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Floating Homes: Homemaking Practices among Seafarers as Strategies against Isolation

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This article analyzes the multilayered practices of homemaking among the seafarers from a theoretical perspective on the polysemic nature of home, space, and masculinity. In addition, distinction is made between involuntary and involuntary types of isolation at sea (whereby professional sailors belong to the former and adventurous sailors to the latter). The research is based on remote ethnography that included semi-structured interviews, virtual "walks", informal conversations, and photos.
▪ **Keywords**: seafarers, homemaking, (in) voluntary isolation, masculinity

Avtorica je preučila večplastne prakse ustvarjanja doma ed pomorščaki s teoretičnega vidika polisemičnosti doma, prostora in moškosti. Poleg tega razlikuje neprostovoljne in prostovoljne izolacije na morju (pri čemer med prve spadajo poklicni pomorščaki, med druge pa pustolovski mornarji oz. jadralci). Raziskava temelji na etnografiji na daljavo, ki je vključevala polstrukturirane intervjuje, »virtualne sprehode«, neformalne pogovore in fotografije.
▪ **Ključne besede**: pomorščaki, ustvarjanje doma, (ne)prostovoljna izoliranost, moškost

Četiri noći kroz oluje,
Olupina dok izranja
Svako svoju toplu kuću sanja.
Pomorac sam, majko, na bijelome brodu,
Pomorac sam, majko, u modrome grobu.
(*Pomorac sam, majko*, Atomsko sklonište, 2007)[1]

Introduction

Social isolation, as one of central concepts in the social sciences, has captured the attention of many classic sociologists, from Durkheim, Marx, Simmel, Tönnies, and Sorokin to more contemporary authors such as Giddens, Bauman, and Castells, to name a few. Multiple and diverse forms of social isolation occur at various levels (individual, group, and social), with various intensity and duration (situational or permanent), in different dimensions (spatial and/or social; urban and rural), and among various social groups and categories (migrants, the elderly, the disabled, the poor, the unemployed,

[1] Four nights through the storms, / As the wreck emerges, / We all dream of our own warm house. / Mother, I'm a seaman on a white ship, / Mother, I'm a seaman in a blue grave ("Mother, I'm a Seaman," Atomsko sklonište, 2007).

remote communities, minority communities, urban dwellers, members of the underclass, and so forth). This points to the fact that, although certain social groups and situational circumstances are more often associated with social isolation, the concept itself should be grasped theoretically primarily as an emic phenomenon that is fluid and dynamic in nature—a process rather than a fixed category. It is thus carried out as a lived reality in everyday lives and in the formation of individual identities and life narratives, but it also has a significant influence on the physical environment, health and psychological wellbeing, loss of social capital, restructuring of political relations and ideas, economic relations, and economic and cultural global processes.

In sociological theory, social isolation is associated with categories of age, sex, race, ethnicity, education level, work, income, health, migrant status, and personality characteristics (de Jong-Gierveld et al., 2018) and thus often involves an ethical dimension (Bauman, 1990, 2004; Cortina, 2022) and the critique of liberal capitalism (Barry, 1998; Gallie et al., 2003; Salerno, 2003). Social isolation, as the inadequate quality and/or quantity of the social relationships a person has (Kelly, 2019), can refer to the micro-level or lack of individual social ties with (close) people and groups and the macro-level or a lack of inclusion on the broader society and nonexistent or weakened ties to social institutions or social entities beyond the level of individuals (Cacioppo et al., 2014). Seeman (1959) connects social isolation with feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, and alienation. Other authors associate it with loss, feelings of invisibility, and marginality (Luskin Biordi, Nicholson, 2009), and loneliness (Cacioppo et al., 2014). Although these feelings are intimate and personal, they are "embedded in given forms of social organization and cultural fabrics" (de Jong-Gierveld et al., 2018: 397). In other words, building on Giddens's structuration theory (Giddens, 1984, 1990), social isolation can be seen as a process that takes place between agency (individual expressions of will activity) and structure (external forces such as social systems, institutions, resources; de Jong-Gierveld et al., 2018; Machielse, 2017; Machielse, Duyndam, 2020), which are deeply connected, mutually dependent, and reinforce each other. In addition to the structuration theory approach to social isolation, micro-level isolation is usually sociologically studied from the network theory approach (Hortulanus et al., 2006).[2]

Another vital aspect is the (in)voluntary nature of social isolation. Whereas voluntarily isolated individuals seek disengagement and actively choose isolation, involuntary isolation is more or less imposed or coercive, meaning that "an individual's demand for social contacts or communications exceeds the human or situational capability of others" (Luskin Biordi, Nicholson, 2009: 85–86). Although being a seafarer is a career

[2] The network theory approach to social isolation involves analyzing the size, scope, and strength of an individual's networks of meaningful personal contacts. Hortulanus et al. (2006) formulate a definition of social isolation based on network approaches oriented toward various aspects of person's network, and loneliness approaches that emphasize the subjective evaluation of the network.

