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Place, Geography and the Concept of Diaspora – A Methodological Approach

SUMMARY

This paper is an investigation, in a methodological sense, of the relevance of place in the context of international migration. It offers a critical discussion of the concept of diaspora, especially in relation to place. It furthermore argues against the use of homogenised and pre-fixed concepts such as disembedding as bases for empirical research about place in the context of international migration. The theoretical part of the paper begins with what has been called the “cultural turn” in human geography, a development which is discussed in relation to the material and the immaterial. Throughout the paper the argument is that the material and the immaterial interact within the concept of place. The methodological argument starts with the phenomenological concept of typification, and continues by placing categories and prototypes as methodological concepts in a semiotic model which highlights both the material and the immaterial contexts of life.

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Introduction

Is place, in contexts of diaspora and international migration, a relevant category? The objective of this paper is not to proclaim definitive solutions or judgements to this question, nor to present a completely consistent approach, but rather to offer some reflections and try to elaborate approaches upon these matters from a methodological point of view.

There have been varying conceptions of the relevance of place in contexts of international migration. Some of these approaches rely on a concept of *diaspora* (see for example Hall 1995, Massey and Jess 1995), which, in short, often denotes unlocalised social networks and transnational movement in the contemporary period (Anthias 1998). Yet historically the notion of diaspora has varied greatly. The ancient Greeks conceived of diaspora as migration and colonization. For Jews, Africans, Palestinians and Armenians diaspora signifies a collective trauma where one dreams of home while living in exile (Cohen 1997). The classical notion of diaspora concerning Jewish history refers particularly to the Jews living outside Palestine among peoples of non-Jewish faith, the community of those living under these conditions in foreign parts, and to places where these dispersed Jews live (Baumann 1995).

In migration studies where diaspora refers to contemporary transnational movements, new diaspora identities and experiences have been in focus (Cohen 1997, Anthias 1998). These more recent approaches display a tendency to insert and promote a less essentialising vocabulary concerning "race", "ethnicity", nationality and national groups than the classical notion of diaspora, as a result of the focus on the construction of new identities which cross national and ethnic borders and boundaries. This latter concept of diaspora is often related to "the age of globalisation" in which social and national identities do not necessarily coincide, and where "there is no longer any stability in the points of origin, no finality in the points of destination" (Cohen 1997: 175). We can use Giddens' (1991) term "disembedding" to describe this situation where social relations are "lifted out" from local contexts and rearticulated across blurred and indistinct tracts of time-space. Because of these "lifting-out-processes", *place* becomes much less significant as an important point of reference in the lifespan.

In relation to diaspora studies, disembedding can be understood in at least two ways. First, diaspora can be understood as social groups with a common ethnic and national origin, but living outside the territory of origin. This group has a strong feeling of attachment to their "homeland". Its place of settlement is not an important point of reference as their social

network comprises diasporas from the same ethnic group, rather than being localised in one particular place.¹ Place of settlement is therefore irrelevant for social relations. An opposite way to understand this kind of disembedding, is related to what we can call the postmodern notion of diaspora. Here it is suggested that diasporas "think globally, but live locally". This version of diaspora is a condition which makes no specific reference to ethnicity, a "homeland" or to a particular place of settlement. All diasporas, independent of national and ethnic background, are treated as a single group in which ethnical boundaries are crossed; it is hybrid and globally oriented.²

It is not difficult to see that these two versions of diaspora and disembedding both have relevance. Cohen (1997) demonstrates how Jewish, African and Armenian diasporas are spread over the world, yet retain continuing affective bonds to their homeland and exhibit unlocalised networks. On the other hand we can see Clifford's (1994) multiethnic diaspora expressed in global cities where we find transnational and transethnic mixing and social relations seemingly without particular reference to nationality and ethnicity.

