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Empowering Place: Multilocality and Multivocality

Author(s): Margaret C. Rodman

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## Empowering Place: Multilocality and Multivocality

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*The concept of “voice” has received considerable attention in anthropology recently. This article suggests that the concept of “place” requires a concomitant rethinking. It explores ways in which place, like voice and time, is a politicized social and cultural construct. It applies insights from geography and sociology to the anthropological study of place, drawing on research in Melanesia, including the author’s fieldwork in Vanuatu. The article concludes that attention to multilocality as well as multivocality can empower place conceptually and encourage understanding of the complex social construction of spatial meaning.*

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A critique could be carried out of this devaluation of space that has prevailed for generations. Space was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile. Time on the other hand, was richness, fecundity, life, dialectic. If one started to talk in terms of space that meant one was hostile to time. It meant, as the fools say, that one “denied history,” that one was a “technocrat.” They didn’t understand that to trace the forms of implantation, delimitation, and demarcation of objects, the modes of tabulation, the organisation of domains meant the throwing into relief of processes—historical ones, needless to say—of power. [Foucault 1980:70]

PLACE IS A PROBLEM IN CONTEMPORARY anthropological theory. The problem of place arises, paradoxically, because the meaning of place too often seems to go without saying. As anthropologists and as ordinary people living in the world, we are as situated in place as we are in time or culture. The people we study in non-Western, less industrialized countries may have even more immediate and full relationships with place insofar as time-space relations are less fragmented and they retain more local control over their physical and social landscapes. Yet anthropologists who take pains to lead students through the minefields of conceptualizing culture often assume that place is unproblematic. It is simply location. It is where people do things. This article takes the kind of hard look at place that others have taken at culture. It suggests how anthropologists can learn from current thinking about place in geography. And it applies anthropological thoughts on voice and place, especially multivocality and multilocality, using examples from Melanesian ethnography and field research in Vanuatu (the ex-New Hebrides).

The article approaches the anthropological problem of place from two vantage points, exploring in the process some of the terrain between them. The first is that of places as anthropological constructions. Places in anthropological writing have been equated with ethnographic locales. As such, they could be taken for granted. They were just space, “the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile” in Foucault’s lament above. They became the settings, albeit often exotic ones, where things happened.<sup>1</sup> Anthropologists have critiqued places as localizing strategies (Fardon 1990) or ideas (Appadurai 1988a; 1988b); for example, India has exemplified the concept of hierarchy. Others have objected to the use of places as metonyms in which one locale stands, inappropriately, for a

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MARGARET C. RODMAN is Associate Professor and Graduate Director, Department of Anthropology, York University, 4700 Keele Street, North York, Ontario, Canada M3J 1P3.

whole area (Fernandez 1988), as, for example, Andalusia has been made to stand for all of Spain. But insufficient attention has been paid to conceptualizing place in anthropology as something other than a physical setting or a passive target for primordial sentiments of attachment that flow from life's "assumed 'givens'" (Geertz 1973:259).<sup>2</sup>

Places are not inert containers. They are politicized, culturally relative, historically specific, local and multiple constructions. Anthropologists have accepted the polyphony of the voices they hear and represent ethnographically. What Appadurai (1988a:17) has called "the problem of voice ('speaking for' and 'speaking to')" may intersect with "the problem of place ('speaking from' and 'speaking of')," but the former has certainly received more critical attention. One goal of this article is to show that place as an anthropological concept is as complex as voice.

A further problem is that place and voice are not, or not just, academic creations. Places are not defined simply by researchers or by the topics that preoccupy them in particular settings. Places in the world of our research are not totalized, essentialized Western creations.

This leads to the second point of view in the article, namely, that of places as socially constructed. Here the emphasis is on places in the world, on the agency of individuals and of forces beyond individual control. Places have multiple meanings that are constructed spatially. The physical, emotional, and experiential realities places hold for their inhabitants at particular times need to be understood apart from their creation as the locales of ethnography. While anthropologists indeed create places in ethnography, they hold no patent on place-making.

I advocate a different approach to place than the traditional ethnographic focus on setting. I argue for a more critical usage of place than is common in contemporary anthropology and take seriously the attendant dimensions of power. I raise questions (and do not try to answer all of them) about how the anthropological study of place relates to experiences of living in places. In so doing, I explore the idea of multilocality as one way of "constructing regional worlds in experience," to borrow Nancy Munn's (1990) evocative phrase.

Organizationally, the article begins with a selected overview of the study of place in contemporary geography, emphasizing work that seems especially appropriate to anthropology. I go on to evaluate new approaches to place and the related concept of region in anthropology. The next section of the paper pays particular attention to place as lived experience. Using recent studies in Melanesia concerning power and social landscapes (esp. Lindstrom 1990), I point to some ways that the work of Foucault applies to understanding multivocality ethnographically. I suggest how Giddens's (1990) views on space-time distanciation also can be helpful for understanding multivocality and multilocality in non-Western places. Examples from my own fieldwork in Vanuatu illustrate a multivocal, multilocal approach to understanding the social construction of place anthropologically.

### Geographers and Place

To some extent, the concept of place and, on a larger scale, that of region have languished even in geography. "Chorology," the study of region and place, was marginalized as a theoretical subject in the 1950s and 1960s as geographers, like anthropologists of the period, sought to make their discipline more scientific. This does not mean that regional studies disappeared. Even within Melanesia their continued contribution remained evident into the 1970s (see, e.g., Brookfield with Hart 1971). But regional studies became a largely descriptive field.

