

From the Messiah's Glade to the Gods' Mountains: Christian Landscapes of Africa and Asia

As social anthropologists working with Christian communities in distinct areas, we share a common frame (that draws from both the Anthropology of Christianity and the wider anthropology of religion), but we also are shaped by our engagement with the distinct regional literatures of postcolonial engagement in these regions. We consider that these distinct literatures have tended to skew our research and writing in different directions and seem to draw an apparent distinction and distance between both of our field sites: one in the former rainforests of West Africa¹ and the other in the mountains of India. However, when we look at these regions through the methodological frame of landscape, we notice important similarities, as well as informative differences, in how Christian communities shape and are shaped by their interactions with the ecology of the places that they inhabit and through which they circulate. Building from this analysis, we will advance a twofold model centered around the concepts of the 'node and the 'bridge' for the comparative analysis of two seemingly distinct Christian communities in postcolonial contexts.

To approach this comparison, we therefore operationalise the term landscape as a verb, drawing from its etymological route to work the land. In so doing, we follow what has become the accepted convention in Anthropology (Ingold 2000), Geography (Wylie 2007) and allied disciplines (Gibson 2007). However, we move beyond the common discussions of landscape in relation to Heideggerian (1971) notions of dwelling and engage the concept of landscape with dynamic concepts of, pilgrimage, change and social transformation. A focus on Christian landscapes allows us to also complicate the discussion of human/non-human interactions, beyond the purely material. In choosing to focus on the sacred and numinous elements of landscape, we are not however seeking to reinforce a Durkheimian/Eliadean division of the sacred and profane. Rather, we follow Bateson (1976) and shift in emphasis away from division and towards integration. Especially, we focus on the way that an ecology of relations exists within the landscapes that allow them to become sites of grace, awe and enthusiasm.

The above concepts are operationalised in this chapter to help us understand the processes of postcolonial Christianity in landscapes within radically different contexts. To achieve this, we will

¹ Most of the rainforests in this area have gradually disappeared due to the introduction of cash crops since the 19th century and urbanisation.

place in conversation two sites of Christian ‘pilgrimage’ and the communities that shape/inhabit them: Christchurch Cathedral (located in the Indian Himalayas) and Canaanland, located in southwestern Nigeria (West Africa). Through this conversation, we will develop an understanding of how both landscapes are powerful sites of becoming that maintain their relevance precisely because of the traumas of history. This will lead us into an understanding of the anthropology of Christianity that operates from a phenomenological, inductive, basis and in so doing opens new avenues for the comparative study of Christianity in both regions.

A Journey to ‘Shiloh’

December 2009, a group of five Pentecostal pastors and Sitna are traveling from Pobe in Benin Republic to Ota, Ogun state in Nigeria. They are on their way to an event called ‘Shiloh’ an international Pentecostal convention that takes place every year at Canaanland, the headquarters of David Oyedepo’s international ministry, also known as Winner’s Chapel. Oyedepo is one of the key representatives of the Prosperity Gospel in Africa, and his influence has spanned over 65 countries around the world. Pentecostal conventions, such as Shiloh, are events that gather large numbers of people, who often travel long distances to reach a ‘religious destination’. Shiloh attracts thousands of people from countries in Africa, and Africans in the diaspora, where there exists branches of Oyedepo’s church. The shared experience of travel to these conventions creates a sense of interrupting the flow of everyday life to meet with people from different geographical locations. It enables the exchanging of news, sharing of meals and conversations that contribute to creating a sense of ‘communitas’ (cf Coleman 2002a, Ebron 1999, Turner 1969, *et al*), and belonging to a Pentecostal global community.

The pastors travelling with Sitna decided to rent a taxi to travel directly from Pobe, a small city located in southeast Benin, to Canaanland. On the day of their journey, their departure was delayed because two pastors were trying to complete their budget for the trip, asking relatives and friends to lend them money. Renting a taxi resulted in higher expenses for the pastors, however they all concurred that it was the best way to guarantee Sitna’s safety. Although dwellers in southeastern Benin share a historical and cultural past with people in southwestern Nigeria, most Beninese people distrust Nigerians. Pobe is located only few kilometres away from the border with Nigeria. They took a shortcut, a dirt road that goes through the palm oil² plantations (that have existed since the colonial period) between Pobe and the Nigerian border. They reached a makeshift border control where two men sitting behind an old desk checked and

stamped Sitna's passport. Shortly after they entered Nigeria, they were stopped at a military checkpoint, where army officials asked for Sitna's passport. The pastors intervened on her behalf to explain that they were on their way to a religious convention. The officials checked her documents and allowed them to continue. Although the whole journey to Ota is only 110kms, they were stopped at military checkpoints two more times³. The pastors explained to Sitna that if they had not intervened on her behalf, the officials would most likely have asked for a bribe. They also feared that if they had travelled on public transport, someone would have tried to mug her.

The areas of south-eastern Benin and southwestern Nigeria belong to what has been historically known as Western Yorubaland. This was an area with predominantly ethnic Yoruba population that was under the influence of the major Yoruba kingdom, Oyo (Adediran 1994:1). During the nineteenth century, before the colonial period, this area became the battleground of rivalries among the Yoruba and between the kingdoms of Oyo and Dahomey (Fon), each of which sought to establish their dominance over the slave trade. The French and the British took advantage of the existing rivalries to gradually consolidate their power (Asiwaju 1976:9). In 1889, after the Berlin Conference, this area was partitioned between the French and British governments. Most of Yorubaland remained under British control, leaving its western portion together with the kingdom of Dahomey under French control (Asiwaju 1976:45-53). This arbitrary division fractured towns and families that today live on each side of the border. Their subjection to different colonial regimes contributed to shaping different political and economic trajectories. It also shaped people's mutual perceptions of difference, including linguistic, religious and economic. Throughout the years, and after the independences of Dahomey - today's Benin Republic - and Nigeria, the border has remained porous (Flynn 1997). People have continuously engaged with each other, mainly through the commercial activity that has shaped an important corridor of trade between Lagos and Cotonou.⁴ Relatives visit each other and participate in each other's funerals or ceremonies. With the flow of people across the borders there is a constant exchange of ideas, of tangible and intangible cultural objects, such as music, fashion, films and, nowadays, of Pentecostal churches and preachers (cf. Mayrargue 2001, 2005;

² Palm oil became the main cash crop that the French established in this area after the abolition of the slave trade.

