

THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF HOUSETRUCKING IN WEST AFRICA: TOURISTS, TRAVELLERS, RETIRED MIGRANTS AND PERIPATETICS

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ABSTRACT

The Ethnography of Housetrucking in West Africa: Tourists, Travellers, Retired Migrants and Peripatetics

In the last two decades, West Africa with its Atlantic coast, the Sahara and various other remote places has become a haven for many people from the Global North, who have adopted mobility as a way of life. Most of them are so-called "housetruckers", i.e. people travelling and at least temporarily living in cars, jeeps, vans, caravans, buses or trucks converted into mobile homes. They represent a highly diversified group that is sometimes hard to put into any conventional mobility category and deserves more academic attention. The aim of this article is to present the variety of this phenomenon and most of all to call attention to the appearance of a new, largely disregarded and undocumented researchable entity within it, i.e. peripatetic housetruckers, which calls for new theoretical reflection within mobility studies.

KEYWORDS: Mobility, housetruckers, neo-nomadism, new researchable entity, West Africa

IZVLEČEK

Etnografija avtohišarstva v Zahodni Afriki: Turisti, popotniki, upokojeni migranti in peripatetiki

V zadnjih dveh desetletjih je Zahodna Afrika z atlantsko obalo, s Saharo in z različnimi drugimi oddaljenimi kraji postala pristan za številne ljudi z globalnega severa, katerim je mobilnost postala način življenja. Večina med njimi je avtohišarjev, tj. ljudi, ki potujejo in vsaj začasno živijo v mobilne domove predelanih avtomobilih, džipih, kombijih, avtobusih, tovornjakih kakor tudi kamperjih. Gre za izredno raznolik fenomen, ki ga je včasih težko uvrstiti v konvencionalne mobilnostne kategorije, in bi kot tak zaslužil več akademske pozornosti. Namen pričujočega članka je predstaviti raznolikost tega fenomena in predvsem opozoriti na pojav nove, precej spregledane in slabo dokumentirane raziskovalne entitete, to je peripatetičnih avtohišarjev, ki predvsem od študij mobilnosti zahteva novo teoretsko refleksijo.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: mobilnost, avtohišarji, neonomadizem, nova raziskovalna entiteta, Zahodna Afrika

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INTRODUCTION

West Africa with its Atlantic coast, the Sahara and various other remote places presents a highly ambivalent mobility landscape frequented by various Africans and people from the Global North, mostly Europeans. They include local nomads, irregular sub-Saharan migrants, transnational tradesmen, smugglers, retirees, tourists and travellers. In the last two decades this site has also become a haven for people from the Global North who have adopted mobility as a way of life. Most of them are “housetruckers”, i.e. people travelling and at least temporarily living in various kinds of mobile homes. They represent a highly diversified group, a largely disregarded and undocumented phenomenon that is sometimes hard to put into any conventional mobility category and deserves more academic attention.

The aim of this article is to present the variety of this phenomenon, as well as to call attention to the appearance of a new researchable entity within it, i.e. peripatetic housetruckers, which calls for new theoretical reflection in studies that deal with human mobility. It first traces the predecessors of contemporary housetruckers, then outlines the varieties of the phenomenon, and finally addresses peripatetic housetruckers and the difficulty of conceptualising this new entity which occupies a place between tourism, travel, migration and nomadism.

The article is based on ethnographic data collected during extensive fieldwork that took place between January 2007 and May 2012 in Morocco, the Western Sahara, Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Guinea. During my research I employed the methods of mobile ethnography (D’Andrea 2006), participant observation with a focus on practices of moving and meeting with other mobile subjects, interviewing, as well as a good measure of self-reflection, which is a logical consequence of my personal involvement in the housetrucking lifestyle. All of the descriptions of the housetrucking lifestyle employed in the present article are based on field notes that I made during my fieldwork.

ON HOUSETRUCKING

The notion of living a nomadic lifestyle is older than civilization itself. Traditional nomads are found throughout old Europe, America, the Middle East and Asia who periodically change their location in order to maximise the advantages of climate, the environment or economic opportunities, and whose lifestyle is very similar to that of the contemporary housetruckers (Berland 1992; Berland, Salo 1986; Berland, Rao 2004). However, the contemporary housetruckers sprang up from more recent socio-cultural processes of global late capitalism. They are very closely related to the development of time- and space-compressing information, communication and navigation technologies, and the development of the automobile industry that offered off-road exploration of remote places and comfortable caravaning suitable for all ages (cf. Sheller, Urry 2006). Important factors underpinning the phenomenon also include the development of tourism and travel culture, higher standards of living, and as paradoxical as it might sound, also the recent recession beginning in 2008 that revealed a mass-scale disillusionment with the national states’ neoliberal¹ system (cf. Bousiou 2008; Clark 1997; D’Andrea 2006, 2007; Dearling 1998; Korpela 2009; Martin 1998, 2002; Oliver 2007; Juntunen, Kalčić, Rogelja 2012). The phenomenon has its historical analogies and continuations in the phenomenon of the Grand Tour and its later forms such as the international countercultural hippy movement of the 1960s and 1970s and the New Age Travellers movement of the 1980s and 1990s (Clark 1997; Dearling 1998; Hetherington 2000).² It could

1 I refer to neoliberalism as a “political, economic and moral system governed by globalized financial markets that decouples labour and capital, disconnects the social and the political rights and undermines the possibility of a true foundation of citizenship” (Raulet 2011).

2 New Age Travellers are groups of people who often espouse New Age or so-called “hippie” beliefs, and travel between music festivals and fairs (mainly in the United Kingdom) in order to live in a community with others

also be associated with the rise of the phenomenon of adventure travel and the quest for “elsewhere-lands” (Löfgren 1999).

