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Place

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9

Place: Connections and Boundaries in an Interdependent World

Noel Castree

Definition

Place is among the most complex of geographical ideas. In human geography it has three meanings: a point on the earth's surface; the locus of individual and group identity; and the scale of everyday life. Until recently, all three meanings were framed by a 'mosaic' metaphor that implied that different places were discrete and singular. However, in the wake of globalization, it has become necessary for human geographers to rethink their ideas about place. This is not to imply that places are becoming the same, as if globalization is an homogenizing process. Rather, the challenge has been to conceptualize place difference and place interdependence simultaneously. The metaphors of 'switching points' and 'nodes' enable us to see places as at once unique and connected. The chapter shows how these metaphors have been applied to the three definitions of place identified in the chapter. It ends with a brief discussion of new place-related research frontiers being explored by human geographers.

INTRODUCTION: THE END OF PLACE? THE END OF GEOGRAPHY?

Geography is concerned to provide accurate, orderly and rational description and interpretation of the variable character of the earth surface. (Hartshorne, 1939: viii)

The fundamental fact is that ... places ... become diluted and diffused in the ... [new] logic of a space of flows. (Castells, 1996: 12)

Places are not what they used to be. Consider the two quotations above. Writing over six decades ago, Hartshorne, one of the most influential geographers of his generation, famously argued that geography's principal aim was the study of 'areal differentiation.' The world, he argued in *The Nature of Geography* (1939), was a rich and fascinating mosaic of places, and the geographer's task was to describe and explain this 'variable character' in both its human and physical dimensions. Writing on the cusp of a new millennium, the sociologist-cum-geographer Castells saw things very differently. The globalization of production, trade, finance, politics and culture, themselves facilitated by remarkable advances in transport and telecommunications, has made the world a 'global village'. The globalization of flows – flows of people, information and goods – is increasingly breaking down the barriers that have hitherto rendered places distinct and different. The contrast between this argument and Hartshorne's is striking. If Castells is right, the twenty-first century arguably entails something Hartshorne could scarcely have anticipated: namely, 'the end of geography' (O'Brien, 1992). In other words, if areal differentiation is diminishing, if places are becoming 'diluted and diffused', geography as a subject arguably loses one of its *raisons d'etre*. Globalization, it seems, forments a crisis of disciplinary identity.

Or does it? In this chapter I want to argue that far from signalling the end of place, the global interconnections to which Castells refers have resulted in an exciting and innovative redefinition of what place means. Accordingly, the discipline of geography is still very much alive and well. The point, though, as we'll see, is that this variation can no longer be accounted for by treating places as relatively bounded and separate. This 'mosaic view' of the world was already outliving its usefulness in Hartshorne's time. By the 1940s it was becoming clear that places were no longer isolated, a fact that posed a challenge to Hartshorne's idea of 'areal differentiation.' Over 60 years later, places worldwide are, as Castells argues, more intimately interlinked than ever before. However, as we will see in this chapter, contemporary human geographers argue that this does not result in the diminution of place differences. Their challenge is to explain an apparent paradox: how can places remain different at a time when they're more interconnected – indeed interdependent – than ever before? Surely, the globalization of trade, finance and the like to which Castells points signals a more homogeneous world? This paradox, as we shall see, is indeed apparent rather than real: for contemporary geographers have argued that a concept of place fit for our times is one that sees *place differences as both cause and effect of place connections*. Far from heralding the end of place, the argument is that globalization is coincident with new forms of place differentiation. This, if you like, is Hartshorne's areal differentiation resurrected but with an important new twist. In the twenty-first century, the geographical study of place cannot afford to remain caught in the conceptual straitjacket of a mosaic view of the world. But neither should it buy into Castells's exaggerated vision of a placeless planet where geographical sameness is replacing geographical difference.

In what follows I want to explain how human geographers have fashioned a concept of place that is appropriate for this era of globalization [see Chapter 19 on globalization and Chapter 10 on place and physical geography). Moreover, I want also to explain why this concept matters – both for geography as a discipline and for people living in the interdependent world geographers study. First, though, we need to look a little more closely at what place means, and how geographers have defined it in the past, and its importance as a concept to geography as a discipline.

THE 'PLACE' OF GEOGRAPHY

...the significance of place has been reconstituted rather than undermined.

(McDowell, 1997: 67)

The term place, as geographer Tim Cresswell (1999: 226) has observed, 'eludes easy definition.' My Concise Oxford Dictionary identifies 20 meanings of the term, and this semantic elusiveness is compounded by the fact that human geographers have used it in a variety of ways throughout the discipline's history. John Agnew (1987), writing many years ago, cut through this complexity to identify three principal meanings of the term in geographical discourse. These meanings arguably remain in force today:

1 *Place as location* – a specific point on the earth's surface.
2 *A sense of place* – the subjective feelings people have about places, including the role of place in their individual and group identity.
3 *Place as locale* – a setting and scale for people's daily actions and interactions.

In the following sections of this chapter I want to explore these three meanings of place in more detail. In each case my overarching concern is to explain how contemporary geographers have reckoned with the fact of the increasing interconnections among places while still insisting that places are not somehow becoming more alike [see Figure 9.1]. For now, though, I simply want to describe how this triad of approaches to place has emerged, waxed and waned in the years before and since Hartshorne's plenary statement about areal differentiation and the nature of geography. As we'll see in the chronology that follows, the second and third definitions of place emerged to challenge the first in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, since when attempts have been made to synthesize and update them.

