

Chapter 1

Toward a Global and Multidisciplinary Understanding of Place, Religion/Spirituality, and Well-Being



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Abstract A global and multidisciplinary approach to place, religion/spirituality, and well-being could contribute to improving our understanding of how place is related to religion/spirituality, well-being, and the intersection between these two fundamental aspects of human life. Re-establishing the centrality of place to human life, this chapter highlights place as a common thread that connects religion/spirituality and well-being. We draw on multiple spheres of human life—personal, social, and cultural—to discuss some of the dynamic and complex ways in which place, religion/spirituality,

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and well-being are interconnected. Following this illustration, we outline the structure of this global and multidisciplinary volume in three parts, and briefly summarize the collection of chapters within it. As a first step toward building a comprehensive body of knowledge on place, religion/spirituality, and well-being across various disciplines, the contributions in this volume collectively underscore how place inherently intertwines with personal spiritual encounters, societal adaptability, and cultural expressions of spirituality. We hope that this book provides a useful foundation for subsequent theory, research, and practice that recognizes the centrality of place to religion/spirituality, well-being, and the relationship between them.

Keywords Health · Place · Religion · Spirituality · Well-being

The scientific study of place provides various insights into how individuals and communities live out their daily lives within particular geographic contexts. The concept of place opens the door to investigating multiple spatial domains that are part of our daily routines, including the physical environment itself, memories or social experiences in certain places, and the cultural identity of places that shape individual attitudes. These multiple understandings of place have been well-documented (see Counted et al., 2021, 2023; Lewicka, 2011; Scannell & Gifford, 2010), and provide some grounding for conceptualizing the role of place in the scientific study of religion/spirituality¹ and well-being.²

¹Although we use the term ‘spirituality’ in the title of this volume for brevity, we do not mean to imply that the concept of religion is subsumed under spirituality. The relationship between religion and spirituality is nuanced and varies across cultures and academic disciplines, with distinct boundaries in some contexts and blurred distinctions in others (see Chen et al., 2022). In our usage, ‘religion/spirituality’ (and similar combined terms such as ‘religious/spiritual’) is meant to be inclusive, embracing a spectrum of religious or spiritual beliefs, behaviors, and experiences. It does not suggest that religion and spirituality are conceptually equivalent or interchangeable. In the spirit of an inclusive understanding, Saroglou et al.’s (2020) 4Bs framework—*Believing, Bonding, Behaving, and Belonging*—offers a suitable lens for exploring religion/spirituality in this volume. This framework encapsulates the broad spectrum of human experiences within religion/spirituality, transcending the boundaries between personal convictions, shared emotions, communal practices, and collective identity. Believing refers to the cognitive aspect of religion/spirituality, emphasizing the importance of personal convictions and the acceptance of a transcendental reality. This dimension is explored in various chapters of this volume through analysis of individual belief systems and their role in shaping the perception and experience of places deemed spiritual or sacred. Bonding underscores the affective and communal facets of religion/spirituality. It pertains to the emotional connections that individuals form with the sacred, as well as the ties that bind members of a religious/spiritual community together. Bonding is especially visible in chapters that explore how emotional connections to spiritual places contribute to communal well-being. Behaving represents the moral and ethical actions inspired by religious/spiritual beliefs. Chapters in this volume that intersect with the behaving dimension explore the ethical implications of religious/spiritual connections to place, such as those that occur within the context of social justice movements. Belonging encapsulates the social identity and commitment that come with being part of a religious/spiritual community. The sense of belonging to a spiritual place, as well as the social identity derived from it, are discussed in various chapters, especially those examining the relationship between sacred spaces and community resilience. The chapters in this volume explore religion/spirituality in conjunction with these 4Bs. By adopting such a comprehensive approach, we aim to paint a richer, more nuanced picture of the interaction between place, religion/spirituality, and well-being—one that respects the multifaceted nature of religious/spiritual experiences.

