

*Mapping the visible and invisible
topographies of place and landscape
through sacred mobilities*

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Mapping the visible and invisible topographies of place and landscape through sacred mobilities

'This is how we live our lives – through places, through the body' (Nast and Pile 1998:1).

Introduction

Over the last decade I have explored relationship between bodies, emotions, religion place and landscape in a number of themes and contexts – bereavement; gender and religion; the Marian shrine of Madonna Ta Pinu in Gozo, Malta; gender and religion; pilgrimage walks; pilgrimage and landscape; and wider sacred mobilities. Geographies of gender, and of religion, embodied and emotional geographies are central to these endeavours. Scholarship grounded in feminist theories and methods has played an important role in bringing analytical attention to questions of gender, embodiment and performance within religion (Maddrell 2016); as can be seen in significant bodies of work on feminist theology and gender and religion (e.g. Morin and Guelke 2007; Jansen and Notermans 2012); sacred places and landscapes (e.g. Dwyer 2012; Kong 1993, 2001; Maddrell et al 2013; Parks 1997; Saunders 2013); spirituality in various contexts (Cloke and Beaumont 2013; Holloway and Valins 2001; Shah et al 2012;); This chapter builds on that body of work.

Here I draw on those studies to provide an overview of the intertwined and relational character of place, sacred mobilities and body-mind-belief. Morin and Guelke's (2007) volume, *Women, Religion and Space*, highlighted three recurring themes: i) embodiment (e.g. Gokariksel (2007) on veiling), ii) lived tactical religion (which is often highly gendered); and iii) the need to 'best understand religion not as a discrete category of social life but as a way of being in the world, one that is always articulated within particular [situated social-cultural-historical]] contexts' (Secor 2007: 158). The next section reflects on the spatial nature of such situated contexts.

The spatialities of place and landscape

Space is often perceived in static Euclidian form (a field, a room, a container); but recent geographical scholarship and the 'spatial turn' in the wider social sciences have recognised and reconceptualised space *as* organic, fluid, alive and dynamic. Lefebvre's (1994) *The Production of Space* encapsulates something of those processual and dynamic qualities. This has prompted those inspired by his work to attempt to 'capture in thought the actual process of [the] production of space' (Merrifield 2000: 173), including making the qualities of space, both perceptible and imperceptible, visible and cognizant (ibid.). It is through understanding space and spatial relations that we can understand the complexities of places and wider landscape – and how these are inflected by and experienced as sites of belief, spirituality and/or religion.

Doreen Massey (2005) neatly captured the nature of space as the product of interrelations, constituted through interactions and pluralities when she wrote: 'space is always under construction . . . a simultaneity of stories-so-far' (Massey 2005: 9). The same can be said of *places*, those sites shaped by meaning, experience, association, and attachment, described by Yi-Fu Tuan (1974) as *Topophilia* (love of land/place). A range of approaches explore people's relationship to place. 'Sense of place' has been developed to account for phenomenological experience of, and response to, place, whereby place is understood as a loci for lived experience and meaning-making, which in turn engenders discursive, dialogical and hermeneutic understanding, by individuals and collectives (Relph 1976, Seamon 2014). Crucially, this includes negative relation to place, as seen in Tuan's (1979) *Landscapes of Fear*. Work on place attachment has identified particular geographical locations as objects of psychological attachment (e.g. through childhood memories and day-to-day relational experiences), whereby place becomes the object of attachment and site of relational interaction and emotional bonds, prompting particular forms of behaviour. Place thereby acts as a loci for a transactional process which provides the individual with a sense of security (Counted and Zock 2019). While both sense of place and place attachment are characterised as 'slow' processes, in contrast, Raymond et al (2017) make a case for complementing 'slow' understanding of and attachment to place with approaches which accommodate immediate 'fast' sensory experience and perceptions of place by dint of

