

# **‘People-Place-Process’ and Attachment in the Museum**

## **A New Paradigm for Understanding Belonging?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Previous studies of place attachment have tended to focus on the positive (rather than negative) reasons why individuals associate themselves with a particular place, while studies on memory and identity have frequently been based on negative experiences of and in place. Drawing on interviews and focus groups, this article highlights how Germans and Poles with a history of forced migration have different perceptions of the same geographical ‘home’, and how their tangible and intangible encounters during a museum visit helped to generate these understandings. It argues that a people-place-process complex of attachment provides a more useful conceptualisation of belonging than either place attachment or memory, because it encapsulates a greater breadth of ideas that contribute towards these feelings.

### **KEYWORDS**

belonging, displacement, home, memory, migration, museums, people, place

The primary aim of this article is to ‘bridge the gap’ between frequently disparate or isolated subjects of academic study – people, place, processes of memory and belonging – as a means to develop a new and holistic understanding and conceptualisation of belonging and ‘home’. At the same time, it seeks to uncover and analyse how different groups with backgrounds relating to historical forced migration and displacement may feel towards the same place, and why their sense of belonging ‘attaches’ to varying concepts. It will do this through analysis and observations of individual and collective human encounters with objects, voices, people and place, all articulated within the space of a museum.

This article explores the personal, individual processes and attachments to the idea of ‘home’, belonging and place among both German and Polish residents of Görlitz-Zgorzelec, a town that straddles the



River Neisse and therefore the national border between these two countries since 1945. Large proportions of both the German and Polish populations in Görlitz-Zgorzelec have histories shaped by forced migration as a result of post-war border changes. The changes to Poland's eastern and western borders meant that Germans living east of the Oder-Neisse Line (drawn up at the 1945 Potsdam Conference) and Poles living east of the Curzon Line fled, were displaced, expelled or resettled by various means. Silesia was one of the areas which underwent the most significant population changes – as Germans fled and were expelled, so Poles were moved in. By drawing on the encounters of contemporary inhabitants of Görlitz and of Zgorzelec with the past (and with one another) in the Silesian Museum Görlitz, this article highlights the significance of investigating and understanding the impact of border change and forced migration on place attachment and belonging. It also demonstrates the potential role that museums can play in examining, analysing and building relationships between the past and the present, as well as between people. Such an analysis and methodology is therefore particularly valuable when the human cost of migration as a result of conflict, natural disaster or climate change – displacement, trauma, loss of property, home or family – becomes a cultural, social or political issue beyond the immediate need for shelter, food, clothing and medical aid.

The article builds on literature and theory from a range of disciplines, including place attachment, museum and heritage studies, anthropology and ethnology, history, cultural studies, psychology, memory and identity studies, in order to develop a more holistic approach to understanding the idea of 'home' and belonging. It then draws on empirical data, collected during fieldwork at the Silesian Museum Görlitz, in order to illustrate how Polish and German visitors conceptualised ideas around belonging, home and place in relation to the exhibits on display. This feeds into the development of a new theory for understanding belonging, partly through 'place *detachment*' or 'dislocation', which is of as much importance as – or perhaps even more than – place *attachment*, in particular within the context of understanding forced migration, displacement and refugee issues – whether historically or in the present. It draws together the significance not only of place for attachment but also of people, objects, memories and sounds, for example, seeing the processes of attachment as a bridge between the common focuses of people and place. As such, the crucial interplay of people, place and process together is at the centre of the argument for a new approach to understanding the complexity

of belonging. As this article will show, the intangibility or immateriality of people and place takes on increased significance for displaced people, due to their physical or temporal detachment from a 'home-place'. Therefore, we need to analyse the complex relationship between the roles of memory, of re-encounter with things (tangible objects, intangible culture and concepts) and the re-framing of place as a concept (rather than merely as physical or cultural geography) in order to grasp the nature of home and belonging within such communities.

The next section will critically examine the literature and ideas around home, taking into consideration the key frames within which such research has usually been undertaken – place and memory. It will then examine the potential impact of migration on questions of home and belonging, before addressing the role of museums in understandings of all of these, and museum-focussed research as a method in itself.

## Understanding 'Home'

What is home? While 'where is home?' might be a more familiar question, understanding the idea of 'home' and how this word is interpreted by different people, at different times, in different places and/or in different languages is crucial within the context of migration and also of different scales of belonging (such as regional, national or European, for example). In short, 'home' is tied up in a complex web of identities, belonging, places and attachments, where there are numerous nodes of interconnection but also large voids between the various threads.

There is also the sense of 'home' as 'homeland', a country or region of origin. The German word *Heimat* is sometimes used in English to describe the emotional, perhaps even sentimental idea of belonging to and longing for a particular 'homeland'. While this will be a geographically situated, tangible place, *Heimat* is also strongly connected to emotive and sensory attachments to place, such as through food, music, traditions, language or dialect. It is also frequently used in both historical and contemporary forms of political nationalism, where the supposed homogeneity of the 'native' population – its culture, language, ethnicity, religion, for example – are instrumentalised in political discourses on belonging according to an apparent belief 'that some people are more entitled to inhabit particular places than others' (Duyvendak 2011: 1–2). Duyvendak's analysis of this phenomenon within recent Western European politics is all the more prescient today with the rise

