The Right to Terroir

Place and Identity in Times of Immigration and Globalization

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In order to describe a sense of connection with the local without denying dynamic physical and virtual interpersonal relationships, philosopher Marc Schuilenburg introduces the term *terroir*. Introducing *terroir* as a right makes it possible for new subjectifications to arise, with which the relationship between identity and places can be restored in this age of immigration and globalization.

The discussion about how a specific urban practice can lay claim to a distinct identity has thus far been neglected in the social sciences literature about immigration and globalization. Researchers have written plenty about the way in which immigration and globalization take place, but you could replace these terms with other general terms such as mobility. These writers also usually point out the influence of information and communication processes and the movement of people, goods and capital that this sets in motion. For example, in *Modernity at Large*, the Indian anthropologist Arjun Appadurai demonstrates how narratives and images from television, Internet and films prompt people to leave their homelands and head out in search of other destinations.[1] An important theme within that same literature is the debunking of the myth that the local dimension of life has disappeared because of migration and globalization. The interpretation of the local is indeed exposed to external influences, and the authority and sovereignty of national government has waned considerably, but in practice it turns out that local connections remain important for matters such as place and identity. Hence the global and the local find themselves in a permanent field of mutual tension. The mirroring of that tension, or the breaching of existing orders and the institution of new structures, is known as a process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization.

In this essay I examine the process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization on the basis of the term 'rhizomatics', which was coined by the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. To this end I primarily explore the reterritorialization aspect: the embedding of the local by means of establishing the creation of new relationships. By introducing the concept of *terroir* I introduce a conceptual shift in Deleuze and Guattari's legacy, proposing the term as a useful alternative in discussions about the consequences of migration and globalization.[2] This touches on the demise of traditional community relations and the alienation of the existence of the average person. It will become apparent that *terroir* allows a deeper reading of the relationship between place and identity in the context of these mobility processes. Finally, with the 'right to *terroir*' I advocate consideration of the productive aspect of these processes and thus for new articulations of communality.

Rhizome

The current debates about migration and globalization revolve to a large degree around the tension between the global and the local, between the homogeneous and the heterogeneous, or between the universal and the personal. More than 35 years ago, in order to thematize that tension, Deleuze and Guattari introduced the term 'rhizome' in their 1975 study into the work of the author Franz Kafka. [3] A year later they elaborated this concept further in 'Rhizome', a short essay which also appeared in an adapted form as the introduction to *Mille plateaux* (*A Thousand Plateaus*). The word 'rhizome' is a botanical term that literally means a rootstock. This rootstock is exceptional in that it grows horizontally rather than vertically and spreads its roots below ground over great distances in the form of inextricable tangles. This makes it impossible to trace back the structure of a rhizome to a single origin, core or centre. It has no beginning or end, but seems to simply start somewhere; it is always 'in the middle (*milieu*), between things, inter-being (*inter-être*), *intermezzo*,' write Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*. [4]

I have no desire to hold a philosophical disquisition about the appropriate or inappropriate use of the term here, but I do want to emphasize that Deleuze and Guattari contrast the image of a rhizome against a mind-set based on a tree structure, as encountered in Plato's two-worlds theory and Hegelian dialectics. This 'tree-thinking' is founded on a metaphysics in which the process-driven character of reality is always reduced to a single unit or a new whole. Proceeding from this, it then establishes a series of antitheses: 'subject-object', 'individual-group', 'personal-social', 'normal-abnormal' and so on. By extension, this thinking sets itself apart from the idea that reality *an sich* is never stable or static. Whitehead called this the 'fallacy of bifurcation', the attempt to subdivide reality into conceptually strict distinctions or predefined principles. [5] A major shortcoming of such an approach is that it adroitly but rather unsatisfactorily sidesteps an important problem, namely the process that precedes and shapes every form of arrangement. Hence it cannot explain how a specific structure has come about and acquired precisely this set of properties and no other. In response to this, rhizomatic thought actually operates through a multitude of intertwinings and intersections that are not predetermined. In other words this model assumes that everything 'differs' and views reality as a process that is in constant flux: its significance can only be determined in retrospect.