Housetruckers in West Africa are a highly heterogeneous group of people. Due to the geographical proximity of Europe the most prevalent among them are Western and Central Europeans, but there are also some Eastern Europeans, Americans, Canadians, Australians, and New Zealanders. They are of different generations, various professional qualifications and social strata. They mainly consist of women and men travelling in couples without children, for the simple reason that a mobile life with children requires more economic resources, planning, security and time-consuming household chores. Others travel in pairs of friends but it is not uncommon to see single men on the road. Women travelling by themselves are rare exceptions. Most housetruckers are of urban origin and many among them tend towards a sustainable ecological life. They travel in converted cars, jeeps, lorries, vans, buses, trucks or mobile homes of different values that vary from a couple of thousand to a couple hundred thousand euros. When traversing African landscapes they are often misconceived by Africans, as well as many Westerners,³ as being prosperous and privileged people. While this is sometimes true, many of them come from the lower economic strata of their background societies where they suffered from precarious positions in the labour and housing market. Their degrees of connectedness to the sedentary life back home also differ. While some of them have fixed property in their country of origin where they more or less frequently return, for others the vehicle that serves as their home is the only valuable they own. The French, English, Germans, Spanish and Italians in particular live in their vehicles during their stays in both continents, but many among them resort to squats or turn to their friends, families, or the rental market for housing while back “home”.

Housetruckers choose their destinations according to climatic, economic and socio-political conditions, romantic images of the African continent and the Sahara, navigation skills, the amount of adventure and comfort they are looking for, as well as other more specific personal preferences. Those with four-wheel-drive vehicles often follow the beaten tracks of deserts, coasts, riverbanks, mountains and other remote places. Many state that they find freedom in extremely remote areas. They say that the deserts in particular serve as sites where a total cut-off from stress can be accomplished. The empty desert is alluring to them for the fact that it doesn't involve social obligations or career responsibilities, and one can entirely detach oneself – at least temporarily – from worrying about money and markets. For most housetruckers, deserts, but also the African continent itself, represent synonyms for freedom and an escape from the fast pace of Western life. However, the most important factors that shape their mobility are their economic conditions and strategies. Some started to travel upon retirement; some are still of working age; some have regular incomes (pension, salary) or live on savings; some have to resort to various flexible economic strategies.

The reasons for mobility among housetruckers are various as well. While a love of travel is a prerequisite, many think that housetrucking enables them to improve their lives as it offers more freedom and satisfaction. However, very often they had to choose this kind of mobile life out of necessity, when faced with different kinds of problems connected with personal, family, professional or existential is-

who hold similar beliefs. Their transport and homes consist of vans, lorries, buses, narrowboats and caravans converted into mobile homes. They also make use of improvised bender tents, tipis and yurts. New Age Travellers largely originated in 1980s and early 1990s Britain. As of 2010, a small number continue to travel in the country, and cultural groupings with similar composition have also manifested themselves in other countries, such as France or New Zealand (cf. Clark 1997; Dearling 1998; Hetherington 2000).

3 When using term ‘Westerners’ I have in mind people from more affluent countries of the Global North, which also includes people from the southern hemisphere such as New Zealanders and Australians, or Japanese who are actually Easterners. I fully acknowledge the paradoxical nature of the descriptor, which actually derives from the notion that people from the political West (United States, Western Europe) are those who are affluent as they come from the cradle of neoliberalism, which nowadays no longer represents a Western but a global phenomenon.

sues. While some have taken a conscious decision to break away from the everyday routine of sedentary life, others decided on more permanent mobility only after some time spent on the way.

The number of housetruckers dwelling in and crisscrossing West Africa is hard to estimate, as they are dispersed all over the continent, and in addition the tendency of many of them to remain invisible in public space and above all before the administrative apparatuses of their homelands adds to obscure presentation of the phenomenon.

In fact, housetrucking is not confined to only the African continent; the ethnographic data indicates that the phenomenon is widespread in the Mediterranean and Western Europe, in South, Central and North America, Australia, New Zealand, Asia and according to Werner Herzog's Documentary *Encounters at the End of the World* (2007) even in Antarctica. West Africa represents the most pragmatic choice for European housetruckers because it is relatively near, it is pleasantly warm during the cold European winter, it is attractive due to its romantic imagery of wilderness and desert, and not least, also relatively cheap.

However there is also a certain peculiarity about housetruckers. Some of them use converted vehicles as alternative housing only in their countries of origin, in a similar way as squatters use abandoned buildings. They are simply parked somewhere where they are left alone, for example in the suburbs of Berlin, in the mountains or forests of Portugal, Spain or France, or on a squat parking area in Barcelona, Toulouse, Marseille or London. When in Africa, they backpack and travel by public transportation or hitchhike. This is the point when the question of whether the descriptor "housetrucker" is broad enough to speak about this phenomenon in all its multifacetedness should be raised. That is, when it comes to backpacking, one finds that many backpackers do not own any valuables at all and resort to alternative housing in whatever form it may come and wherever they go. Others keep their apartments which are used as ports where they switch between housetrucking and backpacking, depending on their destination. Besides, "housetrucking" is a fluid mobility type, since a vehicle that serves as a temporary home can always be sold, which does not exclude the maintaining of the nomadic life on the road. Yet, it is precisely accented mobility which represents the common denominator of this heterogeneous group of people.

THE VARIETY OF THE PHENOMENON

According to my observations, the housetruckers that one can meet in West Africa can be divided into four main mobility categories: tourists, international retirement migrants (IRM), sabbatical travellers, and peripatetics. The descriptor for the last category refers to people who have adopted mobility as a way of life and whose everyday practices in many ways resemble traditional peripatetic nomads, i.e. they are highly mobile, exploit social resources for their existence (Berland, Salo 1986),⁴ yet they are not members of any traditional nomadic group. While the proposed differentiation is formulated predominantly according to different economic niches that housetruckers exploit for their existence, as well as the duration of their mobility and everyday practices (i.e. behaviour), situations from real life reveal blurred boundaries and overlaps between the proposed categories.

We have one month for this trip. Every year we decide on a different destination, and this year we chose West Africa. As we wanted to see the desert and Dogon land, we decided to hire guides. In Mauritania we went to

4 Traditional groups of peripatetic nomads (Berland, Salo 1986) do not exploit natural but social resources and have been labelled by other researchers as service nomads (Hayden 1979), commercial nomads (Acton 1981), non-food producing nomads (Rao 1982) and symbiotic nomads (Misra 1982). The term "peripatetic nomads" is broader, more neutral, and most of all applies also to non-traditional groups of nomads such as New Age English Travellers, which is the reason I find this term to be a useful descriptor for this special group of housetruckers.

