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The Role of Spirituality in Promoting Sense of Place Among Foreigners of African Background in the Netherlands

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Abstract

This paper investigates the relationship between negative place experiences (involving racial discrimination, place insecurity, and feeling of anxiety about the future in a place) and sense of place (SOP), and the role played by spiritual attachment (AG) as a moderator. Cross-sectional data (N= 175; female 52%) were obtained from African migrants in Northern (33.3%) and Western (66.7%) regions of the Netherlands using the SOP Scale and AG Measure. Overall, study results show that migrants of African background in the Netherlands who had a secure relationship with God were more likely to develop SOP despite the sociocultural challenges associated with their place change and migration. Hence, securely attached migrants (high AG) turned more to God to manage their experiences of racial discrimination while insecurely attached migrants (low AG) embraced the Dutch lifestyle/identity as a mechanism for mitigating their own feelings of insecurity in the Netherlands. Study implications are discussed in relation to the role of spirituality in promoting SOP. Key Words: Sense of place—Attachment to God—Place attachment—The circle of place spirituality—Religion and place.

Introduction

Negative place experiences involving experiences of racial discrimination, place insecurity, and feelings of anxiety about the future can have serious negative effects on people's sense of community in a host country (Korous, Causadias, Casper, 2017; Manzo, 2003). Sense of place (henceforth,

SOP) theory (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001, 2006) has been used to understand the extent to which people are attached to, depend on, and have identity of a place as a representation and conceptualization of their sense of community. Most importantly, place has been discussed as a multidimensional construct that can be synthesized into three functions: emotional attachment, cognitive identity development, and behavioral dependence (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001; Stokowski, 2002).

As an attachment setting, place is discussed in terms of its material qualities and geographic ensemble (Low & Altman, 1992; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001; Seamon, 2012), in that people may form attachment to place (PA) on the basis of the spatial features of a place. Secondly, place is discussed in terms of how it affects the individual's cognitive development and produces identity, or what Seamon (2012) refers to as *genius loci*. This aspect of place involves how the individual mirrors the character of a place and understands a place identity (PI) on a personal level (Proshansky et al., 1983). Thirdly, place involves some sort of conative, behavioral dependence on the lifeworlds, routines, and natural attitudes of place, or people-in-place (Seamon, 2012; Stokols & Shumaker, 1981), or place dependence (PD) (Jorgensen and Stedman, 2001). These three dimensions of place have been conceptualized as SOP attitudes, expressing the social psychology of place-specific attitudes in terms of "beliefs [PI], emotions [PA] and behavioural commitments [PD]" (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006, p. 317).

Sense of place is mostly influenced by length of stay and place of residence (Anton, 2014; Lewicka, 2006). For example, long-term residents are most likely to have stronger SOP than newly arrived ones, and living in a socially cohesive community buffers the effect of SOP. These factors trigger place-specific attitudes such as PA, PI, and PD, which facilitate people's experiences in a place (Counted, 2016c; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001; Morgan, 2010; Scannell &

Gifford, 2014). Using the SOP theory, I examine the main effects of negative place experiences on SOP attitudes (i.e., place attachment, place dependence, place identity), and the role of spirituality, in terms of believer-God attachment, as a moderator in this relationship.

Negative place experiences and sense of place

Despite literature on predictors of SOP attitudes (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001, 2006), relationships between negative place experiences and SOP have not been fully investigated, although Scannell, Cox, Fletcher, and Heykoop (2016) suggested that negative place experiences—such as separation from one's significant place and forced relocation—can have a negative effect on SOP. Given the settlement and displacement challenges associated with migration, Fried's (1963) magisterial study on place suggests that migrants are most likely exposed to displacement and negative experiences in a host country, which can affect their perception of a place. Given the sociocultural and health challenges associated with migration and place change, migrants with lower level of SOP in a host country/community may be exposed to additional negative place experiences, such as racial discrimination, anxiety about the future, and feelings of insecurity; these experiences can take a toll on migrant health.