With the term 'rhizome', Deleuze and Guattari found a highly original image for phenomena for which there was still a shortage of adequate concepts. In the sense of migration and flows of capital, the fairly abstract concept of the rhizome has, not surprisingly, acquired a concrete and empirical translation. Well-known authors such as Manuel Castells, Saskia Sassen and David Harvey argue that these flows expand in every direction and are constantly crossing, influencing and reinforcing each other on a global scale. Another characteristic is that they mobilize and reconstitute the world, through migrants having to win their place in their new city from existing inhabitants, for example. It is also typical that the greater and the stronger the links with the local, the greater the chance that the same flows will continue to exist. Deleuze and Guattari rank among the few philosophers to have pointed out the interdependence of two processes in this regard: reterritorialization (connecting) and deterritorialization (disconnecting). In a more general sense, a rhizome is a movement that deterritorializes an old structure and reterritorializes it into a new structure. Deterritorialization is about liberating certain meanings and functions from existing relationships, which in most cases means that a field of dispositions is broken open by introducing new openings and establishing different connections. Such an uncoupling can, for example, arise around a specific theme – take the transfer of work to low-wage countries like Vietnam and India, for instance. However, the momentum of decomposition always corrects itself. Deleuze and Guattari call this reterritorialization, a process that brings about a unification of a social space, a certain cohesion of place and identity among the persons present. For example, the South Central district of Los Angeles has metamorphosed fairly swiftly from an African-American neighbourhood into a typical

Latino environment with all the attendant characteristics.

From Rhizome to Territory

Thinking rhizomatically opens up other perspectives for looking into the question of place and identity in an age of immigration and globalization. The meaning of these concepts has long been derived from the symbols and rituals of the nation-state. The state's values and norms were used to imbue meaning at the level of identity. In the latter decades of the twentieth century, the rhizomatic character of mobility was praised enthusiastically as a critique of this modernistic body of thought. A boundless world would be established in which one wall after another – ideological, physical, mental – would crumble. With that the idea of a global identity no longer defined by nation, family, language or religion would take root: the citizen was a world citizen and trade was world trade. Nowadays people think that matters are somewhat more complicated after all. This does not apply only at economic and political levels; it turns out that globalization bears an individual and emotional price tag as well. This makes it easy to link the idea of a world citizen with a 'McDonaldization' of our culture and thus with an increasing lack of identity and an uprooted existence. A discussion about place and identity must, in my opinion, navigate a middle course between the two positions. In a liquid world, to use Zygmunt Bauman's terminology,[6] how can the urge for community be actualized without lapsing into a naïve world citizenship on the one hand and a conservative debate about national values and norms on the other?

Proceeding from the process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, I wish to limit myself here to a discussion of actual places and more especially to the social context of two typical examples of the contemporary struggle for place and identity: the gated community and the *terrain vague*. What kind of communality is taking shape here? What signification is occurring in these spaces? The gated community is a continuation of a series of protected environments that enjoy access to a rich concentration of infrastructural services and amenities. This often involves a continuous spatial network of places with distinct social, cultural, physical and functional characteristics, such as residential domains, offices, VIP lounges, private jets, SUVs, hotels and golf courses. Examples of gated communities, where wealthy sections of the population fence themselves off from poorer city quarters, are to be found in Asian, African and Latin American cities. The densely populated city's chaos of traffic, scorching heat, criminality and noise pollution reigns outside, while inside one finds every imaginable amenity for a 'city within a city', a complex that is relatively independent of its location and immediate surroundings. The inhabitants of such complexes have 24 / 7 access to babysitters, support staff, a laundry service, a newspaper and magazine delivery service, clubhouses, car parks, car maintenance and shuttle-bus transportation. The physical traces that exclusion leaves behind in the process are typical: fences, barriers, moats, guarded gates and ID checks. The upshot is that groups which are less mobile – e.g. the unemployed, beggars, the homeless, drug addicts and failed asylum seekers – are perceived as a threat and denied access to the on-site facilities.[7]

