CHAPTER 7

Belonging and Home

Abstract In this chapter, the authors discuss artifacts in which children explore belonging and home. The chapter defines the sense of belonging as a core feature of humanity and living together. The feeling of having a home and being at home is both an intimate and a socially shared aspect of belonging. The children expressed belonging to a wide range of spaces in their artifacts. This spatial span extends from macro to micro scale and indicates belonging based on spaces, social relations, and materiality. Even very young children can see and depict their belonging as multiple and including spatial and social dimensions. The analyzed artifacts reveal both concrete and symbolic approaches to belonging and home.

Keyword Belonging · Nonbelonging · Identity · Home

DEFINING THE CONCEPTS OF BELONGING AND HOME

The sense of belonging is one of the core features of humanity; people live with other people in a world determined by interlinked, constantly emerging, and transforming social relations. The feeling of having a home and being at home, one's own safe and secure place filled with familiarity, comfort, and emotional attachment, is a both intimate and socially shared aspect of the sense of belonging. In this chapter, we analyze the artifacts

in which students in the Cultural Literacy Learning Programme (CLLP) explored their understandings of belonging and home. We analyze where students claim to belong and how they give meanings to their feelings of belonging. Since the students often connected belonging to the idea of a home, we scrutinize what home means to them and what makes them feel at home (see also Maine et al. 2021).

The concept of belonging has been broadly discussed in scholarship during the past decade. It has emerged alongside, and partly replaced or challenged, the concept of identity (Lähdesmäki et al. 2016). Even though the two concepts seem to address similar kinds of feelings of being in the world with others, several scholars have emphasized the difference in the experiences and positions that the concepts are able to capture. For Probyn (1996, 19), the concept of belonging “captures more accurately the desire for some sort of attachment, be it to other people, places, or modes of being, and the ways in which individuals and groups are caught within wanting to belong, wanting to become, a process that is fuelled by yearning rather than the positing of identity as a stable state.” Scholars have used the concept of belonging to address diverse forms of attachments and experiences of being and becoming part of a community.

A review (Lähdesmäki et al. 2016) has shown how previous researchers have usually approached the concept of belonging through a personal–public axis and/or in relation to place and politics. For example, Yuval-Davis (2006) distinguishes between psychological and political belonging, while Antonsich (2010, 645) explains the discussions on belonging as structured around two dimensions: “Belonging as a personal, intimate feeling of being ‘at home’ in a place (place-belongingness) and belonging as a discursive resource which constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion (politics of belonging).” Other scholars (Bauböck 2005; Fenster 2005; Jones and Krzyzanowski 2008) have drawn an analytical distinction between micro and macro structures: Belonging spans from public-oriented official membership in a community, such as citizenship, to a private sentiment of attachment and an informal subjective feeling. In addition, scholars (Sicakkan and Lithman 2005, 27) have mapped the practices in and through which the belonging occurs.

How can we approach belonging to analyze children and young people’s attachments, experiences, and positions in the world? Following Lähdesmäki and her colleagues’ (2016) analysis, we emphasize that it is difficult to perceive the concept from two-dimensional polarities based on

either personal–public, spatial–social, or micro–macro relations. Instead, we understand belonging as an interrelated network of these diverse relations where attachments, experiences, and positions occur and emerge simultaneously as personal, public, spatial, and social. Belonging is not micro- or macro- but “multiscalar” (Huot et al. 2014): Attachments include a wide range of interdependent spatialities connecting homes, neighborhoods, suburbs, villages, cities, regions, countries, and even the planet—as our analysis indicates.

We also relate belonging to materiality: It is commonly expressed and constructed through material objects, physical environments, and embodied practices. Boccagni (2014, 289) claims that “there is a need to relocate belonging in something real.” Researchers have often investigated the materiality of belonging in terms of migrants’ or other mobile people’s longing for (another) home or through homemaking practices in which people invest their houses with social and emotional meanings (Lähdesmäki et al. 2016). Even though home usually has a material basis, we define home “less as a particular geographical and/or architectural entity, and more as a space where specific forms of sociality take place,” as Botticello (2007, 7) notes. Indeed, scholars have typically located the core of the idea of home in social relations: A material place gets its meaning as a home through its intersecting cultural, sociodemographic, and psychological dimensions (Hayward 1975; Saegert 1985; Lawrence 1987).

