The Concept of Home from Sojourners' Viewpoint, "Case Study Research in Malaysia"

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Abstract: Home has a complicated meaning and incorporates physical, social, cultural and psychological dimensions. These qualities of home are mixed together, so home is more than its boundaries and it extends further beyond its wall. It has a principal role in everyday life and includes numerous psychological meanings, which affect people's shaping identities. There is a deep and intimate connection between most of us and our homes and our attachment to home are often uniquely personal. This paper explores a study on the meaning of home for temporary residents in a new social and cultural environment away from home. In addition, the study tries to find out whether the residents can emotionally be attached to their new environment and consider it second home and which of the elements in the new environment help them feel attached was also identified. The starting point of the research was the person and their habitual lived experience of home. Through an exploratory study, some Iranian temporary residents in the city of Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia shared detailed description of their feelings, thoughts and opinions of the meaning of home and their current environment. The results of the study show in the first choice, their country mean home for them and later their own home. Also, The common assumption about home is that each person has only one home can change sometimes in special situation and some key elements such as similarity in environment, culture, religious, foods and others can help to feel at home in the new environment.

1. Introduction

In the fields of social sciences and study of human behaviour what is understood from place and its different meanings have gained an important significance recently. Home as a place that is attached with humans' daily life experience is crucial to investigate in the context. People have different recognition of the place called home since it is in conjunction with personal feelings and their realization of this concept varies in different situation and different times (Easthope 2004; Chow and Healey 2008). Since the physical and social association with place is changing, these understandings also undergo a continuous assessment and evaluation. Hence probably in various social, cultural and hypothetical situations, the concept of home needs a second thought. In addition, some determinative factors such as relocating have effect on the meaning of home (Rutman and Freedman 1988). Moreover, the numbers of persons, who choose to depart from where they live and decide to study, work or live abroad increases every year, though changing the place of residency is often challenging.

Concept of home

When defining the concept of place, one encounters quite a big task as there are many definition theorists and they all have their own angle to discuss this theme (Aksli 2009). The word 'home' in English takes from "ham" which is an Anglo-Saxon word and it means estate, town or village (Douglas 1991). For most people home as an important place has a prominent role in daily life and owns rich historical, social and cultural significance and holds great number of psychological meanings, which has significant importance to form people's identities (Moore 2000).

Natural symbol of home related to these meanings is a place to preserve the privacy and people emotionally bond with it since it contains our memories of loved ones and represents feeling of security and excitement (Chow and Healey 2008).

However, the physical framework of a house is usually considered as a home by architects, what they think to be true is people expressing themselves and others via what they say and how they perform as well as through their ownerships and physical environments (Goffman 2002; Hauge and Kolstad 2007). While in some people's mind home is considered as a focus of emotional feelings and belonging though they indeed believe seriously in the symbolic significance of home (Sixsmith 1986; Southgate 2005). Home in this regard is important from the point of view of the neighbourhood, city, town, country and its surroundings which it is located in and not considered as a physical structure (Norberg-Schulz 1980).

Various meanings can be extracted from the word "home". In literature and poetry using the word of home as country or place of birth was featured. However, there are many references that mean home as the final journey or death. These concepts still carries meaningful, and they represent how the meaning of the word home goes beyond its routine meanings that is used generally (Moore 2000).

As some researchers have indicated, "home" is often used as a spatial metaphor for relationships to various places, along with one method of being in the world (Moore 2000; Williams and McIntyre 2000; Manzo 2005). In recent studies the concept of "at-homeness" has been investigated as the "usually unnoticed, taken-for-granted situation of being comfortable in, and familiar with, the everyday world in which one lives, and outside of which one is visiting" (Seamon 1979).

In addition, a place becomes meaningful, when a person has an unique connection to that specific place (Aksli 2009). Social relationships and various personal experiences happened during a period of time in a place will lead to developing emotional attachment toward a geographic space. Therefore, recognition of our solid attachment to a place and concept of home, unavoidably incorporate an understanding of the changing transactions we make, besides the experiences we have gathered in our lives (Leith 2006). Moreover, the home's boundaries apparently extended further its wall to the neighbourhood, even village or town. Home is place and a space too, where relationships are developed, activities take place and that inhabited by people, family, what they have in possession and their things. Based on what I believe, what we call as home is an imaginary place, an archive for our experiences in the past and of the lived spaces (Mallett 2004).

Attachment to place

It is said that the place we live and spend most of our time in can be the focus of attention and we can build a strong emotional bond with it, as Relph (1976) claims: "there is for virtually everyone a deep association with and consciousness of the places where we were born and grew up, where we live now, or where we have had particularly moving experiences"(Seamon and Sowers 2008). Having an emotional bond toward a place or in other words, place attachment is a complicated incident which includes various facets of attachments between places and people and takes into account the interaction of beliefs and knowledge, manner of acting and behavior and emotions and affect in relation to a place (Altman and Low 1992; Chow and Healey 2008; Rollero and De Piccoli 2010). Behaving more independently, having trust in oneself, exploration and representing

appropriate responses in a small familiar community is inspired through this phenomenon (Fried 2000).