The term I will use for the counterpart of the gated community is *terrain vague*. This term comes from the Spanish architect and critic Ignasi de Solà-Morales and refers to a zone that still has no fixed identity, a sort of between-land or residual space.[8] The intriguing thing about this term is that the word *terrain* refers to an enclosed space, while *vague* relates to the disruption of that same space. This dual meaning builds on the idea of a Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ), places meant for short-term use before local authorities seize control with their regulatory mania. In Hakim Bey's inspiring 1991 essay, *The Temporary Autonomous Zone*, he demonstrates that such places have a temporary openness allowing different groups to make unrestricted and undisturbed use of them: undesirable visitors are not excluded here. Like Solà-Morales, Bey was strongly influenced by the rhizomatic thinking of Deleuze and Guattari, and in this respect he speaks of 'a

temporary but actual location in time and a temporary but actual location in space.'[9] This vaguely defined place, whether a vacant, unused plot of land in the suburbs or an abandoned industrial site, has not been officially or definitively appropriated as yet and assumes a temporary elaboration. An important function of these fallow sites is that they provide space for collective activities and shelter for society's marginal groups. Familiar examples include quarters of East Berlin and the Free State of Christiania in Copenhagen, but autonomous associations or a virtual environment like the *World of Warcraft* video game can also fulfil the functions of a *terrain vague*.

It should be obvious that a gated community has little to do with what has been known as 'the public interest' since the eighteenth century. It is not an adequate response to a public problem such as a lack of safety, but primarily groups together the self-interest of its inhabitants. In addition, the *terrain vague* has much in common with a utopian-nostalgic conception of pre-modern forms of living and assumes a genuine desire for pirates' islands and free states. In any event, it is evident that what applies to the gated community also holds true for the *terrain vague*, where people lay claim to place and identity by taking destiny into their own hands. The principal effect of this – and this is the pivotal idea – is that a collective form of subjectivity evolves in these places. Living together in a zone that is demarcated from the outside world, such as a guarded urban district or a luxury housing project, can thus be traced back to a private need, but it is also defined by a community spirit and the wish to establish a collective style of living. In the case of the *terrain vague* this also involves the sharing of interests and a process of self-organization that, however transient, results in a new collectivity emerging there. This does raise the question of which concept can be employed to make concrete the claim to such places. For this I want to introduce a new term: *terroir*. While rhizomes continue to proliferate below ground, *terroir* relates to the specific qualities of a place, in a manner akin to rocks being able to assume the colour of the earth.

From Territory to *Terroir*

Anyone who has explored the world of wine must have come across the concept of *terroir*, which refers to everything associated with the grapevine's environment. Wine lovers consider *terroir* to be the most important hallmark of a fine wine. *Terroir* has been causing plenty of furore among wine tasters in recent decades, but it is one of the most complex terms in the world of wine. Surprisingly enough, there is no adequate English translation for the concept. Sometimes 'terrain' is used, and one can find examples of its translation as 'soil', 'land' and 'ground', but each of these terms is insufficiently specific to describe all the aspects of *terroir* fully. To gain a better understanding it is useful to look at the original French term properly. In the 1694 *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Françoise, dédié au Roy* it is defined as the typical quality or specificity (*odeur, goût*) of wine that is related to the quality of a place. Etymologically, the word *terroir* is a conflation of *tioroer* and *tieroir*, which are both derived from the Latin *terratorium*, a variant of *territorium*. The Latin *terra* means 'earth' or 'land', but what is it that actually contributes to a good *terroir*?

Terroir is related first and foremost to geographical and geological factors. In that regard it concerns the region where a vineyard is situated. It more specifically concerns the soil (clay, slate, sandstone, stones, limestone, marl, and so on) on which the vines grow. For example, how quickly can the soil absorb rainwater? In this regard you could also speak of a locale's natural capital. Surprisingly enough, the properties of a soil on, for example, the west side of a vineyard can be completely different to the soil on the south side of that same vineyard. The soil's colour might be different there and that, in turn, plays an important role in the absorption of sunlight. Dark soils absorb more sunlight than lighter soils and are more suitable to grape varieties for producing red wines. *Terroir* also denotes climatological factors, namely a country's climate and the average number of hours of sunshine and rain that a parcel of land is exposed to. *Terroir* is also linked to biological

factors such as the quality of the vines and the grape variety: the vines must be able to withstand drought, and white grapes require less sun than red, for example.