Geographers now are expressing renewed interest in the theoretical concepts of place and region.<sup>3</sup> Entrikin (1989:40) regards this interest as part of attempts to "redirect geographical research toward a concern for the richness of human experience and an understanding of human action. . . . [T]hey are taking seriously the cultural significance of everyday life."

In his recent introduction to systemic regional geography, Dov Nir (1990:59–60) observes that there are two opposing views of “region” in contemporary geography. For some, “region” is just a concept, a mental construct or analytical tool. For others, regions are realities that exist in space. Anthropologists similarly hold these two seemingly opposing views with regard to place, as the two viewpoints from which this article is organized suggest—that is, place as (1) an anthropological construct for “setting” or the localization of concepts and as (2) socially constructed, spatialized experience.<sup>4</sup> Nir (1990:10) proposes that both views can be compatible insofar as regional studies are in fact studies of places, spatial relationships (Claval’s [1984] “social space”), and values attached to places and relationships. Others would call this concatenation “lived space.”

Berdoulay (1989:130) defines “lived space” (*l’espace vécu*) to include living space (territory, activity areas), social space, and the values attached to both. He notes that current interest in lived space, especially among French writers, grows out of the contribution of Vidal de la Blache’s (1917) possibilism to the development of regional studies and analyses of place. One aspect of Vidalian geography focused on the tensions between the influence humans exert on their environments and, reciprocally, the impacts their environments have on them. Berdoulay suggests (1989:126) that “the Vidalian thrust in geography is compatible with the current interest in place. It was very attentive to the environment as experienced by people. The concern for people’s plans, worries, initiatives, and efforts gave this geography the highly humanistic overtones which have frequently been noted by non-French commentators” (such as Buttimer [1971], and Ley and Samuels [1978]).

In this sense, places not only feature in inhabitants’ (and geographers’) narratives, they are narratives in their own right: “a place comes explicitly into being in the discourse of its inhabitants, and particularly in the rhetoric it promotes. Thus the geographer’s discourse uses the same ways as the people who define their own place” (Berdoulay 1989:135; see also Tuan 1991). Entrikin (1991:3) suggests that such discourse productively blends distinctions between place as an analytical concept, on the one hand, and as “situatedness” in a real world, on the other: “We understand the specificity of place from a point of view, and for this reason the student of place relies upon forms of analysis that lie between the centered [subjective, experiential] and decentered [objective, transcendent] view; such forms may be described as narrative-like syntheses.” Entrikin’s book, *The Betweenness of Place*, goes on to advocate a position interstitial to the two viewpoints, one that could suggest a resolution of their apparent contradiction for anthropologists as well:

This divide between the existential and naturalistic conceptions of place appears to be an unbridgeable one, and one that is only made wider in adopting a decentered [objective] view. The closest that we can come to addressing both sides of this divide is from a point in between, a point that leads us into the vast realm of narrative forms. From this position we gain a view from both sides of the divide. We gain a sense both of being “in a place” and “at a location,” of being at the center and being at a point in a centerless world. To ignore either aspect of this dualism is to misunderstand the modern experience of place. [1991:134]

One problem here is the tendency to privilege verbal communication. Ironically, while this has been common in anthropology, it has been rare in geography until recently. Lack of attention to speech now troubles geographers interested in narrative. Tuan (1991:684) points to the neglect of speech as a “curious gap in the extensive and growing literature on place.” He advocates an expansion of human geography to include speech and writing as integral to both place-making and geographic inquiry. One approach he favors “is cultural—the varying ways by which different societies use speech and/or the written word to realize place” (1991:695).<sup>5</sup> But places come into being through praxis, not just through narratives. One should also be wary of the assumption that the geographers’ and the inhabitants’ discourses will be consistent and that all inhabitants (and all geographers) will share similar views. The briefest glance at recent anthropological writing on

ethnography and on rethinking culture would cast doubt on those assumptions. Entrikin, but not Tuan, seems well aware of recent work in this area.

In a comment reminiscent of the Foucault quote at the beginning of this article, the Marxist urban geographer David Harvey (1989) notes that time-space relations are fundamental to social relations, yet time has tended to receive much more attention than space:<sup>6</sup>

The priority given to time over space is not in itself misplaced. Indeed, it mirrors the evolution of social practices in important ways. What is missing, however, is an appreciation of the practices that underlie the priority. Only in such a light can we understand those situations in which location, place, and spatiality reassert themselves as seemingly powerful and autonomous forces in human affairs. And such situations are legion. [1989:175]

Harvey quips that “the question of space is too important to be left exclusively to geographers.” In the next section, I explore what anthropologists have had to say about the topic recently, beginning with the matter of voice and returning later in the section to the question of time.

### New Approaches to Place in Anthropology

Despite considerable reappraisal of “voice” in anthropology, “place” has received surprisingly little attention and virtually no critical reassessment. There is little recognition that place is more than locale, the setting for action, the stage on which things happen. Anthropologists would do well to follow geographers’ renewed interest (Agnew and Duncan 1989b:2) in reunifying *location* (i.e., the spatial distribution of socioeconomic activity such as trade networks), *sense of place* (or attachment to place), and *locale* (the setting in which a particular social activity occurs, such as a church) to yield a more rounded understanding of places as culturally and socially constructed in practice.

The idea, well-established in geography, that places produce meaning and that meaning can be grounded in place, has yet to attract much theoretical interest in anthropology. Denise Lawrence and Setha Low’s (1990) article in *Annual Reviews in Anthropology* begins to redress this neglect, although their concern is with studies of the built environment rather than place more broadly. They and others involved in the Place and Space group have made important contributions to the anthropological study of place and space. This work deserves more critical theoretical attention.<sup>7</sup>

Place too often is subsumed as part of the problem of voice, so that geography becomes purely metaphorical. For example, Rosaldo speaks of “Miami Vice” TV episodes as places that are the “site of the implosion of the Third World into the First” (1988:85).

