

Our need to reflect on the meaning of “home”

Bedürfnisse des Reflektierens über die Bedeutung von Heimat

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Abstract

The aim of this research project was to extend our understanding of the phenomenon of “home,” and how the meaning of home is understood and constructed. For this purpose, a literature review and two interviews with fellow students were conducted. The interviews were based on the problem-centered interview (PZI), which involves looking for categories that are frequently mentioned by the subjects in the course of answering questions. After discussing the project, we came to the conclusion that a dynamic approach is necessary to investigate the character of the “home” phenomenon. It was therefore necessary to clarify the research question, in order to take into account the dynamic nature of how we define and perceive “home.” The method of introspection, which was applied by both authors, appeared to be particularly suitable for this purpose.

Keywords

meaning making processes of home; sense of belonging; introspection

Kurzzusammenfassung

Ziel des vorliegenden Projekts ist es, unser Verständnis des Phänomens "Heimat" bzw. „zu Hause“ zu erweitern und besser zu verstehen, wie die Bedeutung von „Heimat“ erlebt, gedacht und konstruiert wird. Zu diesem Zweck wurden zusätzlich zu einer Literaturrecherche zwei Interviews durchgeführt. Diese basieren auf dem Ansatz des problemzentrierten Interviews (PZI). In der Auswertung wurden, ausgehend etwa von besonders häufig genannten Stichworten, Kategorien gebildet, um den untersuchten Gegenstand „Heimat“ besser darstellen zu können. Während der Arbeit wurde offensichtlich, dass das kategoriebildende PZI zur Erfassung des Phänomens „Heimat“ ungeeignet ist. Vielmehr bedurfte es einer Methode, welche der Dynamik, der Prozesshaftigkeit von „Heimat“ Rechnung trägt, und die Reflexion über sie nicht in quantitativ abbildbare Kategorien zwingt.

Deshalb wählten die beiden Autoren die Methode der nach innen gerichteten Beobachtung, der Introspektion, um ihre Gedanken über „Heimat“ zu reflektieren und neue Erkenntnisse zu gewinnen.

Schlüsselwörter

Bedeutung von Heimat; Heimatgefühl; Introspektion

1 *Home — a diverse concept*

The notion of “Heimat,” or home, is ambiguous. It has an outer dimension that aims for the realm of experience, and an inner dimension that seeks the realm of the spirit. Associated as it is with the modulation of feelings and attitudes, the inner dimension lends emotive, aesthetic, and ideological components to the meaning of home (“Heimat,” 1999). In ordinary language, “Heimat” refers to the location where someone is born, and where the early experiences of socialization take place — experiences that later shape one’s identity, character, mentality, attitudes, and perception of the (inside and) outside world. It can be defined as a geographical area to which somebody feels strongly connected. The notion of “Heimat” reflects the need for spatial orientation, and for a territory that provides safety, identity, and stimulation for one’s own existence (“Heimat,” 1989). The word “primary” refers to an emotional bonding between humans, space, and place. This can be a home, city, district, village, quarter, nation, land, language, or religion. Moreover, it can be concrete places, or imagined people or objects, plus the events and circumstances that formed a backdrop for life. All these things are factors in the construction of group identity (Kehl, 2011). The notion of “zu Hause” (at home) has a long history with many shifts of meaning (Grimm & Grimm, 1854–1961). Home is not just a physical building but the dynamic order of a social group, a configuration (Schmidt-Voges, 2015). The primary function of a home is to provide a place to live, a shelter, and even an occupation (Grimm & Grimm, 1961). The notion of home in the English-speaking world means both “zu Hause” and “Heimat,” i.e., the meaning of “going home” is “nach Hause gehen” and hometown means “die Heimatstadt.”