Human factors are also part of the equation. The craftsmanship, the whole ensemble of knowledge and expertise and passion for the work, to quote Richard Sennett,[10] plays an important part in the improvement of the conditions for the growth of the vines. Take, for example, the construction of terraces on steep slopes in order to gain greater solar exposure and the way the land is worked, such as the tackling of weeds and moulds. It is difficult to give a complete enumeration of human activities. The important thing is that *terroir* cannot exist without cultural and social capital, something that was already recognized by Louis XIV's military strategist, Sébastien Le Prestre de Vauban, in the seventeenth century: 'Left uncultivated, the best soil is no different to poor soil.'

There is, to conclude, a mystical aspect. People from many cultures regard wine and its consumption as a mystical symbol. 'I am the wine that I drink, and the cupbearer,' as the Persian mystic Abû Yazîd wrote in the ninth century. And in relation to *terroir* itself, the American geologist James Wilson mentions a spiritual aspect, which he describes as 'the joys, the heartbreak, the pride, the sweat, and the frustrations of its history,'[11] an aspect sometimes referred to as 'the soul of the place'.

In short, *terroir* is more than the soil alone; it points to social, mental and ecological processes – what Guattari terms an 'ecosophy' in *Chaosmose* [12] – which are always acting simultaneously and mutually affecting each other. No matter how different these processes may seem on the surface, they come together in the idea that under certain circumstances a specific place acquires meaning and direction and that these circumstances can also, to a certain extent, be altered so that the whole assumes a different actualization. Let us turn once again to the tradition of wine making. Technically speaking, parcels of land that are mere dozens of metres apart can produce wines that taste totally different, so the wine from the one plot is a completely different product to that from an adjacent plot. [13] This raises the question of whether one can talk in a comparable sense about other forms of organization and identification in our everyday surroundings.

The Right to *Terroir*

However scanty the signs may be, there is reason enough to take up the characteristics of *terroir* and thus give a positive thrust to the question of place and identity in times of immigration and globalization. It requires but a small step to translate the social, mental and ecological processes of *terroir* into an urban context and apply them to the varied multitude of meaningful places and groups of people in the city who often touch one another but do not overlap. The intriguing thing about places such as a gated community or a *terrain vague* is that there is a communal 'basis', a social cohesion or interpersonal connection expressed in the values and norms that apply locally, as is the case with private residential domains where inhabitants choose to encounter like-minded people. Surprisingly, it turns out that safety and security concerns are not a reason for this. Many people are more likely to be at a loss as to how to deal with the modern city's anonymity, so the craving for 'hospitableness' fosters an environment in which social contacts and neighbourhood bonds are formed more easily. [14] A second reason for *terroir* being of interest in this context is the fact that it allows for new subjectifications, in the form of a collective signification, for example. This is evident in the temporary use of zones undergoing restructuring as places to garden and recreate, which is a fine example of a *terrain vague*. Subjectification is produced somewhere in the interaction among the social, mental and ecological processes and must then be reproduced repeatedly in order for it to survive. [15] Communality is thus the interim 'outcome' of a local group process.

To avoid any misunderstanding, *terroir* does not correspond with a notion like *Blut und Boden* – 'Blood and Soil' – which refers to the link between descent (blood) and the land that would nourish a people. The vast majority of the world population has become far too mobile for such a static – and often radically nationalistic – definition. This means that mobility does not relate to migration and globalization alone; because of tele- and automobilization, a virtual and physical increase in scale has taken place in many people's social lives. Recognizing the universal problem of mobility therefore calls for a contextualizing approach to place and identity that shifts the emphasis to the dynamic relations between objects and persons. Henri Lefebvre's classic championing of the 'right to the city' can serve as a starting point for this. The right to the city, writes Lefebvre, is 'like a cry and a demand … a transformed and renewed right to urban life.'[16] This right implies a claim to places rich in qualities and utilitarian value, where there is time for encounter and social intercourse without commercial motives or a profit-and-loss mentality being involved. Lefebvre formulated the right to the city in response to the urbanization occurring around him and out of a desire to organize the social, economic and political relations in the city, as well as the decisions made about them, differently. Of particular relevance here is that he wanted to append this right to the right to education, to work and to a minimum standard of living.

