

Sense of place and migratory histories. *Idiotopy* and *idiotope*.¹

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Abstract

Research on mobility often considers migration to be a discrete act by which individuals change their place of residence as a result of constraints or by decision. A richer approach would take into account the whole migratory process involved, the sequence of connected movements. However, between each of these movements there is a period of installation within a specific space of relationships, in a socially constructed place. Thus, the study of mobility becomes inseparable from the study of settlement or permanence. This paper establishes the interest in, and even the need for, elaborating concepts that express the interaction between people and places, and how these interactions contribute to an understanding of migratory movements and of "place histories". It also explores a pertinent methodological approach. Geographical identification (*idiotopy*) and place identification (*idiotope*) are proposed as useful concepts. Finally, qualitative methods would seem to provide the most useful tools for working with the variables involved in this kind of research.

Keywords: Migration; Place; Settlement; Idiotope; Place history; Qualitative methodology; Literature

1. The persistence of place in a globalised world.

When people are introduced to each other, a specific sentence often arises at a very early stage of the conversations: *Where are you from?* Equivalents are found in numerous languages: *D'ou êtes-vous?*; *¿De dónde eres?*; *Di dove sei?* *De que lugar você é?*; etc. No-one is ever surprised by this question, or by the wording involved, and everyone answers it more or less without hesitation. However, if we were to stop and think about it, we would realise that this sentence is actually laden with meaning.

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Indeed, we take it for granted that people *are* from somewhere, and that the fact that they are is a meaningful feature of the process of establishing any relationship, because their personality is involved in the fact that they are from a specific place. The question "Where are you from?" clearly refers to a geographical area, however it is not limited to a physical space but rather to one which is constructed socially.

Similarly, we can see that all biographical references – whether they are from an encyclopaedia, from a text which introduces the author of a book, from a genealogical tree or from other sources – start off with the person's place and date of birth; followed by the place and date of their death, where pertinent. Birth and death, space (in the sense of place) and time (personal – age – and historical), are the basic coordinates of any life trajectory.

Of course, although people answer this first question quite freely, and define themselves as *being* from a place that does not always coincide with their place of birth, biographical data always includes the place of birth as a simplified, but clear, approach to the initial place of reference in their lives².

In a world that certain people would like to consider globalised, the presence of place persists unyieldingly. Certain theoretical approaches which glorify the virtues of distopy deny the relevance of this persistence; or undermine its role by considering it simply an ethnic feature. Many people are unaware of the importance of this sense of place, however, it appears persistently in everyday reasoning³, and is a factor that must be taken into account, all other judgements aside.

The network of relationships that are constructed by people and by social groups do not happen in a void. They exist in time and space. They are based on both a common history and a common territory (Wolch; Dear, 1989). Everything and everyone owes their existence to – and can even be considered to be a product of – the time and the space in which they exist. People's relationships to space allow them to be there, to pass through it, to enter it and to exit it. Bonds of different intensities are established. We mark our territory, as it marks us, and thus a space becomes a place. Through this acting upon and being acted upon, the lives of people and the lives of social groups become intimately related to the places where they live, and where their ancestors lived⁴.

Space and place are two distinct concepts. Space is undetermined and place is limited and contained, although the limits may not always seem clear. Space simply *is*, whereas place *is socially constructed*. Place is where the physical substratum merges with the people that act upon it, that think about it, that give it a name, and to that name, its

² In this regard, we could also consider the fact that people living in a specific town, village or country acclaim the "illustrious" people that were born there, or who died there. They are rendered homage, monuments are dedicated to them and the relationships they have established there are the object of analyses.

³ On this subject, J. Lévy (1998) indicated that when people are interviewed about the *places* in their lives, they often simply talk about their lives. He adds: "En fait, notre rapport à l'espace est tellement fondamental, tellement prégnant, que nous avons tendance à ne pas le voir." ("In fact, our relationship to space is so fundamental, so all-encompassing, that we tend not to notice it.") (p. 193)

⁴ In some cases, it is true that people can remain completely apart from the place where they live. They perpetuate the state of just passing through, are usually rather insensitive to the place, and keep all their bonds and support systems elsewhere.

contents; with the people that recognise it and recognise themselves in it; and that inhabit it individually and collectively in such a way that their existence is structured by reference to this substratum. Therefore, unlike space, place has a personal temporality, a history (Crang, 1998, p. 103). Place can be conceived as the inscription of a collective history and of individual and personal histories in space⁵.

2. The study of migration and the duality of permanence and mobility.

Space and time are the basic coordinates of all social phenomena. However, in the specific case of the study of spatial mobility, these variables are not simply reference points that allow us to locate a social event, but are actually intrinsic elements that define its very existence. Mobility consists of moving, at a certain moment, from one place where a period of time has been spent – be it longer or shorter – to another place where one arrives and will spend another period of time which has yet to be decided. One cannot consider mobility without considering the periods of permanence spent in these places.

Thus, we move from the classical analysis of migratory movements as discrete, isolated acts by which people change their place of residence because of a series of constraints or decisions, to another analysis of migrations as events that take place in time. This is a richer approach, as it considers the whole migratory process as a sequence of movements that are linked to each other by periods of settlement, which entail relationships in socially constructed places. The study of mobility is, thus, inseparable from the study of permanence, of settlement, of establishment.

In this context, it is essential to look at the role of place in migration. It would offer an overall understanding of the interrelationships established by people – individually and collectively – with the places where they live and have lived, through which they pass, about which they think, and where their ancestors are buried; and which lead to a socio-territorial inscription of their lives as a whole, in which the territory is not just the material foundation but is rather an element in the way one positions one's self in the world. From this point of view, the role of what we shall call *idiotope* is essential.

