Fixed Identities in a Mobile World? The Relationship Between Mobility, Place and Identity

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Short Title: Fixed Identities in a Mobile World?

Abstract: Starting from the premise that mobility is a fundamental social issue, this paper addresses the impact of mobility and place on identity. Three major schools of thought addressing this issue are examined: the socio-historical approach of Giddens (1991) and Bauman (1997, 2001) that describes a shift over the last century from place-based (prescribed) identities to mobile (achieved) identities; recent theories in sociology that see identity as mobile, dynamic, hybrid and relational; and recent theories in geography that consider the relationship between place and identity. With reference to my own research into the migration experiences of a group of young adults in Australia, I argue that both mobility and place are essential components of identity construction and discuss the complex inter-relationships between mobility, place and identity.

Key words: Mobility, Place, Identity, Migration, Post-modern society
Introduction

Mobility is an integral aspect of social life. The sociologist Urry (2000) even goes so far as to say that sociology’s focus on societies (understood as bounded units) is no longer relevant, and that sociology should instead focus on mobilities. Certainly, the migrations of people can provide us with valuable insights into both macro-social processes such as economic restructuring, social polarisation, and development, as well as micro-social processes such as changes in housing markets and work routines.

Despite the wider relevance of migration and mobilities on both micro- and macro-social processes, the bulk of migration research to date has considered migration to be a discrete event, rather than considering mobility a fundamental social issue. This has been reflected in the overwhelming concern in migration studies with assessing the structural factors influencing migration decisions in various (discrete) contexts. The most popular forms of such studies have been econometric (e.g. Clark 1982; Straubhaar 1988; Stark and Taylor 1991; Robolis & Xideas 1996; Klinthäll 1998; Klinthäll 1999) and “push-pull” (e.g. Dorigo & Tobler 1983, King 2000) studies of migration. Such studies fail to explicitly recognize the broader relevance of mobility to social life and tend to neglect both the interrelations between these structural factors and individual agency.

However, with the rise in popularity of post-structural, post-colonial, and feminist studies of migration, this situation is changing. Since people do not always act as rational, calculating subjects, some academics have recognized that as well as asking why people migrate, it is also important to ask how people experience, understand, and negotiate their migrations (for example, McHugh 2000; Hardwick 2003; Silvey & Lawson 1999). These
academics recognize the ambivalence of migration experiences and the complexity of understandings and negotiations of migrations.

This paper is located in this space where mobility is considered a fundamental aspect of social life, and migration is considered a complex (and turbulent) process requiring a consideration of both structural factors and human agency. It addresses only one of the important ways in which mobility impacts upon social life - the impact of mobility on identity, and asks the question, “Is increasing mobility leading to increasingly dislocated identities?” In other words, in what way and to what extent is the spatial, social, and temporal movement of people, goods, money, and ideas affecting the nature of identity construction?

The paper outlines the major arguments of three academic discourses that address the issue of identity. The first is the socio-historical discourse of the changing nature of identity and the rise of reflexive individualism in late-modern times. This discourse holds that we are moving away from (rooted) identities based on place and towards (routed) hybrid and flexible forms of identity (Giddens 1991; Ang in Zournazi 1998; Bauman 1997, 2001). The second is the sociological discourse of hybrid and relational identities, which provides support for the claim that identities are incomplete. The third is the geographical discourse of identification with place, which points to the continued importance of attachment to place in shaping our identities in the modern day.¹ The relationships between these three discourses are examined in the context of the potential impacts of mobility and place on identity construction. In order to provide some context to the theoretical arguments presented here, I have included extracts from in-depth interviews and focus groups conducted with young (20-38 year old) adults regarding their experiences of leaving,² and returning to, the state of Tasmania, Australia.