Beginnings

Hartshorne used the term 'place' rather imprecisely, often conflating it with the equally complex term 'region'. This fact notwithstanding, it's probably fair to say that Hartshorne viewed place as location – the first and oldest meaning identified by Agnew – and places as distinct points on the earth's surface. Indeed, in the five decades or so that geography had been a university subject in western Europe and North America up to 1939, the normal expectation was that
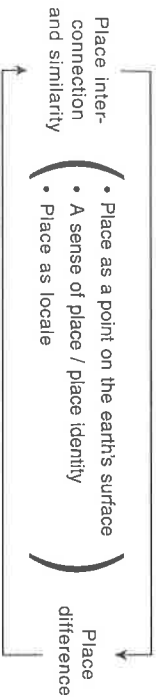
professional geographers would study particular places, in both their human and environmental aspects, in great detail and publish articles and books on them [see Chapters 1 and 3 on the strength of regional geography]. Classic examples include *Tableau de la Géographie de la France* (1917), by French geographer Paul Vidal de la Blache, and H.J. Fleure's *Wales and Her People* (1926). For Hartshorne, these types of study were what made geography special among academic disciplines. In *The Nature of Geography* (1939), he distinguished among 'systematic', 'chronological' and 'idiographic' subjects. The former take just one main aspect of reality and study it in detail – thus economics studies the economy and chemistry the world's chemical elements, and so on. Chronological disciplines study change over time – as history and geology do. However, Hartshorne argued that few disciplines look at how multiple different processes and events come together in the real world in specific places. Geography, he insisted, is precisely this 'synthetic' or integrative discipline. Moreover, because economic, social, political, hydrological, topographic and all manner of other factors never relate in quite the same way in any two places, he argued that geography studies the unique rather than the general. This, for Hartshorne, is what made it an idiographic discipline: it was about accounting for difference rather than sameness.

In truth, Hartshorne exaggerated the importance of place study to geography's disciplinary identity. Others had for decades seen geography less as the study of place and more the study of 'man–land [sic] relationships'. Indeed, after Oxford University's first professional geography appointment – Halford Mackinder – had famously defined geography as a 'bridging subject' between the human and natural sciences in 1887, many geographers had devoted their energies to studying these relationships right up to the continental and global scales. Moreover, the 'nature' of the geography Hartshorne sought to define and defend was to change almost as soon as his widely read book was published. There were three reasons why. First, many professional geographers were drafted into the armed forces during the Second World War and soon found that they lacked the technical skills required to undertake military and intelligence activities. The problem was many of the place studies geographers undertook were broad and largely descriptive. Geographers were trained to be jacks of all trades – to know a bit about a lot of things in given places – but masters of none. Second, this gave the subject a 'dilettantish image', as historian of geography David Livingstone (1992: 311) has put it, which served it poorly in a postwar educational environment where specialization was the norm. When the Geography Department in America's most prestigious university – Harvard – was closed down in 1951, many geographers keenly felt the need to make the discipline more rigorous and

Place inter-connection and similarity

- Place as a point on the earth's surface
- A sense of place / place identity
- Place as locale

Place difference

respectable. Finally, the mosaic view of place that seemed common sense to Hartshorne and his predecessors started to look highly unrealistic, both during and after the war. As one geographical critic of the time put it: 'We are no longer dealing with a world of neatly articulated entities. ... Our suspicion ... [is] that ... geographers may perhaps be trying to put boundaries that do not exist around areas that do not matter' (Kimble, 1951/1996: 500, 499).

Displacements

Consequently, the concept and study of place fell into disuse for almost three decades after Hartshorne's tome was published. In the immediate postwar era a new generation of geographers instigated what one of them called a 'scientific and quantitative revolution' (Burton, 1963). Learning and applying the tools of mathematics and statistics, this new generation sought to make geography a science (see Chapter 3 on geography and the social science tradition). This entailed specialization – including the increasing separation of human and physical geography and the subdivision of each – and the attempt to develop testable theories, models and laws. Rather than looking for the unique, the different and the particular, geographers sought to mimic the physical sciences by looking for similarity, generality and pattern. In the words of Hartshorne's great rival, the geographer Fredrick Schaefer (1953: 227): '... Geography has to be conceived as the science concerned with the formulation of the laws governing the spatial distribution of certain features on the surface of the earth.' The keynote titles of the period said it all and were a far cry from the regional monographs of the prewar era: *Theoretical Geography* (Bunge, 1962), *Models in Geography* (Chorley and Haggett, 1967), *Locational Analysis in Human Geography* (Haggett, 1965) and *Explanation in Geography* (Harvey, 1969). To the extent that Hartshorne's vision of place figured at all, it was when events or things in one place were shown to be 'a particular realisation of the laws governing all similar events and things' (Rogers, 1992: 244). So much for place difference and uniqueness. Geography was now to be a 'spatial science', devoted to searching for geographical order at a variety of scales, to measuring .numerically both people and things, and to testing rigorously hypotheses and models so as to develop generally applicable laws, rules and theories.

Mid-century geography therefore survived quite happily without place as a central, organizing concept. By the early 1970s, however, it started to become clear that scientific geography was not to everyone's liking. Specifically, a cohort of human geographers wondered whether people's activities could and should be studied 'scientifically'. Within a decade this critique of spatial science, as this chapter now goes on to explain, led to what Rogers (1992) described as 'the rediscovery of place'.

The return of the repressed

This critique and rediscovery came in two phases. To begin with, a set of so-called 'humanistic geographers' argued that spatial science was 'in-human' (see Chapter 4 on geography and the humanities tradition). By treating people as 'little more than dots on a map or integers in an equation' (Goodwin, 1999: 38), it ignored the subjective, qualitative and emotional aspects of human existence

and amounted to a 'Geography without man [sic]' (Ley 1980/1996). Consequently, the attempt to rehumanize human geography took the form of close and careful studies of individual and group 'lifeworlds'. Two classic examples were David Ley's (1974) exploration of gang 'turf' rivalries in poor inner-city neighbourhoods in Philadelphia and Graham Rowles's (1978) detailed analysis of a group of old people's attachment to their homeplace. In effect, what Ley, Rowles and other humanistic geographers were doing was resurrecting the importance of place. However, in the humanistic lexicon places were not, pace Hartshorne, conceived as objective points on the earth's surface. Rather, the aim was to recover people's varying *sense of place* (the second definition of place identified by Agnew): that is, how different individuals and groups, within and between places, both interpret and develop meaningful attachments to those specific areas where they live out their lives.

