

PLACES IN MOTION

*The Fluid Identities of Temples,
Images, and Pilgrims*



JACOB N. KINNARD

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Preface: The Questions of Places

This is a call, then, for attention to religious messiness, to multiplicities, to seeing religious spaces as always, inevitably, and profoundly intersected by things brought into them from outside, things that bear their own histories, complexities, meanings different from those offered within the religious space.

—ROBERT ORSI¹

The same place at the same moment will be experienced differently by different people; the same place, at different moments, will be experienced differently by the same person; the same person may even, at a given moment, hold conflicting feelings about a place. When, in addition, one considers the variable effects of historical and cultural particularity, the permutations on how people interact with place and landscape are almost unending, and the possibilities for disagreement about, and contest over, landscape are equally so.

—BARBARA BENDER²

ON A BLAZING morning in June of 1995, I boarded a small regional bus in Bodhgayā, in the north Indian state of Bihar, for a two-hour ride to Rājgir. I was finishing research on a project on medieval Buddhist art and was stopping in Rājgir on my way to see the ruins of Nālandā, which is the site of what was one of the largest and most important Buddhist monasteries in medieval India. Rājgir is a famous Buddhist site as well: in the Pāl Canon, it is mentioned as the place where the Buddha, after attaining enlightenment at Bodhgayā, spent several months meditating and teaching—he is

said to have delivered the "Heart Sutra" in Rājgir, at "Vulture's Peak." He also is said to have converted King Bimbisara, one of the first royal patrons of Buddhism, at Rājgir. It is also the site of the First Buddhist Council. Although it is not certain when it became a significant pilgrimage place for Buddhists, the Chinese pilgrim Faxian saw it as important enough that he visited the site in the fourth century C.E. as part of his grand tour of Buddhist sites in India. Here is his description:

Entering the valley, and keeping along the mountains on the south-east, after ascending fifteen le, (the travellers) came to mount Gridhira-kuta. Three le before you reach the top, there is a cavern in the rocks, facing the south, in which Buddha sat in meditation. Thirty paces to the north-west there is another, where Ananda was sitting in meditation, when the deva Mara Pisuna, having assumed the form of a large vulture, took his place in front of the cavern, and frightened the disciple. Then Buddha, by his mysterious, supernatural power, made a cleft in the rock, introduced his hand, and stroked Ananda's shoulder, so that his fear immediately died. The footprints of the bird and the cleft for (Buddha's) hand are still there, and hence comes the name of "The Hill of the Vulture Cavern."

One of the images on which I was working at the time was the *Aṣṭamahāpratihārya*, the depiction of the eight great pilgrimage places associated with the life of the Buddha that seem to have presented a kind of virtual pilgrimage route of many of the places that Faxian visited,⁴ although most Buddhists could not practically visit all of these sites, which would have required months, if not years, of grueling and dangerous travel, they could experience them via the sculptural representation of the group. All of these places are located in northeastern and north central India, and I had hoped to visit each one during my research (Bodhgayā and Nālandā are both included). In the sculptural depiction of Rājgir, it is the place where the Buddha tames the wild elephant Nālagiri, who has been unleashed to trample the Buddha by the schismatic monk Devadatta.

Despite its importance in Buddhist literature and art, there was not much to the town, as I remember—a scattering of stalls for the pilgrims and tourists. With some difficulty I was able to discern the way to Vulture's Peak and set out to climb it. It was very hot and very dry, the monsoons having not yet begun, and I remember feeling that I was

crazy for setting out. It was also not pilgrimage season, for good reason, given the pounding heat. As I climbed, there wasn't another person in sight, a rare thing in India, and I felt rather anxious, worried that I was climbing the wrong hill, since the directions I was able to get consisted of a vague wave in the direction of a rocky hill. I was perhaps half way up when the trail suddenly became crowded with young men on their way down. They were all wearing loose white pants and shirts, and each had an identical red scarf wrapped around his shoulders with images of Śiva on it. After passing dozens of these young men, who were staring at me as if I were some sort of alien creature, I finally stopped one of them and asked what they were doing there. "We have come to visit Buddha!" he shouted, and then loudly bellowed "Jai Śiva! Sankar! Jai Māhadev!" which was then echoed up and down the trail as his fellow pilgrims returned the call.

What were these Śaiva pilgrims doing there? Why were they visiting a Buddhist site? I had seen Vaiṣṇava pilgrims at Bodhgayā, certainly, but the presence of these Śaivas puzzled me. Rājgir is a pilgrimage town, and pilgrims from a number of different strands of Hinduism, as well as Buddhists and sometimes Muslims, visit the seven peaks and the various temples located in the area. This much I knew before my trip, but I had assumed that pilgrims would visit the places specifically associated with their own religious tradition—Hindus to the Hindu sites, Jains to the Jain sites, and so on. What I didn't understand was why Śaivas would have any interest in a Buddhist place.

Looking back, I am a little embarrassed at my surprise at seeing these young Śaiva pilgrims on Vulture's Peak. Not because I didn't realize that Śaivas visited the site, which was an acceptable kind of ignorance—and I must admit that I still do not know if they were visiting as part of a standard pilgrimage route, or if they had simply made a slight detour for some other reason (such as simple curiosity). There is often an ad hoc aspect to pilgrimage in India, as there is elsewhere. Individual pilgrims make little side trips, sometimes for what we might label "religious" reasons, sometimes for what seems more like tourism. No, I am not chagrined by my ignorance of the details here, but rather by my surprise at thinking these Śaivas didn't belong, that they were, essentially, trespassing on Buddhist ground. It is this kind of World Religions view of what people should and should not do that troubles me still, a discomfort with the fact that even after years of studying comparative religions, I could so easily fall into such an essentialist division of the religious world.

Weeks after my climb up Vulture's Peak, I returned to Bodhgayā and stayed for several more weeks. I had essentially finished my work there but stayed in part because I now found myself looking at the people who milled around the great Mahabodhi temple with very different eyes. During my prior visits to Bodhgayā, I had had this idea that there were three sorts of people who traveled there: Buddhists, Hindus, and foreign tourists. However, the more time I spent there actually paying attention to who these people actually were and what they were doing in the temple's environs, the more I realized how wrongheaded this neat division was. First, there were the Buddhists. Although I am not an anthropologist and was doing archaeological and art historical research at Bodhgayā, I had spent enough time there that it was obvious to me, just on the surface, that not all Buddhist pilgrims were the same. There were Tibetans, Burmese, Japanese, Sri Lankas, and others. There was also a sizeable Ambedkar, or Dait, Buddhist presence at Bodhgayā. These are the formerly untouchable Hindus who, following the example of A. K. Ambedkar—one of the drafters of the Indian Constitution and the country's first Law Minister, who became a Buddhist in 1956 to protest the harsh caste divisions in India—have converted to Buddhism. The Hindu pilgrims, likewise, were not uniform: I had earlier assumed that they were Vaisnavas who had come to the region to visit Gayā, but I began to notice a sizeable number of Śaivas at Bodhgayā as well. There were also many Indians who seemed simply to be on holiday, visiting this significant archaeological site as tourists. And then there were the Western tourists, some of whom had come on tour buses, some of whom were backpackers, and some of whom were clearly Buddhists and had come as pilgrims, and so were not really tourists at all.

I had, over the course of several years, probably spent a total of two months in Bodhgayā, but now, having had something of an epiphany on Vulture's Peak in Rājgir, I was struck by the fact that I had been paying attention to almost nothing other than Buddhist iconography. I realized that I'd barely noticed the Hindus at Bodhgayā, nor paid any sort of attention to what they actually did there. After my trip to Rājgir, it was clear to me that my understanding of Bodhgayā as a religious place, and my assumptions about the sorts of religious people who visited it, needed serious revisions. So once I finished my book on Buddhist art, I turned my attention to the complex social history of Bodhgayā, and in particular to the colonial construction of it as the center of the Buddhist world—largely to the exclusion of the Hindus who also claimed it as a

pilgrimage place. Several of the chapters that make up this book are the result of that research.

The more I worked on Bodhgayā, though, the more I became convinced that I needed to address a larger issue in the study of religions: namely, the easy assumptions that we—academics and non-academics alike—adopt about the singular, static identities of religious people, religious objects, and religiously significant places. When a person we identify as a Vaisnava Hindu goes to a place we identify as a Buddhist temple and performs an act we identify as a Hindu ritual that is directed toward an object that we identify as a Buddhist image, what is going on? And what about when, a few moments later, a Buddhist performs a different ritual act before the very same image? Or what about when a Hindu goes to a Muslim tomb to pray to a Sufi saint? Or when a Christian in South India prays before an image of Kṛṣṇa? Who is the “we” doing the identifying here, and what sorts of political and social complexities are masked by the labels we affix to people and places? What are the power dynamics in the affixing of such labels?

These are complicated questions, certainly, and I offer up no simple answers in the pages that follow. Rather, it is the questions themselves that I find most interesting, and in the chapters that make up this book I explore specific instances of what I see as the vibrant messiness of religious practice, the multivocality of religious objects, the fluid and hybrid dynamics of religious places, and the shifting and tangled identities of religious actors. When I first began to teach comparative religions, these issues seemed far less complicated to me than they do now. Indeed, the more I know about the religions on which I write and about which I teach, the more I think that many of the ways we talk and write about such matters are simply wrongheaded, and do not line up with the ways in which religions have played out on the ground. For instance, in my introductory classes—inevitably some variation of “World Religions”—I had long been of the habit of beginning each section on each individual religion with a basic question: What are the minimal conditions to be a Hindu, or a Buddhist, or a Christian? This struck me as a good way to think about identity and belonging, to think about the beliefs or practices that all members of a particular religion held in common.

When I took up my current position at Iliff School of Theology, after having spent a decade teaching in liberal arts colleges, I was immediately confronted with the fallaciousness of my thinking. “What are the minimal

conditions for being a Christian?" I asked on my first day of teaching. I expected my students—liberal Protestants, mostly—to give the usual answer: belief and faith that Christ is who Christians say he is. I was met, however, with puzzled looks and wrinkled noses. Silence. So I offered up a possibility: "How about belief that Jesus Christ died for your sins? That faith in him guarantees salvation? Or how about baptism—you're dipped and you're in." Someone snickered, "Seriously?" A student in the back shouted, "I don't believe that!" A cacophony of dissent, which was followed by a long discussion—lesson plan scrapped—about what it means to be a Christian *and* a liberal, or *and* a lesbian, or *and* a gay black man, or—and this one still intrigues and puzzles and challenges me—a Christian *and* an atheist. For my students, there could be no minimal conditions for religious identity: Christian identity for them is fluid and contextual and highly subjective, all the way down.

The Saiva pilgrims I encountered on Vulture's Peak were certainly Hindus, and they were certainly Saivas. Visiting what is labeled a Buddhist place did not change that. Hindus who perform *pūjās* to what was originally constructed as an image of the Buddha do not change that original identity. However, for the practitioner the identity of the image or the temple is, at least temporarily, changed. It is, for the Hindu, an image of Viṣṇu. And it is also an image of the Buddha. This is complicated. I am reminded of this each day as I drive home from my office: I pass a condominium building that was until a few years ago a Methodist church. It still looks like a church, but it is clearly no longer a church, having been converted into two very expensive condominiums. I wonder about the space, about how "churchy" it still feels inside; I wonder about the people who live there, and whether it is important to them that they live in what used to be a church; I wonder if it feels like a different sort of living space than, say, a tract house on a cul-de-sac in the suburbs, and what, really, the difference is.

I have found it very useful to think with a rather large grouping of theorists while writing this book. Some I have engaged quite explicitly, and they appear throughout these chapters; others have informed my thinking in significant ways but make only cameo appearances in the text, and some do not appear at all except in the bibliography. I think of all of these theorists, and really everyone I have read in relationship to writing this book, as part of the conversation. It is, to my mind, a more interesting and engaging conversation because there are so many people talking, but I recognize that some readers will find this sort of methodological

eclecticism frustrating, wishing that I had, instead, relied more heavily and consistently on only one or two theorists.

In this regard, I am in agreement with Edward Soja, himself one of the most influential recent writers on space and place—and very much one of the people I have thought with while writing this book—who takes an intentionally interdisciplinary and trans-theoretical approach in his work, and who is quite explicit about his use of other theorists. Soja urges us to "set aside the demands to make an either/or choice and contemplate instead the possibility of a both/and also logic, one that not only permits but encourages a creative combination of postmodernist and modernist perspectives, even when a specific form of postmodernism is being highlighted" Borrowing from Henri Lefebvre, Soja uses the term *transdisciplinary* to describe his methodology, by which he means the interplay of historicality, sociality, and spatiality. This is Soja's rewording of Lefebvre, who describes his own methodology as *un dialectique de triplicité*, a "triple dialectic." I do not claim to be anywhere near as sophisticated a thinker as Soja (or Lefebvre!) but my own multidisciplinary approach has been an intentional and really unavoidable move on my part. This is simply how I think through the issues in which I am interested. I also believe that we better understand the kinds of places that I discuss when we approach them from multiple directions. Indeed, much as we see and experience a temple or a church differently when we approach it from the front or the back, or sit in the center or the side, so too do I think we understand these places better when we engage a variety of interpretive and analytical positions.

The various places that I discuss here are what we might call, borrowing Soja's terminology—which he in turn explicitly borrows from Lefebvre—Firstplaces. That is, they are physical places, places that are made up of material—buildings and walkways and trees and dirt. John Bergquist has called these "geophysical realities . . . the concrete materiality of spatial forms . . . things that can be empirically mapped."⁶ But through human use these places become what Soja calls Thirdspace—they exist not only in the physical realm, but also in practice and ideology. A great deal has been written on Soja's notion of Thirdspace; it is a complex, slippery, and often frustrating concept. That said, I have very much had the idea in my head as I have written these chapters. In Thirdspace, Soja posits, things come together and interact, intertwine, and tangle: "subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency,

mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history."⁷ Another way to put this is that religiously significant places—Ayodhya, Bodhgaya, Mato Tipila, Karbala, and so on—become overdetermined through use and association, and thus are freighted with all sorts of social and political and mythological and theological significances.