in right-wing nationalism and populism across Europe and within the United States. He highlights the ways in which migration is presented as a threat to 'native' populations' sense of belonging within the nation: 'politicians across Western Europe champion the ideal of nation-at-home to "support" native majorities who feel "overwhelmed" by the arrival of "strange" new neighbours with unknown habits speaking in foreign tongues' (Duyvendak 2011: 2). But what of these 'new neighbours' own sense of belonging, particularly if they have lost connections to their own 'native' places? And what if in some cases the 'new neighbours' are not necessarily 'speaking in foreign tongues' but are also citizens of the same nation, who have been forcibly displaced? Responses to such questions can be found in Maruska Svasek's work on Sudeten German constructions of 'home' (2002), which is relevant to this inquiry not only for its examination of a sense of 'home' and belonging but also because it addresses this within German expellee narratives, here Sudeten Germans who were expelled from Czechoslovakia and their descendants. Similar work has also been done on 'diaspora' communities made up of those descended from displaced people, such as Pertti Alasuutari and Maarit Alasuutari (2009) in relation to Karelians.

Several bodies of academic literature have sought to explore the relationship between different interpretations of home and belonging, and thereby generate a better understanding of these concepts. In particular, many have focused on 'home' within the context of displacement, border change and migration – where perspectives on place identity and place attachment, identities and belonging, emotions, affect and loss/attachment, memory studies, and museum and heritage studies have all made important contributions.

### Place, Memories, Identities and Belonging

In Hazel Easthope's analysis of the extensive body of literature on identities 'in a mobile world' (2009, see also Eckersley, introduction to this special issue), she explores the 'place' of place within identities. She focuses here on the relationship between people and place, in the sense of emotional attachments, embodied experiences and interpreted significances of place for people in understanding and communicating their own identities (Easthope 2009: 70–76). Svasek, in differentiating her analysis from 'the idea that people have natural or divine rights to certain territories' (Svasek 2002: 498), explores a distinction between *place* and *space* made by Anthony Giddens (1991),

where place is a fixed locality and space is a ‘mental picture’ of place or ‘imaginary space’ (Svasek 2002: 498). This distinction has echoes of the difference between the two German phrases, ‘*zu Hause*’ (in the house) and ‘*Daheim*’ (feeling at home), both of which ostensibly mean ‘at home’ – notwithstanding the regional German dialect variations in their usage – and lies at the core of the question of what it means to understand home (see also Rainer Schulze’s book on German expellees and refugees, whose title includes the phrase ‘between *Heimat* and *Zuhause*’). Two well-known English sayings also illustrate how different people may think about ‘home’ in different ways:

- ‘An Englishman’s home is his castle.’
- ‘Home is where the heart is.’

These can be summarised as follows:

- The castle: home as a defined and *tangible* place, with responsibilities and rights of ownership or custodianship.
- Where the heart is: home as an emotional and *intangible* feeling, connected to individual and often sensory experiences, memories and attachments.

However, other literature on place attachment tends to focus on the experiences of and interactions within a place or places as being the key contributing factors in levels of place attachment. For example, Hernan Casakin and Shulamith Kreitler, while pointing out the lack of an agreed definition of place attachment, highlight three significant elements of place attachment which various definitions have in common: ‘emotional bond; meaning of the place or site; interactional processes between the individual and the place’ (Casakin and Kreitler 2008: 80). This appears to undermine Svasek’s division of ‘place’ and ‘space’, which is based on a differentiation between the tangible location of place versus the intangible associations of space. In fact, Casakin and Kreitler (2008: 80) write that: ‘by interacting with their environments individuals create bonds and links. In the course of this interaction anonymous spaces are converted into places endowed with meaning, which serve as objects of attachment’. It becomes clear through analysing literature on place attachment from a wide variety of disciplines, that not only is place attachment understood in different ways, but that understandings of ‘place’ and ‘space’ may be utterly contradictory, and therefore such delimited definitions become unhelpful. What is agreed is that place (or space) is not meaningful in and of itself, rather that it only becomes significant through the different associations which people attach to it. The result of this is that place attach-

ments or place identities, while they may be harnessed, utilised or instrumentalised for purposes of collective identification, expressions of collective belonging and exclusion, are always in their essence as individual and unique as the multilayered associations which people may attach to them.

Place attachment may also be seen as something which is reactionary – it may be presented as relating to an idea of place, identities and belonging as fixed and bounded within certain parameters, particularly in the face of change, or other perceived 'risk'. While nostalgia is sometimes perceived as nothing more than sentimentality, when it is utilised for political purposes it has the potential to be divisive and dangerous. In the book *Heimat als Utopie*, Bernhard Schlink comments specifically on the German post-war generation's inability – or unwillingness – to feel 'at home' with a 'tainted' German national identity. He notes that the concept of *Heimat* was not merely sentimental and nostalgic but had also become political and ideological, along the lines of the political discourse of 'nation-as-home' analysed by Duyvendak. The emotional aspect of place attachment is therefore not only significant as being the means by which attachments to place are developed but also as a potential cultural, social and political tool.

In a world shaped by migration, mobility and social change, Schlink's comment that: 'home could be everywhere and nowhere' (2014: 15) reflects the ways in which an understanding of 'home' and belonging may not necessarily be fixated on (and in) place, but also (or alternatively) on intangible qualities, experiences and memories. This echoes the distinction between 'place' and 'space' identified by Giddens (1991) and Svasek (2002), and suggests that an individual could have more than one 'home' simultaneously.