But there are indeed problems with these positions. Anthias (1998) emphasises the problems of homogenising populations in diaspora, for example assuming that all Jewish people living in diaspora have the same relation to and the same ideas of their "homeland". She notes that different groups within the same overall category, for instance different generations, classes, genders and between people who live in different places of settlement, might have varying political projects and interests. The problem is that this kind of position might end up in a new sort of ethnic absolutism. We find the same problem in the postmodern idea of diaspora, where all diasporas, independent of ethnicity, gender, class, generation, place of settlement etc., are treated as one group in a new "deterritorialised ethnicity", as Anthias calls it.

Another problem with this discussion and these notions of diaspora is their relation to the theories of modernity and postmodernity. These theories and discourses often create a dichotomy between contemporary and "traditional" periods, in which the contemporary period implies change and has its own phenomena and processes, in contrast to "tradition" which implies continuity. This is a part of the classical sociological theories about contrasting types of society, relations and lifeforms following in historical progression (Paulgaard 1997).

Yet another problem with these theories is that they often lead to prefixed ideas about the empirical world that might be taken for granted in empirical research. This involves a

¹ Cohen (1997) is one researcher who takes this position.

² Clifford (1994) takes this position. But in a limited way, people do not live in diaspora if they are not detached from a homeland of origin or from their ethnicity. See also Anthias (1998) for a more complete discussion of Cohen's and Clifford's positions.

"foreshadowing"³ over the empirical context that might lead to generalisations and to an interpretation of continuity as romanticism, and then against a "natural" development. The above discussion about the significance of nationality, ethnicity and place of settlement for an understanding of diasporas is an example on how this modernity/postmodernity discussion very often tends to generalise, even when it is not the intention. As I pointed out, it is not difficult to find empirical evidence for these positions today. Giddens (1991) has identified disembedding mechanisms where for instance place plays a less significant role for contemporary people, and diaspora might very well fit into this theory, but not necessarily. Cultural change, implied in theories of modernity and postmodernity do not exclusively belong to the contemporary period. It has probably never been correct to describe places and identity projects in one form only and as fixed and stable. It has always been necessary to include several forms.

Writing is a form of discourse and we engage in discourse by relating to its rules. The discussion of place and diaspora is also about theoretical and methodological discourses and positions. I will here try to discuss a *methodological* position, i.e. how we can ask questions about how place has meaning, how it is differentiated and contested, how it is a part of and how it plays a role in migrants' lives. Finally I will relate these questions to the discussion of diaspora above in an attempt to avoid pre-*fixed* ideas about the empirical world.

The methodological discussion in this paper is related to the discussion we might call the place/space debate in geography. Therefore, in the following I will bring in elements of this debate as a backdrop for my methodological reflections.

Geography and the cultural turn

Humanistic, radical and Marxist geography can be seen as reactions to the spatial science which emerged in the 1950s and 1960s (Cloke et al. 1991, Peet 1998). In the field of humanistic geography it was argued that place involves meaning and sense, not only geometric representations. Within radical and Marxist geography, with their focus on social structure, a more social relevant geography was called for (Harvey 1973).

Alongside spatial science arose cultural geography. Carl Sauer and his followers in the "Berkeley School" focused upon physical artifacts and material culture (landscape) to find unitary cultural groups connected with distinct geographical areas (Cosgrove and Jackson

³ I borrow this term from Thrift (1996) who himself borrowed it from M.A Bernstein (1994) *Foregone conclusions. Against Apocalyptic History*. University of California Press, Berkeley. With this term Thrift means "an apocalyptic history of inevitable moments leading inevitably towards a predefined goal or fate which commentators already know, a goal or fate in which everything becomes faster, more compressed in space and time, more commodified, and so on" (p. 4). Thrift uses the term in describing the tendency of theorists to produce a logocentric presence which then becomes the focus of research and thus "foreshadows" the empirical material.

1987, Philo et al. 1991). Later, the notion of landscape as filled with symbolic qualities which produced social meaning became a focus of research (Cosgrove and Jackson 1987).