These places also can be understood as what Soja calls Secondspace, by which he means imagined space, or "ideas about space, . . . thoughtful re-presentations of human spatiality in mental or cognitive forms."⁸ Soja's Secondspace is the Bodhgaya in Edwin Arnold's imagination, the idealized version of this elemental Buddhist place that I discuss in Chapter 4, a Buddhist Jerusalem that Arnold had formed through reading Buddhist texts in his study in London, an imagined place that very much clashed, when he finally made his pilgrimage, with the messy, lived Thirdspace—and Firstspace as well—reality that he encountered in India. Karbala could also be understood as Secondspace, for as will become evident in Chapter 6, Karbala is both a physical place—a Firstspace—as well as a highly charged idea, a kind of orienting virtual place that is at the very core of Shi'a Muslim identity. Karbala is also very much a Thirdspace in Soja's sense. Likewise, the area in lower Manhattan known as Ground Zero after the attacks on September 11, 2001, which is the topic of Chapter 2, has come to occupy a metaphorical place in American discourse and imagination, and so it too could be understood to be Secondspace (as well, again, as Firstspace, and Thirdspace). What all of this highlights, I think, is that places are very much not limited to their physical dimensions, to the stone and steel with which they are constructed. They become embedded in our individual and collective imaginations, and as such become part of the ongoing formation of our identities. The early nineteenth-century house I lived in for the first seven years of my life may no longer physically exist—this I do not know, actually—but it is very much present in my imagination and a part of my sense of myself.

Although it may not always seem to be the case, I have actually tried to downplay the theoretical in these chapters, have tried to resist the academic urge to inject theory into every paragraph. This is not a book about Soja, nor is it an extended application of his theoretical position (or, more properly, positions). It is my hope that more theoretically inclined readers will hear Soja and Lefebvre and Foucault and Heidegger and many others with whom I have thought at critical junctures, but hear them as part of, and not as dominating, the conversation.

This is very much intended to be an inter- and intra-disciplinary book, and as I have said, a theoretically eclectic one. Indeed, in the second volume of his trilogy on space and place, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Soja makes what I think is an elegant defense of this sort of methodological and theoretical promiscuity (as it has sometimes been derisively called). What he describes as his "creative combination of postmodernist and modernist perspectives" is intended to be a methodological invitation—and not, I think, a dogmatically prescribed method or theory:

It is instead an efficient invitation to enter a space of extraordinary openness, a place of critical exchange where the geographical imagination can be expanded to encompass a multiplicity of perspectives that have heretofore been considered by the epistemological references to be incompatible, uncombinable.⁹

One of my own teachers, Wendy Doniger, has used the image of the bricoleur—which she in turn has borrowed, as have many others, from Claude Lévi-Strauss—to describe what she thinks is the most appropriate methodological stance for the scholar of religion: we are jacks-of-all-trades, using whatever tools we have at our disposal to get the job done.¹⁰

The job, in this case, is comparison. Jonathan Z. Smith, who along with Pierre Bourdieu often dominates my particular scholarly conversation, has emphasized throughout his work that comparison is a matter of difference:

As Lévi-Strauss, among others, has convincingly demonstrated, when we confront difference we do not encounter irrationality or bad faith but rather the very essence of thought. Meaning is made possible by difference. Yet thought seeks to bring together what thought necessarily takes apart by means of a dynamic process of disassemblage and reassemblage, which results in an object no longer natural but rather social, no longer factual but rather intellectual. Relations are discovered and reconstituted through projects of differentiation.¹¹

Difference is where the interest lies, as I find I must frequently remind my students, who tend to want to stop at surface similarities. Although they often wish to see Christianity in Buddhism, to see the Buddha or Kṛṣṇa as

a Christ figure, it is in the differences between the two traditions or figures where the conversation gets interesting. Again, for anyone who has read Smith, this is the foundation upon which all of his work is based.

That said, Smith has also pointed out that comparison begins with some sense of similarity—otherwise there would be no conversation. So what is the logic of comparing the places that I discuss in the following chapters? All of these places are religiously significant; they are what many people call sacred places. This commonality is what gets the conversation going: in what way sacred, though? sacred for whom? sacred why? I will have significantly more to say about the sacred later in the book, but I want to emphasize at the outset that these places are conceived as sacred by someone. As Rob Shields puts it, “Sites are never simply locations. Rather, they are sites for someone, and of something.”¹² My point is perhaps too obvious, but I shall make it nonetheless: sacred is a designation, an argument to be made. Individuals and communities make places sacred. I am paraphrasing Smith here, but I want to push this, and ask, bluntly and basically: what do we get, in the end, by comparing these places, by thinking of these places—and the objects that are placed in and at them which make them sacred—in relation to one another? What sort of relation are we talking about?

Thinking about the various theoretical discussions of space that are out there—and theorizing about space has, since Lefebvre and then Soja’s work on place and space, become its own academic cottage industry—it is tempting to offer up a general theory of the places I discuss, a theory that would in some way unify my discussion, and neatly answer my questions.¹³ I find it difficult to imagine what such a theory might look like, though—these are all Thirdspaces... they are messy, conflicted, inconsistent... and that is the nature of such places. But that is not a theory—that is simply a fact. I am not sure that a theory would be possible here, precisely because these places are in motion and are constantly changing in relation to the complex agents who make and use and transform them. In this sense, Soja’s Thirdspace is a good orienting point for me, but again, I am not sure that it is so much a theory as a descriptive and analytical category: “Thirdspace is a purposefully tentative and flexible term that attempts to capture what is actually a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances, and meanings.”¹⁴ As such, it is an appropriate way to think about what I call places in motion. Thus what I strive for here is the application of theories as they are useful, as they help us understand these places. I thus align myself with Shields,

when he writes at the beginning of his own ruminations on space and place: “This is an exploratory work, a book of reappraisals and rereadings of the taken-for-granted, which sets out to cover a great deal of terrain and to produce a workable mapping of the cultural importance of the spatial.”¹⁵ This is an iteration that I must say I wish I had come up with on my own.

Thus a way to think about how the different places I discuss relate to each other is that they are places on a conceptual map, a map that I have constructed, a map that is not a reflection of the way things actually are (as if any map is ever that). I have in mind here a kind of thematic map, or the kind of map I can conjure up on the GPS in my car, one that locates, say, gas stations or hospitals or state parks. The map itself is what puts these places in relation to one another. Put another way, contested conceptions of religiously significant places and objects is what brings these various examples together. With a different map there would be a different organizational, or relational, logic. What do the shrines of John the Baptist and Hussein’s heads at the Great Mosque of Damascus have to do with, say, Ground Zero or Ayodhya or Mato Tipila? They are all religiously charged places of contestation. Sometimes it is sacredness itself that is contested: one group simply does not recognize or accept the claim of sacredness (as is the case at Mato Tipila and, to a degree, Ground Zero). More typically, though, sacrality is claimed by more than one group, and so it is not so much the place’s sacrality itself that is at issue, but what sort of sacrality it is. Whose sacred is it?

It is this question that makes me often go back to that encounter with the Śaiva pilgrims on Vulture’s Peak: I am struck, still, by how very little I know about why they were there and what they did. Did they perform a *pūja* to the image of the Buddha? Did they see the image as an image from another religion, or did they see it as a *mūrti* of Viṣṇu, as an embodiment of the god on earth? What sites had they visited before their climb, and where were they going next?

When I returned to Bodhgayā after my time in Raigir, I spent a great deal of time talking with pilgrims, particularly Hindu pilgrims. “Why are you worshipping this image?” I would ask. Retrospectively it was at the very least a decidedly unsubtle question: did they see the image as an image, or as a *mūrti*, as a living god? “Is it the Buddha, or Viṣṇu?” Again, wrong question, because I assumed at the time that it had to be one or the other. Open any World Religions textbook, and there will be a chapter on Hinduism, followed by a chapter on Buddhism. Some will explain that Buddhism grew out of, or broke away from Hinduism.

They are separate religions—chapter four, and then chapter five. But is that in fact how people have experienced these traditions, on the ground? Is that how the places associated with these traditions have been experienced? So many questions. In the end, it is these questions, and so many others, that have informed my study of religions. “What’s going on here?” This is the first question I bring to each of the places I discuss in this book.

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constitutes its sacrality, and what does the articulation of a discourse of sacredness vis-à-vis this particular place actually entail? Some of the same issues at play at Ayodhya are also present there. In particular, I wish to analyze the rancor over the Park 51 project—the so-called “Ground Zero Mosque”—and the fight over not only the identity of the space itself, but also the people who participate in this space.

2

Power Fallen from the Sky

2.1 The Seats of the Goddess

Sites are never simply locations. Rather, they are sites for someone, and of something. The cultural context of images and myths adds a socially constructed level of meaning to the genus loci, the classics’ “unique sense of place,” said to derive from the forms of the physical environment in a given site.

—ROB SHIELDS¹

IT WOULD HARDLY be an exaggeration to say that the most discussed, debated, and analyzed place in the United States for the first decade of the twenty-first century has been the site where the World Trade Center towers had stood until September 11, 2001. For many Americans, this is hallowed ground, a most charged and sacred place, but swirling about the site is an array of questions concerning the space it actually occupies and the precise terms of its sacredness. What sort of place is this? What constitutes its sacrality? Where does its sacredness begin, and where does it end? Who has access to, or can participate in, this sacrality—and, perhaps more to the point, who cannot? This is a most complex place, a messy and ambiguous physical area that embodies a range of contested meanings.

Places that are regarded as sacred, such as Ayodhya, or Jerusalem, or the site where the World Trade Center towers once stood, become sacred because of something that happened there, or something that mythically took place there, or because of something that is located there. But such myths and etologies and histories tell only part of the story. There is also the human use of and discussion about such places. There are

often competing versions of the significance of a site, such as in the case of Ayodhya: or the same physical object that lends power to the site is regarded quite differently by different groups, such as the footprints at Bodhgyā and Gayā, which I will discuss in subsequent chapters, that are alternately regarded as belonging to either the Buddha or Viṣṇu (or, for some, both the Buddha and Viṣṇu).

Before I turn to the contested place where the Twin Towers once stood, I wish to go on a bit of a tangent, but what I think is a relevant tangent. In the small town of Tarapur, three hundred miles north of Calcutta, in the Indian state of West Bengal, there is a temple dedicated to the Hindu goddess Tārā. People come to the temple to make offerings to her, so that they can receive some of her awesome power, they ask her for boons, for protection, for fertility. Tārāpīṭh, the temple, is a mostly local place visited by local Hindus, although despite its remote location and relatively small size it is also an important national pilgrimage place.² There are several stories that relate the temple's significance. One holds that this is where Saṭi's third eye, her eye of insight, fell.³ Tārāpīṭh, according to this version of its origins, is one of dozens of temples known as *śāktia pīṭhas*, places—literally “seats”—that are thought to embody the power of the goddess, her *śākti*. Some of these places are quite well known, such as the famous Kalighat temple in Calcutta, while others, such as Tārāpīṭh, are rather obscure and located in very remote places. There are often said to be fifty-one of these *pīṭhas*, although some sources put the number at over one hundred.⁴ Each is in some way related to a well-known myth involving Śiva and Saṭi. Although the myth has several variations, here is the basic outline of this story: The god Dakṣa once held a great sacrifice and invited all of the inhabitants of the heavens. He excluded his daughter Saṭi, however, and her husband, Śiva, because he disapproved of their union: Śiva was an inappropriate partner for his daughter; he lived in cremation grounds, with the ghosts and the ghouls, and he smeared his naked body with ash and spent all of his time in meditation; furthermore, he was an ascetic, celibate, and thus could hardly be counted on to produce sons. Although Śiva himself was unaffected by this slight—why would a renouncer care about such mundane matters?—Saṭi was quite upset. She went to the sacrifice and became so angry, in fact, that she generated a tremendous amount of heat, *tapas*, and she self-immolated. Śiva, when he learned of what had happened, became enraged and engulfed in grief. He wreaked havoc on the whole affair, destroyed the sacrifice

and lopped off Dakṣa's head, and then flew about the heavens with Saṭi's body, screaming in grief.

Śiva's wailing was so loud that it blocked out all other sounds – including the Vedic verses chanted in ritual in the universe – and order, dharma, broke down. Chaos, adharma, engulfed the cosmos, and in some versions of the story the universe went dark. The other gods did not know what to do, until Viṣṇu—in his typical role as restorer of dharma—then took his cosmic weapon, the *sudharsana cakṛa*, and used it to cut Saṭi's body to pieces, which eventually caused Śiva to forget his grief and cease the adharmaic din he had been creating. The pieces fell to earth, and the places where they landed became the *śāktia pīṭhas*.

This myth is about many things—devotion, asceticism, Śiva's power—but at its core it is an etiology, explaining and substantiating the religious power of the sites. The power of these places is constituted both by the corporeal remains of the goddess, which may or may not be actually thought to be located at the sites, and the association of the place with the myth. Although it is often said that the goddess is everywhere, and that she is fully embodied in any of her thousands of temples,⁵ it is at these special places where the power of the goddess is most condensed, where it is particularly charged. In a similar manner, the god Śiva's power is universally available, but it is thought to be most concentrated in the city of Banaras, which is understood to be the special abode of Śiva: millions of pilgrims visit the city because it is there that Śiva is thought to be most present.⁶ Likewise, pilgrims and devotees go to the *śāktia pīṭhas* in order to partake in that power, devotion directed to the goddess is thought to be more effective at these sites.

