

Conflict, Heritage and Place: Problems of Cultural Ownership in the Era of Globalization

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Introduction:

People value places¹ for their reflection of contemporary cultural concerns or categories². Who owns places and who controls them is an issue of social policy. As places are part of our humanity, they are social goods and their determination is important to social well being.³

There are some places that seem to attract conflict. They are symbols of cultural, political and religious fervor. Frequently, they are opposed to the contemporaneous forms of the establishment. They are the places where stands are taken against political repression, religious subjugation or economic tyranny. They may be expose individual, community, national, or global concerns. Such place names as Tiananmen Square, the Gdansk shipyards, the Temple Mount, Selma, Alabama, Harlan County, the Golden Temple, Bhopal, Chernobyl, Jerusalem, and even Seattle have come to have heavy emotional content. They are the icons of militant particularism thrown in the face of globalization. On one side are marshaled the politics of community, ethnic interests and the workplace- on the other the vested interests of class, the state and multi-nationals. These places of confrontation often demonstrate the infinite resilience that people are able to bring to bear when articulating their opposition to the established order. Through a wide variety of actions ranging from “peaceful demonstration”, through “militant march”, to “occupation”, people express their cultural practices, heterogeneous values, and diversity of belief at places that take on lives of their own.

Theory: Space and Time

Anthropological theories and methods enable ethnographers to focus on local communities as well as states and international organizations in order to examine the material and symbolic processes of culture. This focus on everyday life and on the

¹ Place is a multi-faceted. One facet consists of the actual locations; another the objects of place such as particular historic houses; others include interpretation, control, discovery, politics, and ownership.

² Shanks, M. and C. Tilley (1987) *Social Theory and Archaeology*, Polity Press, Cambridge. p187

³ Wilson, Thomas M. and Hastings Donnan. 1998 *Border Identities: Nation and state at International Frontiers* Nation-State and identity at international borders. Wilson and Donnan Cambridge University Press Cambridge p 1:31

cultural construction that gives meaning to places is often absent in the other social sciences. It reminds us that nations and states are composed of situated people that cannot nor should not be reduced to the images constructed by the state, the media, or other groups that claim to represent them. When ethnographers study place, they do so with the intention of narrating experience of the people there and are comfortable with the idea that these people may be tied culturally to other people of other places. Thus, place frequently is tied to more than one location and to more than one time.

One tends to forget that geopolitics are geographic. There is spatiality to political and social strategy. Globalization, economic unions, trade zones, and domino theories all have spatial components as part of their definitions and more importantly as part of their operation. Borders keep people with different cultural backgrounds out and people with similar cultural backgrounds in. (Canada passes law after ineffectual law trying to maintain its cultural institutions against the cultural imports that cross its southern border). Since places have a geopolitical component, one finds all forms of political forms materialized. There are places that are nationalist, others colonialist and even others imperialist⁴. They vary in scale from those recognized globally to those important to the individual.⁵ There are places at the “centers of power” (e.g. presidential palaces and military bases) and places at the “margins of power” (e.g. schools and museums). There are constructed sites of opposition, radical openness, and of revolutionary activity ranging from coffee houses, political offices, and even military barracks. It is a locus of agency and the “situatedness” of leveraging emancipatory politics. In short, space is part of all forms of social determination.

In addition to the geography of geopolitics there is a geography of difference. The world is seen as continents of “haves” and “have-nots”. Races, ethnicities and classes are not located in the same or even similar spaces in urban or rural environments. There are “black places”, “indigenous places”, “wealthy places” and “slums”. These spaces are socially constructed and the same space is not even named similarly let alone conceived similarly by these diverse groups. One person’s “indigenous place” may be another’s “diverse space”.

Yet, place is not completely a social construct. In an important sense, it is the residual of social process. After one considers such issues as the power relationships, the agency and the social determination, there is still the location where power actually was or was thought to be applied. What is this left over? It is place.

Place and Ownership

Some societies will emphasize place as public property. There is no ownership; everyone has access, and there is no private possession. It belongs to the nation/state.

⁴ Trigger, B. (1984) “Alternative archaeologies: nationalist, colonialist, imperialist”, *Man* 19:355-70

⁵ Space is nested from the globalized, through the national, through the provincial, through the community, through the family, to the individual.

For other societies, most places are private to be bought and sold on any of a variety of markets. Possession is based upon the principles of private property or may follow ownership of the land. Possession provides the rights to exclusion of others. It is particularly poignant when absentee ownership of a monument prevents members of a society from accessing their own places.

