

Geography and Health – A Nordic Outlook



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GEOGRAPHY AND HEALTH – A NORDIC OUTLOOK

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4. The power of place in the context of pregnancy

Margareta Rämgård

Theoretical background

In this study I explore the coping strategies of pregnant women and how the prospect of giving birth affects their relationship to place, arguing that pregnancy makes us aware of our fundamental need for *ontological security* in place. I maintain that a specific kind of place attachment, what I call *place security*, is a fundamental aspect of ontological security. Considering that ontological security has been demonstrated as a necessary condition for mental and physical health, as well as for developing a healthy identity, the present study has wider implications for our understanding of well-being related to places. Anthony Giddens (1997) has argued that in order to achieve ontological security, we need to constitute our identity and ritualise our daily lives in social interaction with other people and institutions in the society in which we live. Thus, outer processes of socialisation contribute to continuity in our self-identity. Being ontologically secure is largely a question of how we see ourselves, in other words, how we see our self-identity. However, continuity in the social self and repeated opportunities to reaffirm and confirm identity in relationships with others also performs an important function in this respect. Ontological security involves several aspects, and I maintain that place is one of them.

In order to construct any category socially, including our identity, the reality we experience has to present some degree of regularity, similarity, and recurrence. In individual life histories, places provide the context that allows such recurrence and recognition. In the present study, *self-iden-*

tity – the way an individual sees himself or herself – is viewed as open to influence from their environment. Security based on the constancy of self-identity linked to place involves a dimension of trust in the continuity, reliability, and predictability of our social and physical environment. The personality can be seen as a product of social processes, but the characteristics of a core self above all require continuity, involving memory, intentionality, beliefs, rationality, and emotions.

Margaret Archer (2000) distinguishes between a *personal self-identity* and a *social self-identity*, maintaining that the self is real, emergent, and relational. Whereas Anthony Giddens describes a core self, Archer has a more stratified view of the self, where what she terms the ‘personal self’ stands for continuity. Archer argues that this should not be understood as an identity isolated from its environment, but rather as something that emerges through its relation with psychosocial forces and events. I argue that this also involves places, because internal processes formed by memory and emotions from different places are *embodied* in us as human beings, and are of fundamental importance for ontological security. A sense of place in a conscious mind will thus turn past experience into present knowledge, involving memory, emotion, and sense perceptions, which in turn is also connected to routines and habits, and how experience of places is *situated* in *events*. Such experience is embodied, so in this sense we carry places with us wherever we go, even when we ourselves are no longer embedded in the place where the events occurred.

Places are not only incorporated in our minds and our bodies, but also in the ways we construct meaning, and these patterns then shape our actions (Thrift 1999).

On the basis of contemporary findings in neuroscience, Margaret Archer argues that there are two non-verbal forms of memorising that help us to maintain continuity in the self-identity. The first form is the visual image, the *eidetic*, which is a type of memory that serves recognition (Archer 2000). The second non-verbal form of memorising, *procedures*, resides in procedural skills and know-how. Archer argues that both eidetic and procedural memories are fundamental for continuity in self-identity. Until puberty, there is a tendency to have a more active eidetic memory, independent of gender, ethnicity, class, or school achievement, whereas adults recall memories in a more selective process than children: '*At birth, we may guess, all types of input may seem to be of about equal relevance; within only the widest possible classification rules, everything must be registered and ordered so as to enable each individual to build his or her own criteria of significance*' (Steven Rose 1992, cited in Archer 2000, 141). As children, we experience a fuller range of sensory input, but when we become adults, we learn to select *key features* in the environment. Moreover, these key features vary with the different environments in which the child grows up: '*One can then speculate that Inuit children were making perceptual discriminations between different types of snow long before they learned to name them, and that their desert Arab counterparts could pick out different kinds of camels well before acquiring their large camel vocabulary*' (Archer 2000, 141).

The above findings from neuroscience research show that memory also involves spatial integration. On the one hand, the human body, in direct interaction with the physical environment, shapes portions of our memory through our senses. This may explain why childhood experiences becomes significant for an adult, and may influence their behaviour later on in life.