This is not the only story of how Tārāpīṭh came to be a sacred place. Another is connected to one of the distinct iconographic forms of Tārā at the temple—she is depicted as a loving mother, holding Śiva on her lap nursing him. This myth, which seems to be part of the local, oral history of the temple, involves the Buddha and the Hindu sage Vasiṣṭha. Vasiṣṭha had been engaged in ascetic practices for ten thousand years, but failed to gain any power from his practices. He then went to the god Brahmā for help, and Brahmā explained to him that it is through Tārā's power that he creates the world, and through Tārā's power that Viṣṇu maintains it and Śiva destroys it.⁷ Brahmā told Vasiṣṭha to recite the Tārā mantra, which he did, and then worshipped her for one thousand years. Again he gained no power, and became angry. At this point Tārā appeared to him, and told him he did not know or understand her, and thus his worship was

futile: "only Viṣṇu in the form of Buddha knows my form of worship, and to learn this kind of worship you have to go to China."⁸

Vaśiṣṭha then went to Tibet, where he had a vision of the Buddha, intoxicated, surrounded by beautiful, naked girls. Vaśiṣṭha was understandably shocked, and refused to join in this behavior, until a voice from the sky told him that this was the best way to worship Tārā. Confused, he went to the Buddha—who was really Viṣṇu—and asked what he should do. The Buddha/Viṣṇu gave him a special form of tantric *śādhana*, or practice, along with a basic primer in tantric practice and instructions. He performed the rituals as instructed, and then went to Tārāpur where the Tārāpīṭha temple is now located. According to Alan Morinis, the "stone image of Ugratārā which was seen by Vaśiṣṭha had actually existed before that time. The eye of Saṭi (some say the third or spiritual eye) which fell to earth at Tārāpīṭh turned to stone and sprang up in the form of the image which Vaśiṣṭha saw."⁹

This is a rather more complicated etiology than the myth about Śiva and Saṭi, in part because it presupposes that myth—that is why Tārāpīṭh is regarded as powerful in the first place, because it is where Tārā's eye fell—and then adds another etiological layer, explaining how the particular image of Tārā, sucking Śiva, got there. In this instance, these layers add depth to the Hindu identity of the site. This is not unusual, of course; we have already encountered this at Ayodhya. What is at play in such instances is a kind of palimpsest quality that in part constitutes the sacrality of places, in which stories and myths and histories and building materials are layered one upon another—although, really, it is more dynamic than this, more of a tangle than a layering. I borrow this notion of the palimpsest from Andreas Huyssen, who begins his complex discussion of memory and history and architecture, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, by pointing out—it actually seems like a lament—that historical memory is not what it used to be, and that the boundary between past and present has become rather more porous than it once was. "Unfold recent and not so recent pasts impinge upon the present through modern media of reproduction like photography, film, recorded music, and the Internet, as well as through the explosion of historical scholarship and an ever more voracious museal culture."¹⁰ Huyssen intentionally overstates his case, and although there may be real truth that what we are seeing in the contemporary world is something new, and that history and the past have taken on a new meaning, I am not convinced that this has not always, to some degree, been part of collective memory and orientation;

the mythical, historical, political, and personal intersect, conflict, overlap, and become entangled and confused in praxis. Just as physical structures such as temples are built, altered, destroyed, rebuilt, converted, and so on, so go the histories of those buildings and places.¹¹

What I think is useful about Huyssen's use of palimpsest is that it gets at something of the dynamic character of religiously charged places. Part of what makes them charged in the first place may be a kind of collective mimetic desire, to invoke René Girard, in which what leads one group to make a claim on a place is precisely that some other group has already made a claim to the place.¹² Certainly something like that seems to have been in play at Ayodhya. In this regard, the figure of Tārā, and the places where she is worshipped, where she is embodied, provide a significant contrast to many of the places and objects I discuss here. For Tārā is shared by both traditions, Hindu and Buddhist, but that sharing is rarely contested and, really, rarely sharing at all. It is, rather, more like there are two female deities who share a name and have some overlapping characteristics, but who otherwise are so distinct as to be, for lack of a better term, unthreatening. In other words, they are other, but not inimical.

Whereas in most Hindu contexts Tārā is a fierce figure, haunting the cremation grounds, at Tārāpīṭh she is benign; the central image presents Tārā nursing Śiva, and her devotees treat her as a domesticated woman, a benign mother who bestows favors and cares for her worshippers. In this regard, she resembles the Buddhist Tārā, although at the temple she also receives blood offerings. Despite the presence of the Buddha in this myth, however, and despite Tārā's more benign, and perhaps more Buddhist, character, Tārāpīṭh is unambiguously a Hindu temple. This, then, is a largely monothetic sort of religious place, one that is not contested. Given the presence of Buddhist motifs and Buddhist figures in this etiology, it would be reasonable to expect that some Buddhists might visit the site, or claim it as their own, but in my experience the site is rarely ever visited by Buddhists, no doubt in part because there are virtually no Buddhists in this remote part of the subcontinent.

Although the primary focus of this chapter is the very recent dispute over the Muslim Community Center—known as Park5 or, to its detractors, the Ground Zero Mosque—that has been proposed to be built in Lower Manhattan, near the site of the destroyed World Trade Center, I began this chapter with this brief discussion of the *śāṭīa pīṭhas* because one of the larger issues I address throughout this book is the question of how and why particular places become freighted with religious significance, and

why that religious significance sometimes leads to conflict (the question of why, in most instances, it does not lead to conflict is decidedly more difficult to analyze). In India, many sites that Western scholars typically call sacred are the places where some significant event has happened (or is alleged to have happened): the Buddha attained enlightenment there, say, or Śiva slayed a demon there, or Kṛṣṇa was born there, or some saint performed a miracle there. In other instances, sites are significant because of what is located there: in the case of the *śākta pīṭhas*, it is the power of the goddess; across Rajasthan, in northwestern India, there are tombs where Sufi saints are buried; in Sri Lanka, at the Dalaga Maligawa in Kandy, the Buddha's tooth is enshrined, and so on.

To say that sites such as the *śākta pīṭhas* became significant because of their association with the myth of Śiva and Śaṭi only tells part of the story, however; left out are the personal dynamics, the political machinations, the physical work, and so on, that make up the dense history, or more properly histories, of the sites. Furthermore, as we have seen in the last chapter, places, like people, often have shifting, dynamic, and contradictory identities. They are in motion.

It is useful here to return to Charles Tilly who, in writing about the vexing question of social identity, has suggested that a conversational model of analysis might offer a way out of the impasse of instrumentalist (identity is constructed) versus primordialist or essentialist (identity is a given) approaches to religious conflict.¹⁴ He says that we could instead "recognize the conversational character of contention" and "examine such a conversation's location in continuously negotiated interchanges among specific interlocutors."¹⁴ This is, I think, a useful way to think about contested religious sites, as places that are continuously negotiated; in other words, as much as one side or the other might wish to fix the identity and character of the site, the dynamics of the contestation subvert this. Tilly points out, however, that it is not a matter simply of a kind of free-form, anything-goes struggle for control. Rather, adopting the language of performance—and thus echoing, in a sense, the Turners—he suggests the notion of "contentious repertoires," in which the "pair of interlocutors has available to it a limited number of previously created performances within which the people involved can make claims."¹⁵ These repertoires are not unlike Bourdieu's *habitus*, in the sense that there is a kind of limiting structure amidst, or underlying, the fluidity. Thus the history of the place, the usage, the ownership, the physical structures, all are, in a sense, limiting, in the same way, say, that legal rules and the specific evidence

presented limit what goes on in a courtroom, or the way a script limits a dramatic performance. But they are only partially limiting, precisely because of the interpretive, performative dynamics of the sites and the people who claim them.

To return briefly to the question of why some sites are contested and others are not, we might adopt Tilly's notion of the conversational character of contestation, and say that in the case of non-contested sites, such as Tārapīṭh, there is no conversation. That is not to say that people do not talk about the site; rather, it is to say that they do not talk—although such talk may well emerge at some point in the future—about what sort of site it is, or what it really represents, or what deity is really present there. There is no contestation here—it is what it is. But of course that is not the case at all sites. Indeed, for many religiously significant sites, such an iteration is precluded by the more pressing question: What is it? and for whom? This has been at the heart of the contested discussion about how to mark the sacredness of what is called Ground Zero and the fierce debate that erupted in the American media in 2010 over the Muslim community center, the Park5 project that was proposed for the site of the damaged Burlington Coat Factory in Lower Manhattan.

2.2 *Consecrating a Void*

Basically, though, we don't want to live in a memorial.

—Battery Park Resident¹⁶

One of the important conceptions of the sacred space of Ground Zero has been the image of the towers' footprints. As the various designs for the memorial were publicly vetted, analyzed, critiqued, rejected, and revised over the course of several years in the early and mid-2000s, the footprints where the towers had stood became central; thus as Maria Sturken puts it, "the footprints of the building are asked to give the vanished dead a home, a place where they are imagined to be, where one can imagine visiting them, to make them present in the absence of their remains. And it is, above all, the absence of remains that haunts this site."¹⁷ The final design for the memorial at Ground Zero—Michael Arad's "Reflecting Absence"—prominently features the footprints: the central memorial consists of two block-length squares, where the original bases of the towers were, with two square fountains cascading down the sides of each of the footprints into two 350,000-gallon reflecting pools thirty feet below

surface level. The chair of the Lower Manhattan Development Committee (LMDC) jury that selected Arad's design said that his memorial had the capacity to "make the gaping voids left by the Towers' destruction the primary symbol of loss."¹⁸

The sacrality of Ground Zero itself is complicated and complex, as I noted at the outset of this chapter. Arad's memorial in an important sense reduces and limits this sacrality by making it primarily about loss. As Sturken puts it:

The idea that the towers should be mourned as lost buildings is so taken for granted in the debate over how to rethink Ground Zero that few have attempted to question it. This means that lower Manhattan is constantly conceived as a space of absence, not only where the dead are lost but as a place that will always seem to be lacking the towers no matter what is built in their place (and whatever is built will always be seen as having been built in *their place*).¹⁹

Jay Winter, in his *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, calls such spaces an "embodiment of nothingness."²⁰

There is indeed something profoundly powerful about the footprint as an image of absence; it is a space, an empty space, whose emptiness is constituted precisely by a presence that no longer is. A footprint marks a place where a person has been but is no longer. It is perhaps understandable, then, that the concept of the towers' footprints became so central to the conception of the planning of the memorial. As early as 2002, Governor George Pataki talked of the footprints of the towers as an inviolable space. Sturken points out that during the process of planning the memorial, there was

very little questioning (and almost none initially) of the constant reemphasis of the footprints and reassertion of the twin towers in these designs. The discourse of sacredness has inscribed the footprints of the towers with a particularly charged meaning, and in relation to that the repetition of the towers in these designs, either as absence or presence, is remarkable. This underscores the way this reenactment has functioned as a kind of mourning and a compulsive repetition, one that has constituted both stasis, with architectural imaginings caught in the moment of trauma, but also mourning.²¹

This intertwining of absence and presence was visually captured in one of the first formal memorials associated with the World Trade Center site—although there were of course dozens of impromptu memorials on the streets of New York in the days and months after the attack on the towers—the Tribute in Light in March of 2002.

Created by the artists Paul Myoda and Julian LaVerdier, this temporary memorial, which has been repeated on each anniversary of the attack, consisted of two huge beams of blue light projected into the night sky, from where the towers had stood. There is something ghostly about this (they originally called the project "Phantom Towers"), the lights creating a kind of chimera of the towers. Sturken notes that in many of the artistic images of Ground Zero, the towers had been "a constant refrain, constantly reemerging in the space as if they cannot be erased from people's artistic imaginations of the skyline."²² Much like Jacques Derrida's—via Martin Heidegger—notation of writing *sous rature*, "under erasure," the towers are crossed out, as it were, absent, but also present, a presence that is perhaps made all the more powerful by the iconicity of their absence. Hence the power of the footprints. When the *New York Times* published the September 23, 2001 edition of the *Sunday Magazine*—less than two weeks after the attacks, after all—it focused on the destruction of the towers, not surprisingly, and featured an article titled "To Rebuild or Not: Architects Respond." The husband and wife team, Elizabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio, responded this way, seeming to channel Derrida in what now seems to be a most ironic way: "What's most poignant now is that the identity of the skyline has been lost. We would say, let's not build something that would mend the skyline, it is more powerful to leave it void. We believe it would be tragic to erase the erasure."²³

Presence and absence comingle in Arad's memorial design, not just with the prominence of the footprints of the buildings, but also with the inscribed names of the dead on the inner walls of the subterranean space of the footprints and the inclusion of parcels of the remains of the dead, deposited in small bags, interned within the memorial. Like relics in other contexts, all of this serves both to remind us that there is loss, and thus absence here, but also presence. David Simpson has called the central motif of the memorial a "double void."²⁴ This goes to the core of at least one aspect of Ground Zero's sacrality: it is a graveyard. When George Pataki famously declared, in a speech at a gathering of victims' families in February of 2002, that nothing could be built where the towers had stood, calling the area "hallowed ground," he was invoking the sense that

the place was a graveyard, in part, and also tapping into the patriotic—if not xenophobic—symbolism of the sacrifice of the “heroes” of 9/11. It was a projection of a kind of sacredness on the site, and Pataki invoked, in that speech, the importance of the footprints: “They will always be a permanent and lasting memorial to those we lost.” Many have since pointed out the rather ironic clash of the imputed, or imposed, sacredness of the site and the commercial interests of the owners of the parcel, but it is not insignificant that this tension was noted immediately after Pataki’s speech by Bruce S. Fowle, who was the senior principal at Fox & Fowle Architects, the firm that had helped to produce an early report on possible configurations and uses of Ground Zero: “You can’t even find the footprints right now because everything has been taken away. To think of it as sacred ground is purely symbolic. And once you’re in symbolic mode, you have to ask whether there are other alternatives you could consider that might be better.”²⁵

When the towers collapsed, they came down with almost unimaginable violence, and the destructive power was almost total. The towers, and everything in them, were effectively reduced to dust and rubble. As a firefighter in the documentary *9/11* said, “You have two 110-story office buildings. You don’t find a desk, you don’t find a chair, you don’t find a computer. The biggest piece of telephone I found was a keypad and it was this big. The building collapsed to dust. How are we supposed to find anybody in this stuff? There’s nothing left of the building.”²⁶ Patricia Yaeger and Sturken have each written extensively and incisively about this dust,²⁷ and both have noted its peculiar and alarming ambiguity; it was both dirt, refuse, a dangerous pollutant that needed to be removed as quickly as possible—it is this dust that is suspected of sickening many of those who worked at the Ground Zero site in the months after the attack—and it was also the comminuted bodily remains of those who died in the towers and the planes that crashed into them.

Much of this dust—and I must point out here that in fact it was not really dust at all, or at least not all dust, but over one million tons of rubble—and all but a few large structural pieces of the towers and the damaged building near them, was removed to Fresh Kills landfill, where forensic scientists would eventually spend thousands of hours combing through the debris searching for recognizable corporal remains on which they could conduct DNA tests. They eventually recovered nearly 3,000 body parts. Some of the dust was also collected only a few weeks after the attacks, in steel drums—standard fifty-five gallon oil drums—at

Fresh Kills and given police escort back into the city. There, on October 14, 2001, this dust was ceremoniously scooped into four thousand urns, which were then distributed to those families that wanted one. Thus the dust had been, through this ritual act, transformed—same material, but the status of that material is largely determined by the context in which it is situated. One is reminded here of Jonathan Z. Smith’s quip that in the field we talk of soil, but in the house it is dirt.²⁸

The imputed sacrality of the site where the Twin Towers stood is, in part, constituted by the attack on the towers, by the deaths of over 2,000 people there, and by the continued presence of the remains of those who died there. Indeed, even with the meticulous search for the remains of the dead, and the removal of the rubble and dirt and dust from the site, the remains of the dead are still very much present at Ground Zero and, really, across much of Lower Manhattan. Small pieces of human remains continued to be found near where the towers stood years after the attack and, of course, the dust scattered and then settled across the region. In a dubious note in the March 24, 2007 edition of the *Daily Observer*, a worker for the Department of Sanitation claimed that the city had used some of the debris from Fresh Kills to fill potholes in the city: “I observed the New York City Department of Sanitation taking these fines [building material] from the conveyor belts of our machines, loading it onto tractors and using it to pave roads and fill potholes, dips, and ruts.”²⁹

The World Trade Center occupied sixteen acres of land: “And as the smoke cleared in those very early days, those sixteen acres downtown were being asked to do the impossible: to make sense of the senseless; to extol the dead even as they were being exhumed; to transform victims into heroes and heroes into gods; to find meaning in the squalor or real-time mass murder.”³⁰ Larry Silverstein, the developer who had leased the World Trade Center only months before it was destroyed, was a vocal advocate for rebuilding, for quickly restoring the thousands of square feet of office space that had been lost; to him, the site was commercial to the core. Many others strongly disagreed, but Silverstein said that it would be “the tragedy of tragedies not to rebuild this part of New York,” since, to him, not restoring the financial vitality of the area would “give the terrorists the victory they seek.”³¹ In the long, contentious debate about rebuilding, about what to rebuild and whether to rebuild at all, it became clear that not all of those sixteen acres were going to be a memorial—despite Mayor Rudolph Giuliani’s opinion that nothing mundane nor commercial should be built on the site, and Pataki’s early sentiment, echoed by many of the victims’

family members, that nothing at all should be built there—the commercial development of the site was virtually a given. But if the site was sacred, as it had been deemed, then how would or could this sacredness be preserved and marked? Part of the definition of the sacred is, after all, that it is restricted, separate, not sullied by the mundane.