A meta-analysis by Korous, Causadias, and Casper (2017) suggests that the disparities in health and social belonging among migrants are related to the experiences of racial discrimination in a new place. These authors further reported an association between racism and an increase in the hormone released in response to stress (i.e., cortisol). Another study reports an association between place insecurity in hostile regions and one's ability to form attachment to a place (Billig, Kohn, & Levav, 2006). Feelings of anxiety about the future in a new country have been linked to mental health problems and the inability to form a sense of community in a new abode among migrants and refugees (Sampson & Gifford, 2010). This anxiety might also be associated with separation anxiety and mourning the loss of attachment with another significant place (e.g., a home country or community) (Brook, 2003; Felix et al., 2015). These studies support the idea that negative place experiences, in the form of racial discrimination, place insecurity, or feelings of anxiety about the future in a particular place, may have an effect on people's SOP in a host community/country.

Attachment to God as a moderator

Although the above-mentioned studies highlight the causes and consequences of SOP, only a few offer initial empirical evidence that support the role of spirituality in human interactions with the environment (e.g., Kamitsis & Francis, 2013; Trigwell, Francis, Bagot,

2014), while others offer theoretical insights on the role of spirituality on SOP (e.g. Counted, 2018; Counted & Watts, 2017; Counted & Zock, in press). These studies emphasize the role of spirituality in managing stressors associated with a place, thus conceptualizing places as distal dynamic contexts of social interaction that contribute to spiritual interconnectedness. One aspect of spiritual interconnectedness studied in the psychology of religion literature is the idea that religious believers have a personal relationship with God in the form of an attachment relationship (Cicirelli, 2004; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016). Hence, the positive effect of SOP constructs in people's experiences of place, in environmental psychology circles, is in the same way that having a sense of proximity with God plays a significant role in people's lives especially when faced with negative experiences. This makes it plausible to expect that spiritual attachment (AG) of such kind may be functionally tied to SOP both directly and indirectly. Spiritual attachment reflects the normative ways in which people evaluate and experience their spirituality in terms of developing proximity to a Divine entity, turning to the Divine as a response to loss, and perceiving God as a safe haven and a secure base (Counted, 2016a, 2016b; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016; Sim & Loh, 2003), or even in terms of spiritual struggles when the individual experiences insecure AG such as divine avoidance and having anxiety about God (Ano & Pargament, 2014; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002).

The role of spiritual attachment in the link between negative place experiences and SOP may best be conceptualized in the circle of place spirituality (CoPS) model (Counted, 2018; Counted, Possamai, McAuliffe, & Meade, 2018; Counted & Zock, in press), which shows how the attached individual oscillates to and fro in a circular pattern between two objects of attachment when exposed to negative place experiences within the environment. The correspondence model of CoPS shows how attached individuals transfer their existing or previous attachment working model onto a new relationship with a surrogate (Counted & Zock, in press). In terms of the compensation model, the individual seeks a new relationship with a different object because of the loss of attachment or negative experience in a previous or existing relationship (Counted & Zock, in press). Alternatively, the CoPS motivational systems approach recognizes that individuals are likely to form attachment and at the same time explore a relationship with another object of attachment (e.g., a place, a divine entity) based on certain motivational factors such as personal feelings, tastes, intentions, drives, emotions, needs, and opinions. For example, in the event where the CoPS exploration-assertion motivational system is activated, the migrant may explore a relationship with their new abode either out of curiosity or to better understand

the place of their attention, even though they may already be in a secure relationship with God. However, when the attachment-affiliation motivational system is activated based on perceived negative place experience, the migrant turns to seeking or maintaining proximity with God to manage their SOP in relation to a perceived threat. To further illustrate this, see the CoPS model in Fig. 1.

Consequently, building upon previous research in SOP literature, direct relationships are first proposed in that negative place experiences will be negatively associated with SOP attitudes. Second, spiritual attachment will be positively related to SOP attitudes. While literature sheds some light on the relationship between negative place experiences and SOP attitudes, little is known about the moderating role of spiritual attachment in this relationship in a migration context. Hence, given the role of spirituality in place literature, it is expected that spiritual attachment will moderate the link between negative place experiences and SOP attitudes, such that negative place experiences (NPE) are positively related to SOP among people

scoring high on AG, whereas among people scoring low on AG there is a negative relationship between NPE and SOP.

Methods

Setting and participants

The Netherlands is divided into Southern, Northern, Eastern, and Western regions. Although there are similarities and distinctions between these regions, most cities and provinces in the West and North of the Netherlands are considered multicultural cities with a significant number of international migrants, while cities in Southern and Eastern regions are quite unlike the rest of the country in that they have very few migrant populations (Nabielek, Hamers, & Evers, 2016). Western and Northern regions have well-known cities renowned for institutions such as the University of Amsterdam, University of Groningen, and Universiteit Utrecht. These are largely responsible for attracting thousands of international migrants, working professionals, and students to Western and Northern Netherlands. Participants were recruited from cities such as Amsterdam,

Fig. 1. The Circle of Place Spirituality (Image reused with permission; © Victor Counted).

