

The dining room as sacred space:
An exploration of the interactions and conventions that make the
dining room sacred in the Spanish Mediterranean tradition.

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For my Grandmother and my Mum.

Abstract

The aim of this research is to investigate the role of spirituality in everyday life activities, particularly in the practices and beliefs that occur around the space of the dining room in the Spanish Mediterranean culture. To support this, the paper draws from different theories of the disciplines of Sacred Geography and Ecological Spirituality. By bringing the Ecological Spiritual influence to the task of Sacred Geography, this paper seeks to bring awareness and respect to a world that is inherently sacred.

With the fieldwork developed under the methodology of phenomenology and reflexive ethnography, this research will conclude that the dining room in the Spanish Mediterranean culture is a sacred space. For ease of understanding it is presented in three sections. The first section discusses the descriptive form of the dining room as sacred space. The second section focuses on the spiritual function of the dining room. Finally, the third section presents the role of the dining room as sacred space.

To perceive the richness of the sacred qualities of the dining room it is required to question and resist the modern paradigm that perceives reality under an anthropocentric and Cartesian dominance. Neither dependent upon social construction nor the person's religious experience, the spiritual role of the dining room crosses the boundaries between the sacred and the profane, opening reality to a constant relational phenomena between human and other than human subjects.

In conclusion, this paper explores a post-modern mindset to perceive and appreciate the relationships that are embodied in places, objects, communities and behaviours. This is, to see the landscape as sensuous and animate. Therefore, it is the purpose of this paper to contribute to the rise of scholarly interest towards an interconnected and alive world, and thus, to the rise of post-enlightened contemporary societies.

Introduction

The aim of this research is to investigate the role of spirituality in everyday life activities, particularly in the practices and beliefs that occur around the space of the dining room in the Spanish Mediterranean culture.

In modern Spanish Mediterranean culture, the dining room is a frequented space in day-to-day life, commonly seen as a secular space where people perform activities such as eating, talking, relaxing or watching television. Nevertheless, the dining room is also a space where people embody unspoken lore of the family tradition, where predecessors are remembered or certain objects such as special chairs hold a particular status. By bringing attention to the ways in which humans behave in the dining room and the ways in which the space is arranged and where it is located inside the home, this research aims to acknowledge how spirituality pervades in the quotidian space of the dining room through activities and objects such as rituals, family traditions, or decoration motifs.

The field of Sacred Geography offers different theories from which to identify sacred principles in the land or in constructed spaces. Some of these views will be discussed to consider the meaning of 'sacred'. While Emile Durkheim emphasises human agency in the attribution of sacredness to the space by setting it apart from mundane activities, Mircea Eliade sees an intrinsic value within the sacred site independently of people's action.¹ Nevertheless, they both attribute special qualities to the sacred in opposition with the profane or secular.

¹ Emile Maurice Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. By Karen E. Fields, (New York: The Free Press, 1995 [1912]); Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. by Willard R. Trask, (London: Harcourt, Inc., [1957] 1987).

The Ecological Spiritual movement gathers different theories that broaden the ways to identify the sacred other than its opposition with the profane. Some of these views, such as Patrick Curry's ecocentric experience of the world and Val Plumwood's reductionist materialism, will be presented to consider more inclusive concepts of the sacred.²

In this way, while conceding that the 'sacred' and the 'profane' can be distinct in ideal terms, the boundaries between them can show more complexity in daily life. The work of Graham Harvey states that spirituality or religion can be recognised within ordinary life activities as the way in which people interact with the wider world.³ His work will be the base from which the secular space of the dining room will be analysed as sacred.

These reflections will be broadened with the work of: Kim Knott's spatial study of religion, which offers tools to analyse the location of religion in secular places; Belden C. Lane's methodological axioms for the study of space, which underlines its connections with spirituality; and Frédérique Apffel-Marglin's anthropological work on how to understand ritual, which will help to infer the interactions and conventions that bring spirituality to the space of the dining room.⁴

² Patrick Curry, *Ecological Ethics: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011); Plumwood, Val, *Environmental Culture. The ecological crisis of reason*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

³ Graham Harvey, *Food, Sex And Strangers. Understanding Religion As Everyday Life*, (Place: Acumen, 2013).

⁴ Kim Knott, *The Location of Religion: A Spatial Analysis*, (London: Equinox Publishing, 2005); Belden C. Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred: Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2002 [1988]); Frederique Apffel-Marglin, *Subversive Spiritualities: How Rituals Enact the World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Lastly, these reflections will be contrasted with the fieldwork data collected, which in turn, will be compared with the operational definition of sacred site by Anthony Thorley and Celia M. Gunn.⁵

The research methodology of this project will consist of a phenomenological study with participant observation and reflexive ethnography. The fieldwork will take place in five dining rooms of private homes situated in the Mediterranean area of Spain during a five-week period. In this way, by following the principles of phenomenology in the work of Merleau-Ponty, Christopher Tilley and Tim Ingold, the dining room will not be addressed by itself, but only in relational significance between the interactions of people and the space, furthermore, resituating the self and the environment as the same dynamic totality.⁶

In summary, by observing and participating in what happens in the private space of the dining room, this research intends to become aware of how human and other-than-human agents engage in spiritual practices through everyday life activities and what functions these practices play.

⁵ Anthony Thorley and Celia M. Gunn, *Sacred Sites: An Overview*, (The Gaia Foundation, 2008).

⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962); Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape*, (Oxford: Berg, 1994); Tim Ingold, *Lines. A Brief History*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2016 [2007]).

Academic Rational

The investigation of the role of spirituality in everyday life activities in the space of the dining room can be approached from different academic disciplines. This paper locates the topic in a post-enlightenment contemporary context of modern culture; within the discipline of Sacred Geography, which gathers the scholarly efforts for identifying sacred principles in the land or in constructed spaces; and with the influence of an Ecological Spirituality that involves relational ways of thinking about the environment, matter and culture.

The present work arises from the concern to acknowledge the significance of the space in the spiritual practices in western contemporary society, which consequently leads to the acknowledgement of the significance of its cultures and traditions too.

In reference to this, by modern culture this paper refers to the complex result in which the current secular scientific hegemony is based in western European culture, a human-centred view of the world that predominates in western societies since the Enlightenment age.⁷ This anthropocentric view of the world is characterized by a Cartesian dominance that perceives reality in opposed and separated dualities such as mind and body, subject and object, culture and nature, or religious and secular.⁸ This dual way of perceiving the world not only separates the binary opposites, but that also oppresses one against the other.

Patrick Curry, an academic of ecological ethics, identifies that as a result of this process an ‘uncritical acceptance of ... [the] distinction between “material” and “spiritual” has

⁷ Anthony Thorley and Celia. M. Gunn, *Sacred Sites: An Overview*, (The Gaia Foundation, 2008).

⁸ Anthony Thorley and Celia. M. Gunn, *Sacred Sites: An Overview*, (The Gaia Foundation, 2008).

been privileged and conceptualized as materialist culture.⁹ As such, one of the results of what is called modernity is the conception of nature as something 'purely material'; therefore, resulting in something abstract, objectified and commodified.¹⁰

In this way, an expanding secular western and industrialised world has threatened and threatens a relational world of meaning by disengaging matter of its agential behaviour; not only of the natural environment but for the whole environment of natural and constructed matter too. In order to understand the significance of the space in spiritual practices in western contemporary society, it is crucial to take in consideration this modern culture mindset.

On another hand, in a post-enlightenment contemporary context, this paper refers to the shift from a predominantly anthropocentric and materialist view of the world to an ecocentric experience of the world. This shift is currently reflected in the increasing rise of western scholarly interest towards an interconnected world that reconsiders the Cartesian split between nature and culture, subject and object, and mind and body.¹¹

To borrow Curry's language again, an 'ecocentric' experience of the world would perceive altogether not only the materiality of nature but also its spiritual dimension, it is something 'more-than-human, sensuous and alive, ... which is always potentially a subject or set of subjects'.¹² In this way, an ecocentric experience reverts an 'enlightened human self-interest' and hence an impoverished experience of the world by

⁹ Patrick Curry, *Ecological Ethics : An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), p. 138.

¹⁰ Patrick Curry, *Ecological Ethics : An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), p. 138.

¹¹ Anthony Thorley and Celia. M. Gunn, *Sacred Sites: An Overview*, (The Gaia Foundation, 2008).

¹² Patrick Curry, *Ecological Ethics : An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), pp. 143.

re-memembering a form of collective co-participation with other-than-human subjects, a 'collective spirituality'.¹³

It is the purpose of this paper to contribute to the rise of scholarly interest towards an interconnected and alive world, and thus, to the rise of post-enlightened contemporary societies. This collective spirituality and ecocentric mindset will be further explained under the presentation of the Ecological Spiritual movement.

The discipline of Sacred Geography offers the rationale that informs the title of this research. In general, Sacred Geography explores the ways in which people live in our home, the Earth. More concretely, Anthony Thorley, a teacher and researcher of this discipline, defines Sacred Geography as 'the study of the qualities of the sacred and related cultural activities found in certain places and expressed in a spatial context'.¹⁴ In line with this, the subject area of Sacred Geography tends to be dominated by study cases of either, natural and ancient places such as groves or stone circles, or of constructed and western modern secular spaces such as economical business buildings or sport stadiums.

Rather than turning the gaze to alternatives offered by other cultures such as the different indigenous ways of approaching reality, this research is challenged by the alternatives that lie within western culture. In this way, this research focuses on a perspective that provides an alternative to western modern culture, but within western modern culture itself and through other than capitalist or entertainment features. Hence why the sacred will be inferred in an everyday life and apparently secular space of the western modern culture like the dining room. With the endeavour to understand how

¹³ Patrick Curry, *Ecological Ethics : An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), p. 3.

¹⁴ Anthony Thorley, 'Sacred Geography: A Conceptual Work In Progress', *Spica*, Vol. IV, no 2 (April 2016) pp. 4-8, (p. 8), http://sophia-project.net/Spica/pdfs/SPICA_4.2.pdf

human people live in the world in contemporary societies, in other words, how to understand contemporary spirituality and what functions it performs.

For the endeavour of understanding contemporary spirituality and what functions it performs, the postulates of the Ecological Spiritual movement will be present. This current gathers different scientific and philosophical theories that link the relationships between human, non-human and the other-than-human, and the balances between these relationships. Accordingly, it defends that the present ecological crisis cannot be understood without its spiritual dimension.

For this way, an Ecological Spirituality is one that entails a post-modern mindset and an ecocentric experience of the world. As introduced above by Curry, an ecocentric view would experience the world as 'more-than-human, sensuous and alive', furthermore Curry adds that 'it is embodied and embedded in specific relationships, communities and places, and realized in ongoing more-than-human relationships'.¹⁵ Thus, an Ecocentric Spirituality is one that seeks awareness and appreciation of the spiritual dimension along the material one; this is to say, a spirituality that perceives the sacred embodied and embedded in everyday life interactions and in specific communities and places.

Among these scientific and philosophical theories there are some western scholars that have been re-defining the term 'animism' to name this embodied and embedded ecocentric spirituality. In this matter, Graham Harvey, an authority of religious studies,

¹⁵ Patrick Curry, *Ecological Ethics : An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), pp. 143-144.

recalls the role of animism in western culture for the integration of an experiential interconnection of a living world and into our understanding of the normal.¹⁶

Harvey refers to animists as ‘people who recognize that the world is full of persons, only some of whom are human, and that life is always lived in relationship with others’.¹⁷ Consequently, a particular space perceived under an animist relationality becomes full of ongoing relationships participating in a common ontology.

Whether the term ‘animism’ will gain new popularity in the western mindset or not, Harvey invites colleagues and people ‘elsewhere’ to understand religion or spirituality as everyday life in a multi-species relational world.¹⁸ It is the intention of this dissertation to embark on such an invitation.

In summary, the Ecological Spirituality influence widens the concept of sacredness by conceiving it as something that permeates all areas of life. Therefore, it also widens the focus of Sacred Geography by opening the possibilities for the study of the dining room as sacred space. In other words, by bringing the Ecological Spirituality influence to the task of Sacred Geography, the present project seeks to bring awareness and respect to a world that is inherently sacred.