By as early as 2002, this question had become important in the discussions about the memorialization and development of the site. In November of that year, the LMDC produced a formal development document, “The Blueprint of the Future of Lower Manhattan,” that presented fifteen guiding points for the development of the site, one of which was to “reserve an area of the site for one or more permanent memorials.” Although various groups representing the victims were opposed to any commercialization of the site, eventually a “memorial quadrant” was proposed, an area that was centered on the towers’ footprints, and that space covered about two acres. Given the competing memorial and commercial conceptions and functions of the area, many felt the need to separate and preserve the sacred, to create a clearly demarcated boundary between the mundane space of Manhattan and the sacred zone of the memorial. That space, however, would contract and expand; by 2005 the actual bounded area of Ground Zero itself had tripled in size to 6.5 acres. Eventually the LMDC fixed the memorial quadrant as a 4.7 acre space—although in the final iteration of the memorial it has grown to 8 acres—that would be bound by Fulton, Greenwich, Liberty, and West Streets. Stefan Pryor, the president of the Corporation, used religious language to describe this quadrant, saying that it was “special; indeed, sacrosanct.”³² This is an interesting moment in the discussion of Ground Zero, because it seemed to be a point at which the geographical parameters of sacredness were, finally, after years of debate, established. The sacred space of Ground Zero, however, could not be so easily bound.

Indeed, when plans to build an Islamic cultural center in Lower Manhattan were first reported in 2009—a project that became for several months a ubiquitous topic of conversation and debate in the national popular media—a phrase that was heard and read over and over again, attaining a kind of iconic status, was “in the shadow of Ground Zero.” The phrase “Ground Zero” had been used to designate the site where the towers had stood just hours after the attacks,³³ although the phrase has been critiqued, certainly, as a striking instance of American exceptionalism—there are any number of places around the world, including Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Dresden, Darfur, or Baghdad, to which this label could equally

apply—“Ground Zero” is used largely without further thought or qualification to refer to the place where the World Trade Centers stood.³⁴ The phrase “in the shadow of Ground Zero,” likewise, came to be used so frequently in the media in the spring and summer of 2010 that it goes utterly unmarked as a figure of speech, and has become a kind of rhetorical fetish or totem, a metonymically charged iteration that essentially speaks for itself, that makes an entire argument in six words, in the process expanding, symbolically and physically, the resonance of “Ground Zero.” But where did this phrase come from, and how has it become so charged?

The first usage I have found occurred in the *New York Times* just six days after the planes crashed into the towers, in a report on the displaced residents of Battery Park: “Gus Ouranisas, the resident manager of 200 Rector Place, has been sleeping in the lobby for almost a week—a sentinel at one of the evacuated apartment buildings in Battery Park City, a 92-acre complex in the shadow of the ruined World Trade Center.”³⁵ It appeared again six days later, in an article by the critic Michiko Kakutani, who writes about the strange and uneasy continuance of the mundane amidst the chaos and rubble and trauma of Lower Manhattan: “Still, it would take awhile. In what used to be the shadow of the World Trade Center, a couple of children played catch, their faces obscured by dust masks.”³⁶ These two usages are, significantly, different: in the first, it is the ruins of the towers and the other buildings that cast the shadow, a kind of absent shadow, after all, in that it would be a shadow of a shadow; in the second, Kakutani actually uses the past tense, marking the absence of the buildings and, thus, the shadows that they would have cast.

The rhetoric of the shadow of Ground Zero seems to reflect a desire, conscious or not, to preserve the towers somehow, while at the same time it seems to be a way of marking their absence. There is something decidedly mournful about the phrase, and, indeed, mourning and loss have, as Sturken and others have noted, been a consistent theme in discussions of the place.³⁷ A shadow is constituted by a presence, of course; something that is not there cannot cast a shadow. But a shadow is also not the object itself. Clearly, “in the shadow of Ground Zero” is connected to the towers themselves, to the physical shadows that they once cast; these shadows, the actual shadows cast by the actual buildings, were not, importantly, static, but moved with the course of the sun, both on a daily basis and with the changing angle of the sun over the course of the seasons. The phrase, though, in this context is even more complex: How can an absence have a shadow? How can something that is not there extend... well, to

where? How is it that this non-existent shadow, this chimera shadow, has come, for some, to delimit—physically and conceptually—the sacrality of Ground Zero?

2.3 *Polluting the Shadow of Ground Zero*

The Cordoba House is a 16-storey middle finger to America.

—Editorial on *Atlas Shrugged* Website³⁸

Religion has nothing to do with this.

—RICK LAZIO³⁹

When the second plane—United Flight 75—tore into the south tower of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, it was a scene that tens of millions of Americans, and millions living elsewhere, witnessed on live television, and hundreds of millions would eventually see videos of the event; the image was on the cover of both *Newsweek* and *Time*, and countless other magazines and newspapers as well. It continues to be shown over and over again. In some ways, the image of the plane hitting the tower became an image of the nation's collective trauma, a synecdochically charged image, and a video icon, one that could be played over and over again, and this experience and sense of trauma certainly has contributed to the perceived sacrality of Ground Zero.

A far less noted and noticed scene occurred at virtually the same moment, only a few blocks away, and was directly linked to this iconic image and the event itself. A large part of the plane's landing gear tore off when it hit the tower and hurtled through the sky at tremendous speed. It crashed through the roof of the Burlington Coat factory, at 45 Park Place; the store was not open at the time, although a few workers were inside having breakfast. No one was injured there, but there was considerable damage to the building. Given the tremendous destruction caused by the impact of the two planes, and the subsequent collapse of the towers themselves, it is little wonder that initially no one really noticed the debris that crashed into the Burlington Coat Factory. Such violent intrusions occurred across a wide swath of Lower Manhattan. Setha Low writes, for instance, of a woman who returned to her apartment weeks after the attacks, only to find a filing cabinet that had fallen from one of the towers in her living room.⁴⁰ Gradually, the pieces of the planes that had rained down were

gathered and taken away as evidence; the debris and dust was eventually gathered as well, much of it taken to Fresh Kills. The partially destroyed building at 45 Park Place remained locked and empty, a gaping hole in its roof where the rain and snow and sunlight poured in.

In the fall of 2009, some of Lower Manhattan's sizeable Muslim community began to gather in the empty space for Friday prayers; they had a permit issued by the City of New York, as well as the permission of the building's owners. The space was used as an overflow space for the Al Farah mosque, at 245 West Broadway. Perhaps some New Yorkers saw this as a kind of sacrilege, Muslims praying on the site of this great trauma that was, for many, caused by Islam. Mostly, though, these gatherings went unnoticed. For many of the Muslims praying there, it was a kind of act of defiance aimed at the radicals who had flown into the towers; as Feisal Abdul Rauf, the imam at Al Farah, put it at the time: "We want to push back against the extremists."⁴¹

A few years after the attacks, the owners of the damaged building that had housed the Burlington Coat Factory building, Kukiko Mitani and Stephen Pomerantz, attempted to sell it, but were unsuccessful; the area in Lower Manhattan around what had been the World Trade Center remained for years a chaotic place, at once a site of broad destruction and frenetic building, and the larger commercial real estate market had been badly affected by the housing downturn and subsequent recession that began in 2005. Eventually, the real estate investment group Soho Properties purchased the property in July of 2009 for \$4.85 million, considerably less than the original \$18 million asking price. The chairman of the Soho group, Sharif El-Gamal, said at the time that the space would "provide a place of peace, a place of services and solutions for the community which is always looking for interfaith dialogue."⁴² One of the investors in the site was the Cordoba Initiative, an interfaith group that was founded by Imam Feisal in 2004, as well as another group he is associated with, the American Society for Muslim Advancement.

The Cordoba Initiative is "a multi-national, multi-faith organization dedicated to improving understanding and building trust among people of all cultures and faith traditions," named after the city in Spain that, under Muslim rule from the eighth to the eleventh centuries, has come for some to symbolize the possibility of inter-religious coexistence.⁴³ As Daisy Khan, Imam Feisal's wife and herself an active voice in the inter-religious dialogue movement, has put it, the proposed center, initially called Cordoba House and later changed to Park51, "is a symbol... that will give

voice to the silent majority of Muslims who suffer at the hands of extremists. A center will show that Muslims will be part of rebuilding Lower Manhattan."⁴⁴ Initially, El-Garnal had bought the property to develop it as a commercial project, intending to build a condominium on the site. It was Rauf and Khan who convinced him to build a cultural center instead, intended to be a kind of Muslim version of a Jewish Community Center or YMCA—specifically they had in mind the model of the Jewish-run 92nd Street Y—but with an expressed intent to foster interreligious dialogue and understanding. The initial vision of the project was a 13-storey cultural center that would include a 500-seat performing arts space, a cooking school, a restaurant, exhibition space, a swimming pool and gym and basketball court, a library, and an art studio. There would also be ample space for prayer. "We insist on calling it a prayer space and not a mosque," Khan noted, "because you can use a prayer space for activities apart from prayer. You can't stop anyone who is a Muslim despite his religious ideology from entering the mosque and staying there. With a prayer space, we can control who gets to use it."⁴⁵ This last remark seemed particularly directed at those, such as Robert Spencer, who have condemned all mosques as breeding grounds for radical Islam.

Despite their intentions to foster dialogue and understanding at Cordoba House/Park51, Rauf and Khan were well aware of the potential controversy the proposed center might stir. As Rauf put it: "I have been part of this community for 30 years. Members of my congregation died on 9/11. That attack was carried out by extremist terrorists in the name of my faith. There is a war going on within Islam between a violent, extremist minority and a moderate majority that condemns terrorism. The center for me is a way to amplify our condemnation of that atrocity and to amplify the moderate voices that reject terrorism and seek mutual understanding and respect with all faiths."⁴⁶

An initial hearing was held with a local community board, at which the issues discussed were mostly logistical; however, this meeting came only a few days after the arrest of Faisal Shatzad, a disgruntled and perhaps also mentally ill Pakistani American who had attempted to detonate a car bomb in Times Square on May 1, and the atmosphere in New York was again highly charged with anti-Islam feelings. The community board was immediately inundated with calls and emails, some of them threatening. A second hearing was held on May 25 before Community Board No. 1—which is an advisory board for Tribeca, Battery Park City, City Hall, South Street Seaport, the Financial District, and Civic Center in Manhattan that

makes recommendations to the city government—to debate the project. The hearing was only advisory, but it was tense and contested, with some in attendance voicing their adamant support of the right to free speech and worship, and the power of such a place to heal the wounds of 9/11, and others decrying the project as an affront to those who died in the attacks. The Board voted 29-1, with 10 abstentions, in favor of the project.⁴⁷ The New York Landmarks Preservation Commission would later vote on the project, with a 9-0 vote backing the proposal.

The Lower Manhattan community, including prominent Christian and Jewish leaders, largely embraced the project, viewing it as a significant peace initiative and a financial boon to the area, which was still struggling to financially and socially recover from the attacks on the World Trade Center. As soon as the project entered the national public consciousness, though, the tone changed dramatically. One of the first national figures to seize upon the issue was Mark Williams, a Tea Party figure who, in a paroxysm of religious confusion—and a telling example of the way in which the Muslim other was a kind of magnet for other sorts of otherness—denounced the project on his website, declaring that "The monument would consist of a Mosque for the worship of the terrorists' monkey-god."⁴⁸

It was at this point that things became particularly rancorous, and the issue moved from a mostly local one to the national stage. Pataki passionately defended the project, citing the U.S. Constitution; congressman Rick Lazio, who was running to replace Pataki, was equally passionate in his denunciations of it. For the next several months, Park51 was hotly debated in the U.S. media; there were protest marches both against and in favor of the project. Although the most vocal national opponents of the project were associated with the Tea Party and other conservative political organizations, more mainstream politicians denounced the project as part of their campaigns, and a wide variety of religious groups, from conservative Christian organizations to moderate Jewish groups, including the Anti-Defamation League, joined in the fray. President Barack Obama publicly supported the project, as strongly as Sarah Palin and other conservative figures denounced it. The issue became part of the campaigns of any number of politicians.

The mayor of New York City, Michael Bloomberg, was a vocal supporter of the project, and, in response to the increasingly vocal critics of the proposal after the vote to allow the project to move forward, gave an emotional speech on the subject at Governors Island on August 3, 2010, in which he cited the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution as well as

New York's long history of racial and religious tolerance: "Let us not forget that Muslims were among those murdered on 9/11, and that our Muslim neighbors grieved with us as New Yorkers and as Americans. We would betray our values and play into our enemies' hands if we were to treat Muslims differently than anyone else. In fact, to cave to popular sentiment would be to hand a victory to the terrorists, and we should not stand for that."⁴⁹ The issue would soon include not just the center itself, but the sanctity of the Ground Zero site, the status of Muslims—and really all immigrants—in the country, and, in the end, the very legitimacy of Islam as a religion. There were protests across the country, including a threat by an obscure evangelical pastor in Florida, Terry Jones, to publicly burn the Koran; these plans were aborted after international and national pressure, including direct pleas from both Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and General David H. Petraeus.⁵⁰

2.4 *The Muslim Other and the Indeterminate Sacrality of Ground Zero*

81% of US Mosques Promote Jihad

—Widely Used Headline Responding to M. KEDAR AND D. VERUSHALMI'S Study of Violent Images and Literature in American Mosques⁵¹

We can perceive the collapse of the WTC towers as the climactic conclusion of twentieth-century art's "passion for the Real"—the "terrorists" themselves did not do it primarily to provoke real material damage but for the spectacular effect of it.