² ‘Well-being’ is a multidimensional concept that includes but is not limited to the domain of health (Cowden et al., 2022c; Shiba et al., 2022; VanderWeele et al., 2022). Similar to the *whole person*

We begin this chapter by considering place as a central part of each person's psycho-social-spiritual healing system. This system, which can be unpacked using Saroglou et al.'s (2020) 4Bs framework of *Believing*, *Bonding*, *Behaving*, and *Belonging*, serves as a foundation for how people navigate the labyrinth of challenges and uncertainties that they encounter in life. For instance, when facing a serious illness, an individual's spiritual beliefs (*Believing*) can offer a sense of purpose, their faith community can provide emotional and spiritual support (*Bonding*), their shared religious practices can foster well-being (*Behaving*), and their sense of identity within their faith group can reinforce resilience (*Belonging*). In each of these aspects, 'place' assumes a central role, serving not just as a geographical location but as a nexus of personal beliefs, community bonds, shared behaviors, and a sense of belonging. Healing systems influence how we think about the nature of stressors, what constitutes our well-being, and ways to overcome a difficult situation 'using what works' (Quah, 2003). A psycho-social-spiritual approach to healing systems recognizes the dynamic interplay between psychological, sociocultural, and environmental factors that support well-being when beliefs are formed, bonds are created, behaviors are adopted, and a sense of belonging is cultivated. This interplay not only supports individual resilience but also nourishes collective flourishing within a given place or community.

Crucially, this broad-based approach underlines the centrality of 'place' to both religion/spirituality and well-being. We see place not merely as a passive backdrop, but as a bridging force that brings religion/spirituality and well-being together. This bridge is made even more salient when examined within the context of personal engagements, social resilience, and cultural connections. Places influence our personal spiritual engagements, strengthen our resilience within social structures, and forge rich cultural connections. Consequently, we understand that religious/spiritual beliefs and health-related outcomes do not exist in isolation. Rather, they are integrally woven into the fabric of place, both historically and contemporarily. The ensuing chapters in this book illuminate these connections, offering a nuanced perspective on the interwoven tapestry of place, religion/spirituality, and well-being.

The Centrality of Place to Well-Being

Place is an environmental setting in which physical elements and human experiences are unified (Castello, 2006). The physical elements of a place can include natural (e.g., landforms, water, plants) or man-made features (e.g., landmarks, monuments, bridges). Human experiences in a place can include, but are not limited to,

perspective, well-being is an integrative concept that emphasizes the importance of understanding how a person is doing across different aspects of life (Höltge et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2022). Beyond the theoretical, empirical, and practical advantages of applying this holistic perspective of well-being to the concept of place, well-being is sufficiently broad that it can accommodate the wide range of human states and outcomes represented in this book.

recreational activities, cultural events, and social gatherings. It is the fusion of physical elements and human experiences that make places meaningful to people, playing an important role in everyday life as the settings where life events unfold.

Whether we are conscious of it or not, places are central to our well-being. This link is well established in historical texts. For example, Greek physician Hippocrates first wrote about the link between places and health in his book *On Airs, Waters, and Places*, arguing that medicine should be investigated from the subjective lens of experiences and activities that occur within places (Cozier, 2017). The same underlying sentiment was conveyed by the nineteenth century medical historian, August Hirsch, who proposed that scientists should consider the different aspects of health-related outcomes “at all times and in all places” (Barrett, 2000, p. 104).

There are several ways that places influence well-being. First, places are the backdrop of social inequalities that are often used to categorize people into social classes. For example, terms that distinguish areas within a city (e.g., urban vs. suburban) are sometimes used to describe the general class composition of people in those places and how they are related to the health (e.g., high mortality) of people who live there (Jackson et al., 2000). Living in a low-income area may itself be a source of distress for many people, which can impact other facets of well-being. Data on global differences in life expectancies across cultures has shown that people’s opportunities in life and health-related outcomes can vary based on their geographic locations (Oláh et al., 2010; Phillimore & Morris, 1991; Shaw et al., 1999). For example, members of health-conscious social clubs in affluent suburbs may show better health outcomes than those who live in low-income, under-resourced residential areas. Social stratification can also influence the type of social ties people have in a particular geographic location, which is known to play an important role in supporting well-being (Kawachi & Berkman, 2001).

Second, places produce spaces that reveal the intricate connections between physical locations in the environment and the complex nature of human experiences. For example, people imbue places with meanings that can form an integral part of their healing processes, as has been the case with racial justice protest sites (see Chap. 5) or sacred religious/spiritual sites such as Mecca in Saudi Arabia (Tunstall et al., 2004). In such places of significance, people often experience a sense of security and transcendent connection that contribute positively to their well-being (Howell et al., 2013; Scannell & Gifford, 2017). Many places are also settings in which people learn about societal norms and expectations, including those related to the human body, identity, mental illness, disability, and healthcare (Tunstall et al., 2004). Thus, socialization processes within places can serve important functions in supporting well-being.

