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Searching for a countercultural life abroad: Neo-nomadism, lifestyle mobility or bohemian lifestyle migration?

This article outlines a phenomenon whereby people of affluent countries move abroad in search of a countercultural lifestyle. The article compares the concept of bohemian lifestyle migration with those of neo-nomadism and lifestyle mobilities; the different concepts are understood as lenses that light different aspects of similar phenomena. The article uses two ethnographic case studies from India as lenses onto the phenomenon. Rather than merely focusing on what people say and how they define their identities and lifestyles, it is important to pay attention to the structures and circumstances within which they operate. Their transnationally mobile lifestyle not only is an individual choice but is embedded in political and economic structures that both enable and limit their actions. In particular, the article argues that paying attention to people's income strategies and to the prevailing nation state system is crucial when elaborating on the phenomenon. The article also discusses the limitations of the countercultural aspects of the lifestyle and asks whether such a privileged group of people can be defined as countercultural and if so, what kind of counterculturalism it is.

Keywords: neo-nomadism; lifestyle mobility; lifestyle migration; countercultures; bohemian; India

It's difficult to live in a different way in my country of origin. [...] If you want to live and be happy there, I think you have to live the way people are used to living. (Sara, 32, March 2002)¹

Although much of the existing migration literature focuses on people moving abroad in search of better income opportunities or safer living conditions, some people pursue a “different way of life”, signifying a search for an “alternative”, countercultural, lifestyle. Researchers have recognised this phenomenon in a variety of empirical contexts, but in this article I argue that there are shortcomings in the theoretical approaches used. Up to now, the search for an alternative life abroad has mostly been defined as either neo-nomadism/ global nomadism (D'Andrea 2006, 2007; Bousiou 2008) or as lifestyle travel/ lifestyle mobility (Cohen 2010; Duncan et al. 2013; Cohen et al. 2015), but here I also use the concept of bohemian lifestyle migration (Benson and O'Reilly 2009; Korpela 2009). The different concepts have been used to describe similar empirical phenomena; however, the concepts of neo-nomadism and lifestyle travel emphasise mobility, fluidity and individual agency whereas the concept of bohemian lifestyle migration pays more attention to structures and destinations. Discussing the three concepts together will provide a more holistic picture of the phenomenon than has so far been offered. In other words, I do not aim to dismiss any of the concepts but to show how each of them enlightens a different aspect of similar phenomena and thus complements the picture.

All the three concepts aim to conceptualise transnationally mobile “alternative” lifestyles. Such lifestyles question the ontology of sedentarism (Tyfield and Blok 2016) by refusing a settled life, and they are often celebrated as innovative and novel

alternatives. Less attention has, however, been paid to the “alternative characteristics” of these lifestyles – are they really creating something new or does it only seem so on surface? The discussion on the alternative mobile lifestyle also reflects on the fundamental debate between structure and agency in social sciences (see e.g. Bakewell 2010; O’Reilly 2012a); so far, more attention has been paid to the individual agency of mobile subjects than to the empirical realities and structures within which those people act.

In this article, I first briefly introduce the phenomenon of lifestyle migration. Secondly, I discuss the concepts of neo/global nomadism and lifestyle travel/ mobilities and introduce empirical studies that have used these notions. I then describe my own empirical case studies in India. I use these studies as lenses onto the phenomenon of people searching for an alternative life abroad. In the following sections, I elaborate on the characteristics of the phenomenon. I discuss the different features of the transnationally mobile lifestyle as well as the countercultural aspects of the phenomenon. In the final section, I argue that the income strategies of lifestyle migrants (/neo-nomads/lifestyle travellers) provide an important lens through which to view the phenomenon within wider societal and economic structures. Throughout the article, I argue that rather than merely focusing on what people say and how they themselves define their identities and lifestyles, it is also important to pay attention to the structures and circumstances within which they operate.

Considering lifestyle migration

Lifestyle migration refers to a phenomenon whereby middle- or working-class citizens of affluent nations move abroad in order to find a more meaningful and relaxed life, usually in places with lower living costs and sunny climates (see Benson and O’Reilly

2009). Michaela Benson and Karen O'Reilly's working definition of lifestyle migration has become widely used:

Lifestyle migrants are relatively affluent individuals of all ages, moving either part-time or full-time to places that, for various reasons, signify, for the migrant, a better quality of life (Benson and O'Reilly 2009, 609).

Similar phenomena have been defined as "amenity migration" (Moss 2006; Gosnell and Abrams 2009; Osbaldiston 2011) or counter-urbanisation (Buller and Hoggart 1994; Mitchell 2004; Eimermann et al. 2012) but the concept of lifestyle migration has become increasingly popular during the past decade and, according to Benson and O'Reilly (2015), it has characteristics that differentiate it from other such concepts; above all, it focuses on people rather than on places or populations and it is predominantly used in research that relies on qualitative, often ethnographic, methods. In addition, the concept focuses on people's ongoing identity negotiations and processes of migration. Benson and O'Reilly (2015, 2) also emphasise that the aim of the concept is not to demarcate a discrete category of migrants but to provide an analytical framework for understanding some forms and aspects of migration. In other words, it should be understood as a lens rather than as a box.

