

# “SAIL AWAY”: THE BIOGRAPHICAL APPROACH AS A TOOL TO UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT OF TEMPORARILY UNBELONGING

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## ABSTRACT

### “Sail Away”: The Biographical Approach as a Tool to Understand the Concept of Temporarily Unbelonging

The paper explores the connection between the sea, sea imaginaries and lifestyle migration. Through the use of qualitative longitudinal research, specifically the biographical approach, it discusses in what way sea imaginaries are the inspiration for lifestyle migrants and how they are translated into practice *in situ*. It introduces the idea of *unbelonging* developed by Rogoff (2000) in relation with migrants' experiences. In the first part I discuss the sea as a physical place and as a significant symbol for my interlocutors in relation to the ideas of liminality and temporarily unbelonging. In the next part I put forward two representative (family) portraits in order to highlight details from individuals' lives on a longer time perspective, while in the final part of this article I place the individual stories, sea imaginaries and people's experiences with the maritime environment in dialogue with each other. This makes it possible to better understand the expectations, aspirations and experiences of my interlocutors and to discuss further the idea of temporarily unbelonging in practice.

KEYWORDS: the sea, biographical approach, lifestyle migration, Mediterranean, temporarily unbelonging

## IZVLEČEK

### »Odjadraj«: biografski pristop kot orodje za razumevanje koncepta začasnega nepripadanja

Članek raziskuje povezavo med morjem, imaginariji morja in življenjsko-stilskimi migracijami. Z uporabo longitudinalnega kvalitativnega raziskovanja, zlasti biografskega pristopa, prikazuje, na kakšen način so imaginariji morja navdih za življenjsko-stilske migrante in kako se *in situ* prevajajo v prakso. Predstavi idejo nepripadanja, ki jo je na izkušnjah migrantov razvila Rogoff (2000). V prvem delu razpravlja o morju kot fizičnem prostoru in za sogovornike pomembnem simbolu, povezanem z idejami o liminalnosti in začasnem nepripadanju. Za osvetlitev podrobnosti iz življenj posameznikov v daljšem časovnem obdobju v naslednjem poglavju predstavlja dva reprezentativna (družinska) portreta, v zadnjem delu članka pa individualne zgodbe, imaginarije morja in izkušnje sogovornikov postavi v dialog. Vse to omogoča boljše razumevanje pričakovanj, prizadevanj in izkušenj sogovornikov in poglobljalno razpravo o začasnem nepripadanju v praksi.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: morje, biografski pristop, življenjsko-stilske migracije, Sredozemlje, začasno nepripadanje

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## INTRODUCTION

The online advertisement for the book *Sail Away: How to Escape the Rat Race and Live the Dream* by Nicola Rodriguez states: "There's never been a better time to buy a boat and sail away. Western economies are on the brink of collapse and a decent return on investments is hard to find – so why not cast off on the adventure of a lifetime?" (<http://www.sailawaybook.com/>). A quick browse on the Internet produces numerous results linking to poems, books, personal blogs, charter or tourist agencies, all using the phrase "sail away". The "sail away" idea can be broadly contextualised with the myth of departure that has been widely celebrated in the popular discourse of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, particularly among the middle classes. The idea of escaping to the good life has been extensively discussed in the edited volume *Lifestyle Migration. Expectations, Aspirations and Experiences* by Benson and O'Reilly (2009). Following their observations, the search for a better way of life reflects the wider lifestyle choices that individuals in the post-modern world make on a daily basis, while the recent increase in this phenomenon implies that it emerges partly as a result of the reflexive assessment of opportunities that Giddens (1994) identified as only recently having been made possible, rather than a direct outcome of relative economic privilege (Benson and O'Reilly 2009). There are various social changes such as globalisation, individualization, flexible work opportunities (Amit 2007), and ease of mobility (Urry 2004, Sheller and Urry 2006, Sheller 2011), which have enabled the appearance of privileged forms of mobility such as lifestyle migration. Regarding the liveaboard lifestyle migrants in the Mediterranean, several specific reasons can be listed: the opening of internal borders within the EU, rapid development of affordable navigation technology, rapid expansion of boat charter industries that have popularized the pleasure of cruising, as well as several recent socio-political contexts within Europe which vary from increased standards of living to recession and disillusionment with dominant nation-state system norms of society marked by global capitalism (D'Andrea 2006, 2007; Juntunen, Kalčić, Rogelja 2014).