Third, life course historians and social scientists emphasize the importance of history to health (Ben-Shlomo & Kuh, 2002), but there is relatively little discussion about how history is the byproduct of place-based events. For example, the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic is a global event that has spread around the world, reshaping many aspects of human life. The history of the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be discussed without emphasizing how a place-based event (e.g., contamination of an animal market or a leak from a virology lab) led to global

transmission of severe acute respiratory syndrome. There are also noticeable life course factors (e.g., war, human rights abuse, natural disasters) that influence the well-being of people in particular places. From a developmental perspective, people tend to prefer living in specific geographic areas at different stages of their lives (Howley, 2009; Litwak & Longino, 1987). For example, the buzzing energy of city life might be a source of vitality for younger people, whereas older adults might derive value from the tranquility that often comes with living in a non-metropolitan suburban or rural area (Hertzman & Wiens, 1996; Li et al., 2022; Lundberg, 1997).

To adequately understand human flourishing, we must recognize that influences on well-being operate through many different place-related processes. Most importantly, well-being must be investigated within its appropriate ecological formations and should go beyond individual-level attributes to include place-related factors (Massey et al., 1991). In this book, we recognize places as settings in which all of human life unfolds, including well-being. However, to understand how well-being is a function of place, one must examine the cultural practices and belief systems that are central to place.

Religion/Spirituality and Well-Being: Threads to Multiple Place

Recent efforts have shown that religion/spirituality and well-being are intertwined in place contexts (Counted et al., 2020, 2023; Counted & Watts, 2019; Meagher & Cheadle, 2020). For example, the combination of regular religious/spiritual communal experiences, teachings, or practices which, when taken together and experienced within the backdrop of a place of worship (e.g., church, mosque, temple), may create meaningful experiences and gradually alter behavior toward full human flourishing (VanderWeele, 2017). There are three aspects of place that have been covered in place psychology, namely the affective, cognitive, and behavioral domains of place (Counted, 2016; Counted et al., 2021; Scannell & Gifford, 2010). The first domain of place has to do with a person's emotional connection to a place, or their attachment to the physical features of a place, such as the beauty of its scenery or the opportunities it presents for recreational activities (Lewicka, 2011). For example, people who have strong connections to pilgrimage sites may have a stronger devotion to the sacred through their ties to such places. The ties to such places can be initiated by the process of socialization marked by place visits, use of religious objects, and storytelling. The connection that many people have with religious/spiritual places affords a secure base—emotional security, meaning, stability, and confidence—that can have important benefits for well-being (Counted et al., 2021; Counted & Watts, 2019). Several chapters in this book (e.g., Chaps. 7, 12, 14, 15, 16) explore the emotional connections that people have with the physical elements of place and how these ties shape religion/spirituality and support different aspects of well-being.

The second domain of place is the cognitive process related to the cultural identity of a place. A common approach to studying religious/spiritual beliefs in place contexts starts with basic assumptions about human cognition (Counted et al., 2023). Humans are generally thought to have two broad systems of cognition (i.e., intuitive vs. rational), though there is no consensus about terminology (Akinci & Sadler-Smith, 2013; Kahneman, 2003). We assume that the actual experience of religion/spirituality largely makes use of intuitive cognition, though there are ways that rational cognition could also be involved in religious/spiritual beliefs. Both systems of cognition have mechanisms (e.g., attachment, perceived security, presence) through which interactions with places support the acquisition of religious/spiritual beliefs. Over time, as individuals begin to critically evaluate their belief systems and religious communities, they find themselves in, the encompassing effect of this process can contribute to enhancing or deteriorating well-being. For example, negative images of a higher power in religious texts, such as possessive, unhappy, or judgmental, can be a source of distress for people (Counted & Watts, 2017; Steenwyk et al., 2010). On the other hand, positive images that position the sacred as fatherly, loving, or as a relational figure can be beneficial for well-being (Kruizinga et al., 2017; Pargament, 2011; Steenwyk et al., 2010). This cognitive aspect of religion/spirituality can shape character and identity formation within the context of place, affecting how people relate to themselves, others, and the world around them (Boğaç, 2009; Proshansky et al., 1983). Chapter 4 sheds light on this cognitive-theological process, advocating the need to acquaint ourselves with the places we live—its history, people, and culture—in order to be ‘in sync’ with the sacred. Several other chapters (e.g., Chaps. 10, 11, 13) also touch on this cognitive aspect of place.