This concern with geographical experience was a vital corrective to the passionless, placeless grids of spatial scientific analysis. But it was not the only alternative to scientific human geography. From the early 1970s humanistic geographers were both accompanied and challenged by another group of dissenters from spatial science. Marxist geographers. Led by David Harvey, a former darling of geography's scientific establishment, these politically left-wing geographers argued that spatial science did little to address pressing real-world problems, like poverty, famine and environmental degradation. Moreover, they argued that by hiding behind a mask of 'objectivity' spatial science was dishonest about its own conservative, 'status quo' political commitments. As Harvey made clear in human geography's first overtly Marxist book, *Social Justice and the City* (1973), a radical geography should be focused on non-trivial issues and should be geared to changing the world rather than simply understanding it (see Chapter 25 on relevance and human geography). What has all this got to do with place? A good deal as it turns out. Despite their common disdain for spatial science, tensions developed between Marxist and humanistic geography – and it was, among other things, over the question of place. For Harvey and his Marxist colleagues, the humanistic concern for a sense of place was worthy but ultimately problematic, for it tended to treat people and places in isolation and was obsessed with the minutiae of local attachments and local experiences. Against this, the Marxists – pointing to the development of a truly global economy by the early 1970s – argued that places were increasingly not only interconnected but also interdependent. That is, places were not only related to one another but related in ways that meant that what happened in one place could have serious consequences for another place many thousands of miles away. Harvey's (1982) *The Limits to Capital* was a major attempt to explain and criticize the nature and consequences of these global interconnections: namely, those specific to capitalism.

Overcoming dualisms

This brings me to the second phase in human geography's rediscovery of place. Though the Marxists were right to argue that human geographers needed an objective understanding of what places had in common, they were, by the early 1980s, as guilty as the spatial scientists had been of failing to pay sufficient attention to place difference. They also tended to give far more attention to the global economic and other processes that supposedly 'structured', and even, it was sometimes said, 'determined', the thoughts and actions of people in specific places (Duncan and Ley, 1982). That is to say, the Marxists were preoccupied with interplace connections more than specific place differences. By the same token, though humanistic geographers were right to emphasize the particularity of place experience, their concern with difference and lifeworlds arguably blinded them to the common processes linking places worldwide – 'stretched out' processes that could change the 'objective' nature of place and, thereby, locals' 'subjective' sense of place. Likewise, they tended to over-emphasize the degree to which people in place could control their own lives since Marxists like Harvey argued that global systems (like capitalism) constrain people's 'agency' in their home-places. How, then, to connect 'local worlds' with 'global worlds'? This was the challenge taken up by a set of British and American geographers from the mid-1980s. What inspired these geographers' efforts was a mixture of dramatic real-world changes and new theoretical developments.

During the previous decade, Britain and the USA, like many other countries, had seen their human geography literally remade by the ravages of a sustained economic crisis. The geography of people and places in the two countries was being restructured in the face of global economic competition and neoliberal governments (led by Thatcher and Reagan) intent on creating a new Britain and a new America. But the point, as Doreen Massey showed in her germinal book, *Spatial Divisions of Labour* (1984), is that the *same* processes of economic competition were having varying effects across the face of these and other countries. In other words, the global interconnections that meant that British and American cities and towns could not be analysed in isolation were producing not *geographical similarity* but *geographical difference*. The task of the so-called 'localities projects' which followed Massey's study (and which involved UK human geographers undertaking detailed studies of different British towns and cities) was to explain how global forces could have such variable local effects. Concurrent with the writings of Massey and the localities researchers were those inspired by new theoretical developments from outside geography. In a series of books, the now famous sociologist Anthony Giddens had developed 'structuration theory' in order to overcome the impasse between structural [or determinist] explanations of people's actions and free-will [or voluntarist] explanations. How, Giddens asked, could one combine a focus on 'big social systems' with a focus on individual and group action? (1984). In geography the impasse was represented by the Marxist obsession with global socio-economic processes and the humanistic geographers' concern with locally variable place experiences and actions. The geographers Derek Gregory and Allan Pred sought to spatialize Giddens's thinking (and to answer his question) in their innovative books, *Regional Transformation and Industrial Revolution* (Gregory, 1982) and *Place, Practice and Structure* (Pred, 1986) – books which used historical examples to show how previously isolated places became embroiled in translocal forces. What Gregory and Pred demonstrated is that social structure and social agency come together differently in different places such that they *mutually* determine one another.