Groningen, Utrecht, Rotterdam, Almere, The Hague, and Assen, which have the largest population of international migrants in Western and Northern Netherlands. Some of the cities have been recognized by the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency as the largest metropolitan areas attracting international migrants in the Netherlands (Nabielek, Hamers, & Evers, 2016).

The participants for this study had been residents of cities in Northern and Western parts of the Netherlands for more than 6 months (33.3% and 66.7%, respectively): 58.9% more than 5 years and 41.1% less than 5 years. Their countries of birth are part of the sub-Saharan African region, which share similar cultural and religious orientations. Roughly half (52%) were female, and 81.9% of the total sample spoke Dutch or had a little knowledge of the language. In terms of age, 72.4% of the participants were between 18 and 45 years old, with the remaining over 45. In the total sample, 56.3% had completed tertiary education (compared to 43.7% with high school or less education), 50.6% were married, 43.1% single, 6.3% either divorced, widowed, or separated. Almost all the participants (94.2%) were Christian, 3.5% were Muslim, 1.2% were followers of African traditional religions, and 1.2% identified their religion as other.

Procedure and sample size

A cross-sectional survey was conducted between November 2015 and April 2016 to explore the sense of place and AG of African migrants in the Netherlands. Cross-sectional data were collected from 175 African residents who had settled in Northern and Western Netherlands. The study used a snowball sampling approach, a method preferred for studying migrant and hard-to-reach populations and recruiting participants from existing community structures (Renzaho, Bilal, & Marks, 2013). Participants had regular meetings as religious groups, student groups, and cultural groups. The author toured around Western and Northern regions of the Netherlands to participate in different cultural, student, and religious events organized by group leaders, most of whom have been in contact with the author and been informed about the study. Leaders of these groups informed their respective communities about the study, and a date for the data collection was arranged. Upon arrival at the group events, the author was asked to explain the study to members of the community. They were told that the study was exploring how their relationship with God is related to their sense of place in the Netherlands. Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire if they identified themselves as having a relationship with God whether through their Christian, Islamic, or traditional African faith. A total of 353 participants responded to the initial invitation (collecting copies of the surveys) to participate in the study at different meetings and

events, but only 175 participants returned their completed surveys either on the spot, the following week, or via mail.

Measures and variables

Sense of place. A 12-item measure adapted from the Sense of Place Scale (SOP) by Jorgensen and Stedman (2001) was used to assess the place experience of the participants in terms of their PA, PI, and PD. The measurement was guided by the three-factor model for measuring SOP, which is seen as a response to an object or stimulus in a place that has the potential to arouse attachment (PA), identity (PI), and behavioral commitment (PD) (Jorgensen and Stedman, 2001). PA ($\alpha = .80$; $M = 3.22$, $SD = 0.80$), for example, refers to physical attraction to a place or attachment to “human-made and non-human-made material elements and environmental qualities of a particular place” (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001, p. 13), with statements including (a) “I feel relaxed when I’m in the Netherlands” and (b) “I feel happiest when I’m in the Netherlands.” PI ($\alpha = .61$; $M = 3.17$, $SD = 0.72$) refers to an individual or group’s “cognitions, beliefs, perceptions or thoughts that the self has invested in a particular spatial setting” (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001, p. 238), showing how a place can function as a repository for relationships that give meaning and form identity (e.g., Everything about the Netherlands is a reflection of me; I feel that I can really be myself in the Netherlands). PD ($\alpha = .67$; $M = 2.96$, $SD = 0.75$), on the other hand, is “an ongoing relationship with a place that supports our life goals and activities” (Counted, 2016c, p. 13), with statements including (a) “Netherlands is the best place for doing the things that I enjoy most” and (b) “For doing the things that I enjoy most, no other place can compare to Netherlands.” Each aspect describes a dimension of place experience, whereas the overall 12 items measure general SOP ($\alpha = .83$). The rating was done on a 5-point scale (1 = *Disagree strongly*, 5 = *Agree strongly*), with higher scores suggesting higher levels of the construct in each dimension. Two negatively worded PD items were reverse coded before data analysis.

