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## Landscapes on-the-move

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### ABSTRACT

Both archaeologists and anthropologists have been slow to address the question of how people on the move engage with landscape. Anthropologists have tended to discuss the larger political and social terrain of diaspora without too much consideration of what this might involve in terms of intimate and personal engagement. Archaeologists espousing a more phenomenological approach have focused on intimate and personal engagement with place and well-worn territory, without acknowledging that these often work within larger, less familiar landscapes of movement. The article attempts to move between the two approaches, between different and interlocking scales of human activity and understanding. It attempts to show that however 'out of place' people may be, they are also always 'in place'.

### KEYWORDS

anthropology ● archaeology ● diaspora ● landscape ● people-on-the-move ● phenomenology



## ■ INTRODUCTION

As the twentieth century ends, many taken-for-granted in anthropology – about people, personhood, society, place and space – are being questioned and reworked. Persons and personhood have become partitive, provisional, performative and relational (Strathern, 1988; Butler, 1993). Boundaries between persons and things have become osmotic and creative of one another, and persons, places and spaces are understood to be intimately imbricated (Bender, 1993, 1998; Hirsch and O’Hanlon, 1995). Landscapes are no longer to be separated from human experience or seen as purely visual, instead they are part of a world of movement, relationships, memories and histories (Feld and Basso, 1996). All this adds up to a dense and complex web of people/things/places. And yet, at the same time, another anthropological trend questions this web of intimate relational beings and, instead, emphasizes routes over roots, speaks to the condition of migrancy and diaspora, *dis*-placement, *dis*-jointedness and, often, to a thinness of experience (Deleuze and Guattari, 1981; Augé, 1995; Clifford, 1997).

In archaeology there have also been moves towards an experiential and phenomenological understanding that emphasizes locatedness and familiarity and moves the action away from site-specificity towards landscapes that work and are worked on many different scales (Tilley, 1994; Bender et al., 1997; Thomas, 2000). These parallel developments within anthropology and archaeology are hardly accidental. Not only are the disciplinary boundaries increasingly porous and open to question, but also, as we have come to recognize, the questions posed and answers posited, whether about the ethnographic present or the past, are responsive to contemporary preoccupations and context-dependent world views. Because this is so, we also understand that both questions and answers are temporary and selective. Already in the above statements I have emphasized some trends, ignored others, selecting in ways that respond to my own changing perceptions and placement within the world (Bender, 1998: 13–24).

There is, however, one domain in which archaeological theorizing has been slow to keep pace with anthropology. At first glance it seems surprising that in trying to understand great sweeps of prehistory there has been a reluctance in recent years to think about the dynamics and impact of people on the move.<sup>1</sup> No doubt one reason for the hesitation is that through to the 1960s archaeological (and, in North America, anthropological) explanations were awash with rather mechanistic notions of migration and diffusion. Then, as dreams of Empire or International Socialism receded in Europe, and narratives of colonization and frontier lost their innocence in North America, and as nation states asserted their independence and increasingly raised barriers against ‘intruders’, the pendulum swung violently

towards regional integrity and independent development: from Childe to Renfrew in Britain, from Boas to Binford in North America. Later, though the postprocessualists critiqued the functionalism associated with much of Binford's and (some of) Renfrew's writings, the regional focus remained in place and very little was said about long-distance movement, colonization or dispossession. Only slowly the pendulum is again moving, and the momentum will surely gather speed (Bender, 2000). This time round, migration and diffusion will be allowed to intertwine in complex ways with regional and local development (just as various forms of contemporary globalism interact, often uncomfortably, with regional and local identities). And this time round, our own positioning will be included in the discussion, and there will be a continued questioning of how agency, historical and spatial contingency and relationships of power play off each other.

In this article I want to pick out two contemporary strands, the first the discussion of landscapes of diaspora in anthropology, the second the experiential or phenomenological approach in both anthropology and archaeology. I want to bring them into closer rapport, suggesting that the larger political and social terrain of diaspora involves intimate and personal engagement, just as the intimate and personal engagements with place and well-worn territory opens towards larger political and social landscapes. It is a question of moving to and fro between scales of human activity and understanding, creating open-ended interactions between agencies and historical and spatial contingencies, and exchanging oppositional *either/or* explanations for much more fluid *and/and* ones.<sup>2</sup> I start with landscapes of diaspora.