However, it may be the case that one form of understanding 'home' predominates within different communities and in different places. For example, in some cultures and social groupings it will be more common for several generations and branches of the same family to live in close proximity to one another, often never having left the area within which they were born and grew up. In this situation, the tangible 'home'-place dominates, because it is where all of the intangible feelings have been and continue to be focused and are physically as well as emotionally situated.

In contrast, emotive and sensory attachments to place, such as through food, music, traditions, language or dialect, may be more important to individuals who move or migrate to follow opportunities for work and study, or are displaced due to external pressures such as

conflict. In other words, the intangible senses of belonging or feeling ‘at home’, including memory (of people, place, objects, experiences, sounds, smells, tastes etc.) may be more significant when the individual is no longer fixed emotionally or geographically to a single place, and/or because their ‘home’-place is no longer reachable by them. Furthermore, as Arjun Appadurai (2016) argues, ‘memory becomes hyper-valued for many migrants [...] memory, for migrants, is almost always a memory of loss’. As such, these intangible feelings may not always be positive ones, or even be straightforward binary positive-negative ones (whether for migrants or for those who have remained in their ‘home’-place). In fact, ‘home’ may be a site of trauma. A person who has lost their ‘home’ or who has left it behind during conflict may desire to return but at the same time want to stay away to avoid difficult memories, or be prevented from returning due to political change or active conflict. Individuals who have encountered violence within the ‘home’ (whether home is understood here as a family home or house, or more broadly as a town, city, region or nation) may associate it with danger, while for others it may be a safe haven from the world outside. The experiences of, and associations with ‘home’, will be unique to each individual, being just as layered, complex and ‘in flux’ as a human life course itself. Artefacts (or objects, or things) may play a key role in provoking memories of home in these contexts, but this may be

in forms which are unpredictable and disruptive [...] artefacts are sensed through our bodies but how this sensing occurs and the impact that it has results from complex, historically changing processes of social production, communication and signification (Urry in Macdonald and Fyfe 2005: 50).

This raises various issues that warrant further exploration, including whether people who may have lost many of their own tangible connections to a place feel their intangible connection to that place more keenly, as a result of their loss. Alternatively, what form does their connection (or attachment) take, or how does it become apparent to them? Such issues relate to how the memory-studies literature has sought to examine the significance of place and place attachment, particularly since Pierre Nora’s *Lieux de memoire* (1989).

Drawing these threads together, a place is considered important because of the memory (whether individual or collective) of what happened there, but perhaps sometimes the memory is imbued with greater importance because of the place it is associated with – either the place where the event, emotion or experience being remembered ‘took place’, or the place where the memory is remembered, and where

it may take on a new or increased significance or emotional quality. Furthermore, in addition to the role of individual, directly experienced memories, what has been described as ‘multidirectional’ memory or ‘post-memory’ (Hirsch 1996; Rothberg 2009) – the influence of both individual and collective memories on subsequent generations’ feelings and behaviour – is also significant. Aleida Assmann points out that this process of transmission also changes memory narratives, with younger generations periodically challenging, refuting or questioning what they hear (in Pakier and Wawrzyniak 2016: 26) in order to re-frame memory for their own ‘embodied memory’ (ibid.). Memory has long been part of the anthropological tradition of analysing cultures, beliefs and behaviours, which has taken on particular significance in work relating to Germany’s collective response to its difficult past (Assmann 2010; Macdonald 2009) and the framing of heritage and identity within this past as being part of a public ‘memory culture’ (*Erinnerungskultur*). The notion of a ‘memory complex’, which is presented by Macdonald (2013: 5) as ‘shorthand for something like “the memory-heritage-identity-complex”’ is useful in that it highlights the interconnected (and entangled) nature of what it means to be human within a world which places value on the past for understanding both the individual and the collective in the present and into the future. However, it is interesting to note that Macdonald’s memory complex does not – explicitly at least – include any particular emphasis on relationships to place. Instead, this is implied as being situated within some of the various ideas of memory, heritage and identity which she examines. Given John Dixon and Kevin Durrheim’s (2000: 28) assertion that the wide range of academic research into place attachment has ‘established the importance of place for the production of self’, this may appear surprising. However, Ullrich Kockel’s (2012a, 2012b) exploration of ‘belonging in and out of place’ (2012b: 558) highlights the tendency of place to be downplayed within anthropological studies, at the same time as being a key focus within geography-based research.

### **Towards a People-Place-Process Understanding of Belonging**

In their extensive review of the large body of academic work focusing on place attachment and place-identity, Dixon and Durrheim (2000) also highlight these tangible and intangible interpretations of ‘home’ by identifying three significant shortcomings of existing research. In particular:

(1) it has largely ignored the rhetorical traditions through which places, and the identities they embody and circumscribe, are imbued with meaning; (2) it has disregarded how place-identity constructions, as deployed within everyday discourse, are used to accomplish discursive actions, including the justification of certain kinds of person-in-place relations; and (3) most importantly, how one locates oneself and others (Dixon and Durrheim 2000: 28).