Conducted in the wake of the stand-off between Marxist and humanistic geography, the localities research projects and structuration theory-inspired work
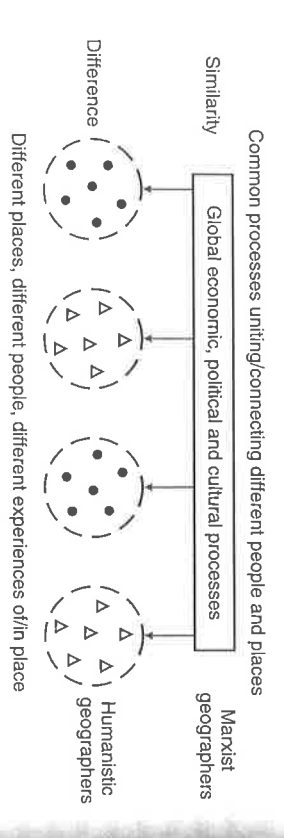
Global economic, political and cultural processes

Marxist geographers

Humanistic geographers

Similarity

Difference

Different places, different people, different experiences of/in place

Figure 9.2 Marxist and humanistic geographers' approach to place

of Gregory and Pred sought to find a middle ground between two dualistic and untenable positions: that is, that places are *either* all the same or all different and that people in places are *either* free agents – able to develop their own singular attachments to, and practices in, a place – or the victims of overwhelming global social forces. The result was a conception of *place as locale* – the third meaning of place identified by Agnew. For Massey, Gregory, Pred and their fellow travellers, a locale was the scale at which people's daily life was typically lived. It was at once the objective arena for everyday action and face-to-face interaction *and* the subjective setting in which people developed and expressed themselves emotionally. It was at once intensely local *and yet* insistently non-local to the extent that 'outside' forces intruded into the objective and subjective aspects of local life in an interdependent world. And every locale was at once unique and particular *and yet* shared features in common with the myriad other locales worldwide to which it was connected (see Figure 9.2).

To summarize, after fading into mid-century obscurity, place is once again 'one of the central terms in ... geography' (Cresswell, 1999: 226). Over the last decade human geographers have extended and enriched the return to place pioneered by those writing in the 1970s and 1980s. In the remaining sections of the chapter I want to take each of the three approaches to place discussed here and illustrate briefly, using examples, how contemporary geographers have shown that place interconnection and interdependence in the modern world mark not the end but what Neil Smith (1990: 221) once called 'the beginning of geography' [see Chapter 19 on globalization and human geography]. In terms of our three definitions of place, we can ask three key questions – namely, how can places be unique and yet subject to similar global forces? How is people's sense of place intensely local and yet (implicitly or explicitly) extroverted? And how can human actions be place-based, unpredictable and variable and yet considerably constrained by extra-local forces hailing from far away? In the last few years human geographers have offered innovative answers to all these questions. It's to these answers that I now turn.

RETHINKING PLACE AS LOCATION: POROUS PLACES

People and things are increasingly out of place. (Clifford, 1988: 6)

I've already called into question the mosaic view of place. Globalization entails the 'stretching' of social relationships across space such that the boundaries between the 'inside' of a place and the 'outside' are rendered porous. Today, we must appreciate the openness of places; that is, we need what Massey (1994: 51) calls 'a global sense of the local'. It's not just that today more and more places are interlinked and interdependent. It's also that the *intensity* of these global connections has increased: we live in an age of what Peter Dicken (2000: 316) calls 'deep integration'. In sum, the world is no longer a vast mosaic of places. At this point it might be tempting to join Castells and declare 'the end of place'. But this would be to confuse the redundancy of *a particular conception of place* with the disappearance of place as such. As I said in the introduction, places are not what they used to be. But places still undoubtedly exist. For instance, Manchester, where I live, is not the same as and remains far distant from, say, Manila – even though the two cities might be directly connected by relations of finance, trade or immigration. As Massey (1995: 54) puts it, 'we ... [therefore] need to rethink our idea of places...' because 'place has been transformed..' [Agnew, 1989: 12).

In metaphorical terms, this rethinking can be evoked as follows. Since the mosaic view conceptualizes places as distinct points in space – which is, today, largely unrealistic – it is perhaps better to see them as *switching points in a larger global system* or else *nodes in translocal networks* (Crang, 1999) [see Figure 9.3). These metaphors, as I'll now explain, allow us to think of places as inextricably interconnected – indeed interdependent – *and* as different and unique. Let us take each half of this metaphorical equation in turn.

Places in the contemporary world are, clearly, no longer separate. For instance, the bank where I this morning deposited a cheque is but one local fragment of a global financial system, while the apple I just consumed in front of my Taiwanese computer implicated me in a production network stretching back to an orchard in New Zealand (from whence the apple came). Moreover, with interconnection also comes *interdependence*. For instance, barely a day passes without newspaper reports of job losses and job creation in places as diverse as Chicago, Calcutta or Cairo. Often, though not always, these changing local employment situations can be explained with reference to interplace competition for investment and markets. For example, if Calcuttan workers can make auto-parts more cheaply than labourers in Chicago, a firm like Ford might favour an Indian auto-parts supplier for its vehicles. In short, what happens *then and there* can have sharp consequences in the *here and now*.

But if places are no longer separate, the more difficult argument to understand is that they somehow remain unique. No two places are quite the same, even in this era of globalization – or so several geographers, disagreeing with Castells, have argued. Notice that I use the word unique and not singular. In Hartshorne's worldview, places were *singular*: that is, they were all so obviously or subtly different from one another as to be absolute one-offs. The same combination of human and environmental factors, the argument went, was never found twice. However, if we see places as *unique*, we can argue that they are different *and* that they have something in common in an interdependent world (just as we are all unique as people in terms of looks and personalities and yet share the same biological make-up). This is the argument made by Ron Johnston (1984)
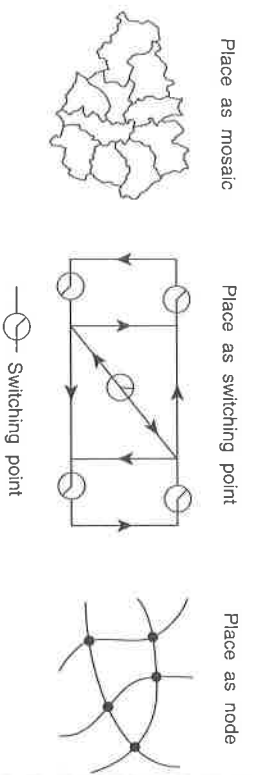
Place as mosaic   Place as switching point   Place as node

—⊖— Switching point

Figure 9.3 Metaphors for understanding place

in 'The world is our oyster' and by Doreen Massey (1995) in 'The conceptualisation of place'.