## ■ GROUNDING THE EXPERIENCE OF DIASPORA

The current emphasis on global movement is about the reality of compressed time and space, of people 'being in touch' at first, third, tenth hand, of a global inequality which works to generate a leisured travelling world for some, a world of desperate economic deprivation for others, a thin wash of entrepreneurs travelling globally, and a wave of underpaid labour making its way from the 'peripheries' to (grudging) 'centres', and of civil wars and dispossession.<sup>3</sup> All of which work off each other and all of which have to be understood in terms of what went before:

WE ARE HERE BECAUSE YOU WERE THERE. (A Third World poster. Rich, cited in Smith and Katz, 1993: 77)

The focus on global movements is also part of a repudiation of a western conceptualization of 'core'/'periphery', of victor and victim. Deleuze and Guattari reacted against *rooted* histories for good reason:



We're tired of trees. We should stop believing in trees, roots and radicles. They've made us suffer too much. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1981: 15)

They offered instead the metaphor of rhizomes and the trope of nomadology. But there is a risk that such generalizations flatten important differences. They may make it seem as if:

'We' [are] all in fundamentally similar ways always-already travellers in the same post-modern universe. (Ang, 1994, cited in Cresswell, 1997)

But even writers who eschew such generalizations assume that movement creates a *dis*-location between people and landscape. Clifford, for example, offered a finely nuanced and gendered approach to the specific, discrepant histories involved in diasporic experiences. Nonetheless he tended to emphasize the historical and social at the expense of the spatial on-the-ground experience (Smith and Katz, 1993; Clifford, 1997: 244). In reality, dislocation is always also relocation. People are always in some relationship to the landscape they move through – they are never nowhere: 'Every movement between here and there bears with it a movement within here and within there' (Minh-ha, 1994: 15).

Augé's (1995: 86) comment that 'The traveller's space may . . . be the archetype of *non-place*' has been much quoted. He talked of the non-place of transit lounges, motels, airports. But are they non-places or are they just particular sorts of places? Are they not invested with many and fluctuating sorts of meaning dependent on experience? Here are *Gast-Arbeiter* in Germany:

Migrant workers, already living in the metropolis, have the habit of visiting the main railway station. To talk in groups there, to watch the trains come in, to receive first-hand news from their country, to anticipate the day when they will make the return journey. (Berger and Mohr, 1975: 64)

And here Ugresic, a 'Yugoslavian' woman who, as a result of the recent civil wars, feels 'homeless':

I like it here [in the airport]. I am a human maggot. I will build my nest here, in a place that belongs to nobody . . . I will live in the artificial light of the airport as an example of the postmodern species, in a transit phase, in an ideal shelter, in purgatory, in an emotionally sterile room. (cited in Jansen, 1998: 107)

This is, of course, a very 'knowing' account, but see how Ugresic created out of 'neutral' airport space a sense of 'nest', 'transit', 'shelter' and 'purgatory'. It is not a 'non-place', it is a place around which imagination weaves itself, a place that is pitched against other meaningful places in the author's biography.

A more phenomenological approach to people on-the-move does not replace the socio-political-economic analysis, it forms part of it. And sometimes it permits a questioning of the categories created by academics and

bureaucrats. Clifford (1997), in his discussion of diasporic movement,<sup>4</sup> admitted that the categories blur, and experiential accounts demonstrate more forcibly the inadequacies of many of the designations, as well as the power of legal niceties to affect the attitudes and actions of reluctant host and desperate 'guest'.

This is a tale as told by male African 'economic migrants':

[They] no longer recalled the stages or the place-names on the next leg of the journey . . . So far as they know, and they were delirious for long periods, they crossed the Algerian Sahara in two months . . . [Williams' companion] explained they had eaten leaves, sucked up the water from pools of sandy mud and drunk their own urine . . . He spoke of 'trekking' to the point of death, of seeming to die on his feet, falling into an abyss of exhaustion, only to be resurrected by the furnace of the late afternoon. (Harding, 2000: 24)

Does it differ very much from this tale told of people who are labelled 'political refugees'?