Besides spatial, material, and social aspects, we understand belonging as multiple and intersecting various spatial locations, material settings, and groups of people. Longing for and constructing belonging often stems from the fear of its flipside, nonbelonging, which is typically considered as negative and something to be avoided. For Gerharz (2014, 553–554), the concept of belonging has the advantage that “it emphasizes the relational dimensions of inclusion and exclusion.” In our analysis, the idea of belonging and being included comprises the possibility of being excluded.

THE CLLP APPROACH TO AND DATA ON BELONGING AND HOME

The CLLP included a lesson for each age group that explored the ideas and experiences of belonging and home. These lessons use the same cultural text, Christopher Duriez’s puppet animation *Baboon on the Moon*

(2002), to stimulate class discussion and the creation of cultural artifacts. In this film, a sad figure, a blue and gray baboon, lives alone in a blue house on the dark and empty Moon and longs for the bright and colorful Earth that they can see through space. Their longing for the Earth is emphasized by melancholic music that the baboon plays with their trumpet. The film does not explain why the baboon is on the Moon, but includes hints of what the Moon could represent: The baboon has *Africa Today* magazine on the floor next to their bed and a poster on his bedroom wall depicting a colorful landscape captioned “Mali.” The film can be thus interpreted as a story of a migrant or refugee, in a place that they feel to be far from home or not yet their home.

The CLLP lesson plans did not explicitly bring this interpretation into the discussion. Instead, teachers were advised to encourage students to form their own narrative of the film, emphasizing the concepts of belonging and home. The lesson plans guided the teachers to take a relativist approach: Home does not mean the same thing for everyone and it is not only a house, but includes social and emotional dimensions.

The classroom discussions inescapably impacted the cultural artifacts that the students created at the end of each lesson. Students in the youngest age group were instructed to “draw a picture on the puzzle piece ‘What does home mean to you?’” on a jigsaw template given to them by their teacher. Students in the second age group were asked “to create a collage of where they belong.” The oldest students were “to create artwork to reflect the keywords and phrases that define ‘home’.” Moreover, the visuality of the figures, environments, and scenes in the film impacted how the students reflected and depicted home and belonging in their artifacts.

Our data for this chapter includes 743 works from Cyprus (77), Germany (32), Israel (339), Lithuania (32), Portugal (111), and the UK (152). Some of these artifacts were created individually but most in small groups, or (especially in the youngest group), created individually but then combined as a collage for the whole class. The collaborative artifacts could include dozens of individual creations. The artifacts dealing with belonging (184) were all made by students in the second age group, while the artifacts on home (559) were created by all age groups (since some teachers used the same instructions for the second and youngest age groups). Many of the artifacts that dealt with home also reflected on the idea of belonging, especially those made in the oldest age group. Even though these two themes are closely connected in our data, we explore

the artifacts on belonging and home in turn for analytic clarity, ending with a discussion on the intersections of these themes.

IDEAS OF BELONGING IN THE CULTURAL ARTIFACTS

Students in the second age group focused on exploring belonging in their artifacts. This age group included students from Israel, Lithuania, Portugal, and the UK. In these artifacts, students expressed belonging to a wide spatial span of locations. This span reaches from macro to micro scale including following categories: Earth; other countries; home country; home town or village; home district or street; the natural environment in one's living area or yard around one's home; house or home; one's own room or own space at home. In their artifacts, students also commonly expressed belonging based on social relations and ties to groups of people. We categorized these relations as follows: Family or family members; friends; social networks related to free time or hobbies; and school. The artifacts also often dealt with the materiality of belonging. Students depicted their personal items and belongings, such as toys, books, or their own desk or bed. All these social categories were connected to locations, while the spatial categories were intertwined with social networks. Both categories include a material dimension as the attempts to represent them with visual means materializes them. For instance, home was typically expressed in the artifacts through an archetypical image of a house (Figs. 7.1 and 7.2), social networks were commonly represented through items related to leisure activities, and belonging to one's home country was expressed through national symbols such as the flag.