Adrar and in Mali we visited Dogons on the Bandiagara plateau. Going into the desert by yourself is too dangerous; the problem is not only navigation but also driving skills. If you sink in the sand you have to know how to dig your car out! Bandiagara is easy to drive, but we didn't know the customs there. It would take us ages to learn the appropriate behaviour, while our guide taught us along the way. Without him we might have walked on their gods without knowing it (German interlocutor, 45, field notes excerpt, Bamako, March 2011).

Tourist houstruckers are primarily people of working age who take annual leave to take a break from their everyday routine and work obligations and head to Africa for adventure, disconnection, change and rest. As they usually have a very limited period of time, which is equal to the length of their vacation (most often up to two months), as a rule they organise their travel itineraries carefully, and use tourist infrastructure such as camps, hotels, and tourist guides, which facilitates their loaded itineraries, and more or less strictly follow their schedules. This group of houstruckers lives on their holiday pay and want to live it to the fullest before returning to the fast pace of their everyday obligations back home. Their migration to places outside of their usual environment represents only a temporary break guided by a lust for leisure and entertainment, and does not comprise an intention of more permanent settlement in a place or more intensive involvement with local population which according to "terms of time and behaviour" (cf. Scott, Marshall 2009: 470; Torkington 2011: 3) "qualifies" them as tourists.⁵

I will be quite happy to sleep in my bed again. One year of modest life in a car was enough! He wants to find a new job, as he got fed up with the old one. Me? I am a translator and I love my job. During our travels around Africa I translated our blog, and now I am ready to go back to more serious texts. Blogging was just an episode (Polish interlocutor, 40, field notes excerpt, Nouakchott, April 2012).

Sabbatical travellers are another group of houstruckers for whom mobile life in a vehicle represents only a temporary experience. As the descriptor suggests, they are on sabbatical leave. Many among these people are well-travelled and take longer breaks of a year or more for their African experience. Usually they choose to travel through West Africa or around the African continent (on the eastern side towards the south and by the western side back north to Europe). These travelers live on savings that were purposely laid by for "the African project", which is why they economize where possible and try to reduce expenditures on various travel services (camping sites, guides). The entire journey is well-prepared beforehand and in detail. Many design their own logos that they put on their vehicles or even T-shirts, they have their travel business cards and they write travel blogs. They clearly display their travel identity, which often gives the impression of being a profession. Their travel is perceived as work which has to be done, and not just as a way of spending free time, as in the case of tourists, which on a linguistic level is manifested in phrases such as "This year I am doing Africa", "Last year I was doing South America" (Weber 1997: 79). After this experience they usually return to everyday sedentary life, which is very often considered a "new beginning" that one starts with a clear head and heart and very often a new social identity (new profession, civil status, place of stay, lifestyle...). Sabbatical travelers i.e. also very often choose to take a longer break off due to a personal, family or professional crisis that forced them to reconsider their lives and not only because of the "travel bug" that they got from previous trips. The result of this reconsideration is sometimes a decision to leave the sedentary life behind and become a full-time nomad. Mobility becomes a "settled way of life" (cf. Rogelja, this volume), and when they run out of savings they resort to various economic activities to make up their monthly budget.

We come here [Dakhla] every year. We always stay at this place. We don't go to camp, as we cannot afford it. We don't stay in France as we cannot afford to spend money on heating either. My husband is already retired, I have

⁵ According to World Tourism Organization, the definition of tourism involves stays away from one's usual place of residence of not more than a year (Torkington 2011: 3).

lost my job. Next year I'll be entitled to a pension. Every year in November we travel to Dakhla and every April we travel back to France. It is not bad to live like this. We enjoy fresh air, sun and good food. And we catch our own fish (French interlocutor, 64, field notes excerpt, Dakhla, December 2011).

Retired housetruckers are people with fixed monthly incomes, i.e. pensions, who usually travel with more expensive factory-built campers, but also trucks, all terrain vehicles, vans etc. Their travel routes are relatively fixed, very often confined to circulation between home in Europe, where they spend spring and summer months, and more or less fixed places of stay in Morocco or the Western Sahara, where they spend the cold autumn and winter months. Some of them spend most of their time in official camping sites. However, retired people also include more adventurous types whose travel routes resemble to those of sabbatical travellers, who resort to wild camping, and whose movement is not confined only to the African continent or season. Some of them do not own any fixed property. While many retired housetruckers seem to fit perfectly into IRM category, i.e. people who start travelling upon their retirement by following the sun with the purpose of maintaining good health, spirit and a feeling of usefulness (see e.g. Ackers et al. 2004; Casado-Díaz et al. 2004; Gustafson 2001; Howard 2008; Huber, O'Reilly 2004; Williams et al. 2000a), some of them start to travel while still of working age. These people are either redundant workers who had to choose a mobile lifestyle out of necessity, or they decided to quit their jobs to be able to travel while they are still healthy and feel fit. Before they have reached the age when they were entitled to a pension, they either lived off their savings (sometimes gained by selling their property or business), or on unemployment money. However, cases where retired people choose a life in a camper because of the feeling of marginalisation of older people in their home society (cf. Benson 2007: 13-15), or for seasonal circulation between continents in order to be able to survive on pensions which according to European standards are too small are not rare at all.

We stopped in front of a shop to buy some food. There was a French guy who looked like a very sterile tourist, who never get his hands dirty and doesn't sweat and who always sleeps in clean hotel sheets - glasses and a neat fleece. At his initiative we started a conversation which continued at Abu's place where we were invited to spend New Year's Eve, and it turned out that this guy doesn't have a fixed place to stay or a fixed job, and has friends all over the world. In a way he is more nomadic than many people who travel with their housetrucks! At the moment he is on the way to Timbuktu, where he plans to work as a volunteer on the Festival of the Desert; he is travelling in a Renault Express that he bought for 200 euros, stuffed with second-hand clothes and computers that he is selling on the way, exactly in the same way as Africans with EU papers do. The car will be sold in Bamako. He actually learned about the African way of business from Africans during his last trip to Nouakchott this year in October. At that time he was earning money by translating a business book from French into English. All the translation was done on the veranda bench of the Sahara Motel. He does for life whatever he comes across, rickshaw driver in Copenhagen, computer teacher in a school in Tajikistan, translator, small trader... (field notes excerpt, Nouakchott, 31 Dec. 2011).