affordances, which are the product of a relationship between the perception of particular situated properties of the world and the possibility for action in response to those affordances in that locale (Raymond et al 2017: 1675). Ultimately, Raymond et al (2017) call for an approach to understanding sense of place which encompasses i) immediate sensory experience and perceived meanings as well as those developed over time; ii) attention to the attributes of individuals and their interface with environmental features; and iii) move away from simplistic linear notions of place attachment in order to recognise the dynamic interface of mind, culture and environment. This approach affords an understanding of sense of place which is perceived and socially constructed, and which may vary over time – notably over the life course, and allows for an understanding both the socially constructed and apparently transcendent meanings of place, as well as the role of tangible and intangible characteristics of places which can evoke emotional, symbolic and spiritual meaning. Such understanding involves the interrelation of the material and emotional-affective, cognitive and the sensory, individual and shared values, norms and experiences, each set within wider socio-economic, cultural and political contexts (Maddrell 2016).

The encounter between human subject and place constitutes a key arena for meaning-making (Crouch 2000), it is an encounter shaped by dynamic interaction: ‘places ... are always ‘on the move’’ (Sheller and Urry 2006: 1); ‘places are always becoming’ (Edensor 2010: 7); moreover, all *relationships* are dynamic, their character evolving, so too people’s relationship to and with places. The next section explores the role of embodied and emotional-affective experience in shaping relationship to place before an outline of a conceptual framework ‘maps’ those dynamic spatial relations.

Embodiment and emotion

The body has been recognised as the body as an important site of enquiry for those concerned with identity, gendered relations and the ‘everyday’ . The body is deeply interconnected emotional, psychological and biochemical system with associated processes, as well as a site of *embodiment*, of identity, experience, performance (Moss and Dyck 2003).

It is a space where things happen, such as illness, ageing, pregnancy, a site of sentience and sensual experience, but also a space of expression, marked by culture and life-history. Its complexity is simultaneously ‘material, discursive and psychical’ (Longhurst 2005: 91), a space where intertwined corporeal and psychological processes occur – and this includes

religious beliefs and spiritual practices. We experience the world through the senses - touch, smell, taste, sight, sound – and the kinetics and rhythms of movement. Inevitably, visual, haptic and embodied experience of places and landscapes can evoke emotional-affective-embodied-spiritual responses (Maddrell, 2011; Maddrell and della Dora 2013).

In parallel to, and often in conversation with work on the body, scholarship has over the last two decades has increasingly acknowledged and addressed questions of emotion and affect. These subjects had previously been relatively neglected within the social sciences, despite their centrality to human experience and meaning-making, and their import to understanding economic, political and policy matters (Anderson and Smith 2001). A consequence of a gendered politics of research which favoured detachment, objectivity and rationality, Anderson and Smith highlight how ‘this neglect leaves a gaping void in how we both know, and intervene in, the world’ (*ibid.*:7). Instead, they make the case for understanding the human world as constructed and experienced *through emotions*, arguing that ‘to neglect the emotions is to exclude a key set of relations through which lives are lived and societies made’ (*op.cit.*: 7).

Being attentive to emotions prompts an understanding that : ‘... places are never merely backdrops for action or containers for the past. They are fluid mosaics and moments of memory, matter, metaphor, scene, and experience which create and mediate social spaces and temporalities’ (Till 2005:8). Thus particular spaces become emotion-laden *places*: ‘embodied emotions are intricately connected to specific sites and contexts’ (Davidson *et al* 2005: 5). This is true of both those spaces we consciously – actively – designate as significant and those affectively-charged spaces which unexpectedly interpellate us, unawares. Thus, places and landscapes are experiential, relational, polysemic.

Relational approaches have informed understanding within various sub-disciplines, including health geographies (Curtis 2010), therapeutic geographies (Bell et al 2018), geographies of religion (Kong 2001, 2010), and processual approaches to cartography (Kitchin *et al* 2013). Both emotions and spaces can be seen as dynamic shifting assemblages, and, combined, represent a complex interrelation of lived place-temporalities, shot through with socio-economic, cultural and political norms. Building on previous work on the

spatialities of grief, the same conceptual framework applies to other situated experiences and relations, including the complex assemblage of arenas, beliefs and experiences which constitute the relationality of place and religion (see Figure 1).