They arrive at the huts [in the harbour of Otranto, Italy] drenched and chilled to the marrow. They are shivering, terrified, nearly ecstatic – a state induced by the journey and the fact of having survived it . . . After an hour or so, the men begin milling about, while the women sit with their heads bowed and the children sleep. (Harding, 2000: 8. Note how the experience is gendered)

Here are some of the effects of the larger legal structures as they impinge on the experience of being 'welcomed':

The migrants shuffle down the line with their hands extended. The abrupt introduction of the illegal alien to the grudging host state begins. In this parody of greeting, gloved hands reach out to bare hands, seize them, flatten them down on an ink block, lift them across the table-top and flatten them again onto a square of paper. (Harding, 2000: 8)

The experiences of place and landscape for those on the move work at many different levels, they shift with the particularities of time and place, and alter shape in accordance with individual biography. In short they are polysemic, contextual, processual and biographical.

How do people relate to unfamiliar and often hostile worlds? How do they create bridges between what is and what has gone before? Let us return to Berger's account of the Turkish male *Gast-Arbeiter* in Germany (Berger and Mohr, 1975). It is a little out of date perhaps, but combines in rare measure empathy and trenchant analysis, and Berger has no trouble acknowledging that the individual or group experience of place and landscape has to be understood within a much larger set of social, political and economic relationships:

To see the experience of another, one must do more than dismantle and reassemble the world with him at its centre. One must interrogate his situation to learn about that part of his experience which derives from the



historical moment. What is being done to him, even with his won complicity, under the cover of normalcy? (Berger and Mohr, 1975: 104)

These men, having made their precarious way to a hostile host country, face the alienation of unfamiliar territories:

One of the walls of the corner where his bed is, leads to a door, the door opens onto a passage, at the end of the passage are the taps to wash under and the place he can shit in, the wet floor of this place leads to the way out, down the stairs into the street, along the walls of the buildings on one side and the wall of the traffic on the other, past the railing, under the glass and the artificial light to the work he does . . .

But after work and on Sundays it is hellish . . . (Berger and Mohr, 1975: 87).

And yet there is a way of creating something out of nothing:

By turning in circles the displaced preserve their identity and improvise a shelter. Built of what? Of habits . . . the raw material of repetition turned into shelter . . . words, jokes, opinions, objects and places . . . photos, trophies, souvenirs . . . The roof and four walls . . . are invisible, intangible, and biographical. (Berger, 1984: 63)

From the old life, what gets brought, what left behind? What remembered, what erased? How does the old get eased into new and hostile landscapes?

In certain barracks the authorities have tried to forbid migrant workers keeping their suitcases in their sleeping rooms on the grounds that they make the room untidy. The workers have strongly resisted this . . . In these suitcases they keep personal possessions, not the clothes put in the wardrobes, not the photographs they pin to the wall, but articles which, for one reason or another, are their talismans. Each suitcase, locked or tied around with cord, is like a man's memory. They defend their right to keep the suitcases. (Berger and Mohr, 1975: 179)

Reminiscing, silently remembering, touched by the physicality of 'things' that matter, the migrant 'gets by'.

Parkin, discussing dispossession in the more extreme situation of people forced to flee their homes, also charted the relationship between the physical minutiae that people seize upon as they leave, and the larger structural significance that these objects hold:

Personal mementoes provide the material markers . . . inscribed with narrative and sentiment, which may later re-articulate the shifting boundaries of a socio-cultural identity . . . But the objects are also . . . archetypal possibilities for the commemoration of the death of those in flight and even of a community. (Parkin, 1999: 313)

Within each context and between different contexts the effect of dislocation varies. A recent account of Indian migrant workers employed in the

Persian Gulf states suggests that in this instance they are 'less deracinated from the web of social relations' and more able to create 'a home away from home' (Osella and Osella, 2000: 120).