Landscape continued to dominate cultural geography, and is still an important concept.⁴ But in the 1980s new directions developed with links to social geography with its focus on spatial divisions of labour, local urban culture, ethnic relations etc., all of which are time- and place-specific. These works contributed to general discussion within the field of geography about the complex relationships between spatial structures and social relations. Cosgrove and Jackson (1987) saw this development as an opportunity within social geography "to develop alternative ways of theorising culture without specific reference to the landscape concept" (p. 98). This new opportunity they called "new directions in cultural geography".⁵ It can be found in Massey's (1993) critique of the notion of place which is derived from the Heideggerian concepts of Being and Dwelling. In her argument these concepts often imply that places have single and essential identities and that a sense of place is construed into a personal, inward-looking history. Instead, she argues for a "progressive sense of place" which means that places are not static, but represent continual processes. Places do not have boundaries that enclose them from an outside. Place comprises social relations which connect people from different places. We might talk about the global in the local. Third, there will always be internal differences and conflicts in a place, and therefore places do not have one uniform and single identity. According to Massey, this understanding investigates the "character" of place in a progressive way. It follows that place is constituted by its social relations and we have to treat place as part of the social and cultural processes that are internal and external to space and place.

Commenting upon this development in geography which Philo (2000) calls the "cultural turn", he argues that in the late 1980s some started to think differently about the social and the cultural in according to "heighten the senses of how all things *cultural* might be raised to a much more prominent positions in studies throughout the corpus of human geography" (p. 28). Individual and collective meaning systems were taken much more seriously. Further, Philo (2000) argues that in a long-term trajectory, human geographers have gradually overcome their *fear of the immaterial*, meaning things without obvious material expression in the world. This development, according to Philo, made the "cultural turn" possible in geography. Philo explains this turn as a dematerialisation of human geography.⁶

⁴ See for instance Hanssen (1998, 2000) who analyses the criteria for the evaluation of landscape within a context of power relations and ideology.

⁵ Cosgrove and Jackson (1987) give a brief introduction to the development and the discussions within the field of social and cultural geography in the first half of the 1980s. See also Ley, Peach and Clarke (1984) on ethnic pluralism and human geography.

⁶ Through various examples Philo (2000) shows how this dematerialisation developed in geography.

Philo (2000) is grateful and appreciates that human geographers have overcome the fear of the immaterial, as he terms it, but he is concerned that human geographers in their search for immaterial spaces "have ended up being less attentive to the more 'thingy', bump-into-able, stubbornly there-in-the-world kinds of 'matter' (the material) with which earlier geographers tended to be more familiar" (p. 33). Indeed, Philo recognises a *re*-introduction of the material into human geography and the new cultural geography, for example with reference to research by Lefebvre and Latour which does not build on material *or* immaterial dimensions.⁷ Still, Philo thinks that it is imperative to *rematerialise* cultural geography in order to be more sensitive on the relationship between the material and the immaterial.⁸

In relation to diaspora studies and studies on international migration and place, Philo's criticism may well be relevant. For instance, Hall (1995) focuses upon the impact of globalisation and migration on *culture*. According to Massey (1993, 1995) he argues that globalisation gives new cultural formations and identities that affect the concept of place. If we regard *place* as "boundedness" and situated meaning systems with borders around, place becomes less significant today because of international migration, the globalisation of culture and the fact that people attached to the same culture and meaning systems are spread throughout the world. To me, it seems obvious that one should not theoretically close and fix places with certain meanings and identities, but instead treat place as a contextual and contested concept. Nevertheless, in focusing on culture and meaning systems which are not bound to place, it is very easy to overlook the fact that even migrants settle somewhere, at least for a while, and the question then becomes how life goes on where they settle. How do migrants relate to the space where they settle, and how are their relations to other places where they might have families, relatives etc.? Here I find Philo's (2000) critique relevant, and I think it is important to be attentive to both the material and the immaterial dimensions of life as well as the relations between these two dimensions. Therefore, this paper further asks what kind of methodological concepts are needed if we want to be attentive to both the material and the immaterial in a *methodological* sense.

