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From Roots to Rhizomes

Place, Transitions, and Translocality in a Less Stationary World

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In environmental and natural resource social science, place has often been characterized with rootedness and stationarity, which neglects important, dynamic connections between people and place(s). In this chapter, we (1) reexamine certain assumptions in place literature about human-mobility and place-change as necessarily jeopardizing the role of place(s) in our lives and (2) explore how a more relational, pluralistic, and dynamic view of place and place-making can help us navigate accelerating anthropogenic change and uncertainty. We hope that by moving from roots to rhizomes as an organizing metaphor for theorizing people-place relationships, this chapter invites an even more diverse cohort of scholars to examine the critical role of place in social-ecological-technical transitions.

Introduction

What is the future of *place* amid pervasive ecological, economic, social, and technological transitions? We raise this question because place as an object

of study has long been associated with rootedness, stability, and “fixity” (Di Masso et al. 2019). However, as the world we live in becomes ever more mobile and fluid, and ecologically less stationary (Newman et al. 2019), the problems with this rooted concept of place become ever more apparent and demanding of our attention. Understanding place amid rapid changes in human mobility and social-ecological-technical systems (SETS) transitions requires place scholars to reexamine their theoretical understanding of place. To advance that goal, this chapter builds on emerging ideas increasingly being explored by contemporary place scholars (see Manzo et al. 2023). For example, problematizing and pluralizing the concept of place for navigating a wider range of global transitions and disruptions reveal how pluralistic and relational approaches to place have been long neglected (Raymond et al. 2021b).

As a contribution to this volume exploring the state of knowledge on society and natural resources and opening windows to new approaches, we reexamine place scholarship and underlying theoretical and conceptual issues, problematize certain taken-for-granted assumptions about transitioning to a less stationary and less predictable world, and suggest an updated vision of place using the metaphor of a rhizome rather than roots. First, we briefly explain why place scholarship has consistently privileged two problematic notions exacerbated by intensifying transitions: ecological stationarity (Newman et al. 2019) and social sedentarism (Di Masso et al. 2019). Second, we explore the value of a more fluid and relational conception of place to better account for the role of increasing mobilities and SETS transitions in place-making processes. Third, we emphasize how plurality and relationality can highlight the importance of exploring more inclusive and diverse approaches to place-based knowledge in place research. By questioning certain fundamental assumptions about place stationarity and sedentarism, we hope this chapter helps a more diverse cohort of scholars examine the critical role of place to meet the challenges of living in a highly mobile and less stationary world.

We take as our starting point the expanding recognition that, historically, both social and biophysical sciences have been infused with questionable assumptions of stationarity, predictability, knowability, and equilibrium (McKelvey 2021; Williams 2018). For instance, stationarity is often implied in management objectives such as sustained yield forestry or restoring ecosystems to a historical range of variation. By extension, place scholarship

historically privileged fixity, stability, and rootedness in a way that normalized social sedentarism—the idea that people are supposed to be securely rooted in a fixed residence, community, and nation (Di Masso et al. 2019; Malkki 1997). Thus, to open new windows of inquiry about the role of place in transitions, we need to critically examine ontological assumptions about the undisturbed earth in homeostatic balance and question the essentialist understanding of people as historically, culturally, and authentically emplaced beings who, in the face of change, are unavoidably at risk of being unmoored, uprooted, or displaced. Moving forward we propose an understanding of place as an uncentered assemblage or constellation of interconnected, networked, fluid, and unfolding relations—nonhierarchical and rhizomatic¹ rather than fixed and rooted—to better account for the role of human mobility and SETS transitions in the constitution and ongoing becoming of place(s).

By giving greater legitimacy to transition, movement, and flow we can reimagine the lived experience of place within more rhizomatic and translocal collections of spaces and experiences. This view offers a more resilient model for building and maintaining ontological security (i.e., expectations about the stability and continuity of one's habits and lifestyle) in the face of uncertainty and change. Not only is a rhizomatic concept of place more useful in a less stationary world but it also helps broaden place scholarship in an epistemologically more inclusive future. We attempt to visualize this difference between a rooted and rhizomatic metaphor of people-relationships by using artificial intelligence image generation, itself a controversial catalyst to uncertain SETS transitions (figure 15.1).