Background
My interest in the ideas addressed in this paper arose from a research project I conducted between 2003 and 2006 into the migration experiences of a group of 30 people aged 20 to 38 who had grown up in Tasmania, left the state to live interstate or overseas, and had since returned to live in Tasmania (Easthope 2006). The out-migration of young adults from Tasmania has been a significant issue in the state since the early twentieth century (Lockyer 1926:11), with the state’s net migration losses of young adults fuelling anxiety over a perceived “brain drain” and the aging of the population in government and community leaders (Tasmania Together Community Leaders Group 2001:13; Tasmanian Department of Treasury and Finance 2003), reported heavily in the media. However, the focus of this apprehension has been overwhelmingly on the economic future of the state, rather than the well-being of the young people involved. My concern was to provide an alternative to this dominant discourse by focusing firstly on young people who had chosen to return to the state, and secondly on the ways in which they negotiated and experienced their migrations. For this paper, I have drawn on the comments of just eight of these young returned Tasmanians (see Table 1).
Table 1: Characteristics of Informants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Birthplace</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Partner co-habiting</th>
<th>Completed education</th>
<th>Current employment</th>
<th>Number of return moves</th>
<th>Years away (most recent)</th>
<th>Year returned (most recent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Hobart</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Part uni degree</td>
<td>Part-time work &amp; student</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Other Tas</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Part uni degree</td>
<td>Full-time work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Hobart</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Full-time work</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9-10</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Hobart</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Uni degree</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katherine</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Other Tas</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Uni degree</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Other Tas</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Uni degree</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susanne</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Other Tas</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Uni degree</td>
<td>Full-time work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Hobart</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Uni degree</td>
<td>Full-time work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8-9</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**A Socio-historical Approach to Identity**

Giddens (1991) and Bauman (1997, 2001) argue that the nature of identity has changed since the late nineteenth century because of a series of significant social and economic changes. According to these theorists, during the pre-modern period, which lasted until early in the twentieth century, the identities of individuals were prescribed by place of birth and the social position of one’s parents. Identities were understood to be a matter of human nature, predestination, and fate (Bauman 2001).

In the modern period, significant changes in Western societies and economies led to changes in the nature of identity. A number of social theorists wrote about the structural changes occurring during this period (for example, Marx [1876], who discussed the need for flexible labour and a “reserve army” of labour) and the resulting changes in the nature of identity (for example, Durkheim 1952[1897], who wrote about the increasing stress on individualism and resulting “anomie”). During the modern period, the individual was “emancipated” from the “ascribed determination” of their “social character” (Bauman 2001: }
144). However, social life was still organised to a degree around the concept of social classes, which were understood to be achieved social positions but which were, in reality, relatively stable (Bauman 2001: 145). The aim during this period was to maintain one’s class position, “keeping up with the Joneses” (Bauman 2001: 145).

In the post-modern period, over the last twenty years or so, more significant social and economic changes - often referred to as globalisation processes (including increasing rates of international migration) - have led to yet another major change in the nature of identity. This period, which Bauman (2001) has called “liquid modernity,” is characterised by endless flows of people, money, ideas, and a requirement for flexibility. Construction of identity is understood as an individual project and individuals carry responsibility for making their lives work (White & Wyn 2004: 184). This means that people are faced with the “freedom and burden” of designing their own identity (Williams & McIntyre 2001: 397), and since everything is changing so rapidly, the previous generation cannot provide a useful template for the best way to proceed (White & Wyn 2004). This period has also seen a rise in concerns with lifestyle and “quality of life” issues because for many life expectancy has increased and survival is now assured (Bauman 1997; Giddens 1991).

Bauman (2001) claims that in the post-modern period, individuals find themselves with no stable position to aim for in the process of identity construction. People must continuously redefine their aims because if they aim for a particular goal, the likelihood is that not only will the goal have moved by the time they get there, but the path they needed to follow to get there will have moved as well (Bauman 2001). Giddens (1991: 5) explains that individuals have to work at sustaining “coherent, yet continuously revised” identities because identity is understood as a task that can never be completed. Hence, identities are understood to be fluid in postmodern society.
In summary, these theorists describe the changing values over the last century in terms of the ways in which people think about themselves and their place in the world. They describe a shift from a situation in which people had unambiguous priorities linked to local communities and shared goals to the current focus on individualism, self-enlightenment, and self-liberation (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 38 in White and Wyn 2004: 187). Or, as Bauman puts it, the shift has been from inherited or acquired identities to a focus on “identification” (2001: 152). This shift in the nature of identity can also be understood as a shift from relatively stable identities rooted in place to hybrid identities characterised by mobility and flux.