3. Sequence and hierarchy of places. *Idiotopy* and *itiotope*.

In the course of a lifetime one is involved with not just one but with many different places. These different places do not all appear at the same time, nor do they carry the same weight or significance.

From the point of view of personal time, there are certain places that are present simultaneously, more or less juxtaposed, or even intersecting. However, there are also places that appear sequentially, often with variable periods of overlap. Certain places

⁵ It is also interesting to notice how this is expressed in certain specific cultures: "In Aboriginal belief, an unsung land is a dead land: since, if the sons are forgotten, the land itself will die. To allow that to happen was the worst of all possible crimes, (...)" (Bruce Chatwin, *The Songlines*, London, Vintage, 1998, p. 52. First edition: Jonathan Cape, 1987)

are left behind, as other new ones appear⁶. Nevertheless, those that are left behind leave their marks and their remainders, to a greater or lesser degree, apparent to the subjects or not, subtle or obvious – which act upon different levels of consciousness. The impact of new places often seems to erase the presence of former places⁷, however they do remain, as layers hidden under the newer contributions. The deeper layers are still there, and are the foundations upon which the newer layers are built⁸.

It is clear that there are places that leave deeper marks than others and that some places are more deeply marked than others by people staying there or passing through. Places have a hierarchical nature among them, which can certainly be modified, but which is remarkably persistent within one's personal history. There are places that stand out from others as basic reference points: they are places of preference. Some of them seem to be our "own" places, and this does not imply possession but rather affection.

Humans are neither ubiquitous nor ethereal. They are neither from nowhere nor from everywhere. There are places with which people develop what we suggest to be called geographical identifications or *idiotopies* (from the Greek *ídios*, specific, unique, pertaining to one's self; and *topos*, place), as a concise and etymologically exact expression of the belonging of people to a place and the belonging of a place to people⁹. We could, then, call one's own place an *idiotope*.

The notion of idiotope refers necessarily to uniqueness. Uniqueness is not predetermined, a factor of fate, but rather of choice. The place (or places) that is each social subject's own place gives them a reference system that is specific, unique, non-universal. Having one, and knowing it, does not mean ignoring that there are, at least in theory, an infinite number of other possible places. On the contrary, recognising one allows us to recognise others, and understand the importance they may hold for someone else¹⁰. Yet, the uniqueness of one's own place does not keep it from being shared with others¹¹; it is not exclusive, and that is how it acquires a social sense: a feeling, a memory or a shared consciousness.

⁶ Past places are subject to modification by memory. Memory is imprecise, it lapses and invents, whether unconsciously or deliberately.

Moreover, one must take into account that the human capacity to imagine and to invent is so intense that sometimes, paradoxically, the *absence* of a place (or of a person) becomes more intense, more meaningful, than its *presence*. Absence can make what is absent more present than presence.

⁷ See the text by José Saramago, *O Ano da Morte de Ricardo Reis*, in the Appendix.

⁸ See the texts by Jorge Borges in the Appendix.

⁹ It is always risky to formulate ideas universally, without referring to a specific society. One could imagine, for example, that in the United States, relationships to places are weaker. People often move, seem less attached to the idea of home, town, and city. The internal migration rate is extremely high. However, their country is clearly their country.

In fact, it is difficult to conceive of a social subject who would completely disregard place references. At least some sort of place reference would always be present, although it be mobile, for instance a boat (the case of the pianist in the novel by Alessandro Baricco *Oceano mare*, or of the sailor in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*).

¹⁰ This could be compared to the bond between a mother and her child. It is specific to them, unique, however they are not oblivious to the fact that there are a myriad of other parent-child relationships. Instead, it furthers their understanding of these relationships. And idiotope is not at all related to localism; on the contrary, it provides a solid basis from which to reach outwards.

¹¹ Who also consider it their own place or a secondary place of reference. These two different ways of experiencing a place sometimes creates tensions.

An idiotope is not a once-in-a-lifetime phenomenon. It is a process of election and of recognition – even if it coincides with one's birth place or if one's choices are very limited¹². At the outset, the place where people arrive is almost free of reference points. Gradually, these people begin to "take possession" of the space, and begin to find areas within this space where they feel less like strangers. They begin to know people from the place and to be known by them, and start building networks. However, they still have a long way to go before they can consider themselves as beginning to inhabit the place (Perec, 1974, p. 88), and even longer before it becomes an idiotope. It is also often difficult to define what is behind one's bonds with a place.¹³

Between the "first" place, one's place of birth or place of origin, and the places that follow, there is a relationship of simultaneous accumulation and sifting of personal experiences. The questions that arise are: "How is geographical identification constructed?" "Why is it that, among the different places in one's life, there are certain places that stand out from others?"

It is important to point out that geographical identification falls within a conceptual field that is different from that of socio-cultural or political identity. Idiopathy is more personal, even individual, and it is freer. The idea of collective identity moves into more ideological, more essentialist and more political areas¹⁴. It is true, however, that for certain people geographical identification and social identity are closely connected. There is not a great gap between them, but the difference that does exist is one of the factors that makes the concept of idiopathy so interesting for demogeographical studies.

4. Boundaries and scale.

As vague as a place may be, it needs boundaries. These may be flexible or diffuse, but, by definition, they must exist. A place without boundaries is not a place. Even a network of places has boundaries. These boundaries are a condition for recognition. People – individually and collectively – must be able to distinguish between being within or outside of these bounds.

However, a place is not a territory and, theoretically, it need not be defended. It has boundaries, but not borders: the differences are not what matter. Because we are not dealing with social identities, the boundaries of idiotopes do not lead to exclusion or struggles for possession. An idiotope does not grant rights, nor is it likely to create obligations. The formation of an idiotope is not an act of power but rather of personal

¹² This would then be the process of giving meaning to the "accident" of being born in a specific place, or of having been taken there.