Thomas Berry, an eco-theologian and one of the leading voices of the eco-spiritual movement, speaks about ‘the survival in a world of meaning’ that has almost been

¹⁶ Graham Harvey, *Animism: Respecting the Living World*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

¹⁷ Graham Harvey, *Animism: Respecting the Living World*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. xi.

¹⁸ Graham Harvey, *Religions in Focus: New Approaches to Tradition and Contemporary Practices*, (London: Equinox, 2009); Graham Harvey, *Food, Sex And Strangers. Understanding Religion As Everyday Life*, (Place: Acumen, 2013), pp. 4-8.

forgotten.¹⁹ This 'world of meaning' that refers not only to our physical relation with the environment, but also to the spiritual one, is what this research pursues. What are the meanings in the ongoing interactions that occur with and within the space of the dining room?

For this matter, the study of sacred space becomes especially relevant when trying to remember a collective spirituality, one that views the world and all its life as intrinsically sacred. Like this, Sacred Geography becomes, as Thorley puts it, 'part of the important post-enlightenment academic rediscovery of an animistic worldview relevant to Western Culture'.²⁰

¹⁹ Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the twenty-first century*, ed. by Mary Evelyn Tucker, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 172.

²⁰ Anthony Thorley, 'Sacred Geography: A Conceptual Work In Progress', *Spica*, Vol. IV, no 2 (April 2016) pp. 4-8, (p. 8), http://sophia-project.net/Spica/pdfs/SPICA_4.2.pdf

Methodology and Reflexive Considerations

The research methodology of this project will consist of a phenomenological study with participant observation and reflexive ethnography. The fieldwork will take place in five dining rooms of private homes situated in the Mediterranean area of Spain over a five-week period. By being present in these spaces, the researcher will observe other people as well as their own experiences while attending the rituals and participating in the different activities that take place in the dining room. In this way, the primary sources of the research will be the experiences, the observations, and the notes and photographs taken by the researcher during the fieldwork.

The use of phenomenology as a method to infer the spiritual meaning of the dining room is due to its capacity to allow wonder. This is to say, a phenomenological approach allows a wondering attitude to experience reality from a different point of view. Which becomes especially relevant when the topic of study is ordinary life activities.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty applied the philosophy of phenomenology to establish descriptions of places as these are experienced by a subject. Through examining a phenomenon and the subject's experience on their own terms and realizing the necessary relation between them, Merleau-Ponty conceived the human body as an instrument of mediation in exploring a place.²¹ Following these ideas, phenomenological theories have inspired different study approaches of space and, particularly, of sacred space. Christopher Tilley regards 'space as a medium rather than a container for action', which entails that the space is not something separated from what happens in it.²²

²¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962).

²² Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape*, (Oxford: Berg, 1994) p. 10.

Following these principles, the dining room will not be addressed by itself, but only in relational significance between the interactions of people and the space.

However, there are other instrumental bodies participating in the same space. A way of acknowledging this, as Tim Ingold advances Merleau-Ponty and Tilly's approaches, is resituating the self and the environment as the same dynamic totality.²³ In this way, by incorporating a phenomenological approach, the researcher can account for other people's experience as well as their own, but also for the dining room experiencing itself through the embodied matters within the room. So that the dining table, the guests and the family portraits equally participate in the interactions and conventions that make the dining room a sacred space.

As already mentioned, Harvey invites scholars to study spiritual activities from 'elsewhere'; this is, to understand spirituality as everyday life in a multi-species relational world.²⁴ In this way, by observing what happens in the private space of the dining room, this research methodology intends to become aware of how human and other-than-human agents enact through everyday life activities in spiritual practices.

Nevertheless, the choice of this methodology carries some limitations. While it is true that a phenomenological approach helps to perceive a wider number of participants in the experience of sacred places, it does not address the theological and sociological dimensions of these. Hence, this paper cannot and will not aim to cover the theological and sociological dimensions of the dining room in the Spanish Mediterranean area.

²³ Tim Ingold, *Lines. A Brief History*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2016 [2007]).

²⁴ Graham Harvey, *Food, Sex And Strangers. Understanding Religion As Everyday Life*, (Place: Acumen, 2013) pp. 4-8.

Why the dining room? To answer this question, it is necessary to provide a few sentences about the researcher's background. After all, to treat the spaces of this study as something separated from the researcher would go against the academic rational and methodology presented above.

As a 29-year-old female sociologist that has grown up in a village on the Mediterranean Levant of Spain, it is important to acknowledge some of the influences and biases that have intrinsically shaped the enquiries of this research.

I have grown up in a village where most of the land is still dedicated to the cultivation of rice and vegetables. The majority of the elder members of the families have cultivated these fields, hence why a connection with the land through the process of harvesting the food and its link to the cooking process is still alive and present. This connection with the food, the land and the nature's seasons is notorious in the calendar of festivities and in everyday life. The space where this connection becomes more relevant is the dining room, with special importance given to the dining table.

As a neighbour of this village, I grew up very close to my grandparents. In the fields with my grandfather I learnt about the seasons, weather patterns, moon cycles, seeds and horticulture techniques of harvesting. In the home with my grandmother I learnt about cleaning the harvested crops, cooking them, and no less important, learning all the liturgy of the dining room and the dining table prior to the meals.

In the last five years I have been living in different countries with different traditions. However, my roots have caused me to pay attention to the connections of each place with its land and the different ways in which food shapes people's everyday life. More recently, while settling in Australia, the different roles and power that the dining table

and the dining room had over people caught my attention. Because of this, my curiosity caused me to re-think the agency that the dining table has in people's everyday life in the Mediterranean culture; far from being a functional role alone, I questioned its spiritual function.

In just a few lines, these are the experiences, relationships and processes that have co-created the questions and methods of this research. As Karen Barad describes: 'nature is neither a passive surface awaiting the mark of culture nor the end product of cultural performances'.²⁵ These reflective considerations are used to portray the academic rational chosen, attempting to resituate materiality and us, and revealing the continuous unfolding ways in which we shape and are shaped.

Therefore, the effort of this methodology has been put into listening carefully to the embodied and emplaced matters around me, in particular, in the dining room.

²⁵ Karen Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity: Toward An Understanding Of How Matter Comes To Matter', *Signs* 28(3) (Spring 2003), pp. 801-803.

Literature Review

In the next section some of the terms introduced in the academic rationale are going to be explored further and in more detail. For this matter, some of the scholars' literature relevant to the research topic will be introduced, compared and contrasted according to the aims of this paper. Finally, these reviews will be the soil from which to further develop the approach that the research project intends to question and answer during and through the findings of the fieldwork and its discussion. As a result, the research is going to be shaped into three parts, each part focusing on different characteristics of the dining room.

This paper explores the margins of ideal terms such as sacred, secular and spirituality. While some of the language and terms will be defined as they are used, there are a few terms that need to be addressed beforehand due to their extensive scholar variety of interpretation and debate.

Due to its wide variety, fluidity and complexity, defining the sacred has been an on-going scholarly debate; this is the reason why the concept still carries objections and limitations. Rather than intending to offer a generalized meaning of the sacred that would necessarily omit a great variety of other cultural understandings and experiences and the possibility for new narratives to arise, this report intends to present the experience of the sacred as found in one specific culture, moment and space.

As Thorley and Gunn determine, 'sacred space [...] is a complex [...] concept which always demands great sensitivity and awareness of local and cultural perceptions'.²⁶ Thus, confining the definition to the context of this paper, it is necessary to consider that modern societies are influenced by a materialist culture that regards binary oppositions, as well as its separation and oppression as natural. This is reflected in the scholar works that depict the sacred as separate from the secular or profane; which includes at the same time the separation of subject and object, mind and body, culture and nature.²⁷

Having said this, Emile Durkheim, one of the theorists on whom the discipline of Sacred Geography relies, wrote that '[b]y definition, sacred beings are beings set apart. What distinguishes them is a discontinuity between them and profane beings'.²⁸ Furthermore, for Durkheim, human agency is crucial in the attribution of sacredness to the space, this occurs by setting it apart and forbidden through specific actions such as rituals and ceremonies; furthermore, he stated that the sacredness is only kept as long as people keep doing this.

In a similar way, Mircea Eliade, another paramount theorist of this discipline, wrote the book *The Sacred and the Profane*, in which the sacred and the profane are tacitly contrasted.²⁹ Unlike Durkheim, Eliade sees an intrinsic value within the sacred site independently of people's action. For Eliade, the sacred is equivalent with the real, whether a person perceives a place or object under a religious or profane experience, it

²⁶ Anthony Thorley and Celia. M. Gunn, *Sacred Sites: An Overview*, (The Gaia Foundation, 2008), p. 29.

²⁷ Anthony Thorley and Celia. M. Gunn, *Sacred Sites: An Overview*, (The Gaia Foundation, 2008).

²⁸ Emile Maurice Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. By Karen E. Fields, (New York: The Free Press, 1995 [1912]), p. 303.

²⁹ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. by Willard R. Trask, (London: Harcourt, Inc., [1957] 1987).

will reveal the participation in that qualitatively distinct reality or in a homogeneous one.

These influential perspectives represent a large part of the debate in western literature between those who advocate that sacred space is a social construct and those who see the sacred as naturally arising. Despite the significant differences of these foundational works, both theories attribute special qualities to the sacred in opposition with the profane or secular; therefore, both theories and their debate belong to the scholar work that re-produces the sacred-profane dichotomy.

But are the boundaries between sacred and profane things clearly demarcated in everyday life? Is this modern idea of the sacred too conditioned by a disembodied spirituality?

Graham Harvey alerts about the use of such dichotomies, which are inheritances of the modernism project that has privileged particular definitions. These, in turn, have been inflected by Protestantism and the European Enlightenment, and treated with globalized prevalence, when in fact they only represent a particular and singular worldview.³⁰ Instead, Harvey claims a more dynamic understanding of the sacred-profane and religious-secular dichotomies through the understanding of 'the real treasure'; the everyday phenomena of 'lived religions'.³¹

Harvey points to the changing process in the fact that '[w]hile things can be profaned (made ordinary if not negative in some way), they can also be made sacred, especially by

³⁰ Graham Harvey, *Food, Sex And Strangers. Understanding Religion As Everyday Life*, (Place: Acumen, 2013).

³¹ Graham Harvey, *Food, Sex And Strangers. Understanding Religion As Everyday Life*, (Place: Acumen, 2013), p. 60.

acts of sacrifice'.³² In this way, by bringing attention to the practices rather than the beliefs, Harvey is pointing to the richness within those changing flows rather than in the ideal concepts of the opposite ends of the dichotomy sacred-secular. It seems like the modern belief of the secular is completely separated from religion, however, the actual living of religion steps constantly in between.

It was during his years of research within indigenous religions, that Harvey came to realize that religion is better defined 'elsewhere' rather than by the modernism project of hyperseparation and belief-centred; he says, even Christianity 'turn[s] out to be a lot like how people do religion elsewhere'.³³ In this way, being 'elsewhere' refers to the ability to resist the modern mindset when studying lived religions, so that religions have much more to do with the relations in a material and multi-species world rather than in transcendental ideas of what religion should be. Thus, being 'elsewhere' requires rethinking the ways in which the ordinary activities have been defined as such.

Under this view, the ordinary activities that take place in everyday life in the real world identify what is 'religion happening'; it then follows that the material, the physical, the embodied, the emplaced and performed life becomes the foci of the study of religions.

Kim Knott, another scholar of the study of religion, reclaims the importance of studying religion in local perspectives, and the value of identifying this in a spatial context.³⁴ Like Harvey tries to explain through the concept of 'starting elsewhere', Knott too recognises the difficulty of adopting a different gaze of what is proximate and familiar. From these

³² Graham Harvey, *Food, Sex And Strangers. Understanding Religion As Everyday Life*, (Place: Acumen, 2013), p. 64.

³³ Graham Harvey, *Food, Sex And Strangers. Understanding Religion As Everyday Life*, (Place: Acumen, 2013), p. 60-65.

³⁴ Kim Knott, *The Location of Religion: A Spatial Analysis*, (London: Equinox Publishing, 2005).

ideas, Knott developed a spatial methodology for the study of religion in contemporary western societies by integrating cultural and secular relationships in a spatial context.