Lastly, aspects of place that involve personal and social engagement with the lifeworld and activities in a particular setting are also essential for understanding the intersecting dynamics of religion/spirituality and well-being in place contexts (Counted et al., 2023; Counted & Zock, 2019). People are drawn to specific pilgrimage sites and religious settings because those contexts enable them to participate in communal healing practices (Counted & Watts, 2019; see also Chaps. 2, 3, 6, 15, and 17). Place behavior often involves experiences with different visual, auditory, and somatic sensory activities. There are recorded historical and contemporary accounts of religious/spiritual experiences in actual physical places (see Counted & Watts, 2017), which end up being converted to sacred places used for pilgrimage rituals. The experience of the sacred in those places often tends to be more visual and/or somatic than auditory. The visual sensory experience of the sacred may be applicable at sites (e.g., ancient churches, shrines, mosques) and cities (e.g., Jerusalem, Mecca) of religious/spiritual significance. The sensory presence of the sacred in different geographical settings is central to many religious/spiritual traditions, demonstrating the role that sacred physical places have in evoking religious or spiritual experiences that support well-being (Chen et al., 2020; Thomas, 1999). Chapters 2, 6, and 9 of this book address the behavioral domain of place and its intersection with religion/spirituality and well-being.

Although the multiple domains of place generally contribute positively to religion/spirituality and well-being, disruption to the bond a person has with a place (i.e., place attachment disruption)—whether due to a natural disaster (e.g., flooding, earthquake) or a human-made event (e.g., religious conflict, cultural genocide)—can impact negatively on the religiosity or well-being of people attached to those places (Counted et al., 2021). For example, people who try to experience the sacred in a place that has substantially been altered or no longer exists (e.g., a sacred site that has been destroyed) may feel the *absence* of divine presence. Similarly, public health measures that restricted people from accessing places of significance during the COVID-19 pandemic may precipitate religious/spiritual struggles (e.g., anger at God), leading to psychological distress that could have downstream consequences for other facets of well-being (Counted et al., 2022b; Cowden et al., 2022a, b; Jung et al., 2022). Alternatively, place attachment disruption might prompt people to turn to the sacred for comfort, safety, or security, which could promote positive adjustment over time (Cowden et al., 2021; Counted et al., 2020).

Unifying Multidisciplinary Themes of People-Place Relationships

Although the existing conceptual framework comprising the affective, cognitive, and behavioral domains³ of place has much utility (see Counted et al., 2021), it is rooted primarily in psychological theories and methodologies, potentially narrowing the scope of exploration and interpretation. To cultivate a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the concept of place, it is prudent to transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries. Such an approach calls for a refined multidisciplinary framework that coalesces themes of place throughout the diverse chapters of this volume. Although not exhaustive, three dimensions of human life—personal, social, and cultural—provide a suitable foundation for developing a more holistic

³In extending the affective, behavioral, and cognitive domains of place into personal, social, and cultural spheres, we foster an expansive, multidisciplinary dialogue on place, religion/spirituality, and well-being. The discussion that follows elucidates how these three spheres illuminate and expand the affective, behavioral, and cognitive domains of people-place relationships. The personal sphere, as an extension of the affective domain, emphasizes the subjective experiences, emotions, and personal meanings individuals attribute to a place. It highlights the role of personal experiences and individual interpretations in shaping religion/spirituality and well-being. This perspective opens up a dialogue with disciplines such as phenomenology and existentialism, which emphasize the significance of individual experience and subjective interpretation. The social sphere extends the behavioral domain to include social interactions, communal activities, and shared experiences within a place. It underscores the influence of social dynamics and communal engagements on religion/spirituality and well-being. The cultural sphere broadens the cognitive domain to incorporate collective beliefs, traditions, and shared meanings associated with a place. It recognizes that our cognitive processes are embedded in, as well as shaped by, cultural contexts. This perspective invites contributions from disciplines such as anthropology, cultural studies, and history, deepening our understanding of how cultural narratives and shared interpretations influence religion/spirituality and well-being.

understanding of place as a complex and interconnected phenomenon. Bronfenbrenner's (1977) Ecological Systems Theory offers an overarching framework for examining human development and flourishing within the context of the systems of relationships that shape an individual's environment. On this view, human well-being is influenced by several interconnected spheres: the personal sphere (equivalent to Bronfenbrenner's microsystem, including immediate environments such as family or school), the social sphere (akin to the mesosystem and exosystem, involving the interaction between two or more personal spheres, and settings that indirectly influence personal development), and the cultural sphere (akin to the macrosystem, incorporating broader societal influences such as cultural norms and values).