Negative place experiences. Negative place experiences were measured by asking the participants to select which of the negative experiences most represent their current place experiences in the Netherlands. Responses were categorized as “Anxiety about the future in the Netherlands,” “Feeling of insecurity in the Netherlands,” and “Experiences of racial discrimination,” with higher scores on each construct suggesting high level of negative place experiences.

Attachment to God. The 16 AGM items ($\alpha = .97$; $M = 5.31$, $SD = 0.85$) adapted from the Attachment to God Measure (Sim & Loh, 2003)

assessed four dimensions of secure AG: the need to seek and maintain “proximity to God” ($\alpha = .89$) (e.g., I seek to be close to God; I do things that help me feel close to God), the extent to which God is experienced as a “safe haven” ($\alpha = .91$) (e.g., When I am afraid or anxious, I know that God is there for me; when I face difficulties, I turn to God), “secure base” ($\alpha = .92$) (e.g., My relationship with God gives me the courage to face new challenges; knowing that God is there for me helps me live my daily life), and perceiving God as a “response to feeling of separation” ($\alpha = .85$) (e.g., It would distress me greatly if I lose my relationship with God; I would feel upset if I sense that God is far from me). These dimensions were identified as part of the criteria for understanding the attachment bond with God by Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2016) and were combined as the total AG variable. The response scale was rated on a 6-point scale (1 = *Disagree strongly*, 6 = *Agree strongly*).

Covariates. Non-identifiable demographic control variables were collected for place of residence, length of stay, marital status, education background, religious affiliation, and country of origin.

Analytical strategy

Study data were analyzed using Stata, version 13. Table 1 summarizes the intercorrelations between the measures. As shown in Table 2, multivariate analyses results were conducted using a multiple regression analysis to examine the main and interactive effects of negative place experiences, spiritual attachment, sense of place attitudes (attachment, identity, dependence). Significance was set at $p = .05$.

Results

Participants showed a moderate mean score of SOP attitudes on a scale of 1 to 5. Overall, participants showed stronger levels of PA ($M = 3.224$, $SD = 0.803$) and PI ($M = 3.167$, $SD = 0.723$), compared to PD ($M = 2.963$, $SD = 0.749$). The participants also had a very strong spiritual attachment with a mean score average of $M = 5.34$ on a 1 to 6 rating scale. As shown in Table 1, results of the bivariate correlations show that there are significant relationships between study variables. The experience of racial discrimination was positively related to place identity and place dependence. The experience of racial discrimination was negatively related to feelings of insecurity in the Netherlands, while place insecurity was negatively related to place attachment and place identity. The attachment to Dutch society was positively related to attachment to God.

As shown in Table 2, multivariate analysis results suggest that length of stay was positively related to dependence on, and attachment to, Dutch society. This indicates that the length of migrants' stay in Dutch society is related to the extent to which they develop a sense of community there. Contrary to the first study hypothesis, it was found that the experience of racial discrimination in Dutch society was positively associated with dependence on Dutch society, thus suggesting that migrants exposed to racial discrimination were often turning to activities/events/resources within Dutch society that helped them overcome racial stigmas. However, in support of the second study hypothesis, study results also suggest a positive link between attachment to God and place attachment, controlling for length of stay, region of residence, religious affiliation, marital status, education, and country of origin (see Table 2).

Table 1. Intercorrelations among Measures of Sense of Place Attitudes, Attachment to God, and Negative Place Experiences ($N = 175$)

	ANXIOUS ABOUT THE FUTURE	EXPERIENCES OF RACISM	FEELINGS OF PLACE INSECURITY	PLACE ATTACHMENT	PLACE IDENTITY	PLACE DEPENDENCE	ATTACHMENT TO GOD
Anxious about the future	-						
Experiences of racism	.115	-					
Feelings of place insecurity	-.024	-.197**	-				
Place attachment	.040	.141	-.203**	-			
Place identity	.071	.156*	-.233**	.570	-		
Place dependence	.024	.159*	-.101	.613**	.507**	-	
Attachment to God	.027	.050	-.121	.150**	-.044	-.030	-

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2. Attachment to God and Negative Place Outcomes on Sense of Place Attitudes

