



Postgraduate/Distance Learning Assignment coversheet & feedback form

**THIS SHEET MUST BE THE FIRST PAGE OF THE ASSIGNMENT YOU ARE SUBMITTING
(DO NOT SEND AS A SEPARATE FILE)**

For completion by the student:		
Student Name: Kimberly Corral		
Module code: HPCA7014 Module title: Sacred Geography	Student ID number: 2024486	Educational support needs: No
Module tutor: Bernadette Brady/Jack Hunter		
Assignment due date: 14 November 2022		
If your module has multiple submissions please indicate which piece of work this is.		
☒ 1 st 2 nd 3 rd 4 th 5 th 6 th		
I confirm that this is my original work and that I have adhered to the University policy on plagiarism. Signed (type your name in).....Kimberly Corral..... Email submission: if you are submitting this form via email, please tick this box ☒ (as a substitute for your signature) to confirm that you agree to the above declaration.		

Assignment Mark**Final Mark**

WILL BE GIVEN ON TURNITIN

NB. All marks are provisional until confirmed by the Final Examination Board.

PLEASE NOTE: ALL COMMENTS WILL BE POSTED ON TURNITIN

For completion by Marker 1 :

Comments:

Marker's signature:

Date:

For completion by Marker 2/Moderator:

Comments:

Marker's Signature:

Date:

AGREED INTERNAL MARK (where necessary):

Comment on process of arriving at agreed mark:

External Examiner's comments (if relevant)

External Examiner's Signature:

Date:

A Critical Comparison of two Secondary Sources

Word Count - 2250 (2362 max) - biblio 241 (2603)

Introduction

This essay critically compares and contrasts Émile Durkheim's ideas on the sacred from *The Elementary Forms of The Religious Life*¹, with those of Mircea Eliade in *The Sacred And The Profane: The Nature Of Religion*².

Context

Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) was a trained philosopher³, who Bernadette Brady described as 'considered to have been one of the founders of the discipline of sociology.'⁴ In *Forms* he set out to use ethnographic material to present a scientific study of a single society that could be used to describe the religious life of all societies. He was 'convinced that at the heart of any social group were its shared categories, or sets of symbols, that also formed the essence of religious thought.'⁵ The first publication of *Forms* appeared in 1912 and it is still an important foundational work in sociology, as evidenced by the centenary anniversary publication of a volume of articles testing Durkheim's method in other areas of social interaction and exploring the extent of his legacy.⁶

Mircea Eliade was a Romanian historian of religion and spent much of his career focused on the nature of religion.⁷ Writing *The Sacred And The Profane* some 45 years after Durkheim's *Forms*, he noted that he was at least partially responding to Hans Otto's *The Idea Of The Holy*, specifically Otto's focus on the 'irrational aspect' of religion.⁸ Although Durkheim's *Forms* appeared in the same time period as Otto's *The Idea Of The Holy*, and Eliade used Durkheim's terminology of 'sacred' and 'profane' in the main foundation of his argument, he does not reference Durkheim at all or acknowledge him as the source of those terms.⁹

Analysis

Methodology

Durkheim made his case for his theory of religious life by using anthropological information about an Australian tribe to create a case study in religion explaining how the sacred is created. He chose to make

¹ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms Of Religious Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1995).

² Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred And The Profane: The Nature Of Religion*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1959).

³ Sondra Hausner, 'Introduction: Durkheim In Disciplinary Dialogue', in *Durkheim In Dialogue*, ed. by Sondra L. Hausner (New York, Berghahn Books, 2013), p.2.

⁴ Bernadette Brady, *Émile Durkheim and Mircea Eliade* [PowerPoint presentation] HPCA7014: *Sacred Geography*. (University of Wales Trinity Saint David, 2020).

⁵ Hausner, 'Introduction', p.2.

⁶ Hausner, 'Introduction', pp.1-2.

⁷ Brady, *Durkheim and Eliade*.

⁸ Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, p.8.

⁹ Brady, *Durkheim and Eliade*.

a very archaic religion the subject of my research because it seems better suited than any other to help us comprehend the religious nature of man, that is, to reveal a fundamental and permanent aspect of humanity.