1.1 *The ship of home in the river of knowledge*

Home, just like culture, cannot be reduced to a variable. Quantitative approaches can evaluate a score on patriotism, for example, but they cannot help develop an understanding of the phenomena of home. Thus, a qualitative approach must contribute to broadening the understanding of how the meaning of home is (individually) constructed. In carrying out a small project, our delving into theory can only go so deep, and further investigation is preferable. Nevertheless, we think that certain components of the concept of home will come into focus if we investigate our fellow students’ understanding of home and discuss our results together in the lecture. The theory introduced in the next segment examines different approaches to “home” under varying perspectives. These variations in perspective made it particularly difficult to come up with a consistent definition of what “home” really is, especially since home is such an affective and subjective entity, not just a physical place, as we will elaborate in the theoretical part of this paper. We came to conclude that the subject of “home” is too wide and too dynamic to be evaluated in a small-scale project like ours. So, we agreed on the necessity of zooming in on the subject and focusing on sub-domains of “home,” regarding the concept’s dynamic and affective character.

One of the readings given to students in the course was a chapter from Ernst Boesch’s *Sehnsucht* (1998) entitled “Heimweh und Fernweh,” meaning “desire for home and desire for the far away.” Basically, the chapter contains reflections upon the notion of “Heimat,” its meaning for people while at home and abroad, and its meaning for identity. After reading Boesch’s chapter, the authors of this

paper discussed what “Heimat” means to them, their perception of culture, and how difficult it is to accurately define a generalized meaning of home (see paragraphs on personal relevance).

In Sehnsucht, Boesch (1998) relates to home (Heimat) as a place of secure acting, where a concrete sense of self is grounded in a familiar setting. From this author’s point of view, two components are essential to home: transparency and acknowledgment. Another important feature of home is language. Home is not a physical element, but rather a phenomenon comprised of a place or a society, and resulting from an I-Environment Relationship (Valsiner, 2016). Home is also made up of images that represent memories, future projects, and ambitions, but also the strange and unknown (Boesch, 1998). Boesch differentiates between two types of homes: the “real” one, geographic and social, and the “fantastic” one, made up of images derived from the “real” home. Boesch (1998) argues that when we move to a new place, the former home is often subject to projections in a positive manner. He concludes that when asked what home really is, the realist will show his passport or driver’s license, while the psychoanalyst will refer to his mother’s lap. Others will, after some thinking, come up with the idea that home is a dimension, with a geographical place and childhood as its origin and the chance of emotional fulfillment as its future.

1.2 *Personal meanings of home*

Inspired by Ernst Boesch’s Sehnsucht, which focuses on the personal meanings of home, we discussed home as a concept. We wanted to conduct a small-scale project, including theoretical analysis and interviews, to be carried out with fellow students (Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 2) in an attempt to approach a generalized meaning of home. In the end, we found out that zooming in on the matter was necessary to enhance the research.

We came to understand the processuality of our project, and also that of the denotation and connotations of home, in order to discover general regularities. We accomplished this by zooming in on the phenomenon feeling at home, after working with fixed categories that were meant to represent home initially. The method of choice used for “zooming-in” was introspection. Because we were not familiar with this method, we were unsure whether it would fit the personal character of a concept like home, but as our results show, the decision was the right one. Both authors recorded their introspection in the German language (English version in the Appendix).

1.3 *Thoughts on home 1 (Roman Gallus)*

I am interested in our topic — the process of meaning-making with respect to home — because I have become more conscious of my personal definition of home in the time since I moved to Berlin. To me, the notion of home is to feel comfortable, secure, appropriate, relaxed, and in a place where I can be myself. The first times I came back home, I understood the characteristics that I connect with the notion of “Heimat” more clearly. In contrast to the city of Berlin, whose current population is estimated to be about 3.7 million people, my hometown is a mere village of 20,000 citizens. While I went to school, and in the first years after receiving my high-school diploma, I went to Berlin a few times and discovered various clubs that fascinated me. The big city, the amount of diverse people, and the possibilities for night owls attracted me. When I went back to my hometown of Isernhagen a

few times after relocating to Berlin, I recognized the characteristics I was missing in my new home: the silence, the clean air, and the good mood of most of the people, in contrast to what one finds in the nation's capital. Moreover, I experienced the people in my hometown to be more relaxed and less self-centered. They acknowledge each other, and are more sincerely friendly. When I think about some things that I associate with my home, I think about the people and the material context. In summer, for example, the lilacs in our garden smell very intense.