Alternatively, places have come to stand for particular problems in anthropology. Thus, for example, Melanesianists as “areal specialists” are likely to study adoption or the invention of tradition. Appadurai (1988a:16) defines this “problem of place” as “the problem of the culturally defined locations to which ethnographies refer.” In his view, ethnographic places become metonyms for certain anthropological images and ideas. As an example, he traces the attachment of the idea of hierarchy to India. In urging anthropologists to contest such “topological stereotypes,” Appadurai is in effect advocating a regional approach. The ideas that seem to represent the essence of certain places would be recognized, in this approach, as merely momentary localizations or coalescences of ideas from all over (Appadurai 1988b:46). Further, he encourages “the production and appreciation of ethnographies that emphasize the *diversity* of themes that can fruitfully be pursued in *any* place” (1988b:46, emphasis in original).

The “problem of place,” as Appadurai defines it, is well addressed in a theme issue of *Cultural Anthropology* (1988). My complaint is that the “problem,” as defined, misses one larger point. It is time to recognize that places, like voices, are local and multiple. For each inhabitant, a place has a unique reality, one in which meaning is shared with other people and places. The links in these chains of experienced places are forged of culture and history.

Recent writing, as evident in the *Cultural Anthropology* theme issue on place and voice, suffers from a failure to be critical of place as an anthropological concept. Place is at best seen purely as locale, and the "problem" is defined as if place were entirely an anthropological creation, a metonymic prison that incarcerates natives, in Appadurai's terms (1988b:37). In his view, such a prison is produced when certain images come to stand for particular areas. To be sure, there are dangers in reifying place (A. Strathern 1990:376). The hegemony of particular research topics, such as exchange, is as evident in Melanesian ethnography as in the Indian example of hierarchy that interests Appadurai. But it would be arrogant and naive to assume that places exist only as localizations of totalized anthropological voices. Anthropologists need to become more aware of Western bias and not assume that "place" means those places foreign ethnographers or metropolitan theory define.

Returning control over the meanings of place to the rightful producers requires reconsideration of questions of power and agency that implicate both anthropology and the people we study. It requires coming to terms with Entrikin's (1991) "betweenness of place" in anthropological contexts, as both subject and object. "What has to be cancelled," argues Marilyn Strathern (1988:94), "is the basis of the comparison" so that we, as Westerners, no longer privilege our own vantage point and peripheralize all other places. Rather than places becoming exemplars of *our* concepts, they should be seen as, to varying degrees, socially constructed products of *others'* interests (material as well as ideational) and as mnemonics of *others'* experiences. The contests and tensions between different actors and interests in the construction of space should be explored. We should consider what Munn (1990) has called "constructing regional worlds in experience."

Ironically, Munn's real interest in her stimulating article on regional worlds is in time more than space. She traces the incorporation of an episode from a *kula* transaction into the construction of events elsewhere in the region some six years later. She wants to understand how people become aware of and use past, distant events as horizons that can inform present action:

My intent is to stress that for the subject a regional world is not given but lived, as Williams (1977:129) has put it, "in singular and developing forms" and created in the "living." Instead of considering the formation of a regional order through the structure and functioning of given social forms such as types of social organization, exchange or communication (see for example Werbner 1977; Smith 1976), I am concerned with its ongoing formation in certain experiential syntheses that actors create in practices, and the events that transpire in their terms. [Munn 1990:2]

Space is only a frame for the action in Munn's article. But at least it is a frame that is locally made. Place could be taken more seriously by broadening her approach. What if we look at places as well as actors and at the ongoing formation of experience that occurs in a particular place or network of places? In other words, instead of confining the analysis to the *actor's* view of a wider *social* milieu, as Munn does, let us consider how specific *places* implicate each other in a wider *geographical* milieu as well. Landscapes, too, can be "listening posts" to somewhere else (cf. Munn 1990).

Her "event history" is similar enough to the geographer Berdoulay's idea of the narrativity of place to suggest a synthesis of their approaches. Both are phenomenological, culturally shaped constructions. For Munn, "the relations between events are developed in the practice of everyday life through infusing the experience of a given event with pasts (or possible pasts) and futures" (1990:13). As well, one could argue that regional relations between *lived spaces* are developed through infusing experience in one place with the evocation of other events and other places.

Rabinow's defense of anthropology as nominalism elaborates on the idea of "horizons" in a way that would have been useful to Munn's argument, had she considered it. The task of anthropology, as passed down from Kant to Foucault to Rabinow (1988:356), is to elucidate the language of social relations through which people create the world as they know it:

As these worlds appear only from the horizon of the present, whose frontiers they form, they function as limits to who we are and what we can know, hope, do. These worlds, along with the structures of our reason, constitute the limits of our experience. For that reason, anthropology taken pragmatically occupies that place where humans learn to recognize their own culture as "l'école du monde," . . . in which universality and particularity are joined in a single relationship. [Rabinow 1988:356]

But how do we decenter this approach so that the "school of the world" is not dominated by *our* (Western) schools of thought and *our* worlds? How do we deal with the problem of multivocality and with the differential power relations implicit in such cultural constructions of place? Munn conveys no sense of contested, competing views in the social construction of regional, lived space. How were various actors' interpretations of Gawa events smoothed into the single narrative she presents? Depending on the placement of the observer, the horizons of the regional world could be quite different. Munn does not deal with this phenomenological problem of constructing a shared narrative from individually unique experiences. Nor does she deal with associated doubts that could be raised concerning the future of comparison and generalization.<sup>8</sup>