The aim of this study is to explore connections between ontological security and place

that become apparent during pregnancy. *Place security* means constituting an identity linked to features in a place. To make this possible, and thus achieve place security, there has to be some kind of continuity in time and space during the periods when identity is constituted or redefined, as well as ritualisation in a familiar environment. In other words, place security involves both individual and collective levels of experience, situated in specific and constant material environments, within a cohesive framework of time and space. Crises, in a psychological and existential sense, are periods in life involving major changes, and which therefore entail an increased awareness of the individual's need for stability and security. Here, I have chosen to study women's need for place-related security in the identity crisis they experience during pregnancy.

Only a few aspects of my study are briefly outlined in the context of the present volume, and I have therefore chosen to focus in particular on the ways pregnant women feel that specific places contribute to their well-being during their third trimester of pregnancy.

Study method

The empirical data in the study are drawn from *in-depth interviews* with 30 pregnant women in the area of Lund (Sweden) and on the small islands of Vesterålen (Norway). The general category 'pregnant women' is by no means homogenous and therefore the sample had to be sufficiently large to provide a certain spectrum of socio-economic and other variables.

The first study was based on a Swedish population located in an area around the municipality of Lund. The town occupies a strategic position as a centre for higher education, and constitutes an attraction for young people from other places. The municipality is therefore an area where a relatively mobile population could be expected, with inhabitants who have a positive attitude towards mobility. The women were selected at random, and although the sample was limited in size, it displayed diversity concerning a number

of variables. The respondents were eight months pregnant at the time when they were interviewed. They had grown up in localities of varying sizes, ranging from small hamlets of 50 households to the biggest cities in Sweden. It can be noted here that most small localities have an urban rather than rural character in a Swedish context. The interviewed women differed in their education and social background, and were in the age group 19–37 years. Approximately half of the group had received an academic education and come from families where at least one of the parents had received higher education. The respondents also differed with respect to mobility. Some of the respondents had moved several times during their childhood, while others had been mobile as adults. Some of the respondents had stayed close to the place where they had grown up, and others had spent periods abroad, both as adults and during childhood. The background factors thus display considerable variation concerning socio-economic and geographical aspects.

In contrast to the urban area of Lund, the northern regions of Norway have stagnating populations and high levels of unemployment. Geographical distances impact the daily life of the Norwegian population to a much greater extent than the Swedish population. My intention in adding the second sample was initially to make a comparison between the results from the two countries. I had assumed that geographical and social differences would provide new angles of reflection. Instead, it turned out that the results of the Norwegian sample displayed striking similarities to the Swedish material and no significant differences of a general nature. The selection of Norwegian women essentially matched the Swedish material in other respects, and hence the two studies could be combined to provide a larger sample with a relatively large span in terms of variation in age, education, mobility, and places of origin and residence.

The expectant mothers in Sweden were contacted by a midwife from the primary care centre in their locality and invited to participate in the study. For a period of two months, all Swed-

ish-born mothers in the health care district were approached. In the Norwegian study, all pregnant women at this stage of pregnancy who were in contact with the local health care facilities at Vesterålen in the course of a given month (July 2005) were invited to participate, and all accepted. The study sample can therefore be considered to represent a random cross-section.

Pregnant women go through different phases in the course of their pregnancy. Questions concerning security become particularly acute in the last weeks, when the women are in a transitional stage and feel most vulnerable (Brudal 2000). After birth, new identities and conditions are established, and the reflections and feelings of uncertainty associated with different possible options no longer feel equally relevant. For this reason, I chose to interview pregnant women in their last month of pregnancy. The women were informed that they were going to be asked to talk about their general subjective experiences of trust and security during pregnancy. To avoid a focus on exclusively spatial aspects, the researcher was not presented as a geographer doing research on place but rather as a midwife doing research on trust and security in pregnancy.

The interviews took place in the women's homes. Over a period of five consecutive summers, I acquired knowledge of the people, especially the women, and the dialect in Vesterålen. This preparation helped me to examine personal issues in some depth and discuss them, because knowledge from interviews not only emerges from mutual understanding and intersubjective depth, but is also dependent on a level of mutual trust (Silverman 1997). Over the years, the population of the Vesterålen islands came to know me as a person who understood their culture and their dialect, which several of the respondents remarked upon in the interviews. I was familiar with them, yet still an outsider who was not involved in their daily lives. The pregnant women appeared to see me primarily as a midwife, rather than as a researcher, and this was evident from the fact that they discussed their pregnancies at the beginning of the interviews.