—SLOVOJ ZIZEK⁵²

On the morning of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, I was home writing and had taken a break to read the *New York Times* online; I vividly remember seeing the "Breaking News" headline scroll across the homepage of the *Times*, reporting that a plane had crashed into one of the World Trade Center towers. I turned on the television to see if I could find more information about what was happening, and spent much of the remainder of the day, as did millions of people across the country and world, watching the events unfold in real time and talking with friends and my family on the phone. I was worried and frightened.

I had many friends in New York, some of whom worked in the towers, and my mother was in the city, about to fly back to her home in Warsaw. The day is a blur in my memory, but I know that at some point I went to pick up my young son at preschool. Partly it was an act of protection; we were in Virginia, less than two hours from the Pentagon, and I felt, somehow, that he would be safer at home. I also simply wanted him near me, for my own sake and, I thought, for his. Although the events in New York and Washington and Pennsylvania began to become clear as the day wore on, no one knew who was behind the attacks, why they had happened, nor whether this was the end or the beginning of the violence. I am not sure if I slept that night, glued to the television and the Internet, trying, like so many millions across the world, to gain some understanding of what had happened. It is difficult to remember that virtually nothing was certain in the hours and days after the attacks. Speculation was everywhere, but little else.

I was scheduled to teach my Hinduism class the next morning, and my college decided, in an attempt to maintain a degree of normalcy in that chaotic and confusing time, to hold classes as usual. I could not see how I could possibly stick to my planned lesson, and so I simply went into the classroom, sat down with my students, and asked them what they would like to discuss. There initially was silence, my students looking exhausted and dazed, until one young woman half-raised her hand and asked, holding back tears, "Why do they hate us so much?" It was a chilling moment, a sentiment that was echoed across the nation, an expression of fear and shock and bewilderment. As I looked at this young woman, tears now streaming down her face, and scanned the tear-streaked faces of my other students, I was deeply struck by how frightened these students were.

This fear was palpable, and this was understandable: many of my students, I knew, had parents and siblings living in Washington, and I knew that some of them also had parents and relatives working in the military, some of them at the Pentagon. But what was most striking to me was the wording of the question: "they," "us," and "hate." Although none of us knew anything of the attackers or their motives at this early time, the immediate sentiment in the United States after the attacks on September 11 was that this was the work of terrorists, and that those terrorists were Muslim;⁵³ for many, this was seen as the first salvo in a cosmic war between us and them, between the benign forces of western Modernity and Christianity and the other as conceived of as the evil forces of Islam.⁵⁴

All of this points to an important aspect of the constitution of sacred places: the discursive process through which a threatening, inimical other is constituted, an other—like the Muslims who were seen as polluting the sacrality of not only Ayodhya, but by extension all of India—whose intent is to usurp such a place. I use “discursive” here not to imply that such an other is never physically threatening or dangerous, which they often are, but rather to highlight the fact that the perception of otherness, and the threat it poses, often precedes the kinds of on-the-ground conflicts that often become violent.⁵⁵

This is a complex topic, and there is a vast body of philosophical literature on otherness and alterity; I am hesitant to wade into these waters here for fear of drowning my specific discussion in their depths. That said, however, it is really impossible to understand the dynamics of a place such as Park51 and the controversy it has created without giving some attention to the way otherness comes into play in the discourse. Judith Butler, in her provocative *Giving an Account of Oneself*, draws on Nietzsche, Levinas, and Foucault, among others, in emphasizing the centrality of the encounter with the other, and the pain and injury and, yes, fear that such an encounter can entail. Nietzsche, Butler points out, “remarks that we become conscious of ourselves only after certain injuries have been inflicted.”⁵⁶ The injury, the pain and trauma, forces a self-reflection and self-evaluation, what amounts to, really, self-recognition for Butler: “[W]e become reflective upon ourselves, accordingly, through fear and terror. Indeed, we become morally accountable as a consequence of fear and terror.”⁵⁷ I will leave it to others to apply Butler’s ethical excursus to post-September 11 American identity—this is, I must say, fertile ground for analysis—but her point is important here in that it points to the way in which the controversy over the Park51 project, and its intimate relation to the perceived sacredness of Ground Zero, has been a collective assertion of self over and against a perceived Muslim other.⁵⁸

Muslims have long been the other in Europe, of course, but before the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, America had other others. Furthermore, anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States did not begin on September 11, 2001; there were waves of such sentiment during the oil crisis of the 1970s, for instance, or immediately after the first bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993, or in connection with the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine. The broad influence of Samuel Huntington’s divisive “clash of civilizations” thesis, which he first articulated in a lecture in 1992, is telling here, in that there was a

receptive audience already in place for such a binary view of Islam and the West.⁵⁹ However, since the attacks in 2001 there has been a rising tide of Islamophobia in the United States,⁶⁰ the high water mark of which seemed to have been reached with the vitriolic response to the Park51 project. This discourse has born a marked similarity to the anti-Muslim sentiment that preceded and followed the destruction of the Babri Masjid in India that I discussed in the preceding chapter, in which the Muslim other was intimately related to an understanding, on the part of some extreme Hindu nationalists, of an India that is exclusively Hindu and cannot include any foreigners.

Pamela Geller and Robert Spencer, and their organization, Stop Islamization of America (SIOA) have been perhaps the most visible proponents of this popular discourse, issuing proclamations on an almost daily basis. Spencer has long been one of the most prominent voices of anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States, running the inflammatory website www.jihadwatch.org, speaking on any number of conservative talk shows, and producing a string of books beginning with *Islam Unveiled: Disturbing Questions About the World's Fastest Growing Faith* in 2002 and including *The Truth About Muhammad, Founder of the World's Most Intolerant Religion* which spent time on the *New York Times* bestseller list in 2009, and others denigrating Islam and Muslims. Geller, for her part, rose to prominence largely because of her relentless attacks on the Park51 project in her blog, *Atlas Shrugged*, and, like Spencer, has been a ubiquitous figure on conservative talk shows.

When she was presented with an award by the conservative activist David Horowitz in November of 2010, Geller used her acceptance speech to once again denounce the Park51 project:

You have to understand that we're in a war. We are at war now. It's not coming. It's not around the corner. We're at war now. The GZM is the second wave of the 9/11 attack.... We are under attack. Obviously, the violent jihad, the academic jihad, the sociological jihad, the cultural jihad, the academic jihad, we have been infiltrated at the senior level of the DOD.... This is not a conventional war. Each one of you must fight this war... You're each activated.... We have not yet recovered the bodies from 9/11 and we're under attack with ground zero mega mosque. And make no mistake, Cordoba, iconic of Islam's conquering of the West, it's quite deliberate.... It's a triumphal mosque. Because one shmuck in New York

says "it's a mosque of healing" doesn't make it so. It's ridiculous, it's insulting."⁶¹

The SIOA went on, in early 2011, to produce an inflammatory documentary on the Parksi project, *The Ground Zero Mosque: The Second Wave of the 9/11 Attacks*, that picked up and extended Geller's rhetoric.⁶² In a press release, Geller called the film a "teaching tool." "This film," she said, "is perfect for showing your skeptical friends and family what we're really up against, and explaining to them how and why we must fight back. It is the first accurate reportage of the number one national and international news story that became national news without the mainstream media."⁶³

Geller and Spencer are certainly extremists, but their anti-Islam rhetoric has been echoed across the country, and the Parksi project has very much been at the center of the storm. A substantial element in this discourse is the widely held opinion that Islam is a violent, predatory religion, and that mosques—any mosque, all mosques—are breeding grounds for extremists and the launching points of a new, global *jihad*. There have been calls from media pundits and political figures and religious leaders to curtail all mosque building in the country; hence Bryan Fischer, the director of the American Family Association—a prominent conservative organization with ties to such political figures as Michele Bachman, Mitch McConnell, and Newt Gingrich—pronounced, "Permits should not be granted to build even one more mosque in the United States of America, let alone the monstrosity planned for Ground Zero. This is for one simple reason: each Islamic mosque is dedicated to the overthrow of the American government."⁶⁴

The question of what could and could not, or rather should and should not, be located in the sixteen acres that had been the World Trade Center was, as we have seen, an important topic during the debates about how to memorialize the site—recall Giuliani's insistence that there should be nothing mundane located in that space. Many of these debates were confined to the actual sixteen acres of the space, but there were all sorts of questions about what sort of buildings and institutions would be appropriate in the immediate vicinity of the site. Pataki, for his part, did not go so far as to publicly denounce those proposals that he found inappropriate—tacky, commercial, kitschy, trite, or simply insensitive—but he did say that "I view that memorial site as sacred grounds, akin to the beaches of Normandy or Pearl Harbor, and we will not tolerate anything on that site that denigrates America, denigrates

New York or freedom, or denigrates the sacrifice or courage that the heroes showed on Sept. 11."⁶⁵ Pataki was talking specifically about the sixteen acres, but the perceived sacredness of Ground Zero did not end there; it extended, it seems, outward, like the shadows of the buildings that were no longer standing, and, like those shadows, it seemed to be constantly shifting.

When the plans for Parksi entered the public discourse, those who denounced them initially did so on the basis of a conception of the sacrality of where the towers had stood: it was a grave, a place of deep loss and trauma, and to place anything that was inappropriate in its immediate vicinity was construed as sacrilege. A mosque, as the Parksi project was described in the popular press, was portrayed as an affront, a pollution, a victory monument to the terrorists. That, of course, is precisely the inverse of what Imam Rauf and Daisy Khan and the other planners intended. The irony here is palpable: a center intended to promote tolerance provokes blatant intolerance. But even without this particular irony, there is something deeply ironic about the perceived sacrality that radiates out from Ground Zero, because there are all sorts of elements located in Ground Zero's diffuse sacred space, in its shadow, that in another context might be seen as pollutants: bars, strip clubs, fast food joints, and betting parlors. As long as such things are not located within the memorial quadrant, though, they seem to be tolerable, seem not to impinge on the site's sacrality. It is Islam's proposed presence in the form of Parksi that most violates Ground Zero's presumed sacredness.

From a comparative perspective, the contestation over Parksi is somewhat different from that of a place such as the Babri Masjid, in that both Muslims and Hindus see that site as sacred space and claim it as their own, and their competing conceptions of sacredness do not mesh. The Temple Mount in Jerusalem is similarly contested: Jews, Christians, and Muslims all claim the site as sacred to their religion, and theirs alone. By contrast, the planners of Parksi have repeatedly stated that it is not a sacred space at all but a community center surrounded by similarly secular buildings. As Imam Rauf has put it, "It is absolutely disingenuous, as many have said, that that block is hallowed ground."⁶⁶ His point is clear enough: the block that runs from 47 to 51 Park Avenue is and has for a very long time been a commercial district. However, he—and he is certainly not alone here—has also missed something of the complexity of the conception of sacredness with which Ground Zero is infused. This is not

in the end, a static sense of the sacred, one that is bounded or fixed, but a strikingly fluid conception, one that is in part physical and in part amorphous. Certainly it is about place, but that sense of place extends beyond the physical and the locative, to the point that the whole of the United States could be understood to be Ground Zero, and thus sacred.⁶⁷

I have, up to this point, avoided defining what I mean by sacred as it applies to Ground Zero, because as I noted in the last chapter, "sacred" as a static, normative category has little purchase. Durkheim famously defined the sacred in instrumental terms, and argued that the sacred is a category created by human beings. In other words, things and places and people are made sacred, and part of what constitutes their sacrality is that they are in some way set apart: "The sacred thing is, par excellence, that which the profane must not and cannot touch with impunity. To be sure, this prohibition cannot go so far as to make all communication between the two worlds impossible, for if the profane could in no way enter into relations with the sacred, the sacred would be of no use."⁶⁸ In a sense, then, the profane is the sacred's other, necessary for it to exist.

It seems clear enough that the sacredness of Ground Zero has been thrust upon the place, without any clear definition of what makes it sacred. As I noted earlier, for some it is sacred because it is a graveyard, while for others it is the trauma and suffering and violence that took place there that makes it sacred; there are, it would seem, gradations of sacrality at play here. It is as if Ground Zero and its sacredness are a kind of spatial *habitus* that shifts and morphs, depending on who is conceiving of it and in what context and for what purpose, although it is not at all clear that any of this is conscious, or fully conscious, on the part of those who employ the term. As Bourdieu puts it, "*habitus* contains the solution to the paradoxes of objective meaning without subjective intention. It is the source of these strings of 'moves' which are objectively organized as strategies without being the product of a genuine strategic intention."⁶⁹ In this sense, there is both a kind of givenness to the sacredness of Ground Zero, but also a field of practice, to use Bourdieu's term, within which there is negotiation and play.

One place this was played out was in the discussion of what sorts of commercial establishments could be located around Ground Zero; another instance was in the protracted debates about the memorial. Although there may have been little debate about the sacredness of the sixteen acres of the actual site, there has been far more ambiguity when it comes to the shadow of Ground Zero. As I have noted, this shadow is not defined, and it is not fixed. It seems that some things can be located in the shadow that

might otherwise seem to compromise any conception of purity: betting parlors, strip joints, fast food restaurants.

There is also no consensus on what sort of religious images and structures might be located within Ground Zero's sacred zone. For instance, the two iron girders that formed what for many was a cross and which remained standing after the towers came down were seen by many as sacred and became a kind of pilgrimage site; however, when plans were announced to move the beams to the memorial museum, a group of atheists threatened to sue, invoking the United States' Constitution,⁷⁰ and, in a sense, articulating a kind of secular conception of the sacred in which the site's sacrality is conceived as national, not religious.⁷¹ Indeed, for this group the religious image of the cross is seen as a pollution. In contrast, in the summer of 2011, the *New York Times* ran an article about a Greek Orthodox Church, Saint Nicholas, which had been destroyed in the attacks. A movement was afoot to rebuild the church, and the *Times* reported that there had, thus far, been no public criticisms of the plan, despite the fact that the church would be located very much within the shadow of Ground Zero as it is typically conceived. Indeed, Paki—himself a Greek American—stood alongside the chancellor of the church, Bishop Andonios of Phasiane, in support of the rebuilding. This silence is striking, given the debate and contestation over virtually every structure in the immediate vicinity of Ground Zero. Bishop Andonios noted that the controversy over Paki had actually aided his cause. "It's unfortunate that it took a controversy over a mosque to bring attention to the church," he said, but the Paki debate was actually "a silver lining," because it drew attention to the plight of the church and, presumably, made the rebuilding of such a structure seem far less controversial in comparison.⁷²

2.5 On the Power of the Sacred

[T]he sacred, as a kind of behaving, is not merely a number of immediate appearances, but a set of rules—prescriptions, proscriptions, interdictions—that determine the shape of the behavior and whether it is to count as an instance of the category in question.