Again, here we have the notion that there are two significant factors associated with place: the meanings which are ascribed to it by people (either by individuals or by groups), and the ways in which these meanings are utilised both in society (in politics, culture and public discourse) and in individual (often private) understandings and positioning of the self. Leila Scannell and Robert Gifford (2010: 1–10) take this further by proposing a framework which has place attachment at the centre, with three subsidiary nodes: ‘person’, ‘place’ and ‘process’. As such, their conceptualisation of place attachment addresses previous concerns around the delimiting of its tangible and intangible aspects. This framework includes within ‘person’ both individual and collective entities (such as groups or cultures). ‘Place’ is articulated as both physical and social (linking to the discussions over the terms ‘place’ and ‘space’). Finally, ‘process’ is divided into affect, cognition and behaviour – which include memory, meaning, emotions and activities (Scannell and Gifford 2010: 1–10). It therefore highlights the roles of individual emotion and memory, experience and behaviour, in addition to collective attributes connected to religious or historical meaning, and the natural, built or social environment. In doing so Scannell and Gifford (*ibid.*) make the significant step of breaking down varying and complex attributes of place attachment into various constituent parts. However, they do not make or examine connections *between* their three ‘nodes’ of person, place and process.

This article will take forward their approach by highlighting the entangled and interconnected nature of people, place and process in relation to attachment and belonging. By changing the ‘person’ to people, it aims to recognise the diversity of both individuals and groups, as well as the potential for common analytical frames for understanding.

### **Museums, Migration and ‘Home’**

It is within this context – of place attachment, memory-complexes, the instrumentalisation of emotions, the notion of heritage and the uses

of the past in the present – that this article explores ideas of belonging and home, and particularly how these concepts relate to presentations of and interactions with post-conflict forced migration and migrant (or refugee) communities within European museums (focussing on the visitors and their feelings as the starting point, rather than on the museum as institution, as in Eckersley 2015, for example).

Museums, wherever they are situated and whatever their focus, are frequently tied to a place – its geography, history, ethnology, culture and politics – and often seek to explain what happened *here*. As such, they try to (re)present places, events and people and they contain objects, collections and (hi)stories (Whitehead et al. 2012). At the same time, they also have the potential to be sites of experience, learning, dialogue and memory, for acts of remembrance, acknowledgement, empathy and understanding (Whitehead et al. 2014). Furthermore, they provide spaces (or places) within which people may become involved in such encounters and experiences, which may therefore contribute towards their ideas of home and belonging. As Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe (2005: 4) argue, 'it is because museums have a formative as well as a reflective role in social relations that they are potentially of such influence'. This also makes museums fascinating places within which to undertake research.

As a result, not only does this article consider museum collections and displays, but it also examines the visitors who interact with these materials and each other within the space of the museum. Moreover, it takes account of how the museum, its objects, displays, activities, staff and visitors relate to the place in which it is situated and the past (or pasts) which it is tasked with presenting (and sometimes, but not always, with representing).

In this context, Scannell and Gifford's framework can help to understand how museums (re)present 'place' – not only since it can be used to analyse place attachment per se but also because it can be adopted as a means to analyse the multimodal nature of ideas of identity and belonging (process) in relation to the experience of visitors (person) within a museum which relates to a specific location (place). To illustrate this further:

- (1) 'place' – museums are always physically situated in a place, and are often also representative of a place or places. Museums are both social symbols of place and social arenas within places (for example, national museums, city museums or regional museums).
- (2) 'person' – museums connect with people, both as frequent subjects of their displays and as visitors, with whom the museum may

attempt to come into dialogue. Such connections are both on the individual and collective level – both as subjects of museum work and as actors within museums.

- (3) ‘process’ – museums may – either intentionally or serendipitously – connect with visitors’ affect, cognition and behaviour, particularly in relation to identity and belonging. Different aspects of the museum-visiting experience can have an impact on people’s memories and emotions, while potentially impacting on their behaviour, for example through visitors’ encounters with objects and/or texts, with audiovisual materials and the physical realities of the museum experience (Smith and Campbell 2015; Tolia-Kelly et al. 2016).

## Method

Since this article seeks to understand perceptions of ‘home’, it is interested in how and why different people associate various issues with feelings of belonging. With this in mind, we might expect contrasting interpretations of ‘home’ to be more common in border areas or in the context of displacement or migration, because these factors are likely to result in different groups attaching different ‘things’ (including concepts) to their understanding of a particular place. As a result, this article uses the example of one museum (the Silesian Museum in Görlitz) to explore the question of how museums and visitor experiences within them may influence and relate to feelings of belonging and understandings of ‘home’, in particular in relation to migration.

The town of Görlitz straddles the River Neisse and was therefore divided into two following the Second World War and the Potsdam Conference, which determined Germany’s eastern border with Poland. The eastern part of the town, now named Zgorzelec, is in Poland, while the smaller western part, including the historic town centre, remained part of (East) Germany – despite the fact that they are both situated within the historical region of Silesia. Both towns are now attempting to define themselves within a new ‘shared’ identity of Görlitz-Zgorzelec, and the museum’s remit to (re)present the cultural history of the region of Silesia may help to facilitate this.

The museum is a cultural history museum (in the central European rather than Anglo-American sense) which is fully bilingual in German and Polish in order to cater to its audiences from both sides of the River Neisse. While neither the museum’s director nor its staff consider the museum to be concerned with migration as such (interview with museum director, 6 February 2014), they see themselves as having

a significant role to play in contemporary social understandings of past and present cultural exchange and as sites of encounter with difference. Issues of migration, identity and belonging in relation to movements of people and ideas run throughout the museum as an undercurrent to the place-based focus of the museum on Silesia, its history, culture, people and politics (*ibid.*).