choice and, as such, it does not conform entirely to the notion of involuntary isolation (as in the case of imprisonment, human trafficking, or concentration camps), it still includes a number of elements that are extremely limiting for an individual: one cannot leave the vessel or leave the job if one wishes to at any given time; the companies' rules and regulations determine seafarers' living conditions; their social contacts are restricted; they cannot freely manage their leisure time (there are no days off during time on board and one is never entirely off duty), company, diet choices, movements, or accommodation; and their access to medical assistance or participation in politics is greatly limited and often impossible. "Involuntary" aspects of seafaring are in line with Erving Goffman's view (2011), which states that a ship can be classified as a total institution, a concept that refers to a place of residence and work in which a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life. In addition, in the emic sense, seafarers often experience their time on board as forced and obligatory. Namely, economic reasons (most seafarers are primary economic providers for their families) that intertwine with the specific type of hegemonic masculinity (as a man and a breadwinner, one needs to endure and overcome any harsh conditions) create the root of this perception. Hence, following an emic perspective as well as the fact that involuntary isolation at least partly "occurs for reasons that are beyond the control of those subject to it" (Barry, 1998: iv), through the text this type of isolation is conceptualized as an "involuntary" isolation. Voluntary isolation at sea, on the other hand, although it may involve confinement or loneliness, includes a range of possibilities that are not available to professional seafarers. Popović et al. (2022), following Rodríguez-Martos Dauer (2009), point out that voluntary isolation at sea includes the ability to choose one's company and to manage the trip itinerary and leisure time, and the freedom not to follow any rules because there are no repercussions for those that do not conform. Starting from the idea that professional seafarers experience their profession and time on board as isolating and somehow inevitable, this article focuses on their attempts to mitigate the feeling of isolation and liminality by employing various homemaking practices onboard. In contrast to this, the analysis also includes an example of voluntary isolation at sea as a separate part, which provides another perspective not only in relation to the feeling of isolation but also in terms of homemaking practices and the notion of home.

After the short introductory part with a very brief sociological perspective on social isolation, the second part offers an overview the sociological and anthropological body of literature on seafarers and the conceptual framework on the polysemic nature of space, home, and masculinity in the seafaring setting. The third part describes the methodological approach, and the fourth focuses on the subjective feelings of isolation, the multilayered practices of homemaking, and the significance of creating domestic spaces in the predominantly masculine constitution of seafarers' lives. The final part of the paper presents some concluding remarks.

Theoretical perspective(s)

Popović et al. (2022) argue that maritime sociology is insufficiently visible within the broader field of sociology due to the fragmented nature of research and the absence of clear sub-disciplinary perspectives. However, there is a growing interest in seafaring in both sociology and anthropology. The literature regards social isolation as a significant problem when spending long periods on a vessel (Acejo, 2012; Esposito, 2013; Fajardo, 2011; Forsyth, Bakston, 1983; Pauksztat, 2023; Penezić et al., 2013; Thomas, 2003). Some authors describe dramatic changes in the shipping industry since the mid-1970s; it became more global, competition grew, and productivity increased, all to the detriment of workload, stress, working hours, the length of time spent in ports, and the general comfort of seafarers (Das, 2018). The seafarer's job is precarious: it is insecure, with no permanent contracts, and highly susceptible to the global market situation and crisis. Seafarers can also sometimes face high costs for identification documents, and shipping companies may violate their contracts, including delayed payment or repatriation (Amante, 2003). In addition, the work environment includes frequent night work, significant challenges in the form of (unsafe) working conditions, exposure to extreme temperatures and weather, inadequate food and accommodation, constant noise and motion, limited movement, and few possibilities for social contact. Life on board occurs in multinational, multilingual, multicultural, primarily male communities, characterized by inequalities in jobs, pay, and rank (Borovnik, 2012).

The literature most often presents ethnographic studies of seafarers' lives on board (Acejo, 2012; Baum-Talmor, 2014; Borovnik, 2012, 2019; Markkula, 2022; Oyaro Gekara, Sampson, 2021) and their family life ashore (Forsyth, Gramling, 1990; Sampson, 2005) analyzing the temporal duality it invokes (Forsyth, Bakston, 1983; Lamvik, 2012; Thomas, 2003), seafarers' performance of masculinity (Mannov, 2021; Thomas, Bailey, 2006; Turgo, 2021), and their mobility through transnational spaces (Acejo, Abila, 2016; Markkula, 2021; McKay, 2021; Sampson, 2003), often criticizing globalization, technocratic practices, exclusivism, capitalism, neoliberalism, neocolonialism, and nationalism (Das, 2018; Dua, 2019; Fajardo, 2011; Kremakova, 2019; McCall Howard, 2012), which this process reveals. Some of these studies indirectly touch upon homemaking practices (Pauksztat, 2023; Thomas, 2003), but only a few of them analyze it in greater detail (Kermakova, 2018; Turgo, 2023).

The issue of space and the imaginary of the ship as a spatial entity are extremely interesting in the context of homemaking practices. On the one hand, ships represent vessels of the global economy, symbols of modernity, fully utilized limited spaces that transport goods and people in which seafarers are only part of the invisible machinery. On the other hand, ships are characterized by mobility, floating, liminality, and borderlessness, and this symbolic discursive representation makes them almost ephemeral phenomena, unreal, placeless, or "hyperspace" (Sampson, 2003). The duality

of freedom and constraint (Borovnik, 2019) associated with ships, however, makes them heterotopias (Foucault, 1986), which can still "hold and transport oppression and resistance, multiple subjectivities, and racialized and classed gender realities" (Fajardo, 2011: 19). This view is different from the imaginary of a ship as a non-place (Augé, 1995) or a non-space that is "without meaning, abolition of a place" (Smithson, 2013: 296). Turgo (2023) argues that ships are predisposed to be non-places because the temporary residents of non-places are irrelevant, following the same patterns or behavior hints during their stay in a non-place. Nevertheless, designed non-places can be enhanced with layers of meanings if complex everyday practices occur in them and if there is an intention to leave an imprint on the space (Turgo, 2023). In a highly mobile and hectic environment, "people desperately need a bit of peace and quiet—and […] a strong sense of place, of locality, can form one kind of refuge from the hubbub" (Massey, 1994: 151). The clean base of the vessel as a non-place makes it susceptible to constant changes and the creation of temporal and symbolic "moorings" (Borovnik, 2012) with the notion of home.