Retirees form a significant group of lifestyle migrants (see King et al. 2000; Oliver 2015) yet they are by no means the only people who migrate for lifestyle reasons; people of working age as well as families with children move abroad in order to find a more relaxed lifestyle (Korpela 2018; O'Reilly 2012b). Several reasons have

been listed as contributing factors in lifestyle migration (Benson and O'Reilly 2009, 609-610), including unemployment, pressurised working environments, hectic lifestyles, rising crime rates, high living costs, consumerism and insecure living conditions in migrants' native countries. At the same time, the destinations are attractive because of the lower living costs, the pleasant climate and what the migrants perceive as a slow pace of life. Lifestyle migration is thus a comparative project that involves a narrative of escape, in which life before migration is described in negative terms and the post-migration life in positive ones. Another contributing factor is that by offering particular kinds of visas – usually targeted at well-off retirees – many receiving states welcome lifestyle migrants (although with limited rights) because of the economic benefits they bring. Other elements include easy online communication (which means it is possible to be in frequent contact with friends and relatives when abroad) and faster, cheaper international travel. It has also been argued that the ethos of late modernity demands that people see their lives as self-realisation projects (eg Giddens 1991), and lifestyle migration offers people a way to take control of their lives and live in a way that is more “true” to themselves. There is a rapidly booming literature on lifestyle migration, which focuses on the phenomenon in various geographical locations². Studies on lifestyle migration have mostly focused on citizens of “Western” countries (that is, Europeans and North Americans) but there are also studies in the Asian context, for example on Chinese and Japanese lifestyle migrants (Ono 2009; Ormond 2014; Salazar and Zhang 2013).

Benson and O'Reilly (2009) have suggested that one way to analyse lifestyle migrants is by employing a typology of destinations, as these tell us a lot about the way of life the migrants are seeking. Their typology includes residential tourists, those who search for a rural idyll and bourgeois bohemians. The residential tourists lead a life of

leisure (typically in a coastal resort), whereas those in search of a rural idyll want a tranquil “authentic” life in the countryside. Bohemians have spiritual, artistic or creative aspirations that they realise in their lifestyle migration destination. I would add to Benson and O’Reilly’s description of bohemians countercultural values; the bohemians define themselves as significantly different from those they see as belonging to the “mainstream” culture (see Korpela 2009). Among the three types of lifestyle migrants that Benson and O’Reilly list, bohemians have received the least scholarly attention. Yet, as the interview extract at the beginning of this article illustrates, some lifestyle migrants are not merely searching for a more relaxed life abroad; they claim to want a significantly different, alternative, life. One of the few studies of such people is that carried out by Jacqueline Waldren (1996) into an artistic expatriate group on the island of Mallorca. Although not using the term bohemian lifestyle migration, she gives an apt definition of the phenomenon:

In Deià, like Tangiers, Saint Tropez, Arles, Martha’s Vineyard, Tahiti, or Goa, a few foreigners who felt they had discovered what they perceived as “paradise” settled in to pursue the arts: writing, composing or performing music, observing and appreciating the wonders of nature and creativity... [They] pursued their idea of idyllic existence in paradise. (Waldren 1996, x)

Although Waldren refers to the life of artistic expatriates in particular locations, many of these people did not sojourn permanently in the destinations but returned to their native countries every now and then for some time, or travelled elsewhere. When

paying attention to this kind of transnational mobility, some scholars have found the concept of neo-nomadism useful.

Considering neo-nomadism

The figure of the nomad plays an important role in today's conceptualisations of mobility. The concept has been developed, above all, by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1986) and Rosi Braidotti (1994). Instead of talking about real nomadic people, these philosophers use the figure of the nomad metaphorically. The nomad is an epitome of postmodern subjectivity (Peters 2006, 144). It represents freedom and independence; it is a free-floating alternative subjectivity (Engebrigtsen 2017, 43; Braidotti 1994, 100). The nomad is an agent of change that represents a subversion of convention (Braidotti 1994, 5; Engebrigtsen 2017, 48). A central aspect of the figure of the nomad is that it poses a challenge to state control and the stability, fixation, stasis and unity that the state represents (Deleuze and Guattari 1986). This position, in opposition to stasis, the state and sedentary authority, culminates in the nomad's ability and desire to be at home everywhere (Peters 2006, 151-152). The philosophy of nomadism places the notion of state science in opposition to that of nomad science and the latter focuses on postmodern flows and constant change and ambiguity (Peters 2006; Engebrigtsen 2017).

Although Deleuze and Guattari, as well as Braidotti, see the figure of the nomad as an analytical concept rather than an empirical one, scholars have applied it to empirical situations as well. For example Anthony D'Andrea and Pola Bousiou have described their research subjects as nomads.

According to D'Andrea (2006; 2007), global nomads/ neo-nomads (he uses the concepts interchangeably) are people from affluent industrialised nations who do not live permanently in a specific location but move in the global arena and make their living along the way, in the various places in which they reside. D'Andrea himself has studied people who spend part of the year in Ibiza, Spain, and part of the year in Goa, India. His research subjects are involved in variations of New Age³ and techno practice⁴. They earn money from the tourism sector, from small-scale import-export businesses or in artistic professions. D'Andrea describes global nomads as people who “reject their original homelands” and “partake in a cosmopolitan culture of expressive individualism” (D'Andrea 2007, 4). He argues that for them, mobility is not only spatial displacement but is significant for their economic strategies and self-identities (D'Andrea 2007, 23). D'Andrea also views neo-nomads as agents of fundamental change, that is, he describes them in terms of opposition and rejection.