Other accounts have suggested that the pull between familiar 'here' and alien 'there' may be less significant than we tend to assume. Wardle (1999), for example, suggested that Caribbean people, already uprooted from their places of origin and sojourning in an alien geography empty of indigenes and individuated by the socio-economics of colonization, do not have a strong sense of roots. Instead the migrant (male) Jamaican worker constructs an 'ego-centred adventure'. Nonetheless, one might wonder whether the 'ego-centred adventure' that works so well in the context of storytelling to an enraptured audience 'at home', works as well at other moments along the way. V.S. Naipaul, with his usual sharp eye, watched the metamorphosis that takes place for a Trinidadian worker as the aeroplane stops down in North America:

At home, among his fellows, just a few hours before, he was a man to be envied, his journey indescribably glamorous; now he was a Negro, in a straw-coloured jacket obviously not his own, too tight across his weight-lifter's shoulders . . . Now, in that jacket (at home, the badge of the traveller to the temperate North), he was bluffing it out, insisting on his respectability, on not being an American Negro, on not being fazed by the aeroplane and by the white people. (Naipaul, 1987: 101)

Nuance of context is important, and gender too. Accounts of migrant workers are often gendered male. It is assumed that it is the men that leave and that the women stay put. But, of course, this is by no means always the case.<sup>5</sup>

Life for women in diasporic situations may be doubly painful – struggling with the material and spiritual insecurities of exile, with the demands of family and work, and with the claims of the old and new patriarchies. (Clifford, 1997: 259)

And then, for many, there are the landscapes of return. The expectation of things being in place. But, of course, as is well known, no-one returns to the same place twice. Time moves on, the person and the landscape have changed. Orford and Becker (in press) used the stories told by Namibian women to show both the terrors of exile – and of return.

It is also important to recognize that the landscape of those who stay put is also on the move. Pheng Cheah has taken Homi Bhabha and Clifford to task for placing too great an emphasis on 'a metropolitan scenario of migrancy and mobility . . . the chronotope of travelling culture does not give equal time to the tenacity of national dwelling' (Cheah, 1998). There is some truth in this, but 'the tenacity of national dwelling' is not stable. It is much affected by the departures (Aziz, in press), and is also shaken by the 'forces that pass powerfully *through* – television, radio, tourists, commodities,



armies' (Clifford, 1992: 103). Perhaps we should follow Avtar Brah (1996: 242) and use the term 'diaspora space' to embrace 'the entanglement of the genealogies of dispersal with those of staying put.'

And then, for some people, there is no return. Willingly, or unwillingly, they move from making-do in an alien landscape, to finding ways of becoming part of the place they have arrived at. In *Lost in Translation* Eva Hoffman (1989) movingly described, first, a Polish landscape of childhood set in amber through abrupt departure to the 'New world', then a landscape of alienation, and finally a landscape of uneasy reconciliation. In her landscape of alienation she focused on language:

The words I learn now don't stand for things in the same unquestioned way they did in my native tongue. 'River' in Polish was a vital sound, energised with the essence of riverhood, of my rivers, of my being immersed in rivers. 'River' in English is cold – a word without aura. It has no accumulated associations for me, and it does not give off the radiating haze of connotation. It does not evoke. (Hoffman, 1989: 106)

What is true of the thinness and instability of words is also true of the thinness and instability of place:

Poland has covered an area in my head coeval with the dimensions of reality, and all other places on the globe have been measured by their distance from it . . . [Now] I have been dislocated from my own centre of the world, and that world has been shifted away from my centre. There is no longer a straight axis anchoring my imagination; it begins to oscillate, and I rotate around it unsteadily. (Hoffman, 1989: 132)

The new world is undernourished by memory and the accumulation of experience. As experience deepens, so reconciliation becomes possible although, always, the present being 'at home' is predicated on an earlier and different sense of place and belonging.

Some hold onto the past, some repudiate it:

Someone in a Cambridge common room [pestered] the self-designated 'non-Jewish Jew' and Marxist historian Isaac Deutscher . . . about his roots. 'Trees have roots,' he shot back, scornfully, 'Jews have legs'. (Schama, 1996: 29)

Or, as Gilroy (1991) memorably summarized it, for young blacks in Britain, 'It ain't where you're from, it's where you're at'. As with the take on Caribbean migrant workers, so with those that have settled, one might hesitate before accepting that Deutscher's sharp rejoinder or Gilroy's pithy summary represents the totality of experience. Did Deutscher always feel that way, or just sometimes? Was it the context of interrogation that brought the instant response? For young black people are there not times and places when 'where you're from' does matter?<sup>6</sup>

Even when a first generation of emigrants fiercely rejects 'home-sickness', the feeling of being dis-placed and a nostalgic longing for roots may re-emerge

in the second or third generation, as Basu (in press) has shown in the context of the Scottish diaspora (see Lichtenstein and Sinclair, 2000 for another reworking of this theme).

