



Volume 12 Issue 4
12/2014
tamarajournal.com

Experiencing Derrida through a Communal Friendship

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Keywords

Ethnography
Friendship
Storytelling
Deconstruction
Island community

Abstract

The theme of friendship flows throughout the paper via a field study into friendship in the rural and remote island communities of the Zadar archipelago. The author explores Derrida's spirit of friendship and asks: What form of friendship exists? How does it manifest itself? What is its importance to the island's survival? The study reveals how friendship, in the form of communal friendship, emerges as a fundamental trait amongst the members of these communities and becomes the choice of their survival. As such, it is useful in gaining a better understanding of what drives a sustainable island development. Communal friendship is explored through the ethnography and storytelling. The study emphasises the usefulness of ethnography to a Critical Theory and argues that storytelling and ethnography co-exist, in order to gain an invaluable insight into the intangible aspects of a communal friendship. The author proposes to call this approach 'an ethnographic storytelling'.

Introduction

Life on remote and rural islands has always been solitary and, as this paper argues, friendship is viewed as a bare necessity for survival rather than as a choice. The special notion of friendship emerges from stories and this is echoed within Nietzsche's Zarathustra:

Not the neighbour do I teach you, but the friend. Let the friend be the festival of the earth to you, and a foretaste of the Superman. I teach you the friend and his overflowing heart. But one must know how to be a sponge, if one would be loved by overflowing hearts. I teach you the friend in whom the world standeth complete, a capsule of the good,—the creating friend, who hath always a complete world to bestow. And as the world unrolled itself for him, so rolleth it together again for him in rings, as the growth of good through evil, as the growth of purpose out of chance. Let the future and the furthest be the motive of thy today; in thy friend shalt thou love the Superman as thy motive. My brethren, I advise you not to neighbour-love—I advise you to furthest love!—Thus spake Zarathustra. (Nietzsche, 1888; trans. 1917, p.75)

Neighbour, brethren, love. These are the words that, in the metaphorical sense, alongside Derrida's seminal work on friendship in 'Politics of Friendship (1997) and *Beast and Sovereign I* (2009) and *II* (2011), inspired the author to start looking more closely into friendship among the members of rural and remote island communities within this study.

Living the life of the islanders

Our understanding of a situation often starts with the anthropological description of the context and the author therefore begin in this way. The study is presented as a field study of the island of Rivanj in the Zadar archipelago in Croatia, seen in the picture below.

Picture 1: The island of Rivanj



Rivanj is an island in the Adriatic Sea within the Zadar Archipelago located between the islands of Šestrunj and Ugljan, with an area of 4.4 square kilometres and a width of up to 1.4 km. Like the other islands in this archipelago, Rivanj has been inhabited for centuries by anglers and their families and the population currently stands at 31 people, excluding the members of those families who arrive in the evening and depart in the morning, as well as at weekends. Rivanj has daily ferry connections with the mainland and neighbouring islands (Ist, Molat, Zverinac and Šestrunj) and is within 30 minutes' reach of Zadar by catamaran. Economic activities include agriculture, fisheries and tourism. Traces of habitation date from prehistoric times and Rivanj was recorded in written sources for the first time in the mid-fourteenth century and then again in the fifteenth century, in Zadar Cadastre as Rivan and in other sources as Ripanium. In the Middle Ages the island formed part of the commune of Zadar. In 1640 the island was bought by a Zadar family named Lantana. At the end of the nineteenth and in the early twentieth century much of the population emigrated to the United States and after the second world war most of the population settled in Zadar. Life on the remote and rural islands has always been solitary. One can find oneself not communicating with the locals for weeks on end. During the summer months, especially in August, the island is very popular with tourists, while in winter the island is left to the locals to enjoy it for themselves. The author became accustomed to the island when her parents retired there ten years ago and she started visiting them. When they retired, they were looking for privacy and a quiet place. However, no such thing exists there as one frequently depends on other people for help, therefore it is difficult to maintain this stance or to preserve one's privacy. The author's mother often complained, "Sometimes I do not want to see anyone for months, but then you just cannot avoid the locals, because we all depend on each other, whether this is to help with the delivery of food or drink, or carrying the newly bought furniture from the ferry docks." The author's stepfather complained countless times that the locals just appeared at his door as an excuse to drink his wine. "They never rang the bell that I installed at the front door that has the purpose of keeping uninvited guests out. People just seem to appear and expect to be given something to drink." It would seem that politeness does not exist in this place. Whether they liked it or not, the author's