Concepts and typification

To claim that it is possible to be free of preconceived notions of the world we do research in and therefore attain "pure" scientific knowledge, is an objectivist standpoint which I reject. But I will nevertheless argue that there is a gradual difference between concepts that are ontological abstractions – beliefs about how the world is (which are, of course, not "neutral" in any sense) – and pre-fixed notions about the empirical world. One example of such an ontological abstraction which is a basic assumption in the methodological approach discussed

⁷ To this we might add Entrikin (1991), Werlen (1993), Soja (1996) and Sack (1997) who all in different ways integrate the material and the social into geographical theory.

⁸ Philo (2000) also argues that the cultural turn in geography developed *desocialised* geographies, which he also is worried about. I shall not follow that debate in this paper.

in this paper, is that every individual is embedded, through his/her body, in material and social contexts. These contexts have a certain spatial dimension. To this spatial dimension we ascribe meaning and this spatiality has certain representations. These representations are not fixed, but are created, reproduced and are changed by social agents through practice and discourse.

If I want to investigate how place plays a role for migrants and how place is part of different meaning contexts, it would be difficult to *start* with for example Giddens' (1991) concept of "disembedding", according to which place has less significance for people of today, and in my field especially for migrants or diasporas. First of all, to see place as less significant might make the investigating project irrelevant from the start. Secondly, it relates the investigating project very easily to the dimension *more/less* significance according to place, rather than *how* place plays a role and *how* migrants' lives are affected by place. Giddens' project first and foremost involves creating general concepts about modernity – or late modernity as he terms it – and how we can understand our contemporary era. But if the project is to investigate how place is conceptualised, understood and how it plays a role in an empirical context of migration, Giddens' concept of disembedding is insufficient. In such a project we need a methodological approach that makes room for analysis of both disembeddedness and embeddedness as well as other ways of relating to and conceptualising place which are not exclusively connected to the more/less dimension.

We all have concepts and use different sorts of *typifications* to make order in our lives and projects according to our previous experiences and our stock of knowledge (Schutz 1967). Typification is a form of abstraction that leads to more or less standardised but also more or less vague standardisation and conceptualisation of common-sense thinking. According to Wittgenstein (1953) this vagueness and sometimes fuzziness is characteristic for all language, also scientific language, because language is used in different contexts and with different intentions.

In social science it has been common to distinguish between researchers' knowledge and typifications and the knowledge and typifications of lay actors.⁹ In principle there is no difference between these two categories of typifications. In everyday life we also use each others typifications to make new typifications. Research is a use of typifications that makes abstractions out of typifications according to certain rules and criteria. If we want our theoretical typifications and concepts to be in accordance with lay actors' typifications, we have to use them as sensitising concepts according to the specific empirical context.

⁹ "Ethical" and "emical" concepts in Geertz' (1983) view, or "first order" and "second order" interpretation in Schutz' view (1967).

In place-studies we make theoretical constructs about place and in empirical work we use lay-actors' constructs together with constructs from the scientific world. Place is therefore also a question of methodology in terms of: How to grasp these empirical typifications – that might be a central part in spatial representations – and then make new typifications out of them. In the discourse of diaspora we often find, as I have shown above, a discussion on whether nationality, ethnicity, place etc. are relevant theoretical categories or not. One answer to this discussion concerning *place* is to let place be the central part of interpretation. If we have an ontology where meaning is constituted in practice and discourse, we can in interviews with lay actors ask questions about place and particular places, what they do there, how they describe it, who they are together with and so on. The task is then to analyse through abstractions what kind of relevance place and the spatial have for lay actors.

If it is correct to say that people are embedded in social and material contexts, and that these contexts have a spatial dimension, then we might ask for example migrants about their place of settlement. One central assumption here is that *language* is about things outside language itself. It has a referent, and can not be reduced to a matter of signs relations to other signs or texts. This is because language is something we are in and live in, embedded in certain life forms (Wittgenstein 1953). This gives at least two methodological opportunities. First, by letting place be a central part in an interview; it is possible to see migrants as located, but still operating with different interpretations and practices related to that place of settlement. Second, when we ask about practices we might find spatial references for action. Maybe the spatial reference for action is not the place where that individual live, but other places and so on.