It was through a study of religion in his own neighbourhood that Knott realised that he would need to study scenarios other than the organised places of worship in order to capture a broader location and role of religion. In this way, a need to capture religious activities in secular places became the focus of his academic methodology. As he expresses it, his attention was captured by the traces of 'religion to be found in ostensibly non-religious sites such as parks, schools, medical centres, shops and restaurants', so that the scholar work could 'produce greater knowledge about the relationship of religion and its secular context'.³⁵

The spatial methodology that Knott developed analyses the descriptive properties, the dimensions and the aspects of space, but also its dynamics and relations with the body as the source of experience and representation of the space. In this way, for Knott the spatial study of religion starts by identifying the embodied identities in the space, which moreover he recognizes, are entangled with other cultural aspects represented through symbols and behaviours. This methodology helps to re-situate the focus of study of the World Religions and allows perceiving an embodied religion. This is to say, religion is not only present in organisations, worship places and ancient scriptures but in the bodies and identities that a space is composed of. Furthermore, Knott adds that a space is the sum of the different people who move through it, which acknowledges the ways that the space has been reproduced through different discourses, traditions or photographs. In this way, Knott defends that '[i]n focusing intensively on particular bodies, objects, groups or places, we begin to see the difficulty and erroneousness of

³⁵ Kim Knott, 'From Locality to Location and Back Again: A Spatial Journey in the Study of Religion', *Religion*, 39: 2 (2009) pp. 154–60 (8).

distinguishing “religion” from other social fields ... [which] inevitably requires a multidisciplinary and polymethodic process’.³⁶ In short, Knott’s spatial methodology of religion reunites separate gazes of different disciplines such as geography, history, sociology and anthropology, and widens the dimensions that compound it, so that religion in place is the sum of its physical, social and mental characteristics.

Although the work of Knott helps to open the definition of religion with social, cultural, and human embodied characteristics, and particularly, that allows locating religion in secular places; his work does not offer the tools to consider other than human relationships that occur in a given space.

As introduced above, through Harvey’s work, a particular space perceived under an animist relationality becomes full of relationships between persons, only some of whom are human. Harvey goes a step further and includes the more than human relationships by considering the world itself as agent. In this way, it is especially useful the way that Val Plumwood explains how to meet the world dialogically; this is to truly ‘understand our embeddedness in and dependency on nature’, so that we know us humans are dependent and interconnected with the non-human kind too.³⁷ To truly understand these relationships, Plumwood calls to reconsider the mistaken conception of considering mind-like aspects as only human, which includes a mistaken attribute of agency and autonomy also only for human-kind, this has been named as reductionist materialism and removes agency from all materiality. Instead, Plumwood defends that

³⁶ Kim Knott, ‘From Locality to Location and Back Again: A Spatial Journey in the Study of Religion’, *Religion*, 39: 2 (2009) pp. 154–60 (20-21).

³⁷ Plumwood, Val, ‘Nature in the Active Voice’, *Australian Humanities Review*, Issue 46 (2009), pp. 113-129 (116).

nature is an alive organism itself, with mind-like aspects, self-organising systems and therefore intelligence and agency.³⁸

To apply this to the study of sacred geography, it would offer the possibility of addressing the agency of the landscape and the agency of material objects.

In this matter, Belden C. Lane has studied space and its connections with spirituality, offering his methodological experience in attributing agency to the landscape.³⁹ Lane explores the scholarly approaches for the study of sacred space and joins them in a holistic perception that gathers ontological, cultural and phenomenological approaches; he defends each of these perspectives to be important in a more complete understanding of how sacred place functions within the human imagination. While ontological perspectives focus on the experience of the sacredness by people, cultural perspectives identify ideological and social constructions of the sacred, and last but not least, phenomenological perspectives introduce the place itself as a participant in the formation of the sacred experience.

With his experience in the study of American spirituality and landscape, Lane came to realize that while it is true that the scholarly discourse tends to omit the phenomenological perspective that includes matter participating in the creation of meaning and experience, it is necessarily to conceive 'the dance-like exchange' that the sacred, the operations of culture, and the particularities of place manifest the holy in a

³⁸ Plumwood, Val, *Environmental Culture. The ecological crisis of reason*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

³⁹ Belden C. Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred: Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2002 [1988]).

space.⁴⁰ In this way, Lane defends the importance of considering the three perspectives individually to then ‘argue for their usefulness as mutually self-correcting tools’.⁴¹

In line with this, Amy Whitehead offers a relationality approach that helps understand how objects can become subjects, especially within religious contexts. For her, the personhood that can be attributed to material objects is not to conceive the objects like other living beings in the way that humans relate to other humans or animals, but by introducing the quality of the moment. The ‘personhood’ becomes fluid and contextual, so that the way humans relate and interact with the object co-creates the power and agency of the object.⁴² Here, the concept of relationality is stressed in order to understand the roles of matter and the other-than-human.

On a similar line, when inferring the relational quality of a moment, Frédérique Apffel-Marglin advances a way to interpret ritual as ‘the medium for communicating, reciprocating, creating, and working with the other-than-humans’.⁴³ Inspired by the world of quantum physics and particularly by the agential realism of Karen Barad, Apffel-Marglin advances the debate between realists and social constructivists.⁴⁴

If, as Barad defends, objects and agencies of observation are inseparable in a whole phenomenon of ‘intra-actions’; then reality is always contextual, or in other words, reality emerges from acts of observation. In this way, distinctions between subject and

⁴⁰ Belden C. Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred: Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2002 [1988]), p. 45.

⁴¹ Belden C. Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred: Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2002 [1988]), pp. 45-46.

⁴² Amy Whitehead, *Religious Statues and Personhood: Testing the Role of Materiality*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

⁴³ Frédérique Apffel-Marglin, *Subversive Spiritualities: How Rituals Enact the World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 6.

⁴⁴ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2007).

object are no longer valid as independent existent entities. The ontological definition of an object changes with the choice of subject or '[apparatuses of observation] [which] are no longer passive observing instruments [...]; rather, they are productive of and part of the phenomena'.⁴⁵ In Barad's words, 'agential reality is not a fixed ontology that is independent of human practices, but is continually reconstituted through our material-discursive intra-actions'.⁴⁶ So matter is no longer an inherent fixed property of an abstracted object or surrounding, but a result of the material and human discursive intra-actions entangled in a given moment.

Along with this theory, Apffel-Marglin's experience in Indian and Amazonian spiritualities brought her to conceive rituals as creative activities that 'enact the world in concert with its humans, non-humans, and other-than-humans'.⁴⁷ If different realities result from different acts of observation, then she defends rituals' capacity to conceive a reality that includes the non-human and other-than-humans too. Using Harvey's words, Apffel-Marglin defends the importance of ritual activities as powerful tools to start 'elsewhere' on conceiving the spiritual meanings of everyday rituals; which applies to this research and its focus on starting elsewhere to conceive the ordinary activities as sacred.

Having said this, rather than focusing on beliefs, this research pursues an emphasis on practices in a world of relationships; hence, spirituality here is seen as the way in which

⁴⁵ Frederique Apffel-Marglin, *Subversive Spiritualities: How Rituals Enact the World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 56.

⁴⁶ Barad, Karen, 'Reconceiving Scientific Literacy as Agential Literacy, or Learning How to Intra-act Responsibly within the World', *Doing Science + Culture*, ed. by Roddey Reid and Sharon Traweek, (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 221-258 [235-236].

⁴⁷ Frederique Apffel-Marglin, *Subversive Spiritualities: How Rituals Enact the World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 15.

people interact with the wider world in each of the activities that they perform in their day-to-day life.

At this point, a small note needs to be addressed about the choice made in this paper of the word 'spirituality' rather than 'religion'. In accordance with the focus of this paper, this choice comes from the capacity of the word spirituality to emphasise practices in ordinary life as distinct from an emphasis on beliefs that religion often carries. While religion normally refers to a particular institutionalized model of spirituality, it does not exhaust a broader meaning of the spiritual, which allows personal experience separate from religion.

In a similar way than Harvey, Curry defines spirituality 'as a concern, sufficiently serious to make a difference in how one actually lives (...) with the sacred: that which is beyond human control, intrinsically valuable, wondrous and not for sale'.⁴⁸ Furthermore, he adds that 'when either religion (relatively more organized) or spirituality (relatively more diffuse) is collective, it can be thought of as an attempt, together with others, to place and maintain ourselves in a healthy or correct relationship with the ultimate source of value, meaning and perhaps life itself'.⁴⁹ In this way, the choice for the word spirituality in this paper attempts to re-enchant a world that has intrinsic value, that is active and alive, that is sacred. Therefore, spirituality refers here to both the religious and the ordinary actions that people perform as a way of life in recognition of the animated and embodied facets of the environment.

In summary, by opening the ways in which religion or spirituality are often depicted under ideal dualities, spirituality and the sacred can be identified with the material, the

⁴⁸ Patrick Curry, *Ecological Ethics: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), pp. 139.

⁴⁹ Patrick Curry, *Ecological Ethics : An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), pp. 139.

physical, and the embodied and emplaced facets of life too. So that the boundaries between the sacred and the profane become a vast land from which to base the fieldwork, rather than in isolated transcendental and ideal concepts difficult to find in the real relational and changing world.

Nonetheless, despite having said this and although the research presents and pursues a rationale that exceeds a materialist culture, the fact that the research is based on a western contemporary society cannot be omitted. Thus, the space, its sacredness and its perception are going to be inevitably affected by a materialist mindset. However, it is the endeavour of this paper to identify the sacred with a focus of an embodied spirituality in everyday life; how to pursue this attempt will be divided into three sets of questions further detailed in the next section.

Research Questions

The fieldwork and its discussion are going to be divided into three sets of questions that focus on different aspects of the dining room; these sections are originally inspired by the work of Thorley and Gunn, specifically in the Thorley/Gunn Definition of Sacred Site. Moreover, the works of the authors already introduced will also contribute to the shaping and answering of the quests of this paper.

The Thorley/Gunn Definition (TGD) of Sacred Site came out of the 2007 report commissioned by The Gaia Foundation and their commitment towards cultural and biological diversity, specifically in this report to provide an overview of sacred sites and their protection around the world.⁵⁰ The need for this report was justified by the international concern to acknowledge the significance of sacred places, cultures and traditions, and the place of spiritual practice. For this reason, the authors developed an operational definition of sacred site with the purpose to connect and increase dialogues between the international community.

The definition that Thorley and Gunn developed after surveying a great variety of sacred sites around the globe is composed by a basic main stem, which reads:

A sacred site is a place in the landscape, occasionally over or under water, which is especially revered by a people, culture or cultural group as a focus for spiritual belief and practice and likely religious observance.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Anthony Thorley and Celia. M. Gunn, *Sacred Sites: An Overview*, (The Gaia Foundation, 2008).

⁵¹ Anthony Thorley and Celia. M. Gunn, *Sacred Sites: An Overview*, (The Gaia Foundation, 2008), p. 76.

In addition, the authors developed nineteen cultural characteristics to reflect the wide variety of sacred sites (see Appendix 1); these characteristics, in turn, are divided into four categories: descriptive, spiritual, functional and other. These categories make reference to the form, the function and the role of the sacred site in question.

A sacred site therefore must satisfy the stem definition and at least one of the nineteen cultural characteristics. In the event that a site meets more characteristics, it does not necessarily mean that it is more sacred, it simply indicates the complexity and richness of its sacred qualities.⁵²

In this way, this research is going to observe the ways in which the dining room in the Spanish Mediterranean tradition meets the basic stem and cultural categories of the Thorley/Gunn Definition of sacred space.

The first part of the work is going to look at the descriptive characteristics of the dining room in the Spanish Mediterranean culture. This section will contain descriptive information of: from one side, the space, its arrangement and its location in the house; from the other side, the human behaviour and the interactions between people and between people and the space.