parents had to embrace this way of life. This also includes helping the locals with their needs. For example, the author's stepfather, in exchange for allowing local residents to use his fishing boat while he is away, expects to receive help from other local residents when he has difficult tasks to carry out. During a 5 month stay on the island, the author was gradually able to piece together the blocks of the story by talking to the locals, listening to their conversations, attending their local festivities and recording the traditional events that took place within different households every week. By going from one neighbour to another, the author was able to observe the everyday themes or problems associated with island life. The most frequent theme encountered was about how the community manages to survive. The author got to know nearly all the locals and had numerous discussions with them. They talked of the ongoing arguments between families over land issues and other disagreements. Yet, despite intolerance and disagreement, when something needed resolving, surprisingly, they all put their arguments aside to work co-operatively. Examples are plentiful and are presented in this paper. The author also began connecting local issues with the broader regional, socio-economic issues facing the remote and rural island communities in the coastal region of Zadar in Croatia. Ongoing litoralisation has resulted in an increase in the value of space and the emergence of new forms of the spatial economy which has, in turn, brought a new wave of immigration towards the coastal areas (Fredotović and Šimunović, 2006). This was followed by the emigration of islanders which has left the current population fearing a disappearance of the island's identity and a creation of ghost villages. Most importantly, there is a growing need to introduce the inter-island ferry transport routes in the coastal region of Zadar's archipelago (Radulić, 2013), to which the current government does not pay enough attention. This theme of friendship, conceived from initial observations, is encapsulated in the story narrated by the author, in Act One.

Act One: Friends in need

It was one of those hot summer Sundays in August 2010. At 7 am, I was standing on the house terrace that faced the newly built island ferry dock with a freshly made cup of coffee in my hands. Around the dock were piles of rubbish standing out in the sun. These were left by the contractor who had built the new ferry dock, just completed after 2 years of mining, drilling and underwater cementing. Someone had to clean it up. The locals had avoided this for months, finding all sorts of excuses and complaining that this was the contractor's responsibility. In reality, no-one wanted to do it. When the islanders realised that the contractor would not return and clean it up, they finally agreed to take action. At around 10 am, I saw a group of locals approaching the dock. There were 6 of them. The ferry was due to dock soon, around 12 noon. The group devised a plan. They first had to clear the dock of rubbish and afterwards they would help each other to collect the cargo they expected from the ferry. You could see them approaching from 100 m away, armed with spades and bags, dressed in sun-washed baggy clothes, and determined to do it right this time. This picturesque scene made me laugh. They reminded me of Dad's Army (BBC TV series). 'Friends in need'. How interesting. I began recalling all those individual conversations with them, when they had been full of hate for each other, spitting on each other, making drunken, abusive remarks and playing bad jokes on each other. I asked myself a question: "How on earth did we arrive at this point?"

The words 'Friends in need' represent the beginning of author's journey into the complex relationship called friendship within the remote island community of the island of Rivanj. They are echoes of a fraternity that has many facets, namely true fraternity. Fraternity in the literal sense would be universal, spiritual, symbolic, infinite fraternity, the fraternity of the oath (Derrida, 1997, p.240). In the case of the island communities, the notion of fraternity appears to be untainted due to isolation. A specific facet of friendship, which is explored in this paper, could also be interpreted as in Kant's (1788) sense, 'one becomes the friend of man' and, even more than that, as the 'one who loves the whole human

race'¹. Moreover, as Montaigne [1877] (trans. 1909–1917; 2001) argues, there is no such a thing as a perfect friendship² but common friendship that demands from us to question our own motives³. The story of the islander's notion of friendship as a means of survival is one such example and yet one is always aware of the commitments and obligations that friendship brings with it to their struggle to survive. In contrast to this need for being connected with each other, as the story in Act One emphasises, one must also acknowledge that there is a decision to be made between choosing to join in or to remain solitary, as Derrida (2009) argued. This introductory story, thus, reminds us of the reality of the situation; the circumstance in which man finds himself (Ortega y Gasset, 1914) or a spatiotemporal circumstance in the words of the author. The term itself suggests that friendship amongst men is necessary in order to survive; and that in a given situation we all need to unite to resolve problems for the sake of our relationships with others. It also means to make a sacrifice for the benefit of the community and this involves certain trade-offs being made whilst not making others better or worse off. This is the kind of situation that prompted the author to ask the following questions:

- How do I approach the situation?
- How do I capture and interpret it?

The author saw these questions as an interesting and immediate methodological challenge.

Structure of the paper

Conceptually, the paper is divided into two parts. The first part gradually deconstructs the notion of friendship, beginning with a discussion of the literature on social ties and friendship, and introduces the possibility of friendship, and it finishes with the methodological approach consisting of ethnography and storytelling. The second part provides an empirical section, introducing stories as acts of the various strata of friendship, and ending with a discussion of the findings and the conclusion.

From Social ties to a Friendship

This section addresses a first question: What fundamental form of friendship exists? To better understand why and how the concept of friendship departs from the traditional literature and introduced here as a distinct dimension of friendship within the remote and rural island communities, it would be useful to introduce the reader to a wider range of literature on social ties and solidarity.