Discussing lifestyle migration, Benson and O'Reilly wrote that, "...the material and social construction of particular places offering an alternative way of living is crucial; this is what explains the exact destinations chosen, revealing the role of imagination, myth and landscape within the decision to migrate" (2009). Following these ideas, I pay special attention to the importance of socially transmitted representations of the sea, sailing and sea voyages in the first part of the article. Apart from these representations, I claim that a consideration of the physical environment and matter, namely the sea, as well as events following the post-migration period, are of special importance to fully understand the experiences of my interlocutors and to reflect on the concept of liminality as it was previously tailored to the lifestyle migration literature (Korpela 2009, Benson 2011, Hoey 2009 and others) and initially introduced by Van Gennep (1960 [1909]) and Turner (1967). In the next part, I put forward two representative (family) portraits in order to highlight details from individuals' lives. Using a biographical approach, I will discuss the process by which sea imaginaries are the inspiration for lifestyle migrants and how they are translated into practice. The growing interest in the potential of qualitative longitudinal research within the field of lifestyle migration is mainly connected to the fact that such an approach reveals the processual nature of migration, as it reflects on the interplay between structural and individual factors. The contemporary model of qualitative longitudinal research, also used in this research, centres on the repeat interview study, long-term ethnography and follow-ups or re-studies of classic research projects (Thomson 2007, see also Holland *et al.*, 2004 for an overview). As stated by Thomson, the general resurgence of interest in qualitative longitudinal methodologies is associated with an interest in processes while "...[one of] the most compelling attractions of this kind of work is that it enables us to explore apparent discordance between what people say and what they do in such a way to escape some of the traditional constraints of qualitative research" (2007: 572). I claim that a biographical approach reflects on the idea of the processual nature of my interlocutors' experiences; it reveals their experiences in the period after the act of migration, while also allowing for the demonstration of an attempt to temporarily inhabit the gap between systems, ports and possibilities. As I argue in the conclusion, the task becomes

not to change the structure but to inhabit it differently. I link this attempt with the idea of *unbelonging* – a critical refusal of the terms, developed by Irit Rogoff (2000) in her book *Terra Infirma*. In the final part of this article I place the individual stories, sea imaginaries, and people's experience of living on a boat in a dialogue, in order to better understand the expectations, aspirations and experiences of my interlocutors and to discuss further the idea of temporarily unbelonging in practice. Following Irit Rogoff (2010), Emma Cocker used the phrase 'temporarily unbelonging' to describe an art experiment of illegal border crossings aiming to actively create a productive gap into which other ways of operating can be called or conjured (2014: 60). In a similar way, I will show that my interlocutors' decision to migrate, to temporarily unbelong, has opened up avenues for their possible future "journeys".

## LIFESTYLE MIGRATION AT SEA

Places are not merely the physical surface and substance but are deeply interconnected with the images imposed on them. Similarly, human mobilities are intertwined with cultural meanings. As stated by Salazar: "Studying the interaction between culturally rooted imaginaries of mobility and real physical movements, a relation coloured by global media images as well as personal accounts, helps us understand the multiple meanings behind contemporary migratory phenomena" (2010: 53). The sea as a specific cultural image is connected to both – to the physical place and to the journey, and as such it has a specific position within the map of "meaningful places" important to lifestyle migrants. In the subchapter entitled *Geographies of Meaning* within the collection of studies called *Lifestyle Migration – Expectations, Aspirations and Experiences*, editors Michaela Benson and Karen O'Reilly write about the importance of specific geographic places holding certain meanings for the migrants in terms of their potential self-realisation:

Lifestyle migrants seek literal and figurative places of asylum or rebirth [...]. These representations of the destinations chosen were drawn from both personal experiences of the places through prior tourism and travel, but they also derived from wider cultural narratives. They can be categorised under three main headings: the rural idyll, the coastal retreat and the cultural/spiritual attraction (2009: 6).

Although the sea partially fits into all three proposed frameworks, it could also be listed as a separate sub-field, stimulating lifestyle migrants with its own culturally specific meanings derived from a long history of colonialism and politically imposed ideas about the "sea of freedom" evident for example in the treatise *Mare Liberum* (1680) by Hugo de Grotius. These can also be found in the Romantic landscape of poets such as Byron, Keats, Wordsworth, or Coleridge, Romantic poets who were also passionate sailors; they wrote about the sea and the sea soaked them in turn. In the context of this intimate relationship between sea and man, small boat sailors and their writings had a special place in sea-symbolism throughout the 19th and 20th centuries (Slocum 2004 [1900], Moitessier 1960, 1967, 1971). Later, culturally specific meanings of the sea important for our debate can be traced in ideas of anti-consumerism and self-reliance as expressed in the writings of 20th century sailors who "sailed away" (such as the famous French sailor Bernard Moitessier from the period of the 1968 student protest, followed mostly by the younger French generation), but it can be also related to the global adventure landscape of the 21st century (see Corbin 1994 for an overview of the historical development of sea imaginaries in the Western world).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> As French historian Alain Corbin observed, initial models of the sea in the Western world were connected with fear and horror (1994). Later, during the ages of Enlightenment and Romanticism, a different perception of the sea was brought forth with more idyllic images.