³ These military checkpoints are meant to control the illegal traffic of gasoline; however, it is known that they usually profit from bribes.

⁴ Illegal trade between borders is a phenomenon that dates from the colonial period (see Asiwaju 1976:186). Personal connections between people on both sides of the border, the landscape and weak surveillance of borders present the ideal conditions for illegal trade.

Noret 2010b); where politics has sought to divide, commerce (and latterly religion) have forged connections.

The pastors and Sitna journeyed from the green plains of inland Benin and Nigeria to the urban asphalt, noise and traffic of Ota, a township at the outskirts of the city of Lagos. The relative freshness provided by the green vegetation gradually disappeared into the dry dusty air of the urban landscape. The hot temperatures of the West African coastal areas get dryer in December with sandy winds coming from the Sahara. The taxi dropped them in front of the gates of Canaanland, an area that covers over 5000 acres of land, which houses a complex of buildings including Faith Tabernacle, a temple with capacity of 50,400 people, a university campus called Covenant University, several schools, businesses and banks that belong to the church. Canaanland appears as an oasis of green and well-manicured gardens, with well-traced wide paved roads, and modern urban architecture. It stands out in contrast to the overcrowded and precarious dwellings, lack of urban planning, noise and traffic that characterise many African cities, such as Lagos. Canaanland thus offers visitors the promise of rest inside the icy air-conditioned environment of its buildings and a bit of greenness in the midst of dusty urban air. An aerial view of Covenant University reveals a complex of carefully designed geometrical buildings among which one can see two Stars of David from above. Canaanland is a place that inspires a sense of awe to the visitor. It therefore generates a sense of spatial separation at the same time as opening the door to interpersonal unity, through a shared religious experience.

[Figure 1. Aerial view]

For the occasion, near the main temple, a series of large white tarpaulins were installed to host stalls selling Oyedepo's books and videos. Several areas within the complex had temporary food stalls and recreational spaces for the visitors. During the five days of the convention, people from all over Africa from different social and economic backgrounds gathered to listen to a series of talks and seminars on the conference's theme, attend prayers, worship, healing and deliverance sessions. Most people were lodged on-site at the student dormitories of Covenant University, others slept in tents placed within reserved areas of the green open gardens. There was a festive and communal environment. The worship sessions were particularly emotive, with thousands of people singing and dancing to Gospel music played to African and modern rhythms.

Oyedepo's Prosperity Gospel ministry is part of the global 'Word of Faith' movement that first originated in the United States. The crux of his messages preached during Shiloh, and delivered through video and publications, is that God's purpose for his people is to provide wealth and prosperity. In the Old Testament, God established a 'covenant' of prosperity with Abraham. Thus, any born-again can access this covenant, and receive God's blessings as long as they become 'covenant practitioners' (cf Gifford 2015). This means that a person must 'step into' this covenant by putting in practice Biblical principles, such as 'sowing and reaping' (giving and receiving). In many ways, it follows practices common to the 'Word of Faith' movement, especially in relation to monetary offerings (cf Coleman, 2000, 2006; van Wyk 2015).⁵

Oyedepo has adapted the American origins of the Prosperity Gospel to his African audience. Aside from engaging with the well documented practices of deliverance from an African 'tradition' characteristic of Neo-Pentecostal churches in Africa (cf Gifford 2005; Marshall 2009; Maxwell 200; Meyer, 1999, 2004; van Wyk 2015), a central aspect of Oyedepo's ministry concerns his message of personal, in particular, black or African empowerment. He presents himself as a prophet who received the divine command to 'rewrite' the history of the African people. In August 1987, Oyedepo narrates, while being a young migrant in the United States, God spoke to him and said: *'Get down home (sic) and make my people rich!'* (Oyedepo, 2005:14). While being in the US, he preached at Shiloh, he realised that many black people and Africans are poor and looked down upon because they do not have a 'prosperity mentality'. He condemned many Africans' dependence on foreign aid because it does not help them to develop their full potential. Thus, a key part of his ministry is to 'equip' people with 'knowledge'⁶ and education, and by promoting an ethics of arduous work and entrepreneurialism. Covenant University was founded as part of his ministry to inspire a 'new generation of African leaders'. Throughout the university campus, motivational messages and Bible passages encourage young people to believe in themselves, to feel worthy, and to step into 'their destiny'. The architecture and aesthetics of the buildings reinforce these messages to the students who inhabit these spaces and the visitors who circulate through them. They contribute to creating an embodied experience where prosperity becomes a tangible reality that can be inhabited. In front of the building where Sitna stayed, there was a statue of a bald eagle about to take off that evoked quite

⁵ In the 'word of faith' movement, monetary offerings operate as 'spiritual transactions' to incite divine intervention. This form of giving is accompanied by the claiming of things such as health, wealth or success, through positive affirmations that affect the 'spiritual realm' before they can manifest themselves in the material world. During Shiloh, after each service or prayer session, people were encouraged to place their monetary offerings, called 'seed offerings' inside paper envelopes provided for this purpose.

⁶ When he speaks of knowledge, it mainly refers to religious knowledge and the principles of prosperity that he preaches.

evidently the American symbol. It was accompanied with a Biblical passage that read: ‘And you shall remember the LORD your God: for it is he who gives you power to get wealth...’ Deut. 8:18. Inside her dormitory, one of the students who normally inhabit this space during the academic year had glued on the wall a paper with a list of ‘positive affirmations’ and Bible passages.