Social ties and solidarity

Literature on social ties and solidarity is intertwined in many ways. Earlier modern discussion of friendship involves a discussion of social ties discussed by Marx and Engels in their treatise on the transition from feudalism to capitalism. In Marx's *Communist Manifesto*, in the analysis of the rise of proletarian consciousness and the transformation of workers into a class-for-itself (Marx and Engels [1848] 1948, p.17-18), they posited an emergence of a bounded solidarity in situational circumstances that can lead to group-oriented behaviour regardless of any ex-ante adopted set of values. Henry Maine (1906) observed the transition of society from relationships based on kinship and joint property to one based on contract, territory and individual rights (Tadmor, 2010). This shift from status to contract which Tönnies (1940), built on later by formulating his *Gemeinschaft* or community and *Gesellschaft* or society (Smith, 2001), proposed a decline in kinship caused by a transition from the realm of blood ties, the family, and obligations to kin, community and nation, to

¹ "Fraternisation is always caught up...there is always someone, something, more fraternal than the brother, more friendly than the friend, more equitable than justice or law – and the measure is given by the immensity and incommensurability of this "more" (Kant [1788] as cited by Derrida, 1997, p.239).

² "In these other strict friendships a man must march with the bridle of wisdom and precaution in his hand: the bond is not so strictly tied but a man may in some sort distrust the same. Love him (said Chilon) as if you should one day hate him again. Hate him as if you should love him again." (Michel de Montaigne, [1877] (trans. 1909–1917; 2001).

³ Common friendships will admit of division; one may love the beauty of this person, the good-humour of that, the liberality of a third, the paternal affection of a fourth, the fraternal love of a fifth, and so of the rest: but this friendship that possesses the whole soul, and there rules and sways with an absolute sovereignty, cannot possibly admit of a rival. If two at the same time should call to you for succour, to which of them would you run? Should they require of you contrary offices, how could you serve them both? Should one commit a thing to your silence that it were of importance to the other to know, how would you disengage yourself? (Michel de Montaigne, [1877] (trans. 1909–1917; 2001).

the realm of commerce and modernity (Tadmor, 2010). Later work on social ties and solidarity emerged in Durkheim's seminal work, 'The Division of Labour in Society' (1893) in which he discusses the analysis of society as it evolved in three ways. It first looks at the origins and nature of social ties by examining the interactions between individuals and society. This is followed closely by an analysis of how social ties evolve as society progresses through time and changes, and, finally, arrives at conflicts within modern society. To Durkheim, social ties represent a social solidarity which binds individuals together, also known as social cohesion. It first emerges as a mechanical solidarity, that is an individual sharing of similarities in a collective life. Later, individual sharing evolves into differences, into an organic solidarity (Durkheim, 1893). Here, referring to a biological organism, that is, we all play different parts in a particular situation since we all may have different views and different aspirations. Durkheim argues that it is the individual's need to think and act differently in a way that binds them more which creates the individual. He refers to the role of the 'clan' (Durkheim, 1893, p.181) which, through divisions of labour, creates ties of interdependence and co-operation. In other words, clans behave as collectives. Spencer (1851), on the other hand, introduces an 'industrial solidarity' and individualism (Spencer, 1851, p.436) and an organic view of society in which individuals pursue actions that would preserve their life and happiness, which is seen as a primary motivation for coming together for the purpose of survival. According to this argument, communities can adapt by organising themselves subconsciously and spontaneously and via the immediate pressure of needs, and not according to a rational plan of 'reflective intelligence' (Durkheim, 1893, p.202). Both Spencer and Durkheim adopted an evolutionary biological perspective and the author will return to this perspective later as it is relevant to this study. Others, like Kant (1788), refer to solidarity as a morally right action in which an individual agent's determination to act in accordance with his duty overcomes his self-interest and desire to do otherwise. Rousseau (1754) spoke of securing the unity of all in a desire for what will most benefit the whole. Marion (1880) referred to moral solidarity, defined as the sum of the conditions that make us moral beings, together with the measure of freedom that we have. Bourgeois (1902) debated solidarity as the risks and gains associated with social progress. Foot (2001) appeals to solidarity between human beings, while Wiggins (2006) debates solidarity as being integral to humanity's moral status. Sociologists refer to social solidarity as the degree and type of integration shown by a society or group of people with their neighbours, and the ties within a society such as social relationships which bind people to one another. Economic literature attempts to explain solidarity using game theory (Arnsperger *et al.*, 2003; Selten *et al.*, 1998) or group behaviour (Kritikos *et al.*, 2005). In his seminal work, *L'Europe sans rivages* (1954), Perroux advocated an approach to economic development based on diversity and solidarity rather than on domination and, later, discussed solidarity in terms of global solidarity - 'a worldwide action that would dissolve imperialism and nationalism, and create collaboration for the good of humanity' (Perroux p.57), and European solidarity - 'a feeling of collective success, a firm belief in the economic progress, in the progress without epithet' (Perroux, p.75). Van Parijs (2004, p.375) further explores solidarity as economic solidarity - 'the existence of institutionalised transfers from the lucky, in particular the rich, to the unlucky, in particular the poor'. In concluding, solidarity remains in many ways a widely explored subject and is also closely linked to a concept of community, introduced below.