The "true defining horizon" of our concepts of "otherness" and "difference," in Edward Said's (1989:217) view, is the fact of empire. We can only understand the world from within our culture, he argues, if we understand the imperial contest that shaped and continues to shape it. Thus an anthropology grounded in place would have to be historically as well as geographically constituted. Then, like Berdoulay's grounded narratives and Munn's regional worlds, cultures may

be represented as zones of control or of abandonment, of recollection and of forgetting, of force or of dependence, of exclusiveness or of sharing, all taking place in the global history that is our element. Exile, immigration, and the crossing of boundaries are experiences that can therefore provide us with new narrative forms or, in John Berger's phrase, with *other* ways of telling. [Said 1989:225]

How do we restore agency to the people we study while remaining keenly aware of their imperial historical (and contemporary) contexts? "Multi-locale ethnography" is George Marcus's term for one way to solve this problem. "The idea is that any cultural identity or activity is constructed by multiple agents in varying contexts, or places, and that ethnography must be strategically conceived to represent this sort of multiplicity and to specify both intended and unintended consequences in the network of complex connections within a system of places" (Marcus 1989:25; see also Marcus and Fischer 1986:94). The goal is to reconceptualize regional ethnography in a way that eliminates distinctions between macro- and microlevels. Marcus wants to preserve the ethnographic concern with place but push it further. He seeks "an ethnography that while it encompasses local conditions, is aimed at representing system or pieces of system" (1989:25). This decentered discourse has ethnographic locale at its heart. It is constrained by the limited notion of place as nothing more than locale. It is also constrained by the notion of system, which needs further definition in his article. Presumably, Marcus does not mean to suggest that such local systems are self-contained or homogenous. But it is not clear how he means to apply the idea of "system" to contemporary cultural analysis.

As for "locale," Giddens (1979:206) has developed the concept to link the individual to what Marcus might call "the system" through human agency, but Marcus does not cite Giddens, so this seems not to be the usage he has in mind. By locale, Giddens means "the physical settings of social activity as situated geographically" (1990:18; see also 1984:ch. 3). The emptying of time integral to modernity, Giddens argues, leads to a concomitant "emptying of space" or separation of space from place. Localized activities dominated the shaping of space into place in what Giddens calls "traditional" or "pre-modern" societies. But distanced relations predominate in the world today and provide the basis for new spatial as well as temporal zones and boundaries:

The advent of modernity increasingly tears space away from place by fostering relations between "absent" others, locationally distant from any given situation of face-to-face interaction. In con-

ditions of modernity, place becomes increasingly *phantasmagoric*: that is to say, locales are thoroughly penetrated by and shaped in terms of social influence quite distant from them. [1990:18–19, emphasis in original]

Like geographers Entrikin and Berdoulay, anthropologists Marcus and Munn, and other scholars (notably Said) discussed so far, Giddens sketches an analytic framework that dissolves macro-micro oppositions. Multilocality, like multivocality, becomes a theme to be explored. For Giddens, place is “phantasmagoric” in that we experience it as a constantly shifting, complex succession of images. The extent to which space-time distanciation prevails varies, ironically, in space and time. In places such as Melanesia today, local identity defined by and expressed through place remains stronger than in much of the West. But place is still fragmented and multilocal in its construction to some degree. This is evident in the commodification of land, its use for cash cropping that relies on foreign markets, the use of such media as radio and newspapers to talk about land and national identity, the construction of an urban identity in terms of a place one no longer lives in, and so on.

The fragmentation of place in Melanesia is not nearly so startling as the postmodern landscapes, epitomized by Los Angeles, that fascinate postmodern geographers. Edward Relph, best known to anthropologists for his *Place and Placelessness* (1976), considers such landscapes in his recent work. Postmodern landscapes confuse and juxtapose times and places. Relph asks (1991:104), “[W]hat happens when the imagineered logic of Disneyworld becomes the logic of the rest of the world?” The resulting landscapes he calls “heterotopias.” The term originated with Foucault (1970:xviii), who contrasted the imagined places of utopias, which directly reflect or invert “real” societies, with heterotopias, which are “a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (1986:24). Foucault’s examples of heterotopias include cemeteries, museums, libraries, brothels, carnivals, and gardens. For Relph, heterotopias are not so orderly:

Heterotopia is the geography that bears the stamp of our age and our thought—that is to say it is pluralistic, chaotic, designed in detail yet lacking universal foundations of principles, continually changing, linked by centreless flows of information; it is artificial and marked by deep social inequalities. [Relph 1991:104–105]

Foucault’s (1980:24) first principle of “heterotopology” is that “there is probably not a single culture in the world that fails to constitute heterotopias,” but by far the greatest impact of this notion has been in geographers’ study of Western, urban, postmodern landscapes. As we shall see, anthropologists working in other places could use the concept productively.

Heterotopias are sites. Multilocality is a way of experiencing those and other places. Building on Giddens and Marcus, I see multilocality as having a number of dimensions. First, it assumes a decentered analysis, not in Entrikin’s sense of “objective” analysis but in seeking to understand the construction of places from multiple, non-Western as well as Eurocentric viewpoints. Multilocality in this sense means looking at places from the viewpoint of Others, while recognizing that there really are no “others” in a world in which everyone can potentially suffer from one agent’s actions (as, for example, in oil spills or nuclear accidents). As Gupta and Ferguson (1992:16) argue, anthropologists should be willing to question “the apparent ‘given’ of a world in the first place divided into ‘ourselves’ and ‘others’.”