As Karen Fields noted, his work is a 'single well-constructed experiment whose results may be put forward as holding for all cases that can be shown to be of the same kind.'¹⁰ Additionally, Hausner pointed out that Durkheim's model is still useful in explaining many modern social phenomena that Durkheim could not have foreseen at the time of his writing,¹¹ which explains its continued relevance and use today.

In contrast to Durkheim, Eliade's approach was more of a philosophical exploration of the nature of the sacred and its appearance out of the profane in the form of 'hierophanies' which he defined as when 'something sacred shows itself to us'.¹² He did not reference specific religions in his study and although Eliade classified himself as a religious historian, Randall Studstill noted that Eliade argued 'historical context is irrelevant to the extent that one's focus is on the content and structure of the religious experience itself',¹³ at least partially explaining the absence of historical examples in his text. In Eliade's view, a hierophany could appear anywhere and in any context and, thus, as Jonathan Z. Smith joked, Eliade's study of religion could include any and every part of life, even secular life.¹⁴

Thus, Durkheim and Eliade took markedly different methodological approaches to their discussion of the sacred: Durkheim attempting to create a scientific case study, Eliade putting forth a philosophical argument. Both of them, however, argued for the universality of their conclusions.

The Nature of the Sacred

Although there are merits to both of their viewpoints, Durkheim and Eliade differed fundamentally in their explanation of how the sacred is formed. For Durkheim, 'what defines the sacred is that the sacred is added to the real.'¹⁵ He argued that this process occurred through society, and that, in fact, 'religion is an eminently social thing.'¹⁶ As Edward Casey summarized, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) had philosophized in 1768 that 'things are not oriented in and by themselves; they require our intervention to *become* oriented.'¹⁷ Durkheim repeated Kant's idea, maintaining that space and time are social constructs that humans create in order to communicate and relate to one another, an idea he then expanded out to include religion.¹⁸ 'Religious representations,' he explained, 'are collective representations that express collective realities.'¹⁹ According to Hausner, with this view, Durkheim made sociality and religion equally significant, a position which continues to cause issues for theologians

¹⁰ Karen E. Fields, 'Translator's Introduction: Religion As An Eminently Social Thing' in *The Elementary Forms Of Religious Life* by Émile Durkheim (New York: The Free Press, 1995), p. xxxviii.

¹¹ Hausner, 'Introduction', p.3.

¹² Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, p.11.

¹³ Randall Studstill, 'Eliade, Phenomenology And The Sacred', *Religious Studies*, 36.2 (2000), p.179.

¹⁴ Smith, Jonathan Z., 'Morphology And History In Mircea Eliade's "Patterns In Comparative Religion" (1949-1999), Part 2: The Texture Of The Work', *History Of Religions*, 39.4 (2000), p.334.

¹⁵ Durkheim, *Forms*, p.424.

¹⁶ Durkheim, *Forms*, p.9.

¹⁷ Edward S. Casey, *The Fate Of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998), p.205.

¹⁸ Durkheim, *Forms*, p.11.

¹⁹ Durkheim, *Forms*, p.424.

and secularists alike.²⁰ Theologians, Hausner continued, fear that religion loses its meaning when reduced to a social activity, whereas secularists chafe at having social phenomena given a religious overlay. In her view, both sides have misunderstood Durkheim's point, which was that 'religion is primary, and perhaps universal, because it is the mechanism that enables collectives to bind together.'²¹ In this way, Durkheim put forth, 'There are no religions that are false. All are true after their own fashion. All fulfill given conditions of human existence.'²²

In contrast, Eliade, although adopting Durkheim's terms of 'sacred' and 'profane', had a view of the sacred that was closer to Otto's 'numinous', which Otto described as 'a felt something...to which the mind turns spontaneously'.²³ Otto later likened this experience to the attraction of encountering a ghost, which is

a thing that 'doesn't really exist at all', the 'wholly other', something which has no place in our scheme of reality but belongs to an absolutely different one, and which at the same time arouses an irrepressible interest in the mind.