When we start with place of settlement and the spatial references for action, we can easily take into account the material conditions, for instance in a city where the schools are, shopping malls, cafés, where people live, where they work, where and how the public areas are used and, by whom, buildings, streets etc.¹⁰ In the following I will extend this argument about typifications (as immaterial) and references for action (material) by showing how to interpret these references methodologically might be a matter of *categorisation* and *prototyping*.

Categories of perception

"Living systems must categorize", say Lakoff and Johnson (1999: 19). Their argument is that our categories are formed through our embodiment, which means that categories are part of our experience. It is not possible to get beyond these categories, rather they are the stuff of

¹⁰ This might also be done by different case-studies where different sites used by lay actors in different ways relate themselves to the locality and how this locality is organised. See for example Lees (1997) and her study of Vancouver's new public library. This study is also cited in Philo (2000) as an example of an analysis that takes into account the material and the immaterial.

experience itself. And further, it is not possible to have an uncategorised and unconceptualised experience. Categories are structures which differentiate aspects of our experience and make it possible to see differences. Categories are in other words a fundamental part of perception.

Categories are often conceptualised in terms of *prototypes*. To make prototypes is a sort of inferential or imaginative task relative to a category. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) operate with two sets of prototypes. One is the *typical-case prototype* which is used when we draw inferences about category members in the absence of any special contextual information. The other is the *ideal-case prototypes*, used when we evaluate category members relative to some conceptual standard.

Aase (1997) distinguishes between category and prototype by saying that a *category* is absolute, with distinct borders between the different categories. If I see a cat, I categorise it as a cat, not as a dog. A *prototype* has more diffuse borders and is that observation which fits best to the constitutive idea in a category. Prototype is then a sort of typification. The Eiffel Tower or Notre Dame can be examples of prototypes of Paris. Prototypes and categories might be understood in relation to Schutz' (1967) notion about stock of knowledge. We might then analyse why exactly these locations and objects were selected as prototypes. Maybe we have different and competing prototypes of for example Paris.

If we assume that we have to use categories in order to classify the world, we might view place as a category or prototype in the following epistemological and ontological way: Categories and prototypes are a part of language. Language is used by social agents. Language is an attempt for the social agent to grasp reality outside language itself. Therefore categories and prototypes must have a referent. This referent might be internal to fantasy (Schutz 1967) and external to reality. The reference might be immaterial and/or material. The Garden of Eden as immaterial and internal to fantasy and your own garden as material and external to reality might be examples here. The latter may also of course be internal to fantasy and immaterial as an idea.

It is important to note that by using prototypes we do not talk about verbal language per se. Prototype is a theoretical construct which involves all kind of practices, discourses, images, ideologies, objects, sites, places, preferences – everything that constitute our lives, and is founded on the idea that we orientate ourselves according to prototypes. These prototypes might very well be articulated and expressed through social practices and discourses, but it is not words per se as prototypes or categories that I am concerned with.

By using Peirce's semiotic terms, we might see place as a part of sign relations in a semiotic triad (see Gorrée 1994) (fig. 1).

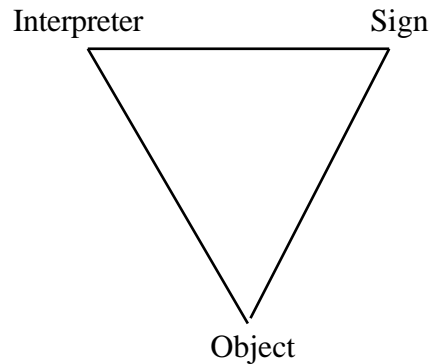


Figure 1: Peirce's semiotic triad

By *sign* Peirce means anything that is perceivable, knowable and imaginable. If a sign is to act as a sign, it must enter into relation with its object, be interpreted, and then produce a new sign, which is its interpreter. This interpretative process is called sign-action or semiosis (Gorrée 1994). An object might be real or fictive. In order to be a sign, a sign must be a representation *of* someone or something, real or imagined. The object is then prior to the sign, but the object is only knowable through the sign. In this way the material and the immaterial are connected.¹¹