Many people who could be considered sabbatical or IRM travellers exceed the frames of these categorizations and could be also considered peripatetics, i.e. people who are at first sight very difficult to distinguish from tourists, sabbaticals and IRMs; there is no typical look or age group, they travel in all kinds of vehicles as well as with backpacks. Peripatetics present a mobility category that is hard to describe with any conventional mobility concept and occupy a place between migration, tourism, travel and nomadism. They are not typical migrants, as they are not moving in a bipolar motion along more or less fixed routes and do not seek a fixed settlement in a final destination with a fixed job and social circle of friends attached to one place. They are not tourists or travellers either, as they are usually working while on the road and have adopted mobility as a way of life. Tourists and (sabbatical) travellers by definition move temporarily, and to break away from the everyday routine, which is usually represented by home and job (O'Reilly 2003: 305; Gustafson 2002: 900). They are on holidays or sabbatical leave. Those

retired among them are not true IRMs either. While they might live on a pension, many among them retired while still of working age, have faced unemployment, or for various emotional or financial reasons simply cannot live in the West. They resemble traditional peripatetic nomads (Berland, Salo 1986; Berland, Rao 2004) in that many among them are engaged in peripatetic economic activities: they work during temporary breaks while on the road, offer their services and sell goods, yet are not attached to any reciprocal kinship structures which would direct their economic activities, make them follow cyclic traditional travel routes or provide a backup social network (Bauman 1993). Their travel routes are most often the result of spontaneous decisions and their economic activities reflect the “cultural ethos of global late capitalism” (cf. Juntunen, Kalčić, Rogelja 2012).

One of the interesting theoretical frameworks for the study of peripatetics seems to be the relatively recently conceptualised lifestyle migration theory (LM) which looks to be broad enough to take the hybrid nature of the phenomenon into consideration. In a similar way as peripatetic housetruckers, lifestyle migrants represent a very heterogeneous group of people who occupy a place between tourism and migration (Bell et al. 2000, Gustafson 2002, Korpela 2009, O’Reilly 2003, Williams et al. 2000b). LM has been defined as a spatial mobility of “relatively affluent individuals of all ages moving either part-time or full time, permanently or temporarily to places which, for various reasons, signify for the migrants something loosely defined as quality of life” (Benson, O’Reilly 2009b: 612). Under the umbrella of LM as a phenomenon of “moving for a better life” (Benson, O’Reilly 2009b: 2) are found typologies such as leisure migration, counter-urbanization, rural idyll, second home ownership, amenity seeking, seasonal migration, residential tourism, bourgeois bohemians (i.e. bohemian lifestyle migrants,⁶ expressive expatriates/global nomads,⁷ New Age Travellers⁸) as well as mid-life, retirement or family migration (Benson 2009; Benson, O’Reilly 2009b: 2, 4; Bousiou 2008; Clark 1997; D’Andrea 2006, 2007; Hetherington 2000; Hoey 2010; Korpela 2009; Martin 1998, 2002; Nudrali, O’Reilly 2009; Torkinson 2010). Peripatetics share many characteristics with the cases discussed within LM theory, however there are certain discrepancies that call for alternative explanations. The most outstanding are those that tackle questions of mobility, the privilege of freedom of choice and communal belonging. Below I will discuss and reflect on these discrepancies.

PERIPATETICS

Movement is not just the experience of shifting from place to place; it is also linked to our ability to imagine an alternative (Papastergiadis 2000: 11).

Lifestyle on the move

Peripatetic housetruckers are highly mobile. Their mobility constitutes a settled way of life, that is to say, they engage in full-time nomadism. They travel, work and live with their vehicles. There is no prevailing pattern of movement, but it would not be far from the truth if I were to state that their trajectories depend on the ways they earn their living. Many Europeans (especially French and Spanish) who engage

6 A conceptualisation formulated by Mari Korpela for lifestyle migrants who have moved abroad in search of a better life but conceive of a more meaningful life in terms different from other kinds of lifestyle migrants as they embrace more bohemian, i.e. spiritual and artistic aspirations (cf. Korpela 2009: 29).

7 Another conceptualisation for bohemian lifestyle migrants formulated by Anthony D’Andrea (2006, 2007), who has studied Western people who spend part of the year on the island of Ibiza and part of the year in Goa, India. They are involved in variations of New Age and techno practice, and D’Andrea conceptualises them as global nomads or expressive expatriates.

8 See footnote 3.

in temporary jobs in agriculture, construction and tourism spend the warm summer months in Europe and begin their journeys towards Africa and south along the Atlantic coast of Morocco and the Western Sahara in the late autumn, when the European climate gets colder. Those who engage in petty commerce, second-hand trade of vehicles and domestic appliances literally live on the road and circulate with a more or less intensive frequency between the European and African continents all year long. On the other extreme are those who stop in one place for extended periods and use their vehicles for housing and for moving between their winter and summer camps. Those whose income is not attached to seasonal work in agriculture and tourism-related services often extend their journeys to various localities in Sub-Saharan Africa, and travel towards South and East Africa and also to other continents. There is always the possibility of boarding a boat to South America either from South Africa or Senegal. At the moment Brazil seems to be a popular destination, but there are many who prefer Asia and take a flight to India, Thailand or Bali once they have arrived at their chosen African destination.⁹ Peripatetic house-truckers' travel routes are not fixed. They are often outcomes of spontaneous decision making. Destinations keep changing along the travel trajectory, largely depending on the social, political, economic and climatic conditions in the localities traversed. However, the freedom of this spontaneity lies in the domain of restrictions, and many peripatetic housetruckers without regular income or savings are also directed in their movement by pursuit of income as well as friends' connections.