For me, stepping outside a domicile into nature that belongs only to you also represents the feeling of being at home. A garden that surrounds the house can be understood as a crossover from private to public life. While the inside of your home is protected from both unlawful entry and inquisitive glances, you cannot forbid someone from looking at the yard; only trespassing is prohibited. Furthermore, I experience the feeling of home independently of a place where I am surrounded by good friends. Thus, I can ascertain that home is not so much a place as a feeling for me. Among friends, I feel comfortable and accepted because the people who surround me are familiar, and I appreciate them. Home can also be a place where I feel at home, because it's the house I grew up in, even when my parents are not there.

When I moved to Berlin, I needed a few weeks to 'construct' a new home, as I got settled in my apartment and developed the feeling of being at home. A friend of mine also moved into the same building in Berlin, and facilitated this feeling of being at home, because he was a familiar person in my life. I was struggling with the feeling at being home when my neighbor, who has a mental disorder, would scream every night and then early in the morning. I was afraid as well as enraged when he screamed the weirdest things; I could not relax and recover easily. After all, "home" is a feeling that is usually connected to memories of a positively connoted past; it is not local but rather affective.

1.4 Thoughts on home 2 (Tilman Schober)

When I was about nine years old, my family moved from the city of Rostock (Mecklenburg–Western Pomerania) to the small town Wolgast in Pomerania, in northeastern Germany and close to the Polish border. I was about to move up to the third grade in school, and I was curious about what Wolgast would look like, whether I would find new friends, and if I would like it there after all. I had felt very much at home in Rostock, where I had a lot of friends in school and liked the place we lived in. It was a typical residential area in East Germany, made up of utilitarian prefabricated buildings of six stories or more, where almost everyone had the same apartment. I cannot really recall the first time we came to Wolgast, and what kind of first impression the place made on me. But today I still remember feeling that this place was small, grey, and not as nice as my hometown.

I am not sure whether I created my own myth of having this idea immediately after moving to Wolgast, but pretty soon I vowed to myself that I would move back to Rostock as soon as I was able to make my own choices — going "home" as I thought. This was in mid-1993, just before my ninth birthday. Western Pomerania (Vorpommern in German) was a typical place people would call "Wendeverlierer," which basically means that after the political changes that followed the end of the German Democratic Republic and the Soviet Union, the place was a "loser." It took some years until I

realized what was really going on, and what was causing my initial rejection of the place, but already after a short time there, I imagined that this place would not feel like home to me the way Rostock did.

When I finally got to leave Wolgast in 2001, and went to Canada for a one-year exchange program, I did not return to Wolgast but to Greifswald, in late 2002. It was then that I had to admit that now Wolgast was my new “home,” on the one hand, because it was the place where my parents lived and where I had found new friends, and on the other hand, because my connection to Rostock had changed: I still had family there but no real friends anymore. It became clear to me that Wolgast was my new home, and Rostock was somehow also my home, but Rostock was the place I wanted to call home. In other words, Wolgast was a home I did not love. To me it was a place of depression; young people were moving to Hamburg and Berlin or wherever they would find work. “Home” back then meant pride to a lot of my peers, and violent nationalism was always present where I grew up. On the one hand, home was always an issue of concern, of fears, of anger, and sometimes of depression, too. On the other hand, people had new freedoms after the downfall of the German Democratic Republic in 1989, and related to that freedom in a positive manner. It was a time of significant changes and transformations of our home. I was trying to make Wolgast my home, but I often had a hard time accepting it as such. I always wanted to go back to the scene of my early childhood, until finally, I did: In 2004, I made Rostock my home again. Nevertheless, Wolgast had become my new home over the years, and since my parents still live there, it somehow still feels like home. When people ask me where I come from, sometimes I say Rostock, and sometimes Wolgast.