[Figure 2 – Eagle]

Oyedepo’s message of personal empowerment had great appeal to the pastors with whom Sitna travelled, and to lesser extent that of prosperity. They belonged to the association of independent evangelical churches in Pobe and occupied a rather marginal position compared to religious leaders from better established churches in Benin. Many had become born-again while being migrant workers in Nigeria and, upon their return to Benin, had felt called to the ministry and founded their own independent churches. Their congregations hardly reached 40 members. They struggled to maintain significant numbers and the necessary income to sustain themselves in a full-time ministry. The majority of the pastors had only a low level of schooling and they had not received any official training in ministry. Their lack of Biblical training contributed to their lower status compared to Catholic priests or pastors from larger Pentecostal churches, such as the Assemblies of God, or other Christian denominations, who receive several years of Biblical training. Attending events such as Shiloh gave them an opportunity to follow informal training. They diligently took notes during sermons and teaching sessions and bought Oyedepo’s books on sale during the event.

One day, during a lunch break, one of the pastors started to calculate the potential amount of money gathered after each service during Shiloh. Even if each attendee gave only a few cents, he said, the amount became significant when multiplied by the number of attendees and sessions held during the day. It was his first time at Shiloh and he was astonished by the way that the landscape draws together expensive materials: with its modern buildings covered with glass, its roads paved with asphalt, and well-kept gardens. He concluded that Oyedepo did not really need all that money from the offerings. In fact, Sitna noticed that this pastor did not give ‘seed offerings’ after each session. Another pastor said that they could never possibly achieve the same wealth as Oyedepo in Benin. They further explained to Sitna that Oyedepo’s wealth was only possible in Nigeria because of the revenues from oil available in this area of the country. Many of Oyedepo’s ‘patrons’, they said, were rich and surely gave him large donations that covered most

of his expenses including his private jet. Thus, despite finding the prosperity message appealing, these pastors were aware of their limitations. Nonetheless, they did not lose hope that one day they would also find a 'rich patron' that would sponsor their mission abroad.

By the end of the convention, all the pastors were encouraged and inspired. On their way back in the taxi, they animatedly talked and expressed how inspired they felt by the messages and prophecies that Oyedepo had declared at the closing ceremony. Oyedepo had proclaimed that God was rising in Africa a new generation of 'Abrahams'. They felt proud of being part of this new generation. The collective conversation gradually faded out. Sitna continued talking to the pastor sitting next to her and who had organised the trip. He attends Shiloh every year. He expressed his admiration for Oyedepo, a black man like him who has been able to achieve 'great things' with God's help. For these pastors, Oyedepo constitutes a role model; he represents an example of an African man with similar cultural background, who was able to achieve greatness.

Oyedepo's message, and the tangible lived experience of visiting Canaanland opened for them a world of possibility, a sense of entitlement, even if it fails to materialise concretely to the same degree. Transformed by the journey, as they travelled across the border back into Benin, these pastors were building a bridge between Benin and Nigeria and overcoming the differences left by the colonial past; they were redrawing a fragment of the postcolonial landscape and contributing to shaping the face global Christianity in late capitalism.

Silent Belfries and Whispering Deodars

May 2009, the Indian Himalayas, tourists from the plains have begun to flood the region in search of cooler weather, but the winter days, where the sun was an ally, have long since passed and the mercury stretches into the 30s. Jonathan is stood with Arjun, a local church elder, in the shade of the large bell tower of Christchurch Cathedral (see figure 3). They are positioned on the edge of the ridge where the church hides them from the sun's glare and a warm breeze rustles through the surrounding deodars. Arjun, who has lived in the church's hinterland for decades, is in the middle of a familiar lament about declining standards when a man, whose loose-fitting clothes contrast so greatly with the tailored suits that we have chosen to wear, draws our gaze. His steps are accompanied by the tapping of a large, rough cut, pilgrim's stick; his forehead adorned with the vermilion blessing of a Goddess temple. From this we can discern both that

he has come from Kali Bari and is going to Hanuman (at Jakhoo), a journey that requires a staff to pacify the simian guardians of the threshold. The pilgrim does not however turn to the forest path but instead walks directly towards the church. Conversation pauses, both now watching the stranger approach the four-cornered portico. At the entrance to the church, he lays down his stick and genuflects, before standing again and moving on. Following a path that tracks behind the Cathedral, where it winds through the monkey-filled forest to the temple of Hanuman at the mountain's summit.

In the wake of the seemingly syncretic actions of this pilgrim, talk turns to the majority Hindu population's engagement with the Cathedral:

“This place is popular with tourists, but it can be a problem, if they don't know how to behave” Arjun asserts, before adding “we have tried different things to accommodate them, but it can be confusing”.

Arjun's statement captures both the certainty and confusion that surround discussion of this sacred landscape. For, this Himalayan Cathedral's landscape is, when presented as a snapshot, certainly confusing, as seemingly discordant elements lend a collage effect to the anticipated pastoral. At the same time, the sure-footed way that Christians and non-Christians navigate these complex landscapes presents a contrasting certainty that inspires a desire for understanding. This impulse draws from the way that a tangle of historical and contemporary actors (both human and non-human), create a balanced ecology of relations in this region. For, while Christchurch Cathedral is suggestive of the type of building that you would expect to find at the heart of an English village, it stands in relation to peaks and groves that are foregrounded by discordant (oriental and orientalist) narratives.

Christchurch is the sacred heart of Shimla, once known as Simla, the former British summer capital of India, which was always understood as more than simply a place from which to govern (Miles-Watson 2013). Set high in the Himalayas, it was cast from the beginning as a Mount Olympus from which the elite could govern the plains below while remaining distinct from it (Pubby 1996: 36). Perhaps more importantly, the site was chosen not because of existing trade links, or transport connections, but rather because the comparatively colder climate and heavily forested mountainside reminded some Europeans of various parts of Europe (Gorden-Cumming 1884: 288).

The often-overlooked importance of the ‘weather-world’ (Ingold 2010) of sacred landscapes emerges colourfully in Colonial descriptions of the Himalayas (Kennedy 1996:51), at the same time as the binary categorisational scheme that lies behind these descriptions diminishes the quality of their insight. What is however important to note here is that something in the weather-world of these mountains connected with the imagined weather-world of the colonists homeland. For, although the rain of the monsoon and the chill of the mountains is readily distinguished from whatever we may imagine an English weather-world to be, this connection was enough for the British to attempt to build on what they viewed (incorrectly) as *tabula rasa*, a ‘little England’ in the hills (Pandey 2014). The core of Shimla can therefore be seen as a deliberately crafted landscape that combines local and imported materials to create a space of ancestral memory (Miles-Watson 2015). Local deodar and stone blended with imported materials, as it was worked by local artisans to interpret the drawings of Gothic and Tudor buildings. Alongside the native deodars and Himalayan wildflowers, imported trees and flowers were planted. Pedigree European dogs crossed the ocean to join the local monkeys, leopards and langurs; Christian saints, icons and crosses came to join the local *murtis*. European dress of the time joined with local dress customs and the distinct landscape of Simla began to come into focus.