—RICHARD COMSTOCK⁷³

Why is a Greek Orthodox church not a pollution when a Muslim community center is? Or, alternately, why are two steel beams that form a

cross a marker of sacrality for some and for others a pollution? What is the understanding of "sacred" that is at play here? This is how I believe Bourdieu helps us: the sacred is structured by the *habitus*, which, in the case of Ground Zero, is constituted by the events of September 11, the violence and death and ongoing trauma of the place, religious and civic ideals, and a great deal more. But within this structure is a kind of fluidity, what Bourdieu calls a field of practice, in which there is room for manipulation. Thus there is a strategic quality to Ground Zero's sacredness, or at least how this sacredness is discussed and manipulated.

A Greek Orthodox church is not a pollution, in part because there had been such a church at the site; however, there had also been prayer rooms in the Twin Towers, and two mosques in the immediate vicinity of the towers. Masjid Manhattan, on Warren Street, was founded in 1970 and is four blocks from the site; Masjid al-Farah, where Imam Rauf has long been a prayer leader, is about twelve blocks from where the World Trade Center was, and has been in its present location on West Broadway since 1985. It was because of overcrowding at Masjid al-Farah that prayers were being held at the Burlington Coat Factory. Furthermore, the Muslim presence in Lower Manhattan dates to the late nineteenth century, when the area was called "Little Syria"—most of the residents were, in fact, Orthodox Christians, but there was also a substantial Muslim population as well. The neighborhood was demolished during the construction of the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel in the 1940s. It is not, then, simply that there had been a Greek Orthodox church that should be rebuilt, whereas Parksi represents something new. Rather, it is the fact that Greek Orthodox Christians are not threatening in this context; they may be other, but they are not The Other. Thus their presence is not polluting to Ground Zero's perceived sacredness, whereas the Muslim presence is.

The designation "sacred" in this context thus becomes a discursive means of exclusion, in that the other—The Other, Islam—must be kept out to preserve the sacredness of the place. Concomitantly, this discourse of otherness becomes a means by which the self, individually and collectively, is formulated and fortified; recall Butler's assertion that we come to know ourselves through the trauma of the encounter with the other. Not only the trauma of that encounter, but also, I would argue, the very threat that the other poses to the self. We become a self, in this sense, through the opposition with this other.

Islam is the "they" through which we constitute our sense of "we"; the question my student asked on September 12 was "why do they hate

us?" after all. But who was the "us," and who the "they"? Addressing this question has been at the center of what became the national discussion of Parksi, and although it may be clear who the "they" are—radical Muslims—it is far less clear who the "we" are. George W. Bush tapped into this dynamic only weeks after September 11, when, announcing that the United States military had begun attacks on purported al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan, he closed his address to the nation on October 7, 2001 with the following: "The battle is now joined on many fronts. We will not waver, we will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail. Peace and freedom will prevail. Thank you. May God continue to bless America."⁷⁴

In the many protests and verbal attacks on the Parksi project, there has been a consistent and rather simple logic at play: it was terrorists motivated by radical Islam who attacked America on September 11, 2001, and so Islam, and therefore all Muslims—except, for some, those conceptual "moderate" Muslims that the conservative critics of the Parksi project find so rare—are the enemy. Parksi has been seen as a mosque by its opponents—the Ground Zero Mosque, as it is typically called in this discourse—despite assertions to the contrary by its supporters, and through an easy synecdoche it becomes Islam. All of America, by extension, is understood as Ground Zero, since it was not just New York and Washington that were attacked, but all of America, and the very American way of life; thus any mosque in America, no matter where it is located, is construed as a violation of American sacred space. The sacred, as Durkheim pointed out, seems to be quite contagious indeed.

This fallacious logic has been most consistently articulated by Geller and Spencer, but it has been broadly echoed by diverse individuals and politically conservative media outlets. Their message is consistent: Parksi is "sacrilege on sacred ground," as Sally Regenhard, whose son died on 9/11, put it.⁷⁵ "This is a place which is 600 feet from where almost 3,000 people were torn to pieces by Islamic extremists," said Debra Burlingame, the co-founder of the group 9/11 Families for a Safe & Strong America and a vocal opponent, at least initially, of any plans to build on the site.⁷⁶ And Newt Gingrich, likewise, prominently remarked that there "should be no mosque near Ground Zero in New York so long as there are no churches or synagogues in Saudi Arabia."⁷⁷ No matter that the United States is fundamentally a secular state founded on the principle of religious freedom and tolerance, whereas the kingdom of Saudi Arabia is, constitutionally, an Islamic state, and that the first article of the Saudi constitution makes this unambiguously clear: "The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a sovereign Arab Islamic state with Islam as

its religion; God's Book and the Sunnah of His Prophet, God's prayers and peace be upon him, are its constitution, Arabic is its language and Riyadh is its capital." Anti-Islamic messages could be seen on the signs carried by protesters at the many anti-Parky rallies held during the summer of 2010, a sampling of which included: "MUSLIMS INSENSITIVE TO VICTIMS & THEIR FAMILIES WITH MOSQUE 600FT. FROM GROUND ZERO. WE DON'T NEED A MONUMENT TO THOSE WHO ATTACKED OUR COUNTRY AT GROUND ZERO!!" and "ISLAM IS NO LONGER A LEGITIMATE RELIGION," or, simply, "ISLAM KILLS."

This particular construction of sacred space, one that echoes the Durkheimian sense of the sacred as defined, in part, by exclusion, has seemed, at times, to be the only one in play, but in fact there have been many groups and individuals who have resisted this monolithic, aggressive, and exclusionary sense of the sacred space of Ground Zero. After all, when the plans for the Cordoba House were first vetted, there was in fact widespread support for the center; recall that Community Board No. 1 voted 29-1 in favor of the project, and The New York Landmarks Preservation Commission voted 9-0 in support of the plans.⁷⁸ The support for the project has been broad and diverse, and for some has been based on a sense of the inherent plurality of religion in the United States, and for others it has been based on the constitutional protection of the freedom of religion. For many citizens of the United States, Imam Rauf's original vision for Parky—a place of peace and reconciliation and resistance to extremism—remains profoundly compelling.

So why has this not been the dominant discourse here? It seems too easy to say that hate and bigotry simply win, that the zealot's voice is heard simply because he or she shouts louder. The matter is surely more complex than that. Returning to the example of Ayodhya that I discussed in the prior chapter, the enmity between Hindus and Muslims that erupted in 1992 did not come out of nowhere; indeed, as Kakar and others have attempted to demonstrate, there were long simmering and deeply embedded tensions between the two communities; the violence of Ayodhya was only spontaneous in a narrow sense, and was, as I have argued, highly orchestrated, the product of intense and complex manipulation by a range of conscious and unconscious agents.

Ground Zero has been no less complexly manipulated. Although it initially may have been seen as sacred because of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the violence and trauma of that event, the sacredness of the site has never been simply a given, and it has never been static; it is the

product of interwoven political and social and commercial and religious discourses. Aspects of this discourse tap into deeply held beliefs for some Americans, as well as deep fears. Extending Butler's discussion of alterity, the discursive formulation of the Muslim other has been a means through which the American self has been defined and recognized. Ground Zero, in this regard, can be seen as the physical manifestation of this encounter, and as such it is intimately connected with a kind of collective American sense of self. As such, Ground Zero has become a synecdochally charged space, a place that is imbued with what Paul Ricoeur might have called a surplus of meaning. It is a place conceived by many as sacred, a place whose sacredness is constituted by particular sorts of absences and presences. The sixteen acres that for some delimit Ground Zero, and the long, long conceptual shadow this space casts, are thus central to a larger cultural debate about the presence of Islam and Muslims in America and the very conception of what it is to be American.

I have argued in this chapter, extending my discussion in Chapter 1, that the sacred is not a static concept, but a decidedly dynamic one that is frequently contested, that is employed not naturally, not as a neutral description. In the case of the debate over Parky, the category "sacred" has been used polemically, as a weapon in a social and political battle, a battle that is about the space of what had been the World Trade Center and what that place should be, but also a battle that extends far beyond the sixteen acres of the site, one that has become not just what should or should not be located there, but what should or should not, and who should and should not, be located in the United States. The shadow of Ground Zero is, indeed, a long one.

As a final note, there is a deep and opprobrious irony at play here that has been too easily lost on those who have so stridently opposed the Parky project: many Muslims worked in the towers of the World Trade Center, and dozens of those workers lost their lives in the attacks on the towers. Muslim children lost fathers and mothers in the attacks; Muslim husbands and wives lost spouses. If part of what makes Ground Zero sacred is that it is a grave, then the unrecovered remains of these Muslim men and women are scattered about and mixed into the space that is Ground Zero. They are very much part of the site's sacredness.

category, it is a word that has also been used as a powerful rhetorical tool. As I have said, "sacred" is an argument to be made, but it can also be used to more powerfully make an argument. In the Native American context, Mato Tipila is certainly a special place, a powerful place where powerful beings are thought to reside, and where important rituals related to those powerful beings are performed. For some Native Americans it is called a sacred place. As such, it is a place that is intimately linked to ontology, with the very core of being; as Heidegger might put it—as paraphrased by David Harvey—place is the "locale of the truth of being."⁶⁰

Of course, as much as Heidegger may speak to the focus of this book—the centrality of place in the lives of religious communities and individuals—the sentiment does little to resolve the very real, on-the-ground struggles over place. These struggles are, as I have maintained throughout, as much about identity as they are about property and ownership. It has certainly not been my intent to provide a solution to such disputes; when it comes to place, it is indeed doubtful that we can all just get along. Viewed from one angle, the dispute over Mato Tipila/Devils Tower offers up a model for how such disputes might be resolved, in that the various groups with claims on the tower did indeed talk to one another, and for the most part they did so in an intentional spirit of cooperation and accommodation. That said, though, I am quite certain that such conflicts over religiously significant places will continue as long as external groups—such as the Archaeological Survey of India, or UNESCO, or real estate developers, or the United States government—wield disproportionate power in deciding what sort of places these are and what sorts of people are permitted to use them and what sorts of uses are permitted.

 8

Fences and Walls: A Not-So-Final Reflection on Preservations, Prohibitions, and Places in Motion

He only says, "Good fences make good neighbors."
 Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
 If I could put a notion in his head:
 "Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it
 Where there are cows?
 But here there are no cows.
 Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
 What I was walling in or walling out,
 And to whom I was like to give offence.
 Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
 That wants it down."

—ROBERT FROST, "Mending Wall"

The question of boundaries is the first be encountered; from it all others flow. To draw a boundary around anything is to define, analyze and reconstruct it.

—FERNAND BRAUDEL¹

A FENCE IS, among other things, a means of definition, specifically a means to define a place, or, more properly, two places. A fence marks a here and a there, a "this side" and a "that side"—or, as is perhaps more usually the case, a "my side" and a "your side." Fences are, typically, arbitrary things;

place a fence in the middle of an open field, anywhere in that field, and there are then two fields where there had been one. But of course fences are much more than that, as Frost, I think, is intimating.

A fence, a wall in this case, is also a walling out, a means of separating and defining—this is, after all, what definition is all about—and this separating is more often than not likely to give offense, likely to be perceived, by someone who finds themselves on the wrong side of the wall, or on any side at all, as aggressive. The massive wall that separates the Palestinians from the Israelis—the so-called Israeli West Bank Barrier—is an offense to those Palestinians; it is a prohibition, a restriction, a means of walling them in and walling them out. The notion of the sacred, as it is applied to a place such as Devil's Tower, is also a kind of wall, albeit a metaphorical wall. It is a means of defining, and, as such, of limiting and prohibiting.

David Chidester, in his important book *Savage Systems*, uses the term “apartheid comparative religion” to describe the ways in which academics have constructed these sorts of fences, or borders:

[A]partheid comparative religion sought local control in global terms... this approach to comparative religion has been committed to identifying and reifying the many languages, cultures, peoples, and religions of the world as if they were separate and distinct regions. Each religion has to be understood as a separate, hermetically sealed compartment into which human beings can be classified and divided.²

There are, as Chidester demonstrates, real effects of this sort of discourse; again, it is a discourse that came to be, in the Southern African case as well as throughout the colonized world, a means of control and exploitation. Such “hermetically sealed” compartments are a means of othering, a means of producing an “us” and a “them”—and a “them” that, frequently, needs to be dominated. As Daniel Boyarin starkly puts it, “Borders themselves are not given but constructed by power to mask hybridity, to occlude and disown it.”

As we have seen throughout these chapters, to define a place—or an object or a person—is also, always, to define what it or he or she is not. Bodhgayā is a Buddhist place, not a Hindu place; America is for Americans, not Muslims; Bear Lodge is a sacred place, not a playground, and so on. But as Boyarin insists, religious people, and I would extend this to religious places, are hybrid: “The religious dialect map is a hybridized one,

and the point is that that hybridity extends even to those religious groups that would consider themselves ‘purely’ Jewish or ‘purely’ Christian in their self-understanding.” For many scholars and students of religion, though, this is a very difficult idea to accept, and even when a nod is given to Bhabha’s notion of hybridity, it is typically business as usual when we go about teaching our courses and writing our books and articles, with neat divisions between what is Jewish and what is Christian, or what is Buddhist and what is Hindu.³

Borders, like definitions, are tentative things. I write this from my office in Denver, if I had been sitting here two centuries ago I would be in Mexico, and two centuries before that I would be in land not defined at all, or at least not in terms of borders and states and nations. One of the most dramatic recent examples of this was the partitioning of India and Pakistan in 1947; suddenly, there was a border where there had been none, an arbitrary line that defined not just territory, but, in very significant ways, identity. Suddenly one belonged to either Pakistan or India, with all of the attendant religious complexities of those belongings—and these quickly became political and social and economic and military complexities as well. The problem, however, the devil in these particular details, is the way such borders become fixed, become reified. Borders, labels, definitions—these are peculiar things, because they pose as natural and permanent entities, when, as we know, as we have seen throughout this book, they are very much not permanent and not static, but in constant flux.

In my discussion of UNESCO’s involvement at Bodhgayā in Chapter 5, I was quite critical of the sorts of “fixing” that an organization such as UNESCO engages in, because, among other things, it involves an imposition by an outside group—a very powerful Western organization, after all—of a particular view of the world, a particular *epistémè*, to use Foucault’s term. And as I argued in that chapter, and as I also argued in my discussion in Chapter 3 of the ways the Archaeological Survey of India “fixed” temples and images, there is a not-so-subtle hegemony at work here. These organizations impose a particular order of things.