I tend to wonder what “home” really means to me, since my concept of home kept changing over the years. Hence, when I speak of my home, I do not have one physical place in mind, but I like to think of home as a place where I can be with my family and my friends, and where I can earn my living, too. After moving to Berlin in 2013, I had to question my concept of home again, since I had been planning to stay in Rostock for the rest of my life, and had never seriously thought of moving to Berlin. Obviously, it did not happen, and my definition of home seems to be evolving with time. Therefore, I was interested in what home has meant to me over the years, what it means to others, and how they construct their personal meaning of home, including which symbols they use to do so. After all, it has become clear that my thoughts about home were strongly influenced by my parents’ decision to move from place A (Rostock) to place B (Wolgast), then my moving back to A and finally to C (Berlin) to study psychology. It seems like the notion of home is always in the making and never rigid, and the process of evolution for my concept of home underwent a change and a lot of differentiation over time.

2 Tensions of “here” and “there”

We strongly agree on the idea that culture, as an important aspect of the meaning-making of home, cannot be seen as an independent variable but rather as a tool within a person (Valsiner, 2013), and that one’s biography has a tremendous impact on their own meaning-making. The basic initial work for the project was carried out just before Christmas, which plays an important part in German social

heritage, since most people happen to be with their families, meaning that they spend time at home (possibly in their “Heimat”).

Because we decided to write the paper in English, although the research was conducted in German, we chose to refer to the English notion of home as our subject of interest, instead of the German terms “Heimat” or “zu Hause” respectively. Since there is no clear definition, but various concepts of “home,” the idea was to find out more about the meaning-making of home: its meaning to people, and the “ingredients” of interest, so to speak. Therefore, this part of the paper will give an overview of different concepts of home. Various authors’ ideas and reflections upon home will be described in order to extend our understanding of the “home” phenomenon.

3 Home is where the heart is

Ahmed (2009) focuses on the relationship between identity and migration, asking what home means in the context of estrangement. She examines the influence of the collective on the meaning of home. One central thesis of her paper is that not just one physical place, but a variety of thoughts, feelings, and places can be home to us, depending on our biography and our desires. This leads to the conclusion that home is always connected to our memories, sentimentalized by many as a space of belonging by expressions like “home is where the heart is” (Ahmed, 2009, p. 341). Also, this matches the definition of “home” in Boesch (1998), since transparency and acknowledgement will be easier to find in a place where we feel comfortable, and vice versa.

Vannini (2006) describes his escapism as the possibility of isolation from the outside world, and from dangers and threats and pollution of the environment as well. This approach refers to Boesch’s notion of secure acting, since escapism is one way of finding a place of secure acting for the self. In accordance with Vojvoda-Bongartz (2012), the basic notion of home is associated with a sense of community and a sense of control: We are not victims of our circumstances, but we can influence them. Rosa (2007) states that the feeling of home is associated with the response of objects and people to our sensations and needs. On the other hand, these circumstances, objects, and people can be perceived as restriction and oppression. Bloch considers home as a counterpart to the alien, a philosophical term that defends against alienation (Bloch, 1985, p. 220). According to Lawrence (1987), the psychological dimensions of home are self-esteem, personal identity, personal space and privacy, aspirations and goals, personal values, domestic spaces and objects, personal preferences, personal role(s), residential biography, subjective life stages, and domestic symbols (symbolism).

As part of our project, we interviewed two fellow students from SFU Berlin, and also discussed “Heimat” with non-students. We formulated our research question as: “How do people construct their meaning of home?” This research question turned out to be too imprecise to deal with in a small scale project, meaning that we would have to zoom in on subjects that reveal the affective character of home, if we wanted to augment an understanding of its systemic character.

4 Interviews: Notions of „home“

Before conducting the interviews, we discussed the meaning of home with workers at the SFU who were installing the ventilation system (during their morning break), our parents, and our friends, in order to get a feeling for the topic. One of the workers said he feels homesick the moment he leaves his bed to go to work every morning. Some of our friends referred to home as the place where “your heart is,” meaning the presence of their friends and families. This was a bit different from what we found out in our interviews.