What is now becoming especially apparent is how people can assert a right or lay claim to their actualization of *terroir*, in other words to the creation of social relationships and ways of life. In that regard several theorists refer to the production of 'the communal' (*le commun*), which is established via social connections and encounters. *Le commun* is strictly speaking what makes or produces a community, and not simply an attribute shared by all of its members. An entitlement to this is, in my opinion, made possible by translating Levebvre's argument from the 1970s into the 'right to *terroir*'.[17] Under the right to *terroir* we must then understand rights such as the 'right to community' (organizing life in small and meaningful places), the 'right to difference' (a tolerance towards practices that diverge from one another), the 'right to openness' (refraining from determining how places should look in several decades' time) and the 'right to citizenship' (linking rights and responsibilities to local practices). These rights tie in extremely well with the rhizomatic and opaque structure of migration and globalization. How one then conjoins and interlinks all these different *terroirs* is a pre-eminently practical challenge.

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Footnotes

1. A. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
2. My thanks to Mireille Hildebrandt for indicating the significance of *terroir*.
3. G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1975); trans. D. Polan as *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
4. G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie*, vol. 2 of *Mille plateaux* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1980), 30; trans. B. Massumi as *A Thousand Plateaus*, vol. 2 of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London / New York: Continuum, 1987).
5. A.N. Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964 [1920]).
6. Z. Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).
7. M. Schuilenburg, 'Citizenship Revisited: Denizens and Margizens', *Peace Review on Citizenship and Social Justice*, vol. 20 (2008) no. 3, 358–365.
8. I. de Solà-Morales, 'Terrain Vague', *Quaderns*, (1996) no. 212, 'Water-Land / Tierra-Agua', 34–44.
9. H. Bey, *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (New York: Autonomedia, 1991), 109.
10. R. Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven / London: Yale University Press, 2008).
11. J.E. Wilson, *Terroir: The Role of Geology, Climate, and Culture in the Making of French Wines* (London: Reed Consumer Books, 1998), 55.
12. F. Guattari, *Chaosmose* (Paris: Galilée, 1992); trans. P. Bains and J. Pefanis as *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995).
13. *Terroir* is now also used to denote the unique character of other products, such as the *terroirs* of fruit, tea, coffee, cheese and tequila. See, for example, J. Avelino et al., 'Effects of Slope Exposure, Altitude and Yield on Coffee Quality in Two Altitude Terroirs of Costa Rica, Orosi and Santa María de Dota', *Journal of the Science of Food and Agriculture*, vol. 85 (2005) no. 11, 1869–1876; H. Paxson, 'Locating Value in Artisan Cheese: Reverse Engineering Terroir for New-World Landscapes', *American Anthropologist*, vol. 112 (2010) no. 3, 444–457; S. Bowen and A.V. Zapata, 'Geographical Indications, Terroir, and Socioeconomic and Ecological Sustainability: The Case of Tequila', *Journal of Rural Studies*, vol. 25 (2009) no. 1, 108–119.
14. L. Bijlsma, M. Galle and J. Tennekes, 'De herbergzame ruimte van de stadswijk', *Justitiële verkenningen*, (2010) no. 5, 90–111.
15. The project initiated by the Dutch philosopher Henk Oosterling in Rotterdam's Bloemhof neighbourhood offers a fine example of this. Since 2008, children at the Bloemhof primary school have been taking lessons in judo, gardening, cookery and philosophy. The aim is to train pupils in skills and thus teach them to experience self-confidence and self-respect. See H. Oosterling, *Woorden als daden. Rotterdam Vakmanstad / Skillcity 2007–2009* (Rotterdam: Jap Sam Books, 2009).
16. H. Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, trans. E. Kofman and E. Lebas (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1996), 158. See also H. Lefebvre, *Le droit à la ville* (suivi de) *Espace et politique* (Paris: Éditions Anthropos, 1972).
17. Here it should be noted that recourse to the 'right to *terroir*' will proceed according to the rules and procedures of national government. In that sense the nation-state continues to serve an important function. The influence of citizens is largely achieved via the institutional framework of the nation-state, whether this involves elections or the judiciary.

Tags

Architecture, Commons, Control, Urban Space

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