Second, multilocality can refer to comparative or contingent analyses of place. Marcus advocates paying attention to this dimension. Some activities (e.g., markets, social movements) arise from the actions of multiple agents in different places and can only be understood by identifying “both intended and unintended consequences in the network or complex connections within a system of places” (Marcus 1989:25).

Third, multilocality can refer to reflexive relationships with places. An anthropologist, traveler, or anyone whose place has been transformed, for example, by a natural disaster or suburban development—in other words, anyone dislocated from his or her familiar



place, or from the possibility of local identity—is keenly aware of contrasts between the known and the unfamiliar. In such situations, people often see a new landscape in terms of familiar ones. This is a multilocal way of sorting out meaning. Alternatively, as Basso (1988) has observed, strange landscapes can baffle and silence observers just as strange languages can.

Finally, a single physical landscape can be multilocal in the sense that it shapes and expresses polysemic meanings of place for different users. This is more accurately a multivocal dimension of place, but multilocality conveys the idea that a single place may be experienced quite differently.

All these dimensions of multilocality are predicated on connections, on the interacting presence of different places and different voices in various geographical, anthropological (cultural), and historical contexts. I agree with Fabian (1990:771) that our goal should be “to transform ethnography into a praxis capable of making the Other present (rather than making representations predicated on the Other’s absence).” The way that Fabian proposes to do this is through a concern with performance and the writing of ethnography. But there are other ways. For our purposes, let me sketch the outlines, or “horizons,” of a view toward empowering place as a critical concept in anthropology. Application to Melanesia of recent anthropological and geographical theorizing about place illustrates how place reciprocally shapes individuals and society through human agency.

The first step is to recognize that space is socially constructed, and contested, in practice. The sociocultural construction of space has received considerable attention from Marxist urban geographers (e.g., Castells 1977; Gottdiener 1985; Harvey 1973, 1989). For many scholars, urban space has been of primary interest. In North America and Europe, the development of capitalism and the “local state” have been crucial in structuring space (e.g., Logan and Molotch 1987). Confrontation between entrepreneurs concerned with exchange values and residents concerned with use values, such as quality of life, must focus on “the complex articulation between symbolic universes of meaning, capital accumulation and space” and are crucial for the analysis of urban development (Gottdiener 1985:155).

In my research on Toronto housing cooperatives with Matthew Cooper (Cooper and Rodman 1990, 1992; Rodman and Cooper 1989), we have shown that when exchange-value considerations are removed, as in nonprofit housing cooperatives, other social processes involved in the creation and manipulation of the use values of urban space come into sharper focus. By use values I mean such noncommodified dimensions of place as quiet enjoyment or feeling at home. Hypothetically, the same may be true of the social construction of space in Melanesia. There capitalism has less impact and use values remain of central importance to most rural islanders, although exchange-value considerations enter the picture through mining, forestry, tourism, and even cash cropping. Very little research has been conducted on the social construction of space outside of the urban centers of the capitalist world. Studying the social construction of place in Melanesia enriches our understanding of people for whom, individually and collectively, places remain integral to social life.

### **Empowering Place: Examples from Contemporary Melanesia**

Margaret Jolly has addressed this issue ethnographically, pointing to the inseparability of place and people in Vanuatu identity.<sup>9</sup> She and I have each written about the powerful condensation of person and place in the concept of *man ples* (Jolly 1990:17; Rodman 1987:35–36). As she aptly remarks, “such imagery was not only crucial in reclaiming the land as inalienably attached to the people of the place, but proclaiming the people as necessarily in control of the place” (Jolly 1990:17). Giddens (1990:88) might consider this a form of re-embedding, an attempt to counter the space-time distancing initiated through the colonial process. In Vanuatu, this was accomplished less by face-to-face contact than by a rhetorical emphasis on the rootedness of people in place, or autochthony.

Jolly notes the primordialism, or evocation of an original state in which people and place were one, that runs through Vanuatu constructions of place. This expression of connectedness between people and places creates what Giddens (1990:102) refers to as an “environment of trust” in kin relations, local communities, cosmology, and tradition, which is place-based. The strong assertion of the inalienability of land in Vanuatu no doubt responds to the extensive alienation of land for plantations in the colonial period, which only ended in 1980. It also harkens back to the insecurity of pre-pacification life (prior to about 1930). Warrior leaders might seize their followers’ land, as well as that of their enemies, and hold it for a lifetime or longer. The connection between place and voice was direct. Followers who lacked the power to voice their objections also lacked the power to regain their land.

Jolly contrasts the meaning of place in contemporary Fiji and Vanuatu. Fijian “custom” is less fused with concepts of place—although it is called *vakavanua*, “the way of the land.” Jolly argues that the British valued Fijian traditional culture and tried to blend it with colonial administrative practice. In Vanuatu, however, the British and French pursued a policy, albeit haphazard, of land alienation in which respect for traditional culture played little part. For the people of Vanuatu, independence became associated with regaining their land as well as their cultural past. As Jolly puts it, “*kastom* was expressly the reclaiming of a place, against European occupation of the land and the reclaiming of a past which had been lost or expressly abandoned” (1990:17).

On Ambae, in the north of the archipelago, place has also been crucial to identity. Concentric circles of identity are expressed in place. This is similar to what Fernandez has called “envelopes of domestic space,” in an African context (1982:106–110). *Vanue* is a word for place that implicates the site of one’s dwelling, hamlet, district, island, and even the country, Vanua-tu. It is lived space in each of a succession of regional zones. Elsewhere I have explored dimensions of people’s attachment to place, as well as ways to manipulate it (Rodman 1987). Later in this article, I will include an example of the multivocality that can be evident in such attachment—and detachment—at funerals.