Mapping the topographies of the visible and invisible

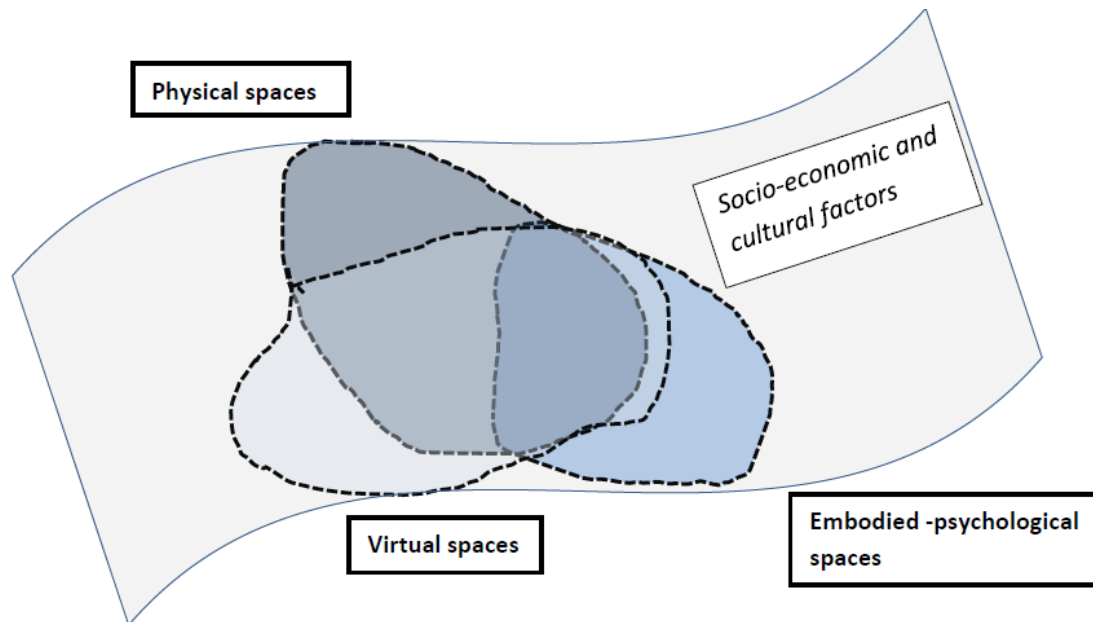


Figure 1 Material, embodied psychological and virtual spatialities: a conceptual framework for understanding dynamic spatial relations (source: Maddrell 2016: 181)

This experiential framework identifies the overlapping and co-producing characteristics of familiar physical-material spaces, the body-mind complex as an intrinsic space in its own right, as well as medium of experience; and the virtual spaces of online arena, virtual communities, and the non-material arenas of belief, including those associated with religious belief, such as heaven. This framework is a schematic representation of a form of ‘deep mapping’ (Harris 2015), used initially to explore the spatialities of grief, loss and consolation, but can be applied to all manner of place-based, experiences, producing a situated experiential ‘map’ for individuals which, in turn, provides insight to place attachment and sense of place. The dynamic contingent and ‘messy’ reality of this approach is represented by the uneven, overlapping and permeable areas, and by the porous outline of any individual or collective map, as seen in Figure 1.