In this task, students most often expressed belonging to their house or home, followed by belonging to a family and family members; the Earth; social networks related to free time or hobbies; their own room or own space at home; their own belongings; and friends. In all four countries from which the data was collected, belonging was most often expressed in terms of house or home, but there were some country-specific peculiarities. In Lithuania, students talked about their home country in comparison to foreign countries (Fig. 7.1) and drew the national flag more often than in other countries. In Portugal, many of the students emphasized meeting basic needs as a basis for belonging. As one Portuguese group explained in the caption to their artifact: "We belong to this place because: We need people to help us; we need a place to live;

Fig. 7.1 A drawing on “Where I belong” by a Lithuanian student in the second age group

we need food; we need a place where we feel safe.” Their artifact depicts on a blue background the Earth, a house, a bed, a drawer, a TV, an apple, and two glasses of something to drink. In the UK, the students several times referred to their school as a place where they belong; students did not mention school as a place of belonging in any other country. In Israel, students drew the Earth and explained belonging to it more often than in other countries. One Israeli student explained the reasons for this: “I belong to the Earth because on the Earth I was born, on the Earth I also learned and grew up, it is the place I belong to, it is my home.” This caption extends the idea of home to include our planet. These differences in the artifacts may not reflect any broader cultural differences between these countries, however, but may relate to the differences in the topics teachers raised during the lessons.

Even very young children were able to perceive and depict their belonging as multiple, including several dimensions, and simultaneously occurring on different scales. For instance, one of the artifacts illustrates belonging through a family holding hands next to an apartment building

in which they have their home. Next to the family, there is a flagpole with a Lithuanian flag and a signpost with the name of the district of the city where they live.

Nonbelonging is implicit in these artifacts as a condition to be avoided or fixed. These views stem from the film *Baboon on the Moon* in which the main character is interpreted as being in the wrong place and thus not belonging to the Moon. Influenced by the film, many of the students emphasized that they—like the baboon—belong to Earth. As the Moon was depicted in the film as a dark and uncolorful place, some students saw the Earth as its contradiction. As one writes in a caption of a colorful drawing depicting a family next to their home: “I feel sorry for Baboon because in his house on the Moon, he is lonely. My house is bright and on the Earth. And there are people on the Earth. The Earth is colored, the sky is blue, the Earth is green, and the sun is yellow. There are no colors on the Moon.” In several artifacts, the students ponder how to get the baboon back to the Earth, where the baboon belongs. These artifacts reflect empathy for the baboon which becomes an attempt to help them. These artifacts indicate the potential of art to promote empathy (Lähdesmäki and Koistinen 2021).

Several Lithuanian students dealt with the idea of nonbelonging by comparing their own home or home country with experiences from foreign countries. In these artifacts, traveling in foreign countries is seen as positive and “fun,” but as one student notes in the caption of a collage depicting their room: “Although [it is] good in another country, everything is foreign, you want to go home.” Here, homeland is filled with positive meanings of familiarity, friends, and belonging. These meanings are depicted in another artifact with this explanation: “NASA has decided to do an experiment to see if Baboon could be without friends on the Moon: We all travel the world, it is very beautiful and fun, but it is best to live in Lithuania because it is your homeland and here you have friends.” In the artifact, the student has drawn the Earth with historical buildings around it. The text in the corner of the drawing reminds viewers that “the whole world may like you, but [you are liked] the most in Lithuania” (Fig. 7.1).