Also Pola Bousiou (2008) defines her research subjects – people who have visited the Greek island of Mykonos for the past thirty-five years and who form an alternative community of dispersed friends – as nomads. Bousiou elaborates on their highly individualistic discourse and self-distinction and argues that they hold various alternative identities and have constantly shifting subject positions. She defines them as nomadic subjectivities and sees their lifestyle as an individualistic performance. In fact, both Bousiou and D'Andrea emphasise individualism among their research subjects; the shifting subjectivities and individualistic performances are central to their analysis. D'Andrea even refers to his research subjects as expressive expatriates (D'Andrea 2007, 7-10) because of their distinctive personal styles.

In what follows I argue that using the metaphorical concept of the nomad to describe real living people is somewhat problematic. It seems to me that when applying

the concept empirically, the nomad is easily romanticised. D'Andrea and Bousiou seem to emphasise what their research subjects say and, consequently, end up ignoring certain structural aspects of the phenomenon they have studied.

Considering lifestyle mobilities

Scott Cohen has written about a phenomenon that he defines as lifestyle travel.

According to him (2010), lifestyle travellers “practice leisure travel as an ongoing way of life” and, for them, tourism, or more precisely the backpacking subculture, becomes an everyday experience. The concept, then, refers to the distinct social identity that the travellers have. Some of them return to their countries of citizenship every now and then to earn money whereas others engage in casual work while travelling.

More recently, Cohen has developed the concept of “lifestyle mobilities” with Tara Duncan and Maria Thulemark. They define this as “a theoretical lens to challenge current thinking of the intersections between travel, leisure and migration” (Cohen et al. 2015, 156-162). Empirical examples of lifestyle mobilities vary from artists and hitchhikers to rock climbers and blue water sailors (Duncan et al. 2013). Cohen, Duncan and Thulemark emphasise the aspect of ongoing mobility, which comes close to the concept of neo-nomadism. Moreover, similarly to neo-nomadism, lifestyle mobilities are seen to provide individuals with a distinctive self-identity. Yet, Cohen, Duncan and Thulemark emphasise the aspects of leisure and ongoing tourism, whereas the concepts of neo-nomadism and bohemian lifestyle migration consider countercultural values as central and view the phenomenon as distinct from tourism.

Päivi Kannisto has used both the concepts of global nomadism and lifestyle mobilities in her work, and she seems to use the two concepts interchangeably. Kannisto defines global nomads as people who travel constantly without returning back to their country of origin or settling down elsewhere (Kannisto 2013, 221-222). She emphasises the nomads' location-independent living and also describes the lifestyle with the term of extreme mobilities. Kannisto, like D'Andrea and Bousiou, emphasises the nomads' agency, freedom and choice, yet, she also recognises their privileged position and the opportunistic nature of their lifestyle. In her analysis, she has used a Foucauldian framework, arguing that the global nomads' critique of dominant discourses eventually enforces those very discourses. (Kannisto 2013, 225-230) With the Foucauldian analysis Kannisto, however, remains on the discursive level and cannot analyse the material and economic circumstances of the phenomenon in depth. I, however, argue that paying attention to such circumstances is crucial.

With the concept of lifestyle mobilities, the analytical emphasis is on seeing mobility as an ongoing lifestyle choice that blurs tourism, migration and lifestyle. It remains, however, somewhat vague how this blurring happens in practice and whether it is sustainable in the long run. Similarly to scholars who have used the concept of neo-nomadism, scholars who have used the concept of lifestyle mobilities put emphasis on what the mobile people say, that is, how they want to present themselves and their lifestyles, but I believe it is useful to look also beyond the discourses and appearances.

Researching lifestyle migrants in India

For decades, India has been a popular destination for “Western⁵” people searching for an alternative lifestyle. Theosophists and other spiritual searchers went there in colonial

times (Alexander, 2000) and, during the hippie era, thousands of young people travelled there in search of an alternative lifestyle (see Hall 1968; Wiles 1972). These phenomena laid the foundations of contemporary phenomena; thousands of backpackers tour the country every year (see Enoch and Grossman 2010; Hottola 1999) and some of them end up returning repeatedly for long periods. In India, they typically live in the same location year after year, and this is one reason for why I have defined them as lifestyle migrants (Korpela 2009).

Typically, contemporary lifestyle migrants in India come from Europe, Russia, Israel, Canada and Australia, and recently also increasingly from Japan and South Korea. Most of them are white and of middle-class origin. Usually, they do not live in India permanently but return regularly to their countries of citizenship or travel elsewhere. For many, this lifestyle has lasted for years, even decades. It is difficult to know how many lifestyle migrants there are, as very few register with local authorities and they enter the country through various routes; many repeatedly use tourist visas, while others are able to obtain business or student visas.