Seafaring, as a male-dominated industry, and homemaking practices on board can draw on studies on migrant masculinities' relationship with domestic home space and "mutuality between domesticity and masculinity, where meanings of home and men's identities are co-constitutive and interrelational" (Walsh, 2011: 517). Seamen usually associate masculinity with their status as workers and providers (Mannov, 2021; Thomas, Bailey, 2006; Turgo, 2021) or "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell, 2005) characterized by endurance, firmness, inflexibility, resourcefulness, and bravery, which are "broadly considered to be 'macho,' i.e., being (to at least some extent) assertive and aggressive, courageous, almost invulnerable to threats and problems, and stoic in the face of adversity. It is thereby viewed as associated with behaviors that display courage and strength and that include refusal to acknowledge weakness or to be overcome by adverse events, while discouraging other behaviors such as the expression of emotions or the need to seek the help of others" (McVittie et al., 2017).

However, a closer examination of the daily activities and homemaking practices of seafarers underscores the necessity for a more comprehensive understanding of masculinities, which are far more nuanced and diverse than commonly perceived (Connell, 2005; Turgo, 2021). Furthermore, this study also builds on the theoretical perspectives on homemaking that stem from studies on displaced people (Brun, Fábos, 2015). In both cases, among the displaced people, as well as among seafarers, a home presents "a spatial imaginary, a set of intersecting and variable ideas and feelings, which are related to context, and which construct places, extend across spaces and scales, and connect places" (Blunt, Dowling, cited in Brun, Fábos, 2015: 6–7). Making a home "in-between"—neither there nor here, in multiethnic, multinational, and multilanguage environments for a limited duration, where important factors are policy definitions, displacement experiences, waiting, and the "duration of temporality"—can benefit from

the analysis of home given by Brun and Fábos (2015). These authors differentiate home at three levels: 1) home as the everyday materialities and practices of homemaking that make a space significant; 2) home as a set of values, traditions, memories, and feelings of home; and 3) home as a homeland that exists as a political entity in a global perspective. This study uses the proposed conceptual framework for the interpretation of homemaking practices and the imaginary of home among seafarers.

Methodology

This article offers insight into the variety of emic concepts of isolation and homemaking practices and materialities that provide a semblance of domesticity for people isolated on board for a long period. Research questions included the following topics: subjective feelings of isolation; objects and practices that seafarers miss the most; contents of their suitcases; cabin decoration; spending leisure time, traditions, and routines on board; and symbolism of the home(land).

The qualitative methodology used in this research was multifaceted. I tried to be as resourceful as I could because of the peculiar character of the seafarers' profession. My primary methodological approach was remote ethnography (Podjed, Muršič, 2021). I used online communication tools (mainly WhatsApp, Viber, and Zoom) to talk to the interlocutors on ships worldwide. This approach made it possible not only to cover such large geographical distances but also to include different types of ships and crews and to take virtual walks with the seafarers as they took their phones with them and showed me around their vessels (their mess rooms, cabins, engine rooms, bridges, and decks). Remote walks by video still carried "sensorial elements of human experience and placemaking" (Pink, 2007: 240). I did not video record these walks, but I took notes as the seaman showed me their "material, immaterial and social environments in personally, socially and culturally specific ways" (Pink, 2007: 240). I conducted and recorded twenty-two semi-structured interviews. In some cases, I noticed that the interlocutors were more cooperative and talkative when they were not recorded as part of a formal interview, and so I used informal conversations as well. They also shared with me some photos they had taken on the vessels because they thought I would find them interesting.[3]

Furthermore, I interviewed an interlocutor that, on several occasions, spent over forty days on his ship, a duration almost equivalent to the contract length of some of the seafarers I spoke with, navigating around Europe. His experience, driven by a desire for adventure, represents a unique perspective on the concept of voluntary isolation. This experience, added in a separate part of the article, provides a valuable contrast and a different emic perspective on loneliness and the notion of home.

[3] Authors of the photos gave the permission to the researcher to publish the photos as a part of this study.

This study also incorporated an auto-ethnographic element. With my husband's extensive experience as a seafarer and the longstanding tradition of the maritime profession in our local community, many interlocutors felt more comfortable sharing their experiences with me, still preferring a relaxed, informal, and friendly setting.

The snowball method proved to be the best means of gathering data. Data were collected from June 2023 to June 2024. The interviews were loosely structured, allowing respondents to discuss their views and experiences in their own words and emphasize some important aspects of the topic. Given that the interview structure was relaxed, the duration was from ten minutes to an hour, mostly lasting around twenty-five to thirty minutes. The recorded interviews were transcribed and coded for key themes using NVivo software. In the data analysis part of the paper, the quotations are pseudo-anonymized using identifiers, which include codes for each interlocutor and their age.