We hope this chapter contributes to place scholarship moving beyond stasis, opening new windows for: (1) engaging with multiple kinds of knowledge and relational ontologies; (2) embracing a broader, more inclusive, democratic, and provisional epistemic orientations; and (3) re-spatializing our lives in ways that are more translocal, inclusive, and resilient.

1. The metaphor of the rhizome, drawn from the title of the opening chapter of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus*, has been borrowed widely to contrast substantive ontologies with relational ontologies. It distinguishes "tree-like systems of thinking organized hierarchically with roots, stems and branches" from that of a rhizome "characterized by horizontal lines of movement, networks and connectivity" (Dovey 2020, 24).



FIGURE 15.1. Two images depicting place as a rooted phenomenon (left) and as a rhizomatic phenomenon (right). The authors generated these images in part with OpenAI’s DALL-E 2 artificial intelligence image generation program based on the authors’ specific descriptions (OpenAI, 2022). The use of this software is also an exploration of how the authors’ description of competing place metaphors would interact with rhizomatic connections by hundreds of millions of images and their associated captions by other people, which is how the DALL-E 2 algorithm works (O’Connor 2022). In the image on the left, a person is shown as rooted and therefore literally place-attached and unable to move. This person is inside a series of “place” containers. These containers represent home, community, country, and the world as a series of nested scales. This version of place is limiting and leaves the rooted person vulnerable. In the image on the right, people are shown moving around a forest of trees. Instead of being rooted to place, the people are mobile and interacting with place. The people are also thinking about what they see (person on the right) and speaking about it (person on the left). These acts of interaction, observation, and social construction are co-creating place as represented by the trees, which are connected underground rhizomatically. The act of co-creation and experience of place is also represented as a rhizome (in the speech/thought bubble). The people are experiencing place and connected to it but not rooted or stationary, and place is connected but not nested.

Place in a Stationary World

Beginning in the second half of the twentieth century, place scholarship emerged as a corrective to overly technocratic approaches that often neglected the authentic character of places and the essential relationships of people to them (Cresswell 2013; Williams 2014). Over time the place

literature evolved to address new concerns and new, more diverse perspectives that critiqued the implicit sedentarism and stationarity in place scholarship (Williams and Miller 2021). However, despite challenges to the dominant humanistic paradigm, fixed and rooted notions of place continued to permeate the empirical literature, especially in natural resource sciences and environmental planning (Williams 2014). In this section we briefly outline the early origin of place scholarship and highlight the most problematic consequences for understanding place in transition.

Place Rooted in Sedentary Metaphysics

A sedentary framing is reflected in the fixed and essentialist notions of place and sense of place advanced by humanistic geographers in the 1970s (Relph 1976; Tuan 1977). Place discourse emerged alongside a hegemonic, sedentary metaphysics (Malkki 1997) that presumed a normative social order in which people were meant to be geographically and securely rooted beings (Di Masso et al. 2019). Specifically, modernist ideas that minimized the importance of place in geography were challenged by humanistic theories that reasserted the phenomenological importance of place attachment as a rooted, centering, and stabilizing force in people's lives (Cresswell 2013). Accordingly, places were seen as under assault from the uprooting forces of modernity, commodification, and globalization (Norberg-Schulz 1979; Relph 1976) and residential mobility was seen as disrupting the anchoring role of place in people's lives (Brown and Perkins 1992; Fried 1963).

Scholars in natural resource social sciences were attracted to these early conceptions of place for several reasons. One rationale was to overcome an instrumental or commodity bias in characterizing the value of natural resources that left little room for recognizing the emotional and identity bonds people form with specific places (Williams et al. 1992; Williams and Stewart 1998). Another was to highlight the important ways people seek out and create meaning through their transactions with particular places with specific histories (Firey 1945; Williams and Patterson 1996). In addition, some scholars looked at the relationship between community and place to better understand place-dependent values in natural resource politics (Brandenburg and Carroll 1995; Trentelman 2009). These perspectives proved valuable to policy makers as they sought to balance the competing environmental

priorities of diverse constituencies (Cheng, Kruger, and Daniels 2003; Yung, Freimund, and Belsky 2003). At the same time, mobility and place transitions threatened the very construction of community, which many scholars conceived of as unavoidably defined by territoriality and locality-relevant or locality-oriented actions (Field and Burch 1988; Luloff et al. 2004).²

The Fixed Ecologies of “Authentic” Places

Sedentary thinking about place is also deeply consonant with fixed, stationary notions of ecology, natural processes, and related ontologies that have traditionally divided and reduced the world into various categories of substantive elements (e.g., humans and nature, social and natural, mind and matter, etc.). In the second half of the twentieth century, just as human geographers criticized modernist ideas of place, ecology took on greater social significance as part of a broader environmental movement responding to the environmental consequence of modernity (Walker 2020). This conception of ecology was rooted in the Enlightenment philosophy and transcendentalism (Harvey 1993). Thus, the study of ecology in the United States and Europe emerged from an epistemology that recognized the existence of “nature” and “natural” as real and distinct from humans and human development (Morton 2008).