The analyzed artifacts reveal both concrete and abstract or metaphoric approaches to the idea of belonging. Many function at both levels at once, so it is difficult to distinguish clearly between the concrete and abstract. For instance, an artifact may represent a concrete building, as a symbol of what a home looks like and a visual metaphor for a place to live. Children’s creative artworks are typically multimodal: The visual outcome is

extended by children's imagination and a broader narrative, so it is difficult—and unnecessary—to evaluate the expressive capacity of the visual outcome. Some teachers were tempted to evaluate the students' responses in their artifacts. This is exemplified by the following note from a British teacher in the data collection form:

We then discussed the question 'where do you belong?' and 'where is home?' This took a bit of time for the children to come up with answers linked to the question but I noticed that their responses where [went], mainly, back to a superficial level. For example, I belong to cubs/school/my family and My home is in my bedroom. However, some children expressed a deeper level of thinking by answering 'I belong to the world' and 'I belong where my heart takes me.'

IDEAS OF HOME IN THE CULTURAL ARTIFACTS

As said above, the concept of home was explored in particular within the youngest and oldest age groups, yet some classes in the second age group also did so. In their artifacts, the youngest and second age group tended to represent home as a colorful house that resembles the resource image given to the teachers in the lesson plans. This image is a clip from *Baboon on the Moon* depicting an archetypical house with a cut pyramid-shaped roof. The oldest age group depicted this archetypical house in only a few artifacts.

The artifacts about home made by the two youngest age groups are quite similar, with only few differences between the artifacts created within students from different countries. The instructions and resource image were perhaps the reason for this similarity, but it may also reflect relative universality of symbols used in children's culture. Specific school classes produced similar artifacts and captions: All students in some classes drew a colorful house. Since the younger children were asked to create a collaborative collage, peer influence has affected their artifacts (see Chapters 2 and 9), which were created through dialogue. There were more differences between countries in the oldest age group, both in the form and content of their artifacts.

The artifacts and captions nevertheless indicate that for most students, home is more than a house. Children in the first and second age groups often drew smiling people next to (or inside of) the archetypical houses. Students did not necessarily draw a house at all, but only focused on people. The collages created by the German children in the second age

group focus more on the interiors of the houses and the people who live there. In the oldest group, family, friends, and other loved ones were the most recurring theme, though often expressed in a more symbolic manner. In all of the age groups, the captions identify the people in the images as family members, relatives, and friends. The oldest students from Lithuania, Israel, and Germany also associated home with memories shared with family. Pets are also included in the artifacts or at least mentioned in the captions as family members by all age groups. In a caption by the youngest students from Portugal, home is described as a place “[w]here we eat and sleep. Where we take care of our pets.”

The depictions of family members and other loved ones in the images and their captions highlight the importance of home as a place of living together—being taken care of and taking care of others. In the oldest group, Israeli children especially highlighted the difference between home as a “physical” place and as a “spiritual” space constructed by loved ones such as family and friends. Both the youngest age groups mentioned activities, such as play. A Cypriot child from the youngest age group connected home solely to the family and the activities done with them, as their caption states: “Home is when I am with my family and my father when we go fishing.” This kind of notion of home has been identified in previous research: Even though the concept of home tends to be associated with a concrete house, it also includes a social (as well as cultural and political) dimension (Aaltojärvi 2014, 40).

In the artifacts, home is represented as a place of happiness and other “good feelings.” In the youngest age groups, this is reflected by the fact that the home is almost always drawn with bright colors. The good feelings associated with home are also depicted by smiling faces and hearts. Other recurring images, such as rainbows, flowers, trees, butterflies, green grass, blue sky, and the sun shining brightly can also be interpreted as symbolizing happiness. Home as a happy place is also emphasized in the captions, which describe home as a place of care and love. The youngest children often described home as a place of warmth, which can refer to the physical aspects of the house as well as to the warm feelings shared with the family. A Cypriot teacher of the youngest age group summarizes their class discussion as follows:

Each child draws a piece of the puzzle on “What is home for you? Where do you belong?” Then they put their pieces together and make a complete puzzle that forms a house making the definition of what a house means.

Home is a place to play, work, take a bath, warm up, a place that has a yard, trees, and flowers, it's where we were born and are safe, where those you love and love you are, where our parents, siblings, cousins, friends, kitten, and dog are. Where you feel happy, you have a hug, a caress, love, a rainbow, where our heart is. At the end of the lesson, the children were given time to complete their work, because they asked for it themselves. They added that home is where we feel loved, happy, where we feel friendly and where sometimes we can also feel sad, but our family and friends are there to help us feel happy again.

