

## CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY OF SACRED PLACES: THE CASE STUDY OF NAZİMİYE DISTRICT (TUNCELİ)

### Kutsal Yerlerin Kültürel Coğrafyası: Nazimiye İlçesi (Tunceli) Örneği

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#### Öz

Bu araştırma Tunceli ilinin Nazimiye ilçesinde bulunan kutsal mekânların insan ve doğa arasında nasıl bir çevresel algı oluşturduğu ile ilgilidir. Araştırmanın cevaplamaya çalıştığı temel soru; insan ve çevre arasındaki ilişkinin, inanç değerleri ile birlikte mekâna nasıl bir ayrıcalık kazandırdığıdır. Bu doğrultuda araştırma; sembol, mekânsal boşluk, örtük çevrecilik ve mekânsal farkındalık yaklaşımları üzerinden insan ve kutsal mekân ilişkisini ele almaktadır. Konunun kültürel bir araştırma olması sebebiyle nitel yöntem benimsenmiştir. Bu yöntem doğrultusunda ilk olarak araştırma konusu ve araştırma alanı hakkında literatür taraması yapılmıştır. Etnografik yöntem kullanılarak görüşmeler, odak grup görüşmeleri ve gözlemler yapılmıştır. Seçilen yöntem doğrultusunda toplamda yüz yirmi günlük saha çalışması gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırma sonuçları, kültürel değerlerin mekâna yansımalarıyla birlikte, insanların kutsal mekâna karşı aidiyetlik duygusu geliştirdiğini göstermektedir. Kutsal mekân ile ilgili anlatıların bir mekân üzerine işlenmesi sonucu kutsal mekân içerisinde sembolik alanlar oluşturulmuştur. Kutsal mekâna yapılan ziyaret, ziyaretçiler için önemli bir unsurdur. Buna karşılık maddi ve manevi engellerden dolayı kutsal mekâna ulaşım sıkıntısı çeken insanlar, bu mekânları başka bir alanda tekrardan tasarlamışlardır. Bu sebeple asıl ziyaret mekânı haricinde, kutsal mekânı temsil eden alternatif alanlar yaratılarak mekânsal boşluk gerçekleştirilmiştir. Ayrıca insanların kutsal mekândaki eylemlerindeki bilinç düzeyi, mekânsal farkındalığın etkisine bağlı olarak gelişmektedir. Bölgedeki inanç yapısı gereği mekâna hizmet/ibadet olarak görülen davranışların aslında çevrecilik veya çevre koruma faaliyetlerinin, inanca bağlı olarak mekânda "örtük çevrecilik" davranışları şeklinde gerçekleştiğini göstermektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kutsal Mekân, Örtük Çevrecilik, Mekânsal Boşluk, Mekânsal Farkındalık, Nazimiye

#### Abstract

This study deals with how the sacred places in the Nazimiye district of Tunceli province constitute an environmental perception between man and nature. The main question the research tries to answer is; how the relationship between man and the environment gives a privilege to the space with the values of faith. In this direction, this research focuses on the relationship between human and sacred places through symbols, spatial emptiness, implicit environmentalism and spatial awareness approaches. Since the subject is cultural research, a qualitative method has been adopted. In light of this method, first of all, a literature review has been done about the research subject and the research area. Interviews, focus group interviews and observations were made using the ethnographic method. A total of one hundred twenty days of fieldwork was conducted following the method chosen. The research results show that, people develop a sense of belonging towards the sacred places with the reflection of cultural values on the space. As a result of the narration of the sacredness on a place, symbolic spaces have been formed within the sacred places. The visit to the sacred place is an essential element for visitors. On the other hand, when visitors have difficulty in accessing the sacred place due to material or spiritual obstacles, they have imitate these places in another area. For this reason, alternative special places have been constructed representing the sacred place, rather than the actual visiting site. In addition, the level of consciousness of people in their actions in the sacred place develops depending on the effect of spatial awareness. As a result of the belief structure in the region, it can be seen that the behaviors that are accepted as service/worship in the space take place in the form of implicit environmentalism.

**Keywords:** Sacred Place, Implicit Environmentalism, Spatial Emptiness, Spatial Awareness, Nazimiye

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## INTRODUCTION

Sacred places are concrete forms in which the faith values of the society are reflected. These areas, which are accepted as sacred by religious communities, are the centers where people feed their cultural identities and the values of the religious community to which they belong. Moreover, it is the place where the basic principles of the individual behavior of people are located (Pacione, 1999). Generally, these areas are seen as places believed to be personally appointed by God in the eyes of the individuals and society (Güç, 2000). These places, which are claimed to have divine power by humans, are places where individuals believe to be connected to the universe (Hughes and Swan, 1986; Henderson, 1993). Usually, these places include elements belonging to physical environment such as mountain, river, lake, rock, a tree as well as cultural structures such as temple, city, grave, and memorial (Çetin, Şahin and Coşkun, 2017: 186).