At the centre of the city, on the highest tier of construction, Christchurch Cathedral slowly emerged between 1844-1857 through the efforts of far more craftsmen and labourers than are today remembered (Buck 1904:118). The church filled with women in ball gowns and men in tailored suits who charged the air with renditions of Victorian hymns accompanied by the sound of the pipe organ. When their voices could sing no more, they were woven into the fabric of the walls, through commemorative plaques that gradually came to cover every part of the interior surface (as Depicted in Figure 4). The building continued to shift and be marked by those whose lives it so greatly impacted on during the colonial years as successive patrons commissioned adornments to the church that had both a personal and a theological resonance (Buck 1904: 81). The landscape began to dramatically draw attention to the traces of the past actions of its constituents at the same time as pointing to a greater belonging and this allowed for the formation of a rooted feeling amongst those who dwelt in a transitory, transnational community.

[Figure 3. The House of Ancestors]

The colonial period however came to a dramatic end, a little over 50 years ago, but Shimla (as Simla was renamed) lives on as a thriving postcolonial state capital. The Europeans and the ball gowns have almost all gone, and the church bells no longer chime, but the pipe organ, the memorials and the dogs remain, creating a tangle of relations that defies expectations. This appears at first as a dramatic rupture in the ecology of the landscape, however this is not the case, for new people joined with the landscape binding their lives with the ancestors of the place (Miles-Watson 2015). Christchurch remains an active place of worship, led by a small number of Indian Christians whose faith clearly connects them with the cosmological elements of the landscape, but it also remained of central personal importance to not only Christians but also to the wider Hindu population, who live their lives in and around it. As the sign at the entry to the city proudly proclaims, ‘Our Built Heritage is Our Identity’, which (whatever we think about the problematic terms) is clearly an indication of the importance of this landscape to people of all faiths and none. This is crucial because the self-identifying, postcolonial, Christian population, of both the region and the nation is an extreme minority (0.62% and 2.3% respectively – 2011 census). The significance of the Christian landscapes would be lost if they were restricted to just this population. The majority of the population at both a local and national level are Hindu (93.5% and 79.8% respectively). Therefore, what we may want to call a colonial, ‘Christian’ landscape, is overwhelmingly constituted by postcolonial Hindus. As in Shiloh, where politics would divide sacred space presents the possibility for unity.

European Weather in the Land of the Gods

Shimla is something of a migrant city still. It attracts people to it, from both the wider region and across the nation, to work at its various institutions and to visit it as pilgrims, or tourists. These latter constituents of the landscape are significant, but also seasonal. For, just as Simla of old was marked by extreme seasonal flows of people today the population of the city can double during the peak summer periods. These modern day flaneurs mix and meld with the landscape dramatically changing its tone and feel, just as the seasonal changes from rain, to sun to snow markedly impact upon it. Conversations over the years have revealed an important range of intersecting reasons that people from the plains give for being drawn to Shimla, that range from viewing it as the land of the gods to a European weather-world.

Shimla is a gateway city to the western Himalayan range; as such it stands in a border zone that is geographically peripheral but cosmologically central to millions of Hindus. These mountains are known as ‘the land of the Gods’, they are the places that mythic events unfolded and crossing points between the eternal and the time-bound (Eck 2012: 7-12). Countless shrines act as local nodes housing local manifestations of Divinity that to the synthesizing mind appear as variants of a grand scheme of Divine revelation. At the same time, Shimla offers people a chance to travel to a little piece of ‘England’, or ‘Switzerland’ and promises to provide an entry into the world of the myths of Colonial India and its Christian Cathedrals. Uniting both these sacred geographies is Shimla’s promise of weather that is distinct to that of the plains, offering both relief from heat and a magical encounter with snow.

Shimla’s weather tends to disappoint, for sure it is colder than the plains, but at the main point of tourism it is far too hot for the fabled snow, which tends to fall only a handful of days a year. However, the connection with sacred landscapes is generally (although not universally) judged to deliver on all fronts. The city is surrounded by well-established temples, set in the sort of striking environment that readily generates a sense of ‘grace’ (Miles-Watson 2016). None more so than the Hanuman temple that lies behind Christchurch, hidden within the famous, sacred, deodars that the monkeys call home. To walk to this temple is to enter the Hindu epic the Ramayana, the events of which gave rise to the spontaneous generation of the current Hanuman. This is the journey of the pilgrim who we began this section with and yet he also stopped to pay obeisance to Christchurch, a striking and yet (as Arjun stated) frequent occurrence.

Entangled Christian Landscapes

Christchurch is clearly an important marker to all who travel the Shimla hills, a selfie with-it in the background is the equivalent of collecting a shell (Frey 1998). There are also those who dwell a little longer, often entering inside the building and even engaging in worship. Two months after the conversation with Arjun, Jonathan was eating snacks and drinking coffee in a café 5 minutes’ walk from the cathedral when Jaswant, a practicing Sikh in his early 30s, visiting from the plains with his family, asked to join him. Over tea Jaswant related that he was taking a break while his family did some shopping, having just visited Christchurch cathedral.

“That place” he said, “It’s really something... it’s so beautiful... I felt peace”

Like our unnamed pilgrim, Jaswant entered the landscape of the Cathedral, thickening its contemporary significance by his presence and at the same time feeling within it a sense of connection to other places and times that he describes as a sort of transcendent peace. This is a common theme repeated in many coffeehouse discussions, on internet chatrooms and recorded in the church's visitor's book (Miles-Watson 2019). Alongside peace a sense of awe, hinted at through the employment of the term 'awesome' is constantly repeated in the comments of non-Christian pilgrims from the plains. Awe, beauty and peace then emerge as the key themes and yet by his presence in the landscape was our turbaned friend, like the Goddess pilgrim, also transforming it? This is certainly what Arjun was hinting at when he said that 'it can be confusing', but confusing to who? Certainly not to the travellers themselves who do not seem to register any confusion in their comments.