In order to gather data about the museum, and how visitors respond to it and its relationship to place – as well as underlying notions of 'home' and belonging, I adopted a mixed qualitative methodology. This consisted of: two separate site visits (one initial visit at the development stage and one in-depth visit as part of the fieldwork); a total of five semi-structured interviews with museum staff (the director and four other members of staff) each lasting between forty-five and sixty minutes; participant observation during an accompanied visit to the museum; and parallel focus groups with two groups of local residents – one German nationals and the other Polish nationals.

The focus-group participants were selected in order to cover as broad a demographic range as possible, balancing numbers of male and female participants, with their ages ranging from early twenties to eighties, and occupations including students, crafts and tradesmen, professionals, carers, homemakers and unemployed. Each group consisted of between six and ten people, who were selected (according to the above criteria) from individuals responding to a call put out on social media, via local cultural and educational organisations and which was taken up by the local print and radio media. The focus-group discussions were recorded and took place immediately before and immediately after the accompanied (but not guided) visit to selected rooms of the museum. The participants of the two focus groups undertook the accompanied visit together, and also had shared breaks and lunch during the day, to allow encounters between them to take place.

This integrated methodology was crucial to understand not only what people thought about the museum displays but also how they encountered them, how they interacted with them and with one another in the space and in relation to particular objects, ideas or themes of the museums. As such, the opportunity for encounter and discussion between the participants, whether within their own language groups, or between them, relates to Assmann's notion of 'dialogic memory', in which she argues that countries with a 'common legacy of traumatic violence [...] engage in a dialogic memory if they face a shared history of mutual violence by mutually acknowledging their own guilt

and empathy with the suffering they have inflicted on others' (2016: 32). Of course, the focus-group participants were not acting as representatives of their countries, nor is there any personal guilt or violence for them to acknowledge. However, the possibility to engage in dialogue connected to their personal and collective histories and memories of post-war displacement relates to Assmann's idea of dialogic memory as a force for mutual empathy and understanding (*ibid.*: 32–36).

I undertook the German-language focus groups myself, while a native speaker facilitated the Polish-language discussions, and then we each transcribed the key areas of discussion and translated them into English. Both display analysis and museum visitor studies are commonly used methods in museum and heritage studies, and therefore they were highly appropriate for this research. Indeed, my approach goes some way to linking these two often disparate aspects of museum research – the display or exhibition analysis on the one hand, and the visitor analysis on the other – as these are necessarily entangled with one another (see Whitehead 2016a and 2016b on analysing museum displays, on which this methodology is based). Bella Dicks has also criticised the tendency within museum and heritage studies to research the museum either from the perspective of the audiences (in visitor studies) or through the analysis of the displays (in exhibition or display analysis) and argues for a consideration of the 'habitus of heritage' in the discipline (Dicks 2016).

Therefore my approach combines two areas of investigation:

- (1) investigation and analysis of the museum spaces as a form of exhibitionary complex (Bennett 1995), where power relations are enacted through the museum space, its exhibitions and representations of the past,
- (2) the dual role of the visitor as both an actor who has agency within the space to make decisions on what to look at and how to respond, and as a subject over whom control is exerted not only by museum curators and exhibition designers but also through interaction with and observation by other museum visitors (and in this case the researcher).

It is important to note that during the accompanied visit the researchers and the focus-group participants became at least temporarily, a form of exhibitionary complex of their own, within which specific relationships, sets of expectations and behaviours, as well as control and power dynamics were at play. Nonetheless, because I kept some distance between myself and the visitors as they encountered the museum's exhibits (and each other), I remain confident that their responses and interactions were largely spontaneous and natural.

After the fieldwork was completed, I analysed the data in the context of the wider theoretical framework discussed above, combining memory studies, theories of place and place attachment, museum and heritage studies and belonging. Transcriptions of the interviews and focus-group discussions, as well as notes from the site visits and observations were read closely and coded in relation to the key themes of the study. While some themes were predetermined in advance of the fieldwork, others emerged from the data itself, and so the coding and recoding of the data was both an iterative process and in itself a form of grounded theory development (Strauss and Corbin 1998), enabling new insights to emerge in response to the data. Through this the need for a more holistic understanding of belonging and 'home', in relation to varying forms and processes of attachment, became evident. Instead of taking each theme or form of attachment as a 'silo' to be analysed separately, an integrated analysis was undertaken in order to understand how a new paradigm for belonging could emerge by bridging the gap between people, place, memory – what I will term a people-place-process complex of belonging.