Pregnant women living in the borderland

Medical research has demonstrated that women are particularly sensitive during their third trimester of pregnancy (Brudal 2000). To be pregnant, give birth, and care for a child are natural phases in a woman's life, but also constitute a developmental crisis related to the formation of a new family. In such times of crisis, transformation, and redefinition of identity, the individual's sense of continuity in her self-identity is shaken. This sometimes leads her to experience ontological insecurity and anxiety:

A person may be considered to be in a state of mental crisis when he [or she] encounters a life situation of a kind where his [or her] earlier experience and acquired patterns of reaction no longer are sufficient to understand and psychologically master the situation at hand. Crises may be triggered by outer events which could be considered as being part of normal life, but which in individual cases become overpowering, such as having a child. ... Such crises are usually called development crises or life crises. (Cullberg 1992, 13–14)

Developmental crises are connected to different stages in life, such as puberty and becoming a parent (Cullberg 1992). *Existential crises* in pregnancy are similar, but additionally include an existential dimension, because these crises involve life and death in one way or another. From an existential perspective, developmental crises are a part of life. Such crises can be seen either as an opportunity for change or as an opening, where the path to various possibilities goes through some form of pain or distress (Brudal 2000). Two forces are in action with respect to the experience of parenthood: an existential satisfaction and a limitation of personal freedom (Wikman 1994). Individual variation occurs in the process, which takes place in varying degrees for both women and men. Joy and expectations alternate with worries and anxiety. For most people, becoming a parent is a critical period, both with respect to their relationship to themselves

and to others. Some people feel open and strange in their approach to their new life task, whereas others feel that it enriches their life. Becoming a parent involves a combination of these emotions, which lead to maturity and growth if they are dealt with. In this critical stage of pregnancy, when couples are about to become parents, they leave something old behind, just as something new appears in its place. This transition involves a number of complex *psychological* and *social processes* connected to the issue of continuity in self-identity, because a woman enters a new identity as a parent, and this clearly affects the way she sees herself. Pregnancy is a transitional process that affects the daily rituals in life, but the process women experience during pregnancy is also influenced by the fact that they look back at their own childhood. What used to be crucial for maintaining a feeling of security in other periods of their lives may not provide the same sense of protection in a new situation.

How childhood affects crises in pregnancy

Development crises such as pregnancy not only affect our actions in the present but also relate to our emotional past. Cullberg's definition of crisis derives from the psychodynamic school of thought, in which a central idea is that our reactions to crises are to a large extent determined by *childhood experience*. A person's vulnerability often depends on factors that can be understood in terms of repressed trauma (Cullberg 1992). Since the feeling of security is related to a fundamental trust constituted in childhood, there is a relation between trust and our reaction to crises. Existentialist psychologists consider that there is a connection between the loss of trust in repressed childhood experience and the adult's experience of crisis. They also maintain that present experience and present perception of identity will have an influence on which childhood memories a person chooses to recollect (Jacobsen 2000). In this sense, it can be said that childhood memories are not determined or constant over

time, but that certain memories from childhood will appear in a situation of crisis.

Some psychologists maintain that *childhood memories* become clearer in the period when men and women constitute a family of their own (Cullberg 1992; Wikman 1994; Brudal 2000). In each stage in life (such as the transition from childhood to puberty and when forming a family), different developmental crises are encountered (Erikson 1965). According to Erikson, the foundation of our identity is established with respect to how we deal with such crises and challenges in life. The years of childhood and youth are particularly important, although identity continues to develop throughout our lives. Erikson distinguishes eight developmental crises, from infancy to adulthood. Erikson's seventh life crisis involves the question of maturing by becoming 'fully adult' and assuming parenthood. This phase is characterised by *generativity*: the need to create and lead the next generation.

Psychologist Lisbeth F. Brudal (1981; 1996; 2000) has conducted extensive research on psychological crises connected to forming a family and giving birth. She founds her work on Erikson's theory of developmental crises, and describes a number of circumstances in the process of change that Erikson calls generativity. The main characteristic of our emotional life in this developmental phase is increased vulnerability. We are in the 'borderlands', and experience new and unfamiliar feelings. We therefore seek security on a more conscious level. Brudal (2000) calls this period the *borderlands*, since individuals are situated in an intermediary territory between the identity of being single and the new identity of being a parent. In these borderlands, women and men seek factors of security and come in closer contact with their childhood memories. Pregnant women try to maintain security through *regression*, which is a common reaction to stress. They tend to abandon the more superficial values acquired in their adult life and instead revert to core values in deeper emotional strata, associated with childhood experience and the initial constitution of their identity. One of the inter-

viewees described how difficult she found it to know what else to relate to when she was going to be a mother for the first time:

When you are having a baby, you easily fall back on the frames of reference you already have, how you had it as a child yourself and how you were raised. Afterwards, you can deal with this in various ways, but there isn't much else you can fall back on. (Sofia, Sweden)

Expectant parents do not just face a new role in life: their whole identity is challenged and examined in a process of self-reflection. Hence, pregnancy is accompanied by a deep-reaching process of transformation for both parents but above all for the mother carrying a child within her body. This feeling can be experienced as both positive and negative, since pregnant women relate to a wide range of feelings about parenthood. In these borderlands, the future parents have to rely on their sources of basic trust.

Lisbeth F. Brudal further emphasises that when we go through periods of transition or what are referred to here as 'crises', manifold forces are mobilised from both within and without. We call upon previously unconscious resources to meet the changes, and become more attentive to ourselves and to our environment (Brudal 1996; 2000). This in turn affects our relations to the physical environment. In the study I conducted in Lund and Vesterålen, all of the women felt that their *place attachment* was reinforced during the third trimester in pregnancy. One woman described the change she experienced in the following terms:

I know that I have always been very good at feeling at home wherever I lived. But my whole view on where I wanted to live, where I felt secure, and what was important changed completely for me and also for my husband when I got pregnant. (Anna, Norway)

Men's emotions concerning parenthood may also derive from their earlier experiences. Psychological distress experienced by men has been related to the period of waiting for their child to be born

and engaging in their role as a father (Lacoursière 1972). Men's anxiety towards their role as a parent has not been studied as extensively as women's anxiety. Nonetheless, Brudal points out that, in the process of becoming parents, women and men frequently come into contact with various layers within themselves that provide them with insights and contact with their own childhood experiences. Pregnancy and childbirth therefore constitute a developmental crisis that relates to earlier memories and experience, and is also a period when unresolved conflicts may be brought to the surface (Brudal 1981).

Place as a source of ontological security

Geographers with a humanistic orientation talk about personal *attachment to place* (Tuan 1974; 1999; Relph 1976; Buttimer & Seamon 1980). This concept can be helpful for understanding how places are related to ontological security because it involves how emotions affect identity and our sense of continuity. The studied pregnant women experienced pregnancy as a time in their life when their self-identity was redefined and places became increasingly important. The positive feelings of belonging they had for places were built on an aesthetic understanding, physical contact, and closeness to a place. In this respect, meaning becomes something that more closely resembles intimacy than rationality. This kind of knowledge requires continuity over longer periods of time, and place becomes an extension of the individual – something that the women knew intimately and to which they felt closely connected. They needed to identify with intimate places and to construct these places for themselves as a basis for repeated experience. The following is an example of how important a feeling of a place as part of a women's identity becomes when she is about to have a baby:

The feeling of familiarity has become important now that I am having a child, in a different way than before. I used to be more able to travel around and feel secure everywhere. The

place in Norrland is part of me, part of my identity, which provides me with some form of belonging. (Sara, Sweden)

For almost all of the women in the study, places appeared to shape an important part of their self-identities. It naturally follows that in the absence of such a place, the construction of coherent identity becomes problematic. The interviewed women related their self-identity during pregnancy to certain places that they felt provided them with continuity during their life history. This involved an attachment to place as a centre of meaning, or 'fields of care' (Tuan 1977; 1999), thus implying that we attribute *meaning* to a place. The meaning we perceive in place and in our relation to place form the basis for a kind of security that is fundamental because it provides a possibility for a sense belonging (Relph 1976). This involves an experience of place that takes time to achieve because it is linked to continuity (Casey 1993; Tuan 1997; 1999). The fact that attachment to place is connected to continuity makes it especially important for ontological security – something that may also be illustrated by the opposite case. We can all relate to the feeling of *placelessness* (Relph 1976). Homesickness, depression, and disorientation are all common feelings connected with being *displaced* (Casey 1993; Relph 1976). On another level, continuity in place is connected to ontological security because it keeps people oriented, as opposed to being disoriented and lost.