Our first plan was to conduct three to six interviews of 10 to 15 minutes each. In the end, we only conducted two interviews with two fellow students; for both informed consent was established. The interviews took about one hour each. We initially thought about using the Problem-Centered Interview (Witzel, 1982; 1989), but ended up using a modified version of a quasi-PZI. We had difficulties applying the PZI, since home is a dynamic phenomenon, and meaning-making does not happen through fixed categories; thus the PZI was not the appropriate method for our research question. (The problem of finding and using the appropriate method will be one of the most important tasks for our project over the next semester.) Nevertheless, we will give a short summary of what the PZI is about and why we thought it would fit our research question when we started doing the interviews.

The PZI is a semi-structured discursive–dialogical procedure, a theory-generating method that tries to neutralize the alleged contradiction between being open-minded and being directed by theory. The interviewed person can be understood as an expert on his own orientations and behavior. The strategies of communication aim at representing a subjective approach to the problem, and stimulating a narrative. First, we constructed interview guidelines that conformed to our research question. The interview questions were constructed to be as open-ended as possible.

Interview Questions

1. Where will you spend your Christmas holidays?
2. Can you describe a place or moments where you feel comfortable and secure?
3. Are there places or moments when you feel strange or uncomfortable?
4. Is there any place you would consider home?
5. Can you describe the time you left your family for the first time?

These “core” questions were followed and complemented by other queries that came up during the interview (i.e., “Are there people you feel home with?”; see transcripts).

The interview sessions were audiotaped, so that we could concentrate on the verbal exchanges as effectively as possible. The three basic assumptions of the PZI are the orientation towards social problems, the orientation towards the object, and the orientation towards the process. Thus, we did not rigidly stick to the formulated questions, and tried to generate a dialogical form in order to stay

flexible. We used the interview guidelines as a kind of background layer to help us remember which aspects we wanted to address.

Each of us did one interview with one fellow student from the first semester of the master's program at SFU Berlin. Within the interview, we asked the subjects about topics related to home, those that they had mentioned previously, in order to develop a detailed understanding of their ideas. After the interviews, we carried out a postscript in which we noted our associations and ideas referring to the interview. The interviews were then transcribed, to make them accessible for interpretation.

Witzel (1982; 1989) distinguishes between open, axial, and selective coding. In our study, we used the open-coding method, meaning that one condenses the passages into a concise statement or paraphrase, and connects the sequences that appear. A "category" is a theme that makes sense of what your subject has said. Building categories (codes) leads to the act of generating core categories, which was inappropriate in our case. Those categories that emerge the most frequently are often connected to other categories. After we discussed the method together in our final lecture, we realized that using PZI — especially for the process of evaluation — was not expedient, because the notion of home is too broad and dynamic for the generation of static categories. Instead, we decided to focus on the passages where the interviewees mentioned aspects of their affective relation to home (as it would occur in the future). One possible methodological approach might be a microanalytic design, which could be helpful in discovering the dynamics of small steps that underlie long-term changes in the concept of home (Krohne, 2002). Microanalytic design also provides the possibility of analyzing multidimensional constructs (Krohne, 2002), and should be subjected to a more in-depth review between now and next semester.

5 To feel at home or not to feel at home

What are the symbol-making processes that lead to making meaning of "home"? We were looking to make these explicit. Following the theory previously quoted, the concept of home is something that results from relationships and processes of geographical places, people, memories, expectations, migration, attitudes towards foreigners, and politics. Our research question was: "How do people make meaning of home?" And so we looked at the signs and symbols that mediate meaning for home, as we thought. Based on the transcripts of the interviews, we were looking for categories of symbols that could be generalized as ingredients of an understanding of home.

After an initial brief evaluation of the interview, we determined that the following statements are of interest. Interviewee 2 said that he does not use the term "home" because he used to move a lot, and never stayed in the same place for too long. In trying to construct and make meaning of his abstraction of "home," he denied the common romanticizing concept of that familiar site embodying comfort, safety, and memories. These thoughts were confirmed by Interviewee 2 in our final discussion. He told us that if he had to choose a place to call home, it would be the place where he had spent most of his life so far, the place he knows best, the place that is the least alien to him. He has positive emotions when he goes back to his mother, traveling through the countryside of Hessen, Germany, where he likes to observe and enjoy nature.