With consideration to this volume, the personal, social, and cultural spheres can be likened to the different facets of an ecosystem, offering distinct but interconnected lenses through which to understand the multifaceted concept of place. For example, personal connections unfold within the microsystem, reflecting the intimate, immediate relationships that individuals form with specific places. These relationships often involve a deep sense of attachment and identity, influencing individual well-being (see Chaps. 2, 3, and 6). Social connections, which can be situated within the mesosystem and exosystem, emphasize the interaction of an individual's personal experience of place within broader social structures and institutions (see Chaps. 5, 10, and 12). Lastly, cultural connections can be positioned within the macrosystem, reflecting broader cultural norms, values, and historical experiences that shape perceptions and experiences of place (see Chaps. 13, 14, and 15).

The abovementioned spheres of place are emphasized in different disciplines (not just in psychological science), with some variation across disciplines. For example, geography and architecture often emphasize the lifeworld (e.g., human activities) of a physical setting (see Chaps. 7, 10, and 14), whereas psychology tends to focus more on the emotional bond that people develop with a place through their interactions with the environment (see Chap. 2). Our position is that experiences deemed religious, spiritual, supernatural, or paranormal are rooted in a place context, and the multiple spheres of place make it possible to look at people-place dynamics (e.g., relationships, perceptions, experiences) in the broader multidisciplinary context of religion/spirituality and well-being.

Our Approach

The approach of this book invites a global and multidisciplinary exploration of the intricately interconnected concepts of place, religion/spirituality, and well-being. It strategically integrates perspectives from distinct, yet related, disciplines, such as epidemiology, sociology, psychology, theology, health science, geography, archaeology, and architecture. Such a multidisciplinary exploration offers a more comprehensive perspective of the subject matter, one that transcends the confines of a single

discipline. Additionally, it encourages the synthesis of diverse disciplinary perspectives, fostering a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the phenomena under scrutiny. For instance, consider the approach taken in Chap. 5 (*Racial Justice Protests and Spaces of Hope and Healing*). This chapter utilizes interdisciplinary insights from sociology, psychology, and urban geography to explore how spatial context, racial tension, and healing mechanisms interact. This exemplifies the merits of a multidisciplinary approach by integrating theories and insights from multiple fields to present a compelling narrative on the transformative role of spaces in times of racial tensions.

At the same time, the multidisciplinary focus does not preclude the opportunity for chapters to exhibit a singular disciplinary style. The aim of the multidisciplinary approach in this volume is not to homogenize, but to celebrate the unique perspectives that each discipline brings to our understanding of place, religion/spirituality, and well-being. This can be seen in some of the chapters. For example, Chap. 11 (*Religious Communities and Well-Being During the COVID-19 Pandemic*) employs a distinct theological perspective to examine the subject matter, contributing a unique layer of analysis to the overall discussion in this volume. The need for disciplinary flexibility is integral in any examination of complex, multifaceted phenomena such as place, religion/spirituality, and well-being. Because these constructs are intrinsically interwoven, their comprehension demands a multidisciplinary approach that appreciates the nuances and insights that diverse academic traditions have to offer. This volume embodies a commitment to disciplinary flexibility, allowing contributors from a broad spectrum of disciplines to address the overarching theme in this volume in a manner that aligns with their unique epistemological and methodological approaches.

Our multidisciplinary approach is not merely an organizing principle for the book, but a substantive methodological stance acknowledging the diverse lenses through which we make sense of the world. The chapters in this volume are a testament to the value of disciplinary authenticity. Each chapter showcases the strength of their respective disciplines while contributing to an integrated understanding of the central theme. This interplay between disciplinary depth and multidisciplinary breadth allows us to explore the intersections of place, religion/spirituality, and well-being from multiple perspectives. This approach does not dilute disciplinary expertise; rather, it extends and enriches it. Thus, this volume not only celebrates the diversity of disciplinary perspectives but also underscores the transformative potential of their interplay. It is through this ongoing dialogue—this interweaving of perspectives, theories, and insights—that we can fully appreciate the intricate tapestry of place, religion/spirituality, and well-being.