Discussing the sea as a physical place, sea imaginaries, as well as practice among my interlocutors undoubtedly leads to a reflection on the concept of liminality, initially introduced by Van Gennep (1960 [1909]) and Turner (1967).<sup>2</sup> Various researchers of lifestyle migration present liminality as an explanatory concept (or a concept with which they develop a critical discussion) while observing the ambivalence<sup>3</sup> of their interlocutors' everyday life. Some discuss the performance of liminality in migrants' lives (Bousious 2008), use liminality to refer to the destination (O'Reilly 2000), while others refer to the in-between state of liminality of their interlocutors in the context of mid-life crisis (Hoey 2009), or critically observe the difference between the term liminal and liminoid in relation to their case studies (Korpela 2009, Benson 2011). The term liminoid, introduced in 1982 by Victor Turner, refers not only to the in-between liminal state but to any position outside. The liminoid state is described by Turner as a transitional phase that individuals enter voluntarily; it is associated with leisure space and was adopted as a more suitable term than liminal by various researchers of lifestyle migration (Korpela 2009). Following Benson's observation however, the concept of the liminoid state cannot fully explain the migrants' experience of life after migration, as the model does not allow for the combination of work and leisure (2011: 68).

The (open) sea can certainly be connected with in-betweenness (the zone between one state and another) and with motion, as one hardly can stay still at sea. Islands, ports, and states function as fixed points while the sea is traversed. As Phelan observed, the seas are empty and full at the same time; full of routes, memories and symbols yet empty, hardly deserving to be called a place: "What is there for us at sea then? Nothing but a boat, one's body and endless waves..." (2007: 5). The sea is therefore on a practical level the space "between worlds", characterised by crossing, movement, connection, but also with hardship and separation. I observed how for my interlocutors the sea and the journey (and its liminal associations) are adopted for a self-project experiment in the context of *what if* questions: what if this is possible (to live on a boat), what if there is a better port, a better community... In the experiment of work-leisure-existence on the sea and on the boat, the liveboards are in a relatively privileged and active position of unbelonging; they temporarily stop (working, going to school or to church, even stop walking as they cross the seas) and critically observe themselves and the dominant structure. Nevertheless this position cannot be fully applied to the model of liminoid, as Turner specifically associates it with a leisure space that is (almost) passively experienced by individuals. As we will observe from the following biographic details in the next section, for the majority of my interlocutors this "experiment" is mostly temporary and difficult to sustain due to various reasons such as family obligations, children, school, personal crises, the difficulties of living on a boat, etc. Despite this, it has quite permanent effects on people's practical knowledge of "parallel paths" (of working, family relations, education...) that they might take and use in the future. Following this line of thought I found the idea of *unbelonging*, developed by Irit Rogoff (2000) useful to reflect on my interlocutors' experiences. In her book *Terra Infirma*, Rogoff writes about learning and transitional processes and how they are "... not so much the addition of information as they are the active processes of unlearning which need to be carefully plotted out into active theories of unlearning which can be translated into active positions of unbelonging" (2000: 3). Her theoretical discussion on *unbelonging* as an active process does not promote the illusion that the state (or any other structural constraint) is not powerful but rather aims "to examine some of the terms by which it has limited and shut down our capacity to understand and thematize issues of belonging beyond those annexed purely to the juridical status of its subjects" (ibid: 5). The movement of my interlocutors has to do with experimentation, curiosity, the constant making of choices; while temporarily unbelonging they acquired skills in adapting to new situations (the marine

2 Van Gennep related the concept of liminality to the transitory phase in rites of passage (to the middle phase between separation from the old position and incorporation into the new one), while Turner developed his ideas further concentrating on an in-between state of the liminal.

3 For more on the concept of ambivalence as an analytical framework for explaining post-migration subjectivities in relation to British lifestyle migrants in rural France see Benson 2011.

environment, new economic possibilities of work-leisure-existence at sea, family relations on the boat, etc.). This does not mean that they altered their previous social position or values, it simply means that they have acquired new skills and new perspectives; they inhabit the same structure differently. The sea and the boat are of particular importance on the practical level, because on a boat one preserves the "floating position" not only literally, but also in terms of social (un)belonging; my interlocutors are usually not entitled to formal migrants' rights nor are they fully entitled to the rights of their home country as many of them live nomadic lifestyles without a permanent address. In this process of learning and unlearning (by placing themselves in the state of temporarily unbelonging), a chain of signifiers and events is important for our debate and can be effectively observed through the use of a longitudinal qualitative method as we will see in the next section.