Cooper (1992) argues that the phenomenon of religion affects the change and development of society on space and those cultural values must be determined in order to assess changes and developments imposed on space. For this reason, in the researches within the context of the geography of religion, it is necessary to identify the phenomena that have attributed religious values to the place (Büttner, 1974). Because the values reflected in religious places not only reflect the depths of human life, but also reflect the relations with the environment (Levine, 1986). Therefore, examining the reflections of religious values on space is vital in terms of acquiring a broad perspective on cultural geography (Mikesel, 1978).

Singh (1992), who thought that it would be possible to explain the religious forms and values placed on space in the meaning of the relationship between the sacred place and humans, stressed the importance of the symbolic spaces on the sacred places and stated a phenomenological approach. It was argued by various researchers that this situation would clarify the dimensions of the relationship between sacred sites and human beings (Levine, 1986; Jett, 1992; Cooper, 1992; Singh, 1992; Azaryahu, 1996). The symbolic areas include morphological forms attributed to the sacred such as mountains, lakes, streams, trees, caves as well as human structures (Jett, 1992; Gesler, 1998). In the places that are generally blessed as a result of culture, there are narratives such as tales, anecdotes, poems, legends, and songs which feed symbolic spaces. These narratives have also concentrated on the sacred and space, creating one or more symbolic places on the space.

The Phenomenological Approach is a model arguing that it is possible to understand the emotions, thoughts, and experiences of individuals or persons through objective realities (Yavan, 2014). This approach focuses on time-wise and historically established perspective-based relationships between places and people (Tatar, 2017). For this reason, it is an approach adopted by most geographers in the name of religious geography (Levine, 1986; Jett, 1992; Singh, 1992; Cooper, 1992). While the functionalist approaches claim that religion brings people together and strengthens social cohesion, structuralists have drawn attention to the similarities between the essential elements of the religious landscape and the social environment (Levine, 1986). In this way, they tried to reduce their religious experiences to social structures. Ecologists have interpreted religion as a spiritual attitude towards understanding life and finding meaning with it (Levine, 1986).

Salick, Amend, Anderson, Hoffmeister, Gunn and Fang (2007), who emphasized that sacred sites are destructed less than those which are not sacred due to their spiritual qualities, therefore, biodiversity in these sites is higher. Faith in these places creates a protective understanding of the environment. Similarly, Byers, Cunliffe and Hudak (2001) stated their study of sacred and unholy forest areas that religions have an ecological understanding (Byers et al., 2001). Shinde (2011) emphasizing the importance of religious sites in eliminating environmental problems argued that the areas where this idea prevails should be protected and also stressed that these areas contributed to the regional economy. (Shinde, 2011). However, Kong (1992) emphasized that the cultural values in the sacred places would take a different form when the function in their secrecy was added to the economic activity. Spatial awareness is formed by the perception of the space in the memory of individuals in the process of perceiving and understanding individuals, gaining privilege on the place of life (Girgin, 2014). This fact is called spatial awareness, which presents the similarities and differences that distinguish the place that has gained spatial privilege from other places for any reason.

Demirel (2004), who defines the boundary of space in human perception through spatial emptiness states that in the cases where two or more physical areas are similar and the access deriving from the physical distance is limited, is defined as a "spatial emptiness" with the perception of people. The sacred places, which are important for the phenomenon of religion, are blessed by the spirit of the sacred place in different places with the effect of human perception outside the sacred place when the accessibility is limited due to material and spiritual barriers. When this action is performed, it is perceived as if there is no actual distance. This situation, which seems to be misleading, emphasizes that culturally valuable areas are important for human beings (Demirel, 2004).

The subject of the present research covers all the visiting areas in the Nazimiye district of Tunceli Province, belonging to Alevism Sect and whose sanctity is accepted by society. Visiting areas in this region are Düzgün Baba, Kureş Baba, Ana Haskar, Kal Ferhat, Kahlmem, Mora Sur and Hızır Taşı. Interviews were conducted with the visitors of the sacred places in the related places and the traces of perception created by the sacred places in the region, the order formed by the behavior patterns of the people in the sacred places on the social structure, and the interaction between the places of faith and the humans, were investigated. However, the relationship between human and space have been evaluated in the scope of implicit environmentalism, spatial awareness, and spatial emptiness. The sacred places in Nazimiye have been explained by evaluating the effects of the legends and stories attributed to the visits on the sacred place and the symbolic points that people take care of in relation to the visits, beliefs, places, and people. For this purpose, an answer to the following questions has been sought;

- Are the boundaries determined by the individuals who come to visit the sacred places in the Nazimiye district related to the concept of spatial emptiness?
- What are the behavioral rules displayed by the individuals visiting the sacred sites in the district of Nazimiye? Are these codes of conduct linked to implicit environmental activities?
- Do the symbolic areas have any impact on individuals visiting the sacred places in the Nazimiye district? If so, what is the place and importance of these symbolic spaces in the perception of sacred places?
- Are there any differences between the spatial perceptions and code of conduct of those who come to visit the sacred places in the Nazimiye district in the sacred places in terms of their generations; if so, what are the differences?