As it has already been introduced, Durkheim and Eliade represent the academic debate between those who stress human behaviour in the constitution of the sacredness and those who see the sacred as naturally arising in a specific space. In addition, Harvey and Lane offer a relational way of thinking that offers a wider range of agents, human and non-human, to take into consideration when inferring the qualities of the sacredness. Moreover, Knott's work offers a methodology on how to identify the physical

⁵² Anthony Thorley and Celia. M. Gunn, *Sacred Sites: An Overview*, (The Gaia Foundation, 2008).

characteristics of the space in relation to religiousness. In this section, taking into consideration these different theories, the process from which the sacredness is constituted in the dining rooms visited during the fieldwork will be analysed and discussed. In this way, the questions that this section aims to answer are:

- What makes the dining room a sacred space?
- How is the sacredness of the dining room constructed?
- What constitutes this sacredness?
- Are there boundaries as to what constitutes the sacred?
- Is it set apart with special qualities or do we make it and unmake it?
- How does it differ from the dining hall as profane space?
- In what sense can we distinguish sacred and profane power?

In the second part, the spiritual characteristics of the space are going to be the main focus; for which the rituals, the decoration motifs, and the family traditions and culture of the place are going to be presented and analysed.

As it has already been introduced, Knott, Lane and Apffel-Marglin's works offer methodologies that focus on different features to infer the physical, social, cultural and spiritual characteristics in a given space. Their works will help to answer the questions that this section aims to answer. These questions are:

- How does spirituality pervade in the space of the dining room? Through which activities and objects?
- How do people use the space of the dining room? Which people and in which ways?
- What are the different uses of the space by different members of the household or visitors?

- What objects are involved in these activities?
- How is community and culture involved in them?

Finally, in the third part, the functional characteristics of the dining room will be the focus, in particular the role that spiritual activities play in ordinary life; for which the emotions generated in the space will be presented and analysed.

As it has already been introduced, Harvey's work focuses on the importance of everyday life activities informed by spiritual codes that bring meaning to people's conduct. In addition, Apffel-Marglin's experience infuses rituals with new ontologies that affect the ways in which reality is defined. Lastly, Lane's phenomenological methodology includes the experience in and with place. Taking into consideration these theories, the questions that this section aims to answer are:

- What role does spirituality play in everyday life activities in the space of the dining room?
- What is the function of the dining room as sacred space?
- Which emotions are generated in the space of the dining room?
- Do people have needs that cross the boundaries between sacred and profane?

Fieldwork and Discussion

In the methodology it has been explained that the fieldwork is based in the space of five dining rooms of private homes situated in the Spanish Mediterranean area. During a period of five weeks, these dining rooms have been frequented so that the space could be observed and experienced at different times and occasions. The data gathered during this time has been divided into the next three parts, each of which focuses on the description, the function and the role of the dining rooms visited, so that the sacredness of these spaces can be inferred.

PART I - The descriptive form of the dining room in the Spanish

Mediterranean culture

The dining room in the Spanish Mediterranean culture represents an important and frequented space at home. The time dedicated to cook and enjoy the food, whether with the residents of the house during the week or sharing it with other people on the weekends, is a habit enrooted in people's everyday life of this culture. Although the room in which the food is prepared is the kitchen, it is in the dining room where the food is normally presented and consumed. The dining room is the place where the residents of the house spend most of the time together, normally to share a meal around the dining table three times a day; it is the room where special ceremonies and meetings are held; and it is the space in the house that is shared with the visitors.

As Thorley and Gunn defined, 'a sacred site is a place in the landscape, occasionally over or under water, which is especially revered by a people, culture or cultural group as a

focus for spiritual belief and practice and likely religious observance'.⁵³ This first part of the fieldwork and its discussion gathers the descriptive information of the space of the dining rooms visited in order to add more information to the Thorley and Gunn stem definition. In this way, by paying attention to the arrangements and objects in the dining room and the location of this room within the wider space of the house, it will reveal distinctive characteristics when it comes to inferring the interactions that this space holds.

In this way, the questions that this section aims to answer are:

- What makes the dining room a sacred space?
- How is the sacredness of the dining room constructed?
- What constitutes this sacredness?
- Are there boundaries as to what constitutes the sacred?
- Is it set apart with special qualities or do we make it and unmake it?
- How does it differ from the dining hall as profane space?
- In what sense can we distinguish sacred and profane power?

A first descriptive impression in the houses visited is the fact that the dining room is the biggest room in the house and it is situated in a central location. While an entrance and a corridor precede some of the dining rooms, other dining rooms are the first room of the house, however, when this is the case, they share the space with other parts of the house. This leads to the second descriptive impression; in some of the houses the dining room has been fused with the entrance and the living room. Although they are still two or more clearly differentiated spaces, walls or doors do not separate them; therefore, they are the same room with different spaces.

⁵³ Anthony Thorley and Celia. M. Gunn, *Sacred Sites: An Overview*, (The Gaia Foundation, 2008), p. 76.

Despite this, people in the house still name 'dining room' or 'living room' to these separate spaces that are now joined in the same room. Therefore, the observations for this research have been mainly held in this area of the wider room. Moreover, the distinctive characteristic of the space that people name as 'dining room' is that there is a dining table in that space. Therefore, the dining table is the main focus for observation during the fieldwork.



Image 1. Central space in a house where the dining room shares the space with the hall and the living room.



Image 2. Central space in a house where the dining room shares the space with the kitchen and the living room.



Image 3. Dining room with the distinctive characteristic of a dining table.

In this way, the arrangements and distributions in the dining room are mainly based on the presence of a dining table, which occupies most of the space in the room, and that it is surrounded by chairs that invite people to sit down. It is common that in the centre of

the table there is a centrepiece or a big bowl of fruit. The presence of salt, pepper and olive oil is also common on the dining table. In two of the houses visited, the dining table was partly covered with washed laundry waiting to be ironed. In some cases objects such as books, notebooks, pens and phones sat on the corner of the table. This reveals other uses that the dining table serves during the week.



Image 4. Dining room with the distinctive characteristic of a dining table that is being used for computer work and with a basket full of local seasonal fruits.



Image 5. Dining room with the distinctive characteristic of a dining table being used by the washed laundry waiting to be ironed.



Image 6. Dining table with salt, pepper, olive oil, jar of water and other snacks.



Image 7. Dining table during an after-meal conversation.



Image 8. Dining table that is being used for the washed laundry waiting to be ironed.



Image 9. Dining table that is being used for work.

Other common arrangements of the dining room are glass cabinets against the walls that display collections of dinnerware sets with similar decoration. Different shelves around the room display family members' photographs and ceramic pieces with local motifs. Other than the chairs around the table, there are a couple of chairs against the walls and

facing towards the middle of the room. These different collections and objects seem to point to the importance of food and eating as the main purpose of the room. Moreover, they also present the family to visitors in a luxurious and comfortable way, in a room for eating, talking and celebrating.

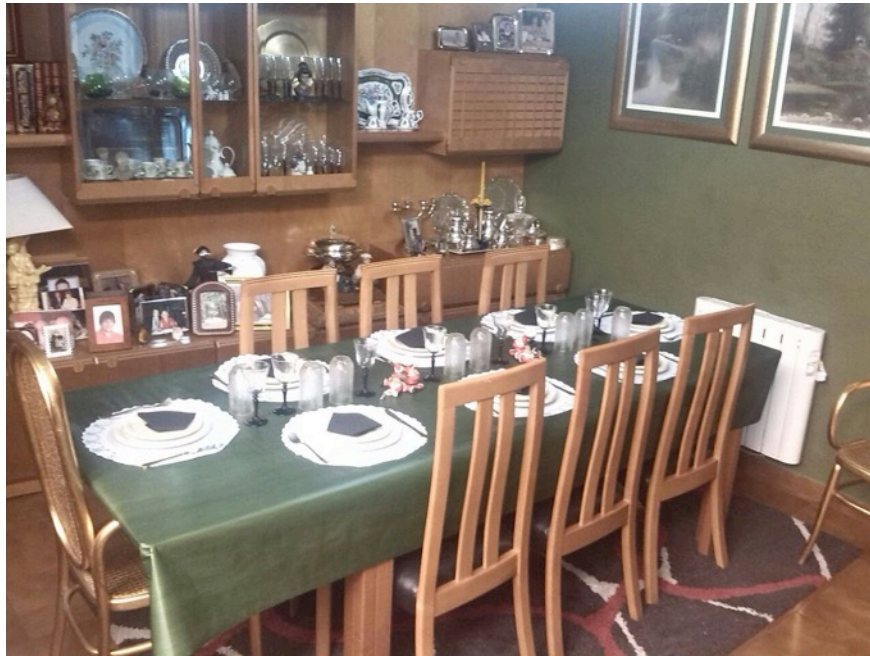


Image 10. Decoration of a dining room with family portraits and memories, dinnerware sets and dining table ready for a meal.



Image 11. Dining room ready for a social celebration.

The location of the dining room and the arrangement of objects within it interact in the everyday life of the people in the house. The bigger size and central location of the dining room influences peoples' behaviour; as it is normally the first room that people go to when they enter the home. The location and arrangement of the space invites people not only to eat, but also to stay there, talk with others, work or relax. This is to say, the dining room is a space with a location and size inside the home that attracts people to go and be there.

The distinctive presence of a dining table with chairs invites people to sit and stay for longer; the dining room is not a space where people rush. Not only that, the shape of the table, whether round or square, and the chairs facing each other, creates the conditions to initiate a conversation. The extra chairs located against the walls and facing the middle of the room, invite people to sit and share the space with others. This is to say, the dining room is a space that invites social engagement.

The displays of different collections on the walls, shelves and glass cabinets interact with the people in the room in different ways. On one side, everyone takes special care of these objects, whether it is someone dusting them meticulously, moving them to use the surface, showing them with pride or being admired by visitors. From the other side, these objects are usually ignored when people are in the room. Although objects such as dinnerware, cups and glasses have a practical function, most of the time they are treated as collection pieces to be shown off and admired; and only to be used on special occasions. Some of these household goods have been in the family for a long time, previously belonging to parents, grandparents or even great grandparents, or given as a dowry from the wife's family when the residents of the house were married. In this way people use them not only for their practical function but also treat them with respect for

what they represent. This is to say, the dining room is a space where people display the heirlooms of the family.



Image 12. Glass cabinet with dinnerware sets in the dining room.



Image 13. Glass cabinet with dinnerware sets in the dining room.

The ceramic pieces and other diverse decoration objects are also displayed, not because of the function that they serve but because of the stories that they carry. Some examples of this are clay figures that were made by the kids of the family for significant occasions such as Father's Day or Mother's Day. Other figures are presents and memories from special ceremonies such as weddings and first communions. Other figures represent typical traditional art of the local area such as fired tiles or ceramic objects. This is to say, the dining room is a space where people display memories of important life events.



Image 14. Local painting of peasantry life.



Image 15. Local fired tile.

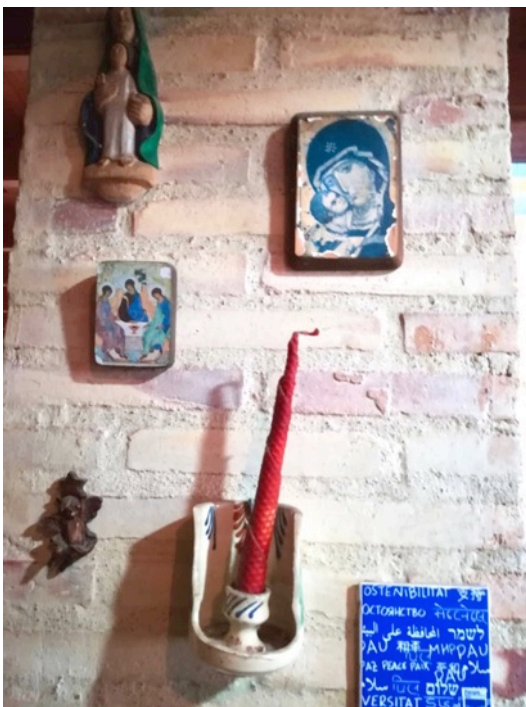


Image 16. Decoration objects in the dining room with Christian motifs and local ceramics.



Image 17. Decoration objects in the dining room.