Embodiment is central to the framework presented here, the body being a space of 'experience, practice, performance and trace' (Maddrell 2016: 176). Being attentive to the body contributes to understanding the contextualised co-constitution of people, experience and places. Embodied spaces represent an overlap between the material space of the body and emotional-psychological space, as experienced through place and landscape (e.g. home, workplace, sports arena or riverside). Sense of wellbeing being reflects conscious and sub-conscious processes and associated biochemistry (Damasio 2000) which are shaped by physical, psychical, emotional-affective and spiritual engagements, including those anchored in, or triggered by, site-specific experiences of place and landscape (see Foley 2011). Meaning and attachment can coalesce around sites of personal experience and significance, as well as shared symbolic spaces and sites of meaning-making, such as a place of worship, shrine, or site associated with revelation. Religious beliefs and spiritual practices mesh material and embodied experience with the virtual realm of the, imbricating the embodied and material to the topographies beyond the body-mind and physical environment into the non-material and more-than-human arena, such as prayer networks, global communities of believers and spatial imaginaries of the afterlife. Combined, the resulting dynamic maps of personal and communal meaning and experience lay bare the topographies of the inner and virtual worlds of belief in relation to the material world.

Thus, if, following Secor (cited in the introduction to this chapter), we view lived religion as a spiritual *embodied* faith practice rather than one focused institutionalised creeds, structures and buildings (although the two frequently intersect), then it is necessary to recognise that a person's religious beliefs and spiritual practices travel with and within them, with varying degrees of visibility, influencing perceptions of, and responses to, particular places. To rephrase an argument made in relation to mapping the dynamic, overlapping and relational spatialities of grief and remembrance: 'if we recognise the primary space of [spirituality] as embodied by the believer, they (we) carry belief *within* and can potentially be interpellated by it at any juncture of time-space. If we recognise the mobility of embodied and relational belief, greater understanding of the complex dynamic spatial patterns of belief, spiritual experience and religion will follow.' (rewording of Maddrell 2016: xx, underlined)

sections replace 'grief' with 'belief'). The following section applies these principles to understanding the practice of pilgrimage as a form of embodied sacred mobility.

Embodied emotional-affective sacred mobilities

'The hermeneutics of place progressively reveals new meanings in a kind of conversation between topography, memory and the presence of a particular people at any given moment' (Sheldrake 2001: 17).

In the quote above, Philip Sheldrake usefully identifies the topography, memory and people in a specific time-space; however, this co-production of hermeneutics also speaks to and from body-minds with sensory, sensual, kinaesthetic, emotional and spiritual dimensions, which in turn enrich our understanding of religion and place. In this section sense of place, place attachment, and place perception are explored through the medium of landscape. 'Landscape' is simultaneously material territory, socio-economic, cultural and political text, historical palimpsest, place of dwelling and practice, and local aesthetic, reflecting local topography, geology, architecture, land tenure and industry, and a blend of stasis, continuities and dynamic flows. Tilley (2010: 27) privileges 'places and their properties and paths or routes of movement between these places and their properties' in defining landscapes, but any combination of these characteristics may be perceived at a particular point in time by particular individuals or groups. Tilley helpfully emphasises the role of sensory embodied experience in understanding place and landscape, but it is necessary to include the non-material arena when examining religious and spiritual beliefs, practices and experiences, such as those associated with sacred sites, pilgrimage and other forms of sacred mobilities (Maddrell et al 2015a).

A focus on place- and landscape-situated experience has proved fruitful to the understanding of the embodied experience and meaning-making of sacred mobilities (Maddrell 2013, Maddrell and della Dora 2013, maddrell et al 2015a,b). 'Landscape blurs the boundaries between the static and the dynamic, between imagination and lived experience, between subjectivity and objectivity, between the self and the transcendent. It combines nature and culture, process and form, land and life. It accommodates exploration of the

‘bigger picture’ of spiritual cultures and how these relate to the tangible material world’ (Maddrell et al 2015b: xx).