The close connection between place and ecology was made explicit with the emergence of ecosystem management in the 1990s (Grumbine 1992; Williams and Stewart 1998). Much of ecological thinking as a philosophical discourse about sustainability built on the early notions of fixity and authenticity. Deep ecology and bioregionalism, for example, blended ecological science and environmental ethics to argue for sustaining bioregionally “authentic” ways of acting and dwelling in the world premised on closely linked ecological processes and social practices. The underlying assumption was that greater alignment between social and ecological boundaries promote more sustainable (and therefore more stable) ways of living (Aberley 1999; Thayer 2003).

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2. The relationship between community and place has prompted considerable debate. In the 1970s researchers began to ask if new technologies allowed people to form and maintain primary ties outside of locality (i.e., place), and promoted a networked conception of community (see Bender 1978; Wellman and Leighton 1979). But it is our estimation that, despite challenges, the link between community and place remains dominant. If community is understood to be place-dependent, then mobility and transition potentially threatened community social order and wellbeing (Wilkinson 1991).

The Challenge of a More Mobile Future (and Past)

As the new century began, a major challenge to sedentaristic metaphysics involved the elevation of mobilities, movement, and flows in constituting modern life that some took to calling the “new-mobilities paradigm” (Sheller and Urry 2006). With circulation and flows of people, goods, and ideas increasingly dominating modern life, identities seemingly no longer required a fixed, authentic essence rooted in a singular home, territory, or nation. Instead, identity formation was seen as an ongoing project of weaving together a coherent but multicentered self-identity narrative (Williams and McIntyre 2001) and raised the possibility of multilayered citizenship (Castles 2002; Lippard 1997). These ideas challenged the way social and environmental transformations often over-simplify place relationships and reaffirm an ethnocentric vision of authentic human habitation that privileges sedentarism and reifies outdated ecological concepts that overestimate the stationarity of past ecological conditions.

The sedentary framing of place often sought to assign people into national, cultural, or other local place-based categories and territorialized their identities (Di Masso et al. 2019). Departures from this presumed norm (e.g., the unhoused, the displaced, refugees, and peripatetic cultures of various sorts) were deemed pathological conditions in need of fixing that justified deliberate, state-imposed processes of sedentarization (Malkki 1997). We believe that this reveals deeply rooted ontological and axiological assumptions about social progress that positions human habitation as developing progressively along a singular path.³ Based on these assumptions, early attempts to understand the importance of place reified places as static containers of meaning (Cresswell 2013). But this way of thinking about place potentially serves exclusionary and unjust notions about the sanctity and authenticity of certain relationships between specific people and their conceptions of a place, which supports nationalist politics (see Harvey 1993).

With an eye toward the dynamics and asymmetries of power, a relational concept of place emerged in the early 1990s to challenge these notions of place generally associated with humanistic geographers (Harvey 1993;

3. According to a simplified, problematic story, people used to be nomadic, then they settled and planted roots (literal agriculture roots as well as cultural and legal ones). This framing marginalizes people displaced by settlement and underestimates the complexity of less sedentary people.

Massey 1993). Writing about the inescapable politics of place, these critical geographers proposed a more open, dynamic, and progressive understanding where places are forged through relational processes constituted from larger networks and flows of people, goods, and ideas of local and global reach that support multiple identities (Massey 1993). Likewise, some natural resource social scientists questioned whether the primacy of a fixed notion of place in constructing community supported unequal power structures and argued instead for a relational understanding of community (Wilkinson 1991). Similarly, sociocultural studies of place emphasized the way landscape features and settings are often symbolically constructed through the meanings ascribed to them by visitors (Williams and McIntyre 2012) and residents (Greider and Garkovich 1994) as well as the intentions of planners, managers, and promotional organizations (Saarinen 1998). Collectively, this place scholarship described how places are subject to complex, contested social processes where various stakeholders struggle to control place meanings, values, and uses (Williams and Patterson 1996; Williams 2014). These emerging relational concepts emphasized the role of discourse and practice in making and remaking places (Di Masso, Dixon, and Durrheim 2014; Pierce, Martin, and Murphy 2011).