The photographs in the room are of family members and close friends that were taken on special occasions such as cherished holidays, birthdays, weddings, first communions, village festivities or Christmas' celebrations. They are in the dining room to remember those special ceremonies but also to remember the people who have passed away. It is

common that when someone mentions a person in the photos, people look at the images; or vice versa, when someone makes reference to the presence of the photos, people keep silence for some seconds before sharing a memory involved with the person mentioned. This is to say; the dining room is a space where people pay homage to their family members, alive or passed away.



Image 18. Decoration objects and photographs in the dining room.

According to category 1 of the Thorley/Gunn Definition and the data presented above, the characteristics that the dining room satisfies for the descriptive category are:

- d. It is embellished with man-made symbols or artefacts.
- e. It is partially or wholly man-made.
- f. It is a memorial or mnemonic to a key recent or past event in history, legend or myths.⁵⁴

Little needs to be justified to the obviousness that the dining room is a constructed space; it is not a natural place with natural features that have given rise to this building,

⁵⁴ Anthony Thorley and Celia. M. Gunn, *Sacred Sites: An Overview*, (The Gaia Foundation, 2008), p. 76.

it is a wholly man-made space. The presence of the objects described such as furniture, dishes, cups, glasses, and framed pictures justify the embellishment of the room with significant man-made symbols and artefacts. Lastly, the presence of the family members' photographs and objects that have been in the family for generations work as a mnemonic procedure that keep the memory of the family alive and of those who are not there anymore. In this way, the dining room represents a place for reverence and homage of the family lineage and ancestors.

At first sight, it could appear that Durkheim's definition of the sacred would be more suitable here; the space of the dining room is an entirely human constructed site that would not exist if it weren't because of human's action. Nevertheless, different from what Durkheim required in his theory of the sacred, the dining room does not present a space that is set aside to differentiate the sacred and the profane activities that are performed in there. Nor Eliade's theory of the sacred seems to be satisfactory here. Although Eliade differentiates between someone's religious or profane experience as the factor to reveal the participation in the qualitatively distinct reality of a sacred space, his definition of the site that holds intrinsic value within does not suit the characteristics of the sacredness contained in the space of the dining room, as this room could be converted into a different room and therefore completely changing its characteristics.

In light of these findings, it can be asserted that there are no noticeable discontinuities in the dining room as to what constitutes the sacred. Therefore, as Harvey, Knott and Lane asserted in their different studies of spirituality in place, the boundaries between the sacred and the profane are not inferable as real, but blurred and changeable.

As Harvey claims, when we focus on the practices of everyday phenomena, a more dynamic understanding of the sacred-profane arises. It is within the changing flow of people's activities in the space of the dining room that the richness of this research is found. An example of this would be the changing function of the dining table, sometimes as a space to socialize and celebrate, sometimes to read the newspaper or messages on the phone, and other times to iron clothes or take notes on a diary. Other example would be the way in which from one moment to another, people are ignoring the photographs around the room or are revering them. Or the way in which people organise the space of the dining room with gadgets and symbols, which some times serves a functional role and other times a symbolic representation or expression.

These ordinary examples show from one side how the actual lives of people step constantly between what is believed to be secular and spiritual; therefore, informing a new meaning of the word spirituality, one that also includes the embodied and mundane practices of beliefs. From the other side, these examples also point to the importance of relationality between the arrangement and objects of the room with people's behaviour. Like Whitehead defends, this reveals 'the powerful roles of matter and where power can be located accordingly', exposing the depth of considering a relational way of thinking that leaves behind the modernist separations.⁵⁵

As Knott says, 'a spatial analysis of the boundary constructed around the dining space and what lies inside and outside it helps us to see how spatial and temporal difference is marked by changes in physical, social and cultural arrangements'.⁵⁶ Although here Knott acknowledges the crossing of boundaries between the religious and the secular in

⁵⁵ Amy Whitehead, *Religious Statues and Personhood: Testing the Role of Materiality*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 18.

⁵⁶ Knott, Kim, 'At home in the secular: A spatial analysis of everyday ritual', *Jaarboek Voor Liturgie-Onderzoek*, Vol. 23. (2007) pp. 45-62 (62).

everyday life, he defends that ‘people continue to set things, events and places apart as “sacred” even in the domestic sphere’.⁵⁷ This would be in line with what Durkheim says, stressing human agency in the construction of the sacred; however, in the examples presented, there is no necessity for setting things apart in order to participate with the sacred. As Harvey invites, starting ‘elsewhere’ is to question and resist ‘the putative contrast between “the sacred” and “the secular” or “the profane” when defining religion’.⁵⁸ It could be inferred that this invitation is the same exercise that Lane defends in his axioms for the study of sacred places. He says, ‘any thorough experience of sacred space will have to follow this deliberate pattern of mystery, demystification, and the subsequent reawakening of wonder’.⁵⁹ This reawakening of wonder points to the fact that whilst it is true that people create space, it is true too that the space creates people; and that not one of these sentences is truer than the other.

This leads us to the next part in which the spiritual function of the dining room is introduced through the objects and rituals encountered within the dining room.

In summary, the dining room in the Spanish Mediterranean culture satisfies the TGD Category 1.d, e, and f. The dining room is a human construct, embellished through furniture and objects that hold significant symbols for the family, and that it also serves as a memorial for important past events in the life of the family members and relatives. The modern paradigm that perceives reality in dichotomous categories constrain the way spirituality and the sacred are lived in everyday life; therefore, it too constrains the perception of the way in which the sacred is constructed in the dining room. Neither

⁵⁷ Knott, Kim, ‘At home in the secular: A spatial analysis of everyday ritual’, *Jaarboek Voor Liturgie-Onderzoek*, Vol. 23. (2007) pp. 45-62 (62).

⁵⁸ Graham Harvey, *Food, Sex And Strangers. Understanding Religion As Everyday Life*, (Place: Acumen, 2013), p. 63.

⁵⁹ Belden C. Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred: Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2002 [1988]), p. 24.

dependent on social construction nor the person's religious experience, the dining room becomes a sacred space without boundaries between the sacred and the profane, but by the flowing changes in between both of them through a manifold of interactions between people, objects and ideas.

Part II – The spiritual function of the dining room in the Spanish

Mediterranean culture

The second part of the fieldwork and its discussion collects information that informs the spiritual function of the dining room. In Part I descriptive information has been added to the Thorley and Gunn stem definition; this has been inferred through the analysis of arrangements and objects inside the room and the location and distribution of the room inside the house. Part II intends to advance the data presented in Part I by adding social, cultural and spiritual variables to the physical and descriptive ones, so that the Thorley and Gunn stem definition adds its category 2 characteristics; this is, the spiritual function of the sacred site in question.

For this matter, the ritualistic behaviour of people, the symbolism of decoration motifs, and the family traditions and culture of the place that inform them are going to be the main focus of this section, in order to understand which activities and objects portray spirituality in the space of the dining room.

In this way, the questions that this section aims to answer are:

- How does spirituality pervade in the space of the dining room? Through which activities and objects?
- How do people use the space of the dining room? Which people and in which ways?

- What are the different uses of the space by different members of the household or visitors?
- What objects are involved in these activities?
- How is community and culture involved in them?

Some of the ways in which people use the space of the dining room has been introduced in Part I. Some of these are that people are attracted to go to the dining room when they arrive home; people are drawn to stay there, not only to eat, but to be in the company of others as well. It is uncommon to see people rushing in this space, but common to see them relaxed, comfortable and engaging in social matters. When visitors are at home, they are guided to the dining room, and it is in this room that they spend most of the time.

In this way, it is especially noticeable that the dining room in general and the dining table in particular are protagonists when people visit the house. When this is the case, whether for a regular family Sunday lunch or for the celebration of a special ceremony or festivity, people in the house make sure that everything in the dining room is ready. Previously chosen, different tablecloths cover the dining table during different occasions. Different dining sets and glasses from inside the glass cabinets will be used during different occasions, which are previously dusted so that they are ready to be used during the meal. The photos and objects on the shelves are also dusted and relocated. All the random objects such as washed clothes waiting to be ironed on the table, notebooks and pens, bags and toys, or other objects other than the ones that strictly belong to the room due to their displayable characteristics, are previously removed and taken to other rooms in the house. When the visitors arrive, the etiquette protocol begins; from kisses, hugs and hand shaking, to the way people sit around the table, the order of serving the

food between commensals, and the order and choice of the dinnerware set that will be used.

This behaviour shows that people use the space of the dining room with an orthodox attitude that responds to specific social conventions. Which becomes particularly obvious in specific situations when ceremonies such as Christmas, birthdays, or local festivities are held in the dining room, and for which the organisation involves more detail.



Image 19. Decoration of a dining room and dining table ready for a meal celebration.

Although the main function of the dining room is to eat, which in turn, makes the dining table the epicentre for action in this space, it is not only the celebration of meals that are held in the dining room. For example, it is common that when one of the kids in the house is receiving their first communion, the parents will display the dress, shoes and jewellery in the dining room so that the neighbours can come and admire them. Often local sweets and drinks are served on the dining table for the visitors; who in turn, will bring something to offer to the family, normally food or a present for the child. However,

on this occasion the dining table passes its prominence to the child's outfit; it becomes noticeable that the chairs are not used to sit around the table but are arranged in a circle-like shape around the dress.



Image 20. Decoration of a dining table ready for a meal celebration.



Image 21. Decoration of a dining table ready for a meal celebration.

Other special ceremonies that the dining room hosts is when someone in the house is getting married; prior to the wedding ceremony, there is a family gathering in the dining room. Whether for the man or for the woman, the dining room serves as the room where they get their hair and costumes ready and finalised with the help of the elder members of the family. The funerals too are sometimes held in the dining room, although nowadays it is more common for families to use funeral services that take place outside of the home. However, it is still common that whether the corpse is there or not, the

family waits in the dining room for friends and neighbours to come and give their condolences. Some of these examples of using the space and the behaviour of people in the dining room respond to ritualistic patterns induced with spiritual meaning.

The link between certain objects and their symbolic function to the ritual activities presented is highly noticeable; and moreover, fundamental for these rituals to take place in the space of the dining room.

The symbolic meaning of some of the objects in the dining room has already been introduced. For example, the presence of a dining table and chairs invites people to socially engage. The dining table is the surface where foods and goods of the family are presented as an offering to the commensals. The food preparation process and the order for serving and eating the meal is linked to special utensils and objects, such as special pots and dinnerware sets, some of which are displayed in the dining room when they are not being used. The dining table also serves as an agent that arranges people's location according to their social status within the family; in this way, there are chairs in which only the elders of the family will sit, and others that are for the guests and the youngest. Not only do the chairs point out the person's status, but also their position in the room indicates the kind of ceremony that is taking place. If the chairs are facing each other and are around the table, the attention and importance of the ceremony will be drawn to the meal; but if the chairs are separated from the table and facing a different space or object, then the attention during the ritual is drawn to a different space.



Image 22. Meal celebration at a dining room in which the table and chairs influence a social dynamic between people.

The dinnerware sets, plates and cutlery displayed in the glass cabinets in the dining room are other objects that have a symbolic meaning attached to the spiritual function of the room. These objects, as already mentioned in Part I, are used not only because of their practical function but are also revered for what they represent: memorials for important life events and membership to a family lineage. In this way, the presence and uses of these objects are linked to the ceremonies and rituals that take place in the room, and hence informing the spiritual function of the dining room.

Lastly, the presence in the dining room of family photographs, which are sometimes attached with a funeral commemorative card or obituary, point to a direct spiritual function; the presence of the family ancestors. This is acknowledged in many of the rituals held in this space. For example, it is common that at Christmas meals, birthdays or other important ceremonies, someone blesses the meal. These blessings most certainly start with a mention of those who have passed away in the family and cannot

be there at that moment, those whose faces have been framed and have gained a prominent place on the shelves of the dining room. In this way, the dining room is a space where the ancestors of the family are often remembered and constantly made present.



Image 23. The typical paella pan invites social engagement at the dining table, as people sit around and eat from the pan.



Image 24. Composition of decorative arrangements in the dining room with a painting of local landscapes, local oranges and photographs of ancestors with candle offerings.