¹³ "J'aime ma ville, mais je ne saurais dire exactement ce que j'y aime. Je ne pense pas que ça soit l'odeur. Je suis trop habitué aux monuments pour avoir envie de les regarder. J'aime certaines lumières, quelques ponts, des terrasses de cafés. J'aime beaucoup passer dans un endroit que je n'ai pas vu depuis longtemps" (*"I love my town, however I don't know what it is exactly that I love about it. I don't think it's how it smells. I'm so used to seeing the monuments that I don't want to look at them. I love certain lights, certain bridges, the outdoor cafés. I certainly love going somewhere where I haven't been for a while."*) (Perec, 1974, p. 87, about Paris)

¹⁴ This proposition has certain points in common with Stuart Hall's (1996) approach, applied in his case, to social identity.

definition which does not appear to encourage separation but rather brings people together who share a same place reference.

To understand place in general and specifically idiotopes, the concept of scale must also be taken into account. A place of identification may be a specific spot, or a vast area, if it is meaningful. Frequently, one can refer to concentric spaces, with a centre and a surrounding area that extends outwardly in ever increasing circles and which may be uniform or follow a preferential axis. In theory, the more a place is one's own, the more details one sees in it and the more one breaks it up into smaller components. (Brunet, Ferras, Théry, 1992, p. 273). A child grows up extending the boundaries of his/her place and at the same time discovers its multiple components, however with age the central core is often reinforced.

A person's first place may be his/her home¹⁵, or even room or bed. Bachelard (1957) refers to the nooks in a home, where one loves to curl up (p. 130). They are not geographical locations, but they definitely are somewhere. Nonetheless, they would not be considered idiotopes because they are exclusive and create certain rights. An idiotope starts outside one's home; it is a personal place that can be 'touched', where things have a name, where one feels at home. Beyond that, there are places that may also be one's own, with unclear boundaries, which sometimes extend in keeping to the distance travelled.

5. The role of place in the construction of migratory histories.

a) Territoriality in people's lives

We maintain that mobility, as part of a life history, is constructed around certain places, which *exist* insofar as they are inhabited. In every life history there are places, and they do not each have the same role. We have already referred to the difference in their importance, to hierarchy and to place identification (idiotope).

The idea is that from the moment one is born there are factors in life that favour permanence in a place and others that hinder it. The interaction of these factors results in a story of successive periods of permanence and mobility which is sometimes known as migratory history – leaving out one of the terms of the binomial – which we suggest could more exactly be called 'place history'. This takes place on an individual level, however, the general framework is certainly collective. Seen in this way, migration can be conceived as a complex mechanism by which population adjusts to the social organisation of space (Cardelús; Pascual de Sans; Solana Solana, 1999, p. 123).

One could say that people's lives are spent in the places where they live or where they study or work, places with which they have some sort of relationship. What we propose is that a life history, and specifically a migratory history, is shaped around the interaction with places – and most especially through the construction of geographical

¹⁵ Italo Calvino, in his short story, 'La formica argentina', wrote, "(...) casa mia, pur infestata com'era, la sentivo per la prima volta casa mia davvero, un posto dove si torna dicendo: finalmente." ("*...*) for the first time, I felt that my house, as infested as it was, was really my home, a place I come back to saying: at last") (*La nuvola di smog e La formica argentina*, Turin, Einaudi, 1958, p. 105)

identifications – and is guided in large part by the existence of idiotopes. Thus migratory history becomes a ‘place history’.

It is interesting to note that there are words that describe the ways people move from place to place, which make explicit reference to those idiotopes. One speaks of exodus, of exile, of return, of refuge, of "destierro" in Spanish, of diaspora. People have their own place, and sometimes leave it; they may come upon other places where they hope to be welcomed; and they sometimes have places they hope to recover.

Every person is born in a specific place, which they obviously do not choose. It is given to them. It may be the place one's parents or other ancestors are from, or were passing through. That person may stay in that place and begin growing up there, and the place may thus become their personal place of origin. Or a person may leave it at a very young age – probably with their parents – and grow up somewhere else, which then becomes their place of origin. On a poetic note, Antonio Machado expresses his basic bond to a place through love: "Mi corazón está donde ha nacido, / no a la vida, al amor, cerca del Duero..." ("My heart is where it was born, not to life, but to love, by the Duero River..."¹⁶, even though several years earlier he had written: " (...) / en estos campos de mi Andalucía, / ¡oh, tierra en que nací!, cantar quisiera.", ("I wish I could sing in those fields of my Andalusia, oh land where I was born,"¹⁷ And according to Australian aborigines, "the definition of a man's 'own country' was 'the place in which I do not have to ask' ".¹⁸

Other places may appear during the course of people's lives, or not. Certain ones will be chosen, others will be imposed; some are searched out, others are discovered by chance or through circumstantial moves. People may remain in places, voluntarily or by force, or may leave them behind, feeling more or less attachment. They may return to them, or may not. Among all the different places, there will be one – often only one – that acts as a central reference point and is often recognised as such, as a place with which one has a privileged bond: it is a place of identification or idiotope¹⁹. Finally, there is a place where one dies. Often one chooses where they would like that place to be, and reaches it or not. But sometimes one is simply there. However, it is not like a place of birth: the place where one dies has to do with the life that comes to an end at that point.

A place of identification or idiotope can certainly be one's place of birth and we often assume that it is, either for the sake of simplicity or for lack of data. It can also be one's place of origin, if it differs from the place of birth. However it is also possible for it to be neither of these places, but instead a chosen place, adopted and adoptive, that is encountered over the course of a lifetime; one that may have to do with one's ancestors but may also be completely new.

It is also conceivable for several idiotopes to exist simultaneously. For example, a nearby place of identification, one close at hand; and a place that serves as a distant

¹⁶ *Los sueños dialogados, II* (Seville, 1919), in *Poesías completas*, Madrid, Espasa Calpe, 1928, p. 318.