## METHOD

In this study; the qualitative research method was preferred in order to get the answers of the selected questions depending on the problem. The qualitative research does not limit social issues to numbers. The main objective of qualitative research is to clarify the causes of events and cases and to enable analysis to shed light on the past, present and future of the subject (Patton, 2014). In this context, the use of qualitative method has been used because the subject being investigated requires interaction and process (Kaya, 2014). Qualitative research is focused on understanding the different perspectives between events and phenomena. The approach of qualitative research to the issue is subjective (Kaya, 2014; Kılıç ve Cinoğlu, 2008; Yıldırım ve Şimşek, 2016). This is why the researcher's point of view, methodological skill, sensitivity and honesty are of great importance in terms of the course and results of the study (Kılıç ve Cinoğlu, 2008). In order to understand the visitor's experiences, perceptions, norms, events and phenomena in the space, which enables us to go deeply into the real nature of people, the subject is not only evaluated from the perspective of the researcher but also from the inner world of the people interviewed in the field by examining their perspectives and making a more accurate orientation to the subject (Punch, 2005).

In accordance with the qualitative method, interview questions were prepared by conducting a literature review on the field and subject. Interview questions were applied to 98 randomly selected from the visitors who came to visit the sacred places of Nazimiye. The interviews were implemented both in conversation style and in the form of standardized interviews. Of these interviews, 86 people were visitors and 12 were Alevi Dedes. One-to-one meetings were held with 86 visitors. Both one-to-one interviews and focus group interviews were conducted with Dedes by splitting the group into two (Photograph 1). Also observations were made in the field to support the interviews. The reason for using the observation technique is to measure the consistency between what individuals say and do, and to monitor the flow of everyday life in the sacred place. It is seen that the interview and observation methods used in the study are preferred in the related literature (Arslan, 2013; Mazumdar and Mazumdar, 1993; Ruback, Pandey and Kohli, 2008).

The ethnographic method was used in the study to determine the religious values and norms of the people in the area. In line with this method, daily activities of individuals in the sacred places were observed with a continuous fieldwork lasting 60 days. June and September 2017, the fieldwork was carried out. The main reason for choosing this time period is that the most intense period of visitors to the area is between these months. However, there is not the same intensity of visits every day during the summer season. Especially thursdays and weekends are the days when the visits are more preferred. The fact that thursday is considered to be holy and saturday and sunday are holidays are effective in making these visit days come to the fore. For example, on a thursday during the fieldwork, approximately 150 people visited the sacred place of Düzgün Baba and 75 sacrifices were made there. On the other hand, in the fieldwork were carried out on monday, 15 people visited Düzgün Baba and 2 sacrifices were come across. The fieldwork was started with the Düzgün Baba visiting area, where the visitor potential is most intense. During these works, the author was accommodated in rooms organized for visitors in the sacred places. The lack of public transportation to the visiting places in Nazimiye has

been a factor that has made the fieldwork difficult. Therefore, access to all the places is provided by private vehicle or with the help of people living in the surrounding villages. The fact that it is a region where terrorist incidents are seen also limited the fieldwork. Due to terrorist incidents during the fieldwork, security forces blocked the entrance and exit to the sacred places for 2 weeks.

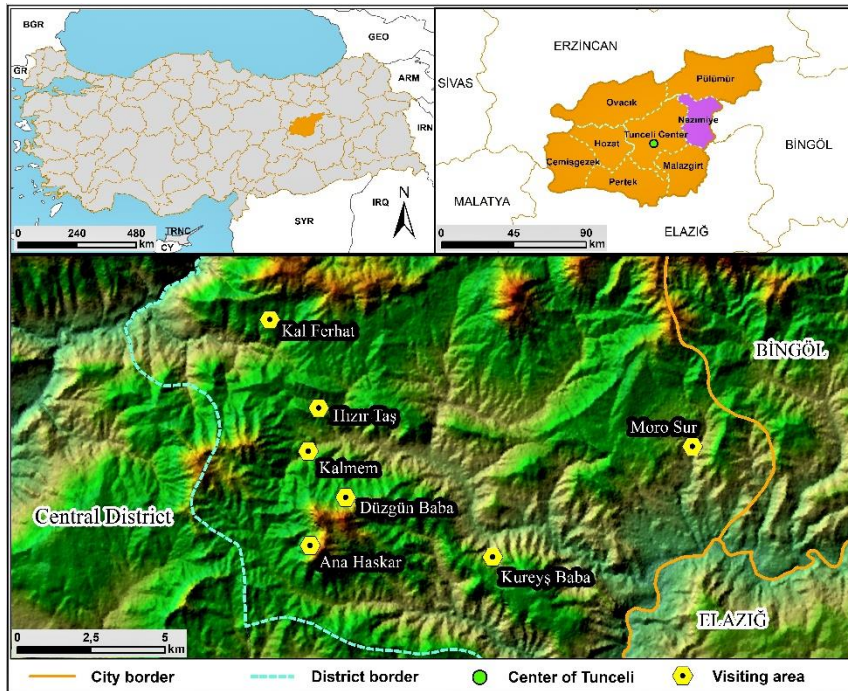


**Photograph 1:** Alevi Dedes in the Nazimiye Region

The data related to the research were obtained as a result of the interviews and observations in the field of research. The first step in analyzing the data was the grouping of data from the visitors under certain themes. In determining these themes, a framework has been formed by considering the research questions and the problem. In the second stage, the records obtained from the field, the notes about the field and the previous researches about the field were examined and the data was converted into a text supported with visual data. The findings obtained from the interview and focus group interviews were directly quoted in the text and interpreted in the findings and results.