The Mobilities framework facilitates analysis of the meaning and experience of movements and journeys (Sheller and Urry 2004). Just as place accrues significance through meaning-making (Tuan 1974; 1977/2001), when movement it is freighted with meaning it is described as *mobility* (Cresswell 2006). Mobilities are experienced through bodies and senses, inflected by place, practice, belief, emotion and affect, but also by the constraints and affordances of wealth, culture and physical capacities. Attention to situated practices and performances, including their embodied and emotional-affective dimensions, which when combined with feminist non-dualistic concepts, such as sacred-secular and body-mind, can offer insight to experience of lived religion and the everyday spiritual practices. A Sacred Mobilities approach seeks to creatively explore the experiential intersections of those seeking and practising the ‘sacred’ (however defined) and both travel and other forms of movement (Maddrell et al 2015a). Just as ‘Place is characterised by the mobilities that course through it ... Patterns of mobile flow thus contribute to the spatio-temporal character of a place’ (Edensor 2010:5), so too people’s experience of place and wider landscapes are inflected not only by their bodies and sensory experience (Tilley 2010), but also by the emotional-psychological-spiritual nexus they inhabit. The following section draws on insights from accounts by participants in a series of guided pilgrimage and prayer walks to early Christian sites on the Isle of Man (see Maddrell 2011, 2013, Maddrell et al 2015b), which are analysed in order to identify and reflect on aspects of embodied-emotional-spiritual encounters of place and how these relate to the tripartite spatial framework, as represented schematically in Figure 1.

Pilgrimages often centre on site-specific place-based spiritual experience relating to sites denoted as intrinsically ‘sacred’, by dint of sacred materiality (e.g. a saint’s shrine), ‘theoplicity’ (Belhassen 2008), or a looser ‘spiritual magnetism’ (Preston 1992) relating to broader qualities including the aesthetics and ‘mood’ or atmosphere of the place. The place-specific material-spiritual interface is illustrated by a male respondent during a prayer walk to the remains of a medieval keeill (chapel) and a collection of carved Celtic-Norse stones and crosses from the same period, both at Maughold. ‘Touching the stones [of the keeill]

and sitting on the walls gives me a great sense of connectedness to Christianity, to our ancestors and to this beautiful Island ... the Celtic crosses here are reminders again from whence we have come. I love to come and just be in their presence ... [St Maughold's well is] another of the special places, it conveys a great sense of peace'. (Male, 66-75 years, Methodist). Here the physical tangibility of both the situated ruins of the keeill and the beautiful carved stones generates an aesthetic-spiritual experience in this particular place, with its assemblage of historical sacred artefacts which engender a spiritual atmosphere in the present, as well as creating a virtual bond, across time, to the forebears of faith in this place. Imagination plays a critical role in the social construction of place (Adams et al 2001: xxi) and beliefs (Holloway 2003), and here the physical attributes of place, including the representational 'texts' of the stone carvings, create a prized and revisited place characterised by spiritual liminality and temporal mobility, an experience of place often attributed in popular Celtic theology in terms of 'thin places': 'Both pilgrimage as an experience and particular landscapes have liminal qualities' (Maddrell et al 2015b: xx)

As another participant reported, both the practice of worship and being in nature can act as spiritual thresholds: 'Apart from worship, I find it easiest to be in the Lord's presence when I am in His beautiful Creation' (Female, 66-75 years, Evangelical Christian); needless to say when worship takes place in an inspiring natural environment, it can create heightened experience, as evidenced in the following description of what might be described as spiritual enchantment: 'Sitting in a place of prayer surrounded by beautiful woodland and carpets of spring flowers was sheer delight. An awe-filled mystic experience each day being a new landscape, vista, and different type of weather. [...] From hilltop and Viking burial grounds and grassy fields to the woodlands and waterfalls to the beaches, all enveloped in the glorious May splendour of new green and wildflowers. Magic.' (Female, 66-75 years, Roman Catholic). However, even adverse physical conditions can engender heightened spiritual experience in charged places: 'On this wild, wet day, the elements ... it just inspires ... it was driving rain but we were together inside, and we shared the Elements together, passed the chalice round to each other and gave the bread to each other. We were soaked through, it was pelting with rain when we were there and we had come some distance walking down, but I [was moved by] the simplicity of it' (Jean, 60+ years, Methodist). While a secular

analysis might characterise this wind and rainswept service in the coastal keeill ruins as sensual and Romantic experiential aesthetics, for those like Jean, who were spiritually moved by this prayer walk culminating in the Eucharist, this characterisation would not do justice to their experience of spiritual transport. Rather, it might be described as a place-based convergence of physical movement and spiritual mobility, in Inge's terms, an example of 'sacramental encounters in which the material becomes a vehicle for God's self communication. In such events the role of place is essential' (Inge 2003: 91).