The sample consisted of eighteen Croatian seafarers, one Pole, one Lithuanian, and two Filipinos. All interviewees were male, except one female cook.[4] The materials were collected while the interlocutors were on board. They were part of crews from four different vessels: two small merchant ships (three interlocutors on one and five on the other), one large passenger ship (eight interlocutors), and one large merchant vessel (six interlocutors). The youngest participant was twenty-five and the oldest sixty-one, and the majority of them were in their forties. Most of the interlocutors were Croats because my initial contacts on all four vessels were Croats, and I assume they were more comfortable talking to me in their native language and were more relaxed because I come from a similar social setting (given my family situation). On the other hand, migrant workers were somewhat reluctant, and some of them refused to be interviewed. Some of my interviewees shared that the reason for rejection in some cases was that seafarers (especially migrant workers) felt unprepared and as though they had nothing to contribute, and perhaps were even frightened to participate. In terms of profession, thirteen interlocutors were officers and nine were lower crew members. Although it would be intriguing to explore in greater depth how different groups (based on rank, country of origin, and sex) experience isolation, this was only briefly touched upon due to space limitations. However, these findings suggest intriguing possibilities for further research in these directions.

Isolation on board and taking roots in the open sea

Subjective feelings of isolation: Being away from home

One of my interlocutors told me, quoting Samuel Johnson, that *"being on a ship is being in a jail, with the chance of being drowned"* (DC, 36). Seafarers often use the

[4] Although the study focuses on masculinity in the seafaring setting, a female cook was included to explore a female perspective and possible other isolating factors that sex can invoke.

prison metaphor when speaking of their time on board. Because life on the vessel is limited in terms of space, social contacts, and choices of activities, it is no wonder that one might experience time on board as incarceration. In addition, some seafarers do not perceive their job as a voluntary choice, but as a necessary obligation or constraint that they must endure. Hence, they concentrate on counting the days until the end of the contract: *"I keep counting, twenty days left, fifteen days left* […]*"* (RM, 47) and experience long periods spent on the ship as non-time: *"Basically, I'm throwing my life to the wind just to live the time when I'm at home"* (RM, 47). SG (48) also mentions his fixation on counting the days in non-time:

SG, 48: *I've been counting the days since the beginning, and I already know exactly where I'll be on the next Christmas day, New Year's Eve, and next summer.*
Researcher: *But what about this time in between?*
SG, 48: *I won't live for those 183 days, just count the days so I can live at home for another 183 days.*

Seafaring is a very masculine setting, whether it is voluntary or "involuntary." Seafarers perceive their masculinity primarily through the role of breadwinner or the leading provider for the household: *"I need to feed the family, so I have to endure it while the contract lasts"* (MD, 32). The high salary is a factor that they point out as one of the few positive sides of the job. In addition, it is a source of pride and self-worth to endure such a harsh, dangerous, and sometimes cruel job: *"Life on the ship makes you a little stronger, hardens you, makes a man out of you"* (TP, 58). ML (48) said: *"You have to complete the contract as a man and move on. Then you return home happy."* Having and building self-resilience is one aspect of masculinity, and another is reliability: *"I must know my job, I must be good at it, so others can trust me because this is teamwork"* (SP, 61).

Although the setting at seafaring is masculine, my interlocutors still expressed various emotions related to the experience of isolation. They recounted life situations when they were not there for important events; they said that they missed their family, that they had missed their children growing up, and that they were sometimes frightened in dangerous situations and stressed because of their demanding responsibilities. They named their feelings, albeit tersely, saying things like *"I can be a little depressed"* (RM, 47), *"Sometimes I have a lump in my throat"* (JB, 45), *"It can be difficult"* (MM, 25), *"Sad situations will happen"* (PL, 52), *"I get sad"* (FP, 31), and *"It was emotional"* (DC, 36).

Isolation on board has several dimensions. Seamen are not only isolated from wider society, from their communities and families, but also among themselves. *"Depending on the shift, we can be isolated in the sense that we don't even see the people we're on board with, except at handovers,"* said MB (42) in his interview. He only worked

night shifts and felt lonely. Communication with his family was also difficult because of the work schedule. Later, he sent me a picture of a scratch on the kitchen floor in the form of a little man *"who keeps me company during my shifts"* (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Scratch on the floor. Photo: MB.

Daily life on board differs depending on the type of vessel and the rank of the seafarer. The hierarchy is stringent on passenger ships. Officers and crew are separated; they rarely communicate other than about work-related matters, and they have separate mess halls and lounges. Officers also have various privileges, such as shop discounts, the possibility of socializing with guests, moving about freely, and dining in restaurants for the guests as long as they wear their uniforms and nametags. Lower-ranking crew can eat only in crew mess rooms with other employees, and they are not allowed to go to the guest area during their free time. On merchant ships, there is also hierarchy and separation, but, because the crew is limited to twenty-five to thirty people, the atmosphere on board is much different, and people are closer to each other. Even though one might expect the feeling of isolation to be less pronounced on passenger ships, some of my interviewees that worked on different types of vessels recount that they always feel isolated and lonely, even more so on passenger ships: *"I worked as a second engineer on a passenger ship, and I never felt more alone. All those people that are on vacation, having fun with their families, while I am missing mine. Other than that, I had to pay for internet services to call home, and it wasn't cheap"* (MB, 42).

Because the crews on the vessels are usually multiethnic and multilingual, language can be a significant barrier to communication, further isolating individuals on board. JL (34) shared: *"I'm surrounded by a crew of the same nationality, and they talk in their language, forgetting that I don't understand them. Then I'm looking at my cell phone and trying to understand something* [trying to translate]. *Even during the day, I'm alone in the kitchen and don't have time to sit with them during breaks. So, I feel slightly excluded from the rest of the crew."*[5]

The internet and modern means of communication are seen as a welcome change that reduces isolation and loneliness.[6] On the other hand, it has increased the isolation

[5] Although this is a statement from an interview with the female participant, some male interviewees stated similar experiences regarding language barriers.