As the summer days of 2009 lengthened it was possible to see more people entering the Cathedral and with them increasing flash points in the otherwise peaceful landscape. These all occurred during the standard, weekly, English language service, which involves traditional hymns, supported by both a choir and pipe-organ. The problems came with people talking over the prayers, or the sermon and constantly wanting to record the service by means of photograph. On one occasion, a man was wrestled out of the doors while fighting to get one last snap in. This is in part a commodification of the landscape of worship and in part a cultural mislabelling, for the very striking peace of the Cathedral is at odds with much Hindu temple worship. The latter is characterised precisely by its soundscape (Beck 1995, Prasad 2015) and that soundscape is so powerful that during less-essential ritual moments silence is not demanded. However, when this soundscape ethic is transposed to the cathedral then it risks destabilising its fragile ecology of relations.

This is only part of the story, Hinduism itself has a tradition of silent retreat and in Jonathan's experience these flash points of tension characterise only a small minority of Hindu/Christian entanglements in this landscape. Many middle-class Hindus, throughout India, have a strong affinity with Christian spaces of worship that draws from childhood formation in church schools (Lobo 2002: 186). These Hindu elements of the landscape are not only highly familiar with convention, but also skilled interpreters of the landscape, able to meaningfully engage the trans-communal religious symbolic elements within it. Perhaps more importantly they have personal

memories connected with places that are similar enough in appearance as to give an associated sense of personal belonging within the space (Miles-Watson 2015).

Jonathan lived in Shimla imbedded in Hindu familiar networks and found throughout his time there that the local Hindus viewed themselves to be authentically part of that Christian landscape. Many of these would attend the church at key rituals and others simply drop in between ritual events, lending the landscape vitality at times of quiet. One local Hindu resident captured this sense wonderfully when she reported that Christchurch is “an oasis, [where] when my soul is tired and dry I come for refreshment”.

Local Hindu residents are able to engage with the landscape as wayfarers, who carefully move around the landscape, blending sympathetically with it, moving with a developed awareness of the trace that will be left by their own actions and how this connects with the trace of historic actors both living and dead (cf Ingold 2000: 237-240). At any given time, they constitute an important part of the landscape and no more so than during the previously mentioned service, for here, a substantial proportion of the assembled schoolgirls (whose hymnal voices are said to resonate angelically) self-identified as Hindu. If these girls return to the church when they are older (as many have done before them) and they will return to a place that is not only of global historic experience (through the symbolic revelation of Christ), or even national significance (through its colonial roots), but also personal historic significance (through its connection to their own childhood). In such ways, a seemingly alien, colonial landscape is revealed to be a vibrant, postcolonial landscape that is intimately bound up with the identity of contemporary Christians and non-Christians in this modern migrant city.

Ruptured Landscapes and Balanced Ecologies

Both Sitna and Jonathan’s ethnographic accounts reveal striking similarities in areas that are seldom placed in dialogue, at the same time, they point to significant differences that are also a key source of revelation. Using Bateson as an inspirational point of departure, we will now turn to explore how these similarities and differences shine a light on the way that different ecologies operate in distinct Christian landscapes to achieve balanced systems of operation. That is to say, we use Bateson’s ‘systems theory’ (1972, 1979, 1987) to think with as we critically explore the processes of rupture and healing that lie at the heart of both our Christian landscapes. Through

such an exploration, we aim to demonstrate the ways that postcolonial Christian landscapes can operate as either bridges or nodes of entangled relations, paving the way for future comparative explorations along these lines.⁷

The accounts of both the Christian Landscapes of Cannanland and Shimla open with a journey, highlighting the importance of movement for these seemingly static landscapes. The journey in Jonathan's account is told from the perspective of engagement with movement into a place of long-term dwelling. In contrast, Sitna's ethnography operates from the perspective of movement from a place of dwelling. However, in both we have a common theme of movement, yet while one focuses on movement to, the other emphasises movement from. This is no simple coincidence; both of the landscapes' systems powerfully combine movement and transformation with stability and continuation. The ethnographic material that we have presented, therefore, demands that we address, from two distinct perspectives, the same central issues of both life lived *in* Christian landscapes and life enriched by movement *to/through* Christian landscapes. This suggests a key feature for a potentially wider exploration of sacred landscapes. In Canaanland, we see quite clearly the importance of collectively undertaking a potentially perilous journey, coupled with the site operating as a place of coming together to attend Shiloh, 'a gathering', of distinct threads in the overall weave of this region. In Shimla, the journey is less perilous and stressed and yet there remains a sense that here too we have a landscape that gathers together distinct elements, even if these elements are not so much joined through processes of bridging as winding (around a node of remarkable significance).

The dynamism of the movement that the ethnographic accounts present contrasts with the implicit static bias of 'dwelling' associations, which take off from Heidegger (1971) and move through Ingold (2000) into the anthropology of Christianity. In particular, Ingold's influential discussion of a church landscape painting has been important for highlighting the way that Christian landscapes might operate to ground a traditional community in its environment (Ingold 2000: 202). This has many resonances with Jonathan's account of the way that the landscape operated during the colonial period. However, both ethnographies dramatically break the cosy presentation of dwelling that Ingold's painting allows, by engaging with real life messy entanglements of postcolonial societies and (crucially) by adding the dynamics of 'movement to' and 'movement from' to that of 'movement within'. These movements evoke a conceptualisation of rupture (cf Robbins 2007; Meyer 1998, 2004), but also highlight the

⁷ These two categories are not intended to close the possibility of other, further, systems of Christian sacred space.

importance of the systems of continuities and realignments (cf Engelke 2010; Chua 2012) that different forms of Christianity facilitate in these different geographical locations.