In addition to the unique multidisciplinary nature of this volume, it is also distinguished by its global scope. Place, religion/spirituality, and well-being are universal aspects of human existence that defy geographic, cultural, and temporal boundaries, and we have attempted to capture this by including contributions from a diverse range of geographical contexts (i.e., America, Africa, Oceania, Asia, and Europe). This infusion of global perspectives enables this volume to resonate with a broader audience and ensures that it captures a variety of ways in which different cultures

understand and articulate their experiences of place, religion/spirituality, and well-being. Consider the contribution from Chap. 3 (*Place, Spirituality, and Wellness in the East and the West*). Here, the author embraces the global perspective of this volume to delve into an East-West comparative analysis of place and spirituality. This chapter, drawing upon psychological and cultural studies, underscores the diversity of spiritual practices and beliefs across cultures. The examination of the legendary Gyanganj, a mythic place in the Himalayas known in Eastern spirituality, underscores the integral role of specific geographical locales in shaping spiritual narratives and fostering well-being. The cultural variations that emerge in expressions of religion/spirituality accentuate the necessity of a global perspective to fully grasp the nuances of this multidimensional phenomenon.

Similarly, chapters in this volume that explore intersections between place and spiritual practices during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as Chap. 8 (*Embodied Spirituality and Health Amidst Place Confinement and Disruptions During the COVID-19 Pandemic*) and Chap. 9 (*Can Prayer During COVID-19 Home Confinement Support Psychological Health After Lockdowns End?*), reflect the adaptability of spirituality under conditions of global adversity. The confluence of health science and psychology enriches our understanding of the embodiment of spirituality amidst the spatial constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, the shift in spiritual practices and places of worship from communal to home-based spaces during lockdowns offers unique insights into the resilience of place spirituality (Counted et al., 2023). This pattern of multidisciplinary and global exploration is repeated throughout this volume. For instance, Chap. 15 (*Religious Tourism: Exploring Experiences of Spirituality, Place Attachment, and Well-Being in Zimbabwe*) explores the intersection of geography, sociology, and religious studies. The authors draw on multiple disciplines to highlight cultural specificities of Zimbabwe, which contributes to an expanded and more global understanding on the role of sacred spaces in promoting well-being.

The multidisciplinary approach in this volume weaves a tapestry of perspectives, experiences, and insights that foster a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the interconnectedness of place, religion/spirituality, and well-being. This approach is more than a scholarly endeavor; it is a concerted attempt to encapsulate the lived experiences of individuals across various cultural, social, and geographic contexts. Our multidisciplinary approach, on the other hand, breaks down the silos of individual disciplines and brings together diverse perspectives, fostering a more holistic understanding of the interactions between place, religion/spirituality, and well-being across spheres of personal, social, and cultural interests. We adopt these constructs as a unifying multidisciplinary thread that ties the chapters in this volume together, thus allowing for the integration of diverse disciplinary perspectives that deepens our understanding and opens up new avenues for research and dialogue.

Pandemic Perturbation as Our Lived Experience

The creation of this volume, which unfolded over the course of three tumultuous years dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic, inevitably embeds within its pages the profound influence of these unprecedented times. The COVID-19 pandemic has undeniably reframed our collective and individual experiences of place, religion/spirituality, and well-being—themes at the heart of this volume. It has brought into sharp focus the importance of places in our lives (see Counted et al., 2020, 2021), and deeply impacted our understanding and pursuit of well-being. Consequently, it is impossible to disregard the influence of the public health crisis on the content and tone of the chapters of this volume, as they not only reflect the research interests of the authors but also their lived experiences during this time of human existence.

This volume is not diminished by its strong reflection on the COVID-19 pandemic; rather, it is enriched by it. The COVID-19 pandemic has foregrounded several aspects related to place, religion/spirituality, and well-being that might have otherwise remained in the periphery of academic discussion. It has emphasized the importance of safe and nurturing physical places in a time of isolation, the comforting role of religion/spirituality amid global uncertainty, and the pressing need for strategies to maintain and promote well-being in the face of unprecedented challenges (Counted et al., 2022a; Cowden et al., 2023; Jacobi et al., 2022; Wilson Fadji et al., 2023). As such, many of the chapters in this volume address one or more of these themes.

