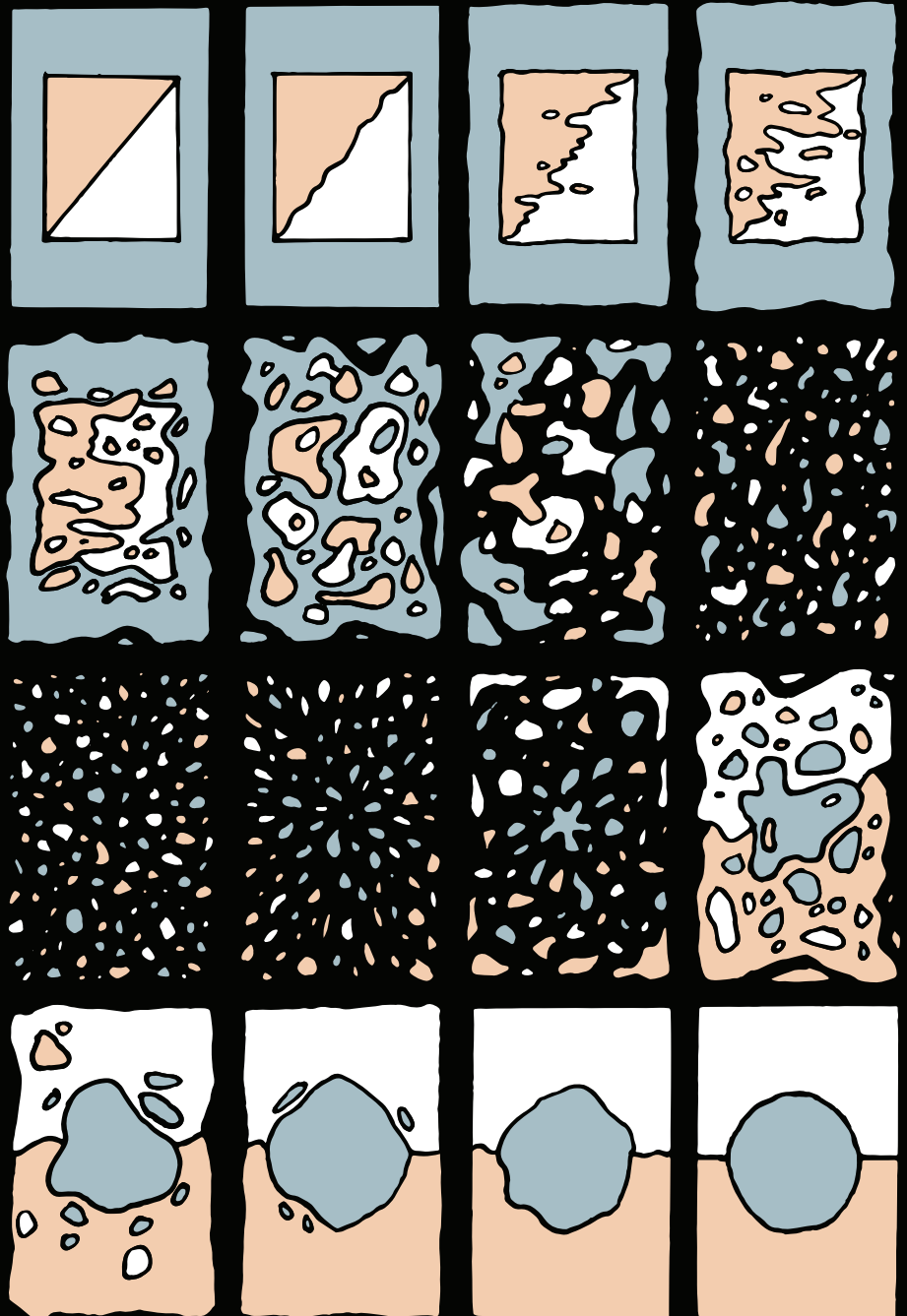


Belonging to the In Between

An Ethnographic Account on
Transforming Relationships
in Benaí, Spain

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August 2018
MSc Cultural Anthropology — Sustainable Citizenship
Supervisor — Gijs Cremers
Wordcount — 19.838



ABSTRACT

In a world with an increasing flux of people, questions of belonging to places and people become more complex and relevant as natural attachments to places and people decrease and imagined communities and places rise to the occasion. This thesis discusses lifestyle migration towards a community in Spain called Benalí which entails the project of the inhabitants to change and negotiate their way of life. Three months of fieldwork dissected the intertwinement between Benalíans relation to the environment, a sense of self and feelings of belonging. Although it seems that the inhabitants desire a life in which a unity with nature and sensing a community spirit are central, this thesis shows how these motivations are mostly based on escaping from a former life which is imagined as the opposite. This results in the ascribed meaning of Benalí which is inspired by being a type of antithesis of former lives, an antistructure. Therefore, the inhabitants' sense of self and feelings of belonging relate to the project of negotiating life, of deconstructing normalized values, and by being in between phases of life.

Key words: Spain, Benalí, lifestyle migration, rural idyll, escapism, place making, liminality, human-environment relationships, identity, belonging.

‘Home is where one starts from. As we grow older the world becomes stranger, the pattern more complicated’ – T.S. Eliot¹

¹ Quote of Thomas Stearns Eliot from his work ‘Four Quartets’ in 1943.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To all who were living in Benalí during my stay I owe an intellectual debt, as you have given me your trust, openness and insights to understand more and more about the paths on which you are leading your lives. Without your willingness to be understood, I could have never seen further than I perceived and think differently than I thought. I owe you a personal debt, as you have all crossed my path and in one way or another filled it with companionship, acceptance, and joy. This also goes out to the cats and dogs, the uncountable amount of olive trees, the forests, the mountains, you have given me a home away from home.

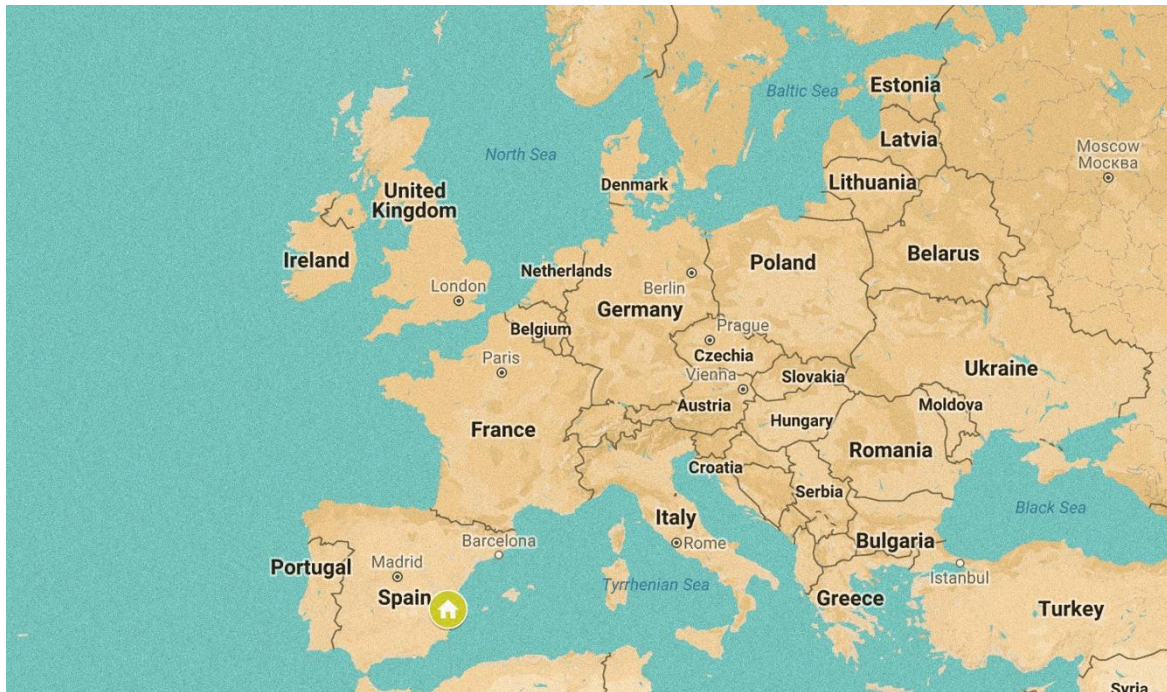
All the other people in the Valencian province who I have met and have welcomed me with laughter, stories, music, dancing, wine, olives, thank you. Without you, this experience would have missed its happiness and its melancholia when I left.

And although some of you might not always understand what I am doing, I am grateful to my family and friends who would check up on me when I was hidden from the world, whether in the mountains of Valencia or behind a computer in my self created office. Who would draw me back into my own lifeworld, happening right in front of me instead of in written text, giving me the opportunity to lean back and look again with a fresh eye.

My fellow students who would share their insights, experiences, frustrations, and relieves, making me realize that one is never alone in their journey. Finally, my supervisor Gijs Cremers who gave me meaningful headaches with his critical eye, guiding me towards a path which is still my own.

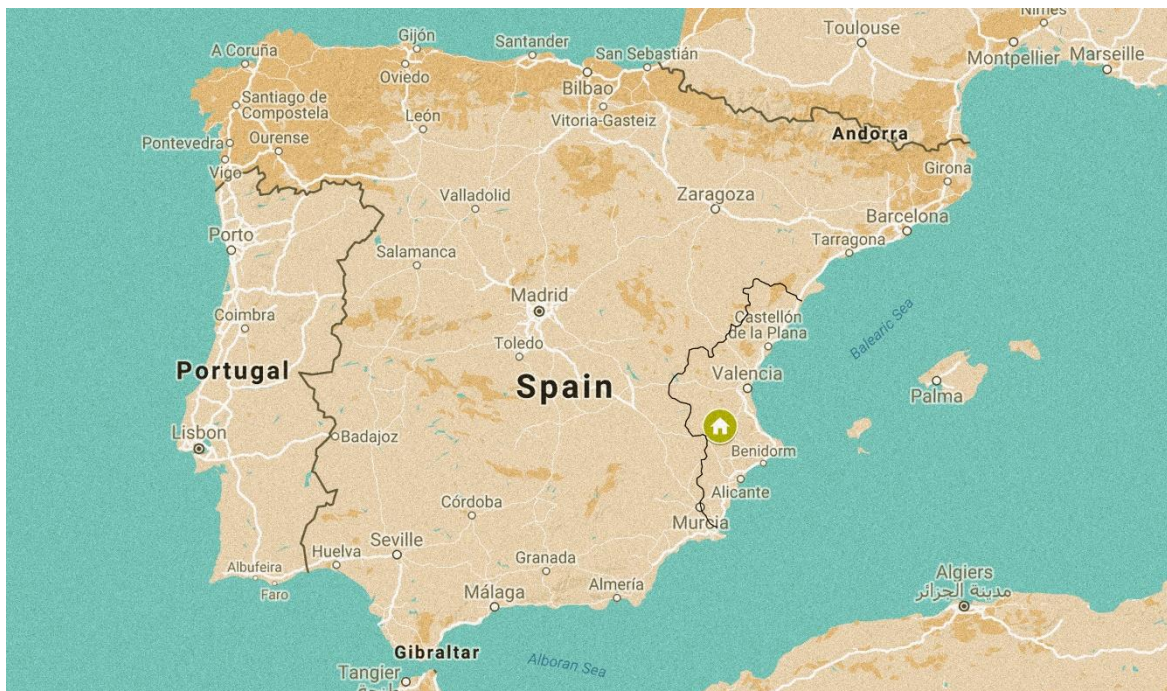
MAPS

Map I – Europe, Spain



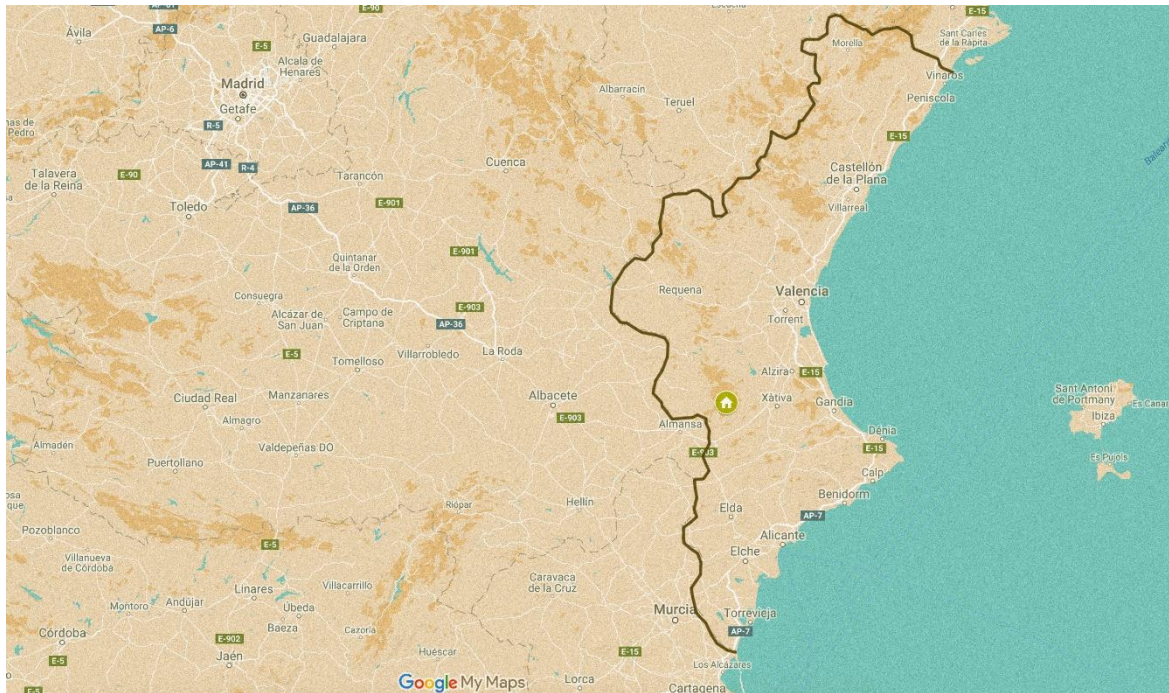
Retrieved from www.googlemaps.nl on 19-07-2018.

Map II – Spain, Valencia Province



Retrieved from www.googlemaps.com on 19-07-2018.

Map III – Valencia province, Benalí marked by the green dot with a house symbol



Retrieved from www.googlemaps.com on 19-07-2018.