¹⁷ *Campos de Castilla, CXXV (1907-1917)*, in *Poesías completas*, Madrid, Espasa Calpe, 1928, p. 177.

¹⁸ Bruce Chatwin, *The Songlines*, London, Vintage, 1998, p. 56. (First edition in English, Jonathan Cape, 1987).

¹⁹ It is conceivable that this place does not exist for certain people: for example, those whose lives have jostled them about too much, who have moved too much, and who end up not recognising themselves as being from any place.

reference, that is there, but that will rarely be reached. Just as we refer to a place, we could refer to a constellation of places connected by links forming a network (Lévy, 1998); a network, however, like those of true nomads, who have a strong sense of place because their movements are circumscribed within an area that they know well.

b) Specificities of the present moment

In modern society the relationship between mobility and sense of place often becomes more complex. The so-called new nomads – executives, for example – have weaker links to the places they pass through (Tuan, 1977; Bauman, 1998). They are more like itinerants or wanderers. It must also be said that for some of the population from wealthier countries, territorial reference is weaker than it was in the past. Today a person can travel in just one day through places that, a few decades ago, would have taken weeks or months to reach. A person is pulled by a myriad of places and since the capacity for fantasy does not change and it does not admit large numbers, tension ensues and an infinite nostalgia sometimes follows, as the Polish poet Wislawa Szymborska might say²⁰. And then there are places, fortunately, that one ignores, that one knows nothing about, that “do not exist”.

The multiplicity of places in modern life is so present that many of them are simply accidental secondary places, even though one might spend time there. They are weak places, to borrow Jacques Lévy’s term (2000, p. 170). The cumulative weight these places carry may thus stifle the idiope, or so it may appear. This may go on forever, or later in life the idiope may reappear, and be recovered.

One might wonder what effect longer life expectations will have on the importance of idiope in place histories. It is well known that youth is the period of mobility. Does permanence in a place at an older age contribute to transferring the idiope there?²¹

c) The geometry of place history

What organises geometry, or the map of the places in which a life unfolds? Except for cases involving serious constraints, people are faced with a continuous choice between two possibilities: staying where they are (anchorage) or moving on to another place (migration). Permanence and settlement bring with them many options, as does mobility. There are multiple elements in play with regard to a place: factors of attraction, of bonding (rooting), and factors of removal and rupture. There are elements that make moving easier (for example, migratory networks, prior knowledge of the place) and others that make it more difficult (for example, family ties in a place). What are decisions based upon? What takes people to a place and what encourages them to stay?

It is neither work, nor health, nor family ... it is much more, and is much more difficult to grasp. That is why migration cannot be considered insignificant, nor is it insignificant that movements are prevented or prohibited: place assignment.

²⁰ ‘Un gran nombre’, *Vista amb un gra de sorra*, Barcelona, Columna, 1997, p. 105. A selection of poems from different anthologies translated from Polish into Catalan.

²¹ This idea was suggested to me by Anna Cabré in a conversation when I mentioned this text, which I was at the point of completing.

A person's place of birth is not a decisive factor, but nor is it irrelevant. One's place of origin is much more important. The interplay of influences begins further down the line. It must also be said that people are often torn by conflicting feelings about permanence and mobility; decisions are not easy; they hesitate, sometimes turning back, and feel divided. Numerous literary texts reflect this tension. The hypothesis supported here is that, generally, *an idiotope is a crucial organising factor*.

In the course of a lifetime, what places represent – and what guides people's connection to them – changes considerably. When one is a young child, a place is everything; his whole world. Later, some things take on more importance than others, depending on the stage in one's life cycle:

Youth: possibilities of promotion; adventure; discovery

Adulthood: security (ownership; work)

Old age: sentiment, emotional bonds: recovery of one's attraction to known places, to recurrent places and/or to the idiotope.

Finally, the map is plotted out, with all its gradations, continuities, ruptures, reiterations or, at times, with its pure simplicity.

It is clear that in this type of approach, the distinction between internal migration and international migration loses much of its meaning. From the point of view of a story of relationships to places, administrative circumstances are an external factor and are not determining.

6. A tentative systematisation of places and of relationships to place.

Obviously, there is a wide variety of places, and numerous ways to classify them, according to different criteria. All the possibilities cannot be explored here. By way of a first approximation, we present certain major distinctions – as seen from the point of view of the subject – that are classified into large categories which could obviously be further broken down into sub-categories with more nuances. Idiotope certainly holds an important place among these categories.

- Place of birth / other place
- Place of origin / later place
- Place of identification (*idiotope*) / secondary “own” place / place pertaining to others
- Personal place / ancestors' place / descendants' place
- Inherited place / elected place / assigned or imposed place / place one is taken to / found place (fortuitous)
- Place of permanence / place of passage
- Present place / past place / projected place²²
- Place lived in / place envisaged, imagined
- Place where one has (or has had) experiences / irrelevant place

²² The reason for the choice being either precise or vague: for example, to retire there some day.

Obviously, these taxonomies are not mutually exclusive. Quite on the contrary, they are closely linked. Every place belongs to several categories at the same time; by combining them, typologies can be constructed. It is also clear that during the course of a lifetime the same place can move from one category to another in this classification. Thus, for example, a place that was originally a place of passage can become a place of permanence.