This paper warns against simplistic readings of the work of Giddens and Bauman. Indeed, a crude reading of these theorists’ work could take their arguments to mean that place no longer holds any relevance for identity. In part, such a reading is possible because these theorists, in concentrating on the social aspects of identity, underplay the importance of the role of the body in identity construction and particularly the body’s interactions with the physical world. However, Giddens (1991) does talk about the body and Bauman (2001) does address the issue of place. Giddens mentions the body when he explains that the reflexivity of self affects the body in that “the body becomes reflexively mobilized” in the construction of identity (2001: 7). Yet Giddens is only talking about the role of the body in terms of image creation, not in terms of the relationship of the individual with the physical world in the form of place attachment. Bauman (2001: 146) does specifically address the issue of place attachment, claiming that:

In our times of “liquid” modernity … not just the individual placements in society, but the places to which the individuals may gain access and in which
they may wish to settle are melting fast and can hardly serve as targets for

life projects.

This claim that places are “melting” is potentially misleading, however. Places do not exist independently of our attachments to them (remembering that “place” is not the same as “space”) and so long as we exist as physical bodies in the physical world, we will always have some form of attachment to that world and hence we will always create meaningful places. Indeed, neither Giddens nor Bauman claim otherwise in their work. However, their focus on the diminution of the relative importance of rooted identities based upon significant ties to places has the potential to be misinterpreted to mean that attachment to place(s) is no longer important. The argument made in this paper is that attachment to place must exist in some form, and must impact upon our identities so long as we exist as beings with bodies.

A number of scholars have addressed the dual nature of identity as simultaneously linked to place and to mobility. Perhaps the most influential is Tuan (2001), who argues that the cosmos and the hearth correspond to our dual nature. The hearth is local, cozy, familiar, and nurturing, and implies a small bounded place, accessible to us through direct experience through the senses (Tuan 2001: 319). The cosmos on the other hand is large, abstract, and impersonal, and is accessible only through mediated experience (Tuan 2001: 319). Tuan says that these two terms correspond to the fact that we are both body (which desires the hearth) and mind (which reaches out to the cosmos) (2001: 319). While Tuan’s terminology is reminiscent of Cartesian dualism, he recognizes that while the cosmos and hearth are two theoretical extremes, “the worlds and experiences that these terms conjure often overlap” (Tuan 2001: 319). Tuan says that both the hearth and the cosmos contribute to a sense of self, but in different ways. The hearth offers security while the cosmos offers adventure. The
similarities to Giddens’s and Bauman’s work are apparent here, but Tuan is explicit in his recognition that both the cosmos and the hearth are necessary parts of our nature.

These ideas are explored in more depth with reference to the stories of eight young returned Tasmanians, first through a discussion of the relationship between mobility and identity and then through a discussion of the relationship between place and identity. These two streams of thought will then be drawn together to discuss the impact of both mobility and place, as well as stability and change, on identities.

**Mobility and Identity**

Recent sociological accounts of identity provide some support for the arguments of Giddens and Bauman that identities are less fixed and stable than they once were. Gabriel (2004: 110) explains that there has been a recent shift in the ways in which sociologists view the self, with increasing focus being placed on the strategic, positional, and context-reliant nature of identity; the “multi-vocal, fragmented and hybrid” nature of identity; and the construction of identity within “particular discursive formulations” and relations of power. In other words, these theorists argue that identity is dynamic (Rutherford 1990), positional (Gupta and Ferguson 1997), hybrid (Bhabha 1994; Ang in Zournazi 1998), and constructed within relations of power (Mason 2004).

According to these accounts, as situations change over time, so do identities. Rutherford (1990: 24) explains:

Identity then is never a static location, it contains traces of its past and what it is to become. It is a provisional full-stop in the place of differences and the narrative of our own lives.
Indeed, many of the young people interviewed spoke about their identity as a dynamic, open-ended, and incomplete project:

Gary: *I felt pretty good [when I left Tasmania]. I actually thought I was never going to go back, yeah, I felt quite happy, I felt like it was a new chapter, I actually felt like I could re-invent myself.*

Tim: *My father was fairly well respected in Hobart [so] you were sort of always going to be in his shadow if you were here and I wanted to go away and just do it on my own and just have a bit of a clean break and it’s worked well because now I’ve come back it’s different to if I’d stayed here I reckon, because I’ve done all these things by myself now and I’m a different, I’m my own person.*

Katherine [talking about when she moved to Melbourne]: *I just see that whole time of life as incredibly enriching in terms of me understanding the world and incredibly frustrating in terms of me trying to understand who I was and my place in it.*