## RESEARCH AREA

The research area includes the sacred places, which developed in connection with Alevism Sect, located in the Nazimiye district of Tunceli Province, located in the Eastern region of Turkey (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Visiting Areas in Nazimiye Region

In order to reveal the dimensions of the relationship between the sacred places and humans, we focus on the perception of place based on the values of people's faith and the development of their actions in the sacred places. For example, Kureyş Baba, which is a uniting and unifying nature of society, has daily ritual actions that people apply when they come to the place. Votive, Cem, "Çıralık" and Glove Ritual are applied during the visit. Among the rituals in visits in the Nazimiye region, Glove Ritual is not practiced in other venues, but this ritual is only for visiting Kureyş Baba. Another example can be given from the sacred place of Khalmem. Here, it is believed that "Jiars", means "sacred trust", possess some mystical-magical latent powers. The majority of them are used in therapeutic rituals. They are regarded as the representatives of "the inward world" in worldly life as well as in individual dimensions (Gültekin, 2016: 55; Gezik and Çakmak, 2010). For this reason, they believe that the sacred trust represents the inward world and that it is a force that protects the visit. If a situation arises that does not like the sacred trust in the visiting area, the sacred trust may leave the place. Therefore, people are respectful to the visits places.

## FINDINGS

### Sacred Places Shaped with Faith in Nazimiye

The dominant system of belief in the Nazimiye region is developing depending on the Alevi sect. There are a total of seven sacred places in the district (Photograph 2, 3, 4 and 5). These sacred places are Düzgün Baba, Kureyş Baba, Ana Haskar, Kalhmem, Moro Sur, Hızır Taşı and Kal Ferhat.

The factors that attract visitors to the holy places in this region are not merely healing and intercession. The sacred places in the region are representative of their faith and are also places that feed individuals in the sense of faith. With the reflections of the traditions that have been going on since the past, these sacred places emerge as the fields that give people a sense of belonging.



Photograph 2: Düzgün Baba Visiting Area



Photograph 3: Kureyş Baba Visiting Area



Photograph 4: Hızır Taşı Visiting Area



Photograph 5: Moro Sur Visiting Area

In the areas of visit, there is a practice called "Çıralık"; people donate according to their wishes. This money, which is given by consent, is provided for service or for people who need help. However, some of the local people have recently

started seeing this as an income opportunity. Today, some people in the areas of visitation ask visitors for donating money. On the other hand, this situation, which has become disturbing for visitors, also has a negative impact on the local people's participation in production activities (agriculture and livestock breeding).

The sacred places in Nazimiye district are formed within the framework of the understanding of Pir and Talip. Pir's descendants, who are obliged to ensure social order, must be based on the Ehl-i Beyt (Yıldırım, 2010). Talip is a title for those who want to enter "the road" in Alevism. According to the belief everyone can be a Talip, but there is a necessity of being from Ehl-i Beyt to be a Pir. The Ehl-i Beyt lineage dates back to Imam Musa Kazım who was from the lineage of Hz. Ali. This situation revealed the reflections of Talip and Pir relations among the sacred places in Nazimiye.

The sacred places bearing the title of Pir in the Nazimiye region are Kureyş Baba, Ana Haskar and Düzgün Baba. Biological adherence is said to be existent between these places. Khalmem, Kal Ferhat and Moro Sur are the sacred places that bear the adjective of Talip. These places are an exemplary position for those who are on their way. With this perception, visits have become a field that fosters cultural identity in terms of faith.

When the order in the sacred places is kept alive according to the traditions and customs learned from the ancestors and people living in the region, this idea is dominant: "The sacred souls will always exist with them". According to this conception, the place is totally shaped according to the blessed. For example, visitors who come to the Düzgün Baba for the purpose of sacrificing choose their sacrifice animals and the chosen ones go to the slaughterhouse. Pir makes the sacrifice prayer, and after that prayer, their sacrifice animals are cut off (Photograph 6 and 7).