[6] Seafarers use smartphones, laptops, tablets, e-readers, and gaming consoles for communication and entertainment.

among the people on board: *"Basically the internet ruined the companionship on the ship. Before, we played cards, we talked, joked, and had fun. And now, after dinner, already at 6 pm everyone is in their cabins, like rabbits in holes* [in front of their screens]*"* (RM, 47).

When asked what they missed, seafarers put their families in first place, as expected. As the song from the beginning of the text says, on these lonely, remote "white ships," everybody dreams of their warm homes. In general, my interlocutors missed everything that reminded them of home: certain types of food and *"Mom's cooking"* (MM, 25); spending time at home and *"My home, it's funny to say, but I'm really a homebody"* (SG, 48); some personal things *"I miss my bed"* (MB, 42), and usual daily activities *"taking a walk, going to the woods, to the beach, to the cinema"* (FP, 31), *"having a meaningful conversation"* (JL, 34), *"the everyday life of my family"* (MM, 25). GB (44) explained: *"My family and friends, fun, normal life* […]. *It's like the army here, you have a strict routine, getting up, sleeping, working, coffee breaks* […]. *This type of military life is a hindrance."* For some, this type of daily structure is welcomed and appreciated because it organizes their days and leaves little time for contemplating the things they are missing. Nevertheless, by the prison metaphor or "blue grave" metaphor from the song above, interviewees emphasize freedom as something they immensely miss.

Homemaking: Instant homes from a suitcase

Seafarers have a suitcase half ready even during their time home, half packed with things they always carry on board. Among these, personal medicines stand out as one of the most crucial items: *"I carry a lot of medicine. That is what I do not go without. My suitcase is always ready with things I don't go without. We've got medicines on board, but usually the instructions are in another language, so you don't even know what they're for. I'm skeptical about it"* (IK, 58).

Another essential thing seafarers carry is work clothes: *"I bring work clothes, sometimes even shoes, because when you go on a ship for the first time you never know what's in store for you"* (SP, 61). Bringing medicines and work clothes indicates the need to be self-sufficient and able to take care of oneself as part of a masculine identity. Other things that they carry fall slightly out of the essentialized masculinity concept: certain types of food (sweets, instant food, and drinks)[7] and all kinds of random things that make their living spaces more comfortable, domestic, and familiar: pillows, bedding, coffee cups, calendars, humidifiers, clocks, kitchen utensils, cleaning products, books, and so on. The older generation still carries framed family photos.

[7] My interlocutors from Croatia mention Čokolino instant cereal and Cedevita juice powder, which are popular in Croatia and are signature tastes and smells that were already mass produced by food industries in the former Yugoslavia.

SG (48) told me: *"I like to rest my head on my own pillow. I'm not too fond of those on the vessels—you never know what you'll get. Moreover, I have my pillowcase. I also have a clock, and I feel at home when I look at it at night."*

Seafarers that are on the same vessel for a long time are more relaxed, and so they leave their belongings in their cabins when they go home, although they put them away because another person resides in the same space during that time: *"A few times, I unexpectedly got transferred to other ships, and then you realize how you settled in and how much you feel like the vessel is 'yours.' I leave lots of personal stuff here, so I don't have to carry it all the time, and I can travel with a small suitcase"* (AR, 59).

For some seafarers, the struggle with constant uncertainty about returning to the same vessel makes it difficult to relax and leave their personal belongings behind, and so they carry everything with them all the time: *"I come with a suitcase that looks like I'm taking half the house with me. I carry everything, including pillows. I bought the biggest suitcase I could find. When I get on the ship, people ask me if I ever intend to return home"* (SG, 48).

For women on board, the situation is more complicated due to efforts to protect privacy and avoid unpleasant situations, especially in the context of sex differences and excessive intrusion into the intimacy of the opposite sex. My interlocutor said: *"I try not to leave anything. I share a cabin, so there's that. Besides, I never know if I'm coming back. The previous cook, a woman, left plenty of her personal belongings, and she never came back. Her underwear and other very personal stuff remained. That's not nice. Some things are private. So that's why I'm careful. I don't want somebody to access my privacy at this level"* (JL, 34).

The private domain of a cabin

If there is a semblance of privacy on board, it is a cabin space. It was endearing to learn from some of my interlocutors that showed me their cabins that they cleaned and tidied them up beforehand. The cabins are quite small, usually furnished with essential items (a bed, a table and chair, and a wardrobe) and sometimes with additional items for comfort (a refrigerator, armchair, or sofa). Most of them have a bathroom, but on some older vessels they do not. Officers' cabins on passenger vessels are similar to guest cabins, whereas lower crew cabins are much more modest. The vessel staff maintains the cleanliness of the officers' cabins. On merchant vessels, the crew clean the cabins themselves, and the captain or chief mate checks the state of the cabins every week.

During our video walks, I felt a sense of pride and homeliness when the seafarers showed me around. They showed me some things they made themselves: corners with shelves, freshly painted floors in common areas, and decorations in social areas. The photos they sent me depicted the storage areas where they stow their belongings when they disembark, the furniture they skillfully made, and the corners of their cabins (Figures 2–4).

Most pictures show objects that, although they speak about the person's individuality and express the narrative of self, remain in the domain of simple, useful objects. There are almost no decorations in the private areas of the cabins. Somewhat different from that is a very unusual cabin. It belongs to the captain of a smaller merchant ship, RM (47). In his interview, he told me that he insists that his space be clean and tidy, *"maybe even excessively so."* It is not easy, he stated, when a colleague you are changing with has somewhat different habits (during his time off, his colleague uses this cabin). Because he likes to keep himself busy, he redecorated his entire cabin with material he could find during his last contract. He put up some new flowery wallpaper, which was *"a bit feminine, so the crew teased me a little, but also they liked it"* (Figure 5). His involvement in decorating the cabin partly stems from his officer position because he has somewhat greater security and permanence on board. However, his initiative and desire to invest work and time in his space are greater factors.