Not only are identities seen as dynamic, they are also positional. These arguments draw on the work of Said (1979), who argues that people define their own identities in part through the identification of “the other.” In this sense, people’s identities are in part constituted by their definitions of what they are not, and by the creation of (physical and mental) borders or
boundaries around their identities. Penrose and Jackson (1993: 207) explain that this situation “gives rise to a politics of identity, as groups of individuals become aware of their differences.” However, such identities, and the boundaries created around them, are also understood to be dynamic and constantly changing. This leads Gupta and Ferguson (1997: 13) to claim that:

identity neither “grows out” of rooted communities, nor is it a thing that can be possessed or owned by individual or collective social actors. It is a mobile, often unstable relation of difference.

Within this discussion, a number of theorists (e.g. Bhabha 1994) have used the term hybridity to stress the dynamic and positional nature of identity. The word “hybrid” was originally used to describe people of mixed race, but has been adopted by these theorists to talk about “the notion of ‘in-betweenness’ as a position, being between positions” (Ang in Zournazi 1998:160). According to Ang (in Zournazi 1998: 161), hybridity is a useful term because it starts from the presumption that boundaries are blurred. Hence, identities, once they are understood to be hybrid, are no longer fixed, bounded, or discrete entities; they are necessarily dynamic and positional.

The young people I interviewed also talked about their identities in positional terms. First, they highlighted the differences between themselves and other people:

James: *I found a lot of my old friends really annoying and sort of narrow minded ... Canberra doesn’t exactly broaden your horizons in the same way*
that going to Peru would or something but ... yeah, I had a very different perspective I think.

Second, they highlighted the fluidity of their own identities:

Susanne: I mean there are some times when I think I’m a completely different person to what I was when I was travelling and ... sometimes you’d prefer to be the more exciting one that’s living the life ... but in reality I know now what I’m really comfortable with and I know who I am.

Heather: I swear, I had so many hang-ups and issues and problems, um that yeah, I just look back now and I think it’s a different person.

Finally, some theorists (e.g. Gabriel 2004; Mason 2004) have brought attention to the significance of discourse for identity construction, arguing that people construct their own identities through the stories that they tell to themselves and to others to make sense of their lives. Mason (2004: 165) discusses this issue with regards to the narratives of migrants, explaining:

narratives are interpretive devices through which people represent themselves to themselves and to others and a means by which people connect past and present, self and other.
However, the types of stories one is able to tell and the ability to have those stories heard and taken seriously is intricately tied up with relations of power. For example, drawing on the work of both Foucault and Goffman, Gabriel (2004) brings attention to the significance of discourse for identity and provides support for the argument that identities are constructed within relations of power. Indeed, Foucault’s (1980: 93) notion of power, as “a complex strategical (sic) situation in a particular society,” rather than an “institution,” a “structure” or “a certain strength we are endowed with,” fits well with these sociological accounts of identity as dynamic, positional, and hybrid. Similarly, Goffman’s (1963[1959]) focus on the “construction of the self in everyday interactions” (Gabriel 2004: 115) is important in understanding the influence of migration on identity construction: when people move they usually experience new interpersonal relations that will impact upon their understandings of their own identities. Indeed, Susanne spoke of the freedom that migration could bring in terms of re-defining oneself and moving away from ascribed identities:

Susanne: *After a while the anonymity becomes really sort of fun and you realise that you don’t have to fit any stereotype that you’ve had before, you can be whatever you want to be, and if you’re a quiet, retiring sort of person no one knows it and you can be really outrageous and no one’s going to think any different of you.*

However, Susanne also noted that upon her return to Tasmania, she once again found herself having to grapple with others’ preconceived ideas of who she was and who she should be:
Susanne: *What I did find difficult was keeping the friendships up when you’re experiencing things that are so completely different than everything you’ve experienced before ... and I think people just expect you, it really was quite a life-changing experience and people expect you to be the same [when you return] and to have the same interests as you did before and you don’t, so that was tough.*

Susanne’s comments provide a clear example of the ways in which the identities of migrants are constructed within relations of power. She struggled to have her own achieved identity recognized in the face of the ascribed identities imposed upon her by friends and family in Tasmania.