We can now briefly attempt to classify some of the elements that are in play in the interaction that people and primary social groups – such as domestic units – maintain with places. The list is not exhaustive: it is simply intended as one possible approach to analysis.

a) Factors affecting the ways of relating to places (positively or negatively):

- Physical surroundings: climate, territory, landscape
- Personal emotional environment: loves/hatreds, friends/enemies, family (living or deceased), memories, familiarity with the present place and other places
- Collective context: projects, customs, laws, social and political circumstances and events
- Material situation (real and potential): production, property (land, house, business), salary
- Social situation (real and potential): living conditions, social relationships, gender, socio-cultural identity, activities of engagement in (education, work), contacts
- Stage in life cycle

b) Feelings that can develop vis-à-vis a place (where one lives, to which one arrives, from which one leaves):

- Enjoyment, pleasure
- Well-being
- Surprise, curiosity
- Fascination
- Rejection, discomfort
- Oppression, feeling stifled
- Contempt
- Indifference, distance
- Incomprehension
- Depredation

(It must be noted that people are more critical and demanding of their own place than of others, and that distance mitigates negative evaluations.)

c) Attitudes vis-à-vis staying in a place:

- Permanence
- Departure
- Escape
- Seeking out, attraction
- Return
- Refuge

The way in which these elements are combined is variable, depending upon personal characteristics and circumstances, and upon the environment.

What about the relationship to time? It has been mentioned above. Tuan (1977, p. 185) expresses it as follows: “Many years in one place may leave few memory traces that we can or would wish to recall; an intense experience of short duration, on the other hand, can alter our lives. This is a fact to bear in mind. Another is this. In relating the passage of time to the experience of place it is obviously necessary to take the human life cycle into account: ten years in childhood are not the same as ten years in youth or manhood.”

With regard to decision-making – when the subject or the family circle or another circle makes the decision – a distinction should be made between the decision to move and the decision about where to move. The order in which these two decisions are made is also relevant to a better understanding of the story. Similarly, what motivated the decision should be established, as should the final catalyst.

7. The interest and pertinence of qualitative methodology in the proposed approach.

Of the three basic processes that demography studies – reproduction, mortality and mobility – demographers encounter most difficulties when dealing with the last. This is true to such an extent that, as Robinson states it (1996, p. xiv), “the absence of a sustained tradition of migration research within demography has undoubtedly left the field open to be inherited by others”, referring in this case to geographers.

Nonetheless, a considerable number of studies have been carried out, mostly in the area of quantitative analysis. What are not so common – and are of interest here – are the investigations that approach the study of migrations from a longitudinal point of view, taking into account not only the changes in geographical places, but also the periods of permanence and the things that happen around the migratory history and the life cycle. The studies by Daniel Courgeau and Eva Lelièvre (1989) are a perfect example.

However, the body of data provided by institutions of statistics, as well as that derived from census material or obtained through biographical surveys using standardised questionnaires (in France, the so-called *triple biographie*, in Spain the *Encuesta Sociodemográfica*) is not sufficient for one to comprehend the enormous complexity of personal histories. Even Courgeau mentions the limitations of these surveys at the end of his article on the connections between life cycle and migrations and he calls for “une analyse plus approfondie des liens qui s’établissent entre un individu et sa communauté d’accueil” (“a deeper analysis of the bonds that are established between an individual and the receiving community”) (1984, p. 508).

As Yi-Fu Tuan (1974) also indicated, we are still very ignorant about the quality and variety of experiences with regard to place.²³ As to the logic behind movement and permanence, it is obvious that one must go beyond simply considering the motives

²³ He uses the concept *topophilia* in a positive manner, when he says: “The term *topophilia* couples sentiment with place” (p. 113).

expressed by individuals when they are questioned. Numerous factors of very different orders and which are at work at different levels of consciousness must be taken into account to be able to understand the decisions made by people and domestic units throughout time.

It is precisely qualitative methodology that stresses a deep knowledge and allows for a more subtle elaboration of fine concepts. Therefore, the approach we propose involves using in-depth personal interviews, while constructing life stories and thematic life histories focused on place (even though we have mentioned – see note 3 – that places often lead to a *whole*, to complete stories). Group interviews (focus groups) could also be part of the approach.

The work on the resultant texts – with the analytical techniques established – allows us to study how space is experienced; to analyse decisions about moving; to examine the different place references. How does the subject define and delimit them? How does he/she refer to them directly or indirectly? It also lets us detect and follow the explicit or implicit references to the *idiotopie*; to see how it acts – or if it is absent – in the overall place history. In short, the study is concerned with testing concepts, categories, proposed typologies; with elaborating others; and finally with coming to a deeper knowledge of the matters undertaken. Additionally, what is suggested by qualitative analysis can be, where pertinent, applied and contrasted with quantitative analysis.

Thus texts can be custom made, written from surveys that speak about places. However, we can also use – why not? – texts constructed in the manner of egodocuments: personal diaries, memories, autobiographies. Other useful sources are literary texts, biographies, novels and films, in which authors express themselves directly or through their characters²⁴. This material can be analysed freely or more systematically. Songs and expressions from everyday life are also full of references to the bonds that exist among people and certain places, be they places of birth, or places of childhood or first loves. It is very interesting material, and also represents reality. This is not the place to discuss the methodology of the control that researchers have over this material, which has already been dealt with elsewhere by methodologists. The question is whether it leads us to a better understanding of relationships to places. The answer proposed here is clearly affirmative.

In the way of examples of this last type of document, we have included an appendix with several non-academic texts, chosen from a wealth of possibilities. They refer in other ways – often very rich and full of nuances – to what has been put forward here. They are an addition to the passages cited in this article, and provide expressions of the interaction among people and places, of the preferential relationship to certain places, of the sequences, the maps, the networks and, above all, of the power – by presence or absence – and the unyielding persistence of the *idiotopie*, all of which lead to a deeper understanding of place and its role in people's lives, and lend support to the concepts and categories proposed here.

²⁴ It is worthwhile going back to the classical text by Paul White (1985) on the use of literature by geographers. Having observed how it is used in connection to the concept of 'place', he arrives at its potential use in the study of migration. He illustrates the subject with examples taken from novels. Fabio Lando (1996) gathered the bibliography on the relationship between geography and literature.