As we intend to show in the next section, the relational view of place provides useful leverage for addressing the inexorable complexities and uncertainties inherent to navigating SETS transitions (Williams 2018) and resulting social-ecological precarities (Manzo et al. 2023). Embracing the relational view of place in SETS also provides new opportunities for diversifying the epistemologies of sociospatial scholarship and opens up new ways to re-spatialize our lives that are translocal, multicentric, and resilient.

Place in a Transitioning World

As the western sciences have begun to grapple with the problematic assumptions outlined above, place inquiry has turned increasingly toward more plural and fluid conceptions (Di Masso et al. 2019; Raymond et al. 2021b). In this section we examine the implications of this turn for understanding SETS transitions and how a rhizomatic vision of place can help us understand sustainability in a less stationary world. We do this from three perspectives: ontology (the nature of being or existence), epistemology (what constitutes

knowledge), and the everyday lived experience of place, mobility, and transition. An organizing feature across these perspectives is the importance of relationality and a corresponding shift of metaphors from roots to rhizomes.

Ontological Transitions

The shift from place as a fixed entity to a more fluid and dynamic process involves a shift from a substantive ontology and toward a relational ontology. Historically, most of western science has operated from the view that substantive entities (things in the world) are ontologically primary and relations ontologically derivative (Wildman, 2010). In contrast, relational ontologies emphasize how places are in a continuous process of becoming or emergence rather than a collection of fixed (or authentic) meanings. Moreover, this relationality takes on greater ontological significance as the object of inquiry increases in complexity (Polkinghorne 2010). Thus, relational ontologies are particularly useful in thinking about complex, adaptive SETS transitions (Raymond et al. 2021a; Walsh, Böhme, and Wamsler 2021; West et al. 2020). In the field of sustainability science, shifting from substantive to relational concepts can also help transcend longstanding and troublesome binaries such as humans/nature or social/ecological in generating innovative policy approaches to sustainability (West et al. 2020, 306).⁴

One of the main critiques of relational ontologies applied to sustainability science, however, is that they have been hard to put into research practice (Masterson et al. 2017; Raymond et al. 2021a). As a result, some sustainability researchers are increasingly turning to place scholarship for insights on how to apply relational thinking to sustainability (Chapin and Knapp 2015; Masterson et al. 2019; Williams 2018). Likewise, some place scholars have begun to argue that place itself should be understood as a complex adaptive system that engages the sciences of emergence and resilience thinking (Dovey 2020).

In place scholarship, relational thinking has increasingly drawn on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) assemblage theory and their use of the rhizome metaphor. Specifically, assemblage theory provides a bottom-up framework for

4. The emerging interest in relational ontologies within place research and sustainability science shows up in their mutual penchant for adopting assemblage philosophy in the social science.

examining complexity and multiplicities by emphasizing fluidity, exchangeability, connectivity, and emergence. Assemblage thinking—much like relational thinking and resilience thinking—resists simplification or reduction to a singular definition, theory, or set of propositions, yet it offers powerful advice for addressing complex phenomena in an uneven landscape of power. For example, Greiner, Peth, and Sakdapolrak (2014) applied the relational concept of translocal assemblages to understand the complex relationship between climate change and migration in Africa.

Dovey (2020) recently made the case for place as an assemblage, noting the way assemblage thinking highlights the relational, multi-scalar, and anti-reduction attributes of place as well as the important role of power in place-making processes. First, assemblage thinking adopts what he calls a flat (i.e., non-hierarchical) ontology because it does not recognize a larger transcendent order to which the emergent world can be reduced. At the same time, assemblages are multi-scalar multiplicities, thus a particular place cannot be reduced to the general nor can the local be scaled up to the global. Second, assemblage thinking is radically relational by acknowledging interconnections as preceding the things being connected. Thus, a place is not a thing (nor a collection of things) but the multi-scaled relations of material and flows. The assemblage is not fixed in time or space but is dynamic—trees grow and die, people come and go, buildings are constructed and demolished, meanings are created and lost. Third, assemblage thinking offers an approach to place without the reductionism, essentialism, authenticity, and fixity (i.e., rootedness) of early place theory.