Map IV – Benalí from the sky



Photo retrieved from <https://www.benalitoursim.com> on 20-07-2018.

1. INTRODUCTION

‘I don’t wanna go back home any time soon, or ever maybe’.² Iris is packing up her stuff and is reminded of her home in the United States because of some crumpled dollar bills she found in her small backpack. Not wanting to continue her life in the same way, she left her hometown on the other side of the world. She quit her job as a knee prototype designer, gave up her apartment and said goodbye to her family and friends. Iris came straight to Benalí and now has decided to leave again to go rock climbing in Tenerife. Iris and I are reminiscing about her time in Benalí which makes her emotional, she is still not sure whether she is ‘ready’ to let go of the place, the people, and the life at Benalí. Iris does not know where she is going, yet she knows that she does not want to go back to her old life which she still calls home.

This conversation with Iris, one of the Benalí inhabitants, represents the story of most inhabitants. It entails an issue of belonging, of connection to a place and people, which is dealt with by resituating oneself. The other day, one of the owners of Benalí, Olive told me that everyone who has ever come to live in Benalí is on some sort of crossroads in their life. The silence surrounds our conversation, sitting on a wooden bench, the sun brightens the light-colored stone houses, and the mountains fill up our view. One could wonder why a random group of people comes together to rethink their lifepath in this particular place called Benalí, in the mountains of Spain. Therefore, I ask Olive if ‘being on a crossroads’ is some sort of requirement before being invited to Benalí. She hesitates, maybe she never even thought about this. For Olive it is important that people who come to live in Benalí have affinity with their philosophy, being to ‘promote a healthy, ecological and sustainable way of living’ and ‘meeting the silence’³. As one of the dogs Abri impatiently barks for Olive to come with, our conversation is finished, and they walk off to disappear in the sunny fields filled with olive trees. Possibly Olive, unconsciously, only invites people who show that they want to change their life around, to break with old customs. Perhaps, the people who have affinity with this philosophy are people who change their life around.⁴

Either way, this conversation demonstrates that Benalí forms a place where the inhabitants detach themselves from their old lives in society and come to (re)negotiate their lives whilst being in a different environment, doing different things, and being surrounded by different people than back home.

² Conversation with Iris on 01-03-2018.

³ ‘Home’, Benalí Rural Tourism, accessed on May 14, 2018. <https://www.benalitourism.com>.

⁴ Conversation with Olive on 17-02-2018.

1.1 INTRODUCTION TO STUDY AND RESEARCH CONCEPTS

All the inhabitants I met in Benalí during my fieldwork are from western countries and lived in a city before coming to Benalí. As Olive mentioned, the Benalíans⁵ are all escaping their life back home in the city because of time consuming office jobs, the surroundings of concrete, traffic, crowds of people, disruptions in beliefs and ideals, and the expectations of 'society' which they feel they cannot meet. The diversity of nationalities in Benalí reflects that 'ours is a century of uprootedness', meaning that everywhere around the world it is becoming more common to live somewhere else than where one is born (Jackson 1995, 1). This increasing flux of people around the world, and towards places like Benalí, calls for research towards the question of belonging (Jackson 1995, King 2002). The migration studied in this thesis reflects the concept of lifestyle migration; 'the relocation of people within the developed world searching for a better way of life' (Benson and O'Reilly 2009, 208). The Benalíans fit into the spectrum of lifestyle migrants as they all have relocated, come from the so called 'developed world' and have expressed to be searching for a different, better way of living which they hope to find by coming to Benalí.

In this transformational process the inhabitants endure in Benalí, they release themselves from normalized constraints of their surroundings back home, and while deconstructing and negotiating their common sense of social reality, they arrive in a state of liminality⁶ (Turner 1977, 68). This liminal phase symbolizes a paradox, as one is in passage from one social reality and status to another, they are 'betwixt and between' the positions of the 'former' and a possible 'future' person (Turner 1977, 68). As the Benalíans negotiate the former and future imagined reality on a daily basis, this thesis demonstrates how this relates to the environment they live in, the people they are surrounded by and their daily activities. In doing so, this thesis explores the negotiation of one's life in Benalí and how this transforms attachments to people and places which is intertwined with their relationship to the environment, identity constructions and subsequently, feelings of belonging.

In their project of searching for a better way of life they are simultaneously escaping previous responsibilities and obligations while temporarily 'living outside of societal structures' (Brown 2002; Sardinha 2015). While being between phases, there are always

⁵ In some cases I will refer to the inhabitants of Benalí as Benalíans as I believe it will improve reading comfort.

⁶ The concept of liminality is owed to two scholars, Arnold van Gennep who first introduced liminality in his work *Les Rites des Passage* (1909) and Victor Turner. The concept can be explained, in its simplest form, as the stage between a 'pre-ritual' constructing lives, identities, and routines, and a new way of being and belonging in the future.

traces of their previous life present which inform this liminal phase, as meaning is created along the paths of the Benalíans and their journey conditions the knowledge of a place (Ingold 2011). The (re)negotiation of ones' life in the act of lifestyle migration is thereby mostly informed by narratives of escaping their former lives (Benson and O'Reilly 2009). At the same time, where one is heading, the subsequent stage, is also informing this place of liminality (Turner 1977, 68). In Benalí this can be recognized in a type of lifestyle migration called the rural idyll in which the migrant 'is driven by the search for a simpler and authentic rural life in which he/she can sense a community spirit and experience a life project in union with the natural environment' (Gaspar 2015, 16).

This thesis questions what this migration towards the rural idyll in Benalí brings about. How does one 'experience a life project in union with the natural environment' and 'sense a community spirit' and which implications does it entail? As the Benalíans way of life and perceptions of it change, 'with it their identity begins to shift, redefined by space and place' (Renfro-Sargent 2002, 91). To understand this shift in identity in relation to a purposely changing life, I refer to the reflexive construction of identity as explained by Anthony Giddens (1991). Anthony Giddens (1991, 81) wrote about modern identity; 'the lifestyle choices that individuals make [...], give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity'. Therefore, the act of migrating to Benalí, is a reflexive project of becoming, practiced in day-to-day life, in relation and differentiation to others which continually shapes ourselves and our perception of others (Jenkins 2014). By delineating the process of inhabitants' identity constructions in accordance to their migration towards a rural idyll, the inhabitants' relations to the environment are analyzed with different approaches to study human-environment relationships by scholars such as Ingold (2000, 2011) and Tsing (2015). The inhabitants' relation to people, and thereby the project of 'sensing a community spirit', is analyzed by an analogy of Goffman (1959) who explains the presentation and constitution of one's self-identity as a performance. A person presents oneself to guide and control an impression of themselves in everyday life. Depending on the comprehension of the audience, a social establishment, the performance is successful or not (Goffman 1959).

However, as attachments to people and places and simultaneously self-identities are in transformation, how is this intertwined with the inhabitants' feelings of belonging which reflects a sense of self and (dis)connection to people and places (Christou 2011)? As inhabitants' self-identities are transforming, no longer aligned to one community or place but 'betwixt and between' the previous and future stages of their life, "feelings of uprootedness, [...] the construction of multiple homes and hybrid senses of belonging can take place" (Hedetoft and Hjort 2002, introduction xvi). Hence, feelings of

belonging are explored by studying the attachments to people and places of the Benalíans according to empirical data and literature concerning belonging, place making, and identities (Giddens 1991; Goffman 1959; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Probyn 1996).

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTION AND METHODOLOGY

I have conducted this fieldwork in a hamlet called Benalí in the mountains of the Valencia province of Spain. This hamlet was of interest for my research as the owners presented the place as one where a new way of life can be practiced. More specifically, a way of life with a focus on living ‘off-the-grid’ where one can ‘connect with nature’⁷ which corresponded to my interest towards human-environment relationships and the entanglement with feelings of belonging in our modern day. Subsequently, the focus of my field work, conducted in 13 weeks between February 2018 and May 2018, has been on the following research question:

‘How are human-environment relationships and identity constructions of the inhabitants of Benalí, Spain, shaped, narrated, enacted and entangled in feelings of belonging during a time of migration?’

Apart from the theories concisely explained above, I have gathered data using a triangulation of qualitative research methods existing of participants observation, informal conversations and interviews, and life histories. The combination of these methods uncovers “the confusing array of subjectivities, subtle changes of mind, ambiguities of feelings, ambivalences, misunderstandings and strongly held beliefs” (O’Reilly 2005, 119). Participant observation is a method to collect data in a natural setting which I did by observing and taking part in all the activities in Benalí, from gardening to cooking, and from eating together to going out (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 2) This method required to record my observations by means of field notes which I wrote down in my laptop at the end of almost every day.

As I became part of the community by living with them 24/7 there was a risk of becoming a complete participant and losing my sense of objectivity (O’Reilly 2005). I tried to avoid this by keeping my research goals in the back of my mind and staying in touch with my role as ethnographer by sporadically reading the ‘Ethnographic Methods’ by Karen O’Reilly (2005). While doing participant observation I took advantage of specific moments and ask relevant questions. These moments often continued in conversations

⁷ Text on profile of Benalí retrieved on January 16, 2018. <https://www.workaway.com> (profile on website discontinued).

throughout the day, even sometimes in bed with my roommate. As personal realms of feelings and thoughts, and what a person or community, actually do in daily life compared to what they say often differs, I additionally conducted three guided conversations to clarify certain issues (O'Reilly 2005, 119). The guided conversations were structured so that apart from the topics I predetermined, the participants could let their thoughts roam freely making this research more collaborative instead of just my own.

Even though my research was overt, as all the Benalíans knew what I came to do even before I arrived and gave their consent, I did put in effort to portray myself as being part of the community instead of being an obvious researcher which in the end I might have been both. This reflects the reason why I chose to conduct the few guided conversations at the end of my fieldwork, as I expected the participants to be more open towards me if they saw me as a fellow community member instead of a researcher. Accordingly, the foundation of this fieldwork is the rapport I build with the participants meaning that 'both the "informant" and the researcher come to the point when each is committed to help the other achieve his or her goal' (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 47). To establish this rapport, I have put time and effort into relationships, learned appropriate behavior respecting the participants, reciprocated the participants efforts and was a good and careful listener (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 48). What was helpful, is that my research goals responded to the Benalíans interests and the path they were on. As they wanted to be heard about their personal conundrum, I wanted to hear all about it for the good of my research. What moved me was the comment Thyme made at the end of a conversation; 'Thank you Eva, for come to Benalí, [...] your dynamics. Because, you do that we realize, not only me, but we realize about what we are living, what is the meaning of that, what is this kind of change in the world, in our lives, and why we are here. In my opinion, [...] are very, very important'.⁸

The third method which strongly depended on the rapport I had built with the participants leading them to trust me and put in effort from their part, was during a drawing exercise where the participants shared their lives before and during Benalí. The aim of this exercise was to find out aspects that belong to implicit structures of people's life, which might not be seen by the participant as important. Therefore, just asking or talking about it is not always the way to find out (Blommaert and Dong 2011). The life-histories complement the participant observation and guided conversations as these personal stories can affirm, validate and support the interpretation of a participant's experiences, relations with others, and their place in the social order of things (Atkinson 1998, 10). Even though these

⁸ Guided conversation with Thyme on 13-04-2018.

life histories the participants drew are not their entire experience of life from birth, it does highlight the most important aspects which lead up to their choice of coming to Benalí (Atkinson 1998). As the stories were told and narrated by the participants where I acted as a guide, this method made this research more of a collaboration (Atkinson 1998, 8-9).

An important note is that this research and its outcome needs to be seen as interwoven and interconnected as all the different aspects being in a relational field, a meshwork of which the participants and the researcher are part (Ingold 2011). Instead of studying the participants, the world out there, I see myself as the researcher being part of that world and thus of the research. As life is seen as a continuous birth of becomings, human life unfolds along paths which all interconnect, interweave and overlap creating a meshwork. Therefore, the knowledge I gained from this research is 'neither classified nor networked but meshworked' (Ingold 2011, 154).

1.3 OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

This thesis is structured in such a way that the first two chapters provide more contextual and literal descriptions of the fieldwork while the two ending chapters are shaped towards more abstract analyses based on the empirical data of my fieldwork which is interwoven with different theoretical concepts. Chapter two is contextual and describes Benalí in a practical way to clarify who lives in Benalí, how Benalí is presented, what the daily activities are, the existing structures and what Benalí means for its inhabitants. It shows how Benalí is set apart from their old lives and thereby the inhabitants place themselves in a less stable and predictable, temporary environment in which the constraints of their ordinary lives are removed, enabling the inhabitants to negotiate the rules and regulations of their normal life (Kamau 2002, 19).

This temporary phase, also called a liminal stage, is not a clear-cut phase, there are traces of the previous and subsequent stages informing the liminal stage (Turner 1977, 68). The conception of their previous life continually informs and shapes the perceptions of living in Benalí or any other future home, making the past and imagined future intertwined with the project of renegotiation one's life. In chapter three these motivations for the inhabitants to move away from their previous lives and move to Benalí are delineated by analysing drawings of the inhabitants and their reflections on them. These reflections show how the Benalians are escaping a previous life and search for 'a simpler and authentic rural life in which he/she can sense a community spirit and experience a life project in union with the natural environment' (Gaspar 2015, 16).

During this process of reshaping their way of live, 'their identity begins to shift, redefined by space and place' (Renfro-Sargent 2002, 91). Therefore, chapter four delineates this shift in identity, with a focus on two elements of the rural idyll the inhabitants are looking for; 'a life project in union with the natural environment' and 'sensing a community spirit' (Gaspar 2015, 16). By exploring the way inhabitants relate to the natural environment, it becomes clear how their perception of the relation between humans and nonhumans becomes less pronounced which effects their sense of self in relation to their environment. Furthermore, the sensing of a community spirit seems to depend on the possibilities of the inhabitants to express their sense of self towards the people around them. Both these projects have an impact on the classifications of 'we' and 'others' and simultaneously enables the inhabitants to reshape their sense of place and community (Leonard in Gupta and Ferguson 1997, 135). This sense of place and community, or rather the attachments towards them are studied in chapter five, where the concept of feelings of belonging explains the consequences of transforming relationships in Benalí. Furthermore, in this chapter the different processes in Benalí come together, uncovering the intertwinement of human-environment relationships, identity construction and feelings of belonging.