When the National Park Service was created in 1916, its mandate was to preserve the natural beauty of the parks, to freeze them, as it were, and preserve them in their pristine, original state. As Ross-Bryant nicely puts this:

Central to the symbolic power of the national park has been the connection between the actual site and the idea of a *changelless*

pristine America and an understanding of the sacred that is coincident with this unchanging reality. The discourse surrounding this symbol, however, is constantly changing, as are the parks. The creative tension between this attachment to a timeless ideal and the actualities of change is at the heart of the national park as a sacred site, a place that is seen as set apart, immune to the passage of time and the imperfections of life in the world. Sacred places are often said to have these characteristics. In a sacred place, things do not change.⁶

But things do change—that is Ross Bryant's point. "Of course, this doesn't actually happen in any sacred space—humans and their cultural creations are always in the process of change." Firstspace is rarely just that, and becomes Thirdspace through use and through the sorts of Secondspace imaginings that all of these places participate in. The sort of "creative tension" Ross Bryant is interested in can mean that one worshiper sees Visnu's footprint, another the Buddha's; this can mean that one person sees a gnarly place to climb, while another sees a place for the performance of solemn rituals. And as much as these sorts of tensions can be creative, they can also be strikingly destructive.

Where does religion end and the secular begin in all of this? It is a rhetorical question, but one worth posing nonetheless. When the climbing guide Andy Petefish says, "Climbing on Devils Tower is a spiritual experience for me," is he really making a religious claim? For the Hindus who claim Ayodhya as the birthplace of Rāma, it is certainly a claim about religion, but it is also about many other things: about power, crudely put, but also about identity and social location and about straight-up alienation and aggression. For the young men who stormed the mosque, they were surely acting as much as disenfranchised underemployed youth as militant Hindu fundamentalists.

It is in part we who decide to foreground a particular identity, labeling certain sorts of actors religious, others secular. For the Dalits who have agitated at Bodhgaya in recent years, their aims are as much about religious access to the temple as about a rejection of an imputed social identity and location. Likewise, Pamela Geller's attacks on Islam, as distasteful as they are, are not simply attacks on religion, but also assertions of what she, and her followers, perceive as normative American identity, which for many of Geller's followers precludes Islam. What I think is interesting about the resolution of the Devils Tower dispute—if it is indeed a resolution—is

that the place continues to be understood by those who claim it as both a sacred and a secular place, and a sacred place with multiple resonances. In other words, it continues to be in motion.

I have perhaps too quickly moved on from my point about walls and definitions and labels; surely it is not as simple as the labels that we scholars—or any other observer, for that matter—put on particular places and the disputes that swirl around them. Part of what determines what sort of conflict is involved is the orientation of the actors on the ground. The Native Americans protesting what they see as the desecration of a sacred place are acting first as Native Americans, and their objection is in large part a matter of what we—and not necessarily they, since "religion" is not necessarily something Native Americans think they are engaged in—call religion. The issue, for them, is the pollution of their sacred place. The rock climbers, typically although not exclusively, are not making a religious claim, although religion is obviously at the heart of the matter, since their lawsuit was based on an interpretation of the Establishment Clause of the United States Constitution. When Imam Feisel Abdul Rauf rejected the designation "sacred space" for the area around Ground Zero, he was in part attempting to remove religion from the discussion, which for some Americans is nonsensical, since the center planned for Parky is a Muslim community center, not simply a community center. And here is the complexity of the wall: even if only one person or group erects a wall, it is a wall, nonetheless, for both groups.

Walls, like borders, are temporary things. Walls go up, certainly, as is painfully evident to the Palestinians living in the shadows—and quite obviously on the wrong side—of the so-called Israeli West Bank Barrier. Walls come down as well; there is no longer an East and a West Berlin, just Berlin. Likewise, the wall separating the religious and the non-religious, the sacred and the secular, is never absolute. The sacred is contagious in a way somewhat different from that meant by Durkheim. It seeps in and out. As Frost puts it, "Something there is that doesn't love a wall / That wants it down." I began this book with Robert Orsi's provocative injunction: "This is a call, then, for attention to religious messiness, to multiplicities, to seeing religious spaces as always, inevitably, and profoundly intersected by things brought into them from outside, things that bear their own histories, complexities, meanings different from those offered within the religious space." In motion, messy, hybrid—such is the nature of the places I have been discussing in this book.

I hope, in the end, to have provoked an attention not just to messiness—although I think that is crucial—but also to the particularity of

religiously charged places and the actors who engage and constitute them. What is at stake? In part, it is a matter of understanding the complexity of place and responding to this complexity appropriately. Take as an example the Taliban's destruction of the Buddhas at Bamiyan in 2001, which I have discussed at several junctures of this book. This was an act that was certainly about place, about a place designated by UNESCO as culturally significant, a place that was marked by some in the West as belonging to the entire world. The Taliban did not see it this way. This was their place, and UNESCO had no right to designate or dictate anything to do with it. If they wanted to destroy it and all of the other vestiges of foreign religion in their country, then that was their right. To stop there, however, is to miss what was going on, to miss the political and the human dimensions of their act of iconoclasm. Jonathan Z. Smith has remarked more than once that the role of the scholar is to seek more and more complexity. As I said in the Preface of this book, my own question is always some variation of "What's going on here?" There can be no static answer to this question. The places I have discussed here are in motion, as Appadurai would have it, and the conflicted and tense negotiations over their significance, on the ground, is ongoing, as should be our analysis of them. I have noted at several junctures that I am suspicious of the very term "sacred space"—or "sacred place," as the case may be—and although I have used "sacred" a great deal throughout this book, I remain uneasy with the term. But it is my dis-ease with the easy label, with the unexamined generalization, that has held my interest.

Place matters, we might say. The questions remain, though: how? why? when? for whom? In these chapters, I have provided, I think, some specific, contextual answers to these questions. I have tried to demonstrate what is at stake in a particular context. It is an ongoing discussion, in part, as I have argued, because these places do not sit still—they are in motion.

Notes

PREFACE

1. Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 167.
2. Barbara Bender, "Place and Landscape," in *Handbook of Material Culture*, ed. C. Tilley, W. Keene, S. Kuechler, R. Rowlands, and P. Spyer, 303–314 (London: Sage, 2006), 303.
3. James Legge, *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms, Being an Account by the Chinese Monk Fa-Hien of his Travels in India and Ceylon (A.D. 399–414) in Search of the Buddhist Books of Discipline* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886), 124.
4. See my "Reevaluating the Eighth-Ninth Century Pala Milieu: Icono-Conservatism and the Persistence of Śākya-muni," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 20, no. 1 (1997): 28–300; see also John Huntington's series of articles, "Sowing the Seeds of the Lotus: A Journey to the Great Pilgrimage Sites of Buddhism, part I," *Orientalism* 16, no. 11 (1985): 46–61; "Sowing the Seeds of the Lotus: A Journey to the Great Pilgrimage Sites of Buddhism, part II," *Orientalism* 17, no. 2 (1986): 28–43; "Sowing the Seeds of the Lotus: A Journey to the Great Pilgrimage Sites of Buddhism, part I," *Orientalism* 17, no. 3 (1986): 32–46; "Sowing the Seeds of the Lotus: A Journey to the Great Pilgrimage Sites of Buddhism, part IV," *Orientalism* 17, no. 6 (1986): 28–40; and his "Pilgrimage as Image: the Cult of the Aśṭamahāpratihārya, Part I, *Orientalism* 8, no. 4 (1987): 55–63, and "Pilgrimage as Image: the Cult of the Aśṭamahāpratihārya, Part II, *Orientalism* 18, no. 8 (1987): 56–68.
5. Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 56.
6. John Bergquist, "Theories of Space and Construction of the Ancient World," paper presented in the Constructics of the Social and Cultural Worlds of Antiquity Group, 1999, 6.
7. Soja, 56–57.
8. *Ibid.*, 10.

9. *Ibid.*, 5.
10. For a fuller articulation of her methodology, see Wendy Doniger, *The Impied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).
11. Jonathan Z. Smith, "Differential Equations: On Constructing the Other," in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 230–231.
12. Shields, *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1991), 6.
13. For a difficult but fecund overview—which is really much more than just an overview—see Soja's *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), or, for a different sort of overview, Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (California: University of California Press, 1997). For a more accessible survey of some of the major thinkers here, see Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (London: Blackwell, 2004), as well as Shields, *Places on the Margin*, particularly chapter one, and also Margaret Rodman's very useful article, "Empowering Place: Multilocality and Multivocality," *American Anthropologist* 94, no. 3 (1992): 640–656.
14. Soja, *Thirdspace*, 2.
15. Shields, *Places on the Margin*, 10.

CHAPTER 1

1. Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 9.
2. Charles Tilly, "Contentious Conversation," *Social Research* 65, no. 3 (1998): 491–510, 493.
3. Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Toward a Reflexive Sociology* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 134.
4. Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 28.
5. For instance, James J. Preston, in a very useful piece that articulates an interdisciplinary methodology and typology for the study of pilgrimage, nonetheless writes of what at times is a peculiarly agentless, and I think theologically suspect, "spiritual magnetism" created by and present at pilgrimage places; see James J. Preston, "Spiritual Magnetism: An Organizing Principle for the Study of Pilgrimage," in *Sacred Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage*, ed. Alan Morinis, 31–46 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992); see also Belden C. Lane, who writes that "sacred place is not chosen, it chooses.... Sacred place, therefore, is a construction of the imagination that affirms the independence of the holy; God chooses to reveal himself only where he wills," *Landscapes of*

- the *Sacred: Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 19.
6. David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal, "Introduction," *American Sacred Space*, ed. David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal, 1–42 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 17.
7. George Marcus, "Imagining the Whole: Ethnography's Contemporary Efforts to Situate Itself," *Critique of Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (1989): 7–30, 25.
8. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*, trans. Felicity Baker (London: Routledge, 1987); cited in J. Z. Smith, *To Take Place*, 107. Smith cites the French original, *Sociologie et anthropologie: précédé d'une introduction à l'œuvre de Marcel Mauss* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1950), xlix.
9. Roger Friedland and Richard D. Hecht, "The Politics of Sacred Place: Jerusalem's Temp Mount/al-haram al-sharif," in *Sacred Places and Profane Spaces: Essays in the Geographies of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Jamie Scott and Paul Simpson-Housley, 21–61 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991), 55; see also their "The Bodies of Nations: A Comparative Study of Religious Violence in Jerusalem and Ayodhya," *History of Religions* 38, no. 2 (1998): 101–149, and "Changing Places: Jerusalem's Holy Places in Comparative Perspective," *Israel Affairs* 5, nos. 2–3 (1999): 200–225. For more on the social construction of place and space, see Henri Lefebvre's now classic *The Production of Space*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991).
10. See, for instance, Richard Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), for an account of the various identities a single image can take on.
11. For a clear treatment of this in the American context, see the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life's 2008 "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey," accessed November 11, 2011, <http://religions.pewforum.org/>.
12. There is a great deal of literature on the topic; see for instance Sebastian Kim, *In Search of Identity: Debates on Religious Conversion in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), and Rowena Robinson and Sathianathan Clark, *Religious Conversion in India: Modes, Motivations, and Meanings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), and also Suniti Sarkar "Hinduism and the Question of Conversions," in *The Concerned Indian's Guide to Communism*, ed. K. N. Panikkar, 75–106 (New Delhi: Viking, New Delhi 1990).
13. Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), xi.
14. *Ibid.*, 19.
15. See Horni K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).
16. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969), 139.
17. For a discussion of the broad impact of the Turnerian approach to the study of pilgrimage, see Simon Coleman, "Do You Believe in Pilgrimage?"

- incessant improvisation within limits set by the previous histories and relations of particular interlocutors" (494).
82. Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage*, 38.
83. Tapan Basu et al., *Khaki Shorts*, 56.
84. Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 37–41; Turner breaks these dramas into four phases: breach, crisis, redressive action, and reintegration.
85. Turner, *Process, Performance, and Pilgrimage*, 65.
86. *Ibid.*, 66–67.
87. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72.
88. Tilly, "Contentious Conversation," 495.
89. Nandy, *Contesting the Nation*, 148.

CHAPTER 2

1. Shields, *Places on the Margin*, 6.
2. See Alan E. Morinis, *Pilgrimage in the Hindu Tradition: A Case Study of West Bengal* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984), especially 165–201.
3. See David Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Mahāvidyās* (California: University of California Press, 1997), 92–111.
4. See Morinis, *Pilgrimage in the Hindu Tradition*.
5. See Diana Eck, *Darsan: Seeing the Divine in India* (Chambersburg, PA: Anima Books, 1981); Joanne Punzo Vaghorne and Norman Cutler, eds., *Gods of Flesh/Gods of Stone: The Embodiment of Divinity in India* (Chambersburg, PA: Anima Books, 1985); and also Kathleen M. Erndl, *Victory to the Mother: The Hindu Goddess of Northwest India in Myth, Ritual, and Symbol* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
6. See Diana Eck, *Banaras: City of Light* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983); and Jonathan Parry, *Death in Banaras* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
7. Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine*, 96.
8. *Ibid.*, 97.
9. Morinis, *Pilgrimage in the Hindu Tradition*, 167.
10. Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).
11. I do not wish to delve much further into the complex debate about memory and history, which has been raging on and off since the end of the nineteenth century, but it is worth remembering that Nietzsche, in the second of his *Untimely Meditations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), talks of the hypertrophy of memory that characterizes the modern, industrial world of the nineteenth century; true enough, perhaps, although this is perhaps a rather too monoptic, Euro-centric view of the way societies remember,