Photograph 6: An image from sacrifice animals



Photograph 7: An image from horns of sacrificed animals

*When they decided to build Düzgün Baba Djemevi, they started working to build it on the top of a mountain. For this, the road to the mountain began to be carved first. The road was started to be carved, but the digger machines were broken down, and they didn't work. Workers dreamed Düzgün Baba in their dreams and they were warned not to build djemevi at the top of the mountain but at the skirts of the mountain. That is why the road was left halfway. Djemevi was built in the place which was asked by Düzgün Baba. This is his place. Things should be as he wants (R. P. 1).*

*A quarry was opened near Morasur. To remove the marble, we did not want. Nobody listened to us. The quarry collapsed on hot springs of the visit. Those who run the quarry have run away. Now this visit is cross with us and goes. We couldn't protect him, they damaged the place. Now people do not come here as they did before (R. P. 2).*

### Sacred Place Privilege: Spatial Awareness

Awareness is a phenomenon that occurs as a result of an individual gaining self-identity as a result of mentally perceived and understood world. Awareness consists of experiences, observations and observed events (Deikman, 1996). A situation or a case where the individual gains awareness is encoded on the place and stored. The individual supports the perception and understanding process with space. The place is the social structure where social life, social needs, social values and environmental factors are located. The phenomenon, which presents the similarity and difference that distinguishes the space from the other spaces by the people for any reason, is called "spatial awareness". This situation comes to the fore in the sacred places that reflect social values.

The teachings for the sacred place form a certain image in the human mind. Generally, these images push people to search for space. As a result of the identification of the sacred with a physical environment, traces of sacredness are created on the place (Tuan, 1977). These marks are usually reflected as symbols. These symbols are sometimes a reflection of the sacred, sometimes sacred. Since this is a concrete object that supports an abstract existence, it is easier

for man to embrace the holy. For this reason, there is a cult formation next to the symbolized areas on a site (Duymaz and Şahin, 2008). This situation is also present in the sacred areas of the Nazimiye region.

Narratives in the visit areas in the Nazimiye region, the symbolized space in the narrative and the rituals applied in the sacred place, the values and the reasons of the potential attracting people to the space are the awareness. This awareness differs from visits in Nazimiye. Recognition and recognition level of the visits are parallel with the areas where the visitor potential is high.

There is a myth that is attributed to the holy places in all sacred places. The sacred spirit, which owns the sacred place in these narratives, is associated with another sacred spirit in the Tunceli region or the narratives of the sacred places of the holy areas in the past that touch upon the interrelatedness of the sacred places. While all of the narratives cover a past time, they took place on space. These interpretations meet the existing space. Because nowadays, the symbolized areas and the place where the narratives pass overlap. In the symbolized areas, rituals take place depending on certain belief values. Rituals vary according to the physical environment and value of sacred. Rituals and symbolic spaces are higher in the places with higher visitor potential.

One of the common points between spaces is the sacredness attributed to nature. As a result of sacredness, the activities of the people in the space develop with care and sensitivity. Consequently, implicit environmentalism is seen in all visits. It is believed that the holy spirit has the power to provide healing and intercession in addition to punishment. Because everything that exists in the living or inanimate nature comes before the sacred is considered a guest. Therefore, no one has the authority to harm neither the holy one nor any living being.

### Sacred Places and Birth of Symbolic Spaces

While each society builds its own structure and value, the values that unite the society unite individuals under a single identity. The rhetoric conveyed from the past to the present has created social memory. The areas where social memory is nourished rises as memory places. These places are generally public squares, monuments, museums, places where traditions and customs are realized, and places with religious value or sacred places (Kirci, 2015). In this respect, cultural memory and space are not independent of each other and they support each other. Transferring social values to memory spaces also plays an important role.

In all the sacred places in the Nazimiye district, narratives are told in a space based on the events that took place in the past. The events of the narratives are generally shaped around trees, water, rocks, caves, mountains and places of worship. These places formed symbolized spaces formed with the influence of belief values of society. For this reason, the symbolized area is the points defined by the spatial memory. With the influence of the narratives, points have been created to symbolize the place in which people search for spaces.