Communities

The concept of community has been widely debated. Broadly speaking, communities are classified according to their characteristics such as geographical location, boundaries in the sense of differences and similarities in experiencing community life, and as a group of individuals who interact and share common values within a shared geographical location. In this study, community is seen as interconnected individuals who 'signify kinship and friendship' (Crow and Allan, 1994, p.1; Frazer, 1999, p.73), as intimacy between members, trust, and proximity of family (Tadmor, 2010), or as being driven by a set of values such as tolerance, reciprocity and trust, or weak ties (Putnam, 2000). Clark (2007) argues that context, such as space and time, may still play a role in network formations. This may be particularly so for individuals in less affluent neighbourhoods, or for those who have restricted access to public transport. This, arguably, forces communities to remain encapsulated in their own world and in organised, (Durkheim, 1893, p.181) 'self-sufficient unities' that function on their own. The same could be said for rural and remote island community.

In concluding on the literature regarding the link between social ties, solidarity and community, arguably, in order to be a part of the world in which an island community lives, one needs to be accepted by the members of that island community. Then one has relationships that run much deeper than just social ties and, as one will see later, this acceptance may not be granted by proxy but must be earned and, although people may not necessarily choose to become friends, they may develop a special form of communal friendship. These interactions within communities, both voluntary and morally

obligatory, may have a significant influence on forming friendships. At this point, the possibility of friendship within the context is introduced.

Introducing friendship

Friendship remains of great interest to a wide spectrum of academic disciplines; as a personal choice or a moral responsibility, solidarity or fraternity (Derrida, 1997). This paper explores a dimension that emerges from the empirical context and crosses the boundary between personal and social. Early classical discussion appears in ancient texts as amity and civic friendship. In his work *Gorgias*, Plato discussed the concept of political friendship. Aristotle (1934), in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, argues for friendship and trust without which justice is impossible. Cicero (1923), in his work *De Amicitia*, spoke of the relationship between friendship and human nature, which is necessary for developing moral excellence. Seneca (trans. 1912) in *De beneficiis* discusses the association between benefit, friendship and goodwill, and equality as a requisite for a true friendship. As part of the modern discussion, to Derrida friendship is ‘an obligation, a responsibility’ (Derrida, 1997, p.305). In *The Politics of Friendship* (1997), Derrida discusses the politics of friendship including power, responsibility, hostility, courage, fraternity, will, honour, foolishness, justice, faithfulness, loyalty, remembrance, loneliness, silence, reconciliation, mourning, sovereignty, to name a few. Derrida suggests three models: (i) the Graeco-Roman model, (ii) intellectual friendship and (iii) fraternity (Lévinas, 1987). In discussing the Graeco-Roman model, Derrida analyses text from Aristotle who first classifies friendship in three ways: primary, derived and non-primary friendship in *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle, 1934). He then proceeds to discuss a useful and ethical friendship and a partnership in *Eudemean Ethics* (Aristotle, trans. 1981). The Ciceronian variety of friendship, as Derrida notes (1997), stresses that a true and perfect friendship is seen as a temporal exemplar friendship and discuss a difference between true and perfect, and mediocre and vulgar friendship. Derrida frequently cites Montaigne [1877] (trans. 1991) who refers to a friendship among men as a brotherly harmony. This is closely followed by his analysis of Nietzsche’s [1888] (trans. 1981) discussion of a need for responsibility to answer to calling, as much as responding to the call, and of a silence in friendship. Derrida also refers to a text from Blanchot (1971) who discusses a friendship in a literal community, namely an intellectual friendship. Foucault (1983) argues for a civic friendship as a way of life while Gadamer (1985) explores bonds of friendship. In his analysis of Robinson Crusoe, Derrida (Derrida, 2009, 2011) speaks of solitude, isolation, sovereignty and the responsibility ‘to bear’ and ‘to carry’. This seminal work inspired the author to start looking more closely into the relationship between friendship and the island life of the marginal *Other* - rural island communities in this study.

Ethnography and Critical Theory

At the onset of the study the author become concerned with, “How do I approach this situation?” and “How do I capture and interpret it?” As the acts of friendship were observed and captured spontaneously, they remained original and unspoiled, preserved as a snapshot in a particular period of time and place; as a spatiotemporal circumstance in the author’s own words. This explorative nature of the study provided the opportunity to contemplate the usefulness of both ethnography and storytelling in author’s understanding of friendship. Traditionally, in ethnographical research, one usually draws upon mixed method methodologies in order to investigate and make sense of a situation, which in this case is a remote and rural island community. The choices for collecting information during an ethnographic exercise are abundant, ranging from participant observation of recording life in naturally occurring settings; collection of stories, interviews and a wide range of supporting documents, to name but a few. One also, has to frequently, exercise a wide degree of flexibility in a field study in interpreting information from a situation as well as translating it. Because the author is concerned with defining and presenting stories of friendship as the acts of micro stories, in order to understand it better this paper pursues this idea. Since the author, as a researcher, becomes a part of the story itself as an observer and participant in the local community rituals, the study adopts a similar approach to that of auto-ethnography by Ettore (2010) - as a study of culture that involves the self, where the researcher builds research by looking at her emotional recall and feelings and sociological introspection of the situation with the help of transcriptions of narratives and reflective research notes. The study also addresses the power relationship between the researcher and the participants in the process as a distance between the *Other* and the researcher, and where the researcher, as Foucault (1983) states, needs to build a strategic knowledge. Tedlock (2001), on the other hand, argues that the researcher can choose between being a ‘marginal native’, ‘professional stranger’ or see themselves as ‘going native’ or ‘maintaining some distance’. Crewe and Harrison (1998, p.181) argue that a particular circumstance requires groups and individuals to position themselves in relation to the dominant group. Lastly, one needs to include the *Other*, voices that are excluded, unable or unwilling to speak for themselves for various reasons, so the researcher decided to hand over the power to the *Other*. One could immediately link