It is of course possible to address this journeying through the more familiar tropes of pilgrimage and/or tourism, which have a strong tradition of discussion in both contexts as well as within the wider anthropology of religion (cf Turner & Turner 1978, Sax 1991, Graburn 1983, Coleman and Eade 2004). At times, especially in Shimla, we found people deploying the terms ‘pilgrim’, or ‘tourist’ to describe the actions of those within their environments. It is interesting to note that in the context of Shimla the term tourist is often operationalised by the Christian community to talk about someone who is commodifying the landscape. Yet, just as the Turners argued that a pilgrim is half a tourist if a tourist is half a pilgrim (Turner and Turner 1978: 20), so too in both regions, it is common to refer to pilgrims and tourists as simply travellers.

We do not wish to simply add another discussion to the ongoing pilgrim/tourism debate or to reduce the message of the ethnographies to a discussion of these terms. Instead we will now turn to consider how thinking about these as landscapes, all-be-it, more varied and dynamic ones than those frequently discussed, can both do justice to the material under discussion and push it in new directions. The concept of journeying, walking and movement has of course featured in both Ingoldian writing (Verngust and Ingold 2016) and in Ingold’s own turn to lines (2007, 2011, 2015). However, there is still work to be done to integrate these movement-based metaphors with the landscape perspective, as well as to draw out the significance of this for sites that are both complex (ie postcolonial) and sacred (Christian).

Truly Awesome Landscapes

The Christian landscapes of Canaanland and Shimla integrate issues of movement and dwelling in distinct ways that draw from the varied ecologies of relations that emerged from each region’s distinct colonial experiences. There are however also striking similarities that offer possibilities for the formulation of more general rules about postcolonial Christian landscapes. The journey to Canaanland involves crossing a national border to enter a landscape that is both cartographically and ideologically separate from the usual world of the pastors. Although the journey to Shimla is more easily undertaken and does not involve the crossing of national boundaries it is clearly also a movement to a place that is readily separated due to its distinct

(mountainous) geography and its association with spectacular ways of being (be it those of the Raj, or the Gods). Despite the ideological separateness of these regions, the reality is far more entangled with each landscape being in part constituted by the very people who view it as distinct, as well as material goods (commodities) that constantly flow across and draw together these ideologically divided realms.

They are also landscapes that are at first glance radically distinct not only from the everyday, but also from each other (one ultra-modern and the other clearly traditional). Yet, they are united by the fact that both actualise a sense of difference, of being misplaced, to create a sense order and peace. They awake a sense of reverence and awe that draws individuals together and sacralises processes that are commonly cast as profane (such as economics). In this, they resonate well with Sheldrake's general conception of the way that sacred landscapes function in the contemporary city as truly awesome places (cf Sheldrake 2007: 252). Sheldrake argues for a reclaiming of the word 'awesome' as something capable of generating reverential wonder rather than just a description of something vaguely pleasing (2007: 244). Sheldrake links this sense of awe to Otto and Eliade, however the idea of awe also has a useful link to Bateson's concept of grace (1972). For awe contains within its etymology the suggestion of that uplifting and yet, disquieting, loss of self that can occur when say we become conscious of our connection to weather (Inogld 2007, Hsu & Low 2002, Miles-Watson 2017). This sense of awe links to Bateson's idea of grace as a loss of the self that occurs during moments of heightened awareness of the ecology of relations and our integration within it (Bateson 1972).

In Jonathan's account, we hear of people who frequently and literally describe the landscape as awesome and who pair this with descriptions that suggest that awesome is indeed being used in more than simply a colloquial sense. Interestingly, awe here is often associated with peace rather than the common association with fear (Keltner and Haidt 2003), and this highlights the way that Bateson's notion of grace (1973) can bring a sense of relief that comes from the momentary reintegration of our sense of self and its wider ecology of being. In Sitna's account, we hear of a sort of loss of the self in the collective that links to familiar pilgrim theories of *communitas*. This is especially the case in moments of massive communal worship and prayer, for example, or in the seeming blurring of socio-economic differences of people gathering together. However, it also draws us beyond the often narrowly defined employment of this concept into a realm where *communitas* extends beyond the human to take us into the realms of the ecology of constitutive relations, where materials are drawn to the fore (Cf Keane 2008). Cannanland is strikingly

constructed in an ordered way that is perhaps only fully appreciated when viewed from above, just as Shimla is from below, although both in reality are moved through. This extremely ordered and organised nature of the place is itself awe inspiring, especially when paired with the sacred message of the prosperity gospel that invites the 'pilgrim' to understand how Bible passages and buildings bring sermons and messages of prosperity into existence. Shiloh also means 'place of peace' and it evokes a biblical place where miracles happen, where the power of God is made manifest. Through the landscape, prosperity, miracles, and 'greatness' become a lived reality that has the power to transcend the inconvenient constraints of history.

These landscapes are clearly awesome, at least in part because of the theological significance of both their symbolic and material natures. They are spaces that embody Christian myths and visions of what it means to be holy or blessed. In Sitna's ethnography we see how the use of Old Testament terms and sacred places, such as Canaan, Shiloh, Tabernacle and Covenant seek to reinscribe a Biblical historical narrative into the African landscape. Moreover, this Biblical narrative is actualised by infusing it with contemporary symbols of power and prosperity, such as the American bald eagle, which together congeal into a lived promise of blessings in the Abrahamic covenant. In Jonathan's account the landscape draws upon established European conventions for invoking the Divine. A theology of light (Bony 1983: 117-195) is employed, which suggests that light is a way that the divine draws us towards itself (Merton 2008: 137). Inside Christchurch the striking mountain light both pervades and defines the space, as it filters through brightly coloured representations of Biblical scenes. Each scene is not only symbolical resonant of these trans-Christian motifs, but also phenomenologically resonant with its European heritage, both implicitly through its style and explicitly through the inscriptions and mythologies that connect these windows to particular colonial actors (Miles-Watson 2012).

These are also landscapes of social status and wealth. It would be easy to associate the awesome nature of both with worldlier economic fortunes, yet to simply dismiss the power of these landscapes in this way would be to both ignore the message of the people and the lessons of the landscape. For sure, both employ costly materials and construction methods that speak to other places (USA and Europe) and the political-economic relations through which these materials were extracted, and architectural forms achieved (colonialism and globalisation). Yet, both entwine these architectural forms with more local materials, movement and craftsmanship to work landscapes that are of deeply localised significance. This echoes Sheldrake's understanding that for a landscape to be truly awesome it is not enough for it to simply be a symbol of

oppression (2007: 252). Awesome landscapes speak to the collective about possibilities and aspirations; they must lift people's ideas towards something greater and must be embraced by the people.