For Eliade the whole world was made up of the chaos of the profane, out of which came 'irruptions of hierophanies, which define a center point from which man can orient himself'.²⁴ These hierophanies are not the same as the place or object where they occur; instead they are overlayed onto them. The rock is still a rock and the tree is still a tree, but, in an echo of Otto's ghost, 'they are *hierophanies* because they show something that is no longer stone or tree, but the *sacred*, the *ganz andere*'.²⁵ Kim Knott disagreed that space outside the hierophany is chaos or undefined nothingness.²⁶ 'Space' she argued, 'is not an empty container or tabula rasa in which other things are placed or against which they happen. Space is multi-dimensional.' Casey further pointed out that this idea of 'space as something infinite and ubiquitous coincided with the spread of Christianity, a religion with universalist ambitions.'²⁷ Indeed, Eliade explained that hierophanies are not always recognizable to everyone, but that to religious man, 'the cosmos in its entirety can become a hierophany.'²⁸

In Durkheim's collective reality, the sacred rock or tree above can only become sacred through the force of ritual. From his study, he concluded that 'rites are ways of acting that are born only in the midst of assembled groups and whose purpose is to evoke, maintain, or recreate certain mental states of those groups.'²⁹ Objects or spaces could be made sacred through these rites and then carried the energy or the memory of the mental state for the group. Unlike Eliade's independently occurring hierophanies, though, the sacredness eventually wears off and has to be renewed. As Fields clarified, 'nothing that must be imagined "always exists," but must be continuously reimagined through human doing. This is just as true of moral community as it is of sacred objects.'³⁰ There are certainly echoes of this in Eliade's

²⁰ Hausner, 'Introduction', p.4.

²¹ Hausner, 'Introduction', p.4.

²² Durkheim, *Forms*, p.2.

²³ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea Of The Holy* (London, Oxford University Press, 1923), p.11.

²⁴ Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, p.21.

²⁵ Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, p.12.

²⁶ Kim Knott, 'Spatial Theory And Method For The Study Of Religion', *Temenos*, 41.2 (2005), p.160.

²⁷ Casey, *Fate of Place*, Loc. 143.

²⁸ Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, p.12.

²⁹ Durkheim, *Forms*, p.9.

³⁰ Fields, 'Translator's Introduction', p.xlv.

descriptions of the construction of sacred space. As the hierophany was the center around which to orient, communities built sacred spaces or communities around the perceived hierophany, often leaving a space or an opening in the center, through which to communicate with the gods.³¹ If no hierophany appeared, it could be 'provoked' by requesting a 'signs' as to where to build sacred space or the home or the village.³² These places were then special; there was a threshold that separated them from the surrounding profane space and crossing that threshold in turn allowed humans to enter the realm of the sacred.³³ Unlike Durkheim's sacred places, Eliade's hierophanies did not need to be renewed; they existed regardless of whether they were recognized and honored or not. This is, however, not always how built sacred places are treated today. Jane Hubert used the example of Christian churches to explain part of the disconnect between Western society and indigenous peoples around the world – in the Western world, 'it is possible to deconsecrate sites. ... Thus the sacredness of the church is not something that is inherent in the place itself.'³⁴ This certainly reflects a more Durheimian way of seeing things in practice and runs contrary to indigenous worldviews.

In summary, Durkheim and Eliade had opposing views on how the 'sacred' came into being. For Durkheim, the sacred was created by humans to recreate and remember collective mental states and was a necessary social construction. Eliade, on the other hand, believed that the sacred irrupted out of the surrounding profane and created orientation points for religious man. Though both of them described how sacred space could be created through ritual and a separation of the space from the profane, Eliade's religious man was creating a place for divine communication at an existing hierophany, whereas Durkheim's was creating and maintaining sacred space from scratch.

Echoes

Throughout the literature on landscape and sacred place, there are echoes of both Durkheim and Eliade, often in combination. This is evident in Belden Lane's first two axioms.³⁵ The first, 'sacred place is not chosen'³⁶ is clearly Eliadian, while the second, 'sacred place is ordinary place, ritually made extraordinary',³⁷ hearkens back to Durkheim. Lane brought these seemingly disparate viewpoints together by concluding that

Sacred place, we have said, seems to have an unaccountable identity distinct and separate from those who move in and through it. Indeed, it appears that, from one point of view, place creates people. But it is equally the case, from another point of view that, that people create place. We form significant locales out of our memories, our relationships with others, a whole network of associations sacred and profane.³⁸

Catherine Allerton expressed a similar view when she stated that landscape is neither purely natural or social, but rather 'a historical process of interaction between people and the environment in which both

³¹ Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, p.26.

³² Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, p.27.

³³ Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, p.25.