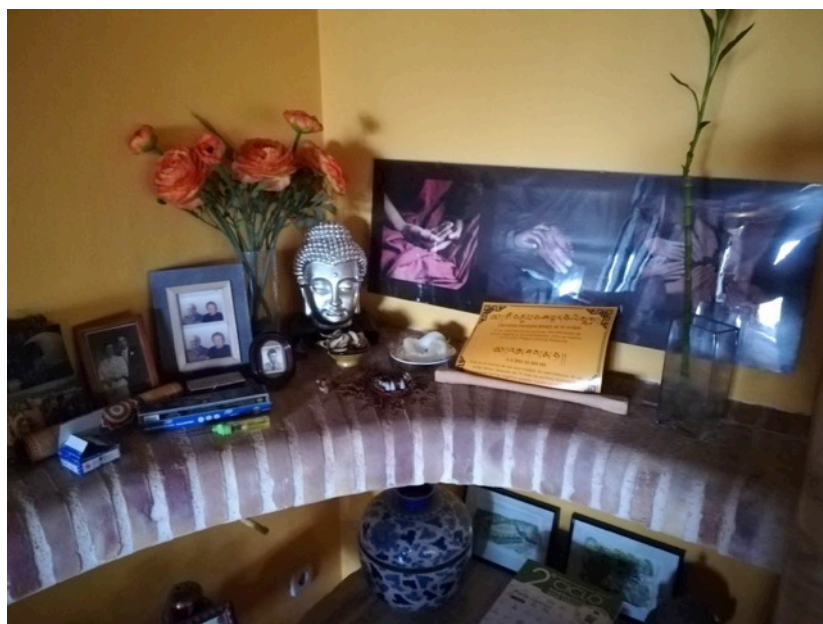


Image 25. Family portraits with incense offering and ceramic objects with local motifs.

According to the category 2 of the Thorley/Gunn Definition of sacred site and the data presented above, the characteristics that the dining room satisfies for the spiritual category are:

- e. It is identified as a place where the ancestors are present and especially respected.
- f. It is a place of spiritual transformation for individual persons or the community, e.g., healing, baptism, initiation, religious conversion, rite of passage, funeral, vision quest.⁶⁰

Characteristic e is fulfilled through the presence of photographs and commemorative cards of members of the family and close friends that have passed away. As mentioned, when someone close to the family passes away, this person acquires a space in the dining room in the form of a portrait or photograph. Not only through photographs, characteristic e is also fulfilled through the ritualistic tradition of blessing the meal, which starts by remembering and calling upon the presence of those who are not physically there.

Characteristic f is fulfilled through ceremonies held in the dining room that are an important event of spiritual transformation for an individual person, the family or the community, such as initiations, rites of passage, birthdays, baptisms, communions, weddings and funerals. Additionally, characteristic f is also fulfilled through the presence of significant objects that are a memory of these special events; for example, the ceramic pieces or other objects that are memories of weddings, anniversaries, or commemorative cards and obituaries from funeral ceremonies.

⁶⁰ Anthony Thorley and Celia. M. Gunn, *Sacred Sites: An Overview*, (The Gaia Foundation, 2008), p. 76.

Although the social and cultural narratives behind these activities and objects are not pursued with detail in this research, it can be asserted that they are infused with spiritual meaning. As Knott states, when the attention is focused on a body or an object, the vastness of multidisciplinary variables that inform the label 'religious' or 'spiritual' becomes relevant. This is to say; the 'religious' cannot be omitted from other social characteristics of the place. In this way, spiritual activities that take form in the dining room, such as the pre-ceremony of confirmation for eight-year-old children, are the combination of physical, cultural and social dimensions.

Focusing the study of religion on particular local contexts makes it possible to better understand a place, and hence, its effects on the area. Knott defends the value of local perspective on studies of religion, and declares that 'patterns of social and cultural change do not necessarily require us to give up the concept [religious or spiritual], but rather to reconsider its meaning and application for current studies of religion in context'.⁶¹

Nevertheless, the conversation between locality and the sacred can be broadened. Lane advances Knott's methodology by adding the particularities of a place through something other than the culture and the religious experience of people; this is, through considering the mind-like aspects or intelligence of the space itself. For example, in the case of the dining room it can be asserted that spirituality is embodied by the dining table itself and by the people who interact with it, like a dance of different bodies in which the dining table is the epicentre. Spirituality is also embodied in the dining room by different objects displayed that make reference to life rites and feelings of membership to a family lineage. Lastly, spirituality is also embodied in the dining room

⁶¹ Kim Knott, 'From Locality to Location and Back Again: A Spatial Journey in the Study of Religion', *Religion*, 39: 2 (2009) pp. 154–60 (20).

through the photographs of family members and friends who have passed away and gained their presence in the dining room.

As Apffel-Marglin defends, the rituals that take place in the dining room and the objects that participate in them have the capacity to connect the ordinary with the extraordinary. This is to say, the ordinary activities performed in the dining room are creative activities induced with cultural and spiritual meaning that reciprocate the sacred. This, as Harvey states, enables to reach a better understanding of the performative and materialist nature of spirituality. In Harvey's words, 'religion [...] is a matter of things and relations, substances and meetings, bodies and movements'.⁶² In this way, the spiritual function of the dining room reveals the pervasive performance of religion, tradition, ancestors and symbols as bodies and things. Moreover, the spiritual function of the dining room does not engage in transcendental beliefs, but in the mundane activities of reality: food, membership and celebration.

In short, the spiritual function of the dining room is composed by relational phenomena of rituals, objects and cultural dimensions that enact the sacred through ordinary activities.

In summary, the dining room in the Spanish Mediterranean culture satisfies the TGD Category 2.e and f. The dining room is a space where the ancestors are constantly remembered and revered through ritualistic behaviours and photographs. In addition, the dining room is also used as a space for individual and social transformation such as initiations, rites of passage or funeral ceremonies. Therefore, spirituality pervades in the space of the dining room in a relational phenomena of spatial, individual, social and

⁶² Graham Harvey, *Food, Sex And Strangers. Understanding Religion As Everyday Life*, (Place: Acumen, 2013), p. 150.

cultural relationships that take form in ritualistic ceremonies and symbolic objects with mundane functionalities.

Part III – The functional role of spirituality in everyday life activities in the space of the dining room

The third part of the fieldwork and its discussion collects information about the functional role of spirituality in the dining room. Part I presented the descriptive information of the dining room and its arrangements, and Part II added cultural and spiritual information to the behaviours and objects in the dining room. Finally, Part III intends to advance the functional role of the characteristics inferred in Part I and II. So that the Thorley and Gunn stem definition adds its category 3 characteristics; this is, the functional role of the sacredness in a specific site.

For this matter, the relationships and the emotions generated during the activities and with the objects in the dining room are going to be the main focus of this section, in order to demonstrate the role of spirituality in mundane activities in the space of the dining room.

In this way, the questions that this section aims to answer are:

- What role does spirituality play in everyday life activities in the space of the dining room?
- What is the function of the dining room as sacred space?
- Which emotions are generated in the space of the dining room?
- Do people have needs that cross the boundaries between sacred and profane?

To present the relationships and emotions that have been generated during the fieldwork, the wide inclusion that this research has intended to sustain when

experiencing and speaking of relationality needs to be remembered; this is, the relations and emotions generated not only between humans but also with the other-than-human in a multi-species relational world. Here it becomes especially useful the term that Harvey borrowed from Harry Garuba, 'animist materialism [...] in which concepts or ideas have material form, expression or phenomenal implications. They are things or even actors'.⁶³ For example, in the case of the dining room, this can make reference to the place itself, certain objects in the room or the presence of the ancestors.

In this way, as introduced above by Plumwood, this section aims to meet the world dialogically, so that through imagining beyond the modernist separatism, inert matters are recognised with their significance as relational actors in a never-ending interacting world. Therefore, bringing new experiences from 'elsewhere' to the definition and role of the spiritual. Nevertheless, as Harvey concedes, 'elsewhere may be everywhere, but it still requires some effort to get there and even more to be there fully and returned changed'.⁶⁴

Part I and II already introduced the descriptive characteristics of the dining room, the ways in which people use the space, and how the location and objects interact in these uses. As already mentioned, the dining room is mostly a space for social engagement normally around food and the act of eating with company, although, it also presents other functions at times. The relationships and emotions within the dining room respond at first sight to the purpose of eating. In this way, the dining table is probably

⁶³ Harry Garuba, 'Explorations in Animist Materialism: Notes on Reading/Writing African Literature, Culture, and Society', *Public Culture*, 15 (2) (2003), pp. 261-285; Graham Harvey, *Food, Sex And Strangers. Understanding Religion As Everyday Life*, (Place: Acumen, 2013), p. 136, 138.

⁶⁴ Graham Harvey, *Food, Sex And Strangers. Understanding Religion As Everyday Life*, (Place: Acumen, 2013), p. 7.

the key element and main actor in the dining room in the Spanish Mediterranean tradition.

It is not long after spending some time in dining rooms that someone realises the amount of unspoken rules that interact around the dining table, conforming relationships and emotions. The dining table presents the end result of a meal that has been composed by traditions, secrets and ceremonial processes. From the choice of ingredients and where to source them, the festivity or day of the week that holds the occasion, the care taken in the preparation of the meal and table, and the use of certain objects. These ordinary activities of everyday life involve a great number of interrelations, emotions, unspoken rules and meanings that respond to specific roles that have not often been considered by scholars of religion and social science in general. Some of these relationships that happen in the dining room and the emotions noticed and experienced are going to be considered in order to infer the spiritual role that they play in people's life.

While spending time in dining rooms, it soon becomes clear that there are different emotions in the space depending of the moment and day of the week. For example, the dining room becomes a different scenario during the short, more silent and rushed breakfasts during the working week; then becoming longer, bigger and more relaxed during the weekends. The lunches during the week are normally enjoyed only by the people who live in the house, sometimes not all of them, and the amount of time dedicated to arranging the table and sitting around while eating and after the meal is noticeably shorter; on Sunday this changes, the meals are bigger and the time spent around the table during and after the meal is considerably longer. The dinners tend to become more important during the week, with a lot of things to talk about at the end of

the day; unless there are guests invited the dinners have less importance during the weekend, sometimes not happening at all. In this way, the energy in the dining room seems to be moved by the intention of eating, sharing and talking; however, it has a more relaxed and slow rhythm on the weekends.

The quality of the food and its presentation has also appreciable variations on different days of the week. Often on Sundays, special ceremonies, during festivities or when visitors are invited to the table, the food cooked and served is not bought in supermarkets; instead it's sourced locally, fresh and bought in smaller grocery shops nearby, such as gourmet shops, greengrocer's, butcher's, bakeries, patisseries or wineries. The hosts would not offer poor quality or pre-cooked food bought in impersonal supermarkets from which the origin of the food cannot be traced; on the contrary, it is preferable to serve local and traditional ingredients when possible. There are meals that are only served in certain annual festivities: such are the 'croquetas de bacalao' or cod croquettes during the Christian Lent period; the 'all i pebre' or eel stew served in Christmas Eve in the small area of the l'Albufera lake surroundings in Valencia; the Catalan-style cannelloni of Sant Esteve made from the leftovers of Christmas Eve and Christmas Day; the 'calçotada' festivity at the end of winter in the Tarragona area, where everyone gathers to eat 'calçots amb salvitxada', a variety of big spring onions with sauce made from tomatoes nuts and peppers; or the more common Sunday stew 'puchero', paella or 'fideuà' with many local variations.



Image 26. Dining table with local dishes and sweets.



Image 27. Centre piece on the dining table with local and seasonal vegetation and fruits.

It is common that families keep a secret recipe for these star dishes. Although the dish does not undergo big variations, otherwise there would be a risk of receiving harsh criticism against its purity and name of origin. The family secrets are often small alterations of the ingredients' amount, the order in which they are added or an extra herb or minor condiment. It is also common that the family has a special pot, pan or utensils that are used only to cook these particular dishes, which has sometimes been passed from mother to daughter or given as part of the wife's dowry. Such is the case for the paella pan and its serving spoon, which is only used to cook and serve paella. In some cases, the pot and dishes used to serve the local traditional stew sit on the dining room shelves as part of the decoration display.



Image 28. Cooking utensils on display in the dining room.



Image 29. The typical paella pan is served on the dining table, and people eat directly from it.