When discussing our findings in the course, Interviewee 2 stated that he does not feel represented by the results of our interpretation of the interview. Before doing the interview, we discussed our research question openly in the lecture, so that Interviewee 2 was well aware of what was going to be asked of him. He knew that the main interest in this research was to explore meaning-making around the concept of home, and gave answers that would make interpretation easy: although the concept of home and the interviewee’s relation to that concept should have been discussed in the interview so as to help him represent his thoughts more accurately. At this point in our paper, we still want to show brief examples drawn from the interviews, and discuss how we thought we would find categories for further interpretation. We will leave these sections in the German language, in order to represent the “real” interviews.

5.1 Interviewee 2

B: Naja ich fühl’ mich in Berlin irgendwie ziemlich wohl, also zum einen ist es von der Wohnsituation, das sind halt auch einfach ganz praktische Sachen so ja, ich muss nicht weit pendeln so, ich hab alles in direkter Umgebung was ich brauche, so vom Einkaufen her, die Verbindungen sind auch wirklich gut, so zu meinen Kumpels, also ich wohne ja fast direkt an der U-Bahn Station, überhaupt sind so die öffentlichen Verkehrsmittel in Berlin total super, dass ist in anderen Städten echt ein bisschen anstrengend gewesen so, das ist super, dann habe ich hier lustigerweise ganz viel Freundeskreis aus W., also ich habe sechs Leute hier die auch aus W. sind, die ich schon von früher kenne so, mit denen ich regelmäßig zu tun habe, und dann finde ich die Stadt auch einfach super angenehm, also viel was man unternehmen kann, und die ganzen Parks aber auch also hier kriegt man schon gut die Zeit rum so, ja (...).

In this part of the interview, the interviewee refers to social matters (friends/buddies) and to autonomy (practicability, freedom of movement), which are important features of the notion of home (see above), as described in the theoretical section. The social references show up more frequently, as well as a reference to nature:

B: Genau. Beziehungsweise, also am besten wäre es irgendwie ein Vorort von einer Stadt, wo eine gute Club-Szene ist so, und wo ich aber auch nicht zu lange fahren muss, um drin zu sein, und wo ich dann auch nicht zu lange fahren muss, um draußen zu sein. Im Endeffekt ist man hier ja auch nicht so weit weg, ich mein’, ich fahre eine halbe Stunde irgendwie mit dem RE [Regionalexpress], dann bin ich am Wannsee, weißt Du, da ist es ja auch total geil, dass mache ich nur nicht so oft.

I: Ich war da noch nie.

B: Echt? Ist total geil am Wannsee.

5.2 Interviewee 1

The central categories mentioned in this interview are nature and autonomy.

das ist mal ein Raum da kann ich mich wohlfühlen irgendwie (...) und das ist voll wichtig, wie eine Art Oase (...) wo ich auftanken kann oder wo (...) ich hab vorher in einem Ort gewohnt, Bad Neustadt, so 16.000 Einwohner, ländlich (...) und da ist man in zwei Minuten draußen im Wald ungefähr, kann Wildschweine oder Rehe sehen und das ist halt ein Unterschied zu hier.

Nature is described as an oasis, the proximity of a forest with deer seems central.

Jetzt war es ganz spannend, weil ich in einem Haus wohne, die Vermieterin war nicht da jetzt eine Zeit lang. Ich hab' zwei Monate da jetzt gewohnt, die war nicht da und dann ist sie wiedergekommen. Sie hat auch ein Zimmer weiter oben. (...) Und das hat die Atmosphäre verändert. Ich bin in der ersten Zeit, ich bin erst gar nicht gern wieder zurück gekommen, weil sie hat viel Platz eingenommen plötzlich und ganz viel da gemacht halt in der Küche

By living in the same building, the landlord seems to limit the interviewees autonomy which makes the house less "home" – this becomes even more apparent after the landlord had been away for a longer period of time.