For a third group of societies, place is communal resource. It belongs in common to a descendant ethnic or religious group (such as the Navajo or Orthodox Jews).

Finally, there are some populations that believe “places” need not belong to anyone. Rather, they belong to humanity as a whole. Thus, one conceives of the ownership of place as being a continuous scale from public to the private with four major categories as shown below (see figure 1).

Figure 1. Types of Places – Organization, Ownership, and Control on the Public Private Continuum

Place is always present in politics and popular culture. Thus religion, nationalism, and international politics are fought and mixed in a witch’s brew of territory, ideology, and traditions about particular places. Whether a national monument such as Chichen Itza is Mayan or Mexican reflects location, class, colonial viewpoint and ethnic identification. The rights to ritual objects within a religious shrine may reside with the landowner, the ethnic descendants either real or imagined, institutionalized religion, or the national state. Some will argue that such shrines belong to none of these but to humanity as a whole.

Neither space nor place stands independent of time. Indeed, there is good reason to think that most places have changed their organizational structure and rules through time. Places that have been community based become national and then international and finally as we shall see later become private.

Figure2. Changing Places: Changing Ownership And Control Of Access Of A Place Over Time.

One may argue that there are actually dialectics of place, time and conflict. When one considers these places over time, there is a record - a history of defeat, invasion, victimization, and oppression. The resistance that takes place at these iconic places becomes embedded into the place itself. One cannot remove the “resistance” or the “defeat” from Massada, nor “fall out” and the “disaster” from Chernoybl”. Without them Massada is no longer Massada, it is only a desert ruin. And Chernoybl is only another abandoned industrial power site.

Some General Principles:

We can suggest the following:

1. Mapping is a discursive activity that incorporates power as well as structuring knowledge. The power to map the world in one way rather than another is crucial tool in political struggles. In some sense they who draw lines on the map determine the social and economic conditions of the population. When Finland lost Kerelia, it doomed one half of the Kerelian population to a far more marginal existence than the other.
2. Social relations always have a spatial component to them and thus revolutionary activity entails a remapping of social relations. The needs of new countries for new cities (or at least renamed and restructured cities) are well known. Colonial cities such as Bombay become Indian cities such as Mumbai. It is not only the past that is rewritten by the victors, it is also the maps.
3. Institutions are produced spaces of more or less durable sort. Sometimes in the complex agendas of social theory we forget they have a material reality. They frequently are actual buildings at actual places. In addition, they have a spatial and territorial reality. Institutions are territorializing. They have territories of control, surveillance, economic support etc. These institutions may be as dissimilar as prisons for political dissidents or schools for warehousing the aged or people with disabilities.⁶
4. Not all places are real. Imaginary communities or nostalgic communities are a fertile source of possible political and social worlds in which there are different power relations, social relations, institutional structures and material practices.
5. Place is dependent upon the resistance to movement. When transport costs were high and communication difficult, places were protected from warfare, competition and even rapid ethnic change by distance. They are no longer protected in the age of low transport costs and easy communication.⁷

Conflicts :

Places attract conflict for a variety of reasons.

First, they are the locus environmental qualities, community, collective memory, and power. All are potentially volatile factors with high symbolic value.

Second, capitalism is growth oriented and place is status quo oriented. Thus, there are always class struggles between those who are already situated in a place and those who wish to come into the place to change it or develop it. These conflicts take many forms – immigrants versus residents, developers versus conservationists, urban amalgamators

⁶ It is not accidental that such corporations as US Sugar were indicted for slavery for they refused to allow workers who owed them money from purchases in company stores to leave the premises of the company towns and tracked down with police and dogs those who tried.

⁷ Harvey, David 1996 Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference, Blackwell Publishers

versus neighborhood advocates, political revolutionists versus establishment, and even local defense versus military invasion.

Third, places are controlled by a variety of rule systems enforced by bureaucracies of inconsistent competence. Conflicts arise because there are numerous bureaucratic inconsistencies and questions of jurisdiction –e.g.. who is responsible for access. One need only think of the relationship between Barak, who as prime minister of Israel, and Sharone, the leader of one of the opposition parties, accepted Sharone’s visit at the Temple Mount. This contributed to an increase in violence, a change of government, and the ending of the peace process.