Both contemporary Christchurch and Cannanland gather people to them, allowing people to be transformed by the very landscapes that their presence also transforms. Both ascending and bridging through worshipful presence. What is more, the very message of prosperity is key to Cannanland's theology and, as such, it would be misleading to simply subjugate the later to the former. The concepts of awe and enthusiasm demand that we consider these landscapes as being as much about sacralising the economy as reducing the sacred to an economic analysis. In Shimla, the situation is less clear-cut and yet a sense of status, if not necessarily wealth, is clearly implied in membership in the body of the church. Crucially, both use prosperity as markers of distinction (Bourdieu 1984) that lead to more substantial connections. In the case of Christchurch, the landscape connects through its appeal to the status of heritage to the past and, in the case of Cannanland, through its promise of prosperity to the future. Both, of course, are united in being landscapes of the Eternal.

Time and Space

In both Shimla and Cannanland it is possible to see how the material trace of past action is crucial to the present landscape and some of these traces evoke a sense of rupture (Miles-Watson, et al 2015) Both sites were subject to European colonialism in the 19th century. In both cases, Christianity left a tangible presence in the buildings and identities of the people, which has given rise to different iterations that point towards different appropriations. Sitna's ethnography presents a scenario where colonialism left its mark with a border that divided towns and families. It established differences of language, culture and wealth disparity between Nigeria and Benin. Different colonial regimes (French and British) supported officially different types of Christian missionary projects, which in Benin were mainly Catholic and in Nigeria, Anglican. Nonetheless, Christianity in its postcolonial iteration manifests itself in a Neo-Pentecostal narrative and practice that unifies broken/ruptured pasts.

In Jonathan's ethnographic account we saw that Christchurch (and Shimla) can be easily understood as a physical rupture in the wider Indian Himalayan landscape. A Cathedral and city

intended to invoke their European counterparts could easily be understood as reminders of colonial domination. Moreover, an overtly Christian landscape, nested in a region of sacred Hindu significance could easily be viewed as problematic to the majority Hindu population. Yet, this is not the case, instead, the landscape continues to operate as a site of awe and peace for travellers and residents, Christians and Hindus. It has become not only a site of awe but also of enthusiasm, which fires the work of postcolonial Hindu artists, poets and authors – a place that feeds the soul. This is because of the inclusive way that participation in the landscape draws people together with not only contemporary actors, but also historical ones (both colonial and biblical). The ecology has reset itself and the landscape has become a site of reintegration rather than rupture.

In both accounts, the historical ruptures of colonialism are overcome by the circulation of postcolonial people who are woven into the landscape as they continue to reweave the threads of the past. In Canaanland we see how the landscape operates as a bridge that brings different and distant places in a ‘single’ Christian gathering (Shiloh) that unifies. In Shimla, the distinct ecology has led to the landscape functioning as a sacred node, around which diverse past, present and mythological actors become entangled in deeply meaningful landscapes of awe and inspiration. It is clear that this comparative exercise suggests that unifying Biblical narratives and colonial experiences take root in distinct ways in the varied ecologies where they are positioned. Yet, through spatially enacted and temporally significant practices, unifying elements of reintegration are common to these often-held apart Christian landscapes. Despite clear differences in ethnological details both of our experiences find common ground at the processual level, where they bring *eris* and *harmonia* together into a *concordia discors*.

References

- Adediran, B. (1994), *The Frontier States of Western Yorubaland 1600-1889*, Ibadan: IFRA.
- Asiwaju, A.I. (1976), *Western Yorubaland under European Rule 1889-1945. A Comparative Analysis of French and British Colonialism*, London: Longman.
- Bateson, G. (1972), *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bateson, G. (1979), *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity*, New York: Bantam Books.
- Bateson, G., and M. C. Bateson (1987), *Angels Fear: An Investigation into the Nature and Meaning of the Sacred*. New York: Macmillan

- Beck, G.L. (2012), *Sonic Liturgy: Ritual and Music in Hindu Tradition*. Columbia (SC): University of South Carolina Press.
- Buck, E.J. (1904), *Simla, Past and Present*, Simla: Thacker & Spink.
- Bony, J. (1983), *French Gothic Architecture of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984), *Distinction*, London : Routledge.
- Chua, L. (2012), *The Christianity of Culture. Conversion, Ethnic Citizenship, and the Matter of Religion in Malaysian Borneo*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Coleman, S. (2000), *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Coleman, S. (2002a), 'The Faith Movement: A Global Religious Culture?' *Culture and Religion*, 3 (1): 3-19.
- Coleman, S. (2002b), 'Do You Believe in Pilgrimage?: Communitas, Contestation and Beyond', *Anthropological Theory*, 2 (3): 355–368.
- Coleman, S. (2006), 'Materializing the Self. Words and Gifts in the Construction of Charismatic Protestant Identity', in F. Cannell (ed), *The Anthropology of Christianity*, 163-184, Durham: Duke University Press.
- Coleman, S. and J. Eade, eds. (2004), *Reframing Pilgrimage. Cultures in Motion*, London: Routledge.
- Ebron, P. A. (1999), 'Tourists as Pilgrims: Commercial Fashioning of Transatlantic Politics', *American Ethnologist*, 26: 910-932.
- Eck, D.L. (2012), *India: A Sacred Geography*. New York: Harmony.
- Engelke, M. (2010), 'Past Pentecostalism: Notes on Rupture, Realignment, and Everyday Life in Pentecostal and African Independent Churches', *Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute*, 80 (2): 177-199.
- Flynn, D. K. (1997), "'We Are the Border": Identity, Exchange, and the State Along the Benin-Nigerian Border.' *American Ethnologist*, 24 (2): 311-330.
- Frey, N.L. (1998), *Pilgrim Stories: On and Off the Road to Santiago*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gifford, P. (2004), *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy*, London: Hurst.
- Gifford, P. (2015), 'Unity and Diversity within African Pentecostalism: A Comparison of the Christianities of Daniel Olukoya and David Oyedepo', in M. Lindhardt (ed), 115-135, *Pentecostalism in Africa. Presence and Impact of Pneumatic Christianity in Postcolonial Societies*, Leiden: Brill.