The question therefore arises: how can places continue to differ in a world of increasingly intimate global interrelationships? There are five answers. Together these answers explain why the metaphors of switching points and nodes are apt: for both evoke the idea that different places are 'plugged in' to different sets of global relations with different degrees of power over those relations. First, and most obviously, while globalization brings places closer together in terms of the reduced time taken to cross the space between them, the fact of geographical distance still remains. Thus, to return to the example of Manchester and Manila, while the two cities are *relatively* closer together, their *absolute* locational differences endure. Second, globalization has not unfolded across a homogeneous space. Rather, it has linked places *because* they are different. For instance, precisely because Boeing is a leading aircraft manufacturer, places without the capacity to produce aircraft have imported Boeing products all the way from its base in Seattle. Third, even though many places are subject to the same global forces, they react to and mould them differently. An aerospace company like Boeing, for example, has a number of choices as to how to respond to foreign competition. It can close its factories in cities like Seattle altogether, lay off some but not all workers or retrain these workers and sell new products to new places. More radically, it could shift production operations to cheaper or more efficient sites outside the USA. Likewise, McDonald's – sometimes held up as a potent symbol of cultural globalization and homogenization (Ritzer, 1996) – means different things in different places. In Maputo it might be a 'trendy' sign of all that's modern or new, in Tangiers it might be the symbol of soulless American commerce, while here in Manchester it's but a familiar and rather banal marker of consumer culture. Fourth, even today all or most social relationships are not global in reach. Many remain insistently local – like the one I enjoy with my family or my local football club team-mates. Finally, we should not forget that not all places in the world are equally 'wired in'. Globalization, as Dicken (2000) notes, can take the form of 'shallow' as well as deep integration. Thus many places in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, remain partially cut off from the rest of the world or else subject to very one-sided relationships that exacerbate poverty – the kind of 'difference' that places in the developing world certainly do *not* want to preserve.

For instance, it may surprise you to discover that Ethiopia – one of the world's poorest places – continued to produce large quantities of food throughout the horrific famines of the mid-1980s and 1990s. How and why? Because wealthy landowners were producing export crops for European and North American markets rather than food crops for their own people. For the five reasons mentioned above, it is simply misconceived to think that globalization equals sameness and homogeneity. On the contrary, human geographers have shown that the more linked places become, the more place differences endure and are remade. In Swyngedouw's (1989) apt neologism, we need to talk less about globalization and more about an uneven process of 'glocalization'.

RETHINKING A SENSE OF PLACE: 'GLOCAL' IDENTITIES

... even local identities are completely caught up in a web of global interdependence. (Mitchell, 2000: 274)

In the previous section we considered places, implicitly, in terms of their objective properties – that is, as material and physical locations – and how to conceptualize them. But what of the subjective questions of how people interpret their homeplaces and those of others? As we've seen, humanistic geographers were among the first to take the subjective aspects of place existence seriously. As these geographers were right to argue, the thoughts and feelings that people have towards places are every bit as real and material as the places themselves. Disclosing people's 'sense of place' requires 'empathetic' enquiries into the realms of feelings, emotions and values. Some three decades after the likes of Ley launched this so-called 'hermeneutic approach' in human geography, it's clear that subjective attachments to, or interpretations of, place matter as much as ever. Global interdependency notwithstanding, most people live their lives within just a few square kilometres. Moreover, at certain times of life, people can be *highly* confined to specific places, as with children and many elderly people. So place remains a crucial locus for daily experience. Think about yourself: which places matter to you and why? Your answer will probably involve just a few places, and one of them will almost certainly be your home-place(s). You will have a highly personal sense of place that's bound up with specific events in your life, involving not just your perception of place(s) but your feeling about place(s). So apart from their physical dimensions, there's an imaginative and affective dimension to places too. This need not always be positive (some of us associate particular places with suffering or unhappiness), but rarely are any of us agnostic about those places that had formative impacts on our sense of self.

How, though, to understand these non-physical realms of thought and feeling? The humanistic desire to disclose people's sense of place will no longer suffice, for two reasons. First, cultural geographers have argued that place is linked to the formation of personal and group *identities* (Keith and Pile, 1993). People have more than just a sense of place: additionally, place is written into their very characters. Think, for example, of how we tend to characterize people – often stereotypically – by their place of origin (e.g. in Britain there are 'Cockneys' and

'Geordies', in North America rural 'rednecks' and an inner-city 'underclass'). And think about how your very sense of self, as a person, is intimately linked to the place you are from. For instance, though I live in south Manchester I'm originally from a town in north Manchester and both my accent and my character still carry the traces, 20 years since I left, of my upbringing. So place runs deep. Second, there was an implication in humanistic writing that there was one ultimately 'real' or 'authentic' sense of place for people. The Canadian geographer Edward Relph (1976), for example, complained about the 'placelessness' of so many modern towns with their high-rise towers and bland, serial suburbs. He believed that the spread of faceless modern architecture and planning was 'dehumanizing' place experience such that people's senses of place were being thinned out and rendered uniform. The problems with this kind of argument are manifold. To begin with it's rather conservative in nature, seeing 'outside' influences as a 'threat' to the supposedly 'authentic' nature of places. It's almost as if Relph lamented the fact that places were increasingly interlinked rather than different attachment and identities that people can and do develop in the *same places*. As problematically, it underestimates the sheer *variety of place* pieces in a mosaic. There is ultimately no one sense of place or place identity (think of how a poor immigrant woman in Hackney, London, might view that place as opposed to a wealthy young male professional) but many. Finally, geographers like Relph underestimate how different senses of place and place identity could persist not despite but *because of* 'external' influences hailing from other places.