Here, the rainbow, for example, is associated with touch, intimacy, and love. The outward appearance of the home as a colorful house surrounded by hearts, stars, rainbows, and flowers can thus be interpreted as reflecting the love shared inside it (Fig. 7.2).

Fig. 7.2 These artifacts from the youngest age group (the collage by students from Cyprus and the single puzzle pieces from Portugal) illustrate how home is often depicted as an archetypal house, yet images of people and symbols like hearts signify that home is more than just the building

Safety, mentioned in the above caption, was referred to by all age groups. In the youngest group, it is mentioned at least once in the captions in each country; Portuguese students in the youngest age group, one German student in the oldest age group, and Israeli students in all age groups also mention home as a place of protection. Whereas the Portuguese students mainly describe protection from natural forces, for one class of Israeli students in the youngest age group, home was “[a] place where they also feel safe and protected from projectiles,” as their teacher put it. Even though this one caption is not representative of all Israeli students’ ideas of home, it highlights how different living conditions shape what home means for the children. In the second age group, Israeli children also emphasized safety more than the students from the other countries; they were the only ones to mention protection. Safety and protection are even more present in the artifacts made by the older Israeli children. In them, home becomes a private space shielded from the outside, which may culminate in the symbol of a shield. One group of students drew tanks, missiles, and a fence protecting a house decorated with hearts. In the caption, the students state:

[W]e chose to draw a fence since the home is our safe zone and the warning signs express the fact that the home is our private zone and often we [keep our] distance [from] people since we are in our private zone.

Here home is aligned with safety and privacy: The artifact and its caption reflect fear of a threat from the outside, which is contrasted to the love and warmth felt inside the home.

Home as a private sphere was also mentioned in two Lithuanian artifacts, one (Fig. 7.3.) illustrating the student’s symbolic thinking, as explained in the caption:

We pictured a winged padlock with a small key. The lock symbolizes security, the privacy of a family and home. A family is like a fist, like the fingers of one hand, nothing can separate them. The golden color implies that a family is the most precious spiritual asset. The blood ties are very strong. A brother, sister, parents are your closest ones, nobody will substitute them. The wings symbolize freedom and strength. We leave home strong because loving people inspire us and wish us success. Although we belong to a family, we feel free to start our own lives, choose a desirable profession and work, and start our own family. The small sized keys indicate that only family members, the spirit of that home, can unlock the padlock and

Fig. 7.3 In the artifact from the oldest age group from Lithuania, a lock with wings symbolizes home as a private place, where one can feel free

live a private, safe life. No outsiders will be able to unlock the locks. It's a sign that the family has its secrets which can never be revealed to anyone else.

This illustrates how the artifacts and captions by the oldest students entail complex symbolic expression. This complexity is also visible in the depictions of animals. Whereas all age groups mentioned pets, in the oldest group animals are also treated as symbols. One student from Germany describes how they always feel at home with a cat, “because for me, animals in general symbolize a feeling of security/comfort and love and I feel comfortable around cats.” The cat thus becomes a symbol for home. Another student from Germany made an origami fish that represented home and important life events within the family. In one Lithuanian artifact, the national bird of Lithuania—the stork—is used as a symbol for nationality, or the nation as home. In the oldest age group, the Lithuanians were most likely to express the idea of nation. In their artifacts, the Lithuanian students also explored home in relation to a broader sense of belonging to one's neighbors, the living environment, the nation, or the entire Earth. In one caption, the students explained how home is: “The Earth, Europe, Country, City, Street, House, Family, Feelings.” This reflects Aaltojärvi's (2014, 40) notion that home is not necessarily “a single and static place,” and can be understood more broadly, for example as a city or nation.