In addition, being satisfied to some extent help people bond emotionally with places since it allows them feel in control, preserve their privacy, quietness and security and foster creativity (Altman and Low 1992; Chow and Healey 2008). However, there are some other factors taken into account to have emotional feelings towards a place including but not limited to more identity related aspects and evaluation as well as other factors ranging from length of stay in the area and amount of socialization within local networks (Moore 2000). People are also important in developing an emotional bond since attachment process to a place inevitably involves the social relations a place brings about. This general agreement is jointly held by Altman and Low (1992) who argue that the attachments may not only be to landscapes solely as physical entities, but may be primarily associated with the meanings of and experiences in place which often involve relationships with other people.

Developing bonds toward a place also take place when a special interaction happens which carries a particular meaning. Memories related to a special place and experiences that happened in the past and its interactional potential; particularly attach people emotionally to a specific place, the expected future events or experiences related to a place can also be considered important in this regard (Milligan 1998).

. Sojourners

Definition of sojourners has been wrestled for many scholars to distinguish from migrants and refugees on the one hand, and tourists on the other, depending on the length of their stay and their motives for geographic movement. The people are grouped as sojourners are included business people, diplomats, foreign workers, students and voluntary workers (Weissman and Furnham 1987; Pedersen, Neighbors et al. 2011).

Due to progress in transferring information and technology and resolving obstacles on the way of trading around the world, a global community is forming. The phenomenon of globalization leads to increase the number of people which decide to study or work outside their country and learn various skills in different parts of the world (Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr et al. 2002).

However changing the place of residency from a conventional environment to a new place is a challenging experience. Usually adolescent sojourners who used to live with their family and take their identity from them feel lost in the new place. This separation leads to lack of confidence, feeling lonely, having less time off and perhaps representing as a malfunction in behavior in the unfamiliar environment

(Hayes and Lin 1994; Pitts 2009). Since the environment and culture in this regard is greatly different for international sojourners, they undergo more stress and challenges. They struggle to deal with new standards and conventions; they are usually ignored by the hosts so as considered foreigners, they may have difficulty making new relationships, language –verbal or non-verbal- is a big challenge and they also may have to deal with discrimination and relationship problems (Church 1982). Leaving the home that has provided the feeling of security and confidence and was part of their personalities for some sojourners may lead to experience the feeling of displacement (Tognoli 2003).

2. Material and Methods

Mix methods refers to the use of more than one approach to investigate a research question in order to enhance confidence in the ensuing findings (Bryman 2006; Johnson and Christensen 2007; Bryman 2008; Bryman 2012). The present research described here is an phenomenological exploratory research, using a mix research design; this is a procedure for collecting, analysing and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study to understand a research problem (Hanson, Creswell et al. 2005; Creswell 2008; Creswell 2012). Phenomenology is the interpretive study of human experience and it tries to investigate and elucidate human situations, events, meanings and experiences in their daily life but typically unnoticed beneath the level of conscious awareness (Seamon 2000). Also, as explained by Yin (2011), the case study is one of several ways of doing social science research. The case study method is an approach to studding a social phenomenon through analysis of an individual case (Kumar 2010). Therefore, the questionnaire survey and interview were conducted to explore what home means to Iranian temporary resident who live in Malaysia and also, to find whether or not the common assumption "each person has only one home" can change sometimes in special situation. Also, research try to investigate which key elements can help them to feel like home after transition.

For quantitative part, the procedure of sampling was conducted based on Trost's (1986) recommendations for strategic non-representative sampling. In this approach we look forward to acquire a large amount of variation in the participants using the strategic consideration of variables or factors which are expected to yield variation in the phenomenon under investigation and not providing a statistically representative sample. The questionnaires were sent for 160 persons who had spent at least 12 month in Malaysia by email.

In the qualitative part, in the absence of reliable lists of Iranian sojourners, purposive sampling was used to select interviewees from person that involved in questionnaire survey for semi-structure interview. Sixteen respondents (DeCuir-Gunby 2008) were chosen and what was considered in sampling process were educational background, age, gender, the length of stay in Malaysia (Table 1). These factors were expected to be involved with differing experiences of place and the perception of home's meaning.