### **People-Place-Process: A New Paradigm of Belonging?**

The museum displays highlight the importance of 'place' and tangible 'things' to perceptions of home and belonging. For example, the first room places exhibits in the context of a large map of Europe, within which is embedded a video screen covering the area of Silesia. This screen displays layers of maps showing the many changes in the borders and belonging to which the region has been subjected. The display cases, positioned in the centre of the room, provide a focus on several place-based Silesian identity tropes (including the River Neisse, Breslau town hall, the coal industry, the mythological mountain spirit *Rübezahl/Liczyrzepa*), which were reported as being universally recognised by members of both the German and Polish contemporary Silesian populations (focus group discussions G2 and P2), and which were the subject of particular interest amongst the Polish participants (focus-group discussion P2). These themes can then be found later on in the museum, recurring at different points, but always emphasising the underlying theme of continuity and disruption through the movement of people through place. The average visitor may not be conscious of it, but this framing of the museum visiting experience and of the displays within the museum with recurring themes, objects and materials

provides multiple layers of what Sharon Macdonald (2012: 233–252; 2013) calls ‘past presencing’ – not only of the histories, objects and places of the past into the present, but also of the past, present and future of each individual museum visit itself, as the themes re-emerge during the passage of time and space inside the museum.

These themes come to the fore again in the final room of the museum, where the more recent history of Silesian population movements, in particular as a result of the post-war border change, is presented, through documents, objects and photographic images. Three objects which stand out in this section, both in relation to their connection to the themes of the first room and also in relation to ideas of home, belonging and change, are:

- A small figure of *Rübezahl* (a folklore figure related to the Silesian *Schneekoppe/Snieżka* mountain)
- A coffee jar containing a lump of lignite coal from Upper Silesia, and,
- A display case containing various bunches of keys, some with keyrings or key pockets attached.

Crucially, however, these apparently very ordinary, ‘everyday’ objects carry with them not only connotations of place-attachment in relation to the themes introduced in the first room of the museum but also personal stories of identification with a lost ‘home’-place in Silesia. Their subjective (some might say sentimental) value is based purely on what they meant to individuals, yet they carry a powerful, universal, message relating to what these people felt was important about their (former) ‘home’ (focus group G2). For example, the *Rübezahl* figure was the only toy which a young girl was allowed by her mother to carry with her on their flight from Silesia. The lump of coal was kept in the jar by a German who had been expelled from Silesia following the post-war border changes, and which was donated to the museum. Both of these items can be interpreted as ‘transitional objects’ (Parkin 1999), which help their owner to make the emotional transition from one home to another, but which may also be seen as bridges between the museum’s presentation of different layers of the past and the present by the museum visitors.

The keys, which were taken by Germans as they left their homes behind, can be more universally understood as signifiers of belonging. Together with the coal, we can view them as ‘testimonial objects’ (Hirsch and Spitzer 2006) – objects which represent a particular history, ‘standing for’ something important (whether that is the idea of belonging to a place, or to an emotional home, or a sense of nostalgia)

and 'acting as points of intersection between the past and the present' (ibid.: 358). As with the *Rübezahl* figure, this applies not only for the owners of these objects but also for the museum visitors who encounter them. Staff interviews indicate that it was an intentional strategy of the museum, to attempt to bring out:

the emotional connection between the personal biographies and Silesian history, [which] activates the memory of older visitors and builds connections between the generations, as well as between the general and the personal (interview with curator A, 6 February 2014).

While the tangible objects on display in these first and last spaces of the museum frame the visitor's experience and understanding of the region of Silesia, there are other *intangible* encounters within the museum which allude to, resonate with and even amplify ideas of home and belonging. In particular, one audiovisual exhibit became a focal point for participants during the accompanied visit and subsequent focus-group discussions. I observed that individuals who had previously been strangers (or in some cases acquaintances) only an hour or so earlier, clustered around a single audiovisual screen, in concentration and animated conversation with one another. The audiovisual in question contained audio recordings of people speaking in various Silesian dialects, describing everyday activities such as how they used to walk to school or work in the fields, or events such as weddings. The dialects are now either lost or at risk of dying out, as the populations who spoke them were expelled from Silesia and dispersed across post-war Germany. The impact of living outside of a specific 'dialect community' as well as of generational change has meant that the dialects are no longer passed on or learnt, and only rarely used or heard today. For some of the fieldwork participants, hearing these dialects acted as a 'testimonial object' in itself – the experience of hearing dialect spoken which reminded them of the voice of their Silesian grandmother (focus group G2, participant M) or other family member allowed them to encounter a direct memory shift, or bridge, from their present reality to their personal memories and sense of 'home' in relation to the comfort and familiarity of the family. One participant spoke of hearing a familiar dialect when one is far away from home as being '*ein Stück Heimat*' (a piece of home) and stated that she felt her experience of hearing the dialect spoken became something quite intimate (focus group G2, participant F).

These connections not only brought the museum, its objects and displays vividly to life, but also made the wider political and social his-

tory of the museum and the region personal, making the participants want to talk to each other about their memories. For the German visitors who made these connections, the experience of being in the museum as part of a group of people who shared similar experiences and encountered familiar objects illustrates the relevance of established ideas of collective memory. For example, Maurice Halbwachs (1992: 38) points out that ‘it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize and localize their memories’. Similarly, it has echoes of more recent studies on reminiscence work with older people, where it was observed that ‘conversations can often serve as a vehicle through which memories spread across a community’ (Stone and Hirst 2014: 316).