Aus so einem Elternnest rauszukommen, selbstständig zu werden, was anderes zu erleben, andere Menschen, andere soziale Situationen auch. Also ich bin da mit den Drogenabhängigen rumgefahren, die dort schon länger waren und die haben mir die Stadt so ein bisschen gezeigt.

Here, we find a metaphorical expression with a reference to nature: leaving home is described as leaving the "Elternnest" (parents' nest), and – again – gaining autonomy in the new home is a central aspect.

6 *Conclusive discussion*

Home is a concept, a relationship, a memory, a symbol filled with affection, depending on its context. Therefore, the phenomenon is to be thought of as a dynamic one, meaning that the method we used seems to be inappropriate, since our quasi-problem-centered interviews tried to fit the phenomenon into categories we attempted to filter from our underlying theory.

It became obvious that the students we interviewed did not possess a rigid understanding of what home means to them, and that home consists of varied features (such as security, autonomy, family, proximity to nature). Because we want to try and examine the affective level of the dynamic concept of home, we will develop a method that fits our object of research. We will try to proceed more flexibly as per Feyerabend (1975), who stated that "the only principle that does not inhibit progress is: anything goes" (p. 23).

The development of categories in the process of evaluation with the quasi-PZI reduces the information, and makes us lose sight of the relevant passages and processes that contribute to meaning-making. The concept of home is a highly subjective and dynamic phenomenon, and can hardly be penetrated and understood by using abstract categories. We will zoom in and focus on the

passages where the interviewees mention how they relate to their notion of home on an affective level (i.e., feeling secure, feeling good).

7 *In the end — home at last?*

To sum up our findings: We realized that the generation of abstract and static categories did not fit our research question, and we had to zoom in on specific aspects of the subjective phenomenon of home by using the method of introspection. At first we wanted to conduct a second set of interviews, to clarify inconsistencies and examine our interpretations of the statements of the interviewees. But we came up with introspection instead, because it helped us to determine the affective character of a concept such as home. Introspection made it possible for us to focus on the dynamic aspects, the affective level, the processual nature, the hierarchy of symbols, and the systemic nature of the concept of home. After our early deliberations, we decided to ask ourselves more specific things about (the change in) our concept of home.

Nevertheless, the interviews were helpful in gaining access to the phenomenon of meaning-making around the concept of home, and in establishing future goals for our research. For example, one of our interview subjects later spent a year in Brazil, and it would be interesting to follow up and ask him how his concept of home changed while he was away. Questions might include how he thought about home when he was in Brazil, and how the construct of home has changed for him in the process of coming back to Germany. Despite our not being familiar with the method of introspection, we were able to add some interesting insights as to how the results of time and emotion, whether denial or affection, combine to create the quality of “home.”

Compliance with ethical standards

The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest. All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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Appendix A

A.1 Introspection: Roman Gallus — Abdominal home

After I turned my attention inward, I first felt the lifting and lowering of the abdominal wall. When I relax, I focus on my belly, which gives me the opportunity to center myself and leads to a feeling of resting inside and of refocusing on myself. Equivalent to my home in the local sense, the central place of my life to which I can return at any time and collect energy is my stomach. It represents the center of my body, into which I can also retreat thoughtfully and center myself again with respect to the outside. Within my house, I combine the symbolic and the literal sense of a warm atmosphere. The belly also represents, as a central part of the body, a very warm part of one's physique, which, like home, contains vital elements. The organs that are used for digestion, without which life would not be possible, can be considered equivalent to my parents, since I would not be alive without them and their care. One could regard the belly in a transcendent sense as equivalent to the cozy kitchen, in which I also felt secure and connected, because my parents put a lot of emphasis on the food we ate together every day. There, I was provided for and nurtured for many years, in a warm atmosphere that is similar to the prenatal condition. My home, in the true sense of the word, was also the belly of my mother, where I was nourished by the umbilical cord that connected me to her. Like the replacement of the “mother paradise,” leaving home requires a removal from the parents' house at a certain age, to which, however, in contrast to one's relationship with the maternal uterus, a temporary return in the form of a visit is possible. When I became acquainted with my girlfriend, I was able to bring her a little bit of my homeland by cooking her typical dishes of my mother's, which I linked with my mother's homeland and vice versa. This way, the sense of home can also have a mobile aspect for me by preparing and eating local dishes in a new environment. For example, “Palatschinke” is a dish that I very much associate with home and Christmas, as my father often cooks this one at Christmastime. When I'm on vacation, food plays an important role for me in getting to know the culture of another country and feeling at home there.