2. WELCOME TO BENALÍ

'If I [do] not stay here, I think I will continue travelling. Benalí it [means] to me, to be aware about my possibilities, my capacities, you know to do things. And there is another way to live. Not only in Benalí but also in other parts of the world. [...] I'm happy with Benalí.' ⁹

- *Thyme*

'The mountains need us' says Thyme while we walk from the olive orchard back to the hamlet for lunch. In a semi line the volunteers hike up the hill, hungry and tired from pruning olive trees all morning. Their second-hand jackets, scarfs, and beanies fill up the wheelbarrow as the combination of work and the midday sun has finally heated them up from the cold morning dew. I ask Thyme why the mountains need us, and she answers that they need us just like we need them, it is simply not good for the mountains if they are not maintained. After passing a big pile of firewood, we leave our pruning tools in the garage and walk around the light plastered hamlet to enter the volunteer house through the patio. Some of us evaluate the weather to decide we are eating inside and start setting the table with plates, glasses and cutlery. Rosemary has been cooking all morning for our communal lunch which every day is eaten with enjoyment. While Rosemary enters the house with today's dish she loudly asks; '*tienen hambre?*' meaning 'are you hungry?'. A few of us grin at Rosemary and her ways of being loud yet caring.¹⁰

Often during lunch, a game is played to learn Spanish, it is a children's song in which one tells the first letter of something they see around them and then the rest must guess what it is. As Olive convinces everyone to take a turn, some are confident, and others are shy or feel they are incapable, nevertheless there is a joyous atmosphere. When the plates have been emptied and our stomachs are full, normally Sage makes infusion tea extracted from herbs growing in the area. Depending on the kind of herbs she will use, she asks if you want to relax or have energy. The smarter choice is energy, as the volunteers go back to work at the olive orchard, Rosemary returns to the kitchen, and Sage continues cleaning. Olive and Oak, the owners of Benalí, do whatever they are doing that day, administration in their small office, doing shopping at the village 30 minutes away,

⁹ Guided conversation with Thyme on 13-04-2018.

¹⁰ Fieldnotes on 10-04-2018.

maintenance on one of the ten houses, or weeding the garden that surrounds the hamlet. There is always something to do at Benalí. At the end of the day there is always a small dinner, the Spanish *cena*, accompanied with some wine from the area, which is usually followed by sitting around the fire to keep ourselves warm. One by one we go to bed with a heat jug as companion.

As I keep pondering over Thymes' comment earlier that day, weeks later I ask her what she exactly meant by the mountains needing us. She explains that if the forests in the mountains are not maintained there is more risk for fire hazards, and fire is not good as it kills all the life in the forest, nonhuman and human. When I ask her why we need the mountains, she explains how 'the mountains are the lungs of Valencia. Without the mountains there is no rain, if you don't have mountains you do not have water.'¹¹

This story depicts a day in the life at Benalí in a practical matter and simultaneously one of the ideas behind being at Benalí; 'connecting with nature'¹² through a collaboration between humans and nonhumans as they believe every species has its own unique role in making the earth a liveable place. This chapter provides a contextual introduction concerning Benalí and the inhabitants to understand in which social context this thesis is written and should be read.

2.1 INTRODUCING THE BENALÍANS

Benalí is an old hamlet in the south of Spain, the Valencia province, which is surrounded by mountains and forest. The small village was saved from ruins in 2004 by a Spanish entrepreneur.¹³ Like many other houses and small villages in rural Spain in the 1970's, Benalí was abandoned by the families who used to live there as they moved to surrounding towns and cities because there are more 'services' over there.¹⁴ Since two years the hamlet is owned by a Dutch couple, Olive and Oak, who have the following philosophy for Benalí in mind; 'to promote a healthy, ecological and sustainable way of living'.¹⁵ Their mission is to fulfill this philosophy by bringing Benalí back to live with eco-tourism and an eco-farming project. By inviting volunteers who share this vision to live with them, Olive and Oak can realize the much-needed work on their ecological farming project and eco-tourism by doing maintenance on the houses and the environment.

¹¹ Guided conversation with Thyme on 13-04-2018.

¹² E-mail received from Olive on 09-01-2018.

¹³ 'Our Story', Benalí Rural Tourism, accessed on July 2, 2018. <https://www.benalitourism.com>.

¹⁴ Guided conversation with Thyme on 13-04-2018.

¹⁵ 'Home', Benalí Rural Tourism, accessed on May 14, 2018. <https://www.benalitourism.com>.

During my fieldwork there were four permanent residents living in Benalí, of which two of them are the owners Olive and Oak from the Netherlands. Before they bought Benalí they owned an eco-camping in the area which was not sustainable due to the lack of monetary means even though Oak maintained his job as a data-analyst to fund the camping. Both Olive and Oak had jobs in the Netherlands before coming to Spain to practice a different way of living.

Olive used to be a social worker which represents her warm and hands on character. Many nights she would come over, all three dogs following her, to share a beer and some nuts, her favorite snack. Not for a particular purpose, just to share each other's company. She had slightly hanging eye lids, a goofy laugh, and a gazelle like body and corresponding movements. Although anyone could see that deep down she is an active person, Olive suffered a burn out causing her to take breaks and sometimes not show herself for a whole day. Therefore, her partner Oak took on most of her work at Benalí. Oak was always busy with something, running around with his firm yet fleeting footsteps. When there were guests, Oak would be in the kitchen from 09.00 in the morning till midnight, creating the most detailed and creative dishes while himself only eating a cracker with cheese and tomato. He is a person who keeps his distance at first, but once he gets to know you opens up and embraces you completely. Both Olive and Oak claim to be 'in it' for the silence, for being their own boss, for making people happy, for creating awareness about ecological farming, and for making the most out of life, but definitely not for the money.¹⁶ Olive and Oak would be the ones 'on top of' the hierarchy as they oversee the place in terms of decision making, creating the rules, and who is welcome to live at Benalí.

To be able to create and maintain the eco-farming project they have welcomed Thyme; an agricultural engineering whose skin is flawed by the strong rays of the Spanish sun, and mostly wears hefty working clothes in which her body swims. Thyme lives at Benalí full time and gets paid a small salary which is based on a person who does not have any expenses on housing and food. She is originally from the area, her family owns a farm as well, and before coming to Benalí has lived in another community close by to manage their garden. Thyme would be just 'under' Oak and Olive when it comes to the hierarchy in Benalí. She has the freedom to create the projects in her vision and time schedule, however, the projects itself are defined by Oak and Olive. Thyme often expressed how she has all the freedom to do what she wants in Benalí, even though she is working under a contract, or a boss, which she claimed as undesirable. Thyme regularly mentioned how in Benalí we live like kings and queens, because of the mountains around us, the good food

¹⁶ Fieldnote on 16-04-2018.

we eat, the outdoor work and the company of each other. It shows the distinction between her previous life, where she experienced the environment of the city as negative, eating bad foods, being in the office all day and was surrounded by people who are not 'aware'.¹⁷ The transformation in circumstances seems to outweigh the actual boss, and a certain structure existing in Benalí.

The other 'future' permanent resident is Rosemary who has arrived at the beginning of this year to be the house cook for the touristic season. Rosemary has lived her whole life in Venezuela until seven years ago when she left the country because of political reasons. She loves to cook in a macrobiotic way which fits the philosophy that Olive and Oak present about Benalí due to its ecologically conscious character. The food she prepares is vegetarian, ecologically produced, in accordance to the seasonal supply, and much spoken about by Rosemary herself. As the older lady of the company and being very expressive about her warm feelings towards everyone, Rosemary is seen by many as a maternal figure. Every night before going to bed, she would kiss everyone good night accompanied with a 'love you'. The other older woman is Sage who is part of the Benalí family yet does not reside at Benalí. Being part of the family means that she receives and gives care and interest, joins the communal activities, and is present on a daily basis. Sage teaches yoga at Benalí, cleans the houses, and works in the garden. She is tall, slim, and has a calm and warm appearance that silently moves around the hamlet. Her own fairytale house is twenty minutes away from Benalí by car, which has its own garden, a water well, a windmill for producing energy, chickens, a donkey and two dogs. Both Rosemary and Sage have a certain authority due to their 'permanent' status, and possible because they are older than everyone else. Next to these permanent human residents, there are three dogs, Lenny, Abri and Lola, and two cats, Cor and Chipie whom are all rescued by Olive and Oak from an unlivable situation and are now loved and cared for by the inhabitants. There used to be chickens as well, but they have been killed by a fox who shows her or himself occasionally in the night.

Apart from the permanent residents there are volunteers all year round to work at Benalí and be part of the Benalí family. During my fieldwork there were 14 volunteers, varying from staying there the whole period of three months or for the minimum of two weeks. All the volunteers were from western countries and lived in a city before coming to Benalí. The different countries where everyone was from are Australia, Czech Republic, France, Latvia, The Netherlands, Spain, the U.K., and the United States. The range of age went from 20 to 62 years and there were both females and men. These temporal inhabitants could be described as a group of people who are all escaping where they came from,

¹⁷ Fieldnote on 01-03-2018.

their lives in the city. The reason why they flee this life might be because of their time-consuming office jobs, the surroundings of concrete, traffic and crowds of people and the expectations of 'society' which they do not meet. For most of the inhabitants, the main drive behind these motivations are mental or physical well-being as many of the inhabitants have suffered from different health problems like insomnia, nervous system disorder, depression, and chronic fatigue syndrome which they partly blame on the life they lived in the city. These complaints and accusations about unhealthy city life would be reflected in comments made daily. For example, Luna who suffered from chronic fatigue syndrome called the Australian city where he is from a pathogenic society, a society build for disease; 'We are sitting all day, no sun, we don't live the life we are meant to'.¹⁸

When you are a volunteer the rule is that you work 5 days a week for 5 hours a day, the work can vary from pruning olive trees, to painting the houses, to cooking. In return you live, eat and drink at Benalí. The volunteers, depending on the length of stay and skillset, would be on the 'bottom of the food chain'. Meaning that they must comply with the rules set by Olive and Oak, do not have a final say in the making of decisions and can be send away if they are not compliant.

Altogether, in Benalí one meets a group of people who are looking for a more aware and healthy lifestyle which they believe comes with being outdoors, meeting the silence (the slogan of Benalí), fresh air, doing physical work, eating healthy food and meeting like-minded people. Therefore, all the inhabitants, temporal or permanent, are at a certain crossroads in their lives where they are trying to change the course where they are heading. Either they want to start living differently in their future home outside Benalí with what they are learning in Benalí, they want to create something like Benalí themselves, or they need a break from their lives at home and do not know yet where they are heading. Although the stories of the inhabitants are different in many ways, on an existential level there is a resemblance. One does not feel at home anymore in the life they live, the place they are from, the people who are around them and the activities they are engaged in. In search for a new home where they feel comfortable, they have all come to Benalí where they can negotiate different aspect of their life in terms of their environment, their daily activities and the people around them.

¹⁸ Drawing exercise on 26-02-2018.

2.2 STRUCTURING BENALÍ; ROLES AND RULES

Being that Benalí inhabits a group of more than five people who are not all related through blood or marriage, and who have a common goal or purpose in life which they want to achieve while living and working together in a close geographical proximity, separated from dominant culture, one could describe Benalí as an intentional community (Andelson and Lockyer 2006, 3; Smith 2002 in Ergas 2010). The boundaries of a community are thereby the key element of the forming of a community, considering that these boundaries are demarcated based on certain ideals and values which clarify who is part of the community and at the same time who is not (Brown 2002, 3). As an intentional community with cultural norms and values, Benalí presents itself as an eco-community with an intent toward sustainable and environmental living which can be practiced by using green building techniques like using earthen materials, by situating housing in a green space where their own food supply can be cultivated, avoiding excessive use of resources and fostering community interaction (Gilman 1991 in Ergas 2010).

However, although one could describe Benalí as an intentional eco-community in all sorts of ways, as one of the owners, Oak, always said 'Benalí is first and foremost a business'.¹⁹ Apart from being a community, Benalí is also a place for tourism. As paying guests can eat and sleep at Benalí, Olive and Oak are able to pay for the projects and general expenses like food and electricity as the place is not yet self-sustainable. Without making Benalí successful as an ecotourism business, it cannot survive nor exist. Therefore, although the presented common goal is to live in a healthy, ecological and sustainable way, 'off the grid', and the hamlet of Benalí is geographically closed off from others, it also depends and flourishes on the earnings of money to keep the place 'alive' and therefore needs and partakes in capitalistic society it intends to close themselves of from.

For example, their food supply is not yet coming from their own land as the building of a garden to cultivate organic vegetables has slowed down by decisions concerning a fence to guard the garden from wild boars in the area. The more ecological responsible fence is either very time consuming or expensive, and the affordable ones are not in line with permaculture ideals or esthetic desires. Although these obstructions do not define the intentions of their goals, it does show how Benalí is situated in a network of infrastructures and products which do not comply with their ideals and therefore the reality is that in practice the community needs to make compromises. This might be one of the reasons why many eco-communities fail, as they are always surrounded by an 'unsustainable context, the global capitalist reality' (Baker in Lockyer and Veteto 2013, 296). To

¹⁹ Fieldnotes on conversation with Oak on 01-04-2018.

compromise between the ideal and the realistic, decision making processes are complicated and time consuming as the decision makers need to be realistic and try to maintain a certain imagined ideal at the same time. Therefore, there are structures by which decisions are made and rules are supposed to be followed by the Benalíans.

The decisions made, the decision makers and the rules inhabitants must comply with, show a certain model of social relations. According to Turner (1977) these social relations are in a 'dialectical process' between structures, defining the static, and antistructures, defining the transitioning. The structural one can be compared to states, and the anti-structural corresponds to 'communitas'. Although one would expect Benalí to be comparable to the antistructure, communitas, it also resembles a structured place as there are 'patterned arrangements of role sets, status sets, and status sequences consciously recognized and regularly operative in a given society, and closely bound up with legal and political norms and sanctions' (Siegler 2002, 42). Additionally, a state of liminality, antistructure, cannot exist very long without some sort of structure to stabilize either individuals or communities which results in creating own internal social structures like the Benalí rules, eventually bringing the inhabitants in a different setting but also abiding to new rules and norms (Sardinha 2015).