- Gordon-Cumming, C. F. (1884), *In the Himalayas and on the Indian Plains*, London: Chatto and Windus, Piccadilly.
- Graburn, N.H. (1983), 'The Anthropology of Tourism', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 10 (1): 9-33.
- Gibson, E. (2007), 'The Archaeology of Movement in a Mediterranean Landscape', *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology*, 20 (1): 61-87.
- Heidegger, M. (1971), *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter, New York: Harper Colophon Books.
- Hsu, E. and C. Low (2008) *Wind, Life, Health: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives*, Malden, MA: Blackwell/Royal Anthropological Institute.
- Ingold, T. (2000), *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, London: Routledge.
- Ingold, T. (2010), 'Footprints Through the Weather-World: Walking, Breathing, Knowing', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 16: S121-S139.
- Ingold, T. (2011), *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*. Taylor & Francis.
- Ingold, T. (2015), *The Life of Lines*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Ingold, T. (2016), *Lines: A Brief History*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Ingold, T. and J. L. Vergunst, eds. (2008), *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Keane, W. (2008), 'The Evidence of the Senses and the Materiality of Religion', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 14: S110-S127.
- Keltner, D. and J. Haidt (2003), 'Approaching Awe, a Moral, Spiritual, and Aesthetic Emotion', *Cognition and Emotion*, 17(2): 297-314.
- Kennedy, D.K. (1996), *The Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lobo, L. (2002), *Globalisation, Hindu nationalism, and Christians in India*, Jaipur: Rawat Publications.
- Marshall, R. (2009), *Political Spiritualities. The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Maxwell, D. (1998), 'Delivered from the Spirit of Poverty?: Pentecostalism, Prosperity and Modernity in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 28 (3): 350-373.
- Maxwell, D. (2008), *African Gifts of the Spirit. Pentecostalism and the Rise of a Zimbabwean Transnational Religious Movement*, Oxford, Harare, Athens, OH.: James Currey, Weaver Press, Ohio University Press.
- Mayrargue, C. (2001), 'The Expansion of Pentecostalism in Benin: Individual Rationales and Transnational Dynamics', in A. Corten and R. Marshall-Fratani (eds), *Between Babel and*

- Pentecost. Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America*, 274-292, London: Hurst & Company.
- Mayrargue, C. (2005), 'Dynamiques Transnationales et Mobilisations Pentecôtistes dans l'Espace Publique Béninois', in L. Fouchard, A. Mary and R. Otayek (eds), *Entreprises Religieuses Transnationales en Afrique de l'Ouest*, 243-265, Ibadan, Paris: IFRA, Karthala.
- Merton, T. (2008), *An Introduction to Christian Mysticism: Initiation Into the Monastic Tradition*. Michigan: Cistercian Publications.
- Meyer, B. (1998), "'Make a Complete Break with the Past": Memory and Postcolonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostal Discourse', in R. Webner (ed), *Memory and the Post-colony. African Anthropology and the Critique of Power*, 182-208, London, New York: Zed Books.
- Meyer, B. (2004), 'Christianity in Africa: from African Independent to Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 33: 447-474.
- Miles-Watson, J. (2012), 'The Cathedral on the Ridge and the Implicit Mythology of the Shimla Hills'. *Suomen Antropologi: Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society*, 37(4): 30-46.
- Miles-Watson, J. (2013), 'Pipe Organs and Satsang: Contemporary Worship in Shimla's Colonial Churches', *Culture and Religion*, 14(2): 204-222.
- Miles-Watson, J. (2015), 'Ruptured Landscapes, Sacred Spaces and the Stretching of Landscape Capital', in H. Sooväli-Sepping, H. Reinert and J. Miles-Watson (eds), *Ruptured Landscapes: Landscape and Identity in Times of Social Change*, 149-165, Dordrecht: Springer.
- Miles-Watson, J. (2016), 'Teachings of Tara: Sacred Place and Human Wellbeing in the Shimla Hills', *Anthropology in Action*, 23(3): 30-42.
- Miles-Watson, J. (2019), *Christianity and Belonging in Shimla*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Miles-Watson, J., H. Reinert and H. Sooväli-Sepping (2015), 'Introduction - Ruptured Landscapes', in H. Sooväli-Sepping, H. Reinert and J. Miles-Watson, *Ruptured Landscapes: Landscape and Identity and Social Change*, 1-7, Dordrecht: Springer.
- Noret, J. (2010), 'On the Inscrutability of the Ways of God: the Transnationalisation of Pentecostalism on the West African Coast', in A. Adogame and J.V. Spickard (eds), *Religion Crossing Boundaries. Transnational Religious and Social Dynamics in Africa and the New African Diaspora*, 107-122. Leiden-Boston: Brill.
- Oyedepo, D. (2005), *Understanding Financial Prosperity*, Lagos: Dominion Publishing House.
- Prasad, M. (2015), 'Conch-Shells, Bells, and Gongs in Hindu Temples'. *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, 137(4): 2427-2427.
- Pubby, V. (1996), *Shimla Then and Now*. Delhi: Indus Publishing.

- Robbins, J. (2007), 'Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture: Belief, Time, and the Anthropology of Christianity', *Current Anthropology*, 48 (1): 5-38.
- Sax, W.S. (1991), *Mountain Goddess: Gender and Politics in a Himalayan Pilgrimage*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Sheldrake, P. (2007), 'Placing the Sacred: Transcendence and the City', *Literature and Theology*, 21 (3): 243-258.
- Turner, V. (1969), *The Ritual Process. Structure and Antistructure*, London: Routledge.
- Turner, V., V.W. Turner and E. Turner (1977), *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- van Wyk, I. (2015), *The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in South Africa*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wylie, J. (2007), *Landscape*, Abingdon: Routledge.