8. Conclusions.

To turn the study of migration in the direction of the study of what is known as migratory histories, and to do so from the point of view of the dynamics of population settlement / mobility, proves to be a very rich approach which fits well with the actual characteristics of the phenomenon. Migration is thus seen as a phenomenon made up of periods of permanence and periods of movement. It is shaped around the interaction that people and social groups maintain with places.

We have presented an exploratory text on the subject and an approximation to methodology. The analysis of 'place history' is proposed to advance the global understanding of this interrelationship that people weave – individually and collectively – with the places where they live and have lived, through which they pass, about which they think, and where their ancestors are buried, and results in a socio-territorial inscription of their lives as a whole, where territory is not just the material foundation but an element that is part of the way one places one's self in the world.

Of all the places in a person's life, certain ones stand out from the others as a basic reference. They are places with which one develops what we suggest could be called a geographical identification or *idiotopy* (from the Greek, *ídios*, particular, one's own, singular, and *topos*, place), as a concise and etymologically exact expression of the belonging of people to places and of places to people. One's 'own' place, then, could be an *idiotope*.

The idea maintained here is that a life history – and specifically a migratory history – is shaped around the interaction with places, especially through the construction of geographical identifications, and is largely guided by the existence of idiotopes that act as one of the leading strands.

With the proposed approach, qualitative methodology seems to be the most pertinent. It can be applied to the analysis of biographies, whether they are already-constructed texts or life stories and life histories. Furthermore, literature, cinema, songs, and expressions from everyday life are full of references to the bonds that exist between people and certain places. It is very interesting material, a small sample of which has been included in the appendix. We have also put forward elements with which to work on this material in keeping with this approach.

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Appendix. Passages.

Note: Citations have been included from a variety of languages, all in their original versions.

Passage 1

Manchmal, wenn mich ein neugieriges Verlangen nach solchen abenteuerlichen Dingen anwandelte, habe ich den Reisenden beneidet, der solche Wunder mit andern Wundern in lebendiger alltäglicher Verbindung sieht. Aber auch er wird ein anderer Mensch. Es wandelt niemand ungestraft unter Palmen, und die Gesinnungen ändern sich gewiss in einem Lande, wo Elefanten und Tiger zu Hause sind.

J.W. Goethe, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, Insel Verlag, 1972, p. 174.

Passage 2

(...) Sabe porém Ricardo Reis o que saudades destas costumam valer, tudo vai é dos hábitos, o hábito que se perde, o hábito que se ganha, está há tão pouco tempo em Lisboa, menos de três meses, e já o Rio de Janeiro lhe parece uma lembrança de um passado antigo, talvez doutra vida, não a sua, outra das inúmeras, (...).

José Saramago, *O Ano da Morte de Ricardo Reis*, Lisbon, Caminho, 1984, p. 205

Passage 3

(...) Se tivesse aqui um mapa da cidade já poderia / assinalar os cinco primeiros pontos de passagem averiguados, dois na rua onde a menina do retrato nasceu, outro no colégio, agora estes, o princípio de um desenho como o de todas as vidas, feito de linhas quebradas, de cruzamentos, de intersecções, mas nunca de bifurcações, porque o espírito não vai a lado nenhum sem as pernas do corpo, e o corpo não seria capaz de mover-se se lhe faltassem as asas do espírito.(...)

José Saramago, *Todos os Nomes*, Lisbon, Caminho, 1998 (7th ed.), pp. 73/74 (1st ed. 1997).

Passage 4

White men, he began, made the common mistake of assuming that, because the Aborigines were wanderers, they could have no system of land tenure. This was nonsense.

Aboriginals, it was true, could not imagine territory as a block of land hemmed in by frontiers: but rather as an interlocking network of 'lines' or 'ways through'.

Bruce Chatwin, *The songlines*, London, Vintage, 1998, p. 56. (1st ed. in English: Jonathan Cape, 1987)

Passage 5

Creo que les hace falta un sitio. Un sitio suyo. Aquello era importante. Una casa en la que yo sintiera que soy de allí y que soy lo que soy y que lo que soy está allí. Porque todos somos de algún sitio, como los árboles.

Eduardo Chillida, Basque sculptor explaining his search for an outdoor space in which to keep his work, which until that time was scattered in different places. *La Vanguardia*, 25.08.89.

Passage 6

Corrandes d'exili

(...)

A Catalunya deixí
el dia de ma partida
mitja vida condormida:
l'altra meitat vingué amb mi
per no deixar-me sens vida.

Avui en terres de França
i demà més lluny potser,
no em moriré d'enyorança
ans d'enyorança viuré.

(...)

"Pere Quart" (Joan Oliver), 'Saló de tardor' a *Poemes escollits*, Barcelona, Edicions 62, 1983, p. 50.

Passage 7

Los sueños

Mi cuerpo físico puede estar en Lucerna, en Colorado o en el Cairo, pero al despertarme cada mañana, al retomar el hábito de ser Borges, emerjo invariablemente de un sueño que ocurre en Buenos Aires. Las imágenes pueden ser cordilleras, ciénagas con andamios, escaleras de caracol que se hunden en sótanos, médanos cuyas arenas debo contar, pero cualquiera de esas cosas es una bocacalle precisa del barrio de Palermo o del Sur. En la vigilia estoy siempre en el centro de una vaga neblina luminosa de tinte gris o azul; veo en los sueños o converso con muertos, sin que ninguna de estas cosas me asombre. Nunca sueño con el presente sino con un Buenos Aires pretérito y con las galerías y claraboyas de la Biblioteca Nacional en la calle México. ¿Quiere todo esto decir que, más allá de mi voluntad y de mi conciencia, soy irremediablemente, incomprensiblemente porteño?