Because the roles are clearly divided between the ones in charge, Oak, Olive and Thyme, and the ones following, the volunteers, the inhabitants have a different status in a hierarchal order. And if the volunteers do not comply to their role or status which entails the rules that apply for them, the sanction is that one must leave Benalí. This model has two sides, on the one hand it creates a certain feeling of inequality with some inhabitants, excluding them from shaping the community they are part of. For others it creates a very clear situation of different roles within the community. For one woman named Tulip, this hierarchy in decision making resulted in her leaving two weeks after I arrived. She could not cope with Oak's work mentality which one night came to the surface. Oak was cooking for guests with the help of Iris and myself. Even though we would normally only work five hours a day, tonight was different as the work in the kitchen took longer than planned. Tulip did not agree we were working 'over hours' and complained about this to Oak and Olive. However, Iris and myself did not mind at all, and knew that any other day we could work a bit less as compensation. After a few of these disagreements, Tulip left Benalí to create her own self-sustainable place in the area.²⁰

Although Oak and Olive are the owners, final decision makers and the ones in power of Benalí, they do not want to be seen as bosses and as a means of compensation they name

²⁰ Fieldnotes on 07-02-2018.

the community the 'Benalí family'. When Oak would tell something that needed to be done, people would joke with the comment 'alright boss' as everyone knew that he does not like to be called or be seen as a boss. It shows how the actual 'performance' of Oak and his preferred image of himself and role in the community are not congruent, creating a disparity, or paradox of what Benalí ideally would be and how it is experienced.

As the community is called the 'Benalí family', Olive and Oak create a certain idea of an unconditional relationship which is bounded by social norms and values instead of a contract between employer and employee. However, the Benalí family is not unconditional as there is a set of rules which one must comply with to stay at Benalí. These rules are created by Olive and Oak to be able to keep Benalí in line with their philosophy and at the same time get the necessary work done. They share these rules with everyone before coming to Benalí in an e-mail. The following is an example;

'IMPORTANT!!! We are off-the- grid. Electricity and water are rare and extremely expensive in Benalí. Try to take a shower for no longer than 5 minutes and be aware of using water in general. Turn the lights of if you are not in your room. No hairdryers or things that have a high electricity consumption.'²¹

These rules are compatible with the idea of an eco-community being to live with less luxuries, avoiding excessive use of resources, like the use of a hairdryer (Gilman 1991 in Ergas 2010). However, the claim of electricity and water being extremely expensive also points to another motive behind these rules apart from an ecological sustainable perspective, as this rule is preached from a financial perspective. Again, this shows a paradox in ideals of living outside certain societal structures based on capitalistic systems which they want to stay out of while at the same time, they give value to having enough financial resources by emphasizing on the expensiveness of water and electricity. This example represents the dualistic character of Benalí being a community, a family, but at the same time a business creating ambiguous structures. Other rules concern food and drink consumption, no drinking alcohol during working hours, feeding the animals, the working hours and respectful behavior towards the people, animals, and environment. One is not directly reminded of these rules on a daily basis. However, indirectly the rules are present as people comply with the rules and therefore there is a certain structure of social control present which maintains these rules. For example, even though no one has ever mentioned face to face not to drink alcohol during work time, as no one is doing so, there is a social norm which makes it clear not to drink during work hours. Occasionally

²¹ E-mail received from Olive on 09-01-2018.

people would remind each other about turning off the lights or how the recycling system works, which all together develops cultural norms and values in Benalí (Andelson and Lockyer 2006, 3). Everyone knows, as they have been told in the first contact e-mails with Olive, that if they do not comply with certain rules they can be sent away from Benalí. Although these rules seem to restrict the inhabitants in their freedom of certain societal structures, and creates unequal power positions, it seems to be accepted as the rules are imagined to be made from an ideological perspective and are predefined before coming to Benalí.

Therefore, Benalí has multiple sides, on the one hand it could be seen as an intentional community which is defined by shared values concerning ecological and sustainable living. On the other hand, it is a business of eco-tourism which is driven by financial prosperousness. This effects the relations between the inhabitants, switching from community and family like structures with less hierarchy, to an unsigned contract between employer and employee with more static and strict structures. As Turner remarks about these two models of social relations, the model of *communitas* is an intermediate phase to help with the renegotiation of normality's in structures and therefore this causes a 'periodical reclassification of reality and man's [and woman's] relationship to society, nature and culture' (Turner 1969, 128). This brings us back to the main motives of the inhabitants to live at Benalí, to negotiate the normality's they faced in their lives, and thereby change the course of their lives. They do this by rediscovering their relationship to their environment, the people around them and their daily activities. Therefore, there should be a shift in focus on the norms and values presented by Benalí as an eco-community towards an eventually more distinctive project of the Benalí inhabitants, being to renegotiate their reality and relationship to society, nature and culture (Turner 1969, 128). This shift in focus allows to see the meaning that the inhabitants give to Benalí, and subsequently, how their presence in Benalí is shaping their perception of the self, social reality, and feelings of belonging.

2.3 BENALÍ; A PLACE OF NEGOTIATION

The meaning of a place is created by those who spend time in that place, who experience the sights, sound and smells, and these experiences depend on the activities the inhabitants are engaged in (Ingold 2000). Subsequently, 'through being inhabited [...] the world becomes a meaningful environment for people' (Ingold 2000, 173). In the case of Benalí, the place is inhabited and experienced by people who have not just lived their lives solely in Benalí. The lives of the Benalí inhabitants are not lived in this one place but

‘through, around, to and from them, from and to places elsewhere’ (Ingold 2011, 148). All of them have travelled a long way before coming to Benalí, in time and place, which has impacted their lives and their reality of it. And as their journey conditions the knowledge of place (Ingold 2011, 152), the meaning of Benalí created by its inhabitants unfolds along the different paths of the inhabitants. Following this path of logic, Benalí is a meeting point where their paths become intertwined creating a knot which density depends on the number of lifelines intertwined (Ingold 2011).

The lifepaths of the inhabitants all have one thing in common; a negative experience of their previous lives leading to the current crossroads they are on. Terran, who is originally from Romania and has been working as a mechanical engineer in the United Kingdom for the past four years, spoke about his family and friends who still live in Romania who do not understand his decision to quit his job and leave the United Kingdom. For them, Terran had a good life; a well-paid job and a permanent contract. During his time in Benalí he would often do a skype call with his brother, in which he would always hear how he is not understood and his family thinks he is crazy for letting his job in the U.K. go in exchange for working on the land for nothing in terms of a salary. For Terran the situation was completely different. He used to say, why would anyone want to work in an office, in a crowded city, when you can live here and do volunteer work in exchange for everything one needs.²² Terran and his brother, who grew up in the same place but eventually trotted different paths, had a different meaning of Benalí as a place, showing how the meaning of a place depends on the experiences and activities of a person in that place, and the previous experiences and activities of their past which inform these experiences and activities.

His story demonstrates how the meaning of Benalí is determined by being on a crossroads as a project of the inhabitants to seek another lifestyle, to distance themselves from larger society on a geographical and social level which enables them to negotiate what is normal (Turner 1969), and to be around people who are on the same path. Therefore, the meaning of Benalí is not necessarily about the natural environment, the activities, or the people, “but that the particular place is set apart from and opposed to other places” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, 13). Thereby, the inhabitants place themselves in a less stable and predictable, yet temporary environment in which the constraints of their ordinary lives are removed, enabling the inhabitants to negotiate the rules and regulations of their normal life (Kamau 2002, 19).

²² Field note on 23-03-2018.

Thereby, Benalí is not an end stadium where one can live outside societal structures which, in the end, might not even be the most relevant for the inhabitants. It might be more valuable to them as a temporary 'halfway house' where the inhabitants can renegotiate old and new-found perspectives about how to give their life shape by bringing themselves in a different setting where normalities become abnormal (Brown 2002, 8/9). Benalí therefore has the meaning and serves as a 'liberation from the normative constraints', bringing the inhabitants in a liminal stage from which they can restructure their life, their identity and routines (Siegler 2002, 42). In the following chapter, this liminal activity of being an inhabitant of Benalí and negotiating life, is studied through motivations to move away from their former lives, and their image of the ideal future which they are moving towards. These 'push and pull' factors fit the spectrum of ideals and motivations of so called life-style migrants, a concept by which the project of renegotiating one's life in a new setting is studied in terms of environment, daily activities and people (Benson and O'Reilly 2009).

3. PATHS LEADING TO BENALÍ

‘In looking for a deep, fulfilled authentic identity in life, migration helps to provide material, aided by what one seeks out in the new setting and what one finds; this while never forgetting that one has a past elsewhere, also brought along on the journey’

– João Sardinha, *Idyllic Seekers and Liminal Beings*, 2015.

Benalí is presented as an eco-community with certain ideals about ways of living, separate from larger society where like-minded people gather. However, it seems that the project of moving to and being in Benalí is less about realizing particular ideals concerning ecological living, and more about imaginatively placing oneself outside of certain structures of their former life which they want to negotiate. The inhabitants have intentionally left certain structures, yet have not found new structures they want to live by. Benalí therefore serves as a ‘liberation from the normative constraints’, bringing the inhabitants in a liminal stage from which they can restructure their life, their identity and routines (Siegler 2002, 42). However, this liminal stage is not a clear-cut phase, there are traces of the previous and subsequent stages informing the liminal stage (Turner 1977, 68). Thus, apart from having motivations towards something one longs for on the road ahead, the past seems to have a big role in informing the inhabitants in their choices and creating this imagination of a longed-for future, as the journey of the inhabitants conditions the knowledge of a place (Ingold 2011, 152). Therefore, the conception of their previous life continually informs and shapes the perceptions of living in Benalí or any other future home, making the past and imagined future intertwined with the project of negotiation one’s life. Subsequently, to understand this negotiation, this chapter dissects the two different stages; from what do the inhabitants move away and where do they move to?

For instance Thyme; after struggling for 15 years to find her way in life, Thyme describes arriving in another dimension at Benalí. For her the energy of the place is different. Lovingly she declares there is forest all around her, silence, and ‘when there is silence you have very good energy’, fresh air, a magic energy of the mountains. The houses are comfortable, the owners give you freedom to do what you want, the people who live here have another kind of awareness, one can do yoga and meditation, the food is good, and

you are never alone because you are in a community.²³ Thyme's description of Benalí reflects a life she aspires; the forest, silence and mountains around her, having freedom, being with like-minded people, doing certain activities, and eating good food. At the same time, these aspirations are informed by the experiences of her previous life which can be read between the lines. Being that she is moving away from a life without freedom to do what she wants, living in a crowded city, sitting in an office, eating bad foods, and being surrounded by people who do not have the same awareness as her.

The project of searching for a better life is conceptualized as the practice of lifestyle migration (Benson and O'Reilly 2009, King 2002). This involves 'the relocation of people within the developed world searching for a better way of life' (Benson and O'Reilly 2009) which is mostly done by relatively affluent people who move part, - or full-time to a place which for them signifies a better quality of life in which they renegotiate 'work-life balance, quality of life, and freedom from prior constraints' (Benson and O'Reilly 2009, 209). The renegotiation of these aspects in their life, is seen as "an ongoing learning process which only begins at the point of arrival and, in reality, has no end." (Kershen in O'Reilly and Benson 2016, ix-x). When it comes to lifestyle migration of the Benalíans, one can recognize two different stages which shape this chapter. The escaping of a previous life, and the search for 'a simpler and authentic rural life in which he/she can sense a community spirit and experience a life project in union with the natural environment' also called the rural idyll (Gaspar 2015, 16).

3.1 MOVING AWAY

By delineating the inhabitants' lives before Benalí, the route leading them to Benalí, it becomes clear which elements from this life route have informed them to move away and come to Benalí. It shows how there is a certain way of escaping involved when one comes to live in Benalí; they are escaping previous responsibilities and obligations while temporarily 'living outside of societal structures' (Sardinha 2015, Brown 2002). Like other ethnographies dealing with different types of lifestyle migration have shown how the renegotiation of work-life balance, quality of life, and freedom is mostly informed by narratives of escaping their former lives (Benson and O'Reilly 2009), this proves to be the case for the inhabitants in Benalí.

The concept of escapism comes from the discipline of psychology, where it is used, for example, to study people engaging in video games, where escapism is seen as an

²³ Recorded conversation with Thyme on 13-04-2018.

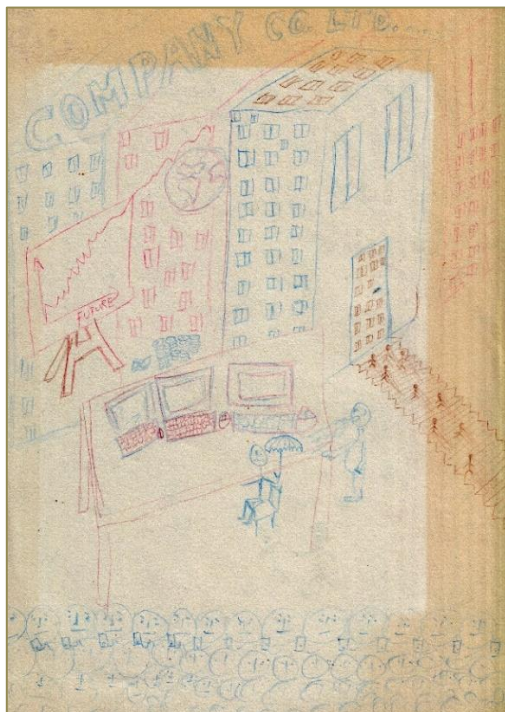
avoiding strategy to escape real-life problems by practicing video games (Li, Liao and Khoo 2011). A more literal way of escaping is seen in tourism, for example when tourists escape to so called holistic holidays as 'the postmodern era of global capitalism has, in many Western developed countries, created a feeling of existential angst or alienation amongst its citizens' (Smith 2015, 103). These holistic holidays provide the tourists a form of escapism by reconciling body, mind and spirit which they are not able to do at home (Smith 2015). The act of escaping is one of the most listed motives in tourism research, where the tourist is offered a place where they can escape from their daily life and routine (Prentice 2004 in Oh, Fiore and Jeoung 2007). Different reasons can be given such as the search for a meaningful life elsewhere, healthy functioning through a time-out, and a more extensive one agreed by Boorstin (1964) and MacCannel (1973) that people live an inauthentic and alienated life and subsequently during travels look for a more authentic and satisfying life (Oh, Fiore and Jeoung 2007). In the research of Oh, Fiore, and Jeoung (2007) three different ways of escaping are recognized; the tourist who escapes as she/he wants to get away from something at home. Secondly, the tourist whose escape is destination driven where they want to immerse themselves in that specific place. And third, the tourists who want to escape their daily life by visiting a place where they can get involved in specific activities, giving them the possibility of partaking a different identity.