## UNDERSTANDING MIGRATION THROUGH BIOGRAPHIES

The research presented here was conducted in several locations: 1. Ionian Greece (Igoumenitsa and Lefkas areas); 2. the Gulf of Corinth and the Peloponnese; 3. Crete; 4. the Marmaris region (S Turkey); and 5. the island of Rhodes. The foundational data for this article was gathered through in-depth, open-ended interviews with people who were living part-time or full-time on sailboats in the last 10 years (with a few exceptions of those who lived on boats from around the 1970s on and belonged to the generation of the 1968 student revolutions). The ethnographic interviews emphasised personal backgrounds, reasons for their mobile lifestyle at sea, their relation to the sea, their travel itineraries and post-migration experiences, and were conducted with a total of 67 individuals. After the two-year-long fieldwork I maintained contact with 5 families through e-mail, following their blogs, or through direct visits. My involvement in this research was made up of two stages. In the first two years I was involved in this lifestyle as an insider: as an unemployed anthropologist I was doing precarious work as a freelance journalist while living and traveling on a boat, fulfilling my dream of spending time with my children while traveling. For the next two years, I was working on an anthropological project studying lifestyle migration of people that live and travel on sailboats, while also living on a boat myself. For the purposes of this article, I have chosen two portraits: of a German family and of a childless British couple in early retirement, so as to provide a broad range of information on post-migration experiences and events. The portraits are a combination of excerpts from my fieldwork diary and passages from interviews, and are deliberately written in an vivid, essayistic manner in order to bring the research closer to the reader.

### Portrait 1

It was in the beginning of nineties that Fritz made his decision. He left his well-paid job as a mechanical engineer, scraped together all his savings and bought a boat. He said he didn't want to be part of the German political system; he didn't want to be a part of an immoral morality; he didn't want to support a world in which he did not believe. So he resigned. "I never had empty pockets but I was never satisfied. Life is too short to be spent on designing elevators for business buildings. Let people walk ... Let people stop with immoral projects. To live and work in such [a] system is an ecological, social and moral disaster ...", he explains. He felt content with his risk-taking gesture and talked about it many times in our interviews.

He gains experience on the way. For four years, he circles between Western Africa, the Canary Islands and the Mediterranean. He works in the Mediterranean, he lives in Africa. Fritz earns his money by chartering, with occasional work in shipyards or building sites, exchanges his services for the services of others, he writes articles, works as a surveyor for boats. For Fritz, the sea is a constant struggle, it's a contagious virus, a place of freedom, a place where a man hardens himself, and throws overboard all

that is unnecessary and starts his life anew. In the third year of his new life, Fritz meets Ines. She came to Fritz's boat as a charter guest and stayed. She chose Fritz because he offered the cheapest charter in the Mediterranean. Ines wanted a change. In Germany she worked as a teacher in a kindergarten and she was thinking about change very often, maybe voluntary work in Africa, maybe a journey. Fritz showed up at the right moment. While on the Canary Islands, Fritz and Ines sell their plastic sailboat and buy a hundred year old wooden brig, once a fishing boat in the Northern seas; for a charter, for educational courses, as a home. "Wood is a good material ... wood does not harm Mother Nature...", Fritz often explains to me. In the warm shelter of the Canaries, they start to renovate the boat. They treat the wood, paint, cut, they glue. Their first son Nur watches them patiently from his baby chair.

Fritz and Ines dream of sailing around the world, they dream about publishing a book, about how they will conduct educational courses for youth about the sea, about ecology ... They often point out how healthy they feel, how good it is to live out in the fresh air, how they started to sleep outside on the deck in summer. Sometimes they dream of an ecological house, of a piece of land, where they could be self-sustainable. Maybe someday, but the journey comes first. Fritz and Ines have friends that are producing their own food: they also lived on a boat, they were also German. The father had serious heart problems; the mother was a social worker. Employers avoided the sickly father; the mother did not earn enough money. Just as Fritz, they said they also started making decisions. They sold their car and everything else they had, they put all their savings together and bought an old boat for 10,000 Euro. For several years they lived on that boat in Greece, receiving state benefits. Then, a few years ago they sailed with their three children to Sweden. They leased a piece of land and started to produce their own organic food. They live there with two other families. Fritz and Ines say they may join them one day.

Since Nur turned one, Fritz and Ines have lived in the Mediterranean. They explain: "the Mediterranean is comfortable for children ... in the Mediterranean one earns better money, but the Mediterranean is also expensive for living ... in the Mediterranean there are too many tourist boats ... in the Mediterranean, people like us are not welcomed ...". Especially in the Western Mediterranean, they explained. That is why Fritz and Ines move slowly towards the east. They have a new plan. They will stay in the Eastern Mediterranean for a year or two to earn some more money, Nur will grow up, and afterwards they will go across the Red Sea to Madagascar. But plans keep changing. Fritz feels the pressure from his family and friends. Why doesn't he just stick to the plan? Why must he always change plans? "Because I am the master of my life", he answers angrily. When it all gets too much, Ines goes back to Germany and works in a kindergarten. They kept an apartment there, their permanent address. In the meantime, Fritz fixes the boat.