In summary, a number of contemporary scholars understand identities to be mobile, relational, hybrid, and discursively constructed within power relations. Research into the experiences of migrants has proved a fruitful field for examination of these issues, given that migrants are often faced with new situations and new experiences, requiring a re-thinking and negotiation of their understandings about the world and appropriate ways to deal with issues that arise in their everyday lives (for example, Ang in Zournazi 1998; Mason 2004).

**Place and Identity**

While the sociological accounts of identity described above focus on the relationship between identity and society, a group of geographers have concentrated instead on the relationship between identity and place. This approach became popular among geographers in the 1970s who focused on the affective bonds people had to different places, due to a growing concern about “the alienation produced by ‘placeless’ modern environments” (Duncan & Duncan 2001: 41).

It is important to understand that these scholars operate with a particular definition of the concept of “place” (Easthope 2004). While there is some disagreement, generally
“places” are understood to be social constructs in so far as our ideas of place “are products of the society in which we live” (Massey 1995: 50). The creation of places is not entirely subjective. It is influenced by physical, economic, and social realities. However, these realities are understood socially in the creation of place. As Gieryn (2000: 465) explains with reference to the work of Soja (1996), “places are doubly constructed: most are built or in some way physically carved out. They are also interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood, and imagined.” Massey and Jess (1995: 219) similarly state “the physical environment is an essential part of place, but it is always an interpreted element.”

In these accounts, identity is said to be created through the body’s interactions with the outside world (Easthope 2004: 130). Personal identity is no longer seen as “a matter of sheer self-consciousness” (Casey 2001: 406), nor is it seen as defined and expressed only through one’s relationship to other people (Proshansky et al. 1983), but rather involves “intrinsically an awareness of one’s place,” an awareness that “there is no place without self; and no self without place” (Casey 2001: 406). This bond between people and place led Bachelard to argue that an investigation of places is essential “in any phenomenological/psychoanalytic study of memory, self and mind” (in Malpas 1999: 5). Hence, identity is understood to be intrinsically tied to place.

According to Dovey (1985), identity is tied to place in two important respects. First, one’s spatial identity is related to ideas of attachment to places and particularly ideas surrounding a special kind of place: the home. Indeed, attachment to places and a feeling of belonging were common themes in my discussions with young returned Tasmanians about their experiences of returning:
Katherine: I look out and look at what the mountain’s doing and I talk about
the mountain as though it has a personality and that’s part of a sense of
feeling that I belong to a place.

Gary: I started travelling back to Burnie one time, as I came over the Don
hill I could see the water and see the coast and ... I actually felt a real peace
coming over me as far as, this is where I belong, this is my home.

Second, place affects temporal identity as the emotion of human beings “finds expression and
anchorage in things and places” (Tuan 1974 in Dovey 1985: 42), and the physical
environment enables us to concretise memory through association (Dovey 1985: 42; see also
Godkin 1980). James’ comments point to the way in which familiarity with a place leads to
feelings of belonging:

James: It must be that feeling [pause] you just know the place, how do you
explain the feeling that comes from growing up somewhere. Because ... you
know every street, you know that if you look at the clouds coming from the
hill it’s about to rain or whatever ... I find that hard to explain but you feel
completely comfortable, you know something almost as well as you know
yourself even.

Susanne’s comment indicates the way in which a place can become entwined with a person’s
sense of self:
Susanne: *I actually made a choice to come to Tasmania because ... it sounds really corny, but there was something about it that never left me when I was away.*

Heather even talked about this in terms of place being engrained in the body:

Heather: *It’s nice going somewhere and just having it seem so familiar that it’s engrained in you.*

While place attachment is of course personal, it is also important for collective identities. The most common examples of group identities connected to particular places are national and ethnic identities, in which connection to a “homeland” provides a common reference point for groups of people (for example, Holton 1998; Martin 1997). Kakar (1995) explains that identification with a group based on a concept of a common “home” place can provide feelings of love and belonging for individuals and groups, and can be formed as a result of feelings of “exhilaration.” It is this feeling of exhilaration that is played upon in nationalistic discourse - a feeling of national pride. Some people spoke about collective identification with Tasmania:

Tim: *A lot of the Tassies that I met away were ... always Tasmanians, in fact they were always bagged out* as Tasmanians, .... *Him and I organized a Tassie party once in Perth ... We picked a pub ... and we rang up all the Tassie people we could think of and asked them to ring up all the Tassie people they could think of and just spread the word and this pub was packed*
... Just packed full of Tassie people, all different ages and different walks of life and they all strongly, obviously strongly identified with Tassie. Because they used to call us the Tasmanians at work, so it’s something you wear.