A person's experience of sense of place repeated over time helps to shape an autobiographical insiderness. Places then become a *landscape of memories*, providing identity and a present source of reinforcement of biography (Rowles 1978; 1983). However, a sense of place that is stored in the body can be experienced even if a person does not live in that particular place any more. People's emotions tell them what matters to them, and if they have sensed a particular mood or emotion in a particular place, they will tend to connect the feeling to the place it arose in (Thrift 1999).

All of the interviewed women expressed the need to identify with specific places in individually varying ways. Their sense of belonging was individual, both in the ways that they attributed meaning to a place and how they saw place as a part of themselves. Despite such variation, all of the respondents related strongly to place, and their sense of place security was reinforced by pregnancy. In the study undertaken in Lund and Vesterålen, 27 of the 30 respondents expressed an increased feeling of belonging to the places to which they could relate their self-identity. Place attachment appears to have provided the women with the security they needed during their identity crisis of pregnancy. The feelings associated with certain places became more important during that period of their lives.

Sense perceptions shape continuity in self-identity

A few geographers have considered the importance of smell in connection with place and memory (Tuan 1974; 1999; Porteous 1985). Douglas Porteous even coined the term *smell-scape* to describe a geographical dimension of smell. He has used the term to suggest that smell is spatially ordered and place-related. Our sense of smell enables us to identify odours in very specific ways, and associate them with particular sources. The importance of our senses can also be seen from the perspective of perception. In this regard, the attachment of the senses is more in terms of direct contact between the body and the environment. It is an immediate direct chemical contact, wherein certain smells characterise different places. The chemical foundation of smell makes *place perception* through smell more directly sensuous than, for example, sight (Rodoway 1994). This has to do with the body and the way the body interacts with the environment (Merleau-Ponty 1962). One of the women in the study described the recollection of her childhood place, Arboga, as follows:

The smell that comes to my mind from Arboga is the pine forest, which is connected to it. And it is very much linked to horses and the smells of nature and those kinds of things. I think it maybe got an additional dimension when we started thinking about having a child. ... It's not the same kind of smells like here, because, well, the horses are the same, I suppose, but you don't get the same kind of bottomless mud like we had up there, where the horses were slopping about in their pastures. It's the bottom of an old lake, no end to the sludge. Here, you have sandy soil and beech woods, and, well, it's different. It's nature, but it isn't the same nature, so something is a bit different. It probably is the history I carry with me. It belongs to me in a different way. This Scanian nature still has not become my own in the same way. It's more. It's really nice and actually has more advantages. But, it's more like being on a visit. It doesn't involve so many feelings. Arboga is the place I carry inside me. (Cecilia, Sweden)

Much of the strength of smell lies in the crucial role it plays for remembering places. It offers a time-space geography in which memories are connected with place experience (Porteous 1985). Smell is particularly important for remembering. It is adaptive in its character and connected to familiarity. Specific smells, especially those associated with childhood memories, trigger emotional responses to specific places that give us a feeling of continuity. In everyday life, people experience meaning in place through sense experience and action. Such meaning contributes to a feeling of identity linked to place. Sensuous experiences and memories of places are inscribed within our body, our structure, and our self-identity, and they provide ontological security. Lisbeth F. Brudal's research also emphasises that in the borderlands of pregnancy women's perception is modified, so that sensory impressions, such as sounds and smells, are reinforced. In my study, I observed that smells from childhood places appeared to provide the women with the security they needed.

Places as important for activities and routinisation

Symbolic interactionism devotes considerable attention to childhood, because we begin to form our identity in this period. Rituals in daily life afford protection of the individual's self-esteem. This concerns largely automated aspects of behaviour such as facial expression and gesture, and knowledge of this type of complex ritual is necessary in order to understand day-to-day interaction (Goffman 1959; Collins 2004). In my study, most of the women expressed in some way that rituals and habits conducted in the place gave them a deeper feeling of home, and that they became more aware of these feelings during pregnancy. For example, one woman stated:

There is a certain sense of belonging that comes back to me when I am expecting a child. It's the language, but not just that. Also, interests and habits I bring along. (Josefine, Norway)

Knowledge of such tacit rules is an essential part of acquiring a culture, and the body language we acquire is automated to an extent that makes it difficult to modify it later in life. Such rituals work best in *face-to-face interaction* when people meet in a physical place, since this allows focus on each other's attention (Collins 2004; Niemi-Kristofersson 2005).

