these encounters. There is no way around it. The

67 Al-Fārūqī and Yusuf, *Islam: Religion, Practice, Culture & World Order*, 42.

awakening does not only occur at the place of pilgrimage. Rather, it is a gradual process that begins with the first step the pilgrim takes towards the place of pilgrimage. In fact, one's home is the first site of pilgrimage. The journey begins from there. As they encounter all that is different, the pilgrim awakens to a world larger than theirs. They also begin to see both the differences and the connections they have with that world. The place of pilgrimage is always beyond their world even if it may have the qualities of their religious tradition. Since pilgrimage always begins within one's tradition or home, the sight of a pilgrim is always tuned towards that which is beyond, even when they are gazing at the familiar. Hence, this looking beyond allows the pilgrim to probe their tradition and to seek ways to enrich their appreciation of that tradition, hence the journey begins towards those sites that can enrich that vision. An example would help here. A Christian from Portland, Oregon who embarks on a pilgrimage to Rome to see the catacombs and other holy sites is awakened to a larger world that is beyond the realities shaping her city. That awakening begins at home and continues as a continuum of consciousness. In Rome, the holy sites contain symbols and rituals that are within the Christian religion and of which the pilgrim is familiar. Yet, they are also within spaces and places that the pilgrim cannot lay total claim to. Rome is not Portland. The sacred sites in Rome offer the opportunity of bridging the familiar and unfamiliar worlds. Consequently, the awakening that occurs for the pilgrim as a continuum of consciousness offers the possibility of holding in place complexities and diverse realities, some of them sacred, and others profane but which serve the purpose of expanding their horizon and understanding of how their Christian identity is an orientation towards otherness and not a flight to insularity in their interactions in Portland.⁶⁸

Phenomenologically, home, as site of pilgrimage, is a site of revelation that allows even the pilgrim to enact the first discourse that instantiates a turn to pilgrimage. What do I mean by this? To become aware that one needs to embark on a journey of pilgrimage that is intended to bring about a broader knowledge of self is possible because what is considered home is the first site of such discourse that instantiates such an awareness. Consequently, the journey of the pilgrim is not a journey that dislocates, rather, it is one of connections. The embodied pilgrim's journey connects the home to the new site where the pilgrim journeys to. In fact, all sites that the pilgrim enters are thus connected to the original site of return which is called home. This point is similar to the unpacking of the nomadic life in relation to place. As Malpas notes, "places are established (though not exclusively) in relation to activity,

68 See Turner, "The Center Out There," 194.

and the area in which a ‘nomadic’ people lives and across which they regularly travel can thus be understood as itself a single place spread across an extended region of integrated activity, or else as a closely integrated network of regularly traversed (regularly ‘enacted’) places.”⁶⁹ Thus, to speak of home for the nomad is to speak of the totality of the spaces and places traversed. This is because home evokes a continuum of connections and not disconnections or insularity. Again, as Malpas argues, “place allows for the appearing of place within it” in a manner that allows both for the instantiation of other places within it and as a source of connection with other places where activities of revelation occur—revelations that produce more awareness of self (identities).⁷⁰ Similarly, for the pilgrim, home opens up to the realities inherent in the spaces and places leading to the pilgrimage site. To speak of home is to speak of a site of pilgrimage which opens itself up to other pilgrimage sites of encounters and self-discoveries. With this in mind, one can argue that a spirituality of inclusivity is itself an embrace of the consciousness inherent in pilgrimage. To be inclusive is to take seriously connections as the bonds that instantiate a healthy identity and even the human condition. The sites along the pilgrimage journey evoke a turn to connection and openness to others as well.