I have conducted two ethnographic research projects among lifestyle migrants in India. The first study focused on lifestyle migrants in the city of Varanasi in northern India and the second investigated lifestyle migrant families in the state of Goa on the country's western coast.

In Varanasi, I conducted fieldwork for thirteen months in 2002-2003. Varanasi, the sacred city of Hinduism situated on the banks of the river Ganges, has 1.5 million inhabitants. I estimate that between 200 and 300 of the people there can be conceptualised as lifestyle migrants. They reside in the city from October to April. Most are aged twenty to thirty-five years old (some are in their forties or fifties) and men

form the majority. Most of them study Indian classical music, and some do yoga, meditation or charity work. A lot of time is spent socialising with friends. My research in Varanasi (2009) focused above all on the community construction of the lifestyle migrants there and on their transnationally mobile lifestyles. I participated intensively in their everyday lives in Varanasi and wrote a detailed field diary of my experiences. I visited their homes and participated in their gatherings and parties. I interviewed more than fifty people, mainly lifestyle migrants but also a few Indians who provided services for them. The interviews focused on the interlocutors' lifestyle choice, their transnational trajectories and their everyday lives and social relations in Varanasi. Although the data is rather old, it is not outdated: I have revisited Varanasi several times after the initial fieldwork (last time only a year ago), and I thus know that the same discourses and practices exist among the lifestyle migrants in Varanasi today as did fifteen years ago.

The state of Goa attracts hundreds of lifestyle migrants between November and April every year too. They are particularly attracted to the beaches and the trance music⁶ and New Age scenes. While they are of all age groups, with significant numbers in their forties, fifties and sixties who have spent decades in Goa, the place also attracts increasing numbers of lifestyle migrant families with young children. Just like in Varanasi, in Goa the lifestyle migrants spend a lot of time socialising with each other. My research in Goa focused above all on how the children of lifestyle migrants experienced the transnationally mobile lifestyle (Korpela 2014; 2016; 2018) and in what kind of cultural and social environment they lived in Goa. I also investigated the parents' views on their lifestyle choice. I conducted fieldwork in Goa for the total of ten months in the winters of 2011, 2012 and 2013. I participated intensively in the lives of lifestyle migrant families, visiting their homes and spending time with them at the

beaches, pools and other popular gathering places. I conducted more than twenty interviews with children and parents, and with adults who work with the lifestyle migrant children there. In addition to a detailed field diary and the interviews, my material includes photos taken by me and pictures drawn by children during projects I ran with them. Although my research in Goa focused above all on children, I do not write about them in this article but concentrate instead on the phenomenon of bohemian lifestyle migration. Moreover, although I use my two empirical case studies as examples of bohemian lifestyle migration, my intention is not to carefully report my empirical findings in this article but rather to outline the phenomenon.

Transnational mobility within the system of nation states

I don't think I will ever settle down, I always say that a divine god gives roots to the trees, for us it is giving feet, we can go from places to places. So I like to go from place to place. I like to stay a few years here, few years there. (Rafael, 40, March 2003)

As the interview extract above describes, a key characteristic of lifestyle migrants in India is that they lead transnationally mobile lives: instead of settling in a particular destination, many of them regularly move between two or more countries; India and their countries of citizenship are not necessarily their only destinations.

Because of the frequent transnational mobility, it is easy to frame the phenomenon in terms of nomadism, as D'Andrea and Bousiou have done. They see the migrants as free agents, pursuing alternative lives and shifting identities at will and

through their own actions. In a similar vein, the concept of lifestyle mobilities puts emphasis on people's individual choices to be constantly mobile. These approaches, however, pay less attention to the significance of structures, above all to the significance of nation states, their border controls and visa regimes. People (including those defined as neo-nomads or lifestyle travellers), do not float in some postmodern space where they move wherever and whenever they wish; they move to specific places located within the borders of specific nation states and very often must leave these places after a specific period due to the regulations of the receiving state. Based on my research among lifestyle migrants in India, it seems that many of them would actually like to settle down there for longer periods but it is not possible due to visa restrictions and limited income opportunities. It is very difficult, or even impossible, for foreigners to obtain permanent residence permits in India – except for those who marry Indian citizens. Consequently, the lifestyle migrants are typically in India on tourist or business visas – typically valid for three, six or twelve months, and one can obtain a new visa only by leaving the country. Similar, or in fact often more restraining, visa restrictions apply to many other destinations where such people like to sojourn.

Therefore, I argue that structures play a very significant role in guiding bohemian lifestyle migration/ neo-nomadism/ lifestyle mobility/travel. Consequently, viewing people as free agents is a somewhat incomplete view that focuses on how people present themselves, that is, on what people say instead of on the circumstances within which they operate. One of D'Andrea's (2007, 4) major arguments is that neo-nomads reject nation-state regimes but I argue that, in fact, they operate very much within those regimes. According to philosophers, the figure of the nomad opposes the state but I argue that the metaphor does not necessarily apply empirically; in my view, those defined as neo-nomads by D'Andrea and Bousiou or lifestyle travellers by Cohen,

and bohemian lifestyle migrants by me, do not really oppose the state system but rather navigate state structures to their own advantage by utilising their privileged nationalities. After all, only holders of specific passports can move relatively freely in the global arena. However, although their privileged passports enable their mobilities, at the same time, visa regimes – defined by the receiving nation states – place concrete limitations on their sojourns and travels. Talking about visa troubles was, in fact, very common among my research subjects in India. This shows that the mobilities of even the relatively privileged individuals are controlled and restrained.