Nur turns school age. Ines educates him on the boat and does the rounds. She circulates between parents, exams in school and between old friends and new plans. School complicates life. In the meantime, Fritz anchors himself at the pier of a particular Greek village where a lot of Germans live. Because of that, life here is easier. Once a month, a private German truck comes to the Igoumenitsa region bringing things people ordered from the home-country, mostly special food. Fritz also feels strange in the German community, he understands the German community but he feels he is not a part of it. Nevertheless he chooses the village, along with many other liveaboards, but just during the winter – in the Mediterranean, weather determines life on the boat. Once, on their way from Italy to Greece, they got caught in a storm. 25 hours of fighting the sea. They were scared. Fritz didn't follow online weather forecasts and it was late autumn. "Did the old sailors have Internet weather forecasts?!", he angrily says.

One spring, Nur is joined by a little brother, Hugo. Ines decides to give birth in Germany. She trusts the German maternity hospitals more, the doctors speak her language, her mother is close by. With scarcely two months, Hugo is looking around the boat from his baby chair. Fritz is grinding, cutting, nailing and gluing. The boat starts to leak, the engine brakes, new expenses appear out of nowhere and then more expenses on top of those. Fritz becomes anxious. Hugo, the school, the money, the boat... Why do things not run smoothly? Why does he have to pay Germany if he wants to home-school his children? Why do they put pressure on him? Why doesn't Ines help him more? Ines decides. She will

leave Fritz. He is inconsiderate, he doesn't know how to behave, he does not understand, she has many obligations because of the two boys, he doesn't support Nur enough. She will go back to Germany. She distributes Nur's toys among the children of the pier, she gives his flippers to a girl passing by, she gives the mask to the boy from the boat next to theirs. She will talk to Fritz for the last time. The children are waiting, the parents are talking. One hour passes, then two hours ... The children wait. Ines shows up; she is not going to Germany. Not this time anyway.

Hugo was two years when Ines received the message. It's her mother, she's had a heart attack. With her children, Ines returns to Germany, while Fritz stays on the boat. He comes occasionally to Germany and feels lost. All these machines at the bus station, he doesn't have a job, so he continues his work in charter tourism in Greece. Nur starts to attend school but Ines can enrol him only in the bad schools. Her official income determines it. So Nur goes to the bad school. He doesn't like it there, he doesn't like computer games, he doesn't like the rude boys. When summer comes, they finally go back to the boat. The family is together again, the world is beautiful, the sea is blue, they feel healthy and happy. The stars are there above them; what they most miss in the city are stars, the feeling of health and strength and the fresh air. One day, they will sail across the Red Sea towards Madagascar. But not yet. They must help Ines's father. Who will help him if not his daughter?

## Portrait 2

Ann and Dave met in the early 1970s. They shared the passion for travelling, for adventures, for motorcycling, changes and motion. Ann worked as a nurse and Dave was teaching physics in a comprehensive. They lived in Wales. Work wasn't the centre of life. At the end of the seventies they take the decision and they set off. They buy a 21-foot long sailing boat, they quit their jobs, say goodbye to their friends and leave. Their friends admire them, they are brave, they are special, to leave feels so good, so victorious, they explain. After a month, they came back. They weren't ready yet. Let's start with a smaller change. So, they set off for Portugal and open a small bar. For five years. After five years, they again long for a change. Let's go on! Actually let's go back! Back to Wales; back to teaching and nursing.

When Ann and Dave turn 55 they try once more. This time more prudent, more mature, different. Dave got made redundant in school anyway so they turn disadvantage into opportunity and cancel their permanent address. This time, they leave forever. I once asked them: "What are your plans for the future?" The answer I got was: "We have no plans. This is our future!" They put all their savings into the boat and via the Channel Islands they sail towards Northern France. Ann and Dave don't sail a lot, they travel. A sailboat is suitable because it's a home that's moving, a home where life is cheap. They follow the Internet weather forecast regularly because they are afraid of the big sea. The height of the waves, the wind speed... The colourful lines of the weather forecast become a part of their life. Along the coast of Spain they sail towards the south of Portugal and stop in Lagos for the winter. In the spring, they continue, passing the Balearics and Sicily towards Malta where they spend the second winter. From Malta they turn north, passing Sicily, Italy and the Ionian Sea towards Corfu – the third winter. The following spring, they continue towards the Bay of Corinth, passing through the Corinth canal, reaching the Aegean and crossing towards Turkey, Finike - their fourth winter. Along the Turkish coast they go back north till they reach the western coast of Turkey. Marmaris - the fifth winter. In springtime they cross the Cyclades, make a few brief stops on the Peloponnese and then come down to Crete. The sixth winter.