William Rodman also has considered the importance of place-making in his analyses of legal autonomy on Ambae. He argues (1985, 1992) that people on Ambae felt effectively beyond the colonial and postcolonial horizon, that is, beyond the government’s reach and/or interest. They formulated codes of law for local places, which they were able to enforce so long as the offense was not something as serious as murder. This suggests, as Philibert (personal communication, 1991; see also Philibert 1988) has commented, that “for an encapsulated social group, going outside group boundaries is a double-edged weapon not to be resorted to very often as it is an admission of helplessness and an invitation to even greater intervention by outsiders. The more porous the boundary, the greater the need for secrecy and self-reliance.” Envelopes of lived space in this instance insulate regional zones of power, and it is to questions of power and place that I now turn.

### *Power*

As the opening quote from Foucault (1980:70) suggests, it is time to stop devaluing space and begin “to trace the forms of implantation, delimitation, and demarcation of objects, the modes of tabulation, the organisation of domains [which means] the throwing into relief of processes—historical ones, needless to say—of power.” Lamont Lindstrom applies a discursive model of knowledge and power to the analysis of Tannese society in southern Vanuatu. This is Foucault in the bush, a fine illustration of how Foucault’s ideas play out incisively in a non-European context. And he adds a new dimension to Foucault, for on Tanna, in Lindstrom’s view, power is localized (1990:22). He regards “geography,” or place, as one of three Tannese “disciplines” that organize people’s know-how. (The others are medicine and magic.) Power is crucial in the uneven distribution of all disciplinary knowledge. Inequality is such that men, especially older ones, are the most qualified to “talk seriously” and exercise power (1990:59). The verbal power so evident

among adult men is, as Lindstrom recognizes, muted in women and in the young, who tend to be silenced where serious talk occurs and power is expressed.

Lindstrom's explanation of the intricacies of discursive power is impressively systematic and smart. It comes at a time in the history of anthropological thought when systematicity needs the kind of conceptual rehabilitation he provides. By this I mean that Lindstrom recognizes the complexity of social patterns while never assuming that culture is a bounded whole. He traces the links between dreams, land disputes, kava drinking, and quashing dissent in national politics. He persuasively shows how, in all these domains, "knowledge is made to be ordinary or ridiculous, truth or lies" (1990:173). His analytic framework would work as well for Ambae, where I conducted fieldwork, as it does for Tanna. In this sense it provides a framework for regional analysis of discursive practice. But to understand nondiscursive power one would have to go further, taking place more seriously than Lindstrom does.

Practical rather than discursive knowledge organizes much of social life in Vanuatu. Lindstrom recognizes this but sets aside serious consideration of it in order to focus on his topic. Nondiscursive knowledge is harder for anthropologists to get at, even though it is expressed right before our eyes. Lindstrom acknowledges that "[s]ignificant bases of power stand outside conversation per se: the physical structures of village house and forest clearing mutely organize island talk" (1990:175). Nevertheless, he privileges the verbal, which in Vanuatu means privileging the powerful, those who "know how" (and are allowed) to talk.

### *Multivocality*

To hear the voices of those silenced in island conversations requires listening with all of one's senses. Multivocality often involves multilocality. Polysemic places bespeak people's practices, their history, their conflicts, their accomplishments. Narratives of places are not just told with words; they can be told and heard with senses other than speech and hearing.<sup>10</sup> Such narratives can be expressed through the sight of a rock that grew, through certain smells, in the way the wind blows, or the taste of a mango. The house in which my family and I lived in Vanuatu looked out on a large rock that had been brought to the village as a small stone. The village itself was named for a wind shift that touched the cheek of a culture hero who was passing through. On his journey, like many an explorer, he named the places he "discovered" and, by discovering, created. He transformed the physical landscape into a multilocal, social one.

In *Masters of Tradition* (1987), I discussed the grounding of identity in place evident in both a child's and an old man's tour of the area surrounding the village where we lived. The rootedness of identity is similar to processes Salmond describes for the Maori, for whom "specific knowledge is 'bound into' specific landmarks" (1982:84).<sup>11</sup> The narrative landmarks of the influential old man included black palms that had once been little stakes to which tusked pigs were tied when he first took rank in the graded society. He pointed out palisades surrounding his natal village, now abandoned, that had taken root and grown into trees that towered above the forest floor. Warfare and pig killing were reciprocally related; pig killing signaled and required peace. Both rank-taking ceremonies and raids were multilocal phenomena. A rank-taker could not kill primarily his own pigs but was dependent on the gifts of others, often people from distant villages and even other islands. Warfare, too, was a multilocal pattern of shifting alliances.

The landscapes of the ten-year-old boy described in my book identified places with names and owners. In part, I think this reflected the emphasis on food in a boy's landscape. A boy needed to know who owned which mango tree, for example, to know if he could eat freely of the fruit. Unlike girls, who stayed close to home, boys on Ambae ran freely through plantations, gardens, and forest. Except for those who had an opportunity to travel by plane or boat, a boy's sense of place was of one continuous territory with clearly defined centers, paths, and boundaries. Place, while regionally zoned, was not locally fragmented, as in our own lives. But it was multilocal in that there were many

connected, named places within that territory, places that linked living people and dead ones with the child through landmarks.