Another crucial dimension of ritualisation is that certain activities are associated with certain places. This includes both the memory of past events and a perception that future activity will be possible. An intimate knowledge of a place as well as where things are located and how things work makes routine activity possible. Activity in familiar places means that risks and uncertainty are reduced: new information does not need to be collected, situations do not need to be constantly reassessed, and mistakes can be avoided.

The studied women informed that they needed a place where they could 'be themselves', and where they felt 'totally safe' in how they perform daily acts in their environment. This presupposed a certain measure of predictability, including

knowing what to expect in their environment with respect to body movement and other ritualised social functions. Such rituals in daily life protect people's self-esteem in the course of their interactions with other people. Many of the women in the study referred to places in their childhood, as exemplified by the following quote:

I have started thinking more and more about these things now that I am about to have a child. It isn't easy to get in touch with people in the same way as the place [in which] you grew up because you are constantly wondering about how to behave. Somehow, nothing works automatically. (Sara, Sweden)

In their theoretical underpinnings, social theories usually not consider the physical environment as something essential for social interactions. It is through responding to other people, not to places, that we attempt to create meaning (Mead 1934; Goffman 1959). While accounting for the role social interaction plays in how we create meaning, such models do not take into account that for any aspect of reality to make sense, people have to construct it, not only symbolically, but also actually and physically in the material world. I argue that specific sets of material objects situated in specific places are used both to form meaning based on experience and *to locate and bound reality conceptually*. Hence, the importance of places in social interaction goes far beyond the role of a backdrop or stage for performances (Richardsson 1980).

Places and, in a broad sense, *activities* are two sides of the same coin because the interchange of the social world is created through people, human creativity, and the internal relationships between people and places (Ley 1978). Day-to-day routines often take place along *familiar time-space paths* (Lenntorp 1976; 1992; Mårtensson 1979; Kjellman 2003). Also, built environments and other artefacts of the modern world can maintain ontological security (Saunders 1986). Familiar activities in unfamiliar environments cannot present the same degree of ritualisation, since we no longer know what to expect. One of

the studied women described her memories of childhood as follows:

You have lived with your own routines for thirty years. That is a kind of security you can feel. In a way, you become more aware of what is important for you, when you are in this situation. It's also the dependence on the place in itself, and everything we do there. There is swimming in summer, and football and hockey, and all our activities. (Lotta, Norway)

Most of the women agreed that the feeling of security they experienced was connected to places they were familiar with and where daily life and activities were predictable. This does not necessarily mean that they spent their daily lives in those places, but that they stressed the importance of familiar activities during their pregnancy.

In any culture, people develop a kind of basic stabilising core of ontological security, derived from different routines. This enables them to deal with exceptional situations of fear and danger by using the emotional and behavioural frame of reference constituted by their normal daily behaviour and thoughts (Giddens 1997). This kind of familiarity is important also with respect to places. A familiar environment makes things easier to manage, as we do not have to reflect constantly on our behaviour or make decisions with uncertain outcomes.

Place security emotions and memory

To experience meaning in place includes being emotionally attached to that place and to certain sense perceptions as smell. However, it should not be forgotten that our emotions also have a *cognitive impact*. This embodied sense (often unconscious) of how we feel about the world affects both our perception of events and how we conceptualise them. There is no sharp division between reason and emotions. Emotions underlie rational thought and determine how we see ourselves (Archer 2000). The cognitive element of emotions is also part of a person's identity, and

in this respect it can be described by the relations that person has to a place.

Living in the borderlands, the studied women explained how they started to question where they belonged. They referred part of their identity to places in the past and explained how that feeling of belonging was related to their need for geographical attachment. One of the women (Hilde) had been born on an island in the northern part of Norway, and had later moved farther north to find education and work. She felt comfortable with the decision to move until her pregnancy, and described how she currently identified more with the place she had originally come from:

I come from Steigen, and although I have lived in Sortland for seven years now, I will never become a Sortlandian. Some things change, but the main part of me will always belong there, and somehow that is what I feel secure with. Somehow, that becomes important when you are going to have a child. And that is when you start to compare the place [in which] you are living with the place you come from. These are the kind of thoughts that are coming [to the fore] now. (Hilde, Norway)