ML (48) has been a chief engineer on the same vessel for over eight years, and so he has settled in the specific space of "his" ship. He said about his cabin: *"Since I have been here for so long, I've adapted it to myself. I see it as my space … Your cabin is everything that's 'yours' on a vessel, like a bedroom at home—a very intimate space."*

Some of my interlocutors shared that they find it challenging to sleep in the cabins. The environment can be noisy and uncomfortable, and during rough seas seamen sometimes secure themselves to the bed to keep from falling out. Despite these conditions, seafarers make significant efforts to personalize their cabins, incorporating a variety

Figure 2: Cabin on a bulk carrier. Photo: IK.

Figure 3: Cabin on a merchant vessel. Photo: JL.

Figure 4: DIY corner. Photo: MB.

Figure 5: Captain's cabin on a small merchant ship. Photo: RM.

of practices and materialities to make them as comfortable and as much "their own" as possible. This process of personalization is a way for seafarers to express their own conceptions of masculinity, revealing it as a multidimensional phenomenon that can encompass practices and materialities not typically associated with its essentialized concept.

For seafarers, cabins are one of the few outlets that allow them to create a semblance of domesticity and comfort, as well as a venue to express their individuality and personal interests. Nevertheless, this is a very temporal occurrence. They do not become attached to the space; they are ready to leave it at any moment and do not remember it when they leave it: *"I have changed many vessels so far. All those cabins are mixed up in my memory. I remember some in which I tried to adapt something to myself because I invested some time and effort and spent more time there, maybe. But, no, in general, these were all transit stations"* (IK, 58).

Traditions and routines

Depending on the vessel's type and size and the seafarer's rank, the duration of work shifts can vary. Hence, leisure time may be split between the shifts or rather short. Most vessels are equipped with a gym or a crew bar, depending on the size of the vessel and the company it belongs to. Passenger ships have many additional features that are not available to the lower crew but only to the officers.

Figure 6: Crew band on a merchant vessel. Photo: JS.

Spending leisure time varies significantly depending on all the factors mentioned. Among the most usual ways of spending leisure time are watching movies and TV series, reading and listening to audiobooks, listening to music, talking to one's family and friends, surfing on the internet and reading news, playing video games, and working out in the gym. Crews that can watch TV do not miss significant sports events (games and matches). Some interlocutors mentioned that they liked to shop online: *"I buy various things, tools, some stuff for the house, but also clothes and things that I think my family would like. I feel like I'm more involved in their lives this way. I like the idea that my children wear the clothes I chose for them"* (DC, 36).

Most of the leisure practices mentioned relate to the outside world, life on the land, or staying in touch with daily events. Depending on the crew and their sociability, they can more or less hang out together by playing cards, darts, or table football. Filipinos have routines such as singing karaoke: *"I love karaoke. That's when we have the best time. I'm glad when the rest of the crew joins in, not only Filipinos"* (JS, 28). Some crews set up bands so there is singing and fun at weekend parties (Figure 6).

If there is an opportunity, seafarers can get off the vessel or take a walk. Again, depending on the vessel, they can take walks along the deck, fish, play sports, and so on. Crews that have been together longer *"begin to look like small dysfunctional families or henhouses with gossiping and all"* (ML, 48). All those masculine activities are thus imbued with some practices that are not usually associated with masculinity, such

as gossiping or opening up about one's problems and sharing thoughts and feelings: *"When I'm good with some of my colleagues, we talk, we share experiences. That helps me. You can hear what's bothering the other person and share the troubles."* Masculinity on board also means that one needs to make compromises and sometimes give up and let others overpower you: *"You have to be smart on board and make many compromises. You're closed in with others and need to know when to give in to win later, when to stand up for yourself, and when to withdraw. This is a male environment, and you can't allow yourself to be trampled on, but you also have to be adaptable in some situations"* (MM, 25).

Other significant traditions and rituals are weekly cookouts, especially popular on merchant vessels. They bring together the entire crew in an informal gathering. Other than that, celebrations for major holidays such as Christmas and New Year have their own rituals, which include decorating the space, decorating the Christmas tree, and preparing special food in a relaxed and festive atmosphere (Figures 7 and 8).

Symbolism of the home(land)

The notion of a home includes a homeland dimension, which refers to the country of origin from a global perspective. Because most of my interlocutors were Croats, this section focuses on representing Croatia in the context of the vessels I had access to.

The most visible notion of a country is through national emblems such as a flag and coat of arms. These can be found scattered on walls around the merchant vessels. Often, they are in a sports context associated with sports clubs and fan props (Figures 9 and 10).

Figure 7: Cookout on a merchant vessel. Photo: DC.

Figure 8: Christmas on board. Photo: MB.

Figure 9: Croatian symbols on a merchant vessel. Photo: ML.

Figure 10: Croatian symbols on a merchant vessel. Photo: MM.

On passenger vessels, every officer must wear a name tag, which includes his or her name, rank, and country of origin (Figure 11). Creating an image of a traditional Croatian seafarer that is respected and good at his job is something that my interlocutors stressed as important for them. Because they work in a globalized, multinational environment, some of them feel like they are representatives of a nation and maritime tradition they inherited from their ancestors: *"Both my father and grandfather were seafarers. My son is a seafarer, too. Croats in this branch have always been recognized as good and capable workers. It's our tradition"* (RM, 47).