this to the ethical aspect of the study. The participants themselves have to decide whether to participate or not on a voluntary basis thus resolving the ethical issue such as data confidentiality and approval.

Acts

This section represents the beginning of the second conceptual part of the paper. It attempts to address the following question: How does friendship manifest itself? When the author speaks of manifestation, she thinks of Wittgenstein's, "What can be shown, cannot be said" (Wittgenstein, 1972, 4.1212) in order to include the excluded *Other*. The author has already presented Act One in the first part of the paper and this section provides Acts Two, Three and Four. Each of these acts gradually deconstructs a complex notion such as friendship into a number of interlinked strata, beginning with the *Gathering*.

Act Two – Gathering

This act represents the first stage in exploration of friendship - an obligation and loyalty through events such as the *Gathering*. The example of *Gathering*, in this study manifests itself as the task of pulling the author's stepfather's fishing boat out of the water. Every year, the anglers must pull their boats out of the sea in order to strip off the old paint and algae and to repaint them. Fishing boats can range in size from a small vessel to much larger boats that can weigh up to 1.5 tonnes, in which case one needs to find 10-15 people. The local people performed different roles in order to pull the boat out of the sea and move it to the designated area so that the renovation work on the boat's hull could be carried out. The picture 2 provides an introduction to this act.

Picture 2. Gathering



Below is a dialogue written after the author captured the process:

It was Saturday morning around 7 am when, at breakfast, my stepfather announced that pulling the boat out of the sea must take place today at 10 am. We would have to pull the boat out of the water so the old blue antirust paint could be stripped off and then the algae deposits on the hull could be removed. After this, the boat is left to dry overnight before it is repainted on Sunday. At 9.45 am sharp I was sitting on the ferry dock while my stepfather was preparing the boat and tools for towing. I waited and looked at my watch. It was 9.50 am, but there was no-one on the horizon. I turned to my stepfather and said, "Are you sure that they are coming?"

He replied, "Yes, do not worry. They will be there."

5 minutes passed and still no-one had approached the dock. I turned to my stepfather again, saying, "No-one is coming. It is 10 am now. Of that I am sure!"

He replied again, "Wait until 10.05 am."

I began thinking, "Why are they not coming? They must come because my stepfather has helped them. It would be very foolish of them not to come." Suddenly, I saw a line of people approaching, slowly, one by one. I turned to my stepfather, saying, "So, here they are! Honestly, I really thought that no-one would come."

He replied, "I told you so. Have patience!"

We both started laughing. The crowd got bigger and bigger. Around 20 people gathered out of nowhere. The job of pulling the boat out of the water could finally start. It was getting hotter, around 35°C. Most of the men wore swimwear and some jumped into the sea straight away to cool off. Some waited for instructions. My stepfather started assembling them. First, the boat had to be tied to a rope connected to machines that would slowly pull the boat out of the sea. 5 people went to one side of the boat and another 5 went to the other. Together they held the boat across the thick wooden trenches that lay in front of the boat. The idea is to hold the boat from both sides, making sure that it remains towed straight while it is being pulled out. With many efforts, plenty of shouting and frantic movements at each step of towing, it took 20 minutes to pull the boat out. The first part of the mission was completed. The next involved stripping off the old paint, letting it dry and repainting.

The next day, they would have to put the boat back into the sea. On Sunday, at 5 pm, the men gathered again and towed the boat back into the sea. The mission for this year was accomplished.