Life swings in a slow pace; six months of motion, six months of stagnation. The stagnation is anticipated, the motion between the winter refuges chaotic and spontaneous. By the end of the summer their nerves are strained, bodies exhausted, thoughts restless. Hands can hardly wait to moor the boat to the berth, the electric cable finds its way to the plug, and the hose looks for its faucet. Standing still can on the other hand be unpleasant too, they explained. Darkness, moisture, rain, wind, crowded places. Too many people together, a lot of gossip, many obligations, too many drinks and then monotony.

They don't join in the collective Christmas celebrations at the marina, neither are they a part of the drinking team, they don't play cards, they don't bowl. "At the beginning of winter we were all friends, we were all sailors, and we all belonged ... At the end of the winter, we scatter, we get to know each other, small groups appear, the pontoon politics forms ..." Ann and Dave like to walk. Having company is fun, but they get stuck with pontoon politics instead. Every Thursday one excursion, every Tuesday and Friday yoga, every Tuesday night music. Days are shipshape, time runs fast, freedom slips out of your hand. By the end of winter their nerves are strained, bodies exhausted, their thoughts restless. Hands can hardly wait to push the boat off from berth. The electric cable is folded, the pipe is coiled up, people on the pier – fellow villagers, neighbours and friends – wave their goodbyes, the sound of whistles cutting through the calm blue skies. The rope is untied, the umbilical cord cut.

Dave and Ann don't have a permanent address. Their permanent address is a temporary address. Motion is a constant. "Some people, they keep fake permanent addresses. They have children, parents, relatives... They collect letters, they pay bills, they lie to the officials, they sign documents..." Ann and Dave don't have a permanent address, as they don't have children, or parents. That's why they sometimes have problems. You can't get health insurance without a permanent address. Computer says no. Ann and Dave at least get a bank account. But not without problems. They asked a banker friend: "Why not without problems?" The bank is just following instructions – he shows them the answer to a query he sent to Whitehall: "Her Majesty's Government does not go out of its way to accommodate mavericks ..."

Sometimes they feel like they are disappearing. Disappearing from the world but "...thank god we have Internet and the BBC", they say sarcastically as they regularly follow news from their home country. Their circle of people gets smaller, only good friendships remain. And then, there are new friendships. In other ways, the circle gets bigger every year, encounters are not fleeting anymore, the repetitive procession of people circulating on repetitive, circular blue lines of the Mediterranean. Some are spat out by this circulation, others swallowed by it. Ann and Dave are planning to get off the circular and onto rivers and canals, into the world of locks, sluices, dead and live branches of rivers, towards new adventures. Not yet - next year. For now, it's all just in their minds. To go back? To whom? To what? The house? They don't have enough money for a house, there isn't enough sun back home anyway. Around the world? Not for us! Forward? River canals? Maybe a year more in the Med?

## STORIES, BOATS AND SEAWATER IN PRACTICE

An in-depth investigation of migrants' lives in a broader time scale is especially important due to the fact that: 1. through biographies we as researchers are able to understand migration within the trajectories of individual lives; 2. we gain knowledge about post-migration experiences and 3. we can reflect on the relation between structure and agency, trying to understand cultural narratives in practice or transformed/confirmed through experiences. For Fritz the sea is a constant struggle, for Ines the maritime journey was a change from her previous life (volunteering in Africa would also be an option); for both of them raising their children while traveling on the boat was a dream of a better life, a better world, with a better educational system, with more time for family and children, a more nature-attuned life. Their choice is not only connected with the question of *where* to live but also *how* to live, as Brian Hoey also suggested of his interlocutors moving to rural areas of Michigan (2005). Their choice can also be perceived as a play-work-existence self-experiment on the sea, through which they gain new skills and perspectives on their initial ideas (of freedom for example). The sea as it is framed within Western cultural narratives fits well with ideas of freedom and change (to a better life, a better school), with the idea of self-contemplation (personal escape from consumerism and the neo-liberal economy to a simpler life), adventure and escape (from monotony and patronage, as the Coopers, a pair of well-known sailors, wrote: "When we get very old we get patronized, nannied and grannied, and swept on to the scrapheap ..." (1994: 3)), but the practical realities of living on the boat (especially with a family