Dovey also notes that assemblage theory allows for empirical examination without reduction to discursive representation, allowing an understanding of the experience of place without the essentialism of phenomenology. Finally, Dovey argues that assemblage thinking understands power as embodied and distributed through material-spatial arrangements rather than as something held by certain agents, which helps reveal why a substantive framing of place necessarily privileges some place-making ideas over others. Since some people in a given place have more privileged access or power over certain place-resources, they have greater power to define these place features, which, in turn, supports their access. Freudenberg (2006) called this a “double diversion” or “disproportionality”—concepts that informed important explorations about place in natural resource social sciences.

Massey (1993) was among the early adopters of assemblage thinking in place research (though she generally used the word *constellation*). She offered a “progressive” view of place that challenged the idea that places have durable, singular identities. Instead, she asserted that places are constituted from a continuously unfolding constellation of local and global processes, flows, and mobilities. Emphasizing the importance of material-spatial relationships, she coined the term *power-geometry* to foreground inequalities that derive from the uneven flow of financial, political, class, and economic power across space. Similarly, Sack’s (1997, 1992) relational geographic framework uses the metaphor of *weaving* to describe places as a kind of assemblage of ontological forces and epistemological perspectives. Thus, everyday acts (e.g., consumption) assemble (weave) together forces (e.g., nature, social relations, meaning, and actions) to construct places while simultaneously altering the character of those forces and processes of place-making.

The turn to relationality in human geography is not without criticism, particularly among those deploying non-Western and anti-colonial modes of thought, what is sometimes collectively described as Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) scholarship. Though sympathetic to this relational turn as championed by Massey, Harvey, and other “critical” geographers, Castree (2004) describes how this political and progressive view of relational place-making undermines the rights of some (particularly Indigenous peoples) to assert their own senses of place rather than have them defined for them (see also Barker and Pickerill 2020; Ganapathy 2013; Torgerson 1999). Coulthard (2010) explains how Indigenous senses of place are about more-than-traditional lands having a deep material importance to Indigenous cultures or serving as sites of strong Indigenous attachments. For Coulthard, place is “understood as a field of ‘relationships of things to each other’ [and] a way of knowing, experiencing, and relating with the world” that often forms the basis of resistance to power relations that too often threaten or obliterate Indigenous senses of place (2010, 79). Although similar to the relational view of place put forth by Massey, Harvey, and others, this understanding “not only anchors many indigenous peoples’ critique of colonial relations of force and command, but also [their] visions of what a truly post-colonial relationship of peaceful co-existence might look like” (Coulthard 2010, 80). As place scholars look to improve our understanding of place, taking the time to acknowledge and center these perspectives is

important for correcting the problematic assumptions of the past as well as avoiding future ones.

Similarly, Black geographical scholarship has called attention to multiple ways of knowing around relational place-making to underscore the unique experiences of Black peoples in shaping spatial meanings and practices. For example, Allen, Lawhon, and Pierce (2019) argue that Black geographical interest in experience, agency, and non-material spatial practices are very congruent with relational place-making. Accordingly, Black geography “offers an ontological position that maintains the possibilities for multiplicity, considering plural process, and incorporating diverse methodologies and data sources” (2019, 1001). Further, “it enables critiques of the exclusionary constructions of society and place and draws attention to Black articulations of place that seek not only to validate Black experiences but to bring into being these alternative visions” (2019, 1012). Thus, properly articulating place as relational opens up place scholarship to more voices, and thus more critique, which will ultimately improve our understanding of place.

In sum, places are complex adaptive systems, better understood by using relational ontologies instead of substantive ontologies. Thinking of place as constellations or assemblages of relations avoids the binaries of human/nature and brings to the fore ideas such as emergence, autopoiesis (i.e., self-organization), and the unfolding arrangements of psychological, social, and material actions of many interacting agents capable of learning and adapting. Finally, recognizing relationality in place-making opens up Western scholarship to multiple ways of understanding the ontology of place more widely appreciated in non-Western scholarship and allows for more effective critique.