Peripatetics have left mainstream sedentary life while still of working age, so they engage in various flexible and mobile economic strategies. It is very interesting that many Europeans that I have met in West Africa engage in practically the same unregulated economic niches as many Africans with European passports (Juntunen 2002; Kohl 2009). While in Europe they usually work in tourism related services and construction sites, and during the harvest season in agriculture picking fruits and grapes. They export second-hand vehicles and domestic appliances to Africa as well as other second-hand goods. Those who sell vehicles always make sure to stuff them with other goods that can be sold at a profit on the way to one of the West African vehicle markets such as "No man's land", i.e. the border zone between Morocco and Mauritania, Nouakchott in Mauritania, Bamako in Mali, Bobo Dioulasso in Burkina Faso or Niamey in Niger. Interestingly they often report discovering suitable market items by observing the African traders circulating between the continents. Many rely entirely on importing vehicles, making up to seven annual trips between Europe and Africa. And what do these car dealers bring back "home"? Travelling back empty-handed would be economically speaking quite lame. Therefore most of them invest some money into purchasing jewellery that can be sold at stalls during the summer in tourist places, at music festivals and various other fairs across Europe. However, this kind of suitcase trade is not confined only to travel between Europe and Africa. Many travel to Asia to purchase clothes, which is much cheaper than Africa in terms of prices.

However, not all peripatetic housetruckers are such talented traders as those described above. Many are not at all interested in trade. All they want is to have enough to live on and to do something meaningful. Many of them live partly on state benefits, such as assistance for disabled people, child supplements, unemployment money, social support etc. They often state that they come to Africa to live cheap for a while, save some money, and to repair their mobile homes; spending €6000 or €600 to paint their mobile home makes quite a big difference for a young couple who spend no more than €500 per month. Economizing is in general the prevailing method of "making" money. Some of those who own better vehicles run overland touring businesses, which are usually organised via the internet. It seems that new information and communication as well as navigation technologies have enabled many to work at a distance. Some peripatetics are privileged enough to earn their money according to Western

⁹ As already mentioned, many housetruckers use their vehicles only for housing while they travel as backpackers and are thus not confined only to housetruck transportation. Some among them switch between backpacking and housetrucking, depending on their destination. Thus they often fly between continents while combining their travel with different kinds of transport.

standards “at home”, while being on the road. They usually engage in professions such as computer programming, translating, writing, illustrating, designing, photography, fieldwork, internet language teaching or running long-distance businesses and overland touring etc. However these kinds of people represent a minority among peripatetics that one can meet in West Africa. Those with a regular income (pension or salary) or savings are rare, and even they are more often than not on a tight budget.

Peripatetics share many traits with bohemian lifestyle migrants (Korpela 2009), expressive expatriates / global nomads (D’Andrea 2006, 2007) and New Age Travellers (Clark 1997; Hetherington 2000; Martin 1998, 2002), i.e. accentuated mobile lifestyle migrants discussed within the LM theory under common descriptor “bourgeois bohemians” who embrace more spiritual and artistic aspirations (cf. Korpela 2009: 29).¹⁰ However, while some peripatetics express affinities similar to those of bourgeois bohemians, in general there is not so much bohemian about them after all. Another parallel between bourgeois bohemians and peripatetics is transcontinental movement, according to which they could be conceptualised as global nomads who circulate through global circuits of countercultural lifestyle (D’Andrea 2006), however the mobility of many peripatetics is often limited to only one continent, if not even to only two or three countries. The magnitude of such mobility can hardly be called “global”. In any case, one of the main characteristics of peripatetics is a pronounced “on the move” mobile lifestyle, which includes constant mobility propelled by an existence which is based on mobile economic practices.

LM theory does not focus on mobility itself, but on lifestyle, constituted at the place of migration. However, LM theory pays a great deal of attention to the phenomenon of the “ongoing quest and the constant search for a better life” (Benson 2009; Benson, O’Reilly 2009a; Korpela 2009). As stated by numerous authors, lifestyle migrants often move in stages. Their first destination is not necessary their final one because they are engaged in a permanent quest for a better life somewhere else (Benson, O’Reilly 2009a: 10). In this sense both lifestyle migrants and peripatetics embark on their journeys in the hope of finding a more meaningful and happier life somewhere else. However, while lifestyle migrants move in more outlined ways and create in the chosen places more or less temporary or permanent homes to which they continue to return, peripatetics somehow do not want to lie at anchor that easily. Their mobile homes always offer the possibility to leave the place and move on whenever and wherever they want.

Their directions are never fixed and their plans are often changing. This stress on the importance of absolute openness, ultimate mobility and the never-ending quest for always new and better possibilities stands as a search for an ultimate freedom which is, in the case of peripatetics similar as in the case of traditional peripatetic nomadic groups, a highly cherished value. Therefore in terms of mobility behaviour, peripatetics are much closer to traditional peripatetic nomads (cf. Berland, Salo 1986; Berland, Rao 2004) than most lifestyle migrants. However, deriving from the theory of neo-nomadism (D’Andrea 2007), which refers to mobility of highly mobile lifestyle migrants engaged in a countercultural lifestyle (i.e. global nomads/expressive expatriates), they could easily be conceptualised as neo-nomads, i.e. contemporary nomads whose nomadism is not rooted in a tribal system and organised through descent groups as in the case of traditional nomads, but has arisen from global modernity, and is marked by pronounced individualism. As many of them do not follow any fixed cyclic routes (as is the case with traditional nomads), i.e. travel with a purpose while wandering the land with no fixed destination, they also correspond to Zygmunt Bauman’s definition of vagabonds and could be described as “pilgrims without destination, nomads without an itinerary” (cf. Bauman 1993: 240).

Squeezed between freedom of choice and the pressure of necessity

Although many peripatetics state that their lifestyle is a result of free choice, the situations in their everyday lives reveal that their freedom is actually constrained by unfortunate or unsatisfactory life situa-

¹⁰ See footnotes 7 and 8.

tions. The mobility of peripatetic housetruckers is actually neither entirely voluntary nor entirely forced. The most accurate way to describe the reasons for their mobility would be that they were pushed in a variety of ways from behind (cf. Bauman 2001).