This last comment brings us to the important insight that different local identities might result from, or be expressed because of, similar global connections. Identities are not natural. They are, rather, socially fabricated over people's life course. People tend, when considering the place element of identity, to conjure up the image of a settled community – literally, a home-place. But in a globalizing world, most places are anything but settled. They are subject to ongoing change, both physically (the factory that shuts down or the new shopping centre that opens) and socially (the foreign immigrants that move in or the older generation who die off) – and much of this change is, as we saw in the previous section, about local changes resulting from global/extra-local processes. So we must recognize that while identities are, today, still formed in places (they are place-based) they are not place-bound – that is, the result of *purely local* experiences. Rather, locally variable identities partially arise from 'outside' influences, paradoxical though this may seem.

Contemporary human geographers have illustrated this 'glocal' nature of identity in two ways. First, there are those cases where identities *seem* to be purely local but where human geographers have shown that they are in fact not so. For instance, in mid-2001 a set of serious 'race' riots erupted in the poor, old industrial towns of Bradford, Burnley and Oldham in the north of England. These towns, like so many multicultural places in western Europe, have had large immigrant populations from the Indian subcontinent for over three decades. Yet extreme right-wing political groups – like the National Front – want to expel them, thereby 'purifying' these places and returning them to their purportedly 'true' character as white and English. The irony, of course, is that this attempt to define and defend a 'local' identity from unwanted 'foreign' influences arises precisely in and through the presence of those 'outside' influences! A further irony is that the Indians and Pakistanis being discriminated against consider themselves to be very much *a part of* these three places – and rightly so, having lived there for over two generations. So *seemingly* local identities that attempt to shut out non-local influences – in the three places mentioned, influences of international immigration – are, in the modern world, not straightforwardly local at all (Harvey, 1995).

Second, human geographers are also showing that many 'local' identities are overtly and explicitly 'extra-local'! There are two main cases to consider here. The first is where people who are not indigenous to a place characterize it in a way that both reflects their own worldview and which therefore takes on a certain reality – even though it might be a far cry from the local residents' view of that place. The best example here is modern tourism, which serves up the world as a set of idealized places, each with a specific image that is marketed to potential tourists. For example, the Caribbean is usually thought of as a peaceful, paradisical place, full of exotic resorts; what tourists rarely see behind this 'imagined geography' are the slums and poverty that are endemic to most Caribbean towns and cities (Cater, 1995; see also Torres and Momsen, 2005). In addition, and rather differently, geographers have shown that many place-based identities today are openly 'extroverted' and outward-looking – in effect explicitly incorporating 'non-local' influences (unlike the National Front in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham). The best examples come from so-called 'transnational communities' – that is, communities that are spread out among different places but which remain connected. In Vancouver, Canada, for example, there are many Chinese residents who are from Hong Kong and who maintain strong familial and cultural links with this former British colony. So their identity as Vancouverites, living in a western Canadian city abutting the USA, is complemented by their identity as Hong Kong Chinese. Theirs is an avowedly *hybrid* identity, such that even though they live physically in one place their place loyalties are plural and transnational [Mitchell, 1993] (see Figure 9.4). In sum, in many places in the contemporary world the identities of people who live in those places are rarely local in the 'mosaic' sense of the word. As Massey (1998) insists, we need to look not for the *roots* of people's identity but the *routes*. That is, we need to trace how 'local' identities are built from the way people internalize a whole array of 'non-local' influences as the latter converge on different places.

RETHINKING PLACE AS LOCALE: GLOBAL FORCES, LOCAL RESPONSES

Life chances are materially affected by the lottery of location. (Crang, 1999: 24)

We live in a highly uneven world. Global interconnection and interdependency have been coincident with inequality and uneven development rather than homogeneity. Since the first incursions of Marxism into human geography, geographers have argued that local inequalities are *caused by* global interlinkages, not merely correlated with them. If we take the example of Ethiopian famines cited
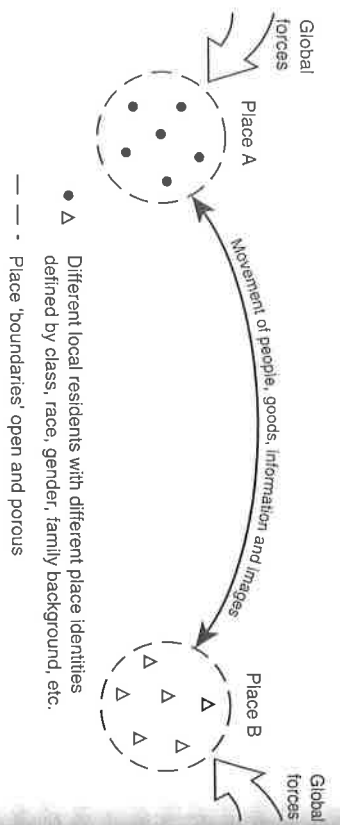
earlier, it's clear that these local tragedies were a direct outcome of colonial and trade ties to Europe and beyond. But the traffic is not all one way. People acting in places are not simply marionettes whose actions and life chances are dictated by movements of the world economy and global politics. In other words, people acting in place have a degree of 'agency' to control their destinies and those of the places they reside in. So local action cannot only *react to* global pressures but also *act back on them*. Since Gregory, Pred and others, following Giddens, first made this argument in the 1980s, human geographers have not only shown the nature and limits of place-based agency, but also how it varies from place to place. This geographically variable interaction between global and international structures and people's place-based agency is the process of what Giddens, as we saw earlier, famously called 'structuration'. In Doreen Massey's terms, there is a global 'power geometry' to which actors in such places get to 'call the shots' [or not] for other actors near and far.