Sarup recognizes that identities are defined and limited by borders and boundaries (1996 in McHugh 2000) and that “in crossing boundaries, taken-for-granted identities are thrust into consciousness” (McHugh 2000: 85). However, other commentators have argued that most people need to have those boundaries in place, but they also need to be able to cross those boundaries in order to maintain their identities. For example, Buttimer (1980) writes about the views of space of “insiders” and “outsiders,” saying that people’s personal and cultural identity is bound up with place identity and that most people need both a home and horizons of reach (of imagination, social relations or physical relations) outward from that home. King (1995) discusses these issues with reference to migrants’ experiences, saying that “the migrant’s sense of place and of personal identity often involve a duality – ‘here’ and ‘there,’ which is an important aspect of their lives” (1995: 29). The following comment by Gary brings this issue of the migrant as both insider and outsider to light:

Gary: Any problems [as a result of moving back to Tasmania]? Oh yeah. Um, I wasn’t from there anymore ... When I came back I looked different, I wasn’t an average Tasmanian anymore, I was, ‘oh you’re one of them mainlanders’ almost.

Indeed, bonds to place need not be positive. People also identify against places, establishing their own sense of place by contrasting themselves with different places and the people in
them. This is the thesis of Said’s *Orientalism* (1979), and there has been much scholarly interest in the connection between places (particularly home-places) and hostilities, especially at the national scale. A number of researchers have discussed the “dark side of topophilia” as manifested in the naturalization of the nation-state” (Duncan & Duncan 2001: 41) and Massey and Jess (1995: 233) note that “the metaphors of home and homeland” have often “provoked damage and aggression.” Indeed, Gary, upon returning to Tasmania, found that he was seen by others as an “outsider,” where the “Tasmanian” identity was set up against that of the “mainlander.” In comparison, James’ comment (above) about his old friends being “narrow minded” helped him to construct his own, more cosmopolitan identity in opposition to those of his “old” friends in Tasmania.

Much of the work on place attachment draws on the work of Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Heidegger (1973). Both Merelau-Ponty and Heidegger challenged Cartesian dualist thought, which differentiated the mind from the body. Merleau-Ponty criticised the idea of a disembodied ego and instead argued, “our primary relation to our world is not, in the first instance, a matter of reflective thought … but rather of practical involvement and mastery” (in Crossley 2001: 100). Merleau-Ponty (in Welton 1999: 154) argued “consciousness is in the first place not a matter of ‘I think that’ but of ‘I can.’”

Heidegger’s contribution was to propose a philosophy of “being-in-the-world,” an explanation of the mechanisms through which attachment to place is realized. Heidegger recognized that who we are is influenced by our relationship, through our bodies, to the outside world. As Casey notes, “the vehicle of being-in-place is the body” (2001: 413, *italics original*). The body “goes out to meet the place-world” and it “bears the traces of the places it has known” (Casey 2001: 414). In other words, these theorists recognize that in order to fully understand the concept of identity, we need to recognize the ways that people interact...
with the physical world through their bodies. It is not enough to simply conceive of identity as a process that takes place in the minds of individuals. Casey (2001) ties Heidegger’s concept of habitualities to Bourdieu’s concept of habitus and proposes that habitus can be used as a term to explain the relationship between self and place (for a fuller explanation of Casey’s arguments, see Easthope 2004). Following from these arguments, I suggest that we feel at home in the places in which our habitus has developed. This appears to be what Susanne was saying when she explained, while talking about the nature of home during an interview:

Susanne: It’s something like not head but heart ... maybe just knowing that you know how to get along in that place, you know how things are done around here, you know what’s expected to live in that way. You know what you’ll come up against, you know how you’ll get through it, which is not to say that you won’t eventually learn those things somewhere else, but maybe it’s just that it comes instinctively rather than having to learn it.