Physical and spiritual journeys are intertwined in sacred mobilities, embodied and metaphorical journeys experienced in and mediated through body-mind, embodiment being central to the experience of landscape through the medium of a sensing carnal body (Tilley 2010). The kinaesthetic, aesthetic, sensory and sensual are all evident in various participants' embodied-emotional-spiritual experiential accounts: 'peace – physical exhaustion, understanding we are such small specks on this earth' (Female, 35-44, Anglican); '... began a lovely trek along the coastal path, very like that at St.David's. Gorgeous wild flowers added so much to our pleasure, archids, thrift, blue scabiou, field sorrel which we tasted. A brief stop at Port Mooar Bay – how I would have loved to swim quite uncomfortable walking on stones after heather' (Adele, 60+ years, Quaker). At another point Adele deployed an extended period of silent walking to facilitate focus and heightened experience – to allow her the spiritual mobility of simultaneously occupying her place on the path and 'another place' (see Maddrell 2013).

The physical and mental benefits of walking are well-rehearsed (*ibid.*; Slavin 2003), and, not surprisingly, these appear in Adele's account: 'I love the buzz I get from climbing mountains, both the physical and the spiritual. The views were wonderful, South to the Calf of Man, Ireland was hidden behind mist or cloud. Lots of ups and downs today, which made me think about the ups and downs of life on the hills and valleys. You can't have one without the other' (Adele, 60+ years, Quaker). Clearly, this exemplifies the agency and hermeneutics of experiential landscape, learning experienced through the soles of boots, ragged and easy breath; it epitomises what geographers have referred to as 'textures of place' or sense of place (see Adams et al 2001).

The physicality of landscapes act as a ground for all thought and social interpretation, it profoundly affects the way we think, feel, move and act' (Tilley 2010: 26). Furthermore, 'Motion and emotion ... are kinaesthetically intertwined' (Sheller 2004:227), but that motion and emotion are situated, rooted in place at a particular point in time, as illustrated further in Adele's account of the day which was her late mother's birthday. 'Day 6 Thursday June 24th. Feast of St John the Baptist. Birthday of Eileen [...] born in 1908. This is always an important day for me, as it was my Darling Mum's birthday ...'. This day's walking, contextualised by the anniversary, was overtly emotionally heightened for Adele, and she had to stop and take some time out when unexpectedly interpellated by an unexpected affective encounter with a cluster of family graves, including a mother and daughter located at the top of the hill: 'A very emotional moment looking at a grave of several members of a family ...' (Adele, 60+ years, Quaker).

Conclusion

Different forms of mobility produce specific situated experiences, and consequently orient the subject differently in relation to that time-space (Spinney 2010). Sacredly charged mobilities intersect with body-minds, place, wider landscapes and perceived spiritual realms in rich predictable and unpredictable ways. Sacred mobilities - journeys and practices - are a 'complex and interactive social, emotional, embodied spiritual experience shaped to varying degrees by individual and collective journeys, beliefs, performances and aesthetic responses' (Maddrell et al 2015b: 172). Place can be 'characterised by the mobilities that course through it ...' patterns of flows being a significant ingredient in the character of a place (Edensor 2010:5). In turn, places and landscapes are agential, evoking and provoking emotional-affective and, in some cases spiritual, engagement. In common with spirituality, emotional ties reach across time and place, ultimately they are both carried within and catalysed by meaningful places and embodied experience of landscape.

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