It is striking to note that for many of the German participants in the study, this was the key aspect of the museum which they felt resonated with them in relation to their personal and individual ideas of home within the context of Silesia. In other words, for those people who had longer historical attachments to the region, Silesia was an ‘imagined place’ – a place in the mind – that was primarily situated within the intangible memories and stories of the people (often family members) who had come from there. Due to the political and border changes affecting the region, this ‘Silesia’ no longer exists, other than in their memories and stories. Indeed, the titles of various German-language books about the region evoke emotive feelings about the experiences of people who were expelled from Silesia and now feel distant from it: *Kalte Heimat* (‘Cold Home’; Kossert 2008) and *Fremde Heimat* (‘Foreign/Strange Home’; Burk et al. 2011) are just two examples. For members of the German focus group, their perception of Silesia as a tangible, physical *place* which could be visited was very different to their experience and encounter with it as an imagined place (or space) in their minds and through their memories. For those who had visited Silesia in Poland once the borders opened after 1989, they did not experience the physical place as ‘home’ in any real sense, but as a new place at once disconnected from both their present lived realities and their (family) memories of Silesia, and yet still strangely connected to their sense of self (G1 and G2).

Overall, therefore, the German group, many of whose families had been detached from (Polish) Silesia for decades, had more of an emotional attachment to the *people* who used to live there rather than the *place*. Their encounters in the museum with personal objects and dialect sounds triggered memories and emotions in connection to loved ones, which they were able to share with others in the group who

had similar experiences. Crucially, because Silesia changed significantly between 1945 and 1990, these attachments are much more meaningful than the contemporary geographical territory in which the experiences occurred. For this group, in other words, the idea of belonging to Silesia related to people and process: '*home is where the heart is*', but also connected to the memory of a real place. Notably, such attachments conflicted with official political discourses on how those German nationals who were expelled after the Second World War should perceive the idea of 'home':

we grew up with the notion that [...] the nation state would dissolve into European or Atlantic political connections, home would be everywhere and nowhere, and whoever could not feel at home there, where he was, but instead yearned for a lost home in Pomerania, Silesia or Bohemia, was a revanchist (Schlink 2014: 15, my translation).

The Polish focus group had a very different understanding of Silesia as 'home'. For them, the region was situated within family memories as a *place* which many had been brought to (as displaced people from formerly Polish territory east of the Curzon Line, following the political border redrawing which took place at the end of the Second World War), and which was therefore associated with uncertainty for a significant amount of time. They described it in relatively mundane terms as being somewhere to live and work, and for tourists to come to, but not necessarily primarily as an emotionally resonant 'home-place' (P1 and P2). Therefore, for the Polish group, many of whose families had been 'resettled' in Silesia after 1945, home related to the idea of *place* attachment where '*home is the castle*'. They associated Silesia as home in relation to the tangible location, property and place, and did not have the same emotional attachment to intangibles such as dialect, food or regional identity. The Polish participants found photographs or other recognisable depictions of places, buildings and geographical features within the museum significant, and their encounters in the museum enabled them to 'discover' the – mainly German – past, and 'forgotten' history of places which they knew well in their contemporary everyday lives.

Although the Polish participants recognised that Silesia had an interesting past, they had few emotional attachments to or strong memories of this history that could contribute towards an image of the region that compared to that of the German-speaking group. Yet, in both cases, the past is quite literally, as well as metaphorically, 'a foreign country' (Lowenthal 1985), one which has lost its connections

to the present and its rootedness in place. The contrast between the ways in which the two groups responded to the idea of Silesia as a 'home' relates not only to the past but also to the perceived need to ensure that past memories of 'German Silesia' are not placed in isolation from the contemporary ways of life and 'new' traditions in Silesia (interview with staff member B, 7 February 2014). This has its roots in the ongoing political instrumentalisation of 'lost' German property, identities and traditions by right-wing groups acting as 'representatives' of former expellees and their descendants. The contrasting perceptions of how the different language groups understood the concept of Silesia meant that it was too 'slippery', and perhaps also too politically and historically loaded, to be considered as an identity category for both the German and the Polish speakers – albeit for different reasons. This was despite the fact that the majority of the members of both language groups readily identified as being either 'Görlitzer' (for the German group) or 'Polish' (for the Polish group) (focus group G1 and P1). This suggests that we need to consider intangible 'home' concepts alongside more tangible 'home' ideas in order to obtain a fuller understanding of how and why people feel a sense of belonging.

In order to encapsulate all of these relationships to place, encompassing within them memories, objects and new experiences, I propose a new, more holistic understanding of belonging, based on a *people-place-process* 'complex', in which place and memory (the two key elements within attachment literature) have equal significance. At the same time, when this is examined in relation to traumatic experiences such as forced migration or displacement, or contested or conflicting notions of belonging, I propose that an agonistic approach (Bull and Hansen 2016) – which recognises the experiences of the 'other' but which neither valorises one over the other nor universalises both – is the most productive of mutual understanding and empathy. The notion of the people-place-process complex can be illustrated through the idea of a bridge between two river banks – one river bank represents 'people' while the other represents 'place'. In order to enable attachments to develop between people and place (either individually or collectively) a bridge is needed – this bridge and the pillars on which it stands represent the processes of attachment – such as memory, experience, stories – which are often triggered by or related to encounters with objects, images, sounds or other people. In the fieldwork undertaken in Görlitz, these processes took place through encounters or triggers within the museum: objects of material and visual culture; voices and stories from audiovisuals as well as

focus-group participants. While 'the medium' may be 'the message' (McLuhan 1994: 7), here the medium is the pivot for the processes of attachment between people and place, no matter what their specific background or family experiences in relation to Silesia and displacement had been.