In this model place is an object that can be described and analysed as material for the agents involved in it.¹² Simultaneously, it is the object (place as materiality) "charged" with meaning (through discourse and social practices). We can here replace "interpreter" with "agent" – who uses and interprets signs. These signs include categories and prototypes, and as actors and social agents we make interpretations about the signs and objects. Place is therefore not only a matter of fact as an object in external reality, but is endowed with meaning, experience, social practices and discourses, and is therefore also internal to sociality and to the human consciousness and body.

By treating place as a category and as a prototype we include the internal and the external, materiality and immateriality in the interpretation process. We interpret the idea of place, its materiality and its sociality. Aase (1997) argues that it is important to use both categories and prototypes in methodological interpretation. This is because social order, and then power, are constituted when prototypes with blurred and vague borders are defined as categories with distinct borders. An example is when a mountain area goes from the prototype "mountain" with blurred borders to the category "national park" with distinct borders and restrictions on

¹¹ For more detailed descriptions of Peirce's concepts, see Gorrée (1994). See also Gorrée's distinctions between Peirce's semiotics on the one side and Saussure's semiology, structural anthropology and structuralism on the other.

¹² See Lees' (1997) description of Vancouver's new public library as an example.

use. Another example is the conflict about Jerusalem that might be understood as a struggle about categorisation over prototypes. For what people is the city and who will decide?

By using the concepts categories and prototypes it is possible to get a contextual understanding about place because these concepts are linked to experience, discourse and social practices. This is an alternative to those diaspora studies which assume as a starting point that migrants are disembodied in place. Instead of treating immigrants as for example national and ethnic groups, we might investigate how and if these categories are relevant to lay actors' discourses and social practices. We can do the same with place. Instead of asking whether place is relevant or not, we may try to find out how migrants relate themselves to the spatial by focusing on practices, social relations, different locations etc. We may then investigate how migrants relate themselves to the prototypes and categories which for some might have spatial referents. Maybe these are not relevant at all. Or we may ask the other way around: How do people relate themselves to already categorised and prototyped places?

Different categories and different prototypes are often related, as for example in the Norwegian discourse the category "national park" to the categories "state" and "nation" (Hidle 1996).¹³ We may also imagine that Jerusalem as a category is connected to the category "Israel" for the Israeli people and to "Palestine" for the Palestinian people. Further we can imagine the Al-Aqsa Mosque as a prototype of Jerusalem and the Palestinian nation for the Palestinian people etc. These connections can be called *meaning contexts*. If we treat place as category and prototype, we can analyse place as part of different meaning contexts.

Place in meaning contexts

Categories and prototypes are, according to Lakoff and Johnson (1999), embodied and connected to experience. This implies that there does not exist a unique correct description of any situation that is the *one and only* description. We do not grasp the whole reality, only parts of it. But in spite of this, there can still be many correct descriptions depending on perspective.

One methodological approach to place, is to treat place in different meaning contexts. With meaning contexts I am referring to how different categories and prototypes are related to each other by different informants (Aase 1997). These meaning contexts might be viewed as related to particular "stock of knowledge" (Schutz 1967) or to certain ways of life (Wittgenstein 1953).

As already pointed out, we all do locate various observations like objects, persons, events and places in categories and prototypes to give meaning to the phenomena observed. These

¹³ Here can we see the state as a category with distinct administrative borders, and nation as a prototype that is imagined with no distinct borders.

categories and prototypes are further placed in different contexts. These contexts are connected to social practices, experiences and discourses, and the methodological task is to analyse the meaning and the social relations of these practices and discourses. This is not an attempt to grasp the whole reality of for example particular places. It will always be a continuous interpretation process, and the meaning contexts are not closed universes.