A spirituality of inclusivity also takes seriously the following insight: the content of one’s faith, as experienced and lived out within space and place, is always open as a continuum for encounters with others. As Malpas notes, “the stuff of our ‘inner’ lives is thus to be found in the ‘outer’ places in which we dwell, while those same places ‘without’ are incorporated ‘within’ us.”⁷¹ Pechilis notes this well when she argues that, unlike places of worship, which are close to home and tend to be used as exclusionary modes for preserving the familiar, whether modes of worship or narratives that evoke a sense of religious tribalism, “places of pilgrimage, on the other hand, are associated with novelty, not conservatism. They are unbounded places in which new connections can be made.”⁷²

However, it is worth noting that though pilgrimage offers the possibility of articulating a vision and an experience of universalism that allows a pilgrim to open himself up to otherness, this is not always the case. The politics of memory and narrative must be engaged for this to be truly concretized. Does the pilgrim allow the experience to speak for itself or does

69 Malpas, *Place and Experience*, 174.

70 Malpas, *Place and Experience*, 175. See also, Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place: Explorations in the Topology of Being* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2017), 49.

71 Malpas, *Place and Experience*, 6.

72 Pechilis, “To Pilgrimage It,” 63.

the pilgrim filter the experience through the hermeneutic lens of their own socio-political world? Or does the pilgrim allow both to be manifested—the filtering and the unfiltering of the experience? Pechilis articulates this well when she argues that “pilgrimage symbols operate ‘bidirectionally,’ that is, they oscillate between local and general meanings.”⁷³ In fact, “we might well posit...that the persistence of pilgrimage depends partly upon maintaining the bidirectionality of its symbolism.”⁷⁴ Also, Candace Slater calls attention to a phenomenon observed among pilgrims who migrate to the pilgrimage site (residents) and those who only embark on the pilgrimage and return back to their homes (non-residents). “Unlike residents, for whom storytelling is an essentially circular process of re-creation, non-residents are likely to adopt a linear approach. Their stories are therefore not the form of repeated circumambulation but are an attempt to connect a series of episodes that would otherwise function much as random dots on an experiential page. ...For them, a master legend represents not an impoverishment of experience through fixation and definition, but the construction of a past that would otherwise not exist.”⁷⁵

Narratives evoke a consciousness of embodiment in a manner that such embodiment is in dialogue with all that is present in space and place. The intermingling of the body that perceives with that which is perceived evokes an enduring notion of intimacy. Here, intimacy is meant to reflect a sense of connection, whether deliberate or not. To be an embodied creature is to live in and through connections. Hence, “to posit the question ‘who are you?’ is to make present the question ‘who am I?’. To resolve the former is to attend to the latter. To attend to the latter is to first engage the former. In fact, the latter can never be resolved unless the former is first encountered. This is the grounds for envisioning subjectivity. It is itself the ritualization of connections even though it is crafted in the domain of self-differentiation.”⁷⁶

The claim to space and place by religious or secular traditions ought not be grounded in a scarcity mindset as though the other’s claim to such space offers some limits to their own flourishing. In other words, a scarcity mindset sees space and place always through the lens of limits and boundaries. Because space and place are scarce, then violence towards the other becomes legitimized. This approach is problematic. To address this, a surplus mindset ought to be embraced; one that is grounded in encountering the other

73 Pechilis, “To Pilgrimage It,” 66.

74 As cited in Pechilis, “To Pilgrimage It,” 66. See also, Candace Slater, *Trail of Miracles: Stories from a Pilgrimage in Northeast Brazil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 2–5, 55–116.