Like tourists, the inhabitants want to escape from their daily life and routines which they do by the three different ways that Oh, Fiore and Jeoung (2007) describe; getting away from home, immersing themselves in a different place, and getting involved in different activities. However, the daily life and routine that the Benalí inhabitants escape from is more permanent, opposite to the temporary character of tourism, as the inhabitants quit their job and give up their house back home. Benson and O'Reilly (2016, 3) mention escaping in their book concerning lifestyle migration as the following: "lifestyle migration is about escape, escape from somewhere and something, while simultaneously an escape to self-fulfillment and a new life – a recreation, restoration or rediscovery of oneself, of personal potential or of one's 'true' desires". The 'somewhere and something' that the inhabitants have expressed to be escaping from, and are subsequently negotiated while in Benalí, can be divided in three different categories; their environment, daily practices and the people around them.

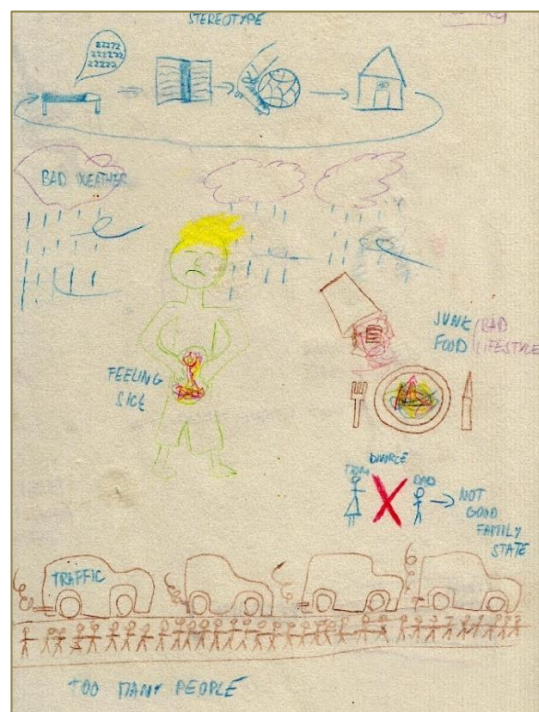
3.1.1 ENVIRONMENT

Drawings of the inhabitants' life before and after coming to Benalí help to understand their experiences of the environment of which two are depicted below. What was outstanding in these drawing was the representation of high buildings, crowds of people,

busy traffic and bad weather symbolizing their experiences of the cities they used to live in. The effects of these characteristics of an urban environment on the inhabitants can be explained as that the city was overwhelming; 'I feel small in a big world, insignificant', 'it pushes me down', 'I cannot move', 'people rushing just stresses me out'.²⁴ The drawing of Terran below, depicts his life which he associates to a world where people's only goal in life is to work for a capitalistic society which solely celebrates growth. The bottom of the drawing represents people who are not aware of their environment, of the people around them and the activities they are doing. They are always rushing to work, depicted on the stairs on the right, to be inside an office all day and be yelled at by their boss. This relates to feelings of alienation in the postmodern era of global capitalism that Smith (2015) mentions, being the 'non-natural' world of cities which the inhabitants want to escape, in return for a rural environment as the romanticized opposite of this world (Tsing 2015, 5). Terran wants to escape the world of 'Company co Ltd.'. The drawing of Fennel also represents his negative feelings towards the environment of his previous life which are partly caused by bad weather conditions. The other inhabitants would share the importance of weather on one's quality of life, the bad weather made them feel less mobile; 'you just want to be stuck inside'. However, if there is good weather you cannot enjoy it as there is 'no sun in the office'.²⁵ Either way, the environment of a city is not compatible to experience good weather.



Drawing by Terran on 26-02-2018



Drawing by Fennel on 26-02-2018

²⁴ Quotes during drawing exercise on 26-02-2018.

²⁵ Quotes during drawing exercise on 26-02-2018.

3.1.2 DAILY PRACTICES

Apart from the environment, the inhabitants also expressed motivations for escaping to Benalí concerning their daily practices. Many of the inhabitants experienced anxiety, stress, depression, insomnia and physical burdens due to their working life. This relates to what is often seen in lifestyle migration; lifestyle migrants leave their old lives at a pivotal moment, mostly because of their health, which brings them at a crossroads in which they reconsider possibilities of where they are going (Sardinha 2015, 36). In this reconsideration, an important factor for the inhabitants is their work; 'work was draining my energy'.²⁶ In Thyme's drawing below, the chains around her body show how working behind a desk made her feel stuck and without freedom. The tears coming from her closed eyes show how she was depressed in that period. Winter has very explicitly drawn the effects of her study and work, she was exhausted, anxious, stressed, sleepless, and suffered from allergies, eczema and asthma.



Part of drawing by Thyme on 26-02-2018



Part of drawing by Winter on 26-02-2018

Both Thyme and Winter, but also other inhabitants, blamed problems with their mental and physical health on being inside in the office, sitting behind a desk, and getting no physical exercise and fresh air. Also, their daily routine made them feel stuck, as they did not have time for other things besides work or a study, leading to a missing sense of purpose. One of the inhabitants Luna called the city where he is from a pathogenic society which is a society build for disease; 'We are sitting all day, no sun, we don't live the life

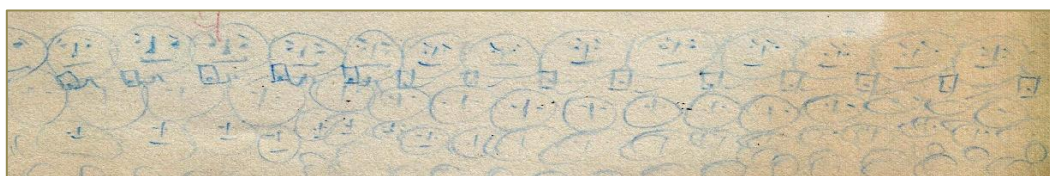
²⁶ Quotes during drawing exercise on 26-02-2018.

we are meant to'. He claimed that sitting in an office all day is physically not good for the human body as it is not made for sitting and people need the day light because it provides vitamin D and a good rhythm for sleeping.²⁷ By escaping from their daily routines, the inhabitants are searching for a healthier life, and a more meaningful one which provides them with more activities than just work (Oh, Fiore, and Jeoung 2007).

Another practice the inhabitants are escaping from is the eating of unhealthy foods. Some inhabitants would complain to not find the time to prepare a healthy meal every day in their previous lives, others simply did not have the knowledge or were not accustomed to cook in a healthy way which was why they were eating 'bad food'. '[I am] expected to work certain hours so it's difficult to eat healthy, [it is] more effort'.²⁸ They linked this pattern of eating to city live, to the negative aspects of not having time, the offer of cheap fast food on every street corner, and individualism, as everyone cooks and eats by themselves which brings us to motivations concerning the people one is surrounded with.

3.1.3 PEOPLE AND COMMUNITY

The Benalí inhabitants expressed that 'normal' society lacks a sense of collectivity, taking care of each other, making them feel disconnected to people around them. In their former life they experienced a certain individualism where a lot of people are cramped up together, but they are not really together, they are not communicating with each other, they do not get to know each other.²⁹ The drawing below depicts this very well as a lot of faces are close to each other, but they do not interact with each other and have an angry or sad expression. Another example is that no one cooks for each other or eats together, which not only leads to eating unhealthy food but also to a lonely existence as the inhabitants would come home from work, eat dinner alone, go to sleep, and return to work by themselves the next day. The two inhabitants who did not experience to miss a sense of collectivity, expressed to feel a sense of community back home as they lived in a shared house with others where everyone had a function.



Drawing of Terran on 26-02-2018.

²⁷ Quotes during drawing exercise on 26-02-2018.

²⁸ Quotes during drawing exercise on 26-02-2018.

²⁹ Drawing exercise on 26-02-2018.

Another reason why the inhabitants did not feel connected to the people around them was because they could not meet up to certain expectations or standards of these people, caused by having different norms, values and ideals. In the drawing below Iris depicts her own state by the use of a 'smiley' which is not smiling but looks sad. Iris, a 35-year-old female, would always feel like she disappointed people back home as she could not live up to their expectations because she is not married and has no children. Therefore, she felt a certain pressure to live her life in a different way to please family, friends and colleagues. All the inhabitants expressed how they would experience obligations to family and friends as a pressure and that they 'can't keep everyone happy' and that the people they are surrounded by in their previous lives would be 'less open minded', have a different consciousness and have different ideals in terms of owning stuff, their image and 'being on top of everything'.³⁰



Drawing of Iris on 26-02-2018

Thyme shares this feeling of disconnection to the people around her because of having other norm, values and ideals. She is Spanish and is disappointed by the non-awareness of Spanish people in general concerning environmental problems like climate change. This makes it difficult for her to feel comfortable being around them as she does not share a common goal in life which has become to play a big role in her life. In her previous life in the city of Valencia she did not feel like everyone else, 'I feel extraterrestre'.^{31 32}

These experiences concerning the inhabitants' environment, daily practices and people around them, show what they are escaping from; a life in which they feel alienated by capitalistic society, in which the work-life ratio is out of balance. An unhealthy state in terms of mental and physical health caused by their environment, their working conditions, eating habits and a stressful life. And a disconnectedness towards the people around them, due to busy work schedules, individualistic mind settings, and having

³⁰ Quotes during drawing exercise on 26-02-2018.

³¹ Extraterrestre is the Spanish word for extraterrestrial.

³² Thyme during drawing exercise on 26-02-2018.

different ideals in life. Escaping in this case is a way of dealing with negative experiences by removing oneself from one place and situation, also a form of alienation, and moving to a new place. In this new place, Benalí, they seek to practice another lifestyle which provides them 'freedom from prior constraints' and thereby the possibility to renegotiate a better 'work-life balance [and] quality of life' (Benson and O'Reilly 2009, 209).

3.2 MOVING TO BENALÍ

How the inhabitants judge what is a better work-life balance and quality of life, where they are moving towards, is thereby informed by what they are trying to escape from, being some sort of antithesis of their former life. In literature concerning lifestyle migration, the stories reflect different drives, from more relaxed and simpler lives, cheaper housing and lower cost of living, appeal of an 'exotic' culture, to the quest of a better climate and improved health (Gaspar 2015, 14). To be more specific towards this particular ethnography, Benson and O'Reilly (2009) formulated a type of lifestyle migration called the rural idyll in which the migrant 'is driven by the search for a simpler and authentic rural life in which he/she can sense a community spirit and experience a life project in union with the natural environment' (Gaspar 2015, 16). These aspirations connect to the previously mentioned negative experiences from which the inhabitants are moving away. Living 'a simpler and authentic rural life' responds to a disbalance between work and life and a corresponding unhealthy state. 'Sensing a community spirit' towards their disconnectedness to people, and the 'life project in union with the natural environment' to feelings of alienation and stressful city surroundings. Therefore, the migration of the Benalí inhabitants can be conceptualized under the discourse of the rural idyll, also mentioned as counter-urbanization, relating to the movement of people from urban to rural areas motivated by escaping from the 'rat-race' (Gaspar 2015). This migration towards rural areas is thereby idealized as alternative living with more peace and relaxation, closer community, less pollution and stress, and a safe environment (Gaspar 2015).

While the inhabitants are escaping from their old life, they also specifically came to Benalí due to its environment, its philosophy, the corresponding activities and the inhabitants. To what extent is this desire for the specific place of Benalí informed by the experiences of their former life? And how does this relate to the negotiation of one's life? Meaning, how does the relationship one has to certain ideas surrounding the environment, daily practices, and people and community change by being in Benalí? To present the

motivations of the inhabitants to move to Benalí, the same three categories are used for analyses; the environment, daily practices, and the people around them.

3.2.1 ENVIRONMENT

When I asked the inhabitants to draw their lives after coming to Benalí, something remarkable came up in their drawings. Almost all the drawings concerning Benalí depicted sunny weather, the opposite of their experience of the weather back home. However, the weather was not that sunny in this period, and everyone was cold most of the time because there was no central heating in the houses and the wind in the mountains was strong and cold. The inhabitants still experienced Benalí to be sunny, as shown in two exemplary drawings of Fennel and Iris below.



Drawing of Fennel on 26-02-2018

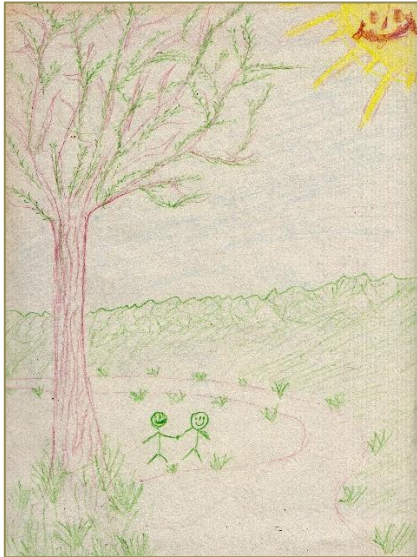


Drawing of Iris on 26-02-2018

In general, the drawings after coming to Benalí were a lot more colorful than the ones of their life before Benalí, showing the difference between their ideas of the city being grey and cloudy. And in Benalí, as a natural environment, the surroundings have color and it is sunny. This shows how the image of Benalí is not completely informed by reality, but by imaginations how it should look like, what they expect it to be, or what they want it to be; the opposite of their previous life. This corresponds to the idea that imagined communities who live in a place less defined by a particular cultural or ethnic distinction, increasingly become attached to imagined places (Anderson 2016).

The drawing of Terran below shows how he sees his life in Benalí to be quite simple as it merely depicts a tree, a sun, a path in a field, and two people. Also, Thyme's drawing consists of trees, a garden, a river, a snail, a ladybug and a smiley face which is supposed to represent herself. Their representations of Benalí thereby correspond to the project of lifestyle migrants towards a 'simpler and authentic life' in 'union with the natural environment' (Gaspar 2015, 16). This simpler rural life without all the modern-day developments, as the inhabitants experience it, is how nature provides quality of life for them. As Luna said; 'Everything is how it is supposed to be, simple, like before technology

150 years ago'.³³ It shows how a rural environment like Benalí is seen as an antithesis to an urban environment, where the rural is still untouched by what the urban represents; the postmodern era of global capitalism which creates feelings of alienation (Smith 2015). Yet again, this imagination of Benalí as a place does not correspond to reality. For example, all the inhabitants brought technological devices in the shape of smartphones, tablets and laptops, reversing the whole point of everything being 'simple, like before technology 150 years ago'.