Fourth, there are questions regarding what institutions are relevant for rule creation regarding places. Examples abound as the European Union argues with national interests about what institutions should control the environment of Europe. One sees this in a more focused manner in the intense debate and court cases among the local, federal, state, international, native American, urban, and rural stakeholders regarding where, when, who, and why the previously straightened Kissimmee river should be unstraightened ⁸

Fifth, there may full scale rejection of the legitimated institutions as well as bureaucracy that are responsible for the place. The place should not belong to one country but to another.

In short, conflict frequently occurs regarding place when more than one rule system is attempted to be applied to the same place or when significant and active populations believe that a differing rule system should be applied for national, ethnic, or personal reasons. These differing rule systems become particularly intractable when the concepts of organization and control are different. If one group believes the place belongs to the state and is thus a public good to be shared while another believes it belongs to an ethnic community and access should be limited to its members the groundwork for conflict is easily laid. It becomes particularly apparent in places such as the Temple Mount or Tiananmen Square where large numbers of people no longer live in the immediate area.

Figure 3: Conflicting Values: Conflicts over Places over Time

For these non-resident populations, the place becomes an imagined space and an imagined community. Thus, there develops a desire for the “golden age” to either return or to develop similar in form to one that never was. Such places attract great symbolic value and considerable emotion and nostalgia as identity becomes wedded to place and conflict. History is always changing the rule systems. The further one gets in time and space away from the place, the greater more the imagined place is romanticized and the

⁸ Zubrow, Ezra 1996 “The Reserve Side of the Degradation Coin” in *L’homme et la degradation de l’environnement*” edites par Sander van der Leeuw, Ville d’ Antibes Centre de Recherches Archeologiques, Editions APDCA-Sophia Antipolis, pp. 435-452.

Zubrow et. al. 1995 “The biological reserve: The future's last stand” in *Futures*, vol. 27(4), pp. 437-446, Elsevier Science, Oxford England.

greater the discontinuity between the imagined rule systems and the actual operation of the place.

Globalization, Place and Conflict

Globalization has impacted these conflicts over place.

First, globalization has resulted in the more uniform sets of rules being applied to places. Western style standards for commercial markets⁹, parks, urban densities, and neighborhoods are tied to various trade and banking decisions. Even more importantly, is the increasing tendency to impose non-local rules and bureaucracies.

Second, globalization has legitimized the shift in the control of places from the public to the private domain by either actually turning over ownership of the places from the public to private or by rationalizing the separation of regulation from practice. In the latter case, there is maintenance of the reality or fiction of control through regulation while practice, process, and function has moved to the private market place.¹⁰

Figure 4.

Third, because of the reduction of transport costs and the improvement in communication there has been a restructuring of space-time relationships since the Washington Consensus and the relative location of places has shifted within the global patterning of capital accumulation. Places that were once secure as political and economic cities and centers, are now insecure and populations of these more insecure places look back to a golden age and hope for Messianic heroes. These insecure places include such cities as Hamilton, Sheffield, Minsk, and Lille to name a few.

Finally, it has increased the competitive needs to “sell” “places” in an increasingly economic and increasingly globalized market. Those who are located in a conflicted place have become acutely cognizant of the conflicted rule systems that apply. They are aware of their socially competitive disadvantage with places with less conflicted rule systems. Within the framework of trying to sell place, residents worry about what

⁹ We mean actual markets-the market places, the stores, the stalls, and the exchanges.

¹⁰ Generally, there is a difference between regulation and practice depending upon how place falls in the public domain or the private. Practice may not follow regulation. One need only look as far as the numerous “historically protected places” in Canada whose protection has disappeared under the onslaught of economic development in the market economy. The files of heritage agencies in many countries are filled with the cases of “protected buildings” that are “accidentally” destroyed by bulldozers that were inadvertently put into reverse. These “accidents” not only benefit the individual landowners but also are a mechanism for the unfettered use of the private goods. It is non-regulated transfer of resources from public sector to private sector. In short, there is great variation in how societies consider place and there has been considerable change through time.

package of physical and social infrastructures, labor qualities, that will bring development while satisfying their own needs and wants.

Conclusions:

There are some places that attract conflict and become icons and symbols for different political, environmental or cultural organizations. There seem to be pretty good explanations for why they become active sites of conflict. The changing nature of place over time and space has resulted in a mosaic of ownerships within a small area. Conflict occurs as differing rule systems are applied and as differing populations demand the rule systems from contiguous areas or from their romanticized pasts. Capitalism is essentially growth oriented and place status quo and community oriented. Thus, conflict is inevitable as new members of the place try to restructure it for their own needs. Globalization has accelerated these tendencies imposing increasingly external rule systems and moving ownership towards the private sector either by increasing individual ownership or by divorcing regulation from practice.