Part of the doctrine of the dining room involves the seats' statuses already acknowledged in Part II. This is also followed when the meal is being served: usually starting from the elder man and finishing with the person who is serving or the youngest one. The members sitting in the chairs that hold more status normally pronounce the

blessings of the food before starting to eat, during which the ancestors are remembered and made present.

These rules could pass unnoticed unless someone is part of the community. The transmission of such knowledge occurs in no random way. There are meals that are cooked by the elder member of the household, and there are some that are cooked by the older men or women. There are meals that are prepared by the woman, however it is the man who starts the fire and pours the ingredients into the pan. Such as the paella, in which the merit for the cooking process and the result is assigned to the man, although it is the woman who passes him the specific amount of ingredients, condiments and water, that have been measured, peeled, cut and rinsed. There are meals that are influenced by the harvest season calendar, in which the process of gathering, preparing or canning the food can last for weeks, and involve complex procedures that take place in the dining room.



Image 30. Family and friends around the dining table prepare Christmas sweets 'pastisets de boniato'. The process of preparing these Valencian sweets takes more than two weeks and it happens in the months of November and December.



Image 31. The harvest and tinning process of the olive is an extended practice that happens all along the Mediterranean territory. It takes place during the months of October, November and sometimes December and January too.

This knowledge is something that is transmitted in subtle ways; there is no cookbook that recompiles these characteristics, or traditional etiquette that is strictly and consciously passed onto the next generation. However, it is something that at the right age, the younger members of the household are introduced to in a natural way. For example, in my situation as a young female of a Valencian family, I was introduced to the ingredients' preparation of the paella as a young child. I learnt the order and secrets to prepare the condiments sitting at the dining table with my grandmother, mother and aunt: a bowl to soak the legumes 'garrofó', a bowl with the cut green beans 'batxoqueta', a bowl with grated tomato, the measured rice 'arròs Bomba', the saffron or colorant in lesser important occasions, the paprika, the salt, and the olive oil. They were all introduced to me because of their particular characteristics and reasons to be used among other varieties. However, as the youngest daughter, with two older brothers, I have not had the privilege of cooking the paella for the rest of the family until recently,

when I was given a paella pan when I moved to a different country. It was at that point that I started cooking the paella by myself, as I am now the oldest person in my household holding the lineage. It was not until that moment that I became aware of the presence of an unspoken rule that bestows the responsibility of cooking upon the elder members of the household, and which everyone has followed without necessarily being aware of it.



Image 32. Dining table during a meal celebration in which the seats are distributed according to the age of the family members.

These are some examples of the unspoken rules behind the Mediterranean meals and its processes; from gathering and harvesting the ingredients, preparing and cooking them, the presentation of a meal on the dining table, the action of serving it, to the transmission and preservation of them.

According to category 3 of the Thorley/Gunn Definition of sacred site and the data presented above, the characteristics that the dining room satisfies for the functional category are:

- a. It is a special place where relationships, both interpersonal and throughout the whole community can be expressed and affirmed, often through a specific form of observance, e.g., prayer, songs, chants, dance, ritual or ceremony.
- b. It is a place especially associated with resource-gathering or other key cultural activities.
- e. It is a cultural sacred-secret, with its location and/or specific religious function only known to a limited number of people.⁶⁵

It has been exposed through different examples that the purpose of the dining room serves as a place where individuals, the family and the community express and affirm kinship relationships. Characteristic a is fulfilled through specific objects, ceremonies, rituals, prayers, blessings and other cultural activities that express ties. These ties are not restricted between people, but also express the ties with the community, with a tradition, with an identity, with the ancestors, and also with the land, the soil that grows the fruit, vegetables and feeds the animals. Which all interact in the space of the dining room through the celebration of meals.

In the words of Apffel-Marglin, 'the world comes into being through intra-actions that typically take the form of rituals'.⁶⁶ Therefore, these celebrations and rituals are not representations of something, like a metaphor would imply, but they are the enactment of the real relationships in which reality is composed of; relationships between people, ancestors, place, soil, climate, animals, and so forth. In this way, the assiduous ritual of Sunday paella is not a representation of the Valencian culture, the peasantry history of the land and its fruit, vegetables and animal species; but that the relational reality comes

⁶⁵ Anthony Thorley and Celia. M. Gunn, *Sacred Sites: An Overview*, (The Gaia Foundation, 2008), p. 76-77.

⁶⁶ Frederique Apffel-Marglin, *Subversive Spiritualities: How Rituals Enact the World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 162.

into being through these interactions that take form in the rituals celebrated periodically. Like Harvey defends, the use of words like “representation” and “symbol” are indeed wrong’, as they encourage a wrong approach and misrepresentation of significant matters that require new scholarly languages for conceptualizing them.⁶⁷ In this way, to understand the lived realities of spiritual life, it is necessary to integrate its performative nature and materialization of ideas.

The act of eating is one of the main purposes of the dining room, hence it is common that this space gathers and presents the resources of food as a prevalent cultural activity and identity. In this way, characteristic b is fulfilled through the various ways of gathering, preparing and presenting the food in the form of meals. This characteristic is closely related with the previous one, as the rituals celebrated in the dining room, which express relationships, are normally cultural activities associated with the process of gathering, preparing and presenting meals in the dining table. As expressed above, these cultural activities are portrayed not only by people enacting them in the current moment, but also bringing to present the times where they were defined as a cultural habit, and also the land, its animals and the climate. In short, they enact relationships between people and the land conforming concepts of nationhood, community and identity.

This points again to the difficulty of delimiting the porous boundaries of the religion/secular dichotomy and the fluid transgression of it in people’s everyday life. Like Harvey defends, the preparation that people make for rituals are part of the

⁶⁷ Graham Harvey, *Food, Sex And Strangers. Understanding Religion As Everyday Life*, (Place: Acumen, 2013), p. 137.

religious life, therefore the setting of the table and the preliminary and post-event cleaning cannot be excluded when defining their spiritual function.⁶⁸

Lastly, the ways in which each family represents and preserves the cultural activities around the process of cooking, serving and eating the food becomes a secret doctrine that it is not shared with other families or communities. The transmission of the lineage passes from one generation to another with certain unspoken rules, which changes from one local community to another, presenting different variations. Therefore, characteristic e is fulfilled not in a conscious act of keeping a secret, but in a more unconscious process of a lore that is only known by a limited number of people that belong to a certain group.

These characteristics can only be noticed by exercising a new way of looking at familiar things. Like Lane says, it is necessary to rediscover a sense of wonder by incorporating ontological, cultural and phenomenological approaches altogether.

In summary, the dining room in the Spanish Mediterranean culture satisfies the TGD Category 3.a, b and e. In this way, the dining room is a space where relationships are expressed through specific rituals, which are normally related to cultural activities of gathering and sharing food resources. In turn, these activities are transmitted and preserved in specific ways that are only known to a limited number of people. These characteristics show that the functional role of spirituality in everyday life activities in the space of the dining room crosses the boundaries between the sacred and the profane; and moreover, it broadens the ways in which reality is normally conceived,

⁶⁸ Graham Harvey, *Food, Sex And Strangers. Understanding Religion As Everyday Life*, (Place: Acumen, 2013), p. 30.

opening it to a constant relational phenomena between human and other than human agencies.

Final Thoughts and Conclusion

The aim of this research was to investigate the role of spirituality in everyday life activates, particularly in the practices and beliefs that occur around the space of the dining room. It is concluded that the dining room in the Spanish Mediterranean culture is a sacred space.

Summarising the work presented, it is asserted that the dining room of the Spanish Mediterranean tradition satisfies the Thorley and Gunn definition of sacred site in the categories: 1.d, e, f; 2.e, f; and 3.a, b, e.

Part I presents the descriptive information of the dining room through the analysis of arrangements and objects inside the room and the location and distribution of the room inside the house. A more dynamic understanding of the sacred-profane arises when we focus on the relations between people's behaviour and the arrangements and objects of the room. In this way, the sacredness of the dining room is constituted by embodied and mundane practices that step between what is believed to be secular and spiritual.

Thus, the descriptive form of the dining room informs that it is a human constructed space, embellished with furniture and objects that hold significant symbols for the family, and that it serves as a memorial to important past events in the life of the family members.

Part II presents social, cultural and spiritual variables of the behaviours and objects in the room. The spiritual function of the dining room does not engage in transcendental believes, but in the mundane activities of reality that involve food, membership and

celebration. In this way, spirituality pervades the space of the dining room in a relational phenomena of spatial, individual, social and cultural relationships that take form in ritualistic ceremonies and symbolic objects with mundane functionalities.

Thus, the spiritual function of the dining room is based on the fact that the ancestors are constantly remembered and revered through ritualistic behaviours and photographs. Moreover, it is a space for individual and social transformation such as initiations, rites of passage and funeral ceremonies.

Part III infers the functional role of the characteristics presented in Part I and II. To understand the lived realities of spiritual life, it is necessary to integrate its performative nature and materialization of ideas. In this way, the dialogical relationships and the emotions generated in the dining room express ties between people, ancestors, place, soil and tradition; conforming concepts of community, identity and spiritual codes that bring meaning to people's conduct.

Thus, the functional role of these spiritual activities serves to express and affirm relationships through specific rituals, which normally are related to cultural activities of gathering and sharing food resources. In turn, these activities are transmitted and preserved under specific ways that are only known to a limited number of people.

The different cultural categories that the dining room satisfies, identifies the richness of its sacred qualities. It also reveals the need to contemplate the cultural bonds, and that the spiritual function needs to be addressed in ways other than under the term 'beliefs'. To perceive the sacred qualities of the dining room requires questioning the modern paradigm that perceives reality under dichotomous categories. Neither dependent on social construction nor the person's religious experience, the spiritual role of the dining

room crosses the boundaries between the sacred and the profane, opening reality to a constant relational phenomena between human and other than human subjects.

By bringing the Ecological Spiritual influence to the task of Sacred Geography, this paper sought to bring awareness and respect to a world that is inherently sacred.

This requires a shift from a predominantly anthropocentric view to an ecocentric experience of the world. To conceive everyday life activities under this shift has allowed us to perceive the landscape under a more valuable view, appreciating the relationships that are embodied in the dining room, the objects, the meals, the community and the behaviours of people. This is, to see the space as sensuous and animate.

This work arose from the concern to acknowledge the significance of the space in the spiritual practices in western contemporary society, which consequently lead to the acknowledgement of the significance of its cultures and traditions. To speak of sacred sites in everyday landscapes and in western industrialized societies acknowledges that a culture, a site or unanimated bodies are participating subjects of reality. Therefore, addressing the significance of sacred sites can also address the limitations of the current predominant materialist culture to lead a change towards new ways of relating with other people, animals, the land, and so on. Thus, addressing the significance of sacred sites in everyday spaces contributes to nurturing and supporting human societies, cultures and traditions, and opening scope for further research.

In conclusion, the aim of this research was to investigate the role of spirituality in everyday life activates in the space of the dining room. It is concluded that the dining room in the Spanish Mediterranean culture is a sacred space due to descriptive, spiritual

and functional features. The modern paradigm that perceives reality under an anthropocentric and Cartesian dominance has shown itself incapable to acknowledge this relational phenomenon. A post-modern mindset leads us to the fundamental cultural change required to acknowledge and value a relational world of meaning, this is, the universal nature of interconnectedness of the Earth and all its life as sacred.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Thorley and Gunn Operational Definition of Sacred Site 2008

SACRED SITE: AN OPERATIONAL DEFINITION

A sacred site is a place in the landscape, occasionally over or under water, which is especially revered by a people, culture or cultural group as a focus for spiritual belief and practice and likely religious observance.

In addition, to satisfy this stem definition and reflect its wide and rich variety, a sacred site must also have one or more of the following nineteen characteristics found under the headings: Descriptive, Spiritual, Functional and Other. Having more or less of these characteristics does not imply that the site is more or less sacred but it may usefully reflect the complexity and rich variety of its sacred qualities.

