

An anywhere or a somewhere? A consideration of the role of storytelling and family folklore in the formation of place attachment

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Abstract

This article builds on connection to place via an engagement with David Goodhart's (2017) thesis concerning 'anywheres' and 'somewheres'. By anywheres, Goodhart refers to people who have no sense of deep rootedness in any particular place(s). By somewheres, he refers to people who have a strong sense of rootedness in the place(s) they grew up. I use autobiographical reflection to analyse the link between my connectedness to place and my relationship to storytelling in childhood literature, family folklore and childhood memories to demonstrate that place identity can be more complex and multi-rooted than the binary conception presented by Goodhart.

1. Introduction

In 2017 David Goodhart published *The Road to Somewhere* in which he argues that his analysis of British Social Attitudes Surveys since the 1980s showed 'the old distinctions of class and economic interest' that once divided British society have been 'over-laid by a larger and looser one – between the people who see the world from anywhere and the people who see it from somewhere' (Goodhart, 2017, p. 3). Goodhart's labels have become shorthand for researchers investigating the divide in British society post the Brexit referendum (Chan and Kawalerowicz, 2022). He argues that the 'politics of culture and identity' now challenge 'the old politics of left and right' (Goodhart, 2017, p. 1). Place attachment is central to Goodhart's theory. Places can be understood as 'meaningful locations' endowed by people with value (Cresswell, 2015, pp. 15-16). Cresswell argues, 'when humans invest meaning in a portion of space [they] then become attached to it... [and] it becomes a place' (Cresswell, 2015, p.17). Goodhart defines anywheres as liberal graduates who belong to the mobile professions who do not invest much meaning in place and are not particularly rooted to anywhere, including the place where they grew up (Goodhart, 2017, p. 23). In contrast, he characterises somewheres as less likely to have 'experienced higher education' and more likely to be 'rooted' with identities such as 'Scottish farmer, working class Geordie, Cornish housewife – based on group belonging

and particular places' (Goodhart, 2017, p. 3). He argues the key factor in developing an anywhere worldview is university education when young adults 'shake the somewhere dust off [their] ... boots' (Goodhart, 2017, p. 37).

This essay will argue these lines of division are not so clear and that in fact place attachment is probably more complex. To explore Goodhart's theory I examine my individual place attachment through storytelling because as Cameron points out 'stories express something irreducibly particular and personal, and yet they can be received as expressions of broader social and political context' (Cameron, 2012, p. 574).

2. Method

Inspired by Paulsen (2017) who used photos and documents to look at his place attachment to Denmark, I investigate my sense of place attachment through storytelling in the form of childhood literature, family folklore and childhood memories, illustrated by family photos that situate these stories within a landscape. Paulsen uses an auto-ethnographic approach to explore what citizenship means for him personally. Auto-ethnography uses self-reflection to study a group from within; I use autobiographical reflection to *first* explore my individual place attachment in order to then reflect on what that would mean for membership of one of Goodhart's groups. The obvious limitation is the focus on one subjective voice. However, Ward (2014) highlights that a 'potentially unreliable narrator [can be] an elegant mirror for the simultaneous multiplicity of place' (Ward, 2014, p.761). Likewise, this approach allows for the exploration of the possibility of more complex place attachment within Goodhart's binary categories.

3. Positionality

Autobiographical reflection requires awareness of the author's positionality. Positionality is the notion that a person's knowledge and perspective is determined by their values arising out of their socio-economic position (Sanchez, 2010). Gold's essay on positionality shows a person's positionality often incorporates 'conflicting world views' (Gold, 2002, p. 223). I have grown up in a world of anywheres. My mother is British, and my father is German, both my parents are university educated and my relatives and family friends are scattered across the globe. My well-educated, culturally middle-class parents encouraged me to read, enabling me to travel in my imagination. However, my family's privilege is rooted in education rather than wealth. Their limited financial capital meant that we lived in a working-class neighbourhood of a small village where children were allowed to play outside in the street and surrounding countryside,

confirming Gill Valentine's finding that rural and working-class children tend to be allowed more freedom (Valentine, 1997b). This meant I was able to develop a somewhere place attachment to my local area. But my parents' education afforded them the opportunity to apply for research grants to study in Australia, while their limited economic means meant they chose to live for a while in France where rents were lower. My parents' education and outlook therefore gave me opportunities to form a strong sense of place attachment to the many places both imaginative and real where I have grown up. I have not yet been to university, but I already appear to be an anywhere, in Goodhart's words someone 'less connected to particular places' (Goodhart, 2017, p. 36).