75 Slater, *Trail of Miracles*, 147.

76 Aihiokhai, “Black Bodies as Sacraments of Disruption,” 13.

through all that define one's religious tradition. Such an encounter must ground itself through the art of listening. "To listen is already to find oneself in a state of openness towards" that which speaks or which we perceive.⁷⁷ Pilgrimage is linked to deep listening. In fact, it is rooted in a turn to perception that involves all the senses. It evokes in the pilgrim an invitation to open up to all that is encountered along the way. The transformation of the pilgrim does not occur at the destination. It is gradual. It plays out both through the entire journey to the site and from it to where the journey started. What is most interesting in this gerundic approach to transformation of the pilgrim is that the pilgrim never comes home the same. Home itself is transformed just as the pilgrim is transformed. This is because to call a place home is to instantiate activities but since the pilgrim is transformed, their activities also become transformed, leading to the transformation of home itself. As Stephen F. Haller notes, pilgrimage "involves the risk of becoming a different person that one cannot envision before the experience. It is only through engagement, brought about by actual pilgrimage activity, that one is even capable of seeing and appreciating the altered worldview that is created—and by then it may be impossible to close that door."⁷⁸ A spirituality of inclusivity entails a process of finding oneself. It grounds the religious person within spaces and places that allow them to encounter others within those spaces and places so that they can adequately find themselves not as an exclusionary being involved in a closed relationship with God, but as a faith person that is drawn to an open-ended intimacy with the God who transcends insularity. It is open-ended because all of creation have a right to experiencing the dignity of God within the spaces and places they live out their lives, and because they approach this relationship through a religious world which speaks to their experiences in a direct manner. But this religious world is never insular. It operates always within spaces and places that transcend insularity.

The pilgrim, through their openness to the pilgrimage experience, does not reduce their meaning making world to a dualistic choice that oscillates between their previous understanding of the world and the encounters they are exposed to in their pilgrimage journey. Rather, they appropriate a complex meaning making world that orients them to a sense of 'belonging' as articulated by Heidegger, hence the grounding of a polyphonic consciousness. In this way, the meaning given to space and place by the religious person is constituted by multiplicities and refusal to turn to a

77 Malpas, "Rethinking Dwelling: Heidegger and the Question of Place," 11.

78 Stephen F. Haller, "Pilgrimage and Paradigm Shifts: The Role of Experience in Identity Transformations," *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*, vol. 11, issue 4 (2022): 9.

reduction of meaning. It ought to be grounded in a surplus that grounds difference and relationality. As Malpas notes while reading Heidegger closely, “this means, however, that rather than being tied to a problematic notion of identity as determinate and exclusionary, the notion of place itself provides the proper attitude to such a notion. Indeed, rather than thinking of place in terms of identity, identity needs to be rethought in terms of place itself—which means in terms of place in all its complexity as well as its simplicity.”⁷⁹ This means that sense of self must also account for the sense of the other, even though the two are not necessarily the same. Their difference does not deny the fact that they are interconnected.⁸⁰

Conclusion

As religious traditions engage in the process of reimagining their sense of self, they cannot ignore the politics of space and place. God encounters humanity not in an abstract context, but in the concrete dimensions of space and place. A proper response to such a God who meets humanity within spaces and places is to study closely how all that inhabit such spaces and places serve as the stimuli for awakening to the intimacy that God offers. The content of such spaces and places cannot be defined through a scarcity mindset as though they do not have the ability to share in the gift of intimacy that God offers. God’s gifts are always in abundance. Consequently, it is only through a surplus mindset that religious traditions can properly respond to the invitation to be intimate with God.

Even the language religious traditions use to articulate their sense of self in the world cannot be grounded in a closed hermeneutic. Rather, it ought to offer an opening to a surprise and the gift of otherness that resides both within and outside the tradition. As does pilgrimage effect a change in the pilgrim in a manner that allows for the pilgrim to embody contents of the world of all they encounter in their journey to the pilgrimage site, while also leaving residues of themselves within such spaces and places their bodies transverse, so also should the content of such language and the meanings given to its content exude for religious and secular traditions. Self-understanding is always open to other-understanding. This connection means that one ought to take seriously the contours that the other’s embodiment portend. In the religious context, religious traditions ought to

79 Malpas, “Rethinking Dwelling: Heidegger and the Question of Place,” 10.

80 See Adrianna Smurzyńska, “Relations between Self-understanding and Other-understanding: Similarities and Interactions,” *Avant*, vol. XI, no. 2 (2020): 1–12.

constantly reflect on how their sense of self evokes a spirituality of inclusivity that allows for an embrace of ‘surplusness’ as it pertains to their respective perceptions of each other within the concreteness of spaces and places. This approach is most relevant for the contemporary era as religious or secular traditions encounter each other on multiple fronts.

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