This uneven geography of structuration can be illustrated, in simple terms, by the following interpretation of a recent, little-known but fascinating event: the attempt by the small, central American country Costa Rica to make money by selling off it's 'genetic resources'. Like other central American countries, Costa Rica is relatively poor in global terms and classed as a 'developing country'. Its principal means of income is the export of coffee beans and bananas. However, large, western transnational pharmaceutical companies have, in recent years, become very interested in tropical countries – such as Costa Rica – that are so-called 'genetic hotspots'. The tropics contain the bulk of the world's plant, animal, insect and bacterial species, and it's estimated that some 50% of these species are yet to be discovered. Transnationals like Monsanto, Pfizer and Smith-Kline-Beecham are now actively 'prospecting' for these species, hoping that their physical and genetic properties might some day be usable in the development of pharmaceutical products, such as drugs or cosmetics. Among developing countries, Costa Rica has been at the forefront of this 'merchandizing' of currently unowned and undiscovered tropical species and, in 1991, set up an organization – INBio [the National Institute of Biology] – to collect species samples and sell them to interested western companies. Thus far InBio has made over US $5 million selling Costa Rica's genetic resources.

In this case, the 'structure' that both conditioned the decision to sell Costa Rica's genetic heritage and led to the establishment of INBio was the world

Figure 9.4 'Glocal' identities

Global forces — Place A — Movement of people, goods, information and images — Global forces — Place B

• △ Different local residents with different place identities defined by class, race, gender, family background, etc.

- - - Place 'boundaries' open and porous

economy, an economy in which Costa Rica has become overly reliant on two staple exports, coffee and bananas. The 'agency' at work here, embodied in INBio's everyday operations in the country's capital, San José, has yielded Costa Rica 5 million valuable dollars. However, this agency has been unequally distributed within Costa Rica. Historically, Costa Rica was widely populated by indigenous or so-called 'First Nations' peoples. These peoples were displaced during the Spanish conquests of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and, today, some 30,000 of them live in small, poor 'native reserves' located in out-of-the-way rural areas. Many of these peoples have a unique knowledge of local environmental resources and, more generally, have legitimate claims to the Costa Rican genetic inheritance being sold off by scientists and bureaucrats at INBio. However, there's little evidence that any of the $5 million earned through INBio has made its way into Costa Rica's native reserves. The country's indigenous peoples are locked in a political structure that offers them little power or opportunity, and their exclusion from INBio's operation illustrates this graphically. On top of this, their physical location in places distant from the capital city, the centre of political authority in Costa Rica, makes it doubly difficult to be heard.

NEW QUESTIONS ABOUT PLACE

'Place' ... is not the sole property of human geographers. We are, however, in a unique position to ... examine ... the concept ... in everyday life. (Cresswell, 2004: 123)

Before I conclude this chapter, let me point to some of the new place-related research frontiers being opened up by geographers. The first relates to cutting-edge information technologies. In my introduction I mentioned globalization and the idea of 'the end of geography', before going on to question the apparent equation between global interconnectivity and the erasure of spatial difference. More than other media of communication, new information technologies seem precisely to signal the placeless 'space of flows' of which Castells speaks. So do we, in effect, have two co-existing worlds: one a virtual, head-of-a-pin world (cyberspace) in which peoples' location is irrelevant; and the other a 'real' world of place connectivity and difference I have presented in this chapter? The answer is yes and no. While information technologies do indeed 'annihilate space' (to borrow Karl Marx's evocative term), 'cybergeographers' like Martin Dodge, Rob Kitchin, Ken Hillis and Paul Adams suggest their geographies are rather more complex. First, information technologies require a physical-technical infrastructure in order to operate: networks of machines, satellites, fibre-optic cables and the like. This infrastructure itself has an uneven geography of production and distribution, linking myriad places to different degrees and with different consequences. The infrastructure is anything but uniform and placeless. Second, a good deal of virtual interaction between geographically separated IT users has an imagined – but very real – locational element to it. Think of 'chat rooms' or 'cyber cafés' where the physical metaphors used actively structure the modes of interaction between interlocutors, in some cases facilitating fictional identities and providing outlets of social behaviour impossible in 'real' locations.

Finally, it is easy to forget that much of the world does not enjoy the benefits of email, the worldwide web or video-conferencing. For all its supposed 'placeless' qualities, modern information technologies can serve to further marginalize certain places in economic and other terms, even as others thrive through their use.

A second research frontier relates to place and morality. With few exceptions, geographers interrogating place have focused on so-called 'cognitive' issues (i.e. those concerning description, explanation and/or evocation). But it has long been clear that questions of place connectivity and difference have a profound ethical dimension in a world marked by uneven geographical development. One ethical issue is what David Harvey (1996: 325) has called 'the right to geographical difference', by which he means the universal right of people to create and maintain places as they see fit. A second, related ethical issue is the responsibility that places have to those they are connected to. For instance, should wealthy places actively assist poorer ones and how? The British geographer David Smith is one of a very few geographers to address both these ethical issues together, but others are now following his lead and thinking hard about the moral aspects of place interrelations and difference (see Sack, 2003).

A final, and related research frontier concerns the politics of place, by which I mean conscious actions undertaken to maintain a particular locality or else transform it. Going back some years, geographers have undertaken important research into purely local actions by locally-based actors: workers, neighbourhood organizations or small businesses, say. However, one feature of the modern world – closely linked with globalization – is the so-called 'up-scaling' of place politics (see Chapter 12 on scale and human geography). By this I mean the enrolment of distant others in local campaigns or activism. Many good examples can be found in a newish research field called 'labour geography'. What labour geographers like Andrew Herod and Jane Wills are showing in their research is how transnational actions are increasingly being undertaken to defend or enhance the interests of particular workforces. This kind of 'borderless solidarity' often works by using workers abroad to affect the operations of a transnational firm whose operations are being challenged in one particular place. In other words, workers overseas are asked for help by one local labour force because they are strategically well placed to disrupt the firm's extraction, production, distribution or marketing activities. Though this sort of up-scaling of place politics may seem to transcend place difference through acts of long-distance co-operation, the reality is that the place differences matter. In most translocal worker campaigns, the location and nature of the workers enrolled in common struggle is important in determining the struggle's likely success.