4. The role of childhood literature in the formation of place attachment

Children become acquainted with their local environment through play (Valentine, 1997b). This was the experience of my mum and aunt who grew attached to the fields and woods around their village where they used to roam freely. Similarly, I formed an attachment to the river near my village by playing in my friend's canoe. However, Valentine (Valentine, 1997b) found since the 1970s, anxieties about children's safety has meant that children's outdoor play has declined and become more restricted. In the 1970s children often played in their local area; in the 1990s 40% of children's outdoor play took place in private gardens. My experience reflects this as my ability to enjoy unsupervised exploration was restricted. I compensated by reading children's literature. One of my favourite fiction series strengthened my connection to my hometown of Cambridge. In Clementine Beauvais' anarchic books the protagonist has crazy adventures free of parental supervision. For me the books transformed the river Cam, usually the venue for sedate punting trips, into a zany place of mystery hiding a treasure chest of performance-enhancing drugs. Although this place attachment was of a different nature than if it had been formed in the real world, Joe Moran asserts that 'words are not a barrier between us and some direct, epiphanic communication with the world; they are a natural way for the human animal to interact with places' (Moran 2022, p. 116). Words can be another means for us to explore a place and develop attachment. And in this case the stories I was immersed in helped root me in my local area and develop in Goodhart's terms, a somewhere world view.

Of course, literature can take its reader anywhere, and one of my favourite childhood books took me to the Lake District. I read Arthur Ransom's *Swallows and Amazons* (1929), based on his childhood experiences, so many times the book fell apart. Tuan argues 'speech and the written word are integral to the construction of place' (Tuan, 1991, p. 694). In my imagination, alongside the six children I sailed boats on Lake Coniston and camped on Wildcat Island free of adult supervision. I was able to enjoy the same freedom for exploration afforded Ransom in the early twentieth century. *Swallows and*

Amazons is what Wirth and Gammon call a 'situational narrative' where storylines arise out of landscape features (Blizard and Schuster, 2007, p. 175). Blizard and Schuster suggest such storytelling can foster a localised sense of place among children. This reflects my experience as the novel gave me 'a feeling of what it is like to be there' (Cresswell, 2015, p.15). The detailed descriptions of the hidden harbour, the clearing where they camped, the rocks where cormorants perched, and the reedy 'Amazon' river brought this world to life. 'Even imaginary places have... have an imaginary materiality' and Ransom's was rooted in an actual materiality (Cresswell, 2015, p. 15). When I visited Lake Coniston, Ransom's Lake District was obscured by commercial tea shops, car parks and assigned footpaths but that did not undermine that I felt rooted in Ransom's imaginary version of this distant landscape. Like Goodhart's mobile anywheres, literature allowed my childhood self to travel in my imagination and put down roots in distant places.



Figure 1. Lake Coniston in the Lake District, where in my imagination, I was able to explore the local landscape alongside the characters in *Swallows and Amazons* (Author's private collection).

5. The role of family folklore and memories in the formation of place attachment

Goodhart assumes all children begin life as somewheres, and Valentine's research confirms children, though often underestimated by adults, 'have well-developed local knowledge... and good understanding of local "place ballets"' (Valentine, 1997a, p. 78). Many of my childhood memories are geographically rooted in my local environment, often with the river Cam as a backdrop. I have developed my own childhood folklore of stories. Including my friend and I capsizing a canoe on encountering an angry swan, and summer picnics on the

banks of the river. In line with Goodhart's theory, my childhood memories root me locally.