and without a pension) reveals other aspects as well. For Fritz and Ines, sailing adventurously, "the old way", didn't feel safe; living in a confined space resulted in quarrels, and while constantly looking for money they both felt agitated, and finally started to turn on each other. Usually, my interlocutors of working age were involved in precarious seasonal jobs such as tourism (chartering or working for charter agencies, sailing or diving schools), peripatetic jobs in marinas offering their skills (sail repair, engine work, boat repair, etc.), or were involved in long-distance jobs associated with their previous professions (translation, computer programming, art, etc.), all the while having to make various different money arrangements to get through the year. In the case of Dave and Ann, the sea was suitable because it offered them a platform for more adventure while they turned disadvantage (redundancy) into opportunity (sea journey) and chose an active retirement. Their experiment of actively coping with redundancy was prolonged beyond a temporary experience but was later on structured within the oscillation between ports and winter sailing communities (forms of belonging) and summer voyages on the open sea (unbelonging). Following their case, a cultural narrative connected with sea imaginaries (adventure, freedom, etc.) was as important as their own individual creative strategy in coping with redundancy. Dave and Ann didn't have to think about their money arrangements as they had pensions, but after a decade of living on the boat they felt like they were circulating on the same track (along with other retired people living on boats), following BBC news while the adventure somehow faded away in this liminal position of *always leaving and never arriving*. They became aware of the humidity, the wetness, the windiness of their new home. They were not desperate, they still enjoyed the "Greek sun" from their small cockpit, they just reflected on their position sardonically (as was also evident from their blogs). In both portraits, my interlocutors talked about themselves as being adventurers, risk-takers (Fritz didn't use GPS), maybe even heroes (Ann and Dave reflected on that when they left home the first time), however it seems as if they didn't in fact escape from the conventional structure but, as Benson argued for her interlocutors in rural France (2011), repositioned themselves within it. Ines and Fritz in a way escaped "the old life", but didn't give up all its privileges and obligations. Ines gave birth in a German hospital (because she felt it was more professional), they kept their apartment in Germany and they choose a "German village" to winter in. Upon the death of Ines's mother, they felt obliged to go back to Germany, so they returned. Coming back was a step backwards (in the same structure) for them even if they were "heroes" among their German friends as "the ones who left".

Following these two portraits it is important to pay attention to the process of (un)learning and to the skills and knowledge they acquired on the way. The initial sea imaginaries and ideas about this lifestyle of freedom were enriched with the new knowledge about *windiness and hardship* (the experiences of the storms, the experience of always following the weather forecast carefully, etc.), of *wetness* (in the wintertime, as Dave and Ann pointed out), of the *perpetual moving* reality of the fluid environment, as well as the knowledge of the *constant change* of social relations, *limited space* (in contrast with the image of the openness of the sea), *invisibility* (e.g. being without a permanent address and migrant status), and different *bodily conditions* (seasickness, a feeling of health, etc.). Although life at sea is difficult to sustain, my interlocutors also acquired new skills, for example how to lead family-work-school life in the new context, how to have less things, how to stay invisible, how to create an economy outside the "possible" paths, and how to live actively in their retirement. Some also acquired various social skills which enabled them to adapt quickly to new situations. It is important to note that these new skills and knowledge were also developed through the process of unlearning. While they put themselves in the position of "swimming along", the process of unlearning was activated and was in the case of my interlocutors translated into an active position of *unbelonging*. It may be that my interlocutors plotted potential ways out or around for future lifestyle migrants or for their personal future experiments. It is interesting to note that for almost all of my interlocutors, the lifestyle migration to a boat was a transitional period of five to ten years followed by the return to their home-country (as in the case of Fritz and Ines), or a wish for or act of relocation (several of the cases I followed sold their boat and bought a house or dreamed of buying a house in rural areas of France, in French Polynesia, rural Spain or rural Sweden

as was the case with Fritz's friends). Those who moved back to the cities reported how they missed the physical aspects of their previous life most; *the air, their health, stars, sleeping outside...* Several of my interlocutors went on to live in "mobile homes" such as caravans or house-trucks, illustrating how their time at sea plotted the way for further experiments.