The act begins with a dialogue between the author and her stepfather. Through the conversation there is a period of silence between these two: Will anyone come? There is a feeling in the air, of an uncertainty and a possibility of no-one coming and of stubborn confidence, believing that someone is coming. These are the two traits known to man: a worry on the part of the person who does not know the islanders well (the author as a researcher) and the confidence of the other person (the author's stepfather and an adopted local) who was accepted by the islanders and who knew them well. Then the tempo of the process intensifies. The arrival of the islanders is happening, the *Gathering* is taking place. The act ends with a happy outcome - the boat was pulled out without any damage. What follows is a celebration of the success. The author's stepfather summons everyone to his house for a glass of wine to thank them for helping. The *Gathering*, in this sense, represents a bond that keeps the community spirit alive and as a possible formation of ties that may lead to friendship amongst the members of the island community and, in Ricoeur's (2005) sense, as a demand for recognition that includes islanders being able to exercise reciprocity and mutuality towards each other, and this capacity is part of being human. Moreover, there is no sense of the inequality that Roseau (1762) speaks of amongst the men, since all the islanders are equal and this is projected in the story. Trust, confidence and belief in each other are the specific preliminary traits in developing the first steps towards forming communal friendship amongst the islanders which include, amongst others, a moral obligation to help each other. These could also be viewed first as a conditional form of friendship, depending on the

particular circumstances. Just remember the words, 'friends in need' that the author introduced in Act One. Then she became interested in how this conditional becomes unconditional, and to establish a more explicit link between these two, one needs to obtain a deeper insight and this is explored in Act Three.

Act Three – Robinson Crusoe from Rivanj

This act further reinforces the importance of unconditionality as the deeper trait of friendship. It is presented as a story that was written out of the memories of a real event which took place on 17 December 2010 (Slobodna Dalmacija, 2010) and which nearly ended tragically.

It was a typical winter's day on Rivanj. It was late afternoon and I was sitting on the pier next to the marina, drinking tea and reading a book. The weather that day was sunny, but chilly. I was watching the sunset from the pier. It was my usual routine. While I was reading, I noticed one angler arriving in the marina after collecting his fishing net. I knew him personally; he was close to my stepfather. I waved to him and he waved back. There was calmness and silence. At the same time, an old man, who was my neighbour and the uncle of the angler who had just passed by, left the port. I was thinking, "He is 80 years old but still very fit." Suddenly, I heard a noise coming from the other side of the pier. My mother was shouting, "Dinner time!" It was time for me to leave the pier and return home. Later, at around 8 pm, as we all sat down in the kitchen, the weather suddenly changed. A strong wind, like a blizzard, started to blow over the island. It turned dark and very cold. It was very unusual for this part of the coastal area to have snow. While we were all chatting, a Rottweiler called Rona who was sitting on the floor, whined and the door abruptly opened with a bang. The angler I had waved to earlier, entered the room. Without greeting us, we could see from his face that he was very worried. He turned to my stepfather and said, "Uncle is not back yet. The weather is awful. We need to go and search for him." The scene was like one from a classic movie, albeit in slow motion. Suddenly, there was silence. We all looked at each other and my stepfather quietly turned to me and said, "Go and fetch me my clothes." I ran out, brought back the clothes and helped my stepfather to get dressed. My stepfather has the biggest boat on the island and only he could go out in this weather. Then the two of them went away into the darkness of the sea. I turned to my mother. "How on earth are they going to find him in this weather?" We went inside waiting for news, for a call from them. The clock struck 10 pm, then 11 pm and midnight and still there was no news. The phone rang. The sister of the missing man called to ask for news. My mother said to her, "I think you need to call the coast guard." "Yes," she replied, "You are right. We cannot delay it any more." After informing them, the coast guard went out to search for them, but very soon gave up due to the bad weather. They said that they would start searching again as soon as the weather cleared in the morning. In the meantime, our men returned, but without the missing man. They said they could have gone further and further out into the open sea, but then they had realised that he could not have gone that far with his little boat and decided to return. They hoped that the man would definitely try to find the safe lighthouse on the nearby island. After a warm drink, we all went to bed, but no-one could sleep. Around 5.30 am, the coast guard rang up to say that they had found the missing old man. He had sought safety at the nearby island of Sestrice which is 15 minutes away by boat from our island. Because the weather was so bad, the old man had been forced to abandon his boat and jump out of it before it sank on the shores. He managed to swim out of the sea and seek safety in the nearby, small lighthouse used by anglers in case of emergency. The old man managed to survive the night by continually exercising to stay warm. He knew that the islanders and coast guard would look for him once the weather turned better. Indeed, in the morning, the coast guard had resumed the search and spotted him outside the lighthouse. When we heard that he was safe, we all ran out of our houses to get a glimpse of him. He looked tired and in a state of shock. I did not speak to him until the following week. The story of this harrowing event appeared in the local newspapers under the title 'Robinson Crusoe from Rivanj' (Slobodna Dalmacija, 2010).

This story captures three emotional actions; a fear of the loss of a fellow islander, a close bond with the members of the community, and a selfless courage and bravery (the author's stepfather and the old man's nephew who went out in search for him) to act without thinking about oneself. In a way, the story provides a passage from conditional hospitality to an unconditional one, as discussed in the previous story. So the author arrives at the notion of unconditionality in friendship, and this very unconditionality that the author has tried to emphasise in the story, echoes with her departure from conditional hospitality of the economy of exchange to an unconditional one - a pure hospitality or a gift in Derrida's sense (1996). This kind of hospitality should be reciprocal as Derrida argues: in exchange for being in one's place, the visitor has to respect its space and culture⁴; and, thus, be viewed as a double blind⁵. The story also highlights the depth of the particular fear of being dependent on each other at such times, on mutual vulnerability and thus creating a sense of duty, an indebtedness to and care of each other. As Ricouer (1992) argues, a feeling of duty can go far beyond the required, but a reciprocity precedes it and the meaning of this reciprocity encompasses hearing and responding to the demands of the *Other*. This story implies unconditionality in the sense of a willingness to help each other at any cost. This willingness is seen as an essential part of humanity. It implies a care for each other, and this brings the author to the idea of humanity in friendship which is further emphasised in Act Four, below.