For example, restaurants abroad that I have often visited almost become a kind of substitute for my kitchen at home, because they develop a homelike feeling. One could say that culture is appropriated or internalized by eating the dishes that are specific to the culture, such that the culture seems a bit more familiar and more homelike.

After a good meal, I develop emotions that I also connect with home: security, serenity, and relaxation. The feeling of saturation, the satisfaction that accompanies it, the pleasant laziness and contentment, the state of rest, when the blood moves from the head to the belly — all these sensations I also connect with my home. When I have great longing for my friends, my family, and my habitual environment, I also feel this primarily in the belly. Like my parents, who told me, as a child or adolescent, when they were concerned about my safety, or have expressed concerns about certain behaviors, my stomach now functions as a primary signal source when I feel unsafe, anxious, or stressed. While I associate security and familiarity with the feeling of home, my belly shows me when a situation appears to me as “sinister,” such that the aspects of security and familiarity seem lost. It also shows me what situations, events, people, or conditions are important to me, and thus guides my actions or has a great influence on them.

In addition to fear and uncertainty, my gut also shows me through a diffuse feeling in the stomach area when I feel a person is extraordinarily connected and falls in love with me. All in all, I associate many feelings that I would call summarized as a sense of home with my belly: connectedness, security, and familiarity.

A.2 Introspection: Tilman Schober — Moving around

In an advertisement it says: “Heimat — always do what your heart tells you”. I think of what it means to listen to my heart. I am a human, my heart beats, it pumps, it keeps me alive. Homeland? This is not even clearly defined. The advertisers want to say that homeland is the feeling, not the superficial part of thinking. So emotionally, too. I do not really understand that yet, but it is also ambiguous. My heart also says a lot of destructive things, things that are negative, destructive, due to disappointments, injuries, and feelings I have experienced, which are often very negative. I think of home again: heart is something I find even more difficult. This is even more abstract; “listen to the heart,” at any rate. Thinking of home, some knowledge is rational, my Wikipedia knowledge, other knowledge is very emotional. What is meant by heart? Thinking of home, I get so much into my mind and it is difficult to arrange that somehow. Where do I start? My earliest memories of home are definitely tied to the fact that I was afraid to lose my home. That was a very strong feeling, one I will not forget. I had just begun to develop something like a home feeling, to perceive things more consciously, had met my first “girlfriend,” we went hand in hand to our after-school sessions, and I had already experienced that other children moved away from us to the West, because there were more consumer goods there than here. Then the relocation, new surroundings, new path to the new home. And then it became the second home. Second home, first home, hard to say. I really did not like the new home, my relationship to it was too stressed, and what followed did not erase the doubts and concerns. At least I stayed by the sea, which always gave me great pleasure. At least the summer was assured, I could spend a lot of time at the beach. The beach is home to me. It always sounds good to name a holiday destination as one’s home. Today I live in Berlin, a concrete desert, but one in which you can also go swimming. But is not just the same as up north. Top right, that was my “corner.” Vorpommern, Province, Dark Germany. Hatred of strangers, unemployment, calm, beautiful landscape, lovely people, freedom, alcohol, alcohol, alcohol, car accidents, crosses on the road’s edge. For me there is not one feeling, but quite a lot, and it is always more than one thing that comes to me when I think of the stations of my life. I do not have one explicit home, like many others, and I was afraid of that before.