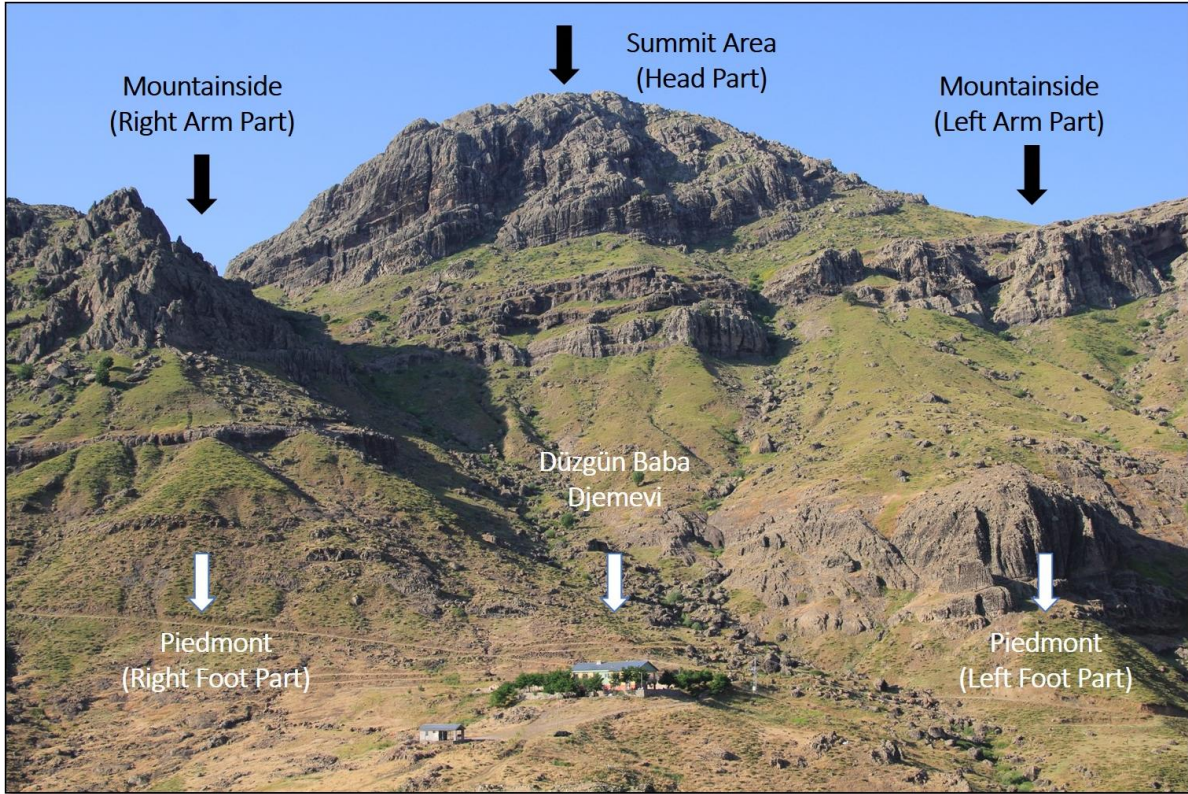
*I've always searched, based on what was told, I searched him in his place (R. P. 3).*

*It is a good feeling to come to the place that our elders told us to come in the past (R. P. 4).*

The size of the space in the narratives and the number of symbolic areas are parallel. The existence of symbolic space in the region not only creates a binding effect on the place but also pushes people into a particular search. The most symbolic space among the sacred places belongs to Düzgün Baba. Düzgün Baba Mountain, Djemevi, Walnut Fountain, Wish Stone, the two caves which are sacred and a bed belonging to Düzgün Baba in a cave, a walking stick and a footprint belonging to Düzgün Baba, as well as a symbolic grave belonging to Düzgün Baba are the places that constitute the symbolic areas. In the formation of more than one symbolic space in the Düzgün Baba visit area, it is effective that the physical environment is suitable for interpretation. As a sacred place where people visit for their wishes, Düzgün Baba Mountain is perceived as a living organism as well as a physical environment. The piedmont of the mountain is perceived as the feet of Düzgün Baba, while the mountainside part is as its arms. The summit of the mountain is symbolized as the head of Düzgün Baba (Photograph 8). There are no visitors here because it is considered a sin to go to the summit. This behavior reflects the visitors' respect for the place. This indicates that the place does not belong to man, but is an area attributed to the Blessed.

There are two areas that symbolize the visit of the Kureyş Baba. One of the first Cem Fire in the Tunceli region is the area where the fire is set and the semah is initiated. The other is the fatherland indicated as the Dome of Rahman. The main Haskar visit area has three symbolic areas: The rock, where cleats are left during the Ana Haskar visit, Ana Haskar Mountain and Ana Haskar Fountain. There is fatherland which is symbolically seen as the Dome of the Rahman Gate and the sacred walking stick. The belief that Kal Ferhat's guardian angel was a red snake in his narratives, as well as his hair and beard were red, integrates with the red soil around the visiting area and thus forms a symbolic area. The Khalmem visit is dominated by a symbol of stone and fatherland. In addition, the fact that the Moro Sur area is thought to heal sick

people and is a symbolic area which also coincides with the spa in the visiting area. Also, a rocky area in the narrative is seen as a symbolic area. In Hızır Stone, the stone at the visiting area forms the symbolic area. Symbols have added value to place as a result of the overlapping of the depictions about the sacred with the space.



**Photograph 8:** The Düzgün Baba Mountain and its Symbolic Parts

### The Limit of the Sacred Place: Spatial Emptiness

The situation of eliminating distance with people's perception is called "spatial emptiness" (Demirel, 2004). In order for a place to be defined as spatial emptiness, two or more areas must have physical distance. In short, apart from the main place, it is the place where cultural values are moved from one place to another. When this action is performed, it is perceived as if there is no actual distance. This situation, which seems to be misleading, emphasizes the importance of culturally important areas for human beings (Demirel, 2004).