Act Four – Paula

The previous story introduced us to a particular strata of unconditionality in communal friendship.

This act is presented as the story narrated by the author after conversations with locals that in many ways helped her to clarify what is meant by an everyday act of humanity in friendship in remote island communities. The story about the catamaran, Paula provides a context for this.

Picture 3 Paula



The story goes as follows:

⁴ We have to welcome the Other inside - without that there would be no hospitality, that the Other should be sheltered or welcomed in my space, that I should try to open my space, without trying to include the Other in my space...But that's a double bind, on the one hand I should respect the singularity of the Other and not to ask him or her that he respect or keep intact my own space or my own culture (Derrida, 1997).

⁵I have to accept if I offer unconditional hospitality that the *Other* may ruin my own space or impose his or her own culture or his or her own language. That's the problem: hospitality should be neither assimilation, acculturation, nor simply the occupation of my space by the *Other*. That's why it has to be negotiated at every instant, and the decision for hospitality, the best rule for this negotiation, has to be invented at every second with all the risks involved, and it is very risky (ibid)

Each time I returned to the island, I took a catamaran called Paula to the island of Rivanj. It was built in Japan and looked just like the Thunderbirds boat, - modern and comfortable. The islanders liked it and the crew, captain and officers were very pleasant and helpful. They always helped the islanders to board and never charged for extra luggage, as other catamarans did. I knew the captain personally and we used to sit down and chat during the journey. He used to tell me about his long sailing trips around the world. The elderly islanders frequently asked crew members to buy medications on prescription for them in the town of Zadar. I did the same on a few occasions. Then things changed. The Paula, which had carried passengers around the archipelago for the last 6 years, from 2007 to 2013, stopped its services to Rivanj. The contract for this route expired and the Paula was sent to new locations. When I returned to the island last summer, 2013, the first thing that my mother told me when I arrived at the airport was, "The Paula is gone." I was curious as to what the replacement would be like because there was only one catamaran like the Paula. Not surprisingly, the replacement for the Paula was uncomfortable and twice as expensive. The crew were unfriendly and impatient. Every islander I spoke to was sad. I began to look for the reason behind this sadness. I spoke to a few people. One man, an angler, told me in a frustrated voice, "The crew on the Paula were much better. You have no idea how much fish they received from us in exchange for their help. Even your stepfather, every time he had a big barbecue, packed the leftovers and gave them to the crew when they docked. I remember when they started sailing down this route, they were reserved but they soon learned that this is the way things are here." I turned to him and asked, "What do you mean by this?" "Just be a human being!" he replied. "Life on the island is hard for the elderly and all that they want is a little warmth and empathy."

Act Four is based on conversations with locals and touches upon an important issue - the last trait of friendship, a humanity, which, in many ways, is present in everyday problems facing the remote and rural island community of Rivanj Island. Consider again, "Just be a human being!" These words imply a necessity of humanity and care. Heidegger and Derrida spoke of human Dasein care. Drawing on the work from Kierkegaard (1843, 1987a), Heidegger (1927) introduces mortal possibilities as a part of the temporality in Dasein, hence the term 'human Dasein' (Derrida, 2011) - the point of view of the common human conscience (Derrida, 2011, p.198). Derrida (2011), in his intention of dealing with the difficulty of translating Heidegger's Dasein (1927), arrives at his interpretation of the world as "our common world (Derrida, 2011, p.267) in which people co-exist"⁶. He speaks of this responsibility, our moral responsibility in creating this world, as carrying the world with us (Derrida, 2011, p.268)⁷. Arguably, to care means to feel towards others, to feel compassion, to support, to help, to show empathy and sympathy. As author's interpretation of Ricoeur's (2005) ethical stance to friendship suggests, one cannot value oneself without valuing the other first, hence introducing compassion and solidarity into the theme of a communal friendship and thus opening up a possibility for introducing humanity in the equation of friendship.

Discussion

The author returns to last research question set out at the onset of the paper: What is the importance of friendship in the island's survival? In arriving, she addresses the fundamental traits of what constitutes a communal friendship that emerges from the field study. With Act One, "*Friends in need*", the author steps into a preliminary discussion about friendship; a voluntary obligation and the duty of members to participate in local activities that concern the community. In Act Two,

⁶ The word "world" we were saying, that has at least as a minimal sense the designation of *that within which*, that in which the beast and the sovereign co-habit, the very thing that –transitively this time – they co-habit. *On habite dans le monde*, but as much, as we say in French, *on habite le monde*, one inhabits the world, as inhabitants. And one co-habits the world...inhabits the same world (Derrida, 2011, p.265).