Jorge Luís Borges, *Atlas* (1984). *Obras completas 1976-1985*, Barcelona, Círculo de Lectores, 1993, p. 338.

Passage 8

Un hombre se propone la tarea de dibujar el mundo. A lo largo de los años, puebla un espacio con imágenes de provincias, de reinos, de montañas, de bahías, de naves, de islas, de peces, de habitaciones, de instrumentos, de astros, de caballos y de personas. Poco antes de morir, descubre que ese paciente laberinto de líneas traza la imagen de su cara.

Jorge Luis Borges, quoted by Claudio Magris in the introductory citation of *Microcosmi*, Garzanti Editore, 1997 in Italian. We have used the Spanish edition (Barcelona, Anagrama, 1999), where the quotation appears in its original language.

Passage 9

La fiction officielle veut qu'un empereur romain naisse à Rome, mais c'est à Italica que je suis né; c'est à ce pays sec et pourtant fertile que j'ai superposé plus tard tant de régions du monde. La fiction a du bon: elle prouve que les décisions de l'esprit et de la volonté priment les circonstances. (...)

Margueritte Yourcenar, *Mémoires d'Hadrien*, Gallimard, 1974, p. 43 (1st ed.: Librairie Plon, 1958).

Passage 10

(...) Und gerade hier, auf diesem mir angeborenen Todesboden, bin ich zuhause und mehr in dieser (tödlichen) Stadt und in dieser (tödlichen) Gegend zuhause als andere, und wenn ich heute durch diese Stadt gehe und glaube, dass / diese Stadt nicht mehr zu tun hat, weil ich nichts mit ihr zu tun haben will, weil ich schon lange mit ihr nichts mehr zu tun haben will, so ist doch alles in mir (und an mir) *aus ihr*, und ich und die Stadt sind eine lebenslängliche, untrennbare, wenn auch fürchterliche Beziehung. Denn tatsächlich ist alles in mir auf diese Stadt und auf diese Landschaft bezogen und zurückzuführen, ich kann tun und denken, was ich will, und diese Tatsache wird mir immer noch stärker bewusst, sie wird mir eines Tages so stark bewusst sein, dass ich an dieser Tatsache als Bewusstsein zugrunde gehen werde. Denn alles in mir ist dieser Stadt als Herkunft ausgeliefert. (...)

Thomas Bernhard, *Die Ursache. Eine Andeutung*, Salzburg, Residenz Verlag, 1975, pp. 64 /65.

Passage 11

És curiós, però de vegades, mentre estíuejava a Formentor, on hi ha la platja més meravellosa del món, em venia al cap el mar peruà, que és horrible. Així que m'hauré d'anar acostumat a l'horror de ser peruà.

Bryce Echenique, writer born in Lima, who has lived outside of Peru since 1964: in France, Italy, Germany, Greece, Spain, Catalonia. He is presently living in Montpellier and plans to return to his country. Article by M.F.C. *Avui*, 3.04.97.

Passage 12

La meva constitució cosmopolita, practicada llargament i reiteradament, m'ha portat a cultivar unes arrels terrenals i precises.

Josep Pla, Preface to *La Substància*, taken from passage quoted by Joan Tort i Donada and Pere Tobaruela i Martínez, in "Vicenç Biete, una visió integradora del territori", **Treballs de la Societat Catalana de Geografia**, 46, 1998, pp. 153-161 (p. 153).

Passage 13

(...) é assim o vasto mundo, os homens, como os animais, têm o seu terreno de caça, o seu quintal ou galinheiro, a sua teia de aranha, e esta comparação é das melhores, também a aranha lançou um fio até ao Porto, outro até ao Rio, mas foram simples pontos de apoio, referências, pilares, blocos de amarração, no centro da teia é que se jogam a vida e o destino, da aranha e das moscas. (...)

José Saramago, *O Ano da Morte de Ricardo Reis*, Lisbon, Caminho, 1984, p. 204.

Passage 14

Personalment opino que el meu art, malgrat els viatges arreu, està profundament arrelat al terror, a l'estreta franja entre els dos mars.

Emil Hansen (known by his artist's name, Emil Nolde). In 1902 this German artist changed his last name to the name of his village of origin. Catalogue from the exhibit at La Pedrera, Barcelona, 1998.

Passage 15

Vull que el meu cos sigui traslladat a Damasc després de la meva mort perquè sigui enterrat al cementiri familiar.

L'ocell retorna al seu niu i el nen al pit de la seva mare.

Niza Qabbani, Arab poet born in Damascus, Syria, and resident of London. Text he wrote, after having been hospitalised in London, prior to his death. *Avui*, 1.05.98.

Passage 16

Je suis l'espace où je suis.

Noël Arnaud, *L'état d'ébauche*, quoted by Gaston Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1974 (8th ed.), p. 131 (1st ed. 1957).

Passage 17

Tota la meva obra està concebuda a Montroig. (...) la terra on arrelar-se i trepitjar fort.

(...) el color roig és el color de l'ermita de la Roca, i el que dóna nom al poble. El color blau és el cel de Mont-roig. El verd és el verd dels garrofers. I el groc és la joia de Mont-roig, les seves floretes i les petites plantes.

Joan Miró, artist born in Barcelona but closely linked from a young age to Mont-roig, a village in the South of Catalonia where his family had their home and where he convalesced from an illness. Later, he lived in Paris, Barcelona and finally in Palma de Majorca and Barcelona. The quotations are taken from the chronicles of the magazine *El Temps* of 3.07.95 and 8-14.08.00.

Passage 18

Marco Polo imaginava di rispondere (o Kublai immaginava la sua risposta) che piú si perdeva in quartieri sconosciuti di città lontane, piú capiva le altre città che aveva attraversato per giungere fin là, e ripercorreva le tappe dei suoi viaggi, e imparava a conoscere il porto da cui era salpato, e i luoghi familiari della sua giovinezza, e i dintorni di casa, e un campiello di Venezia dove correva da bambino.