I argue, therefore, that emphasising these people's freedom and willingness to move is only a partial truth. In India, as in many other places, foreigners' movement, or at least the timing of it, is affected by visa policies. It is not possible for them to move completely as they wish and, above all, they cannot settle permanently, in India for example, because of their inability to obtain permanent residence permits. Therefore, although people like to present themselves as independent actors, the discourse of free nomadic mobility or lifestyle mobility based on individual choice is a somewhat romanticised view that ignores the structural realities that frame their actions. Consequently, I prefer to use the concept of bohemian lifestyle migration because the word migration indicates that directions and destinations matter and that structures play a significant role; rather than freely floating as they wish, people's mobilities are directed and constrained.

Transnational mobility to particular destinations

An important feature of the bohemian/neo-nomadic lifestyle is that the more meaningful life the participants claim to have found abroad is not necessarily tied to a specific

location – it can materialise in various destinations. Yet, unlike in lifestyle mobility that is characterised by an ongoing mobility to new places, bohemian lifestyle migration/ neo-nomadism directs to particular destinations. D’Andrea calls such places “nodes of the global countercultural circuit” (D’Andrea 2006, 105). They include, for example, Ibiza in Spain, Bali in Indonesia, Mykonos in Greece, Koh Pagan in Thailand and Goa in India. As is typical of many lifestyle migration destinations, the climate is pleasant and the living relatively cheap in these places. However, they are not merely pleasant beach locations; they are also assigned certain artistic and spiritual meanings by the lifestyle migrants/ or nomads sojourning there (Bousiou 2008, 140-147). For example, Bali is seen as a place of artistic inspiration and Mykonos has an aura of spirituality connected with the Greek myths. India is a particularly suitable destination for a spiritual search because of its (self-)image as a spiritual place in contrast to the materialistic West (see Ludden 1993; van der Veer 1993). In Europe, for example Berlin has had similar bohemian meanings attached to it; David Griffiths and Stella Maile (2014) have described how British lifestyle migrants in search of an alternative life there talk about the creative potential and bohemian reputation of the city.

Consequently, it seems that lifestyle migrants or those defined as neo-nomads or lifestyle travellers seek the company of the like-minded people, albeit in different physical locations. This, in turn, indicates that they are not necessarily at home everywhere although this is a characteristic of the metaphorical nomad (Peters 2006, 151-152). In fact, mobility or migration in search of an alternative life does not necessarily result in immersion in the local communities in the destinations (Korpela 2017). Although many of the bohemian lifestyle migrants I met in India physically circulate between a number of locations in different parts of the world, they spend their time with people who share a similar lifestyle and values. In other words, instead of

immersing themselves in local cultures, they move within the (Western) bohemian – alternative – space and, rather than being at home everywhere, they are with people who share their lifestyle and values. It is thus not simply migration to a specific place but migration to a specific alternative social scene that exists in various places.

Nevertheless, although the concepts of bohemian lifestyle migration and neo-nomadism emphasise the alternative aspects of the lifestyle, in the following sections, I argue that one should be careful about celebrating the alternative values and the countercultural aspects too much.

Countercultures – nothing new under the sun

A central aspect of the new privileged transnationally mobile lifestyles – whether they are conceptualised as neo-nomadism, lifestyle mobility or bohemian lifestyle migration – is that people search for an alternative, even countercultural, lifestyle. Such an ethos, however, needs to be carefully elaborated on in terms of history and real-life practices and outcomes.

Countercultural lifestyles are obviously not a new phenomenon. By definition, countercultures oppose certain values and practices of “mainstream cultures” (also called “parent cultures”) and search for alternatives, often in the form of lifestyles that appreciate the “simple”, the anti-materialistic and the “natural” (Roszak 1969; Vesey 1973; Musgrove 1974). As long ago as the 17th century there were alternative communities in the American countryside (Zablocki 1980, 3), often based on religious values and practices and on co-operative lifestyles.

Bohemianism is one such well-known and long-established counterculture. According to Elizabeth Wilson, “bohemia is the name for the attempt by nineteenth and twentieth-century artists, writers, intellectuals and radicals to create an alternative world within Western society (and possibly elsewhere)” (Wilson 2000, 2). Bohemians rebelled against the dominant culture, attempting to live free of conventions and emphasising non-materialistic values and pleasures. Bohemianism was a rather marginal phenomenon, but the 1960s and 70s hippie movement, which embraced similar values, became much more widespread and its countercultural values became well-known and rapidly commercialised (and, consequently, less countercultural).

Traditionally, countercultures have defined their criticism of “dominant” cultures within particular nation states. Moving abroad in search of an alternative life is not, however, a new phenomenon. Already the early bohemians used to move abroad to realise their spiritual and artistic goals (see Wilson 2000). In fact, although lifestyle migration is often conceptualised as a new phenomenon, *bohemian* lifestyle migration is actually much older. Some destinations, for example Paris, were already popular in the 19th century, and some bohemians went to India in the 1950s, well before the hippie era (see Alexander 2000).