*There is no limit to the sanctity of space. We define it here but it is at every point that our mind comes (R. P. 5).*

*When you look at the mountains, this place is a bit wild. But if you believe in something, even if you are on the other side of the world, this visit is with you (R. P. 6).*

The physical structure and climatic conditions of the Tunceli region have created problems in accessing the sacred places for the people who lived in the past. In order to overcome this problem, the people of the region have formed visiting areas that represent sacred sites outside the sacred place. These areas are not part of the sacred places. It is within the physical distance of the sacred place. They are in places where access to the real site is troubled and they are part of a built environment. People often chose a place where the original site is seen when creating these areas. These areas are seen by people as the representative of the real place. Usually, these places are formed around the stones stacked on top of each other, in a rocky area or on the water's edge, and they are now symbolizing the sacred. The name "Nişange" was given to these areas (Gezik and Çakmak, 2010).

Nişanges are the places people go to because they represent the sacred places for individuals who have difficulty in transportation due to material and spiritual reasons. In these areas, people perform the ritual they would practice in the original sacred places. Even if the site is different, rituals are applied as in the original space. These areas are the reflection of the spatial emptiness. As a result of the difficulties caused by the physical distance between sites and transportation barriers, the actions of human imagination has created more than one sacred place.



While the perception of spatial emptiness is defined as an example of the spatial emptiness through the understanding of Nişange, there is another spatial emptiness situation that occurs when the people living outside the boundaries of the Tunceli province come and take away objects belonging to the related sacred place. As a result of the removal of the sacred objects such as stone, soil, water, tree branch by visitors who are not always able to come to the sacred place, a new sacred place is created. The locals call these objects "Teberik". Visitors take these objects from the sacred places to protect their homes and family members from evils, evil eyes and diseases.

*We came to Düzgün Baba, sacrificed our animals and distributed our yeast. I also took water and soil as Teberik. I will take it to my children and relatives who cannot come here (R. P. 7).*

The concept of spatial emptiness is not always a situation outside the main site. Sometimes this also happens between the sacred sites. This is due to the existence of shared values between the sacred places. Although the sacred places in the Nazimiye region are all physically different, they are places that show similarity in terms of belief values. When people go to a visiting area, the feeling that comes with it makes calls to all the holies that are connected with that place. People also remember other holies in the presence of the sacred. This perception is a reflection of the human mind. Respect for the sacred keeps all the spaces without separating spatial differences. This situation also responds to the question of how the limits of the individual and the society as sacred are formed. In addition, sacred places that create space perception also reveal the priority of the place people choose to visit. This priority is seen as the most demanded place among the sacred places and seen as the most sacred place.

### Perception of Environmentalism in Religion: Implicit Environmentalism

How individuals and societies react to environmental problems and how they interpret the environment is related to culture (Berkes, 2008). The fact that environmental pollution has become a problem in the world; the rise in the number of institutions and organizations trying to save the environment shows that the situation is very serious. In the belief of some groups, while the physical environment is not included, some others are intertwined with the physical environment. During the period from the Industrial Revolution to the 1970s, economic, technological and scientific developments have generally kept nature in the background. However, there is a limiting effect of cultural factors on the use and consumption of natural resources in nature-based beliefs (Lucas, 2007; Çetin, Şahin, and Coşkun, 2017).

Behind the behavior of visitors in the region to serve in the sacred places, there are environmental activities to protect the physical environment. However, these environmental activities constitute "implicit environmentalism" actions by reflecting the cultural values connected with faith to the place rather than conscious environmentalism.

The idea that the sacred places belonged to the sacred, gave rise to an attitude that led them to see the individuals coming into the space and all living things in the space as guests. This created a perception of protecting people and other living things in the area. The thought that no one should be hurt in the place is thought to be attached to other living things in nature. Hunting or damage to wild animals in the area is strictly prohibited. There are animals such as "deer, gazelle, bear, wolf, fox, lynx, pig, snake" in the region (Photograph 9).



**Photograph 9:** Deers and Bear in Düzgün Baba Visiting Area (Taken by the Authors)

### Perception of Nature Spirituality between Generations and Losses

Generations, in general, depending on the sociological, political and cultural values of the period in which individuals live may change in terms of value according to temporal differences. The conditions presented by the modern world are not

static. Human perceptions, expectations, fronts, life perspective and behaviors vary according to the perception of the modern world. The belief in Alevism, which has traditional belief values, has had its share from the effects of the modern world. The main tasks of the transfer of the cultural values in this belief system are the Pir, Talip and guide. Pir, Talip and guides are obliged to visit the members of the Alevi faith explain the values within the Alevi faith system to the society. However, this situation is interrupted due to the differences in the perception of different worlds, social life and education level in the individuals who migrated from the region. Experts in both one-to-one interviews and focus group interviews often expressed the loss of respect and trust in the sacred places. According to experts, the migration process is causing a problem in reaching the people belonging to Alevism and individuals who do not know the significance of the places are being sloppy.