⁷ ...what I must do, with you and carrying you, is make it that there be precisely a world, just a world, if not a just world, or to do things so as to make as if there were just a world, and to make the world come to the world to make as if-for you, to give it to you, to bear it toward you, destined for you, to address it to you ... (Derrida, 2011, p.268).

“*Gathering*”, she captures a formation of the ties that may lead to friendship amongst the members of the island community: trust, confidence and a belief in each other, also viewed as a conditional form of friendship. Act Three, ‘*Robinson Crusoe from Rivanj*’, reminds us of the much deeper unconditionality in friendship: a willingness to risk life for a fellow islander, a selfless courage and bravery. In the last Act Four, “*Paula*”, the author arrives at the final trait that completes the loop: humanity and humanness in Ricoeur’s (2005). It may include an obligation, a responsibility and above all, a care. To care means to feel toward others, to feel compassion, to support, to help, to show empathy and sympathy (Mendas, 2010). Arguably, friendship is essential to community life as a means of communication between members, survival, and, as such, goes beyond social ties. This also leads back to the previously discussed organic view of society (Spencer, 1851) in which communities can adapt by organising themselves by the immediate pressure of needs (Durheim, 1893). As the study indicates, the members’ offer of friendship is reciprocal and the quality of life on the island depends on the strength and bonds of friendship between communities. “Just be a human being!” Those are the humble words of the islanders. One seems to have forgotten how important it is in everyday live, for bonding with neighbours and people one cares about. One could argue that friendship in this context has a purpose of self-preserving community relationships, culture and the quality of life on the island, hence the term ‘a communal friendship’.

During the process of exploring relationships within the community the author asked herself, “How do I interpret the situation? How do I capture it?” This allows author to introduce the argument that ethnography and storytelling coexist, and this is essential if one is to collect sufficient empirical evidence from the field study. The author introduces the term ‘an ethnographic storytelling’ where the researcher is adaptable and possesses a reflective flexibility in a given situation. This would help to break down power relationships between the researchers and the researched and to work effectively within the situation with subjectivity as one of the few sources of information. The researcher is viewed as both researcher and participant, as someone who is fully integrated within the research process and, in the case of the study, a part of the island community who lives there and is accepted by the island community, as the author was. Since the findings in the study are represented as a collection of micro stories - pictures, memories and words - as the snapshots of the author’s memory of individuals and events, and that these are unspoken, silent, containing the aspects of mood, atmosphere and emotion, one has to deal with the problem of translating their voices. The issue of translation echoes from Derrida’s notes on the difficulties of translating literary text. Derrida speaks of an abyss of translation, insisting on “an interpretive translation that brings with it a whole of culture, and which is a not separable from historical movement in which all the forces of the world and the ages are engaged” (Derrida, 1997, p.449), and on researcher’s own responsibility for the translation (Derrida, 1997). Storytelling, using deconstruction, is defined by Derrida as ‘unclosed, unenclosable, not wholly formalisable ensemble of rules for reading, interpretation and writing’ (Derrida, 1983, p.40) and which can be demonstrated or ‘shown’. It consists of what was previously excluded. Boje (2001) argues that ‘story deconstruction is all the constructing and reconstructing processes happening all around us’ (Boje, 2001, p.1). In this sense, arguably, both storytelling and ethnography help deconstruction to take place in this study through the collection of stories about communal friendship. Limitations and challenges facing the researcher in ethnographic storytelling, such as the lack of materiality on one hand and an abundance of the spoken word, body language gesture, mood and atmosphere on the other, remain present. The author argues that ethnographic storytelling is helpful and future study could address in more depth the following questions: Can storytelling shed light on those things that conventional methods cannot? If so, what are these things? How can one present them in the best possible way? Thus, doing more studies in this way would affirm this argument, but this thought remains open to future readers.

Conclusion

The author returns to Derrida’s meaning of friendship. Friendship signifies what has been so far excluded, what should have been included in community behaviour, what sovereign or grammar the community itself must pursue in order to form friendship within the community. So the author arrives at this point: friendship implies humanity and care. Friendship in context has given the author and reader another dimension, it has a unique purpose, hence the term ‘a communal friendship’. To care means to feel towards others, compassion and sympathy - “Just be a human being!” says one participant in the study. This role that friendship has in remote and rural island communities is seen as a necessity, an obligation and is unconditional, for the benefit not only of a whole but also an individual. In this sense, friendship emerges as a choice for survival and as one of the main drivers in socio-economic development that is crucial to promoting sustainable remote and rural island communities more generally. The author has tried to understand this through the four acts of friendship using storytelling and ethnography. These two co-exist, hence the term ‘ethnographic storytelling’. More

research could reaffirm the advantages that ethnographic storytelling offers both in terms of its aesthetic, academic and practical value.

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