Nick Osbaldiston (2014) calls for a historically nuanced approach to lifestyle migration research, and the importance of this approach becomes particularly visible with the bohemians. Contemporary bohemian lifestyle migration has its roots in earlier countercultural phenomena, even though the current social and cultural context is different. Paying attention to the historical roots of the phenomenon brings us back to the argument that individuals are not as free-floating postmodern agents as they like to claim and that their actions are framed by structural, and also historical, circumstances. The studies that have used the concepts of neo-nomadism or lifestyle mobilities (or

lifestyle migration as a matter of fact), have focused very much on the present phenomena, emphasising the novelty of such lifestyles but I believe there is a need for a more nuanced historical analysis of the phenomena.

Counterculture – a discourse or practices?

Q: Are you different from people in your country of origin?

A: I think yes, I'm totally different. [...] At least I do something interesting. I meet different people. (Marco, 34, April 2002)

Distinguishing themselves from their fellow nationals who lead boring, hectic lives in their countries of citizenship is typical of all lifestyle migrants, not only of bohemians. Those in Varanasi and Goa, however, also distinguish themselves from their fellow nationals on another level. Their lifestyle migration is not only a question of searching for a better life but also of defining themselves as distinctively different, as alternative.

The lifestyle migrants in India often emphasise the fact that they are different from “ordinary people” because they hold different, that is alternative, values. Criticising “mainstream societies” is very common among them.

Everyone fucking knows that your government's trying to rip you off and push you into a certain direction and all of that. [...] I think a lot of the people here think that they are special and that they are transcending these global boundaries. (Matt, 40, March 2012)

In this analysis, however, I place my emphasis on Matt's expression "people here *think*"; there is a difference between people thinking they are transcending boundaries and their actually doing so. The discourse does not necessarily manifest in real life practices or, more precisely, these practices can be controversial. The lifestyle migrants/neo-nomads in India say that they live an alternative life, and this becomes manifested in their distinctive looks and in particular practices. For example, some of the lifestyle migrant children in Goa are home-schooled because their parents are against formal education. In addition, many of the lifestyle migrants/neo-nomads in India are involved with the trance counterculture and/or New Age practices. At the same time, their lifestyle is also a question of leading an easy and enjoyable life, and an important factor in this is the cheaper living costs in India.

I visited Olga, a lifestyle migrant mother of two children. She complained to me about how her servant had just quit her job. Consequently, Olga had to do laundry, cook and clean herself. She was very upset and she burst out: "I feel as if I was in Europe again". [Field diary, March 2012]

In India, many lifestyle migrants lead rather privileged lifestyles; they hire housekeepers and gardeners and frequently eat in restaurants. In addition, in Goa many of them live in spacious villas. Most of them could not afford such a lifestyle in their countries of citizenship but India is relatively cheap for them. Although some lifestyle migrants elsewhere are willing to endure severe hardships in order to live in line with

the values they embrace (see Vannini and Taggart on off-gridders in Canada, 2014), those in India seem to value their comforts and their enjoyment of life. They also accumulate material household possessions over the years; their houses in India contain an abundance of textiles, dishes, toys, household appliances and so on. Therefore, they are definitely not leading anti-materialistic lives with few material possessions. In this sense, current bohemian lifestyle migration to India is significantly different from the earlier bohemian sojourns abroad. Nowadays, economic sustainability and a relaxed life are important elements of the lifestyle; contemporary lifestyle migrants in India do not idealise artistic suffering in poverty.

The metaphorical figure of the nomad represents a subversion of convention and is seen as an agent of change (Braidotti 1994, 5; Engebriksen 2017, 48). Following this line of thinking, D'Andrea (2007) defines neo-nomads as countercultural agents of change. Similarly, Hugo Marcelo Zunine and Ieva Zebryte (2015), who write about utopian lifestyle migrant communities in Patagonia, Chile, argue that the lifestyle and its non-conventional practices accelerate social transformation by disrupting the conventional social rules that define contemporary society.

I am, however, sceptical about the transformative power and revolutionary potential the bohemian's lifestyle has; such a view romanticises their discourse by ignoring the empirical realities. This kind of discourse can certainly be found among lifestyle migrants in India too but instead of merely reflecting on what people say, one should pay attention also to what they actually do, and within which structures and circumstances. Countercultural values are important but it is nevertheless more a question of a discourse and a personal style than of collective revolutionary action. In fact, for many, the aim is individual happiness and improvement in their own lives, rather than a revolution.

Hopeless trying convince such people. Let them rot. If you are cool, and they are not physically stopping you doing it, fuck'em. Because you know, what you are gonna convince some guy ... that some option that is billion miles away from his consciousness, is a good idea. So what? Are you, how many years have you got to waste on trying to convince him? (Matt, 40, March 2012)

Since the lifestyle migrants aim to achieve individual satisfaction and, de facto, utilise existing structures to their own advantage, I am not convinced that they are agents of change and transformation, even when they like to present themselves as such. It seems to me that their discourse and actual practices are often somewhat contradictory. They say they want a change but instead of trying to change “the system”, they actually enjoy their relatively privileged position within it. The same ethos seems to apply for lifestyle mobility and neo-nomadism; it is a question of a lifestyle for the benefit of the individual.