The Epistemic Transitions: Democratizing Ways of Knowing Place

Taking an ontologically relational approach to place also means extending our epistemological outlook toward more diverse, flexible, or post-normal ways of (co)producing knowledge. Co-producing knowledge about places supports complex adaptive SETS transitions by promoting a more situated conception of knowledge that pays attention to local practice and experience (Bartel 2014; Williams 2018). Interest in ideas such as post-normal science and knowledge co-production are in part the product of a growing epistemic

crisis where scholars see more clearly how Western science has been infused with static and ethnocentric assumptions regarding nature, the landscape, and places (Gauchat 2011). The authentic character of places often seems to correspond with the conditions of the past, whether anchored in some pre-Columbian, pre-colonial condition reflecting a “historic range of variability” (McKelvey et al. 2021; Morgan et al. 1994) or favoring the place values of the last generation. For instance, in place literature specifically, scholars have recently begun to document how much place constructs favor a European framing (Lewicka and Dobosh 2021). Likewise, ethnonationalism is reflected in Western anthropology, which, for much of its history, normalized the ideal of sedentary cultures over nomadic ones (Malkki 1997). At the very least it is common for social scientists to assume current conditions or the recent past as the norm against which one might evaluate social change.

In contrast, Raymond et al. (2021b) argued that non-stationary thinking about social-ecological transitions forces scholars to reconsider what they think they know on a fundamental level and reexamine their ways of knowledge-building. They argue that transitioning requires a new epistemic attitude that departs from post-positivist science in three fundamental ways. The first is to replace universalist thinking inherited from the Enlightenment with a pluralistic conception of knowledge better suited to complex systems (Mitchell 2009). The second is to recognize that with pluralism one must also recognize there is no unified “god’s eye” position or approach to science that can organize all knowledge. Instead, diverse and generally unreconcilable positionalities or epistemic standpoints exist from which different people observe the world, which can be used to expand our shared understanding (Williams 2013, 2018). The third recognizes that despite our best efforts, deep ontological uncertainties about systems will persist and thus they argue for a more humble, provisional approach to knowledge (Caniglia et al. 2021; Fazey et al. 2020). Embracing a more plural, positional, and provisional approach to knowledge is a key first step toward democratizing the production and acquisition of knowledge on place (Williams 2014).

Rather than continuing to ineffectually resist ecological and social change, a more pluralistic, dynamic, and political view of place and processes of place-making can help foster more productive and inclusive engagement with transitions marked by less stationarity and more ontological uncertainty and anthropogenic system change. Thus, at the heart of reimagining

place research to better suit a non-stationary world is the adoption of relational ontologies and pluralistic epistemologies (Williams 2018) that imagine place and place relationships as rhizomatic, changing across time and space based on the experiences and interactions of emplaced, displaced, replaced peoples (Barron, Hartman, and Hagemann 2020).

At this point, we believe it's imperative to openly acknowledge that more relational epistemologies have long existed within different cultures and peoples whose perspectives have not been privileged in academic discourse. For instance, many of the Indigenous peoples displaced by European settlement in North America relied on epistemological frameworks based on a more relational dynamic between the self, others, place, and nature (Kovach 2021) discussed briefly above. But these views did not fit the dominant epistemology of place that favored a substantive framing, which therefore promoted fixed conceptions of a place over others. Place scholars have often noted the irony that in natural resource social sciences, place values rooted in the social construction of early American settlers were privileged as authentic even though these settlers had displaced people with different senses of place (Williams 2002). Thus, recognizing the need for more epistemological diversity in place scholarship serves as the first step toward decolonizing place research.

The emerging recognition of these neglected voices in academia coincides with the increasing recognition in the biophysical sciences of the limitations of Western epistemologies and growing appreciation of insights offered by other ecological epistemologies, such as traditional ecological knowledge (Berkes 1993). Here again, greater inclusion of Indigenous forms of knowledge into biophysical sciences and ecologies may have led to an earlier recognition of the inherently dynamic nature of places outside of socially constructed values (Barker and Pickerill 2020). However, acknowledging our own positionality as non-Indigenes scholars, trained as we are within the dominant place scholarship, we look to other scholars to offer their conceptions of place and proposals to decolonize place scholarship and natural resource social sciences.