Figure 11: Name tag of a Croatian officer on a passenger vessel. Photo: GB.

Younger seafarers I talked to prefer to work with a multinational crew, but with a specific hierarchy: *"I prefer to work in a multinational crew when officers are ours* [Croats]*, and the lower crew is mixed. Then the situation on board is more serious, and there is more respect"* (MLJ, 29). This brings to the fore underlying racial, national, and class prejudices.

Voluntary isolation at sea: Isolation, homemaking, and masculinity

DR's experience is an example of voluntary isolation at sea. He was almost sixty when he decided to sail around Europe in his seven-and-a-half-meter-long, 120-year-old wooden boat: *"I sat in my small boat, and I got it into my head that I would go all over Europe on that ship."* This act was somewhat out of character for him as a respectable family man with a well-established business.

In contrast with the "involuntary" nature of isolation that other seafarers in this study experience, DR chose the direction and time of the journeys by himself, same as the routes and the length of the voyages, whether and when he would have company on board, who it would be, and when he would finally go home. He isolated himself at sea out of a desire for adventure. His budget was not large, and he often found himself without funds. He lived a modest lifestyle, trying to get by as inexpensively as possible: *"It was all very modest; it could not be more modest. I did not pay anything anywhere that I did not have to."*

When he first set out, he was inexperienced with sailing and lacked equipment. Because of this, he got into various perilous situations. Nonetheless, he kept returning to sailing and long periods of isolation at sea. In his interview, he describes his time in isolation as sometimes challenging, lonely, and demanding. During his time alone, he experienced complete isolation and separation from the world, but he did not always associate it with negative feelings. Although being alone at some moments was not easy—*"Being alone is the worst thing sometimes. You have no one to talk to, no one to consult with"*—he argued that solitude was sometimes easier than the responsibility of making difficult decisions for somebody else or being in bad company. In addition, he did not feel fear but excitement and adventure in dangerous situations. DR associates his time on board with *"freedom, solitude, decision-making, relying on oneself and managing as best you know in impossible situations."* He rarely communicated with his family and friends at home.

Regarding his feeling of home and homemaking practices, quite contrary to the seafarers that are "involuntarily" isolated, he took only a few things with him, mostly those that were useful such as food, clothes, a few utensils, some equipment, and a first aid kit. There were no personal things or artifacts that would make him more at home. He had no comforts and lived in modest conditions, without things that would create a semblance of home or coziness: *"What do I even need? I learned how little a person needs."* Moreover, he had no artifact reminiscent of home in his daily life. He had no recurring practices, routines, or traditions that would create familiarity or homeliness: *"Every day was different. If I could call it a routine, then the only routine I had was to get off the ship and drink something strong in every port I arrived in."* He did not engage in many conversations or make contacts while he was in ports. He did not observe much of the local life, scenery, or cultural heritage; *"my only goal was to sail away as soon as possible."* However, he recounted: *"When I got to Istanbul,*

I rented a beautiful apartment in a hotel overlooking the Bosphorus. Nevertheless, I couldn't sleep. In the middle of the night, I left, returned to my ship, and slept there like a baby." In contrast to other seafarers, he saw his boat as a means of isolation and adventure rather than a home. So he preferred to stay on it during his trips, isolated from the land life. Speaking of the conceptualization of home from a global perspective, as a homeland, he said that during his voyages he had a Croatian flag only because it is a prerequisite for sailing on international seas. He never felt like a representative of a nation, even more so because just a few people recognized it. Hence, the act of voluntary isolation, in this case, is mainly associated with individuality and an act of personal freedom while rejecting collective connotations.

DR recounts his voyages as a memorable time: *"I will remember that time forever. I experienced so many things and learned a lot about myself."* He claimed that he did not feel fear, even in some life-threatening situations, but only excitement and adventure. Various aspects of his experience that came up during his interview—such as scarcity, discomfort, survival in difficult living conditions, endurance, courage, and facing fears in harsh and dangerous situations—are in alliance with a specific concept of masculinity. Similar to other seafarers I talked to, he stressed these masculine concepts of self-resilience and resourcefulness as something positive he gained from life on board.

Conclusion: Connecting the dots

One can conceive of a home as a place that includes familiarity and intimacy, common frames of reference across space and time with close people, and an immediate and broader community. The seafarers leave their homes for long periods. This experience affects their perception of isolation and marginality and of life as floating on the fringes of their significant groups.

The conceptual framework of a home by Brun and Fábos (2015) identifies three distinct layers: home as the everyday materialities and practices of homemaking that make a space significant; home as a set of values, traditions, memories, and feelings of home; and home as a homeland in a global perspective. These three perspectives can be traced in the seafarers' homemaking practices in time- and space-mobile settings. Regarding the first layer, my interlocutors showed me the rich body of practices and significant artifacts instrumental in their everyday lives, giving character and a stamp of personality to the spaces they inhabit. Homemaking is a strategy that is an "affective, embodied response to an assessment of a place as 'like home / not like home'" (Butcher, 2010: 33). In this regard, time is of particular interest because, although objects and practices of homemaking can be and are diverse, meaningful, and essential, they are still temporal and take place in time-limited sections of contract duration for each seafarer. Although this time is sometimes perceived as a waste of life or non-life, or

non-time (whereas the "real" home on land represents time), nevertheless the practices and materialities they have shown me testify to awareness of duration of temporality, which is then filled with feelings, traditions, rituals, values, and memories. These are constitutive of the second layer of the home proposed by Brun and Fábos (2015). Finally, the third layer of home relates to positioning a home(land) in the global perspective, calling upon national traditions and successes, the significance of seafaring tradition, and the need to represent it all or to be "the ambassador" of the home(land) by leaving the material marks or behaving in a certain way.