Drawing on the dynamic systems theory (Thelen & Smith, 1994), we can view the COVID-19 pandemic as a *perturbation*—a significant event that disrupts the existing state of a system, leading to changes in its structure and functioning. The COVID-19 pandemic has perturbed the global system of human existence and engagement, leading to shifts in our behaviors, attitudes, and norms. Several chapters in this volume provide unique insights into how the interplay of place, religion/spirituality, and well-being has evolved in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, offering a rich understanding of these dynamics under extraordinary circumstances.

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic imprint on this volume enhances its relevance and immediacy. It not only provides insights that are pertinent to the current context but also equips us to better respond to similar challenges in the future. By exploring place, religion/spirituality, and well-being against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, the chapters in this volume offer invaluable lessons for individuals, communities, and policymakers to foster resilience and promote well-being in the face of adversity.

The COVID-19 pandemic serves as an important component to this volume. It situates the exploration of place, religion/spirituality, and well-being within a significant global crisis, providing a real-time, authentic backdrop to examine these concepts. It amplifies our comprehension of these themes and equips us with invaluable insights that will be useful in future crises. This volume provides a strong

testament to the adaptability and resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity. It also demonstrates the value of multidisciplinary science and scholarship in reflecting upon and drawing lessons from a historic global experience, thus emphasizing the indispensability of such an approach in a rapidly changing world.

Structure of the Book

The organization of this volume underscores a profound connection between place, religion/spirituality, and well-being, but it achieves much more as it intricately knits these themes within the personal, social, and cultural spheres of human life. As we delve into this multidimensional tapestry, it is noteworthy how each chapter contributes uniquely to this complex web.

In the first section, *Personal Engagements: Spiritual Ties to Place and Well-being*, we explore the intricate relationship between the individual, their spiritual practices, and their sense of place. Meagher's empirical study exemplifies this aptly as it investigates personal attachment to places of worship and its correlation to spiritual growth among Reformed Christians. Basu's chapter takes a non-Western approach, offering insights into Eastern spirituality and well-being through the psychological exploration of the mythical place Gyanganj, translated as the land of immortals. While contrasting to Western views, Basu argues for the psychological value of polytheistic myth in Eastern religion where the connection to a mystical or mythical spiritual place is a precursor to subjective well-being. The chapter by Stech prompts readers to assume responsibility for their personal locales, reflecting an ecological understanding of place in spiritual practices. In Neff and colleagues' contribution, we see a unique blend of personal and social spheres as they study racial justice protests, particularly the Black Lives Matter movement, as sites fostering hope and healing. Panagopoulos and Pacheco's study further dovetails these spheres as they scrutinize house churches in Scotland and their psychosocial implications for minority congregations. In the closing chapter of this section, Chen and Nute weave architectural insights into the personal sphere, examining how the built environment facilitates positive connections (including but not limited to those within the religious/spiritual realm) to the past, present, and future.

Section two, *Social Resilience: Spirituality and Well-being Amid Adversity*, explores the social dynamics that bolster resilience and spiritual fortitude in the aftermath of place-based resource loss. Except for the contribution from Tamara Lewit, the chapters in this section are written in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Captari's integrative review serves as a suitable starting point, addressing the impact of place disruption during the COVID-19 pandemic on our experiences of the sacred. Following this, Cowden and colleagues' longitudinal study examined whether engaging in prayer while strictly confined to one's home during the first national lockdown in the UK was associated with improved psychological health after the ease of lockdown. Agyekum's research in Ghana brings a nuanced way of conceptualizing home confinement behavior. Reflecting on the complex interplay of

personal and social spheres, Agyekum argues that the lockdown restrictions leading to home confinement fragmented the dynamics of religious activities from a fixed physical place to cyberspace, melting away the strict use of places of worship confined to brick-and-mortar locations. This evolution of religious communities, according to Joynt, has a theological implication that involves four essential tasks: descriptive-empirical, interpretive, normative, and pragmatic. In his chapter, Joynt offers perspectives on how to address the fragmentation of religious activities problematized by Agyekum, suggesting that virtual sacred places may offer similar benefits to traditional physical places.

The notion of resilience in a time of adversity and place-related loss is not only a contemporary phenomenon but an old-age practice, as shown in the archaeological contribution of Lewit. Here, the social and cultural spheres intersect as Lewit explores the resilience of religious communities in the Late Antique Levant amidst various crises (e.g., earthquakes, drought, floods, bubonic plague, wars), underscoring the recurring themes of social resilience and place-related loss. This chapter is a historical reminder that there is ‘nothing new under the sun,’ thus providing a blueprint for navigating global crises impacting human life.