I have used ethnographic examples to make a case for the importance of landscapes of migration, exile, return or relocation. I could have used examples drawn from history or prehistory. The anthropological literature makes it seem as though these movements are contemporary phenomena and Said is correct when he says,

It is one of the unhappiest characteristics of the age to have produced more refugees, migrants, displaced persons, and exiles than ever before in history, most of them as an accompaniment to, and ironically enough, as afterthoughts of great post-colonial and imperial conflicts. (Said, 1994: 402)

But these contemporary movements are only a particular reworking of age-old scenarios, and whether one turns to Ghosh's vivid account of medieval movement and migration around the Mediterranean (Ghosh, 1992), or Ascherson's of endless comings and goings around the Black Sea (Ascherson, 1996), the need remains to relate people's experience to place as well as to time.

## ■ PUSHING THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL BOUNDARIES

Where the literature on diaspora tends to be broad-brushed, focusing on historical contingencies and changing power relations, and fails to recognize the importance of people's sense of place in an alien and unfamiliar world, the phenomenological literature has a wonderful fine-grainedness, but risks losing sight of the larger picture, the larger fields of political, social and economic power and processes of change. Place takes precedence over time.

Recent phenomenological approaches, both anthropological and archaeological, focus on a being-in-the-world attachment to place and landscape (Ingold, 1993; Tilley, 1994; Gow, 1995; Edmonds, 1999). They chart the way in which, by moving along familiar paths, winding memories and stories around places, people create a sense of self and belonging. Sight, sound, smell and touch – mind and body inseparable. Often, in these studies, experience is conceived of as a sort of 'stock-taking' at points along the way, but it would be more accurate to think in terms of 'ambulatory vision' (Ingold, 2000, citing Gibson), or better still, ambulatory encounters.

These phenomenological accounts usually emphasize familiar places and landscapes (Feld and Basso, 1996, but see Dubow, in press, for a bone-crunching account of unfamiliar travel in colonial South Africa). But even for people who live in the same place for generations and work 'within their knowledge', there are always other places (real, or encountered through



hearsay, story and imagination). The familiar topography gives way to the unfamiliar, one landscape nests within another like Chinese boxes – except that the boxes are permeable. How do people deal with the part-familiar or the unknown? Walking along seasonal pathways, a person part-knows the way, part-knows that each time of return there will be change and unfamiliarity; part-fears, part-revels in the chance encounter, the possible adventure. Arriving is important but so are the stories woven around the travelling (Edmonds, 1999). If we think about Papua New Guinean voyagers embarking on sea-borne exchanges (Battaglia, 1990), or prehistoric people from Stonehenge traversing unfamiliar landscapes as they search for and bring back the sacred stones from South Wales or North Wiltshire, or of pilgrims walking and recreating the Nazca lines, we have to envisage them moving through unfamiliar landscapes and dealing with unfamiliar people. How do they do it? What real or fictive kinscapes and clanscapes are created to ease the journeys? What song-lines or sacred topographies are woven to embrace the unknown? What webs of exchange (of people, things, information and ideas) are spun? And who does the travelling? Who is left behind? Who is/are encountered? Who tells the stories? Who gets to hear the tale?

People's sense of place and landscape thus extends out from the locale and from the present encounter and is contingent upon a larger temporal and spatial field of relationships. The explanation moves backwards and forwards between the detail of everyday existence and these larger forces (Sontag, 1983: 385–401; Pred, 1990; Edholm, 1993; Selwyn, in press).

Here is bell hooks walking to her grandmother's house:

It was a movement away from the segregated blackness of our community into a white neighborhood. I remember the fear, being scared to walk to Baba's, our grandmother's house, because we would have to pass that terrifying whiteness – those white faces on the porches staring us down with hate . . .