However, people also mentioned that the sense of home they had in new locations were different than the sense of home they had in the places they grew up because their new homes were more of a “creation.” In both cases, it remains a question of home places being places where the habitus has developed; while the habitus may already be developed from an early age in the place of origin, moving to a new place requires the development of a new habitus for dealing with new environments and situations. For example, Susanne raised these issues when she was talking about feeling at home in London:

Susanne: Yeah, it was different, it was a creation ‘though. It wasn’t like I got there and ... I felt like I could come and live in Hobart, live in Launceston, go to the East Coast and even if I didn’t have the networks there, I didn’t have to create the ability to belong, I had that already because this is where I’m from
and ... when I went to London you had to create that and it actually felt really temporary because it felt dependent on the people around you, whereas maybe Tasmania feels more dependent on the environment.

In summary, the relationship that people have with their physical environment and the ways in which they understand that relationship through different conceptualisations of place are important aspects of identity construction (on both an individual and a group level). These theories are not in opposition to the sociological accounts of identity described above. Theorists of place and identity seldom claim that identities based on place are anything other than incomplete, dynamic, hybrid, and relational. For example, Keith and Pile (1993: 31) explicitly point to the “significance of spatiality in the incomplete process of identity formation (emphasis added).” However, they add an extra dimension to the study of identity by recognising that we necessarily have an attachment to the physical environment through our bodies and that this attachment can be given social significance through attachment to place.

**Mobility and place in identity construction**

My research with young returned Tasmanians indicates that it is possible to understand one’s identity in terms of both place and mobility simultaneously and that it is important not to prioritise one at the expense of the other. The above excerpts from interviews with young returned migrants in Tasmania certainly provide support for the claim that our identities are incomplete, relational, and hybrid as well as constructed in relation to place and mobility. Indeed, the young people I spoke with drew upon notions of fluid, mobile identities, and identities informed by place attachment simultaneously. People can and do talk in terms of the impact of both mobility and place attachment on their identities simultaneously; the two
modes of understanding identity construction are not exclusive. We cannot say that we are moving away from the importance of place attachment totally, nor can migrants be categorised into “modern” and “post-modern” ideal identity types. People can, and do, draw from both facets of identity construction simultaneously.

Following Tuan, Casey (2001) argues that it is not the case that the stronger the self becomes, the less important place should be (and vice versa). The self is strengthened not only by the cosmos, but also by the hearth. It can be argued that a self that becomes stronger through its “explorations” in the cosmos still requires a different kind of strength that can only be achieved through the hearth. In other words, the more we rely on the cosmos for our development, the more we desire the hearth. The following comment by Susanne provides a clear example of the tension between the cosmos and the hearth. She explains that when she was away, she wanted to come “home” to Tasmania and yet when she visited home, the experience wasn’t as satisfying as she had expected:

Susanne: You start to get to know people [in the new place] and so you lose that initial excitement and wow and wonder, um, I think yeah after that wears off a bit, probably the home-sickness kicks in a bit and um, and you know, in a funny way you start to compare everything to back home and think it doesn’t measure up in the same way as when you come home ... it was a bit of a grass is always greener.

A number of other academics have also addressed these issues. Seamon (1985: 227-228) talks about the “rest-movement relationship and its associated polarities of home and reach, centre and horizon, dwelling and journey (italics original),” claiming that:
The relationship between dwelling and journey is dialectical and
identifies the need for both stability and change in people’s dealings with
places and environments.

Similarly, while Rapport and Dawson (1998: 33) argue that movement has become fundamental to modern identity and that people conceive of their lives in terms of moving between relations, people, things, groups, societies, cultures, and environments, they do this in “a dialectic between movement and fixity.”. Both movement and stability are necessary for understanding one’s life. Dawson (1998: 219) also talks about these issues, arguing that there is an ambivalence at the heart of most people’s experiences between “fixity and a connection to the here and now” and movement. His arguments are interesting in that he explicitly explains that this movement includes not only spatial movement, but also social and temporal movement (Dawson 1998: 219-220). Hence he recognizes that even when “people face conditions of fixity … they engage cognitively in movement,” that is, even when a person is in one place, the imagination can be in movement. This is important because imaginations of other places (and other times) “informs images of community constructed in the here and now” (1998: 220). In other words, imaginations of movement can inform the lived reality of “fixity.” By extension, it could also be argued that even when one is in movement, one’s imagination can be focused on a singular place and that these imaginations of fixity can influence the experiences of mobility.

Place as Stability and Mobility as Change?