Experiencing Place Transitions: Toward Translocality and Multicentered Identities

Turning from the ontological and epistemic case for relational place-making, we next want to apply relational and rhizomatic thinking to examine how

people establish, maintain, and/or restore place-based identities in the face of change. Where the rooted conception of place understood mobility and transition as a threat to ontological security, a rhizomatic conception of place normalizes mobility and transition while revealing the importance of a multiplicity of scales and differences in power. With accelerating system transitions and expanding mobilities, the potential scales at which people belong to or identify with places are similarly expanding (Buckle 2017; Tomaney 2015), increasing the ways people “inhabit the world at a distance” (Sheller and Urry 2006, 115). This expansion has been described in various ways including “translocal” (Ganapathy 2013; Greiner, Peth, and Sakdapolrak 2014) and “multicentered” (Lippard 1997; Williams and Van Patten 2006). While much of the translocality literature emerges at the intersection of post-colonial and migration studies (Hertzog 2021; Verne 2012), globalization and other disruptive forces are driving multicentered inhabitation in various other forms, from tourism and second homes (McIntyre, Williams, and McHugh 2006) to translocal work (Wohlers and Hertel 2017) and electronically mediated (Relph 2021; Taipale 2014), virtual, and imagined experiences of place (Champ, Williams, and Lundy 2013).

Simply put, terms like multicentered and translocality refer to a sense of belonging or identification with more than one location. These terms attempt to capture the interconnectedness and processes that happen between different places and people manifest through a variety of enduring, open, and non-linear processes (Greiner, Peth, and Sakdapolrak 2014). Verne (2012, 15) draws important attention to the complexity of mobility practices, offering a relational view of translocal phenomena in a desire to shift the traditional focus in migration studies from the connected entities to the connections themselves. She further argues for using rhizomatic thinking to better account for this relationality as well as for the complexity, multiplicity, and heterogeneity of translocal connections that are constantly in the making.

Of course, one consequence of transitions and disruptions for many is the detachment of traditional social relations and identities from particular places (e. g., home, community, nation) and a rising ontological insecurity (Devine-Wright et al. 2020; Manzo et al. 2021). Gergen (1991, 215) described this in the context of globalization: “The traditional face-to-face community loses its coherence and its significance in the life of its participants. . . . Their sense of belonging is no longer only, or even primarily rooted in the

local soil.” The character of how and where people live, work, and play has certainly been disrupted by the “great acceleration” of various human activities (Steffen et al. 2015). By many metrics, people, goods, and ideas are more mobile now than they have ever been (Castles, Haas, and Miller 2014; Di Masso et al. 2019). For some, moving to new pastures is positive (Williams and Van Patton 2006) and mobility a privilege (Wohlers and Hertel 2017). For others, mobility results from a lack of choice to stay in place (Adelman 2008). Increased mobility also means greater economic competition for the same spaces and/or more conflicts over the meaning and use of highly valued places (Manzo 2014; Di Masso et al. 2021). And the impacts of these disruptions are unevenly distributed. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed both the precarity and inequality that comes with these disruptions to mobility and access to places (Devine-Wright et al. 2020). Not only do people in positions of privilege have ways to enhance their resilience to spatial change through mobility, that mobility also has consequences for others. In natural resource management, for example, tourism and second homes have been examined as multicentric spatial practices for creating or maintaining place identities in the face of an increasingly fluid and mobilized world (McIntyre, Williams, and McHugh 2006; Williams and Kaltenborn 1999). Accordingly, tourism and the use of recreational spaces more generally are theorized as opportunities to re-spatialize one’s ontological security in the face of change and find continuities across a wider range of places, reflecting a more assembled, rhizomatic view of place (Williams and McIntyre 2001).

Various forms of mobility—from tourism, migration, and itinerant work to the environmentally or geopolitically displaced (refugees and unhoused)—are thus a critical nexus around which place meanings are produced, consumed, and contested. They weave together and reassemble various kinds of place meanings and (non-)belongingness (e.g., ancestral, ethno-cultural, refugee, immigrant residential, touristic, and occupational) at different spatial scales. More fluid senses of place are often cultivated through mobility as a way to create greater continuity across various life trajectories such as college, marriage, and retirement (Bailey 2021; Di Masso et al. 2019). Similarly, migration does not necessarily result in the weakening of migrants’ bonds with places of origin or destination and, in fact, raises critical questions about the role of strong people-place bonds in navigating

the vagaries of living in new places (Greiner, Peth and Sakdapolrak 2014; Hertzog 2021). Hertzog (2021), for example, illustrates how place research has long overlooked the translocal reality of many migrants' lives, particularly in Africa, and shows how transactions and interconnections between places of origin and places of occupation are crucial to shaping identities and senses of belonging.