It is thus not surprising that politics of resistance are attached to small-scale communities. Where they are located become the symbols of alienation from the rationalizing, commodified, technocratic nation states and global organizations of modern capitalism. Ultimately, the relationships of power and identity at some places are problematic precisely because the state cannot always control the rule systems which it establishes at its extremities.

TYPES OF PLACES

TYPE OF ORGANIZATION

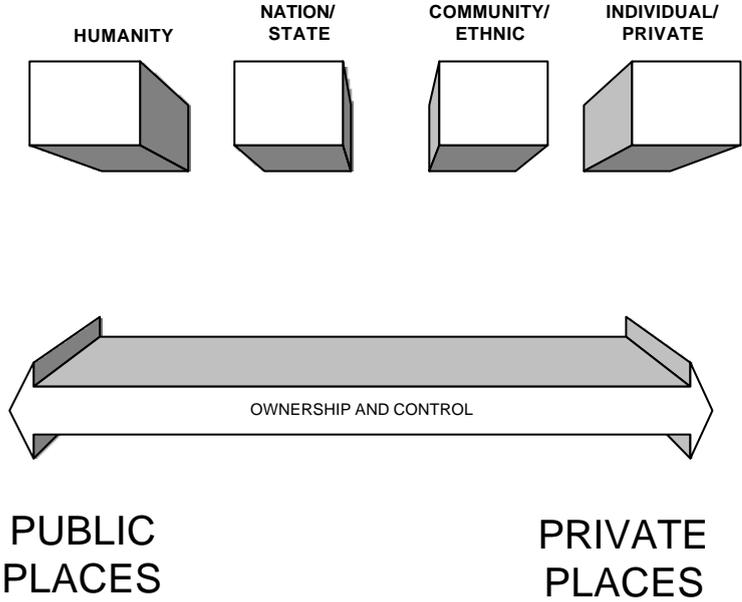


Figure 1. Types of Places – Organization, Ownership, and Control on the Public Private Continuum

CHANGING PLACES

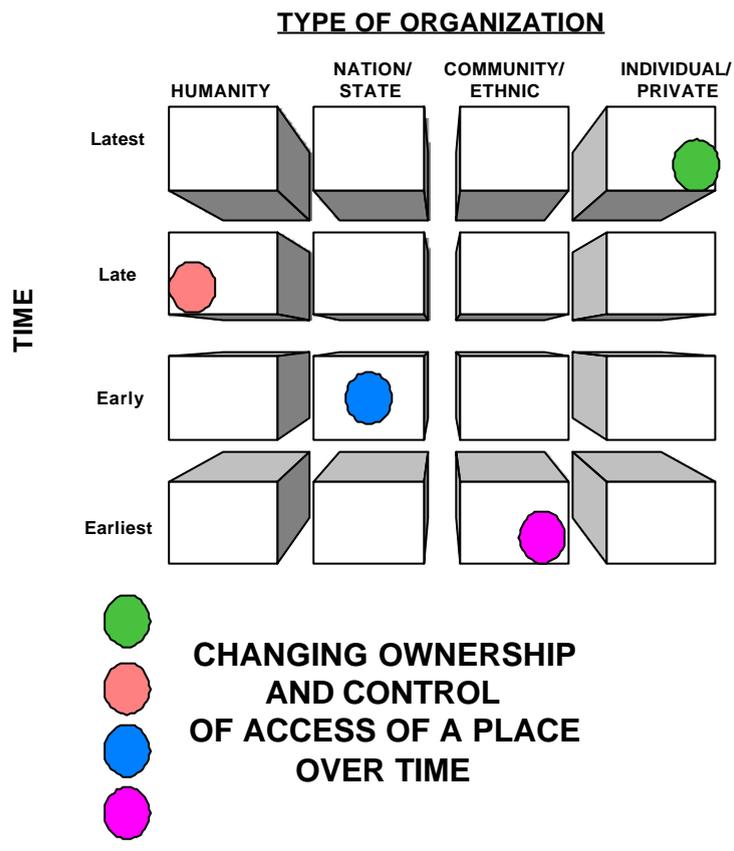


Figure2. Changing Places: Changing Ownership And Control Of Access Of A Place Over Time.