While this paper has focused upon place and mobility, the issues of stability and change have constantly arisen. The arguments outlined above have pointed to the importance of both
mobility and place in understanding identity. However, at the same time, the importance of both stability and change for the identity “project” has also been recognized. This is particularly evident in the work of Giddens (1991) and Bauman (1997, 2001), but also in the writings of Casey (2001), Rapport and Dawson (1998), Seamon (1985), and Tuan (2001). Stability of the external (social, physical, cultural) environment has been seen as important for maintaining coherent identities, while change in the external (social, physical, cultural) environment has been seen as important for identity development. However, despite the importance of both place and mobility and both stability and change for the identity “project,” I want to warn here against simply equating place with stability and mobility with change.

Places, understood as nodes in networks of relations, are not stable in the sense of being static. Rather, they are constantly re-negotiated and understood in new ways by different people, or by the same people at different times. For example, Matthew’s comments regarding his return to Tasmania provide an indication of how a person’s sense of place can change over time:

Matthew: *I realised just how pretty it is here, how naturally pretty, even, I just started to notice things that I hadn’t noticed before just driving around up North between Mum and Dad’s and Devonport, oh wow, you can see Mount Roland and the Great Western Tiers over there and I just it really bothered me, just taken for granted before I guess, and now its something I really notice.*
Similarly, mobility need not necessarily imply change. For some people, mobility itself has become normalized; some people may feel “at home in movement” (Rapport & Dawson 1998: 27; see also Cuba and Hummon 1993: 551). For “cosmopolitan elites” (Bauman 1998), and for nomadic cultures, mobility is normalized and expected. To a lesser extent, this was also true for those young Tasmanians who saw leaving Tasmania (mobility) as a normal state of affairs:

Emily: *Partly [leaving] was just I think some sort of natural ... fly like migratory instincts ... turtles pop out of the sand, run to the water, go for it ... head out to deep sea. And it felt very much partly that, I just had to go, had to get out of town.*

Hence, the stability-change dialectic is related to the mobility-change dialectic, but should not be equated with it. It is important to recognize that reality is even more complex than these dialectics imply.

**Conclusion**

In discussing the nature of identity in these late-modern times, it is not sufficient to address only those aspects of identity influenced by mobility, nor to address only those aspects of identity influenced by place. I contend that these approaches are not exclusionary and that theories that concentrate on identity and society are in fact complementary to theories that concentrate on identity and place. However, if we are to fully understand the process of identity construction and the power relations that are tied up with this process, any approach must recognize the importance of both place and mobility.
Certainly, it is not enough to claim that we are moving from a society of people with identities based on place to one of people with identities based on mobility, neither can we simply assume that increasing mobility will lead to increasingly dislocated identities. Mobility and place are fundamental aspects of the human condition and the concept of identity cannot be fully understood without reference to this dialectic. There may be a trend towards a prioritisation of one over the other, but neither can ever become redundant, and the findings from my research into the experiences of young returned Tasmanians indicates that place still has a very important role to play in identity constructions. Studies of migration and of the experiences of migrants provide an excellent field in which to address these issues of the nature of identity, and a handful of scholars have done so. However, the opportunities for addressing this issue of identity need not be restricted to studies of migration. Once we recognize that place and mobility are fundamental attributes of all identities, we open the door for future studies addressing these issues in almost any field.

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1. These are by no means the only approaches in contemporary academia, but they do enable a fuller examination of the relationship between mobility and identity in contemporary life.

2. For both interstate and international locations.

3. All names are pseudonyms.

4. While Giddens and Bauman seem to imply that their theories of the development of identity apply to the whole world, a closer reading of their work indicates that their arguments are directed mainly at developments in “advanced societies.”

5. Derided.

6. The geographer Yi-Fu Tuan coined the term *topophilia* to describe “the affective bond between people and place” (Duncan & Duncan, 2001: 41). He said that this bond may be stronger for some individuals than for others and can be expressed differently by people from different cultures (Duncan & Duncan, 2001: 41). Topophilia is an affective response to place, but it is also “a practice that can actively produce places for people” (Duncan & Duncan, 2001: 41). That is, the bond people have to a place can help to change the nature of that place (Easthope 2004: 130).

7. “Place-world,” a term coined by Edward Soja, is “a world that is not only perceived or conceived but actively lived” (Casey 2001: 413). The place-world is simultaneously social, spatial and historical (Casey 2001: 413).

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