Following the experiences of my interlocutors on a longer scale, their attempts can be understood as temporarily unbelonging, similar to the aforementioned *Border-Xing* art project as it was reflected on by researcher Emma Cocker (2014). Cocker argues together with Rogoff that unbelonging is not the condition of "being at a loss, of inhabiting lack, of not having anything, but rather an active, daily disassociation in the attempt to clear the ground for something else to emerge" (Rogoff 2011 in Cocker 2014: 58). The sea, as a place which for migrants signifies something loosely defined as quality of life, has a quality of a "gap", which can be inhabited also due to modern technology (the very accurate colourful weather forecasts that Dave and Ann follow, modern sailboats, etc.), and from where one can go in different directions. For a few retired couples such a choice can even be an end point (one of Bill and Laurel Cooper's most popular books, entitled *Sail into the Sunset. A Handbook for "Ancient" Mariners* (1994) has all kinds of advice on how to die on the boat, how to sail into death so to speak, in the aptly named chapter *Your Time is Up*), while for families it can be an intermediate phase. The geographic place of the sea and the liminal imaginaries of the sea can be used as a jumpstart that enables individuals to reflect or even rearrange work and family life, or it can be inhabited in a more permanent sense in order to achieve an active retirement. The models of liminality and the liminoid are in the case of my interlocutors only partly useful, as they entered this "liminal position" voluntarily and once "there" they are also actively creating their future options (rather than passively experiencing the leisure space) by observing their new position and by adopting a critical view that develops into *criticality* – a way of inhabiting the problem rather than analysing it (Rogoff 2006). The point of criticality, following Irit Rogoff, is not to find an answer but rather to access a different mode of inhabitation, while in the duration of the actual inhabitation "...a shift might occur that we generate through the modalities of the occupation rather than through a judgement upon it" (Rogoff 2006: 2). It is exactly the shift in the post-migration period towards new knowledge and new skills (acquired in the state of temporarily unbelonging and leading to future unknown directions) that can be effectively observed through a longitudinal qualitative approach. The desire of my interlocutors to change things by temporarily unbelonging does not signal a passive or romantic longing for wilderness or freedom (even if it is initially informed by these imaginaries), but it rather creates a productive gap that enables them to learn new modes of action and thought. It would seem that the sea functions as a perfect symbolic and material platform for such endeavours.

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## POVZETEK

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### »ODJADRAJ«: BIOGRAFSKI PRISTOP KOT ORODJE ZA RAZUMEVANJE KONCEPTA ZAČASNEGA NEPRIPADANJA

Nataša ROGELJA

Idejo »odjadraj« lahko širše kontekstualiziramo z mitom o odhodu, ki je bil v popularnem diskurzu 20. in 21. stoletja izjemno odmeven še zlasti med pripadniki srednjega razreda. Benson in O'Reilly (2009) trdita, da iskanje boljšega načina življenja odseva širše življenjsko-stilske izbire, ki jih posamezniki v postmodernem svetu vsakodnevno sprejemajo, medtem ko nedavno povečanje tega pojava nakazuje, da se delno pojavlja kot rezultat refleksivne presoje priložnosti, ki jih Giddens (1994) identificira kot nedavno omogočene in ne toliko kot neposreden izid relativnih ekonomskih privilegijev (Benson in O'Reilly 2009). Razne družbene spremembe, na primer globalizacija, individualizacija, fleksibilne zaposlitve (Amit 2007) in poenostavljena mobilnost (Urry 2004, Sheller in Urry 2006, Sheller 2011), so omogočile pojav privilegiranih oblik mobilnosti, kakršna je življenjsko-stilska migracija. V zvezi z v članku predstavljenimi pomorskimi življenjsko-stilskimi migranti v Sredozemlju obstaja nekaj specifičnih razlogov, ki omogočajo tovrstno migracijo: odprtje notranjih meja v EU, nagel razvoj dostopne navigacijske tehnologije, porast števila agencij za najem plovil in navtičnega turizma, ki je populariziral užitke križarjenja, kakor tudi nekateri nedavni družbenopolitični dogodki v Evropi, od povečanega življenjskega standarda do recesije in razočaranja nad prevladujočim sistemom nacionalnih držav v z globalnim kapitalizmom zaznamovani družbi (D'Andrea 2006, 2007; Juntunen, Kalčić, Rogelja 2014).

Na teh opazovanjih članek raziskuje povezavo med morjem, imaginariji morja in življenjsko-stilskimi migracijami. Z uporabo longitudinalnega kvalitativnega raziskovanja, zlasti biografskega pristopa, se ukvarja z vprašanjem, na kakšen način so imaginariji morja navdih za življenjsko-stilske migrante in kako se *in situ* prevajajo v prakso. Z etnografijo predstavi idejo nepripadanja, ki jo je na izkušnjah migrantov razvila Rogoff (2000). V prvem delu članek razpravlja o morju kot fizičnem prostoru in za sogovornike pomembnem simbolu, povezanim z idejami liminalnosti in začasnega nepripadanja. Za osvetlitev podrobnosti iz življenj posameznikov v daljšem časovnem obdobju sta v naslednjem delu predstavljena dva reprezentativna (družinska) portreta, medtem ko v zadnjem delu članka objavljene individualne zgodbe imaginarije morja in izkušnje sogovornikov postavljajo v dialog. To omogoča lažje razumevanje pričakovanj, teženj in izkušenj sogovornikov in pogloblja razprave o začasnem nepripadanju v praksi.