Drawing by Terran on 26-02-2018



Drawing by Thyme on 26-02-2018

3.2.2 DAILY PRACTICES

Simultaneously, the inhabitants express that the work at Benalí is the opposite of their previous work environments. In Benalí they feel less pressure, there is no boss who is saying 'you have to this and that'³⁴ and there is less need to think about future plans or deadlines as the work is done day by day. Also, the idea of being less bounded to a work place by a contract is experienced in a positive way 'it's the first time I enjoy my work, I don't have a contract'.³⁵ The positive character of the work at Benalí, feeling less pressure, is thereby shaped and reinforced by the negative aspects they experienced in their former workplace. Again, this experience is not in accordance to the reality as they do have a boss, and in a way, there is a contract between the owners, Oak and Olive, and the other inhabitants as they have rules and regulations to which both must comply.

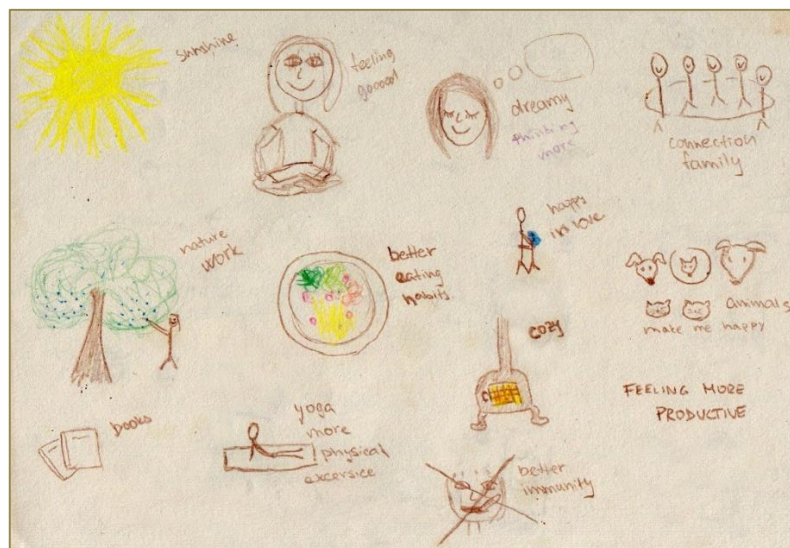
³³ Quote during drawing exercise on 26-02-2018.

³⁴ Quote during drawing exercise on 26-02-2018.

³⁵ Quote during drawing exercise on 26-02-2018.

The following drawing of Winter presents several activities she partakes in, working in nature, reading books, doing physical exercise like yoga, eating healthy food and 'thinking more'. She represents herself as 'feeling goood', more productive, and she has a 'better immunity'. Compared to the drawing of her life before Benalí, Winter seems to feel a lot better and healthier. However, this does not particularly have to do with the fact that she is practicing different work, in fact, Winter would be one of the people who found it quite hard to work five hours a day in the olive orchard. And when it would rain, all the inhabitants would happily stay inside and not complete their work that day.

More so, it has to do with escaping certain daily routines which create comfortable conditions in Benalí. Often the inhabitants would mention how back home they did not have the time, resources or knowledge to cook healthy food. Other daily routines which the inhabitants experienced negatively would be transport, or grocery shopping. In Benalí, this is all taken care of by Olive and Oak, giving the inhabitants a certain freedom from these daily routines. At the same time, they receive the possibility to make a daily routine out of desired practices, like eating healthy food and getting physical exercise. In this time-out of their daily routines, the inhabitants can regain their health (Oh, Fiore and Jeoung 2007) as almost all the inhabitants had problems with their health before coming to Benalí, either mentally or physically, and claim to feel better in Benalí.



Drawing by Winter on 26-02-2018

3.2.3 PEOPLE AND COMMUNITY

The eating of healthy food is not just about the actual health benefits of the dishes but also about the activity of cooking for each other and taking the time to eat together. The preference of the inhabitants for a community setting corresponds to the 'rural idyll', in which the migrant wants to 'sense a community spirit' (Gaspar 2015, 16). The cooking and

eating together in a community setting enabled them to create more personal relationships and it made them feel to be part of a group. Thyme would mention how a community can be seen as a working body, where everyone has their own personal abilities which all together makes a functioning whole.³⁶ This functioning of the group as one, being part of this group and creating more personal relationships, relates to the inhabitants' feelings of being alone in an individual society. In Benalí, they feel more included as they experience to be around likeminded people, and thereby are not surrounded by people back home who they differ from in terms of life choices and expectations. When the inhabitants would explain their experience of being surrounded by likeminded people, their stories were based on their experience of being around people who are not likeminded back home.

Thyme would repeatedly mention how Benalí to her is 'a different country' within Spain.³⁷ As previously mentioned, she has been disappointed time and time again in the Spanish people as they do not have the same 'awareness' when it comes to the finiteness of the planet. In Benalí, Thyme feels to be surrounded by people who do share certain goals and ideals, but more importantly, do not exclaim her to be 'extraterrestre'. Therefore, the reason why Benalí feels like a different country is because of the people living there who make her experience the place in a different way. By comparing Benalí to Spain, Thyme provides a contrast which creates the meaning of being surrounded by likeminded people. As "community" is never simply the recognition of cultural similarity or social contiguity but a categorical identity that is premised on various forms of exclusion and constructions of otherness. [...] at issue is not simply that one is located in a certain place but that the particular place is set apart from and opposed to other places' (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, 13). Therefore, in Benalí the inhabitants find a place where they are not the 'other', as they share certain ideals but more importantly are all placing themselves in a new environment which is imagined to be opposed to their former life.

3.3 IMAGINING A CONTRAST

The experiences concerning the inhabitants' environment, daily practices and people around them of their previous lives show that they are escaping from a life characterized by a capitalistic society. The Benalíans feel that their work-life ratio is out of balance and that there is a disconnectedness between people causing a stressful life, bad eating habits, feelings of loneliness, and an unhealthy state of their minds and

³⁶ Fieldnotes on 21-02-2018.

³⁷ Fieldnotes on 12-02-2018.

bodies. By removing themselves from one place and situation, and moving to Benalí, they seek to practice another lifestyle which provides them 'freedom from prior constraints' and thereby the possibility to renegotiate a better 'work-life balance [and] quality of life' (Benson and O'Reilly 2009, 209). To be more specific, Benalíans' aspirations to move towards Benalí seen as a 'rural idyll' correspond to these negative experiences. As the disbalance between work and life corresponds to living 'a simpler and authentic rural life', their disconnectedness towards people to 'Sensing a community spirit', and their feelings of alienation and stressful city surrounding is answered by desiring a 'life project in union with the natural environment'.

However, the ascribed meaning of Benalí is not completely informed by reality but more so by the inhabitants' imaginations which corresponds to the idea that imagined communities who live in a place less defined by a cultural or ethnic distinction, increasingly become attached to imagined places (Anderson 2016). The inhabitants choose Benalí because certain aspects are imagined to be an antithesis of their previous lives. Therefore, Benalí functions as an 'antistructure', serving as 'a liberation from the normative constraints of structure because it relieves the contradictions that are inherent in structure and induces individuals to think about cultural experiences' (Siegler 2002, 42). This liminal phase the inhabitants place themselves in, provides the right surrounding to negotiate their life as the normalized structures are being deconstructed giving the inhabitants a clear view on how they want to restructure their lives. During this process of negotiating their way of live, 'their identity begins to shift, redefined by space and place' (Renfro-Sargent 2002, 91). Therefore, to understand this shift in identity, the following chapter asks the question; how do the inhabitants relate themselves to the environment, to activities, to each other, and how is this intertwined with their sense of self?

4. EXPERIENCING BENALÍ; TRANSFORMING RELATIONSHIPS

‘As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production.’

- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels ³⁸

Even though in reality Benalí might not differ so much in terms of roles and rules from societal structures, it does provide the inhabitants a place which is experienced to be the opposite of their previous lives. By being an anti-structure, Benalí serves as a place where they can (re)negotiate the way one lives her or his life. By deconstructing normalized structures, or the ‘uninteresting’ (Turner 1977, 68), like living in a city and working in an office, the inhabitants arrive in a liminal state which provides a fairly clean slate, ready to be redrawn, as ‘individuals lose their old statuses and identities’ (Kamau 2002, 19).

In this process of renegotiating ones’ life in Benalí, the inhabitants’ ‘identity begins to shift, redefined by space and place’ (Renfro-Sargent 2002, 91). In this case, identity is seen as a reflexive project of becoming, practiced in day-to-day life, in relation and differentiation to others which continually shapes ourselves and others (Jenkins 2014, Giddens 1991). Giddens thereby claims that ones’ lifestyle choice is a ‘material form to a particular narrative of self-identity’ (Giddens 1991, 81) meaning that the act of moving to Benalí, a rural idyll, plays an important role in the ‘constitution of self-identity’ (Giddens 1991, 5). Therefore, this chapter elaborates on two elements that play a role in migration towards a ‘rural idyll’ which captures the act of the Benalí inhabitants in their search for a ‘simpler and authentic rural life in which he/she can sense a community spirit and experience a life project in union with the natural environment’ (Gaspar 2015, 16).

The two variables that are problematized in their entanglement with self-identity are ‘experiencing a life project in union with the natural environment’ and ‘sensing a community spirit’. To what extent are these variables of the rural idyll lifestyle involved in their sense of self? To give an outline, the following paragraph explores human-environment relationships according to the work of Ingold (2000, 2011) and Tsing (2015) which gives clarity into the ways inhabitants relate to nature and how this is entangled with their sense of self. The second paragraph focuses on how the desire to ‘sense a

³⁸ From the book ‘The German Ideology’, 1977, edited by C. J. Arthur.

community spirit' is part of the fulfillment of self-identity. According to Goffman (1959) this can be metaphorically seen as a dialectic process where a performer, the inhabitant, presents a certain impression towards an audience, the community. The success of this performance of the self, depends on the social establishment where the performance takes place according to Goffman (1959). In this case the inhabitants have changed their social establishment, and thereby the impact of their performance relating to their sense of self.

4.1 RELATING TO NATURE; A LIFE PROJECT IN UNION WITH THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

'When I am in nature, I'm immediately happy'.³⁹ In the many conversations that took place between the inhabitants about life and what one wants in this life, Thyme would refer to nature as one of the pillars that held her sanity and health up, her happiness. Whenever she would talk about her relationship to nature it was so convincing, one would almost forget to ask her to explain her relationship with nature, why does she feel so happy when she is 'in' nature? In the last week of this fieldwork I asked Thyme, can you explain your relationship with nature? After elaborating on the question, she looked a bit confused, maybe even disappointed, how could I not know, or rather feel this after spending this time together. She responded that she cannot describe this, 'it's like something religious'.⁴⁰ All the inhabitants of Benalí expressed to have a positive relationship to the natural environment. However, what this relationship exactly is, or why it is positive, seems difficult to explain in words. As Thyme would explain this relationship as something she cannot describe and subsequently label it as something religious, most of the time the inhabitants, including Thyme, would instead refer to the negative relationship they had with the 'non-natural' environment of the city characterized by noisy, crowded places, being inside, bad weather, concrete and greyness.

This story demonstrates yet again how experiences from the inhabitants' previous lives inform their future aspirations. Apart from that, it shows how human-environment relationships are difficult to capture in words for the inhabitants, it seems intangible and elusive. Nonetheless, for Thyme this relationship is fundamental for her to feel connected to a place, to belong, which she was not able to feel in the city. According to theories of Descola (2014), Ingold (2000, 2011) and Tsing (2015), the following paragraph frames possible human-environment relationships to subsequently analyse how the relationship

³⁹ Quote of Thyme during drawing exercise on 26-02-2018.

⁴⁰ Guided conversation with Thyme on 13-04-2018.

with nature is described and practiced by the Benalí inhabitants. Subsequently, the last paragraph uses this insight to understand how this relationship between the inhabitants and their environment gives meaning to a place and sense of self, and therefore plays an important part in the continuous negotiation of where ones' life seems to have more quality, may that be in the rural idyll or not (Benson and O'Reilly 2009).

4.1.1 THEORIZING THE INTANGIBLE; HUMAN-ENVIRONMENT RELATIONSHIPS

Philippe Descola (2014) offers four different forms of how humans relate themselves to nature which are found across different parts in the world; animism, totemism, analogism and naturalism. These different framings are founded on the idea that elements of the lived world receive ascribed identities according to similar or dissimilar qualities, in which lived worlds are arranged according to the distinction between physical and mental, or interior, states (Descola 2014). By using this universal grid humans are making up differences and similarities between themselves and nonhumans. Resulting are these four different forms of ontologies; animism, totemism, analogism, and naturalism (Descola 2014). The mode of identification which would be characteristic for Western ontology is naturalism where nature, the materiality, is seen as one and culture, the interior, appears in multiple ways. It is "predicated upon a discontinuity of interiorities and a material continuity" (Descola 2014, 277). Humans are distinguished from nonhumans because of this discontinuity of interiorities, being our mind, soul, a moral conscience. This is not just seen when humans distinguish themselves from nonhumans, but also between humans by implying we have different cultures, previously called 'volksgeist' or 'genie d'un peuple'.

In a conversation with Thyme, Winter and Terran about humans and nature and to which degree humans and nature are the same, all three of them respond by saying that humans are part of nature.⁴¹ Terran questions how it could be otherwise, 'are we brought on this planet from somewhere else?'.⁴² I explain the concept of naturalism, how humans distinguish themselves from non-humans, from nature, and how Descola (2014) sees this as a sign that humans privilege themselves and their mode of being over nonhumans by focusing on supposed interior differences instead of material similarities. 'We are just another species, same as the ants'⁴³ says Thyme slightly agitated, reflecting how she feels that humans are not any better than other species, how big or small they may be. All three of them agree how most humans do see themselves 'above' nature on which Winter comments that this view leads to domination of humans over nature which is how humans progress. 'The way the world is right now [where humans are profiting from other species]

⁴¹ Informal conversation with Thyme, Winter and Terran on 22-02-2018.