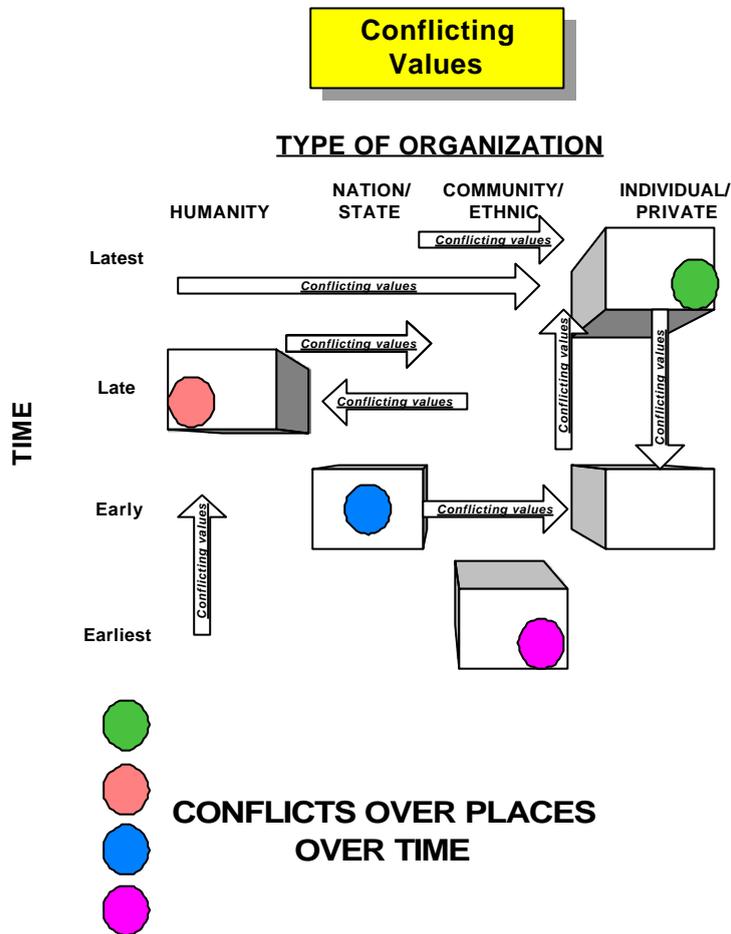


Figure 3: Conflicting Values: Conflicts over Places over Time

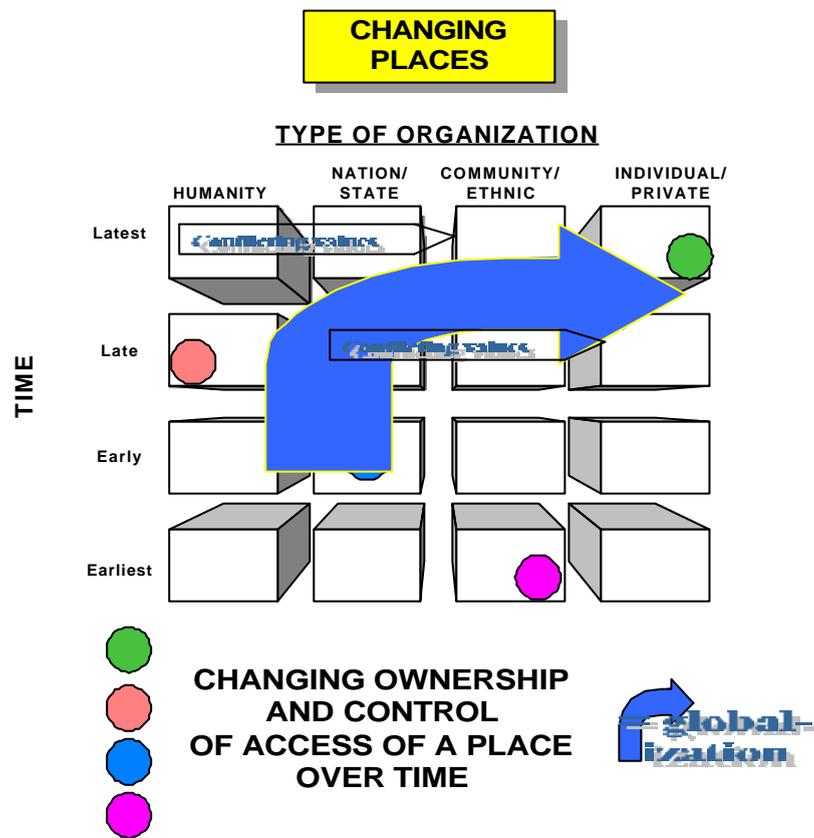


Figure 4. Changing Ownership and Conflicting Values Under Globalization