(...) perché il passato del viaggiatore cambia a seconda dell'itinerario compiuto, (...). Arrivando a ogni nuova città il viaggiatore ritrova un suo passato che non sapeva piú d'averne: (...). (p. 34)

(...) Il suo repertorio poteva dirsi inesauribile, ma ora toccò a lui [Marco] d'arrendersi. Era l'alba quando disse: -Sire, ormai ti ho parlato di tutte le città che conosco.

-Ne resta una di cui non parli mai.

Marco polo chinò il capo.

-Venezia, -disse il Kan.

Marco sorrise. -E di che altro credevi che ti parlassi?

L'imperatore non batté ciglio. Eppure non ti ho mai sentito fare il suo nome.

E Polo: -Ogni volta che descrivo una città dico qualcosa di Venezia.

-Quando ti chiedo d'altre città, voglio sentirti dire di quelle. E di Venezia, quando ti chiedo di Venezia.

-Per distinguere le qualità delle altre, devo partire da una prima città che resta implicita. Per me è Venezia. (p. 94)

Italo Calvino, *Le città invisibili*, Turin, Einaudi, 1972.

Passage 19

M'he quedat allà on m'ha posat la vida. Vaig néixer a Tomelloso i a Madrid m'hi van portar a estudiar i m'hi he quedat. Hi ha una cosa fonda que et fa continuar en un lloc. És una cosa que va més enllà de la teva elecció: és el destí. Madrid és una ciutat barroera i desharmònica. Però en el fons Madrid m'importa més que qualsevol altra ciutat.

Antonio López, artist born in Tomelloso (La Mancha, Spain), in an interview about a collective exhibit under the common title of 'Madrid'. *Avui*, 22.06.97.

Passage 20

Cada jornada lluny de Chartwell és una jornada perduda.

Winston Churchill, letter to his wife. Chatwell is a place where he lived with his wife and four children. The house was his refuge until he left politics. Quotation taken from an article on Churchill by Martine de Rabaudy (translated by María José Seguí), 'El lleó tendre i ferotge', *El Temps*, 17-23.08.99.

Passage 21

C'è una ragione perché sono tornato in questo paese, qui e non invece a Canelli, a Barbaresco o in Alba. Qui non ci sono nato, è quasi certo; dove son nato non lo so; non c'è da queste parti una casa né un pezzo di terra né delle ossa ch'io possa dire "Ecco cos'ero prima di nascere". Non so se vengo dalla collina o dalla valle, dai boschi o da una casa di balconi. La ragazza che mi ha lasciato sugli scalini del duomo di Alba,(...). Chi può dire di che carne sono fatto? Ho girato abbastanza il mondo da sapere che tutte le carni sono buone e si equivalgono, ma è per questo che uno si stanca e cerca di mettere radici, di farsi terra e paese, perché la sua carne valga e duri qualcosa di più che un comune giro di stagione.

Se sono cresciuto in questo paese, devo dir grazie alla Virgilia, a Padrino, tutta gente che non c'è più, anche se loro mi hanno preso e allevato soltanto perché l'ospedale di Alessandria gli passava la mesata. (...)/

L'altr'anno, quando tornai la prima volta in paese, venni quasi di nascosto a rivedere i noccioli. (...)/

(...) M'ero sempre aspettato qualcosa di simile, o magari che il casotto fosse crollato;

(...) Ma non mi ero aspettato di non trovare più i noccioli. Voleva dire ch'era tutto finito.

La novità mi scoraggiò al punto che non chiamai, non entrai sull'aia. Capii lí per lí che cosa vuol dire non essere nato in un posto, non averlo nel sangue, non starci già mezzo sepolto insieme ai vecchi, tanto che un cambiamento di colture non importi. (...)/

Così questo paese, dove non sono nato, ho creduto per molto tempo che fosse tutto il mondo. Adesso che il mondo l'ho visto davvero e so che è fatto di tanti piccoli paesi, non so se da ragazzo mi sbagliavo poi di molto. (...) Un paese ci vuole, non fosse che per il gusto di andarsene via. Un paese vuol dire non essere soli, sapere che nella gente, nelle piante, nella / terra c'è qualcosa di tuo, che anche quando non ci sei resta ad aspettarti. Ma

non è facile starci tranquillo. Da un anno che lo tengo d'occhio e quando posso ci scappo da Genova, mi sfugge di mano. Queste cose si capiscono col tempo e l'esperienza. Possibili che a quarant'anni, e con tutto il mondo che ho visto, non sappia ancora che cos'è il mio paese?

Cesare Pavese, *La luna e i falò*, Turin, Einaudi, 1950, pp. 9-13.

Passage 22

"Quisquis ubique habitat, Maxime, nusquam habitat." (Celui qui habite partout, n'habite nulle part) Martial, *Epigrammes*

Montaigne, *Essais I*, Paris, Gallimard, 1965, p.82.

Passage 23

O escenario do manicomio era arrepiante. (...) O que abraiou ao pintor foi a mirada dos que non miraban. Aquele renuncia ás latitudes, o absoluto deslugar polo que camiñaban.

Manuel Rivas, *O lapis do carpinteiro*, Vigo, Edicións Xerais de Galicia, 1999 (10th ed.), p. 35 (1st ed. 1998).

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Summary

Abstract

1. The persistence of place in a globalised world.
2. The study of migration and the duality of permanence and mobility.
3. Sequence and hierarchy of places. *Idiotopy* and *itiotope*.
4. Boundaries and scale.
5. The role of place in the construction of migratory histories.
6. A tentative systematisation of places and of relationships to place.
7. The interest and pertinence of qualitative methodology in the proposed approach.
8. Conclusions.

Appendix. Passages

Bibliography