Eidetic memory (Archer 2000) involves spatial integration, because recognition is a spatial phenomenon (Heller 1999). *Recognition* means meeting again something we have already experienced and hence something we are familiar with. Personal experience of phenomena is based on physical proximity, whereas familiarity is linked to recurrent experiences and to feelings of emotional proximity. We conceptualise our world in terms of closeness and/or familiarity and distance and/or strangeness. The women in my study experienced the importance of contiguity in relation to the places that stood for continuity during their formative period:

I was born in Gällivare, and then after a couple of years we moved to Hudiksvall, [and] after that to Germany. ... We have a cottage in Norrland. ... So, that was a place we used to return to. We used to be there for Easter, in

the summers, [and] even when we were living in Germany we often went there. So, that was something that came back. Somehow, that felt secure. (Sara, Sweden)

Recognition is thus linked to our self-identity. According to Agnes Heller (1995; 1999), even the existential questions *Where did we come from? Who are we?* and *Where are we going?* are in some sense connected to our own biographical history in places because any identity is shaped and reshaped in a unique context and set of connections. Key features of an environment are highly place-specific; Margaret Archer took the example of Inuit and snow. All of the above-mentioned factors contribute to shape continuity in self, which is needed to feel ontologically secure. The women in my study felt that a myriad of aspects in their place contributed to attach their sense of security to that particular place. Place security is individual and dependent on individual life histories, and therefore appears to differ from one individual to another. Nevertheless, certain features seem universal: almost all of the women referred to specific places when they talked about place security, and almost all of them related place security to the place where they grew up or to places that were important for them during their childhood.

Return to childhood places or construction of a reminiscent place

Some of the interviewed women in the Lund-Vesterålen study had had a relatively stable childhood and had stayed quite close to their place of origin, and these women tended to relate to their place of origin for place security. By contrast, others had moved a great deal during their childhood, and for place security they often related to a summerhouse where they had spent their holidays. No clear connection was apparent between mobility during childhood and mobility in adult life. Regardless of the women's degree of mobility in the past, they experienced an increased need for place security and stability during pregnancy. Two main strategies emerged: the women either

returned to their childhood place or attempted to find a place that reminded them of it – a *reminiscent place*.

Approximately half of the women returned to their place of origin. These women felt they needed to be embedded in those specific places in order to experience the feeling of place security. The remaining women did not return when they were going to have a family of their own. Instead, they looked for a place that *reminded* them of their childhood and that provided certain aspects they could associate with the features that had given them a sense of place security when they were children. Women who lacked security as children still wanted to provide security for their own children, by allowing them to develop a sense of attachment to place.

Place attachment can thus mean a form of security linked to a given place (as in the case of the women who moved back to the place of their childhood), but it can also mean that the women in my study experienced security because a certain place reminded them of their place of origin. Place security does not necessarily mean that a person is embedded in their place of origin. A different place can still provide security for women when they are in the process of establishing a family. For example, a place that is regularly revisited can provide security or places of origin can serve as a model for remembered places.

Regardless of what coping strategy the women actually adopted, a large number of them expressed a longing to return to their place of origin. They wanted to be embedded in their childhood places when they were having a child of their own. The women who did not want to return nevertheless spontaneously referred to their place of origin in connection with their increased need for security, and explained why their childhood place could no longer provide the security they needed.

The women's life histories serve to relate their *identities* to places, while their activities or recurrent events provided scope for *ritualisation*, geographically determined in terms of culture and local conditions. Lastly, the women's onto-

logical security was consolidated by the *permanence* of certain physical features of their special place. The combination of these elements and how they related to specific places constituted *place security*.

Conclusions

The dynamics of modernity are built on social conventions and beliefs that form the foundation of institutions in society. Anthony Giddens has shown how our lives are determined by the functioning of social institutions of a modern type, built on these foundations, and that consequently also our ontological security is intimately associated with them. Both social structures and conventions usually take the form of systems of hierarchies based on overarching forces and values of production, which in turn permeate the dynamics of human relations, cultures, and politics generally. In this perspective, the values of production (work based on technological know-how) act, in a sense, as the essence of modernity. Social relationships and production then become primarily something needed to maintain and serve the forces of production, and loses other functions. In this way, for many people, basic security also relates to production and their possibilities to satisfy their material needs (such as clothes and food) by working at the particular locations and in the specific manner determined by the institutions of modernity and modern technologies. Giddens defines ontological security as a fundamental trust, providing both total confidence that familiar things will remain stable, as well as confidence in the reliability of people or systems. Giddens further supposes that the nature of our identities has changed, and that today, to a greater extent we have reflexive identities, mirrored in abstract value systems and globalised social institutions, rather than identities defined by interpersonal relations in local places. In Giddens' view, place in modernity tends to become a mere spatial container for the structures and activities situated in it. Places become interchangeable – place can be

any place, as long as the system remains intact.