Their breakups with the sedentary life in their home societies happened in various ways and the rationalisations for the reasons for this kind of life vary as well. Among the most often stated reasons are the following: "to travel and see how people live elsewhere", "to leave behind hasty, emotionally empty and consumption-oriented life with too much pressure and too many constraints", "to be stress free and have a more meaningful and harmonious life". Many said that they prefer having more time and less money to being squeezed between too much work, lack of time, debt, more and more oppressing rules and never-ending stress.

"To lead a healthy life, in touch with nature and people who are still genuine and simple" was another frequent rationalisation. It sounds like a typical rat race escape to rural areas, but there is more to it. That is, not all peripatetic housetruckers live in touch with nature and not all of them like to be with simple people. Some of them rent houses or apartments and live in cities such as Bamako, which is among the most polluted cities in Africa! Why? Because it is cheaper than Europe or the States, while excellent Malian music and concerts are within easy reach. When conversation touches on financial issues, the picture distorts again. Many perceive themselves as being deceived by the empty promises of the neoliberal Western state: they had experienced unemployment, redundancy at the age of 50, blocked careers, a precarious labour market position or miserable pensions. Many among them have chosen to move between Global South and North to be able to survive with less money. In fact, survival issues are frequently one of the core reasons for leaving a sedentary life. The search for a more satisfactory life is most often the only rationalisation constructed after the break up. Life on the road has therefore to be seen also as a reaction to economic constraints and to marginalization in the labour market. The recession beginning in 2008 had a tremendous impact on the lives of these people, and especially young people with blocked career choices sought a solution to their existential as well as housing problems by adopting a mobile lifestyle in a converted vehicle. According to unofficial estimates from 2011, approximately 50,000 French people who are not ethnic nomads live in converted vehicles throughout France (Angeras 2011).

Being away and actively participating in mobile life can assuage feelings of uselessness and lack of success for those who feel that they have failed in their home societies and can at least temporarily provide a sense of a meaningful life. However, "romantic and idealised visions of the mobile life tend to fade with time and people become more critical of the fact that mobile life includes compromising many of the comforts, secure routines, and repetitive social rhythms of sedentary life" (cf. Juntunen, Kalčić, Rogelja 2012). That is why over time many peripatetic housetruckers develop a quite critical and embittered attitude towards the political and social order in their home society. Disillusionment with national states is widespread. Many peripatetics claim that states can no longer provide both material and psychological stability and that they are governed by neoliberal interests which are going against their own citizens and humanity in general. "Europe is dead" said a Spanish woman temporarily staying in Nouadhibou, Mauritania. "I'd rather be here in Africa when it finally breaks down." These people do not believe in the social welfare system and do not expect to live to see a pension. They are convinced that working hard all their lives does not guarantee economic security in old age. They also feel that by being obliged to pay contributions to state they are actually either officially being robbed or forced into a kind of modern slavery: they do not agree with the ways the taxpayers' money is spent. Statements like "States are financing wars with our money while they avoid healing people with curable diseases" are not uncommon, nor are statements like "This system is falling apart. It is immoral, corrupt and rotten. It has to collapse in order to make a space for a new one." Talking about the contemporary life in the Global North very often sounds like the "decline of civilization" described in Michael Moore's film *Capitalism: A Love Story* (2009), that one has to escape in order to survive not only materially, but also psychologically and morally.

The tendency to distinguish between poor unprivileged migrants from the Global South and affluent privileged people from the Global North is deeply rooted in people's thinking (cf. Korpela 2009:

19), and perpetuated through LM theory as well as the theory of neo-nomadism. LM subjects are often defined as privileged and free people who had the possibility to choose; as people who engage in individual self-realisation projects, who seek to escape the rat race, who want to improve their life, and who quest for a more authentic simpler environment and a slower pace. These kinds of narrations imply that all lifestyle migrants are privileged and free people and have decided on an alternative which was enabled by the development of transport, ICT, and a rise in standards of living (Hetherington 1992, 1998, 2000; Torkington 2010). However moving to a new place or deciding to live on the move does not always indicate merely a pursuit of better and more fulfilling life but rather an escape from a Gordian knot of difficult and troublesome life conditions (cf. Hoey 2010, Martin 2002, Rogelja this volume). Looking at the phenomenon from the broader socio-political perspective of shifts and transformations within the context of global late capitalism puts the issue of freedom in rather different perspective. As stated by Anthony Giddens, the processes of individualisation that are seen by some LM theorists as those that enable people to freely choose (Torkington 2010) “are not always connected with free will but required by the system” as very often “we have no choice but to choose” (Giddens 1994: 75). Freedom is relative and there is no absolute freedom of choice. The same holds true with the peripatetics, who often state that they were “pushed from behind” (Bauman 2001) to choose life on the road.

Thus peripatetics often seem to be on both sides of this privileged/unprivileged, free/forced dichotomy and could therefore be compared to different contemporary mobilities from both the Global South and the Global North. While this idea sounds quite unorthodox, some studies which analyze human mobility against the context of global late capitalism (Clark 1997; Juntunen, Kalčić, Rogelja 2012; Korpela 2009) reveal the emergence of new researchable entities that challenge conventional boundaries between migrants, tourists, travellers, and nomads; between privileged, regular, legal, irregular, voluntary, or forced migration. These sometimes apparently incomparable new mobilities such as Moroccan irregular migrants (Juntunen 2002), Westerners in Indian Varanasi (Korpela 2009), modern Tuareg youth between Niger, Libya and Algeria (Kohl 2009) or Western liveaboards (Rogelja, this volume), to mention just some of the many, are all rising up from the same context of global modernity, which is marked by increased mobility, time- and space-compressing technology, a general existential crisis connected with disillusionment with national state systems, and tensions between wishes, needs and possibilities produced by an imposed global neoliberal setting (cf. Hoey 2010; Urry 2004).