Homemaking is generally still a gendered area associated primarily with femininity (Turgo, 2023). However, as some previous research has already shown, masculinity in the context of seafaring is a much broader and variable phenomenon (Mannov, 2021; Thomas, Bailey, 2006; Turgo, 2021). Furthermore, masculinity and homemaking are proven to be not mutually exclusive but interrelated and congruent (Walsh, 2011). Specific settings (as vessels are) can challenge not only the essentialized hegemonic concept of masculinity but also one of home, which, as was shown above, can be made in precisely determined time sections, in isolation, and in perceived non-time and designed non-space. Even though seafaring is a highly masculine context, seemingly feeding into a singular "macho" type of masculinity, observed practices and activities point to multifaceted, diverse, and complex connections between masculinity and homemaking. Occurrences of expressing emotions, decorating a space and keeping it clean, buying clothes and household items online, choosing more understated reactions in certain situations, entertaining gossip or confiding one's problems and feelings, and creating close relationships with others all show a richness of practices connoted with home and domesticity that at the same time question the singular concept of masculinity, as well as the gendered notion of homemaking. However, despite the observed nuances of masculinity, in the context of seafarers' life on board they still remain locked within a heteronormative, class, and racial framework.

Regarding voluntary isolation at sea and homemaking, it is significantly different compared to the "involuntary" experience. First, time spent at sea is regarded as substantially rich, memorable, and essential, and isolation is desirable and implies freedom and life-changing adventure. In the face of these premises, homemaking is virtually non-existent; space is ascetic, with very few useful things, without specific routines or rituals, without a notion that a boat represents some national entity or a homeland. The ship is seen instrumentally as a means or symbol of adventure. Voluntary isolation at sea is thus a very intimate and individual act, mainly associated with the expression of separation from the world (and home) and personal freedom while rejecting collective connotations. In contrast, the "involuntarily" isolated mostly yearn for a collective that they are forced to stay away from and that they try to connect with in every possible way. Hence, in this context, voluntary isolation has no common ground with "involuntary" isolation apart from general notions of endurance, firmness, resourcefulness,

and bravery that feed into the concept of hegemonic masculinity commonly connoted with the sea and navigation.

Reflecting on seafaring and homemaking, I argue that seafarers are not simply invisible wheels in the globalized machinery of capitalism or short-term inhabitants of the non-spaces. Even though they disregard and belittle their time on board, the life they lead there is substantive and significant, despite its liminality and transience. Rooting is performed through practices, spaces, relationships, memory, traditions, and habits, even though it requires creating a home anew every time, for some, with each new contract.

The analysis of homemaking in, what seems for some of my interlocutors, a permanent "duration of temporalities"[8] (Brun, Fábos, 2015) has the potential to significantly extend the understanding of how ideas, experiences, and feelings of home are manifested, challenged, and changing. This is particularly relevant in the context of hegemonic masculinity, which is usually connected with the notion of navigation and the sea, whether voluntary or "involuntary." Furthermore, it can provide profound insight into the emic experiences of isolation, resilience, and struggle to create meaning and take root, even when floating in the open sea.

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[8] Permanent "duration of temporalities" here implies limited segments of time (on board) that are constantly repeated, and so they are presented in the seafarers' memory as uninterrupted time.

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Plavajoči domovi: prakse ustvarjanja doma med pomorščaki kot protiizolacijske strategije

Ko govorimo o pomorščakih in njihovem načinu življenja, se skoraj ni mogoče izogniti konceptu izolacije. V članku so analizirane večplastne prakse ustvarjanja doma s teoretičnega vidika polisemičnosti doma, prostora in moškosti. Gospodinjske prakse med pomorščaki se izražajo v uporabi in izdelavi artefaktov, ohranjanju tradicij in ritualov, ustvarjanju spominov in predstavljanju domovine. Opazovane prakse in dejavnosti kažejo na kompleksne povezave med moškostjo in gospodinjstvom. Izražanje čustev, okrasitev prostora in vzdrževanje čistoče, spletno nakupovanje oblačil in gospodinjskih predmetov, izbira skromnejših odzivov v določenih okoliščinah, opravljanje, zaupanje težav in občutkov ter ustvarjanje tesnih razmerij z drugimi, vse to kaže na bogastvo praks, povezanih z domom in domačnostjo. Omenjeno hkrati prinaša pomislek o singularnem konceptu moškosti, pa tudi o spolno opredeljeni podobi gospodinjstva. V tem članku je izolacija razumljena predvsem kot emski konstrukt. Zato ločimo prostovoljno in neprostovoljno izolacijo, pri čemer poklicni pomorščaki spadajo med neprostovoljno izolirane, prva pa se nanaša bolj na pustolovsko in zabavno, sproščenejšo vrsto jadranja. Ugotovitve kažejo, da se ti perspektivi bistveno ločita po gospodinjskih praksah in doživljanju prostora. Raziskava temelji na oddaljeni etnografiji, ki je vključevala polstrukturirane spletne intervjuje z 22 profesionalnimi pomorščaki (18 je bilo Hrvatov) in enim avanturistom, fotografije, video in avdio virtualne »sprehode« po plovilih ter neformalne pogovore s pomorščaki.