

Editorial: Placing religion and spirituality in geography

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As Foucault's work demonstrates, a culture cannot understand itself without first understanding its implicit connection and development within the constructs of religious belief and practice. Contemporary culture is born out of religious traditions and the conditions of our knowledge are therefore embedded in religious discourse. The so-called secular space is itself a hybrid of past religious traditions, and in order to understand contemporary culture Foucault recognised (and was fascinated by) the religious influences upon thought and practice. (Carrette 1999: 33)

From the spatial distributions of religious populations, the impacts such groups have on landscapes (with a particular, and rather peculiar, focus on cemeteries), to explorations into religious ecology and the role of Christian theology on environmental practices, the 'geography of religion'—typically understood as a sub-discipline of (cultural) geography—has a long and distinguished history (see Kong 1990). Nonetheless, in recent years geographers have lamented on a lack of progress, arguing that the field is in 'disarray', with a 'lack of coherence' and replete with topics left 'untouched and questions unanswered' (Cooper 1992; Holloway 1998, Kong 1990, 1993; Levine 1986; Pacione 1999; Sopher 1981, Tuan 1976; Valins 1999; Wilson 1993). Kong's (1993) call for geographers of religion to incorporate and develop 'new' cultural understandings of space,

place and nature remained slow to be fulfilled, but a fresh interest in the area seems finally to be developing. Geographers are beginning to recognize more fully the powerful and contingent role of religion and spirituality on a range of geographical scales, from the corporeal (Holloway 1998), to the institutional (Holloway 2000; Valins 2000) to the geopolitical (Ó Tuathail 2000). This themed section of *Social & Cultural Geography* attempts to consolidate and develop this renewed geographical interest (which became evident at a session on 'Geographies of Religion' at the RGS-IBG conference in January, 2000).¹ Its aim is to draw out two key points that are central to the development of theoretically and practically informed understandings of the place of religion: firstly, to recognize how the religious and the spiritual were and are central to the *everyday*

lives of vast numbers of individuals; and secondly, to appreciate that geographers of religion cannot only usefully incorporate recent *theoretical* developments within (and beyond) the discipline, but also advance and critique such understandings, as processed through the empirical lenses of particular religious case-studies and examples.

Religious and spiritual matters form an important context through which the majority of the world's population live their lives, forge a sense (indeed an ethics) of self, and make and perform their different geographies. Religious beliefs are central to the construction of identities and the practice of people's lives, from the habitual (the food that is eaten, the clothes people wear, the routines of daily prayer), to the structuring of the 'vital' events of births, deaths and marriages. Even in the West, where many mainstream institutionalized religions have suffered from declining attendance, there has been increased interest and participation in 'alternative' spiritualities and fundamentalist forms of belief, and arguably in the commitment of those who directly follow traditional religious practices.² Much more than this, as Foucault recognized, religion is a crucial component to understanding the construction of even the most 'secular' of societies. Through, for example, systems of ethics and morality, architecture, systems of patriarchy and the construction of law, government or the (increasing) role of the voluntary sector, understanding the power of religion (or, at the very least, religious antecedents) to influence (and be influenced by) society and space remains a key arena for geographers to explore. For example, what role does religion play in 'secular' notions of right and wrong, in the 'correct' and 'moral' ways to run societies, the practices (and ethics) of consumption, or in the (historical and contemporary) constructions of the relative places of men and women, straight and gay? Such

questions are beyond the scope of this editorial to answer, but geographers clearly now have many of the theoretical (and methodological) tools with which to approach these issues. Through spatial understandings of difference, Otherness, identity, hybridity, representation or embodiment, geographers of religion can help unlock the processes that shape, and have shaped, contemporary and historical societies. Furthermore, geographers of religion have the opportunity to develop these theoretical tools, looking 'back' on to current spatialized conceptualizations of society. Do current theoretical concepts really make sense of 'who we are' when engaging with the non-rationality (in the sense of rarely being scientifically provable or, for the most part, disprovable) of religious beliefs and values? In short, how can academics effectively place religion and spirituality in geography, and how can such themes refine and re-interpret the spatial theories now commonly used to understand society and societal processes?