The findings from my study do not support Giddens' hypotheses, but rather indicate that ontological security during an existential crisis, such as pregnancy, is not only based on social relationships and modern institutions, but also is intimately connected to the material environment, including the physical environment in specific places – what I call *place security*.

The studied women's awareness of their need for place security increased during pregnancy, at a time when their existence was profoundly changed in ways that affected how they saw themselves and made them feel insecure and vulnerable. Their vulnerability reinforced their need for security in relation to the material world. By contrast, the need for place security was much less visible in other periods of the same women's lives. From a methodological point of view, it seems that the causal forces underlying this phenomenon generated changes in self-perception and behaviour under certain circumstances only. It may be supposed that in this case the underlying causes were constituted by a chain of interdependent dynamic factors, where the mechanisms were not always visible, so that the phenomenon appeared only when all prerequisite circumstances and conditions were present.

The women in the Lund-Vesterålen study related to *places where they grew up* and places where they constructed their identities as children. At this point in their lives, when they felt insecure, they related to their childhood environment and sought security by identifying themselves with the physical environment of those places. The empirical material further shows that the women's perception of place was structured in three parts: the immediate surroundings of the home, the locality, and places within a convenient visiting distance. Although the basic reaction to the life crisis of pregnancy was extremely similar for all of the women studied, the precise aspects of place that provided the women with support and reassurance varied on an individual basis.

My findings support the hypothesis that place has a central function for ontological security.

This involves the relative permanence of objects from the perspective of individual experience. Although a philosopher cannot descend twice in the same waters, and although every molecule has flowed away in a chemical sense, in everyday experience they are still in the same water. We experience continuity in the gradually evolving relationships of objects to their context and in the relationships that link them to each other and to our experiences.

The Lund-Vesterålen study suggests that as social beings we live and interact with material environments, including both the physical and social environments. My findings do not support Giddens' contention that the human condition has changed radically in modern times, and that identity is now primarily based on trust in institutions and expert systems. Although Giddens' claim may be valid in other circumstances, it does not hold for women going through the life crisis of pregnancy.

The place security that the pregnant women related to involved an *existential aspect*, since they interact with objects in the material world and the interaction was the material basis of their ontological security and well-being in daily life. It involved a *spatial aspect*, since the objects that they constituted their self in relation to were placed somewhere, and where the objects were placed was essential for their feeling of ontological security. The study illustrates how we exist through relations in the material environment, and provides examples of ways in which we relate our self-identities to features of place. Our memories and activities are integrated in places in various ways. The objects that we constitute ourselves through are unique for each individual and are related to specific places. By contrast, place security formed a general structure that was relevant for almost all of the pregnant women.

The notion of attachment is often associated with narrow-mindedness and traditionalism. It is frequently seen in contrast to innovation and development. I would rather argue that attachment is a necessary condition for both innovation and development. Childhood years lie at the

basis of feelings of trust, which are needed later on in life. Excessive discontinuity, detachment, and fragmentation during childhood may expose a child to a wider range of impressions, yet also affect their feeling of place security. Since place security plays an important role in periods of transition, it may seriously affect people's capacity to change. Furthermore, disembedded identity will include 'frozen associations', rather than evolving normally and collectively with the place of origin. In such cases, the need for ritualisation may be aggravated in order to compensate for a lack of stability experienced in the environment. In a fragmented society, vulnerability increases when people's sense of coherence is shattered by generalised mobility. In addition, the need for recognition and to experience connection to the material environment grows stronger.

The tendency for disembedded identity to be individualised affects social cohesion and solidarity in modern society, and reduces individuals' potential for normal social interaction in their environment. When foundations for trust are missing, the result may be fear and suspicion. There was no indication in my study that the globalisation of social structures had created identities without any geographical attachment. Rather, my findings suggest that people retain deep relations to geographical places in time and space. Has modernity really transformed our selves into institutional reflexive identities? I doubt it. Even if mobility in society escalates, there will still remain, as Heller says, an existential need for human beings to have a home somewhere.

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