³⁴ Jane Hubert, 'Sacred Beliefs And Beliefs Of Sacredness', in *Sacred Sites, Sacred Places*, ed. by David Carmichael, Jane Hubert and Brian Reeves (London: Routledge, 1994), p.14.

³⁵ Belden C. Lane, *Landscapes Of The Sacred: Geography And Narrative In American Spirituality* (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002). p.19.

³⁶ Lane, *Landscapes*, p.19.

³⁷ Lane, *Landscapes*, p.19.

³⁸ Lane, *Landscapes*, p.24.

are shaped.³⁹ Her description of spirit landscapes as having ‘mysterious realms lying beyond, behind or immanent within the visible earth,’⁴⁰ is reminiscent of Eliade’s hierophanies, while her admonition that researchers should respect the local people’s claims of agency in relation to their landscapes⁴¹ is supported by Durkheim’s view that no religion is false.

The work of Durkheim and Eliade continues to inform discussion around sacred place and how they are experienced or created. Though they took different approaches to the subject, their ideas can be seen as complementary and are still relevant in the exploration of not only the study of religion, but also the determination of what is sacred, who gets to determine that and how conflicts in perception can be understood.

Conclusion

Writing about 45 years apart, Durkheim and Eliade presented their explanations of the sacred and the profane quite differently. Durkheim modeled his study on the scientific method to create a compelling case for how the sacred comes into being while Eliade put forth a philosophical argument on the nature of the sacred itself.

In addition to methodological differences, Durkheim and Eliade also diverged on how the ‘sacred’ occurred. Durkheim argued that the sacred was created by humans as a social construction. Eliade, on the other hand, believed that the sacred irrupted out of the profane and created central points of orientation. Though they agreed that sacred space could be created and strengthened through ritual, Eliade’s believed the space was built around an existing hierophany, whereas Durkheim put forth that it was entirely created by man.

These opposing views of Durkheim and Eliade continue to be relevant and provide context to the creation and recognition of sacred places today. A combination of their ideas, such as Lane’s four axioms can be useful to expand thinking around what is sacred and to help us understand varying perceptions of how sacred space can be understood and protected.

³⁹ Catherine Allerton, ‘Introduction: Spiritual Landscapes Of Southeast Asia’, *Anthropological Forum*, 19.3 (2009), p.2.

⁴⁰ Allerton, ‘Introduction’, p.4.

⁴¹ Allerton, ‘Introduction’, p.12.

Resources

Allerton, Catherine, 'Introduction: Spiritual Landscapes Of Southeast Asia', *Anthropological Forum*, 19.3 (2009), 235-251

Brady, Bernadette, *Émile Durkheim and Mircea Eliade* [PowerPoint presentation] HPCA7014: *Sacred Geography*. (University of Wales Trinity Saint David, 2020)

Casey, Edward S., *The Fate Of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998)

Durkheim, Émile, *The Elementary Forms Of Religious Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1995)

Fields, Karen E., 'Translator's Introduction: Religion As An Eminently Social Thing' in *The Elementary Forms Of Religious Life* by Émile Durkheim (New York: The Free Press, 1995), xvii-lxxiii

Eliade, Mircea, *The Sacred And The Profane: The Nature Of Religion*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1961)

Hausner, Sondra, 'Introduction: Durkheim In Disciplinary Dialogue', in *Durkheim In Dialogue*, ed. by Sondra L. Hausner (New York, Berghahn Books, 2013), 1-16

Hubert, Jane, 'Sacred Beliefs And Beliefs Of Sacredness', in *Sacred Sites, Sacred Places*, ed. by David Carmichael, Jane Hubert and Brian Reeves (London: Routledge, 1994)

Knott, Kim, 'Spatial Theory And Method For The Study Of Religion', *Temenos*, 41.2 (2005), 153-184

Lane, Belden C., *Landscapes Of The Sacred: Geography And Narrative In American Spirituality* (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002)

Otto, Rudolf, *The Idea Of The Holy* (London, Oxford University Press, 1923)

Smith, Jonathan Z., 'Morphology And History In Mircea Eliade's "Patterns In Comparative Religion" (1949-1999), Part 2: The Texture Of The Work', *History Of Religions*, 39.4 (2000), 332-351

Studstill, Randall, 'Eliade, Phenomenology And The Sacred', *Religious Studies*, 36.2 (2000), 177-194