- among the many sources on the topic, see Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
12. I want what you have not because I want it, Girard suggests, but because you have it, René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); also see Girard, "Generative Scapegoating."
 13. For more on this larger debate, see Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).
 14. Tilly, Charles, "Contentious Conversation," 493.
 15. *Ibid.*, 498.
 16. Quoted in Setha Low, "The Memorialization of September 11: Dominant and Local Discourses on the Rebuilding of the World Trade Center Site," *American Ethnologist* 31, no. 3 (2004): 326–39, 335.
 17. Maria Sturken, *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 205.
 18. Sam Lubell, "Reflecting Absence Chosen as World Trade Center Memorial," *Architectural Record* 192, no. 2 (2004): 21–21, 21.
 19. Sturken, *Tourists of History*, 227.
 20. Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory: Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 105.
 21. Sturken, *Tourists of History*, 239.
 22. *Ibid.*, 227.
 23. *New York Times Magazine*, November 23, 2001.
 24. See David Simpson, 9/11: *The Culture of Commemoration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 79.
 25. *New York Times*, July 2, 2002.
 26. 9/11, Jules Naudet, Gedeon Naudet, and James Hanlon, directors (Paramount Pictures, 2002).
 27. Patricia Yaeger, "Rubble as Archive, or 9/11 as Dust, Debris, and Bodily Vanishing," in *Trauma at Home: After 9/11*, ed. Judith Greenberg, 187–194 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003); and Sturken, *Tourists of History*.
 28. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 291.
 29. *New York Daily News*, March 24, 2007.
 30. Philip Nobel, *Sixteen Acres: Architecture and the Outrageous Struggle for the Future of Ground Zero* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004), 22.
 31. Quoted in Paul Goldberger, *Up from Zero: Politics, Architecture, and the Rebuilding of New York* (New York: Random House, 2005), 37.
 32. *New York Times*, June 10, 2005.
 33. According to Michael Tomasky, "ground zero" was first used in relation to the attacks on the World Trade Center just hours after the event, by Larry McShane,

- an Associated Press reporter, Tomasky, "Battleground Zero," *New York Review of Books*, May 1, 2003, 18; <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2003/may/01/battleground-zero/>, accessed October 19, 2011.
34. See Maria Sturken, *Tourists of History*, 167; see also Amy Kaplan, "Homeland Insecurities: Transformations of Language and Space," in *September 11 in History: A Watershed Moment*, ed. Mary L. Dudziak, 55–69 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).
35. *New York Times*, September 17, 2001.
36. *New York Times*, September 23, 2001.
37. Sturken, *Tourists of History*, especially chapter 5, "Architectures of Grief and the Aesthetics of Absence"; see also Nathan Carlin and Heba Khan, "Mourning, Memorials, and Religion: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on the Parky Controversy," *Religions* 2 (2011): 114–131.
38. *New York Times*, October 22, 2010.
39. *New York Times*, July 20, 2010.
40. Quoted in Selha Low, "The Memorialization of September 11," 333.
41. *New York Times*, December 9, 2009.
42. <http://www.cordobainitiative.org/about/>, accessed October 15, 2011.
43. Newt Gingrich, for one, has called it a "deliberately insulting term" that points to Muslim conquest; statement issued on July 21, 2010, www.newdirect.org; the statement, and indeed the website itself, has since been removed.
44. Nancy Fuch Kreimer, *Huffington Post*, May 21, 2010.
45. *Financial Times*, August 13, 2010.
46. *Ibid.*
47. *New York Times*, May 26, 2010.
48. *New York Daily News*, May 19, 2010. Ironically enough, this association of Islam and monkey worship has been in the air for a very long time; see Sophia Shafi, "Muslim Monsters from Prophet Muhammad to Bin Laden: Stereotypical Images of the Muslim Male," Ph.D. dissertation, Iliff School of Theology and the University of Denver, 2010.
49. <http://religiousliberty.tv/transcript-of-mayor-bloombergs-speech-on-ground-zero-mosque.html>, accessed October 17, 2011.
50. The Koran burning was eventually carried out in March of 2011 after Jones and his congregation, Dove World Outreach, put the sacred text "on trial" and pronounced it guilty, an event that provoked violent outrage in several countries.
51. M. Kedar and D. Yershalimi, "Sharia and Violence in American Mosques," *The Middle East Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (2011): 59–72.
52. Slovoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (New York: Verso, 2002), 11.
53. When Anders Behring Breivik detonated a bomb in Oslo on July 22, 2011 and then proceeded to shoot to death some ninety campers on the nearby island of Utoya, news reports immediately pointed to Islamic terrorists as being responsible for the attacks (and, indeed, several groups claimed responsibility). It was

- simply assumed. For several hours, the suspected Islamic links to these attacks were reported in the media, including interviews with Muslims in Norway who denounced the attacks. Breivik, it turned out, was a white Norwegian right-wing anti-Islam crusader. Equally rampant speculation followed the bombings at the Boston Marathon in April 2013, and the assumed Islamic motivations of the accused bombers, Dzhohdar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev.
54. On the idea of religious violence as motivated by or oriented toward the notion of cosmic war, see Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); see also Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), and, for a rather different approach to the question of motivation, Talal Asad, *On Suicide Bombing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).
55. For an insightful and devastating account of this process, see Michael Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), and also Kakar, *The Colors of Violence*.
56. Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), 10.
57. *Ibid.*
58. A simple but graphic illustration of Butler's point could be seen in the ubiquitous "United We Stand" bumper stickers in America after September 11—this is both an assertion of identity ("United" . . . "We") and opposition ("Stand").
59. See Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 22–50, and the expanded version of this article, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).
60. See Peter Gottschalk and Gabriel Greenberg, eds., *Islamophobia: Making Muslims the Enemy* (Plymouth, UK: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008); Andrew Slyrock, ed., *Islamophobia/Islamofilia: Beyond the Politics of Enemy and Friend* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010); Christopher Allen, *Islamophobia* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2010); Gabriele Marranci, "Multiculturalism, Islam and the Clash of Civilisations Theory: Rethinking Islamophobia," *Culture and Religion* 5, no. 1 (2004): 105–117; Michael Welch, *Scapegoats of September 11**, *Hate Crimes and State Crimes in the War on Terror* (Trenton, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006); Salman Sayid and Abdulkarim Vakil, eds., *Rethinking Islamophobia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); and John Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin, eds., *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).
61. <http://thinkprogress.org/politics/2010/11/24/131936/pam-geller-parkys/?mobile=nc>, accessed October 19, 2011.
62. An equally inflammatory movie, *Obsession*, that, among other things, equated political Islam with the Nazis, was produced in 2007 and sent to some 30 million households leading up to the 2008 elections.

63. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/01/20/idUS61419+20-jan-2011+PRN200120>, accessed October 19, 2011.
64. <http://action.a1a.net/Blogs/BlogPost.aspx?id=2147497353>, accessed October 16, 2011.
65. *New York Times*, June 25, 2005.
66. Anne Barnard, "'Everything Is on the Table,' Imam Says of Plans," *New York Times*, September 13, 2010.
67. Eboo Patel, in a speech at the Aspen Institute, actually stated as much, although his point was about inclusiveness, not exclusivity: "I believe Ground Zero is sacred. I believe every inch of America is sacred." "America's Sacred Ground," Aspen Institute, March 30, 2011, <http://www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-work/justice-society/americas-sacred-ground>, accessed October 24, 2011.
68. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms*, 38.
69. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 62.
70. "Atheists Sue to Block Display of Cross-Shaped Beam in 9/11 Museum," Elissa Gootman, *New York Times*, July 28, 2011.
71. See for instance Robert Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), and José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); this issue will reappear in Chapter 6, with my discussion of the dispute over Devils Tower.
72. Paul Vitiello, "Amid Furor on Islamic Center, Pleas for Orthodox Church Nearby," *New York Times*, August 3, 2011.
73. Richard Constock, "A Behavioral Approach to the Sacred: Category Formation in Religious Studies," *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 49, no. 4 (1981): 625–43, 632.
74. Quoted in Lincoln, *Holy Terrors*, 101. In his insightful analysis of the parallel rhetoric of this speech and Osama Bin Laden's speech following Bush's, Lincoln notes Bin Laden's creation of the United States as "The Other as well"—"they measured the relative power of two antithetical cultural formations" (17)—and they both did so using religious language and imagery.
75. Javier C. Hernandez, "Planned Sign of Tolerance Bringing Division Instead," *New York Times*, July 13, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/14/nyregion/14center.html>, accessed October 18, 2011.
76. Lauren Green, "Plan to Build Mosque Near Ground Zero Riles Families of 9/11 Victims," *Foxnews.com*, May 14, 2010, <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2010/05/14/plan-build-mosque-near-ground-zero-riles-families-victims/>, accessed October 19, 2011.
77. William Saletan, "Muslims Keep Out," *Slate*, August 2, 2010, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/frame_game/2010/08/muslims_keep_out.html, accessed October 23, 2011.

78. The project was denied funding by the LMDC in September 2011, however, not because it was promoted by Muslims, but because Parksi had not, at the time of the distribution of funding, been granted non-profit status; see <http://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/2010/09/07/downtown/downtown-nonprofits-get-17m-grants>, accessed October 18, 2011.

CHAPTER 3

- * An early iteration of this chapter appeared as "The Polyvalent *Pādas* of Visnu and the Buddha," *History of Religions* 40, no. 1 (2000): 32–57.
- 1. L. P. Vidyarthi, *The Sacred Complex in Hindu Gṛha* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1961), 24.
- 2. *Ibid.*
- 3. Certainly, the *pādas* do frequently bear various marks, but as I shall discuss below, the markings on the footprints at both Bodhgayā and Gayā seem to be intentionally intermingled and blurred, drawn from a shared Hindu and Buddhist iconographic vocabulary.
- 4. See the essays collected in Waghorne and Cutler, *Gods of Flesh/Gods of Stone*, as well as Waghorne's article, "Dressing the Body of God: South Indian Bronze Sculpture in its Temple Setting," *Asian Art* 3 (1992): 9–34; for an interesting case study of the Buddhist context, see Donald K. Swearer, "Hypostatizing the Buddha: Buddhist Image Consecration in Northern Thailand," *History of Religions* 34 (1995): 263–280. Museum curators have begun to recognize the degree to which the image is out of place in the museum, and there has been some attempt in recent years to recreate something like a temple setting in shows such as the "Manifestations of Shiva" curated by Stella Kramrisch at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in the early 1980s, or the "Gods, Guardians and Lovers" show at the Asia Society in New York in the early 1990s.
- 5. Bernard S. Cohn, "The Transformation of Objects into Artifacts, Antiquities and Art in Nineteenth Century India," in *The Powers of Art: Patronage in Indian Culture*, ed. Barbara Stoler Miller, 301–329 (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 302, 304.
- 6. For a discussion of the practices of arrangement and display of non-Western art in general, see Sally Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).
- 7. Richard Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, 262.
- 8. *Ibid.*, 261. Davis discusses the interesting case of the Dadargani yakṣī, an early Buddhist image that was found near Patna in 1917, which serves to illustrate this point nicely. After the sculpture was disinterred, it was secretly moved to a makeshift shrine, where it was worshiped by local Hindus as a Hindu goddess. When the curator of the Patna museum learned of this, he and several

- Mother Earth: Native American Perspectives on Environmental Justice*, ed. Jace Weaver, 29–46 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996); Sandra B. Zellmer, "Sustaining Geographies of Hope: Cultural Resources on Public Lands," *U. Col. L. Rev.* 73 (2002): 413–519; Leo McAvoy, "American Indians, Place Meanings and the Old/New West," *Journal of Leisure Research* 34, no. 4 (2002): 383–396; Marietta W. Eaton, "Consultation on Grand Staircase—Escalante National Monument from Planning to Implementation," *American Indian Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (2001): 28–34; and Griffin, "Sacred Site Protection."
32. Griffin, "Sacred Site Protection," 395; and Andrew Gulliford, *Sacred Objects and Sacred Places: Preserving Tribal Traditions* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2000).
 33. Fixico, "The Struggle for Our Homes," 9.
 34. Richard B. Collins, "Sacred Sites and Religious Freedom on Government Land," *J. Constitutional L.* 5, no. 2 (2003): 241–279, 241.
 35. Miller, "Culture as Cultural Defense," 92.
 36. Daniel Dubuisson. *The Western Construction of Religion: Myths, Knowledge, and Ideology* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 2007), 64.
 37. Vine Deloria Jr., "Sacred Lands and Religious Freedom," in *The Sacred Land Reader*, ed. Marjorie Beggs and Christopher McLeod, 20, www.sacredland.org/reader.html, accessed December 12, 2012. See also Deloria's discussion of the importance of the spatial in Native American traditions in his important *God Is Not Red: A Native View of Religion* (New York: Putnam, 1973).
 38. The full text of the Act is available at <http://www.cnps.gov/local-law/fhp-IndianRelPrefAct.pdf>, accessed December 12, 2012.
 39. Collins, "Sacred Sites and Religious Freedom," 269.
 40. Deloria, "Sacred Lands," 24.
 41. *Ibid.*, 17.
 42. Miller, "Culture as Cultural Defense," 83.
 43. 16 U.S.C. 431; see Dussias, "Cultural Conflicts Regarding Land Use," 2.
 44. 16 U.S.C. 433.
 45. Patricia L. Parker, "Guidelines for Evaluation and Document Traditional Cultural Properties," U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1990, available at <http://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb38/nrb38%20introduction.htm#tcp>, accessed March 16, 2013.
 46. Miller, "Culture as Cultural Defense," 84.
 47. *Ibid.*, 84; Miller cites John Dormaar and Brian O. K. Reeves, "Vision Quest Sites in Southern Alberta and Northern Montana," in *Kunaiitupit: Coming Together on Native Sacred Sites*, ed. Brian O. K. Reeves and Margaret A. Kennedy, 162–78 (Calgary: Archaeological Society of Alberta, 1993).
 48. Miller, "Culture as Cultural Defense," 85.
 49. Deloria, "Sacred Lands," 18.
 50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*, 87.
52. *Ibid.*, 88.
53. Bruce G. Miller, "Culture as Cultural Defense," 84.
54. J. T. Thomas, "Climbing Ban Upheld at Devils Tower," *High Country News*, April 27, 1998; see also Charles H. Bonham, "Devils Tower, Rainbow Bridge, and the Uphill Battle Facing Native American Religion on Public Lands," *Law and Inequality* 20 (2002): 157–202, especially n68.
55. *Bear Lodge Multiple Use Association v. Babbitt et al.*, 96-CV-063-D (10th Cir. 1996).
56. *Ibid.*
57. *Bear Lodge Multiple Use Association v. Babbitt et al.*, 2 F.Supp.2d 1448, 1452 (10th Cir. 1998).
58. See Dussin et al., "Cross-Cultural Claims on Devils Tower National Monument," 83.
59. Quoted in Freedman, "Protecting Sacred Sites on Public Land," 14–15.
60. Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*, 298.

CHAPTER 8

1. Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, 2 vols., trans. Stan Reynolds (London: Collins, 1972), 118.
2. David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996), 4.
3. Boyarín, *Border Lines*, 15.
4. *Ibid.*, 18.
5. For a refreshing resistance to such neat divisions, see the chapters in Margaret Cornack's *Muslims and Others in Sacred Space* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), particularly Peter Gottschalk's introduction and Lance D. Baird's chapter, "Boundaries and Baraka: Christians, Muslims, and a Palestinian Saint."
6. Ross-Bryant, "Sacred Sites," 53–54.