The landmarks of women also speak. As I mapped the village, a grandmother told me about the birth sites of her children. One birth house had been over here, another time she had given birth in a menstruation hut over there, realizing she would not make it to the hospital eight miles away in time. Although I put an *X* on my map in the locations she pointed out, they were marked by nothing I could see in the landscape. Yet for the old woman these memories were etched as clearly in the landscape as if they bore commemorative plaques. Other memories had visible landmarks with special meanings for her. She thought of her daughters every time she harvested nuts or mandarins from trees they had planted. One of the mandarin trees shaded the smoothed ground where the first house she and her husband had shared once stood.

In the woman's, child's, and man's narratives of place that I have described, use values predominate. The exchange value of the land that means so much to them is negligible, except for the portion of the old man's land planted in coconuts. The child and the woman have no claims of ownership in any case, but only rights of use. These use rights, nevertheless, are a modicum of power.

The most powerless people have no place at all. Here, as elsewhere, the discursive and practical worlds intersect. A widowed woman from Santo island remained on Ambae island for eight years after her husband's death. She lived in a house on land set aside for the Anglican church. She was allowed to use a garden belonging to her husband's kin, but she felt she lived on the sufferance of others. As Lindstrom (1990) might have predicted, she expressed her insecurity about having no place that was really her own by saying how afraid she was of talk: "If I weren't careful people would talk about me. They would say, 'Where's her place?'" (Rodman 1987:40). On my last visit to Ambae, she was dead and her bamboo home was gone. The house site had reverted to communal use. It had become the village volleyball court.

Moving houses, including disappearing ones like the widow's, trace multilocal social patterns in Vanuatu (Rodman 1985b). Overlays of village maps I made in the course of several field trips revealed tremendous individual mobility in an area where the total number of residents remained constant. Houses, as well as people, were moving around. A close analysis of this place-based phenomenon revealed a good deal about kinship and residence patterns. In another study (Rodman 1985a), I considered why the design of men's houses remained the same while women's house forms changed considerably with missionization.

### *Social Landscapes*

A focus on place, like Marcus's multi-locale ethnographies, can eliminate the micro-macro distinction, for region and village are points on a sliding scale. Both are "social landscapes," albeit seen in different degrees of detail. The concept of a lived space is phenomenological, emphasizing individuals' experience in the world. But a "social landscape" takes a broader view of time and space. The concept is not new in Melanesian ethnography (cf. Leenhardt 1979[1947]). As developed by Pacific archeologist Chris Gosden (1989), it links the archeological record to the ways that social groups interact with landscapes that are partly structured by previous social groups. The social landscape is both context and content, enacted and material. It is the lived world in physical form. It can be radically emic—the social landscape indigenous people (collectively or individually) define through particular experiences or interests. Or it can be an analyst's map, marking "differences that make a difference," in Bateson's (1972:453) sense, and depicting the archeologist's classification or understanding of the local people's categories.

Miriam Kahn (1990) provides recent examples of the "spatial anchoring of myth" in what might well be viewed as social landscapes in Papua New Guinea.<sup>12</sup> She observes that places in the landscape, notably stones, are linked to mythical stories, often about

traveling culture heroes or ancestors. "Melanesian ideas about the passage of time are conceived of in a spatial framework" (1990:61). Consequently, she argues, anthropologists should be careful not to give too much weight to verbal (discursive) communication; they should be more aware of the ways "myths are recorded and recalled by other devices, such as physical forms in the landscape. Stones, while not the only type of physical marker, provide pertinent and interesting examples of the Melanesian attachment to place and the recording of myth and history in terms of space" (Kahn 1990:53).

Through greater awareness of the social construction of meaning in the landscape, we can begin to understand the experience of places that live in ways different from our own. Places in Vanuatu, for example, include rocks that grow, people turned to stone, spirits, ancestors, and memories piled upon memories with scarcely a visible mark on the landscape to show that people lived there. Even islands move around. Two islands at either end of the beach in Port Olry on Santo island, where I studied fisheries development (Rodman 1989), moved to their present location from somewhere else. Another island, Araki, used to be there, too, but one day it moved off to a new location about fifty kilometers to the south. The moving island took some people's wives and other people's husbands along, much to the anger of the partners who were left behind. This multilocal narrative explains why the kinship systems of Araki and Port Olry are so similar.

Kahn asserts that "each village uses local landscape to make the myth its own" (1990:59). Each village, in this sense, creates its own social landscape, as does each person. But each community, or each individual, is also part of a chain of attachment to places. "Geographic copyright" (Lindstrom 1990:78) is the authority to speak in public about names and places. It would seem to apply as well to the Papua New Guinean situation of which Kahn writes as to Tanna. Men can silence the less knowledgeable or those who might be said to be out of place in speaking about what is not theirs. So when Kahn comments that Melanesians discredited each other's versions of a myth or discovered kin connections to each other through the fact that they told her identical details of a myth, she is speaking implicitly of this kind of "copyright." Each teller and each mythically charged stone is part of a social landscape whose horizons overlap other social landscapes. Individuals are most strongly attached to particular named places, and can speak of those places (and their pasts) with the most authority. But the story and its larger landscape binds them to other experts and other places.

### Conclusion

The themes of power, multivocality, multilocality, narrativity, and social landscape are intertwined in a final example. The dynamic, socially constructed qualities of place in Ambae are especially evident at the boundaries expressed in funerary feasts. These feasts are heterotopias in Foucault's (1986) sense. They mark and contest boundaries between the living and the dead, between places, and between the conflicting interests of different people.

When a person dies, he or she does not go far from the land of the living for one hundred days. The dead person's spirit hovers near the tops of fruit trees or coconut palms, waiting and watching as kinsmen exchange gifts below. The dead person is still strongly attached to his or her place. Gift exchanges and feasting occur after every death, but the scale of the activity varies. The biggest and most contested ceremonies are those following the death of a major landholder. Landholders are almost always male.