Table 1. Demographic descriptors of sample

Characteristics		No.
Gender	Female	10
	Male	6
Age	23-40	16
Educational background	PhD	7
	Master	5
	Bachelor and Diploma	4
Length of stay	1>x>3	9
	3>x>5	7
Total		16

With focusing on two main subjects, the interviews were designed semi-structurally. First of all, the subjects were to explain what a home means to them and rank their preference about meaning of home during their transition to Malaysia. Secondly, they were asked to explain their idea about the sentences "Each person has only one home" and subjects were provided with a question on a piece of paper. They were required to indicate what remind them of 'home' in Malaysia and which similarities or differences of a country can help them to feel at home.

3. Results and Dissection

Attachment was a complex theme to discuss with interviewees about how much or to which 'home' place they felt attached the most. Affective relations with family members and other important people of their life were stated much more, than any certain physical location. Some of interviewees expressed that they felt the biggest attachment to their home where they had spent the majority of their childhood, relates back to what Relph (1976) wrote in an article: 'the feeling that this certain place has endured and will

persist as a distinctive entity even though the world around may change'.

The results from questionnaires and interviews show for most of interviewees the essence of 'home' is created by the feelings and emotions what create comfort, privacy, safety, freedom, belonging and love for them (Table 2).

Table 2. Frequency of essence of home

Factors	Frequency (percent)
Comfort	90.8
Safety	70.8
Privacy	78.3
Freedom	47.5
belonging	44.2
Family relationship and love	95

In addition, the concept of home meant for them where they grow up, where their family, friends and people who are very close to them live and where their memories belong to. So, they mentioned when they are abroad, their country meant home for them in the first stage (Figure 1).
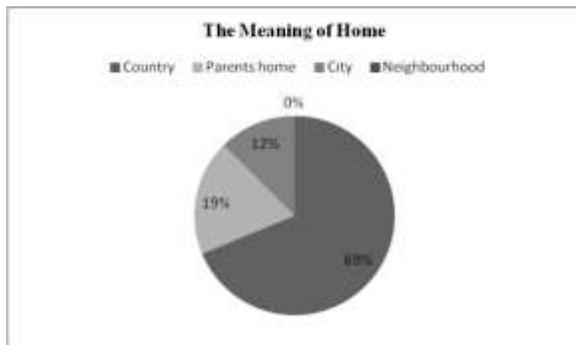

Figure 1. The meaning of home for sojourners

However, when they were asked whether they can emotionally be attached to their new environment and consider it "home", they answered that it might be something that changes over time. Some places where they have been living since they left their home town were more special and they had some degree of attachment to these places, but they never felt completely at home in any of these places, since they did not feel totally comfortable. Sometimes it was the neighbourhood that they were living with, sometimes the differences in culture, environment and others. Even when they felt the place as a good place to live in, it still never felt truly home for them, as they know these places were only temporary to live in.

Also, about 75 percents of respondents believed the idea "each person only has one home" is not correct and when they are asked "Does Malaysia mean as a home for you when you go to other country for holiday (except your hometown) during your education period?" the answer was "yes" (Table 3).

Table 3. Malaysia as a second home

Answers	YES	NO
Frequency (percent)	75	25

To find which elements in the new environment help them to feel attached, the research started with the question "What remind you of 'home' in Malaysia?" and continued with "which similarity or difference of a country can help foreign resident feel at home?"

In their mind, similarity in culture, religious and food have the most effects but other elements such same race, climate, environment and also living in a neighborhood with the same nationality can help to improve the sense of attachments. But one respondent explained any elements could not help him to feel Malaysia as a home (Figure 2).
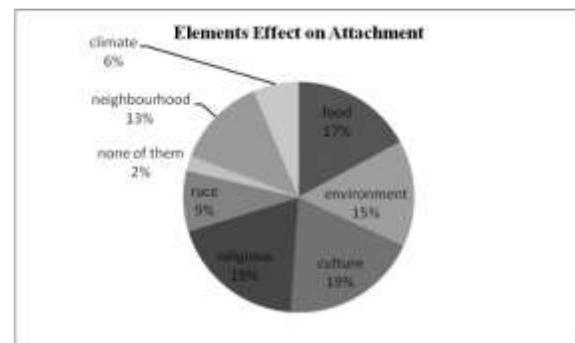

Figure 2. The elements effect on attachment from temporary sojourners' viewpoint

4. Conclusion

Home can be understood as nodal points that have a special role in psychological and social relations of people. The concept of home is taken to mean more than physical locality and ties with the physical world, the social, cultural and emotive worlds of people. This meaning may be expanded sometimes as large as a country and sometimes may be summarised in parental home only. As mentioned, when people live abroad temporarily, the country

meant as a home for most of them. Although, most Iranian sojourners believed that each person can have more than one home but they mentioned their home in their hometown is also recognized as a first home for them.

Likewise, these people face to more difficulty dealing with new situations when they are further away from their home, but some factors including similarities in religious, culture, taste and environmental elements such as social support were also found effective on attachment with new environment.

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9/22/2025