The third section, *Cultural Connections: Sacred Spaces, Tourism, and Well-being*, illuminates the cultural significance of sacred spaces in promoting well-being. This section has points of intersection with the previous section, in that several contributions explore ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic has reconfigured our interactions with sacred places that have been restricted due to the public health crisis. Other more generalized contributions illuminate how placemaking and meanings formed at religious tourist sites shape narratives of subjective well-being. The section starts with a contribution from Schmidt and colleagues, as they report an exploratory study of the management of two sacred Japanese heritage sites (Shinto shrine *Fushimi Inari Taisha* and Buddhist temple *Kiyomizu-dera*), capturing online narratives of well-being in these sacred places. The authors argue for the cultural context of well-being in sacred places, introducing the well-being concepts of *ikigai* and *shiwase* as meaning-making processes of hedonic, eudaimonic, and communal significance that tie people to sacred places in the Japanese context. Next, Huang and Ying reflect on the ‘spirit of place’ (genius loci) and its implications for spiritual well-being in the context of the Guandi Temple in the ancient Hakka town in South China. Concluding the volume, Shereni and colleagues explore the experiences of spirituality and well-being in religious tourist sites during the COVID-19 pandemic. Though the findings point to the benefits of such sites for spiritual growth and healing, the authors suggest that the focus often shifts from the individual subjective benefit to the economic benefits of religious tourism.

Throughout this volume, the narrative arc unites place, religion/spirituality, and well-being through the personal, social, and cultural spheres of human life. Each chapter offers distinct yet interconnected perspectives that enhance our understanding of these multifaceted relationships. This volume is an orchestration of distinct voices, each resonating within their unique disciplinary melody, yet collectively contributing to an enriching symphony of multidisciplinary insights. This kaleidoscope of perspectives underscores the vast terrain of human experience where the

personal, social, and cultural spheres of our lives intersect. The essence of this undertaking lies not just in exploring these spheres in isolation, but in understanding their intricate interplay. The individual's engagement with spirituality (personal), their communal interactions and resilience strategies (social), and the cultural context of these experiences (cultural) form the triumvirate that gives this volume its multilayered richness. Each chapter illustrates these dimensions differently, offering a myriad of insights. For instance, Agyekum's study sheds light on how social changes (the transition from physical to virtual religious gatherings) can reshape personal spiritual experiences and potentially redefine cultural norms.

Huang and Ying's exploration of the 'spirit of place' in the context of the Guandi Temple, and Shereni and colleagues' examination of Zimbabwean religious tourist sites, bring cultural aspects into sharp focus. These chapters offer profound cultural reflections on well-being, spirituality, and the concept of sacred spaces, illustrating how cultural contexts shape and are shaped by personal and social experiences. Even as we traverse from personal to social and cultural spheres, it becomes clear that these are not discrete categories but are deeply intertwined. As Basu's exploration of Gyanganj or Lewit's historical analysis show, the personal, social, and cultural spheres continually shape and inform each other, creating a dynamic, reciprocal dialogue.

The journey throughout these chapters—across personal, social, and cultural spheres—reflects the multifaceted nature of human experience. The COVID-19 pandemic, while predominantly a social crisis, has deeply personal ramifications and has elicited cultural responses and transformations. This volume, penned during these unique times, serves not only as a testament to our collective experience during a turbulent time in human history, but also as a testament to our shared resilience in the places we inhabit and cherish.

In essence, the chapters within this volume, while preserving their unique disciplinary authenticity, each contribute to a broader dialogue on place, religion/spirituality, and well-being. These contributions elucidate the complex interplay between personal, social, and cultural spheres, thereby enriching our understanding of the multifaceted relationship between place, religion/spirituality, and well-being.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have argued that place is an important but often overlooked thread that connects religion/spirituality and well-being. Taking a global and multidisciplinary approach, this book represents a first step towards building a comprehensive understanding of how place is related to religion/spirituality, well-being, and the intersection between religion/spirituality and well-being. Importantly, the analysis is enriched by integrating these connections from personal, social, and cultural spheres of human existence. This volume can serve as a reference point, spotlighting the pivotal role of place within the healing systems that support the lives of

people across cultural and geographical lines. As readers peruse the diverse scholarly contributions nestled within this volume, our vision is that it would function not merely as a synthesis of existing theories, research, and practices, but as a springboard that ignites future scholarly exploration.

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