Producing a better way of life; utilising the system rather than making a revolution

Benson and Osbaldiston have pointed out that lifestyle migration is about not only migration but also consumption, identity and culture (Benson and Osbaldiston 2014, 2). The lifestyles sought are also produced by these migrants; above all, many lifestyle migrants, bohemians and others, need to earn money to support their lifestyle. Retired lifestyle migrants usually live on their pensions and some lifestyle migrants on their

savings but this is definitely not the case for all lifestyle migrants. The relaxed life, as well as the frequent transnational mobility, require money. Lifestyle migrants employ a variety of income strategies which, in turn, affect their lifestyle significantly.

The lifestyle migrants I encountered in India employed two different strategies to finance their lifestyle. Those in Varanasi work for a few months a year in menial jobs (such as waitressing, harvesting, and factory work) in their countries of citizenship or sell textiles or handicrafts – for example bed-sheets, necklaces and clothing – which they have imported from India, Thailand or Indonesia, at festivals and markets in their countries of citizenship or in other affluent industrialised countries. They then spend the rest of the year in Varanasi, living on the money they have earned in these temporary jobs. Therefore, in spite of criticising their countries of citizenship and other affluent states, their lifestyle requires them to regularly return there in order to earn money for another bohemian stint abroad. Instead of rejecting the system or working towards a revolution, they actually utilise the current capitalist system and its global inequalities to earn money in the “West” and then use it in India, where it lasts longer.

In Goa, most of the lifestyle migrants I encountered are entrepreneurs there. Typically, they work a few days a week at outdoor markets selling goods and services to short-stay tourists. Some set up cafés, restaurants or guesthouses. Others utilise their artistic skills or their knowledge of certain New Age techniques of healing or spirituality; they might, for example, teach yoga or pilates, sell their art or give reiki treatments. Many work also as musicians, DJs, fashion or jewellery designers and artisans. A crucial feature of these economic activities is that the customers are other foreigners; locals are not in need of their services or not willing to pay what they perceive as a high price. Some lifestyle migrants also work online, but again, their customers are not locals but from affluent industrialised countries.

Consequently, although the location is often far away from the “West” – for example in India, Thailand or Indonesia – the economic processes of bohemian lifestyle migrants are still very Western-oriented; they either earn their living in affluent countries or provide services for tourists or for other lifestyle migrants in their destinations. This is another reason why I am reluctant to call these people nomads: traditional nomads live in an economically symbiotic relationship with the sedentary populations. There are various political and, above all, economic ties between the nomadic and sedentary groups within a certain area (Barfield 1993), whereas bohemian lifestyle migrants do not seem to have a symbiotic, or in fact very often any, relationship with the sedentary local populations in the areas where they reside (Korpela 2017). Similarly, lifestyle travellers are seldom economically integrated with local communities, which obviously contributes to them being viewed as tourists.

D’Andrea argues that the aim of the neo-nomads in Ibiza and Goa is to have a holistic lifestyle, with a balance between labour, leisure and spirituality, in which mobility and economic strategies are integrated and important for their identity formation (D’Andrea 2007, 23-26). Based on my observations among lifestyle migrants in Goa, many attempt to achieve this, but only a few succeed. Many start small-scale businesses in India but only some succeed and even those who do succeed are in a vulnerable position because they are foreigners (that is, outsiders) and they often run their businesses in the informal sector. In fact, insecurity about the future of their businesses is a constant worry for them and failure is common. Therefore, the holistic nomadic lifestyle is reality only for a few, not for the majority. Similarly, those who have written about lifestyle mobilities claim that the way of life blurs aspects of tourism, migration and lifestyles (Cohen et al. 2013), but I would like to know whether such blurring is successful in the long run and for whom.

Many lifestyle migrants in Goa actually struggle to survive economically, at least in the long term. The discourse of successful mobile economic strategies that provide income in various locations does not apply to all, or even the majority, of lifestyle migrants in Goa. Again, they are not simply free individuals pursuing an alternative life as they wish but people with a lifestyle that is constrained by not only political but also economic structures and realities. There is definitely a discourse of a successful holistic lifestyle among these individuals, but those who fail typically disappear discreetly from the scene, leaving the discourse intact, albeit presenting only a partial picture of the phenomenon.

Moreover, the case study from Varanasi shows that there are bohemian lifestyle migrants who lead a lifestyle that is not holistically combining economic strategies, identity formation and mobility (D'Andrea 2007). Since there are no income opportunities in Varanasi (in the form of tourists who are able and willing to spend money on the goods and services the lifestyle migrants offer), the lifestyle migrants there need to support their lifestyle by working elsewhere. In practice, this means that once they run out of funds they return to a more conventional lifestyle for some time in order to earn money for another bohemian stint abroad. Thus, for the lifestyle migrants in Varanasi labour is a clearly separate sphere of life, something they conduct in the “West” between their sojourns abroad. Labour, leisure and spirituality are consequently not necessarily well balanced. Furthermore, their economic strategies are separate from their identity formation, not only because of the geographical separation but also because many of them work in menial jobs, rather than in jobs that would promote their “alternative” identities. After all, not everyone succeeds in making a living from an “alternative” occupation (i.e. as an artist or New Age therapist) even if they try. Therefore, among the lifestyle migrants whom I knew in India, the holistic lifestyle used

to characterise neo-nomads applies to some but not all. In my view, it may reflect people's discourse and their aims but it does not always coincide with empirical realities.