⁴² Informal conversation with Thyme, Winter and Terran on 22-02-2018.

⁴³ Informal conversation with Thyme, Winter and Terran on 22-02-2018.

there should be a lot of people who think that humans are meant to be dominating nature'.⁴⁴ This conversation reflects how the Benalí inhabitants think about capitalistic societies; they ruin our world, resulting in climate change, environmental damages, and unequal distribution of wealth.

These feelings towards capitalistic systems resonate to the activities and surroundings of the previous lives of the inhabitants, resembling certain characteristics of a neoliberal society, as David Harvey (2005, 3) mentions; "The process of neoliberalization has [...] entailed much 'creative destruction', not only of prior institutional frameworks and powers (even challenging traditional forms of state sovereignty) but also of divisions of labor, social relations, welfare provisions, technological mixes, ways of life and thought, reproductive activities, attachments to the land and habits of the heart". As market exchange has become an ethic in itself which guides human action, this subsequently created a naturalized thought that the social good is an equivalent to 'maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions' which 'seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market' (Harvey 2005, 3). By calling the city where he is from a pathogenic society, Luna affirms this idea that humans are used to serve the market; 'We are sitting all day, no sun, we don't live the life we are meant to'.⁴⁵ The life that Luna believes he is meant to live responds to some of the aspects that Harvey (2005) mentions like divisions of labor, social relations, technological mixes, ways of life, and attachments to the land. In fact, all the inhabitants experienced the previous environment they lived in and the attached activities as being unhealthy for them, mentally or physically, which all relate to these aspects; working too much, being behind a computer, the cities being too crowded, experiencing loneliness in an individualistic society, pressure and obligations towards family and friends, not having the same ideals as your fellow citizens, and not being in contact with nature.⁴⁶

While the above mentioned negative experiences would be characteristic to a modern neoliberal society, where the market defines your lifestyle, nature is often viewed to be a 'romantic space of anti-modernity' (Tsing 2015, 5). Therefore, Benalí is given meaning by the idea of being able to close oneself off from neoliberal, or capitalistic societies, as it is in the middle of the mountains, and presents its philosophy 'to promote a healthy, ecological and sustainable way of living'.⁴⁷ As the previous conversations about the relation between humans and nature give some insights in personal realms of feelings and thoughts, what a person, or community, actually does in daily life compared to what they

⁴⁴ Informal conversation with Thyme, Winter and Terran on 22-02-2018.

⁴⁵ Drawing exercise on 26-02-2018.

⁴⁶ Drawing exercise on 26-02-2018.

⁴⁷ 'Home', Benalí Rural Tourism, accessed August 2, 2018. <https://www.benalitourism.com/>.

say often differs (O'Reilly 2005, 119). This differentiation could be found in the daily practices of Benalí. Although the conversation above would lead to think that the inhabitants believe that humans should not dominate nature, every day the olive trees at Benalí are being pruned by the inhabitants in a way that Thyme has learned it to be best for the tree. When asked why this is the best way of pruning the olive trees, Thyme explains how cutting it in a certain shape, making it more horizontal instead of vertical, is good for picking the olives at the end of the year. By cutting the branches that grow more vertically, the energy of the tree can focus on the 'right' branches which grow more horizontally.⁴⁸ Although Thyme also emphasizes on cutting and sawing the branches in a clean way; 'don't wound the olive tree too much, it is like a human'⁴⁹, one cannot deny that the trees are eventually cut for the benefit of humans; so they can collect and eat the olives coming from the trees.

The shaping of the olive tree and how one can interpret this as domination over nature is beautifully represented by Ingold (2000, 80) as he explains western thinking about humanity and nature; 'human reason is supposed to provide the form, nature the substance in which it is realized'. However, as easy as it seems to define the act of pruning olive trees as dominating nature, the idea that production or cultivation is an action upon nature itself derives from an ethnocentric idea which places the significance of human activities above those of nature. Ingold (2000, 86) suggests a switch of perspective when looking at the ways human beings are involved in cultivation or production of plants namely that they are establishing certain conditions for growth, like the Benalí inhabitants whom are assisting the olive trees in their growth. Therefore 'instead of thinking about the olive trees as part of the natural environment for the inhabitants, we have to think of them and their activities as part of the environment for plants' (Ingold 2000, 87). Subsequently, as human and non-humans are part of each other's environment, how can one think of humans inhabiting a social world of their own which is secluded and dominant over another? To quote Tim Ingold once again (2000, 87); 'both humans and the animals and plants on which they depend for a livelihood must be regarded as fellow participants in the same world, a world that is at once social and natural. And the forms that all these creatures take are neither given in advance nor imposed from above but emerge within the context of their mutual involvement in a single, continuous field of relationships'.

Elaborating on this less ethnocentric view, the relationship between the Benalí inhabitants and their environment is not placed in the dichotomy of the dominant and the subordinate (Descola 2014), but rather as equal partners which have their own part to play in a bigger

⁴⁸ Fieldnotes on 09-02-2018.

⁴⁹ Fieldnotes on 08-02-2018.

process. This partnership reflects what Tsing (2015) emphasizes; the importance of noticing and regaining a partnership between humans and their environment. Although Tsing (2015), like the inhabitants, does recognize how modern capitalism effects relationships between humans and their environment due to commodification of them both, segregating their interdependence and their intertwined relation of being part of the same world, she urges us to look beyond blaming capitalism. By looking around, and noticing possible multispecies partnerships, humans and nonhumans can reinstall a collaboration, like the Benalí inhabitants attempt with the olive trees.

While the olive trees are maintained by humans, consciously without the help of machines or chemicals, the trees also maintain the humans by giving them olives once a year. The same goes for the plants for the garden, using indigenous seeds from neighbouring farms, the inhabitants grow plants and herbs to support them in their need for nutrition. By making a bed for the indigenous seeds to be planted, giving it enough water and making sure it is situated in the right place for the sun, photosynthesis can take place and the seeds are able to grow into plants year in year out. As the garden provides the inhabitants with food to keep them alive, the plants, non-genetically modified, are kept alive by the effort of the inhabitants. Therefore, the humans and nonhumans sustain each other by virtue of collaboration.

Another sign of this idea of collaboration that Tsing (2015) emphasizes on, are the multiple acts of saving certain plants or trees from dying. One day Winter and Fennel were walking around and encountered a field which was hidden from any walking paths. The field was full of walnut trees covered in brambles which were slowly killing the walnut trees. Winter suggested we should save the walnut trees from dying by cutting down the brambles.⁵⁰ Although one could wonder why humans should intervene and thereby decide whether the walnut trees or the brambles die, one can also see this as humans' part in the process which together with many other species has led to this field being the way it is. Thyme made a remarkable comment one day; 'if we understand nature, we understand all'.⁵¹ What Thyme believes is that every species is connected to each other and has a function and role on this earth. She makes a comparison to the community, everyone is good at something else and by complementing each other we form a unity, like the world.⁵² Thyme relates herself to nature as being part of it, reflecting the idea of Ingold (2000) that humans and nonhumans share one world which exists out of different interdependent processes, together making a whole.

⁵⁰ Fieldnotes on 04-03-2018.

⁵¹ Fieldnotes on 21-02-2018.

⁵² Fieldnotes on 21-02-2018.

Instead of contemplating the question whether the relation between the Benalí inhabitants and nonhuman inhabitants could be classified as dominant, the actual agency and thereby mutual involvement of humans and nonhumans in the environment they live in provides the inhabitants to experience this relation as collaborative and mutually dependent on each other. Referring back to how the 'life project in union with the natural environment' (Gaspar 2015, 16) is an act of constituting identity; what does this way of relating to an environment mean for the inhabitants' sense of self? As identifying others and thus relating them to ourselves, we are motivated to take actions towards that information, to confirm or negotiate our sense of self in relation to the other (Jenkins 2014). Thereby, our place in the world as an individual and as members of collectives is constantly negotiated, a process of becoming which is informed by similarities and differences with others (Jenkins 2014).

4.1.2 IDENTIFYING NATURE AND THE SELF

The lifestyle choice that Giddens (1991, 81) refers to as giving 'material form to a particular narrative of self-identity', can be seen as the lifestyle of the rural idyll. Therefore, the act of living at Benalí, and the corresponding activities have an important role in the 'constitution of self-identity' (Giddens 1991, 5). The activities that continuously take place in Benalí are found in the collaboration between the inhabitants and their environment, confirming the relation between the environment and our sense of self. Looking at those activities, Tsing (2015) argues that "we change through our collaborations both within and across species" and our encounters throughout time contaminate and transform self-and-others (29). Although Tsing (2015) might be pointing more towards physical changes of certain species or places, in the case of the inhabitants of Benalí this transformation is about how the activity of pruning olive trees is intertwined with the construction of one's self-identity by transforming relationships.

As mentioned earlier in this paragraph, Terran, Winter and Thyme shared how they see themselves as being part of nature.⁵³ Referring back to the project of constituting a self through the contrast with the other, one could argue that by the daily practice of pruning olive trees, the relationship between them transforms and thereby the way one sees itself in contrast to an olive tree also transforms (Jenkins 2014). As the image of the environment transforms, the image of the self transforms simultaneously making the distinction between nonhumans and the perceived self, less pronounced. Thereby, the relationship one has towards less natural environments, like a city, might become estranged or distant, making it more difficult to feel like one belongs. For example, when Luna described the

⁵³ Conversation with Thyme, Winter and Terran on 22-02-2018.

Australian city he is from, he mentioned what he dislikes about this city; mostly the people and their mentality. However, he also mentioned what he did like about his city; 'it's not all bad, it's really pretty, you've got the beach, ten minutes away you've got the mountains where you can go hiking, it's really pretty, the forests are very [bio]culturally diverse.'⁵⁴

This conversation shows how Luna experiences the natural characteristics in his city as a positive in opposite to the people he is surrounded with. As one relates more and more to a natural environment, to nonhumans, their sense of self becomes intertwined with their relation to other species. At the same time this relationship estranges them more and more from people, environments and products that relate to and derive from a capitalistic society (Harvey 2005). As the relationships towards these aspects of their old and new life transform, the classifications of 'we' and 'others' shifts and enables the inhabitants to reshape their sense of place and community (Leonard in Gupta and Ferguson 1997, 135).

4.2 RELATING TO PEOPLE; SENSING A COMMUNITY SPIRIT

The reshaping of the inhabitants' sense of community concerns the way the inhabitants relate to the people around them, which in the case of Benalí, concerned the people who do not and people who do live in Benalí or in the same type of lifestyle. The success of 'sensing a community spirit' thereby depends on the fulfillment of the presentation of the self. According to Goffman (1959) this act can be seen as a certain performance, in which one presents oneself and her/his activities to others and by doing so guiding and controlling a certain impression of oneself in everyday life. This performance takes place within a social establishment consisting of a team of performers who together present 'to an audience a given definition of the situation' or their social reality (Goffman 1959, 238). When disruptions in a performance occur because of a misrepresentation, the definition of the situation is discredited (Goffman 1959). In the case of the Benalí inhabitants, in their previous social establishments, they maintained a certain performance they did not believe in themselves causing an alienation from a self, but also discrediting the social reality of that social establishment. By changing the social establishment to Benalí, the inhabitants try to save the show by avoiding disruptions in defining a situation, or social reality, by selecting different members for their performance and a more understanding audience (Goffman 1959, 239).

⁵⁴ Guided conversation with Luna on 26-03-2018.

The following experiences of one of the inhabitants, Iris, functions as an example which is recognized by other inhabitants to be significant for their lives. Iris would often mention how she did not feel comfortable with the people and the activities from her previous life in the United States. As Iris and I were sharing a room, I accompanied her while she was packing her bag to leave Benalí to work with a rock climbing facility in Tenerife. As every personal item went through her hands, she became emotional about her departure. She declared how she became very attached to the inhabitants, to being outdoors, and the low-key way of living.⁵⁵

One night, while lying in bed, Iris spoke about the choices she made before coming to Benalí. In the twilight of the room, Iris opened up about the experiences she encountered in which she felt to disappoint people around her. She emphasized how relieved she was to find a place where no one is asking her whether she is married or has children, where no one has certain expectations because of one's age or gender. Back home, when she would respond negatively to being married or having children, people would pity her, expecting that she was unhappy about it, like it would be the thing she most wanted in life. Iris did not want to be seen as the woman who is pitied, or the woman who is a wife or a mother, or a successful designer, she wanted people to see her for who she is besides those roles.⁵⁶

These experiences reflect a certain disruption in the way Iris sees herself, and how others expect to see her, resulting in an awkward situation where she feels to be disappointing as a person (Goffman 1959, 242). When changing the social establishment to Benalí, she found a group of people who never asked any of these questions, and on top of that, she found people who were making the same choices as her in life, quitting a job, not trying to have children, and being a single woman. Therefore, she did not have to explain these choices and the way she wants to live her life. The 'audience' in this new social establishment expected a certain self-representation of Iris which complied with her self-identity, leading to a successful performance as Goffman (1959) would call it in his analogy about self-identity.

This daily struggle of Iris shows how the people back home see her from a different social context, as their cultural values determine how to feel about certain matters, and how a certain appearance of a person should be presented and maintained (Goffman 1959, 241). As Iris changed her social situation, the 'audience' understood her 'performance' which made her 'role' more convincing towards the people around her and to herself.

⁵⁵ Conversation with Iris on 01-03-2018.

⁵⁶ Conversation with Iris on 27-02-2018.

Therefore, being in Benalí is not just about being understood as who one is, but also about practicing the expression and confirmation of a perceived self-identity. The work of Anthony Giddens (1991) towards the modern self-identity supports this practice, as the self is seen as a reflexive project practiced through the many possibilities the current modern world offers. By choosing this lifestyle, Iris is constituting her self-identity by routinely practiced actions which confirm not to be committed towards a marriage, having children or investing in a career (Goffman 1959). The question, like in the previous paragraph concerning the way inhabitants relate themselves to their environment, remains; how does this confirmation of self-identity effect certain feelings of belonging as attachments towards places and people change?