CONCLUSION: THE MATTER OF PLACE

... the significance of place depends on the issue under consideration and the sets of social relationships that are relevant to the issue. (McDowell, 1997: 4)

Place matters and its importance is multifaceted. Some three decades after spatial science reached its zenith, difference is back on the geographical agenda

The discipline is once again concerned with the idiographic, but in a very different and much wider sense than Hartshorne could ever have imagined. Place difference, both objective and subjective, is now understood in terms of uniqueness rather than singularity. We again have a style of human geography that is integrative and synthetic rather than analytical and place-blind. But it must reckon with a world where places are infinitely more complex and changing than they were during geography's first engagements with place in the early twentieth century. In addition, we must also acknowledge that place matters in a very profound and very worldly sense, which is why other subjects – like sociology, anthropology, communications studies and economics – are now very interested in the difference that place makes. We need to understand the variable nature of places not just out of sheer curiosity (though that's reason enough). More than this, as the bloody struggles over place in Israel, Northern Ireland, the Basque country, Eritrea, Sri Lanka, the former Yugoslavia and elsewhere show so tragically, local attachments and differences remain fundamental aspects of the human condition. In short, the renewed study of place is too important to be left to geographers alone. This is why Massey (1993) argues that geographers need to advocate a 'progressive sense of place' to people in the world at large. What she means is that geographers have a moral obligation to show people that their place-based actions and understandings make no sense without acknowledging all those things impinging on place from the outside. What's 'progressive' about this, for Massey, is that it encourages an openness to the wider world, not a defensive putting up of barriers. We must, she says, live with the incontrovertible fact that the global is in the local and vice versa. This is more than a merely academic observation. In a world of place difference, stressing what connects places has real practical and political relevance. It can make all the difference between a world of inward-looking local rivalries and a cosmopolitan world where place differences are respected and place connections celebrated.

SUMMARY

• Place is a complex concept with three principal meanings in modern human geography.

• As the world has changed, so too have human geographers' conceptions of place.

• Human geographers have tried to rethink place in a way that respects place differences while acknowledging heightened place interconnections and interdependencies. That is, places are conceived as being unique rather than singular.

• This rethinking has taken human geographers away from older 'mosaic' metaphors of place to newer notions of 'switching points' and 'nodes'.

• Using these notions, we can rethink all three definitions of place in order to show how local and non-local events and relations intertwine.

- New human geography research on place looks at information technologies, ethics and transnational forms of solidarity
- The importance of a place concept that stresses how 'outside' processes impact on the 'inside' of places is that it challenges the idea that places and the peoples in them can ever thrive by defensively putting up barriers against non-local forces.

Further Reading

A good place to start is with the following entries in the most recent edition of *The Dictionary of Human Geography* (Johnston et al., 2008); place, locale, locality, local–global relations, localization, sense of place, placelessness, globalization and boundary. Cresswell's (2004) **Place** is good, but does not conform entirely to my own presentation of 'place'. Likewise, the chapters on 'Agency–Structure', 'Local–Global' and 'Space-Place' in Cloke and Johnston's (2005) **Spaces of Geographical Thought** make for interesting reading. The introduction and Chapter 1 of Hannerz's (1997) **Transnational Connections** provide a good general introduction to the meaning of place in the contemporary world. A comprehensive introduction to the place concept in geography is provided by Holloway and Hubbard (2000) in **People and Place**, while Massey (1995) and Allen and Hammett (1995) offer first-rate general introductions to conceptualizing place in an era of globalization. McDowell's (1997) edited book, **Undoing Place?**, showcases the best writing on place in geography and cognate fields. In relation to the three meanings of place explored in this chapter, see the following: on the local, the global, difference and sameness, Crang (1999) and Allen and Hammett (1995); on 'glocal' identity, Cloke (1999) and Driver (1999); on local action and global processes, Meegan (1995) and Bebbington (2000). Finally, some examples of research on the three research frontiers mentioned are as follows: Adams (1998), Massey (2004) and Herod (2003).

Note: Full details of the above can be found in the references list below.

NOTE

1 And this book reflects these enduring divisions, with almost every key concept given separate treatment by a human and a physical geographer.

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10

Place: The Management of Sustainable Physical Environments

Ken Gregory

Definition

Place has not explicitly been a primary focus for physical geographers although it has been implicit in much of the development of physical geography for more than a century. The description of places was essential as environments were explored; such descriptions were then compared, leading to systems of categorization of places, so that places could subsequently be evaluated against the background of general models. As physical geography now extends to environmental management, place warrants greater explicit attention by physical geographers in relation to the management of sustainable physical environments as exemplified by urban places.

INTRODUCTION: PLACE LOCATED

The aphorism 'Geography is about maps, but biography is about chaps' (Bentley, 1905) encapsulates much public perception of 'geography' as the study of places, with the word 'geographer' still connoting someone who not only knows where places are but what they are like. Paradoxically, physical geographers have given comparatively little explicit attention to place, although it will be argued here that whereas physical geography was *implicitly* concerned with place for much of the twentieth century, the theme is now becoming more *explicit* in the twenty-first century. To the physical geographer, place is the particular part of space occupied by organisms or possessing physical environmental characteristics. Place is associated with a number of related terms, including environment,