Figure 2. The River Cam in Grantchester, Cambridge a local feature that forms a focal point for my imagined and real stories that root me in my local environment (Author's private collection).

However, we develop place attachment not only through our own personal experiences but also through family folklore. 'The stories families tell one another ... weave through our relationship with the world, adding to the richness of our engagement with place and landscape' (Sakett, 2012, p. 356-7). Goodhart argues it is when young adults go to university and are exposed to new ideas, people and places that they develop an anywhere outlook (Goodhart 2017, p. 36). However, my family folklore already roots me not just to my local area, but to Australia and France, where my family lived when I was young. They tell stories of evening walks to watch the kangaroos grazing and of the morning walk to the French bakery, stopping on the way to stroke the local cats. Goodhart suggests children feel place attachment to the place where they live (Goodhart 2017, p. 36). My family folklore complicates this, as my family stories mean I feel as though France and Australia are also local to my family.



Figure 3. Watching kangaroos, one of the photos that are a part of the family folklore that roots me in Australia (Author's private collection).



Figure 4. Forming place attachment to my French village with the cats on the daily walk home from the bakery (Author's private collection).

My wider family also connects me to distant places. My father's family live in Germany and the village where my grandparents live feel to me like a second home. I have developed place attachment there by spending time with my cousins hiking in the forests and tobogganing in the winter. At Christmas my sense of belonging to a German family is heightened by following German traditions, celebrating St Nicholas' Day on the 6 December and opening

presents on Christmas Eve. Paulsen shows following Danish rituals within his British home strengthened his sense of belonging to Denmark (Paulsen, 2017). Similarly, my link to my German roots and my family's German rituals, strengthen my sense that I'm rooted in both Britain and Germany. My maternal aunt lives in the Gulf Islands in Canada. Summers spent dog walking in the woods and swimming in the sea have rooted me there. Perhaps it is my immersion in nature through outdoor activities in Germany and Canada that has forged such a strong sense of place attachment. 'Ingold explores the idea that places are knots in ... paths of movement – the locations where people, things and memories come together as a "series of stories"' (Sackett, 2012, p. 357). The stories I have woven out of my connection to these places are, like the stories in *Swallows and Amazons* 'situational narratives' that arise out of the landscape (Blizard and Schuster, 2007, p. 175). Whenever I visit these places my family and their friends treat me as though I belong. This, in combination with the sense these places are local to my family, creates a sense that in each of these different places I belong as a somewhere.



Figure 5. Tobogganing with my German family (Author's private collection).



Figure 6. Family dog swimming in a lake in Canada, another site for activities in the natural environment that have helped to create my strong sense of place attachment to Canada.

6. Summary

Goodhart (2017) does acknowledge that some anywheres 'retain some connection with their roots' and that somewheres' local place attachment might be diluted by going 'on holiday with EasyJet or talk[ing] on Skype to a relative in Australia' (Goodhart, 2017, p. 4). However, he concludes that anywheres are 'less connected to particular places' (Goodhart 2017, p. 36) and implies that it is only somewheres, rooted in the places where they grew up, who feel intense place attachment (Goodhart, 2017). This premise has been questioned by Chan and Kawalerowicz (2022) whose analysis of different survey data shows anywheres are more likely to demonstrate place attachment to their locality by participating in local civic organisations and engaging in social activities in their adopted local communities than somewheres who have lived there all their lives (Chan and Kawalerowicz, 2022). My experience confirms Goodhart's thesis as my parents' education has been powerful in creating my anywhere sense of place attachment. Nevertheless, my experience demonstrates, just as children's literature often creates narratives with a strong sense of the materiality of a place, my family folklore and personal memories are often connected to the material landscape. This has created a personal world of stories that root me intensely in multiple and diverse places. This suggests that the stories we tell ourselves about who we are and where we belong could have the potential to disrupt the divisive 'politics

of culture and identity' which characterises anywheres as unrooted and lacking in place attachment (Goodhart, 2017 p.1).

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