Seeking and testing possibilities for an alternative *modus vivendi*

Peripatetics often feel deceived and marginalised by their home society, and therefore lack patriotic feelings of belonging towards their states of origin. On the other side, they often stress commonality with people of similar experiences that they meet on the way. Social interactions among them take place in shifting and occasional small groupings that simply happen to stop in the same places for a few days. These sporadic gatherings often involve fixing the vehicles, the exchange of nomadic experiences and information on travel routes. People clearly display solidarity and readiness for reciprocal help, but the solidarities are first and foremost purely circumstantial. They all live on the road and share the same experience, which provides feelings of belonging despite the ephemeral nature of their gatherings. Those who have a place to stay in Europe clearly demonstrate a willingness to host others if they should drop by one day and seek shelter on their plot. This solidarity is particularly stressed among full-time houstruckers who face numerous problems in Europe with regard to free-of-charge wild camping and living in a converted vehicle, which is prohibited or at least highly regulated in most European countries. Thus some encounters do develop beyond pragmatic mutual help, however most of the friendships formed during stopovers are maintained through e-mails, blogs and Facebook, and are very often consigned to meetings somewhere sometime in a vague future.

In many EU countries, legislation together with indirect constraints on nomadic life directly de-

limits the possibilities for mobility by setting restrictions on camping. As parking in official sites such as camps can cost several thousands of Euros annually, the peripatetics usually stop in areas known for their relaxed bureaucracy, low fees or complete lack of attention from local authorities regarding their stay. Furthermore, peripatetic housetruckers often hide the physical fact that they are leaving in their vehicles in one place, because in the EU vehicles that are used for “camping” are also required to meet strictly defined regulations regarding sanitary and food preparation facilities. While England, for example, is known among the housetruckers as a considerably lax country in relation to vehicle homes, in other areas they are obliged to improvise in order to bypass bureaucratic norms that impose the construction of costly solutions. That is why most peripatetic housetruckers attempt to register their vehicles as ordinary vehicles, and hide the fact that they actually live in them.

Being critical of capitalist economies in general (cf. Korpela 2009), peripatetics seek to evade “state-market-morality regimes” (see D’Andrea 2007: 23). Their life could be easily understood as Greg Martin suggests for New Age English Travellers (2002) as a political statement that announces “We do not want to participate in a system which does not care for us”. As they feel disregarded and cornered by their background societies they tend to bypass sedentary norms imposed on their lives through state apparatuses. The aim of this bypassing is to achieve more satisfactory material and moral existential circumstances. This requires a constant negotiation with the state bureaucracies. E.g., as stated by Juntunen et al., “citizenship and residence grant rights to welfare services and benefits only to those individuals who fulfil the sedentary norm. Entitlement to numerous social statuses, rights and benefits, and obtaining personal documents, certificates and licenses all require a permanent address, and the same holds true with participation in the official economic life through the banking system” (2012). Peripatetics therefore constantly balance their lives between two ends. On the one hand it is beneficial to minimize contacts with the bureaucratic institutions of the state, while on the other hand maximizing the benefits granted by the citizenship and legal residence most often requires one to be at least occasionally within the reach of the authorities. For these reasons peripatetic housetruckers devise various strategies for convincing state authorities that they live at a permanent address and that they are therefore available to the authorities when needed.

In West Africa, housetruckers face a much more relaxed bureaucratic culture than in Europe, and they rarely report being troubled by the police and other authorities. In most parts of West Africa, wild camping is not yet forbidden. Thus they learn about suitable stopover sites from travel guidebooks, online forums, other travellers, and by observing roadsides. As they tend to minimise their expenses they avoid as much as possible payable services such as camping sites, which in West Africa are usually held by expatriates. Makeshift camping usually requires more interaction with local populations whose consent is required for the stay. While in West Africa they do not face major constraints on nomadic life, most African states require a personal entry visa for non-African citizens, country-specific car insurance, and a temporary “pass through permit” for the vehicle. As many peripatetic housetruckers have extremely limited budgets they are highly motivated to learn how bureaucratic requirements can be circumvented in the most economic way. Many for example alter the technical information on their vehicles to cut down insurance costs, and sometimes even choose not to pay if they are not directly asked to do so when entering a country.

The peripatetics’ social world is marked by uprootedness and liminality, and they are more or less invisible in public space. Unlike many contemporary migrant communities, they do not create any politicized identity or politicized public sphere, for the simple reason that they are constructed by individuals and small groupings which are constantly on the move. In addition, in cases when people participate in unregulated economic niches or depend on the management of various forms of state support, invisibility is “required” as it makes bare survival possible. This is why many peripatetics do not want to expose themselves, as it could endanger their existence. Therefore, social relations among peripatetics have a fleeting and situational quality, while social weightlessness and liminality mark their relation with the social spaces they traverse.

However, for the majority of peripatetics spending one's entire life on the road is out of question for the simple reason that in time a modest life in a vehicle becomes too tiresome. One of the significant reasons for such an outcome is nonexistence of a kinship structure that would support such a nomadic life, while fleeting relations with other people on the move simply cannot provide a sufficiently stable emotional environment to fulfil the universal human need for long term stability and closeness. Thus most peripatetics experiment with alternative commonalities and have a readymade plan for their later years. Many talk of dreaming about ecologically sustainable life in a house located somewhere close to nature and about self-sufficiency. Some plan to join eco-societies based on ethical and spiritual values such as Damanhur in Italy or Marinaleda in Spain.

Place has an important role in the construction of personhood for lifestyle migrants and the same holds true for peripatetics (Hoey 2010: 256). However, they are on the extreme side of those lifestyle migrants that are extremely mobile, critical of the neoliberal system and seek to evade predominant mainstream market regimes (i.e. bourgeois bohemians). Their quest for an alternative place is thus manifested in a constant nomadic mobility, which with time transcends into another kind of mobility, a self-sustainable project somewhere in nature, detached from traps of "civilization". Place is in the case of peripatetics thus closely related to spatial and psychological mobility. As stated by D'Andrea, who cites Gilles Deleuze's famous quote "the nomad does not move", neo-nomadism can also be understood as a state of mind and being, not merely a state of movement (D'Andrea 2007). At the end of the peripatetics' neo-nomadic journey, the freedom provided by constant mobility is replaced by the freedom provided by self-sustainability, which points at the multifaceted nature of mobility itself. As stated by Nikos Papastergiadis (2000: 11), "Movement is not just the experience of shifting from place to place; it is also linked to our ability to imagine an alternative". And this is what peripatetics actually do. Their journey which begins with a housetruck and ends up with a sedentary project detached from the infrastructures of mainstream sedentary life is actually all about seeking and testing possibilities for an alternative *modus vivendi* that occupies a place in the grey zone of the neoliberal system, a "non-place"¹¹ (Augé 1995).