To begin answering such (theoretical and empirical) questions about the geography of religion and spirituality— if not yet their impact on the 'secular'— this themed section is organized around investigations into the production, transformation and function of 'everyday' religious built and imagined landscapes. In particular, the papers that follow strongly illustrate the role that faith, belief and spirituality play as key axes of socio-cultural identity. Thus, Petri Raivo's paper on the Finnish Orthodox Church and Clare Palmer's work on Christian representations of the English rural reveal how religion is pivotal in producing a sense of self and notions of togetherness and communal identity. Furthermore, the focus in both Raivo's and Palmer's papers upon the need to express in and through space an identity based around faith and belief, echoes the need to reinforce religious identity

in the construction of material landscapes and sites; as discussed in Simon Naylor and James Ryan's paper on the 'mosque in the suburbs'. Crucially, however, emphasizing the importance of religion and faith in the spatial (re)production of socio-cultural identities does not mean ignoring how religiosity intersects with, is transformed by, or even supports other topologies of identity organized around, for example, gender, ethnicity and age. Thus, religiosity, and its spatial constitution and expression, is also recognized throughout these papers as a process often fraught with contest and negotiation. The dynamics of such contestation is starkly represented in Naylor and Ryan's paper as well as that by Fraser MacDonald on the spatialities of Scottish Presbyterianism. Fraser's Lefebvrian framework for understanding the production of Presbyterian landscapes allows him to trace moments and sites of everyday negotiation of post-Reformation religious space. Thus taking the pews, building work, design, and (non)adornment of the church itself as a space of representation (in a Lefebvrian sense), Fraser can trace the negotiation and (even) micropolitics of religious expression in and through space.

As well as giving substance to the (theoretical and empirical) claim that religion is a key dimension of everyday life and existence to many people the world over (both now and in the past), these papers also make a valuable contribution to the long-standing focus in socio-cultural geography on landscape. For example, Petri's paper supplements this work by documenting how landscapes both reflect transformations and changes in society, and reinforce a sense of symbolic order (Cosgrove 1984). Also, Petri's paper echoes the notion of 'landscape as text' (Barnes and Duncan 1992; Duncan 1990; Duncan and Duncan 1988) in its emphasis upon the ways in which such spaces

are read and re-read in different ways, and how a landscape's work of signification is constituted through a framework of intertextuality with other discursive formations of, in this case, regional identity and heritage tourism. The often multiple discursive constitution of the landscape is also substantiated in Palmer's paper and her discussion of how religious depictions sustain and intersect with nationalistic, as well as other, orderings. Again, this emphasis upon the symbolic role of landscapes imbued with religious meanings in (re)producing imagined communities of the nation traces connections with other work on landscape and national identity (especially Cosgrove and Daniels 1988; Daniels 1993; Matless 1998). Indeed, in a similar manner to how these papers signal the inherent negotiation and contest involved in maintaining everyday religious lives, the following contributions also resonate with arguments concerning the cultural politics of landscape (Anderson 1988). So we see in, for example, Naylor and Ryan's paper how the production and representation of religious landscapes always occurs within a wider contested terrain and the contingencies of other spatial processes and discursive formations—in this case (post)colonial and architectural geographies, and geographies of planning.

The theoretical manoeuvres made by the papers in this themed section thus build upon and attest to distinct traditions in social and cultural geography. Yet we would also argue that geographers of religion and spirituality are well placed to contribute to newly emerging trends in social and cultural geography. For example, the recent emergence of an interest in issues of embodiment, performance and practice (see, especially, the special edition of *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 2000, on performance) is one particular area that geographers of religion can usefully contribute to, sustain and potentially carry for-

ward. Religious and spiritual geographies are (re)produced through a variety of embodied acts and bodily practices. Thus the corporeal enactment and performances involved in, for example, prayer, ritual and pilgrimage (which some of the papers here hint at; see also Martin and Kryst 1998) are central to the maintenance and development of religious spaces and landscapes. Furthermore, in suggesting this as a possible and productive future direction for the geography of religion and spirituality, not only is there potential to enhance thinking on habitual and performed landscapes within geography (see, for example, Driver and Gilbert 1998; Hetherington 1998; Thrift 2000; Wylie 1998), but opportunities also ensue which make connections with work in sociology on religion and the body (see, for example, Mellor and Shilling 1997; Turner 1991). Thus, whether it makes a supplement to a long-standing interest in landscape or enhances a dialogue on spatial practice and performance that is beginning to be clearly heard, we are convinced that the geography of religion and spirituality has something significant to say. But above all, we hope that this collection relays the message that the place of religion and spirituality is of central importance and significance to many people's lives, and that to recognize and explore this is to further human geography's understanding and contribution to the worlds we make and inhabit.

Notes

- 1 Both the conference session and this themed section were organized by Julian Holloway, Simon Naylor, James Ryan and Oliver Valins.
- 2 In a recent survey into the religious and moral attitudes of people living in the UK ORB (2000) found that 23 per cent of respondents had attended a religious service within the last month (similar to figures a decade ago), 48 per cent regard themselves as belonging to a particular religion (compared with 58 per cent in 1990), 62 per

cent believe in God (the figure was 76 per cent in 1981), but 69 per cent believe in a soul (whereas only 59 per cent did so in 1981).

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