VARIABLES	SENSE OF PLACE ATTITUDES					
	PLACE IDENTITY		PLACE DEPENDENCE		PLACE ATTACHMENT	
	<i>B</i> (95% CI)	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i> (95% CI)	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i> (95% CI)	<i>SE</i>
Length of Stay	-.087 (-.33, .15)	.122	.376 (.12, .63)***	.129	.345 (.07, .62)**	.138
Place of Residence	-.054 (-.28, .17)	.115	.074 (-.17, .31)	.121	-.161 (-.42, .10)	.130
Religious Affiliation	-.226 (-.55, .09)	.162	-.156 (-.50, .18)	.171	.031 (-.33, .39)	.184
Marital Status	.035 (-.10, .17)	.070	-.045 (-.19, .10)	.074	.091 (-.07, .25)	.080
Education	-.071 (-.19, .04)	.058	.019 (-.10, .14)	.061	-.085 (-.22, .04)	.065
Country of Origin	.029 (-.08, .14)	.054	.062 (-.05, .18)	.057	.029 (-.09, .15)	.061
Attachment to God	-.006 (-.02, .01)	.005	-.006 (-.02, .01)	.005	.011 (.00, .02)*	.061
Anxious about future in the Netherlands	.132 (-.10, .36)	.115	.048 (-.19, .29)	.120	.002 (-.26, .26)	.130
Experiences of racism in the Netherlands	.161 (-.06, .38)	.110	.247 (.02, .48)**	.116	.202 (-.05, .45)	.125
Insecure/unsafe in the Netherlands	-.397 (-.92, .13)	.266	-.130 (-.68, .42)	.279	-.496 (-1.09, .10)	.302
Anxious about future in the Netherlands × attachment to God	.017 (-.02, .06)	.020	.003 (-.04, .04)	.021	.016 (-.03, .06)	.023
Experiences of racism in the Netherlands × attachment to God	.026 (-.01, .06)	.019	.036 (-.00, .08)	.073	.050 (.01, .09)**	.022
Insecure/unsafe in the Netherlands × attachment to God	-.101 (-.19, -.02)**	.044	-.070 (-.16, .02)	.162	-.050 (-.15, .05)	.050

Note. Covariates: length of stay, place of residence, religious affiliation, marital status, educational background, and country of origin.

Statistically significant outcomes at * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, or *** $p < .001$.

Furthermore, results of the moderation analyses confirm the interaction effects between negative place experiences and attachment to God on sense of place attitudes. First, the moderation results show that attachment to God moderates the relationship between racial discrimination and place attachment ($b = .050$, $p = .01$), such that among those high on AG, a relationship between racial discrimination and place attachment was found compared to those low on AG. Second, attachment to God moderates the link between feelings of place insecurity and place identity ($b = -.101$, $p = .01$), such that feeling unsafe in Dutch society was negatively associated with place identity among those with low level of AG as opposed to migrants with high level of AG.

Discussion

The present study was conceptualized within the theoretical frame of SOP theory with the aim of examining the extent to which spiritual interconnectedness through AG affects the relationship between

negative place experiences (e.g., racial discrimination, place insecurity, feelings of anxiety about the future) and SOP attitudes (e.g., attachment to place, developing place identity, and dependency on place resources/activities) in a cross-sectional study of 175 African migrants living in the Netherlands. These associations were estimated given the complex nature of people-place relationship interactions in which places are conceptualized as more than just geographic locations with definitive features. It was proposed that negative place experiences in a migration context will have a negative effect on SOP attitudes. Secondly, it was estimated that spiritual attachment involving a relationship experience with God will be positively associated with SOP attitudes. Thirdly, a moderation model was estimated in terms of the interaction effects of negative place experiences × spiritual attachment on SOP attitudes. The following findings are noteworthy.

Overall, African migrants in the Netherlands were found to generally have moderate levels of SOP, which was mainly predicted by

the length of their stay in the Netherlands: higher length of stay was positively related to high level of dependence on, and attachment to, Dutch society. This finding corroborates previous studies on the predictive power of length of stay on SOP (Anton, 2014; Lewicka, 2006). Contrary to the first hypothesis which estimated a negative relationship between negative place experiences and SOP attitudes, it was found that the experience of racial discrimination was positively related to dependence on Dutch resources/activities/events. This result provides an alternative perspective contrary to previous SOP studies supporting the negative effect of place challenges in facilitating a sense of community (e.g., Korous, Causadias, & Casper, 2017; Scannell et al., 2016). Most importantly, it shows that migrants experiencing racial discrimination in a new country are likely to turn to place resources and activities. This can include enrolling in or depending on language schools and learning institutions and engaging in native cultural practices that would help them assimilate faster (Remennick, 2010; Laing & Mair, 2015). Those resources and activities help migrants overcome race-based stigmas and stereotypes, such that they become a window to their social inclusion and a safeguard from racial discrimination.