The disruptions in the transfer of cultural values differ between actions and perceptions of generations in terms of the sacred place perception of the visitors, the rules and rituals that must be followed in the sacred place. In the region, adherence to traditional attitudes among the older generation is accepted unconditionally, while the younger generation is more closed to traditionality. Elder generation is more sensitive and conscious about the significance of rituals, the concept of service in the sacred places, the values of faith, and the narratives for sacred sites. The younger generations are more questioning about the actions taken in the sacred places. However, they generally respect the actions and narratives in the place.

*This is our culture, place of worship, everything (R. P. 8).*

*I see what is told as a myth. I can't reconcile it with reality. But I felt pretty feelings here and I was full of tranquility. I liked the atmosphere of this place (R. P. 9).*

When the geographical origins of the visitors to the sacred places in Nazimiye district are examined, it is seen that the majority are from the provinces of Tunceli, Erzincan, Elazığ, Erzurum, Bingöl, and Adıyaman. The visitors from these provinces are also remarkable in terms of being the provinces where Kureyşan tribe has suitors.

Another group of visitors coming to the region is the people who live abroad, although their origins are in this region. Since the 1960s, the number of people who migrated from the region and the neighboring provinces abroad due to the need for Europe's manpower is quite high (Erdoğan, 2015). This situation is concluded from the information received from the visitors who came to visit. The biggest difference between the generations is seen from visitors from abroad.

## RESULTS

Sacred places are critical areas because they reflect the values of faith of the individual and society. These places, where the abstract values are embodied, offer the opportunity to examine the communities. Sacred places undertake essential tasks in terms of feeding faith and maintaining the culture (Ari and Soykan, 2006; Bulut, 2011; Yürüdür and Toksoy, 2017). This situation has led to the formation of motivational forces that attract individuals to sacred places.

One of the main reasons why visitors define the places in Nazimiye as sacred is that the saints who are sacred in this area are descendants of Ehl-i Beyt. In the sacred places in the region, it was determined that the traditions and belief values coming from the ancestor were kept alive and formed a sense of belonging in the visitors. This situation has provided visitors enabling to form an emotional connection with the place by contributed to their cultural identity. These places, which are said to create trust and a sense of belonging in individuals, constitute a source of motivation for visitors to come to the sacred places to find healing and intercession.

Although the places considered as sacred by the visitors are physically stated as a location on a certain area, alternative spaces have been created with the effect of the "spatial emptiness" factor, other than the actual location of the sacred place. When the sacred places in the district of Nazimiye are examined through spatial emptiness; it defines the spatial emptiness of the visitors to perform their moral actions as they go to all the holies they believe in a sacred place as well as forming Nişange and Teberik. This situation shows us the importance of human thought rather than a physical scale in drawing the boundaries of the sacred place. Reflection of religious values into sacred places is important because it nourishes social and spatial memory. These places, which bring concreteness to people's search for reality, attract people to the sacred place even if there is an alternative to spatial emptiness in terms of maintaining ancestral traditions and creating a sense of belonging both for the individuals and the society.

The interpretations in the sacred places in Nazimiye (anecdotes, stories, myths, etc.) were dressed in the morphological structure and a sociological value was added to space. The sacred spirit is associated with morphological shapes.

That the visitors see themselves as guests in the space and the owners as saints have a limiting effect on the human behaviors in the sacred place. In addition, due to the belief that the holy spirit in the region can punish people as well as

protect, sensitivity to the protection of nature and the environment is also remarkable. Rather than conscious action, it reflects implicit environmentalism activities based on respect for both the blessed and the values within the faith.

The sites in which cultural forms come to life in the region support the spatial memory. This shows that place is an effective source of motivation for the transfer of culture. For example, as a result of the collapse of the quarry near the visit of Moro Sur, the thermal spring in the visiting area has disappeared. After this event, the local people stated that the potential of visitors in this sacred place decreased. This shows that interpretations may change with the change of form of the place, and that the importance given to some values may disappear over time. The reflections of the narratives on the space will have a different form or will lead to the disappearance of some values over time not being a supporting memory place anymore for the individual and society.

It is common behavior that the sacred places in the Nazimiye region are accepted and considered equal by the visitors. However, when the potential of visitors and the recognition level of the places are examined, there are three visiting areas that stand out among the seven. These are Düzgün Baba, Kureyş Baba and Ana Haskar. The visitor potential is parallel with the recognition levels of these areas. The reason for this is that these places carry the title of Pir. The other three visiting areas within the scope of the research area (Khalmem, Moro Sur and Kal Ferhat) are the visiting areas with the title of Talip. While the visitor potential and recognition level of the visiting areas of Pir fatherland are international and national, the ones of Talip fatherland remained at national and local levels. This reflects the hierarchical structure that develops depending on the culture among the space.

The migration factor has a significant effect on the difference between visitors and the generations of sacred places. The approach of the younger generation towards sacred places is more questioning and has uncertainty about belonging. The older generation exhibits a more submissive approach towards sacred areas. It is also observed that ritual losses are experienced among the generations. The education levels, places of residence, social environment and different perceptions of the world are influential in the emergence of these differences and losses among generations.

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