Oh! That feeling of safety, of arrival, of homecoming, when we finally reached the edges of her yard, when we could see the soot black face of our grandfather, Daddy Gus, sitting in his chair on the porch, smell his cigar, and rest on his lap. (hooks, 1992: 344)

Note how the feeling of safety involves all the senses – seeing, smelling, touching. Here is Jamaica Kincaid's Lucy, an Antiguan au pair working in North America:

Along the paths and underneath the trees were many, many yellow flowers, the shape of play teacups, or fairy skirts. . . . I did not know what these flowers were, and so it was a mystery to me why I wanted to kill them. Just like that. I wanted to kill them. (Kincaid, 1994: 29)

The daffodils, for that is what they were, triggered memories of the poem by Wordsworth that she had had to recite as a child. She had never seen daffodils, they were just part of her colonial education; part of the larger, gendered structure of endlessly unequal relations. For hooks, a trajectory of fear, for Kincaid one of oppression and anger, for both a present moment strung within a long coercive past.

So the rooted, familiar place is never only that, but always surrounded and affected by unfamiliar spaces and attenuated relationships. Moreover, the rooted, familiar places are not necessarily 'in place', they may themselves be on the move. Thus some of the nomadic communities in Mongolia create an ego-centred world in which the 'centre' moves and the *axis mundi* – the joining of earth to sky – is recreated through the smoke that rises from the campfire at each resting point along the way (Humphrey, 1995). Or among contemporary Roma, the seasonal landscape may be familiar but the temporary campsite – grudgingly 'given' by authorities or claimed without permission – is treated as alien and polluted space. Whether on the move or within this alien space, it is the caravan that is the centre of the world and 'home'.

Another opposition that is often assumed within the phenomenological literature is between a rooted sense of belonging and the alienating forces of modernity. Often it may be so, but sometimes, just as settled landscape can be both familiar *and* unfamiliar it may also be both rooted *and* undergoing rapid change. The forces of modernity may rework a landscape, but they may also be reworked in response to a local sense of place, a particular way of being-in-the-world. Harvey has discussed the way in which in a small Peruvian town a burgeoning (modern) transport system remains responsive to a sacred topography (Harvey, in press). She also suggests the way in which a person may *at the same time* feel at home and powerful within a local landscape and marginal in terms of a larger political and economic landscape. Or in the desert of Rajasthan a prince may undertake a 'traditional' pilgrimage on foot in response to the most modern political agenda (Balzani, in press).

## ■ CONCLUSION

Examples may be multiplied, but the point that this article tries to make is straightforward. We need, in the twenty-first century, to recognize and analyse the creative tension between the local and 'global', between the familiar and unfamiliar, the being at-home which is never as secure as it seems, and the being on-the-move which nevertheless always involves a degree of being in place.



## Notes

- 1 Because of my own particular interests I say this in the context of later prehistory, from the Neolithic onwards. It is true that 'Out of Africa' or other narratives of earlier hominid evolution are couched in terms of migration. But even then what these displacements might mean to the people involved is rarely touched on. Of course there are exceptions. The recent BBC film about European Neanderthals painted a vivid picture of arrivals and – unwilling – departures.
- 2 These thoughts were initially given shape and form when Margot Winer and I organized a session on *Contested Landscapes and Landscapes of Movement and Exile* at the World Archaeological Congress held in Cape Town in the Spring of 1999. Many of the papers presented, and a few more gathered subsequently, form the basis of a book, *Contested Landscapes: Movement, Exile and Place*, which will be published by Berg in spring 2001. I have used many of the arguments that I proposed in the Introduction to the book in this article.
- 3 A recent estimate suggests that 25 million people have been forced to leave their country; 25 million people have been internally displaced; and another 75 million are on the move because of economic or environmental circumstances (Vidal, 1999; see also Shepherd, in press).
- 4 Clifford defined diaspora as: 'A history of dispersal, myths/memories of the homeland, alienation in the host (bad host?) country, desire for eventual return, ongoing support of the homeland, and a collective identity importantly defined by this relationship' (Clifford, 1997: 247).
- 5 Thus, for example, women form the majority of Cape Verdian workers migrating to Italy, of Filipinos working in the Middle East, and of Thais in Japan (Brah, 1996: 179).
- 6 The tensions and ambivalences are clear in several recent novels by young black women writers (Levy, 1999; Melville, 2000).

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