1. Descriptive
 - a. It is a specific focus within a wider and possibly dynamically interconnected sacred landscape.
 - b. It is, or is founded upon, a natural topographical feature, e.g., a mountain, mound, rock, cave, tree, grove, forest, spring, well, river, lake, the sea, an island, etc.
 - c. It is recognised as carrying special manifestation of wildlife, natural phenomena and ecological balance.
 - d. It is embellished with man-made symbols or artefacts, e.g., rock-carvings, painting, holy or religious objects.
 - e. It is partially or wholly man-made, e.g., menhir, temple, church, wayside shrine.
 - f. It is a memorial or mnemonic to a key recent or past event in history, legend or myth, e.g., a battle site, creation or origin myth.
2. Spiritual
 - a. It is recognised as having a palpable and special energy or power which is clearly discernible from that of a similar landscape or surrounding.
 - b. It is recognised as a special place which acts as a portal or cross-over to the spirit world.
 - c. It is recognised as the dwelling place of guardian or 'owner' spirits which care for and oversee the site and possibly its wider environs.
 - d. Its spiritual forces or 'owner' spirits are in a mutually respectful dialogue with local people with specialist knowledge acting as guardians or custodians, who play important roles as mediators, negotiators or healers between the human, natural and spiritual dimensions.

- e. It is identified as a place where the ancestors are present and especially respected, e.g., burial grounds.
 - f. It is a place of spiritual transformation for individual persons or the community, e.g., healing, baptism, initiation, religious conversion, rite of passage, funeral, vision quest.
3. Functional
- a. It is a special place where relationships, both interpersonal and throughout the whole community, can be expressed and affirmed, often through a specific form of observance, e.g., prayer, songs, chants, dance, ritual or ceremony.
 - b. It is a place especially associated with resource-gathering or other key cultural activities, e.g., gathering medicinal plants or material for sacred or ritual ceremony or objects, fishing, hunting, cultivation, burial of ritual objects, giving birth.
 - c. It is a specific pathway or route between significant or sacred places, e.g., songline, sacred pathway, pilgrimage route.
 - d. It is a focus of past or present special visits of religious observance or pilgrimage.
 - e. It is a cultural sacred-secret, with its location and/or specific religious function only known to a limited number of people.
 - f. It has a significant relationship with astronomical order and/or calendrical phenomena, e.g., astronomical alignment, celestial-Earth correspondence, seasonal ritual or festival.
4. Other
- a. It clearly satisfies the stem definition but has unique cultural features that are not represented in the previous eighteen characteristics.

Appendix 2. MA Dissertation Proposal Approval Form**Faculty of Humanities****MA Dissertation Approval Form**

Student Name	Maria Triguero Puchades
Degree Scheme	MA ECOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY
Module code	CSPH7068
Start date (This will be after you have completed your 6 th module)	01/06/2019
Completion Date (The date when your MA registration ends)	04/01/2019

I have completed Part 1 of my degree.

Please read the 'Guide to filling out your proposal' at the end of this form.

Title of Dissertation:

The dining room as sacred space: An exploration of the interactions and conventions that make the dining room sacred in the Spanish Mediterranean tradition.

Aim:

The aim of this research is to investigate the role of spirituality in everyday life activities, particularly in the practices and beliefs that occur around the space of the dining room.

In modern Spanish Mediterranean culture, the dining room is a frequented space in day-to-day life, commonly seen as a secular space where people perform activities such as eating, talking, relaxing or watching television. Nevertheless, the dining room is also a space where people embody unspoken lore of the family tradition, where predecessors are remembered or certain objects such as special chairs hold a particular status.

By bringing the attention to the ways in which humans behave in the dining room and the ways in which the space is arranged and located inside the home, this research aims to acknowledge how spirituality pervades in the quotidian space of the dining room through activities and objects such as rituals, family traditions, or decoration motifs.

Academic Rational:

The field of Sacred Geography gathers different theories from which to identify sacred principles in the land or in constructed spaces. In the first part of this research some of them will be discussed to consider the meaning of 'sacred'.

While Emile Durkheim emphasises human agency in the attribution of sacredness to the space by setting it apart from mundane activities, Mircea Eliade sees an intrinsic value within the sacred site independently of people's action.¹ Nevertheless, they both attribute special qualities to the sacred in opposition with the profane or secular.

While conceding that the 'sacred' and the 'profane' can be distinct in ideal terms, the boundaries between them can show more complexity in daily life. The work of Graham Harvey states that spirituality or religion can be recognised within ordinary life activities as the way in which people interact with the wider world.² His work will be the base from which the secular space of the dining room will be analysed as sacred.

These reflections will broaden with: the work of Barbara Bender, whose

¹ Emile Maurice Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. By Karen E. Fields, (New York: The Free Press, 1995 [1912]); Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. by Willard R. Trask, (London: Harcourt, Inc., [1957] 1987).

² Graham Harvey, *Food, Sex And Strangers. Understanding Religion As Everyday Life*, (Place: Acumen, 2013).

multidimensional understanding of sacred space focuses on the conflicts and dynamics that arise when a space is used in different ways; Kim Knott's spatial study of religion, which offers tools to analyse the location of religion in secular places; and Belden C. Lane's methodological axioms for the study of space, which underlines its connections with spirituality.³ In addition, Frédérique Apffel-Marglin and Catherine Bell's anthropological works on how to understand ritual will help to infer the interactions and conventions that bring spirituality to the space of the dining room.⁴

To which module/s of the MA does your topic related?

The choice of the present topic is a result of different modules of the MA Ecology and Spirituality; some of the learning outcomes of the modules that are related to this dissertation topic are:

- In the core module *Ecology and Spirituality*, we widely studied diverse theories related to different ways of approaching the material world, from both anthropological and experiential perspectives.
- In *The Ecological Self* module, we deepened into different ecological philosophies that reconnect humans with the natural world, such as Ecosophy and Deep Ecology theories.
- In the *Indigeny Today* module, we investigated common elements of indigenous practice that can inform personal and collective actions around place-making, home and spiritual practices such as rituals.
- In the *Sacred Activism* module, we examined the dynamics of personal and collective action in relationship with belief, values, meaning, purpose and narrative.
- Finally, in the *Sacred Geography* module, we studied different theories and practiced qualitative research around the concepts of sacred/profane space.

³ Barbara Bender, *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives*, (Oxford: Berg, 1993); Kim Knott, *The Location of Religion: A Spatial Analysis*, (London: Equinox Publishing, 2005); Belden C. Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred: Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2002 [1988]).

⁴ Frederique Apffel-Marglin, *Subversive Spiritualities: How Rituals Enact the World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Catherine M. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

What papers have you completed in the MA which are relevant to this dissertation topic? List the module and the title of the paper/s.

Ecology and Spirituality Module:

- Abram, David, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*, (London: Vintage Books, 1997).
- Harding, Stephan, *Animate Earth: Science, Intuition, and Gaia*, (Totnes, Devon: Green Books Ltd., 2006).
- Harvey, Graham, 'An Animist Manifesto', *PAN: Philosophy, Activism, Nature*, No. 9, (2012).
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- Rose, Deborah Bird, 'Val Plumwood's Philosophical Animism: Attentive Interactions in the Sentient World', *Environmental Humanities*, Vol. 3, (University of New South Wales, Australia, 2013), pp. 93-109.

The Ecological Self Module:

- Berry, Thomas and Tucker, Mary Evelyn, *Evening Thoughts: Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community*, (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2006), Ch. 2: pp. 25-32 and Ch. 4: pp. 43-58.
- Curry, Patrick, *Ecological Ethics: An Introduction*, (London: Polity Press, 2011).
- Ingold, Tim, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*, (London: Routledge, 2011).
- Macy, Joanna, *World as Lover, World as Self*, (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2003).
- Mueller, Martin Lee, *Being Salmon, Being Human*, (Vermont: Chelsea, Green Publishing, 2017).

Indigeneity Today Module:

- Bohm, David, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, (London: Routledge Classics, 1980).
- Cajete, Gregory, *Native science: natural laws of interdependence*, (Santa Fe, NM: Clear Light Publishers, 200), Ch. 2.
- Grim, John Allan, 'Indigenous Traditions: Religion and Ecology', *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, by Roger S. Gottlieb, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- Grim, John Allan and Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Ecology and Religion, Foundations of Contemporary Environmental Studies*, (London: Island Press, 2014).

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- Tuan, Y-F, *Space and place: The perspective of experience*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1977).

Sacred Activism:

- Akomolafe, Bayo, *These Wilds Beyond our Fences: Letters to my Daughter on Humanity's Search for Home*, (Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 2017).
- Apffel-Marglin, Frederique, *Subversive Spiritualities: How Rituals Enact the World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- Barad, Karen, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).
- Hinton, Peta, 'The Quantum Dance and the World's 'Extraordinary Liveliness': Refiguring Corporeal Ethics in Karen Barad's Agential Realism', *Somatechnics* 3.1 (2013): 169-189.
- La Duke, Winona, *Recovering the Sacred*, (South End Press, 2005).

Sacred Geography:

- Bender, Barbara, *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives*, (Oxford: Berg, 1993).
- Bender, Barbara, *Stonehenge: Making Space*, (Oxford: Berg, 1998).
- Durkheim, Emile Maurice, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. by Karen E. Fields, (New York: The Free Press, 1995 [1912]).
- Eliade, Mircea, *The Sacred and the Profane, the Nature of Religion*, trans. by Willard R. Trask, (London: Harcourt, Inc., 1987 [1957]).
- Heidegger, Martin, 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking', in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1975).
- Ingold, Tim, *Lines. A Brief History*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2007).
- Lane, Belden C., *Landscapes of the Sacred: Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2002 [1988]).
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962).
- Thorley, Anthony and Celia. M. Gunn, *Sacred Sites: An Overview*, (The Gaia Foundation, 2008).

- Thorley, Anthony, 'Sacred Geography: A Conceptual Work In Progress', *Spica*, Vol. IV, no 2 (April 2016) pp. 4-8, http://sophia-project.net/Spica/pdfs/SPICA_4.2.pdf
- Tilley, Christopher, *A Phenomenology of Landscape*, (Oxford: Berg, 1994).
- Whitehead, Amy, *Religious Statues and Personhood: Testing the Role of Materiality*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

Methodology:

The research methodology will consist of a phenomenological study with participant observation and reflexive ethnography: through observing other people as well as my own experiences based in the space of the dining room of three private homes situated in the Mediterranean area of Spain. In addition, these reflections will be expanded with the analysis of the photographs and plans that show how the space is arranged and how this might shape people's interactions.

Following the principles of phenomenology in the work of Christopher Tilley, the dining room will not be addressed by itself, but only in relational significance between the interactions of people and the space.⁵ Other works that will influence the way in which the fieldwork is approached and analysed will be Tim Ingold's anthropological archaeology of the line, which resituates the self and the environment as the same dynamic totality.⁶

In this way, by observing what happens in the private space of the dining room, this research methodology intends on becoming aware of how human and other-than-human agents enact through everyday life activities in spiritual practices, therefore making these secular spaces sacred sites too.

Short Introductory Bibliography 1: Secondary Sources (Scholarly Works)

- Abram, David, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*, (London: Vintage Books, 1997).
- Apffel-Marglin, Frederique, *Subversive Spiritualities: How Rituals Enact the World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- Barad, Karen, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, (Durham: Duke University Press,

⁵ Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape*, (Oxford: Berg, 1994).

⁶ Tim Ingold, *Lines. A Brief History*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2016 [2007]).

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- Barad, Karen, 'Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter', *Signs* Vol. 28 No. 3, Gender and Science: New Issues (Spring 2003), pp. 801-831. <URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/345321>> [Accessed: 7 November 2018].
- Bell, Catherine M., *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
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Short Introductory Bibliography 2: Primary Sources (Original Works/ Documents)

The primary sources of this research are the experiences of other subjects and my own, the photographs and plans of the spaces visited, and the notes taken by the researcher when observing the private space of the dining room and the interactions occurring within them, including human and non-human agents.

Time Schedule:

Regular tutorials with the supervisor
Estimated submission date 04/01/2020

Supervisor:

Dr. Andy Letcher

Please indicate whether ethical approval for project is needed – NO
(This will only be relevant if you are undertaking qualitative research)

Please indicate whether sufficient resources are available for the project – YES

The above topic, proposal, and supervisor have been agreed:



Signed:

Programme Coordinator

Date: 1/9/2019