Moreover, defining these people as marginal (D'Andrea 2007) and liminal (Bousiou 2008) presents only a partial picture of the phenomenon. I argue that such a view is based on their discourse of self-definition but it ignores, again, the circumstances and structures within which they operate. In spite of claiming to be different and marginal, the bohemian lifestyle migrants I encountered in India are not marginal outsiders or disadvantaged but have valuable skills and connections to resources and networks that they can utilise to their own economic advantage. Moreover, although they reject (permanent) wage-work, they do not reject financial profit that enables their privileged lifestyle. In fact, rather than opposing the system they utilise both the current nation-state system and global economic inequalities to their own advantage.

I thus argue that research on lifestyle migrants, lifestyle travellers or neo-nomads should carefully elaborate on how their income strategies connect their lifestyles to the societies in which they reside or from which they originate, and also to the global capitalist system, in spite of their discourse on opposing these societies and systems. In my view, although many bohemian lifestyle migrants (or neo-nomads/lifestyle travellers) say that they have dropped out of the prevailing systems and that they oppose them, in reality they use the global political and capitalist order and its inequalities to maximise their own benefits and, consequently, the counterculture is a contradictory discourse. This also leads me to wonder whether someone who is privileged can be countercultural, or what kind of counterculturalism it is. People may say they are marginal outsiders but one cannot deny the fact that the position of

bohemian lifestyle migrants/neo-nomads/lifestyle travellers within global economic and political structures is privileged in terms of race, class, nationality and so on. Moreover, they utilise neoliberal structures and, in fact, end up re-producing them. Therefore, again, the discourse of being countercultural as well as the countercultural practices take place within existing structures, and the discourse and a person's position within these larger structures can be contradictory. It may be a question of a relative and vulnerable privilege, but it is a privilege nevertheless (on the systemic and relative privilege of lifestyle migrants, see Benson 2013).

Conclusion – same but different

In this article, I have outlined a phenomenon that can be conceptualised as bohemian lifestyle migration, neo-nomadism or lifestyle mobility. The two latter ones, in my understanding, have focused above all on appearances, that is, on how people like to present themselves, but have paid less attention to the structures and material realities within which people operate, no matter how free they claim to be. Consequently, the concept of bohemian lifestyle migration offers a complementary lens to describe the empirical realities within which such people live. I have also shown that there are limits to this alternative lifestyle. If the figure of the nomad stands in opposition to state science, I want to conclude by asserting that in the lives of real-life neo-nomads/ lifestyle travellers/ lifestyle migrants, states and structures matter a lot, even in the late modernity/ the postmodern era. Their transnationally mobile lifestyle not only is an individual choice but is embedded in political and economic structures that both enable and limit their actions.

Although it is important to question the ontology of sedentarism (Tyfield and Blok 2016), the fact should not be ignored that no matter how much particular people move transnationally, they always move within certain structures and become embedded and settled in particular places within particular nation states, even if temporarily. In the future studies on the phenomenon, careful attention should be paid to the political structures within which such people operate and to the role of nation states as both enabling and restricting their lifestyle. So far, emphasis has been predominantly on the individuals' agency but now it is time to look more carefully at the structures as well. Moreover, instead of merely celebrating the alternative ethos of the phenomenon, it is important to investigate how the lifestyle not only opposes but also utilises and reproduces existing systems.

In the future, it is also important to pay attention to such people's actual practices and to their long-term trajectories; one should investigate whether the lifestyle is sustainable on long-term bases and if so, on which terms. In particular, more attention should be paid to the economic structures within which they operate. So far, studies have described individuals' income strategies without paying much attention to the wider political and economic structures (and changes in them) within which the individuals' actions take place. Finally, literature tends to present lifestyle migration/neo-nomadism/lifestyle travel as novel phenomena characteristic to our time and age. I, however, urge researchers to pay more attention to the historical roots of the phenomenon; it may not be as novel as it seems at first look. Paying attention to historical roots will also help us to better situate the phenomenon within wider societal structures and developments.

¹ After each interview extract there is a pseudonym for the interviewee and her/his actual age at the time of the interview. Very few of the interviewees were native English-speakers, as a consequence of which the quotations contain grammatical mistakes.

² For an overview of recent research on lifestyle migration, see <http://www.uta.fi/yky/lifestylemigration/index.html>.

³ New Age refers to a movement of alternative spirituality, which emphasises mysticism, holism and environmentalism.

⁴ Techno practice refers to a range of electronic music genres, along with their ritual sites and subcultural components (eg fashion) (D'Andrea 2007, 21).

⁵ By “West”, I refer to Europe, North America, Israel, Australia and New Zealand.

⁶ Trance music is a genre of electronic music.

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