Furthermore, it was found that attachment to God was positively related to place attachment, suggesting that stronger spiritual attachment is related to greater attachment to Dutch society among African migrants, such that their spiritual interconnectedness became a secure base from which they explored the Netherlands. This result supports the circle of place spirituality model which proposes a to and fro circular pattern of movement between two attachment *poles* based on the individual's attachment needs and exploration curiosity (Counted, 2018; Counted & Zock, in press). Study results suggest that spiritually attached migrants, though experiencing God as an attachment figure, are likely to develop place bond, thus experiencing place as an object of attachment without necessarily substituting one for the other. This means that migrants' PA did not come about as a result of any negative experience with God. Most importantly, this finding reveals the role of spiritual attachment in strengthening PA (Counted, 2018; Counted & Watts, 2017; Counted & Zock, in press).

Lastly, and in support of the third study hypothesis, attachment to God moderates the relationship between negative place experiences (i.e., racial discrimination, place insecurity) and two SOP attitudes (i.e., PA and PI), respectively. Securely among attached migrants with high AG, a relationship between racial discrimination and developing attachment to Dutch society was found compared to those with a low level of AG, whereas among those with low AG there was a relationship between feeling unsafe in the Netherlands and Dutch

place identity. Interestingly, while insecurely attached migrants (low AG) embraced the Dutch lifestyle/identity as a mechanism for mitigating their own feelings of insecurity in the Netherlands, securely attached migrants (high AG) turned more to God to manage their experiences of racial discrimination. The moderation results support the role of spirituality in promoting SOP despite the presence of negative place experiences. This confirms the moderating effect of attachment to God on the link between negative place experiences and SOP.

Some study limitations should be acknowledged. First, the challenges encountered during study recruitment, with the hard-to-reach African migrant population, were a major difficulty in generating a representative sample. This makes generalization harder because African migrants who participated in this study may not be representative of the target sample in the Netherlands. Further studies capturing a much broader representative sample of migrants in the Netherlands would help in the generalization of study results. Second, the results of this study are only applicable to African migrants in the Netherlands. Future studies should explore how the association between NPE and AG on SOP may vary by culture, generation, and region. Third, the cross-sectional design may make it difficult to make firm predictions about causation. Further studies in this area should replicate these findings using longitudinal designs and examine whether the moderating effect of AG on NPE and AG among migrants are robust across time. Fourth, another limitation of the study is the lack of comparison groups, since comparing findings between migrants versus natives, for example, would help in comprehending the extent to which AG plays a role as a moderator for each of the groups. Fifth, the study data did not include experiences in human relationships; such data would have helped in understanding how experiences in human relationship may be shaping the moderating effect of AG on NPE and AG. And lastly, the measure of NPE may also be a limitation of this study since it was created through an item asking participants their agreement with three categories of NPE. This NPE measure may be subjective to participants' retrospective assessment of their position as migrants in a new place as they struggle to integrate within the broader society. Future research may wish to develop a more nuanced measurement for assessing NPE among migrants. Regardless of these limitations, study findings position spiritual attachment as a predictor of the link between negative place experiences and SOP among African migrants in the Netherlands. As a follow-up study, an assessment of other moderator and mediator variables in addition to spirituality across diverse contexts could be helpful to compare data.

In summary, one point of departure from this study is the role of spirituality in the form of AG in promoting PA despite negative place experiences. Based on the study results, it is concluded that migrants of African background who have a secure relationship with God may likely form a sense of attachment to Dutch society despite the socio-cultural challenges associated with their place change and migration. Possibly, these relationships may have been maintained because of the perceived benefits of “place” and “God” as meaningful objects of attachment in the lives of the participants for managing negative place experiences related to racial discrimination and place insecurity in the Netherlands. Findings from the present study not only point to the value of how attachment to God might weaken the negative effects of negative place experiences on SOP in African migrants, but they also underscore the usefulness of evaluating the function of SOP components separately, perhaps especially when conducting studies involving migrants. Nonetheless, I am drawn to the conclusion that the study participants might have built their secure base around their relationship with God despite their negative place experiences, and thus this attachment bond enabled them to explore and engage with their broader environment and form attachment to Dutch society in the process of exploring their broader environment.

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