This interpretation process can be understood with Dinesen's (1994) interpretation and visualisation of Peirce's semiotic triad (fig. 2).

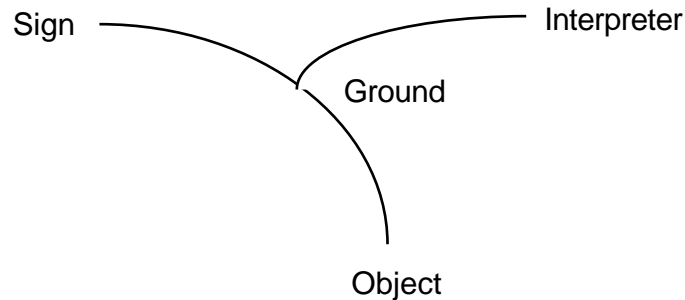


Figure 2: Dinesen's (1994) interpretation and visualisation of Peirce's semiotic triad.

Figure 2 shows the relation of a sign. The difference from figure 1 is that interpreter, sign and object are linked to "ground". In Peirce's theory "ground" is a sort of idea in which the sign stand for its object. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to this idea (Gorlée 1994). If we add that this idea embodies and is part of experience and social practices and is used with varying meanings in different discourses and situations, we can say that "ground" here is a sort of "stock of knowledge" in Schutz' (1967) term.

We shall, as we did in figure 1, also here replace "interpreter" with "agent". In the interpretation process agents locate observations in meaning contexts by using signs (here: categories and prototypes) which then are interpreted. The categories used are part of the "ground" itself. To make an interpretation is to understand how this "ground" works in giving meaning to specific subjects and observations. In an interpretation process we can analyse the same "object" or observation as located in different meaning contexts by different agents and in different situations. A subsequent analytical task might be to analyse the relation between the different interpretations used by the social agents.

Conclusion: Place and diaspora – a question of categorisation?

This paper has discussed and challenged the concept of diaspora within geography and the pre-fixed assumption that we are disembedded from place by discussing the question how it is possible to treat place, in contexts of diaspora and international migration, as a relevant category. I have tried to show that this question might be a matter of, first, immaterial *and* material context by drawing on the phenomenological typification, categories and prototypes in a semiotic model, and second, a matter of theoretical and methodological positions.

Lakoff and Johnson (1999) claim that it is not possible to get beyond categories and prototypes. What we can do is to relate categories and prototypes to each other and understand how phenomena and observations can have meaning (Aase 1997). In this paper I have searched for an approach to grasp a contextual methodological understanding of place in the context of diaspora and migration.

By drawing on the concepts of typification, categories and prototypes in a semiotic model I have attempted to fashion a methodology which does not guide the concepts of diaspora and place in predestined direction towards the concept of "disembedding" and homogenised categories. To do this we need concepts that are sensitive to the empirical context. The theory of categories and prototypes might help in this direction.

But according to Lakoff and Johnson (1999) it is not possible to operate without categories. So is it also in the field of science and research. With such a perspective we can ease the distinction between researcher and lay actor that is so common in social science.

Even when the focus of study is diaspora and place, we need categories. The question is then which categories we will use. The diaspora discourse I referred to in the introduction of this paper can be understood as a discussion of categories which can be useful in the field of diaspora and migration studies. Whether the discourse of social groups as related to ethnicity, nationality, place of settlement, boundaries, disembedding etc. are relevant categories or not, have been some of the questions.

I have argued that choosing categories and concepts is a kind of positioning. If I treat place as a combination of categories and prototypes, and restrict myself to viewing and explaining diasporas only as migrants dependent on social groups connected to ethnicity, nationality etc., I have taken a position. From this follows that an ontological position is also a methodological position, and *vica versa*.

The methodological approach I have presented here by using the theory of categories and prototypes is an ontological commitment of a scientific theory that is possible to utilize in explanations and analysis. As Lakoff and Johnson (1999) argue, categories and prototypes are real in an *ontological* way. They can not be directly observed, but still play a crucial role in explanation and prediction.

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