Multilocality comes into play in understanding funerals at several levels. First, it is important to realize that the stakes have changed during the past half-century as plantation land has become commoditized. Elsewhere (Rodman 1987), I have described the multilocal "chain of copra" that linked the beaches of the colonial New Hebrides with oil-processing mills in Marseilles. Second, the use value of land for subsistence gardening and housing competed with the exchange value of the same land for growing coconuts that could be dried and sold as copra. If a person had access to multiple locales, he or she

could earn some money from copra while still keeping a garden. Third, the funerary ceremonies dislocate dead individuals from the places that were integral to their identities as persons and, in establishing new ownership, shape new identities. In this sense, multilocality is the goal of the exchanges and feasts.

When a landholder dies, funerary feasts held every five days are competitive arenas in which each gift can help build a claim to the dead person's land. Knowledge about the history of the land's connection to people, living and dead, is displayed in competing men's verbal power plays and assertions of what Lindstrom calls "geographic copyright." The social landscape is in flux during the transition between one person's control of a large parcel of land and the new order that follows the feast on the hundredth day after a death. Multivocality is evident in the flow of competing gifts as some relatives use a rhetoric of "helping" to undercut each other's claims or give huge gifts to shame those who cannot reciprocate. It is evident, too, in the silences, in the women and less powerful men who would say they "cannot speak" to oppose an influential man who tries to take control of their dead relative's land through funerary gifts.

At the end of a hundred days, members of a dead person's matriline give a final gift that detaches the deceased from his or her place. With this gift, the dead person leaves the treetops and departs from the world of humans. (In the past, the spirit would have jumped off a cliff into the sea and ended up in the crater lake at the top of the island. Now, many feel, the spirit goes to heaven.) As this detachment of the person's identity from his or her place occurs, a new social landscape is affirmed, for these gifts also ensure that fertility will return to the dead person's trees. Death is turned to life in a living place as life moves on, away from the trees, to the place of death.

In this article, I have suggested that place should be taken more seriously. Although the problem of voice has received considerable attention, related problems of place have too often been reduced to questions of setting. We must acknowledge and try to understand the complex reality of the places in which we do fieldwork. But in empowering place conceptually, it must not be exoticized or misconstrued as the essence or totality of other cultures. Place must not become, for example, a metonym for Melanesia. The socially contested, dynamic construction of places represent the temporary grounding of ideas. These are often overlapping narratives of place, as the examples drawn from a man, woman, and child's landscapes illustrate. They can be competing narratives, as in the example of funerary feasts. We need to consider how different actors construct, contest, and ground experience in place.

Rather than being "incarcerated" (Appadurai 1988b) in ethnographic places anthropologists define, the people we study are constructing their own places. These places are not simply settings for social action, nor are they mere reflections of society. I have tried to show that Melanesian places can be as rich and polyphonous an expression as their voices. By joining multilocality to multivocality, we can look "through" these places, explore their links with others, consider why they are constructed as they are, see how places represent people, and begin to understand how people embody places.

### Notes

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<sup>1</sup>Although place generally has played a passive role in ethnography, some have taken its interaction with social life seriously from the earliest days of anthropology. Durkheim, Mauss, and Morgan all addressed the interplay between the built environment and society. For a discussion of early theories of accommodation and adaptation of people and places to each other, see Lawrence and Low (1990:456–457).

<sup>2</sup>A notable exception is Ferguson and Gupta's (1992) theme issue of *Cultural Anthropology*, entitled "Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference," which appeared as this article was in preparation.

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, the papers in Agnew and Duncan (1989a), and in Buttner and Seamon (1980).

<sup>4</sup>The problem social analysts face of being part of the phenomena they study is at issue here. See Giddens's (1990:45 and earlier publications) comments on the reflexivity of knowledge and the double hermeneutic of modern social life.

<sup>5</sup>Harris (1991) also notes the increasing importance of cultural context as historical geography becomes more interdisciplinary. Relph (1991:102) makes a similar observation regarding post-modern geography.

<sup>6</sup>This view is shared with Soja (1989:11), who calls for spatializing the narrative of historical explanations integral to Marxist geography.

<sup>7</sup>The Place and Space group meets at each American Anthropological Association annual meeting and keeps members informed of planned place-related sessions and meetings via a newsletter.

<sup>8</sup>Marilyn Strathern (1988, 1991) has contributed a great deal to rethinking comparison through her concern with polyphony; see also Holy (1987) for a defense of the comparative method.

<sup>9</sup>This section in no way seeks to deal comprehensively with literature from Melanesia about place. Were I to do so, Malinowski's (1922) "mythic landscapes" and Leenhardt's (1979[1947]) observations about space, social landscape, and personhood would be cornerstones of such a review. Instead, this section deals with a few, selected recent examples, mostly from Vanuatu, to apply the theoretical points made so far.

Place has also figured prominently in the work of the French geographer Joel Bonnemaïson (1986), in Vanuatu. Other anthropologists who have written about place in Vanuatu include Larcom (1982), Rubinstein (1978), and Tonkinson (1982).

<sup>10</sup>For a recent example of anthropology that acknowledges the importance of senses other than the auditory and verbal see Howes (1991).

<sup>11</sup>Salmond (1982) compares the Maori embeddedness of knowledge and place with Western "theoretical landscapes," in which knowledge is represented metaphorically as if it were a territory.

<sup>12</sup>Myths of rootedness are common in Melanesia. For another recent example of the persisting power of such myths see Gewertz and Errington's (1991:33–38) discussion of the mythic charter for construction of a Chambri men's house as, literally, a tourist "attraction."

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