4.3 TRANSFORMING RELATIONS AND THE SELF

By delineating the process of inhabitants' identity constructions in accordance to their migration towards the rural idyll in which they get in touch with different people, activities and environments, a transformation is seen in how they relate themselves to their environment, and to other people, which simultaneously influences their self-identity. Due to the environment and daily activities of Benalí, representing the 'life project in union with the natural environment', the inhabitants experience a certain collaboration and sense of sameness between humans and nonhumans. Regarding the inhabitants' relation to people in the Benalí community, the inhabitants confirm their sense of self, by changing their social situation to one where the 'others' are more perceptive towards their representation of the self which differs from normalized expectations back home. Therefore, as the inhabitants' perception of life in terms of 'experiencing a life project in union with the natural environment' and 'sensing a community spirit' transforms, their 'we' and 'other' transforms as well (Leonard in Gupta and Ferguson 1997, 135).

Hence, being in Benalí as a place which is 'set apart from and opposed to other places' where the inhabitants can detach themselves from old lives in society and negotiate these lives whilst being in a different environment, doing different things, and being surrounded by different people than back home, is about practicing, expressing and thereby confirming the self in relation to the other (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, 13). However, as identity constructions are a reflexive process of becoming, it does not just shift from one to another without any traces of previous perceptions of the self (Jenkins 2014). This transformational process knows a period of liminality, being both the 'former' and a 'future' person (Turner 1977, 68). Therefore, the following chapter presses upon certain 'hybrid' identities, problematizing it as possibly making the inhabitants even more

‘betwixt and between’ when it comes to feelings of belonging that are based on one’s connection to people and places which are intertwined with the Benalíans’ sense of self (Probyn 1996).

5. BELONGING TO THE 'IN BETWEEN'

'Weil Glückseligkeit nicht ein Ideal der Vernunft, sondern der Einbildung ist' – Immanuel Kant ⁵⁷

Different interwoven routes in this thesis lead us to questions of belonging. Being that the inhabitants are partaking in an act of migration, where they are trying to create new roots in a different place with new people (Jackson, 1995). Additionally, because the inhabitants are restructuring their life, identity and routines due to the 'liberation from the normative constraints' in Benalí (Siegler 2002, 42). In this process of restructuring their lives, the inhabitants' perception of the self and the interdependent relationships to places and people are transforming. However, as this constitution of the self is an ongoing process of becoming, there are always traces of the perception of a 'former' and a 'future' self which makes the inhabitants betwixt and between (Giddens 1991, Jenkins 2014, Turner 1977). This final chapter dissects the ambiguity of being betwixt and between the shifting perceptions of the self which are interwoven with attachments to people and places, the fundamentals of feeling to belong (Probyn 1966). To be more specific, how are transformations in the perception of the self entangled with attachments to places and people and therefore to where and whom one belongs?

The concept of belonging in this research is seen as the "desire for some sort of attachment, be it to other people, places, or modes of being, and the ways in which individuals and groups are caught within wanting to belong, wanting to become, a process that is fueled by yearning rather than the positing of identity as a stabile state" (Probyn 1996, 19). These people and places one is attached to are not organically produced and static (Hedetoft and Hjort 2002). These attachments are created in a social process of meaning making, reflecting a sense of self and (dis)connection to people and places which relates to the perceptions of one's belonging (Christou 2011). The following paragraph firstly dissects the attachments the inhabitants have to places which is followed by a paragraph focusing on (dis)connection to people.

⁵⁷ From Immanuel Kant's 'Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten', 1791. Translated to English: 'Happiness is not an ideal of reason, but of imagination.'

5.1 ATTACHMENTS TO PLACE

The expanding mobility of people, like the Benalí inhabitants, affects territorial roots and cultural distinctiveness of places (Gupta and Ferguson 1992) leading to an erosion of previously supposed natural connections between people and places (Ward 2003). While actual places become less defined by a particular cultural or ethnic distinction, imagined communities increasingly become attached to imagined places (Anderson 2016). This reflects what Thyme once declared about belonging; ‘to belong is an idea, your lifestyle, not the geographical place’.⁵⁸ This quote indicates an erosion of naturally supposed connections to the village where she was born, or the city where she lived for 15 years. The place she does feel connected to is an imagined idea, where she feels to practice a certain lifestyle which fits her self-identity of being one with nature; ‘a life project in union with the natural environment’ (Gaspar 2015, 16). Therefore, Thyme’s connection to Benalí is socially constructed as she gives it meaning in which the intertwinement of the natural environment, the people and corresponding activities is fundamental. However, the meaning of Benalí as dissected previously is ultimately determined by the project of seeking another lifestyle. Therefore, the meaning of Benalí and the connection to Benalí as a place does not just depend on the natural environment, the activities and the people which fit their desires towards a rural idyll, but because it is ‘set apart from and opposed to other places’ (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, 13).

Although Thyme was convinced she never wanted to live in Valencia again, she would claim that now and then ‘you need a break from this and you need a little bit of society’.⁵⁹ She is referring to ‘services’ that are available ‘in society’ like a doctor, but also concerts, bars, shops. Just like Thyme, the other inhabitants would enjoy going out occasionally in one of the villages close by or Valencia. This ‘connection’ to society also resembles Iris’ confession that if she is being honest, she sometimes misses her clothes from back home as in Benalí she is always wearing the same clothes.⁶⁰ These desires show how their attachment to Benalí is not about completely closing oneself off from society and its facilities. More so, they feel attached to being in a different setting where normality’s become abnormal, or vice versa, and they are temporarily liberated from normative constraints⁶¹ bringing them in the imagination of a liminal state (Turner 1969).

⁵⁸ Quote of Thyme during drawing exercise on 26-02-2018.

⁵⁹ Conversation with Thyme on 14-03-2018.

⁶⁰ Conversation with Iris on 18-02-2018.

⁶¹ These normative constraints are related to aspects of the inhabitants’ lives they have imaginatively moved away from which for them symbolize capitalistic societies where divisions of labor, social relations, technological mixes, ways of life, and attachments to the land are in service of the market.

5.2 (DIS)CONNECTIONS TO PEOPLE

Although the previous paragraph explains certain attachments the inhabitants hold towards Benalí and the imagination of the place, to belong also depends on the (dis)connection one holds to people (Probyn 1996). As Thyme would claim never to go back to her old village or the city, she was still linked to these places due to her parents and friends. Therefore, Thyme would sometimes leave Benalí to visit them. In general, the connection inhabitants would have to their previous life was the strongest towards their friends and families. This could be recognized in the regular contact the inhabitants would have with family and friends back home through their phones or tablets. However, although the inhabitants would still be linked to other places because of family and friends they are connected to, they did choose to leave these people behind and go on an individual quest to reshape their lives and fulfill a different way of life with a corresponding sense of self-identity.

The story of Terran illustrating how he and his brother hold different meanings towards Benalí told in chapter two does not just show how meanings of a place are created by the experiences one has in their life (Ingold 2011). It also demonstrates the relationship many Benalíans have with their family and friends back home. The inhabitants are often misunderstood by them which causes a certain disruption in their relationship, or the performance of the self according to Goffman (1959). Although nothing can be said about the allegiances towards their family and friends which are maintained by the virtue of technological possibilities, the inhabitants do express feelings of not belonging when asked about their previous lives. Thyme would say; 'you have to cut the roots [...] I'm in love with my family, and it's hard when you want to leave but sometimes it's the best [...] to cut with these kind of thoughts, it's not only our parents.'⁶²

Antithetically, in Benalí they do express to feel like they belong as they are surrounded by likeminded people with the same thoughts which Thyme refers to, and thereby sense a community spirit. This like-mindedness concerns the negative experiences from their previous lives and subsequently the escaping of this life to renegotiate life in terms of their living environment, daily activities, and the people around them. Again, it is not necessarily about the interpretation of a future life which the inhabitants share. More so, it is about this liminal stage their lives and their perceived selves are in which creates a connection between them.

⁶² Guided conversation with Thyme on 13-04-2018.

5.3 FEELINGS OF BELONGING

Coming back to a place being a knot, of 'intertwined trails along which people carry on their lives' which becomes denser once there are more intertwined trails, the meaning of Benalí is determined by the project of its inhabitants to go another direction, to change their lifestyle, to negotiate their lifepaths and the direction its heading (Ingold 2011, 149). Benalí is chosen out of the idea to change ones' way of life and to experience 'a sense of community and a life project in union with the natural environment' (Gaspar 2015, 16). Even though the actual structures, environmental impact, and social expectations in Benalí might actually not differ as much from the places they are escaping from, it does provide them a feeling of belonging as Benalí seems to be the antithesis of their previous lives in terms of 'sensing a community spirit' and practicing 'a life project in union with the natural environment'. As Benalí has this meaning for the inhabitants, and the inhabitants all present themselves as being on this path of life, a feeling of belonging is created as they feel attached to this desired project of changing their way of life. This feeling of belonging is therefore based on the act of negotiating ones' life while being in a liminal stage.

CONCLUSION

Benalí is presented to be separate from larger societal structures linked to a city life, which for the inhabitants resembles a life inside the office, full of expectations they cannot or do not want to meet, a lack of connections between people, and corresponding health issues. As the antithesis of this life, the Benalíans seek 'for a simpler and authentic rural life in which he/she can sense a community spirit and experience a life project in union with the natural environment' (Gaspar 2015, 16). While negotiating their environment, daily practices and relations to people, they experience Benalí as a rural idyll which is not completely informed by reality but more so because the environment, the community, and the daily activities are (pre)imagined as an antithesis of their previous lives. Therefore, Benalí functions as the 'antistructure' and an intermediate phase to help with the renegotiation of normality's in structures which subsequently causes a 'periodical reclassification of reality and man's [and woman's] relationship to society, nature and culture' (Turner 1969, 128). During this process of negotiating their way of live and being between life phases, 'their identity begins to shift, redefined by space and place' (Renfro-Sargent 2002, 91).

The act of choosing a different lifestyle and being in Benalí as a place which is 'set apart from and opposed to other places' is about practicing, expressing, and thereby confirming the self in relation to the other as the Benalíans get in contact with different people, activities and environments which transforms their relationships to people and the environment in and outside the community (Giddens 1991; Gupta and Ferguson 1997, 13). This transformation in relationships changes classifications of 'we' and 'others', as they increasingly experience a sense of sameness with the natural environment, and a sense of community by fulfilling their self-identities with likeminded people, the inhabitants reshape their sense of community and places. However, identity constructions are a reflexive process of becoming, it does not just shift from one to another without any traces of previous perceptions of the self, this transformational process brings them in a liminal state, being both the 'former' and a 'future' person (Turner 1977, 68). Therefore, this state of liminality in terms of their self-identity and relationship to society, nature and culture brings the inhabitants in a state of being 'in between' their previous life and a new one. While the inhabitants are creating meanings around Benalí and become more attached to it, as a place and a community, these developments possibly disassociate them even more from attachments to their lives and people back home.

What the inhabitants are becoming attached to is the imagined meaning of Benalí which is determined by the project of its inhabitants to change their lifestyle, to negotiate their lifepaths and thereby to be in a place of liminality. Even though the actual structures, environmental impact, and social expectations in Benalí might not differ as much from the places they are escaping from. The actual desire to move to Benalí is not about wanting to be completely outside of society, but more so, about the imagined idea of an antithesis of their previous life and surrounding oneself by others who have the same experiences and desires. Thereby, the process of shaping, narrating, and enacting human-environment relationships and corresponding identity constructions is entangled with the inhabitants' former lives they are escaping from. Namely, that these new-found relationships and a sense of self are the opposite of this life. In this sense, feelings of belonging are simultaneously linked to places and people who are related to the project of searching for a better way of life.

Although the stories of the inhabitants are different in many ways, on an existential level there is a resemblance. As delineated in the introduction, one does not feel to belong anymore in the life they live, the place they are from, the people who are around them and the activities they are engaged in. In search for a home, they have come to Benalí where they negotiate their life by transforming relationships towards people and environment. These shifting relationships are intertwined to a sense of belonging as it reflects a (dis)connection to people and places (Christou 2011). The inhabitants thereby long for a connection to people and places which reflects their project of searching for a new lifestyle in which they negotiate their lives. And thereby in this current 'era of uprootedness' (Jackson 1995, 1), this thesis argues that feelings of belonging in Benalí, perhaps temporarily, are created through the consensus of being on a crossroads. Of all being in the project of negotiating life, being critical towards the normalized values of their former lives and deconstructing these, and thereby the Benalíans somehow belong to the 'in between'.

DISCUSSION

The increased flux of people, in this case lifestyle migrants, could lead to an era of uprootedness which points towards the importance of research towards feelings of belonging (Jackson 1995). However, this fieldwork has shown how the Benalí inhabitants actually feel to belong more so when they leave their roots and become unrooted at a temporal place like Benalí. Could it be that the era of globalization is one of belonging to unrootedness by virtue of modern times and as the cause of it. So instead of

questioning peoples feeling of belonging once they are in movement, it also becomes relevant to question how feelings of belonging are manifested amongst sedentary people in this modern time where natural belonging to a place is on shaking grounds. And inspired by Anderson's (2016) imagined communities, how does this natural belonging shift towards imagined places where one has never even gone before?

To study this, and what would have improved my fieldwork for this thesis, is to research lifestyle migrants throughout their lives, in different places, with different people and different occupations. The question remains, how do you know upfront who is going to be a lifestyle migrant so one can start a multi-sided fieldwork before the migration takes place.

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APPENDIX I – Photographs of Benalí taken by author



Casas de Benalí



Clouds reflecting the sun above Benalí



A home-made sign for the 'Muestra' which symbolizes the 'in between', taking care of the world (cuidamos el mundo) while needing the toilet in every day life (aseo).



Misty mornings in Benalí



In between the olive fields



Walking back to the house after pruning olive trees on a foggy and cold day.

APPENDIX II – Poem made by author inspired by daily life at Benalí

Always those jelly peanut butter sammies,

Disgusting, but who complains

The texture, smell, and the taste,

Could all go to waist

But how does one resist,

what is normal and exists,

If you don't like it, take a leap,

Go against the grain

Take off the brown and red,

continue with just the bread

Make it organic,

throw some seeds in the mix

Put on some fresh cut veggies,

Home grown if you wanna be edgy

Spread the recipe,

let it be known

That your sammie,

has changed and grown

APPENDIX III – Poem made by author inspired by daily life at Benalí

Too much noise, too much complaints,

Too much running, too much strains

Left with nothing but a small knapsack,

Stripped from what is known

To stand in an odd background

In search for a new view

Looking for another ear

Looking for a different eye

To hear how I see,

to see how I have heard

Rethinking what I thought,

Transforming what I was

To feel a response,

to be at home for once