In the youngest age group, Portuguese children linked home to broader spatial entities, such as their homeland or the municipal area where they lived, more often than the students from other countries. They also often mentioned the beach, which reflects their everyday surroundings. This indicates that the feeling of home goes beyond the house or the people that live in it, to encompass their broader environment. In the second age group, the Israeli students mentioned their spatial surroundings, such as a village or a state, more than the other students. Moreover, children in the youngest age group (only once in the second age group) made some artifacts depicting the Earth, which may reflect a broader sense of home as the entire planet. That said, the film used in these lessons represents the Earth as the home that the main character longs for. In the oldest group, Portuguese children were specifically asked to draw a film script based on *Baboon on the Moon*, which clearly affected their choice of imagery.

The theme of acceptance was raised a few times by the youngest students and the Israeli students in the second age group. As the previously cited caption from the youngest age group states, home is a place where “we can also feel sad, but our family and friends are there [to] help us feel happy again.” In the oldest group, the theme of acceptance, with freedom and self-expression, recurred even more often. The ability to be oneself and express oneself freely is raised especially in the Israeli data. Acceptance, freedom, and self-expression can be connected to empathy, for instance family members’ ability to treat each other with kindness and mutual understanding and to allow each member to be themselves freely. Empathy was particularly expressed by the Portuguese students in the oldest age group who drew a script for a film based on *Baboon on the Moon*. In these artifacts, the students consider the baboon’s point of view and emotions, such as longing for home, thus empathizing with the animal. Even though the baboon may serve as an allegory for a human being, this empathy can be interpreted to encompass animals. Indeed, in one of the artifacts, the baboon is depicted as missing the fellow baboons—subjugated by humans—on the Earth.

These findings indicate how belonging and home become intertwined in the data. Some of the oldest students explicitly mention belonging in statements such as: “A home for us is a place where you feel you belong,” and “at home there’s a family who loves and you feel toward it most belonging in the world.” Once belonging was mentioned in relation to

dialogue, and once to solidarity. The student describes the artifact dealing with solidarity (Fig. 7.4) as follows:

With a 3D pen I created four figures that join hands in the middle. For me, this means solidarity/belonging because they are all different, this is the reason for the different colors, but they still hold together. They are standing on a “sun” because home means to me that you feel good and the sun radiates warmth and you feel good under its rays.

This artifact and its caption beautifully sum up the idea of the CLLP: Creating cultural artifacts can stimulate children’s thinking on questions such as solidarity, difference, and belonging.

Fig. 7.4 Solidarity despite differences is expressed through differently colored figures holding hands in an artifact by a German student in the oldest age group

INTERSECTIONS OF BELONGING AND HOME IN THE CULTURAL ARTIFACTS

Our data reveals that both teachers and students commonly approached belonging through the idea of home. This was influenced by the assignments given to the students. The youngest students rarely explicitly used the word “belonging” but the teachers wrote it in the captions of their artifacts. For instance, a teacher from Israel describes the lesson with the youngest children as follows:

After watching the video and a plenary discussion we came to the conclusion that a home is not only the building where I live but also a place that I feel I belong to, where I feel loved. After conceptualizing again what is home for us the students thought about additional ideas such as: An afternoon class they take, their parents’ homeland, a place where they love spending time with their family.

The quotation shows how teachers explicitly linked belonging and home in their lessons.

In the artifacts and captions, belonging was explored in relation to various spatial entities, material items, and social networks (in this order of frequency): House or home, a family and family members, the Earth, social networks related to free time and hobbies, one’s own room or space, own belongings, and friends. Respectively, home was explored in relation to family, friends, and pets, yet also to the school, the neighborhood, the state or nation, or the entire Earth.

In sum, in their artifacts, the students commonly explored belonging and home as multiple and interconnected concepts, including attachments to different spatial locations and groups of people. Children and young people’s sense of belonging seemed to easily range between and simultaneously include different scales. Our analysis shows how the students commonly perceived belonging as positive and as something to strive for. Some explored this in terms of nonbelonging, by identifying places or social networks to which they do not belong, where they feel uncomfortable, displaced, or lonely, or in which they miss their home. Hence, nonbelonging was seen as negative and something to strive against.

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