Underlying all of this is the fact that some members of both groups had a family background of forced migration either to or from Silesia. In previous studies of place attachment, the focus has been on 'positive' attachments to place, whereas for many, in particular those with refugee or forced-migrant backgrounds, the emotions relating to a specific place or set of places will be a complex web of 'positive' and 'negative' emotions, memories, experiences, meanings and symbolisms. While studies of displaced people often focus on a sense of longing for the potentially idealised 'lost home' (whether as a country, region, city, village or dwelling place), perhaps for many the primary memory and emotions associated with that lost home are of violence, pain, degradation and humiliation. Again, explorations of place attachments in migrants relating to their 'new homes' tend to focus on the positive – political, religious and other freedoms afforded by the new home, or educational opportunities perhaps, but not on the challenges the new home has brought (such as government bureaucracy, visa regulations, the recognition – or not – of previous qualifications, or experiences of racial and religious discrimination). Place-based trauma and suffering, in particular in relation to discourses of migration and loss of home, has not yet found its home in place attachment theory.

It is crucial for place attachment to be understood in relation to both its positive and negative aspects, for place detachment, or place dislocation, to also become understood as a significant part of what it can mean to feel emotionally attached to a place. In this way it could be described as needing to be understood 'agonistically' (Cento Bull and Hansen 2016, building on Chantal Mouffe's critique of cosmopolitanism (2005)), rather than from an antagonistic or cosmopolitan perspective. This article has indicated that people continue to feel strongly about places in relation not only to the location itself but also to memories, experiences and associations with the place, which may be brought up 'out of place' by the encounter with objects, sounds or other associative materials. This is true even for later generations, who may have no personal experiences or memories which could attach them to a place, but for whom the direct memories and experiences of people within their families has played a significant role in their (potentially unconscious) framing of themselves.

## Conclusion

This study has shown how German and Polish nationals with migration backgrounds understood Silesia as ‘home’ for contrasting reasons and in different ways. Their experiences of the Silesian Museum Görlitz highlighted the importance of both tangible and intangible aspects of belonging, conceptions of ‘place’ and ‘space’, and the role of a people-place-process complex in constructing subjective notions of ‘home’. Crucially, the German group’s perceptions of (Polish) Silesia were rooted in memories and (hi)stories of a place that changed significantly during the Cold War era, whereas the Polish group viewed the region in less emotional, primarily geographic, terms. It is also worth noting that the museum provided an ideal, and perhaps institutionally unique, space to explore and understand these place attachments for various reasons, including by being rooted in the region, by providing opportunities for visitors to trigger memories through encounters with tangible and intangible heritage, and by facilitating interaction, sharing and dialogue between the focus-group participants.

Encounters with objects, people and places in combination form the significant part of a museum visiting experience, and are also key drivers of both memory recall and identity formation processes (in either concrete or in abstract form). As such, they may contribute to a sense of place attachment, potentially alongside a ‘dis-placed’, intangible and ‘un-situated’ sense of belonging and ‘at-home-ness’. Scannell and Gifford’s tripartite model of place attachment could therefore be used or adapted to allow for the inclusion of more complex and entangled relationships to place, including ‘place *detachment*’ and attachments to multiple places, all within a dynamic temporal frame. Again, museums are unique in allowing for people to encounter the freezing, pausing, fast-forwarding and rewinding of time, all placed within a bounded space – whether that is the museum building, the exhibition room or even a single display case – in order for different times to be experienced in parallel, and simultaneously at the visitor’s own pace. The very often collective experience of museum-visiting means that dialogue and interaction with others, and in relation to the exhibits, is recognised not only as a crucial component of museum-going but also of the transformative potential of museums for people. Museums therefore have the potential not only to act as sites for agonistic dialogue (Bull and Hansen 2016) about belonging but may even be the best suited public space to such a purpose.

These findings echo much of the existing literature that has captured how these different factors contribute to what people understand

as 'home'. However, by highlighting how both groups of participants experienced feelings of place attachment for contrasting reasons, it also suggests that the three concepts of people-place-process may carry different weightings depending on how and why individuals consider something to be 'home'. Perhaps this should not be surprising, given that the Polish and German groups included individuals who had family histories of forced migration to and from Silesia respectively, but it is nonetheless worth reiterating. With this in mind, however, we should consider whether place attachment is actually the correct term to use in this context – especially for the German group, since their perceptions and memories of Silesia relate to a place that no longer exists. Instead, the idea of the people-place-process complex of belonging may be more fruitful in helping to understand why people experience feelings of attachment and 'at-home-ness'.

Previous work on attachment has tended to focus either on place attachment or on attachments to the past, to people, objects and so on as separate and different fields of study (often emanating from different academic disciplines), that have not always communicated with one another. This article has built on and goes beyond these studies by examining the entanglement of various receptors of emotional attachment (people, place, objects, memory), in order to understand the broader notion of belonging and a sense of 'home'. Personal experiences or family memories of disruption – such as the loss of a physical 'home-place' may not only heighten the various forms of emotional attachments but also impact on which receptor of attachment (place, objects, people, for example), or which process (memory, experience) is more significant. This has clarified the need for a new paradigm of belonging, which does not separate understandings of attachment into 'silos' according to different disciplines. The significance of this new approach is that at its core it has the complex relationship between people-place-process – making it universally applicable to understanding belonging across time, space (and place) and experience.

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