CONCLUSION: A NEW RESEARCHABLE ENTITY

As a result of the rapid development of navigation and communication technology, higher standards of living, as well as the recession and disillusionment with the neoliberal system, an increasing number of people are turning to housetrucking as a way of life. The article presents the phenomenon of contemporary housetrucking among Westerners in West Africa. Its aim is to point at the multifacetedness of the phenomenon and most of all to point at the emergence of a new researchable entity within it, which is difficult to place into any conventional category of mobility. While many housetruckers could be easily understood as tourists, travellers or international retirement migrants, numerous individuals that I have met during my travels throughout West Africa do not fit any of these conceptualisations. They not only travel, but also live and work in their housetrucks. They are "on the move". As their mobility and economic practices resemble to those of traditional groups of peripatetic nomads, I refer to them with the descriptor "peripatetics". However, their lifestyle as a product of global modernity is characterized not only by accentuated mobility, but also enhanced individualism, the evasion of mainstream state-market-morality regimes, reneging, and a fleeting multinational sociality which results in ephemeral non-

11 In an essay and book of the same title, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (1995), Marc Augé coined the phrase "non-place" to refer to places of transience that do not hold enough significance to be regarded as "places". In the present case study non-places are understood either as places which do not hold enough significance for housetruckers to be considered as places of permanent anchoring, or places that are not perceived by the neoliberal state as significant enough to be controlled and regulated, and thus present suitable places for alternative mobility, "stepping out of the system".

ethnic transnational groupings based on a shared countercultural lifestyle. As such, peripatetic house-truckers could be conceptualised within the theory of neo-nomadism, which refers to “a minority of high-modern renegades involved in hyper mobile formations that seek to evade mainstream regimes”, and “addresses the fluidic and metamorphic nature of subjectivity enabled under conditions of globalization” (D’Andrea 2006: 116). However, neo-nomads as a specific category of hyper mobile lifestyle migrants (sometimes referred to as “expressive expatriates”, “global nomads”, “bohemian lifestyle migrants” or more generically “bourgeois bohemians”) are conceptualised as affluent individuals in search of a better life whose mobility is enabled by their privileged position in global socio-political hierarchies of power. This is the point where the theoretical framework of lifestyle migration turns out to be too narrow to be able to explain the lives of peripatetics in all its multifacetedness; that is, it continues to distinguish between unprivileged poor migrants from the Global South and affluent privileged lifestyle migrants/tourists/travellers from the Global North, while it fails to take into consideration the relativity of affluence and freedom of choice in both hemispheres of the contemporary globe. The bottom-up look at these issues provided by fieldwork reveals individual choices made not so freely in processes of personal negotiations between wishes and necessity.

The recession which began in 2008 has pushed many Europeans to resort to peripatetic economic strategies between Europe and Africa, which were until recently occupied predominantly by Africans with EU passports. Many of them are now engaged in the very same unregulated economic niches of European tourism, construction and agriculture, as well as petty commerce and trade between continents. And even more: in this enterprise they often act in partnership with African EU immigrants, who predominantly originate in Morocco, Mauritania, Mali, Senegal, Niger and Burkina Faso. Peripatetics thus not only transcend the dichotomies of privileged/unprivileged, free/forced mobility but also challenge conventional conceptualisations of migration, tourism, travel and nomadism, and bring to the fore the relativity of the differentiation of contemporary mobile entities merely according to their ascribed collective identities in the hierarchies of global power. Several scholars have argued that in the period of “liquid modernity” (Bauman 2000), marked by accentuated and all-embracing mobility (Sheller, Urry 2006), opportunities for new kinds of group formations based on shared activities, interests, beliefs or lifestyles are provided (Amit 2002a; Amit 2002b; Amit, Rapport 2002; Bauman 2001; Delanty 2003; Kennedy, Roudometof 2002; Maffesoli 1996). These formations are created by people who are conceptually connected and do not imagine their personal commonalities in ongoing and ascribed collective identities (see Amit, Rapport 2002). Nowadays individuality plays a very significant role in the construction of many communities as many of them are based on individual choice, as individuals search for identity and personal fulfilment through collective participation (Amit 2002a: 16; Delanty 2003: 120-2). The emphasis is on what unites, temporality, fluidity and multiple attachments instead of distinctions arising from collectivities in which the individuals are not members (Amit 2002b: 16; Delanty 2003: 131; Kennedy, Roudometof 2002: 15) Peripatetics present one of such new entities where fleeting trans- and multi-national commonality is created during “temporary nomadic rests” (Urry 2003: 126) and is based on the exchange of travel experience and information, solidarity, and also the shared lifestyle “on the road”. This lifestyle rises up from global modernity which promotes, enables and generates an escape to an alternative *modus vivendi* and experimentation with new communal relations. Thus the peripatetic ephemeral groupings often include individuals from both the South and North global provenances who feel marginalised and deceived by the neoliberal world order and who cannot be conceptualised as either affluent privileged tourists/travellers/lifestyle-migrants or poor and unprivileged migrants or nomads. As stated by Juntunen et al., entities such as peripatetics “bring to the fore the fact that pre-occupation with the immigrant-other has up to the present muted a critical debate on the relation between human mobility and neoliberalism” (2012). While predominant academic discourses continue to maintain the traditional boundaries between mobile subjects from the Global South and the Global North, studies which deal with communities in the age of globalisation and transnationalism (see for example Amit, Rapport 2002; Juntunen et al. 2012; Kohl 2009; Korpela 2009; Rogelja this volume) reveal

their common cultural ethos: constant movement along loosely planned trajectories that is not entirely voluntary nor forced, critical and embittered attitudes towards the political and social order in the home societies, feelings of uprootedness and liminality, general invisibility and lack of a politicized public space, resorting to mobile and flexible economic strategies, and constant negotiation with the state bureaucracies that impose sedentary norms on the mobile subjects' lives. As we have seen, all this also holds true in the case of peripatetics from the Global North.

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