Reimagining place in a transitioning world also reinforces the post-colonial critique of senses of place literature produced in the Global North (Hertzog 2021; Verne 2012). For instance, uncertainty and change can be an opportunity to disrupt existing (potentially unjust) social orderings as illustrated in how the Maori interpreted an earthquake as disrupting the colonial identity of Christchurch, New Zealand (cited in Manzo et al. 2021; see also Berroeta, de Carvalho, and Castillo-Sepulveda 2021). But it can also create a potential spaciousness to build resilience through cultivation of translocal and multicentered identities, which allow for greater flows of resources and commodities as well as circulations of social remittances of ideas, practices, and identities (Greiner, Peth, and Sakdapolrak 2014; Hertzog 2021). Where a rooted conception of place focused too much on the essential and enduring quality of people-place relations, a rhizomatic view of place offers scholars a flexible vehicle for examining the role of power (or lack thereof) to (re)connect to a multiplicity of places at various spatial and temporal scales.

Certainly, the need for and potential to re-spatialize our lives in response to transitions highlights the ways in which mobility and belonging are often forms of privilege derived from place-based forms of ontological security. Lau, Durrheim, and Young's (2021) study of informal settlements in South Africa serves as a poignant illustration of struggle to "not belong to non-places" and reminds us of the way in which sense of place research largely represents the point of view of those who feel attached, safe, and a positive sense of belongingness to home, neighborhood, community, or nation (see Manzo 2014). Structural inequalities and injustices may force some people to move against their will, prevent others from being able to move at will, and empower still others to relocate if they so desire. At the same time, a rhizomatic understanding of people-place relations helps to articulate potential adaptations to these disruptions in which more distributed identities afford individuals more resilient paths for maintaining ontological security within the ongoing making and remaking of places.

Conclusion

Place scholarship is increasingly moving beyond its historical association with essentialism and rootedness. In this chapter we have tried to demonstrate how a more relational, pluralistic, and dynamic view of place and place-making helps to navigate social-ecological-technical transitions marked by non-stationarity, uncertainties, and accelerating anthropogenic change. Also, engaging SETS transitions as a way of understanding place challenges our historically emplaced sense of ontological security, elevates the importance of local and Indigenous knowledges, opens inquiry to more diverse, inclusive (democratic), and provisional epistemologies, and shows us how we might re-spatialize our lives around more resilient, multicentric, rhizomatic networks of places.

Global forces, SETS transitions, and a related epistemic crisis elevate transitional anxieties and unmoor us from our historically situated anchorages of place and identity at many different scales. In fact, these transitional anxieties reveal that our stationarities and fixities were never as solid as we once thought. We can recover or restore some semblance of ontological security by embracing the opportunities of such decentering to reimagine place as more complex and multicentered and offer tools for navigating individual and collective change in a way that is more resilient to uncertainties. Shifting our goal to one of resilience to change through rhizomatic connectivity reveals that what limits human well-being is not change but structural inequalities that limit the ability of individuals to adapt.

Taking a more assembled, rhizomatic view of place allows scholars to understand how place identity can be spatially distributed and therefore how people can adapt to transition. The contemporary age, dominated as it is by deep uncertainties and accelerated transitions, needs to: acknowledge more fluid relations to places by repositioning “place” so that it fits this less certain, less stationary, and more mobile age; build a more pluralistic, dynamic, and political view of place-making; and adopt a more inclusive epistemic attitude that recognizes diverse forms of emplacement, nonplacement, and displacement. Unlike a rooted conception of place that ties people down or roots our inquiry, a more rhizomatic conception of place allows people, society, and academic researchers to seek out and/or maintain ontological security through a multiplicity of connections.

We acknowledge that many of these relational conceptions of place are not so much new as increasingly appreciated in their capacity to conceive a world dominated by transitions, give voice to those marginalized within historical and ethnocentric fixities, forge more inclusive epistemic attitudes, and build more resilient ontological securities. In this endeavor we recognize that in addition to changing technologies, the pursuit of knowledge itself is becoming more plural and therefore more contested and, thus, ideas that were once marginalized are gaining greater recognition. But this transition is also fraught; thus, scholars will need to be intentional to navigate this change. We hope that reimagining place as a rhizomatic rather than rooted phenomenon serves as an invitation to scholars who have previously seen the place literature as too limiting.

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