Belonging in an aquapelago: Island mobilities and emotions

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Abstract: This paper concerns belonging in islands. Place-belonging conjures images of feeling at home somewhere, in our case islands. Given the emotionality of belonging, we explore island belonging through emotions. More specifically, we apply the concept of the aquapelago to island belonging and refer to this as aquapelagic belonging. Bringing in emotions, embodied perceptions and mobility, we discuss how these are assembled in island-sea relations to form aquapelagic belonging. In doing so, we draw on qualitative data from fieldwork undertaken in locations where proximity to the sea and access to seaborne mobility is paramount. Our findings demonstrate how certain emotional dispositions and mobility practices emerge in processes of aquapelagic belonging, indicating that mobility is intricately entangled with island belonging. We propose that the interconnected nature of land and sea spaces co-produce emotions of belonging in island spaces. We therefore argue that the concept of aquapelagic belonging lends useful insight to understand what is particular about island belonging. Furthermore, we suggest that attention to mobility, which in this context means navigating land/sea environments, is key to understanding aquapelagic belonging. We conclude that to grasp island belonging, the notion of the aquapelago is relevant and assists in understanding the totality of island relations.

Keywords: aquapelago, belonging, Denmark, emotions, Faroe Islands, mobility

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Introduction

Life in small islands can pose challenges for mobility, prospects for employment, as well as access to welfare, education and markets—all of which are more widely accessible in urban environments. Moreover, mobility challenges may be further

exacerbated in cold water islands, which often contend with rough seas and harsh natural environments (Baldacchino, 2006). In spite of such realities, people actively choose to live in islands, either as stayers, return migrants or newcomers.

Our study set out to research employment and settlement patterns in the small cold water islands of Suðuroy (Faroe Islands) and Læsø (Denmark). When asked to explain their decisions to live in the islands, people repeatedly referred to emotional aspects of belonging. As we shall discuss, how islands make themselves felt can be significant in producing place-belonging. We therefore focus our paper on emotions as one analytical level for exploring island belonging (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2006). To do so, we employ the concept of the aquapelago (Hayward, 2012a) to catch sight of the interactive nature of sea and land environments in island life. In a response to what Hayward (2012a) saw as an overprivileging of *land* spaces in island studies, he argues that the term aquapelago, as assemblages of marine and land spaces, can expand our understanding of aquapelagic societies. This we return to later.

The notion of place-belonging is widely understood as involving feelings of emotional connectedness—being at 'home' in a place (Antonsich, 2010; Lähdesmäki et al., 2016). Probyn (1996) argues that belonging does not emerge in isolation or as an individual affair, but arises in relation with others, humans as well as non-humans. In this sense, islands as places with social and material surroundings impinge on our very being. There is a growing body of literature connecting emotions to place (Davidson & Milligan, 2004; Löfgren, 2014; Thrift, 2004). We draw on this work to understand how emotional engagement with our surroundings may be constitutive of island belonging. Despite the strong reference to emotions in defining place-belonging, Wood and Waite (2011, p. 201) argue that, in texts in which belonging is in focus, questions are seldom asked:

> that explore what belonging feels like, how it 'works' as an emotional attachment and the significance of emotionality in belonging [This is perhaps due to the nature of belonging, which is] more often than not, tacitly experienced; we often know more about what it feels like to belong […] than we can articulate.

In a mobile world, in which a mobility imperative defines modern living, rootedness and belonging are approached as diverse and translocal (Farrugia, 2016; Hedberg & Do Carmo, 2012). We argue, however, that place still matters and territorial belonging remains important (Arp Fallov et al., 2013). This relates to the definition of mobility we apply, namely "the act of moving between locations" (Cresswell, 2006, p. 2) either through corporeal travel of people or physical movement of objects. This definition is apt because our analysis centres on belonging in place—specifically island places. Encountering the island-sea is inherent for life in islands, especially for those islands which depend on the sea for work and connectivity (Vannini, 2011a). Our perspective on island belonging therefore involves island-sea relations (Pugh, 2016). Encounters with the sea are deeply embedded in island life, be it from the shore, on

vessels, from working or playing at sea, the consumption of sea foods, and from being in the sea.

Small islands are often positioned as places of departure from where people—especially the young—out-migrate (Alexander, 2015; King, 2009; Olwig, 2007). However, we move beyond examining place-belonging in islands as places of out-migration, and instead focus on the emotions and mobilities of aquapelagic belonging. Nevertheless, the fact of these places being characterised by out-migration remains an important palimpsest for those who choose to stay—this is evident as respondents continuously position their place of belonging in contrast to elsewhere. We bring in emotions, embodied perceptions and mobility to discuss how these are assembled in island-sea relations to form aquapelagic belonging. In doing so, we draw on interviews, essays, and impressions from fieldwork undertaken in locations where proximity to the sea and access to seaborne mobility is paramount. Concretely, we ask: *What are the emotional experiences of aquapelagic belonging? How and why is mobility part of aquapelagic belonging?*

Our discussion of aquapelagic belonging commences with combining literature on belonging and island studies, which points us towards the centrality of concepts such as 'navigation' and 'mobility'. This discussion is followed by examining the literature of emotions within geography. We then present the two island contexts and the methods employed in the study. Subsequently, we present our findings along two themes of aquapelagic belonging: embodied emotions and mobility. Finally, we discuss our findings and contributions in the concluding section.

Place-belonging

In a review of theoretical approaches to the concept of belonging, Antonsich (2010, p. 644) argues that belonging is "vaguely-defined and ill-theorized", possibly because its meaning seems self-evident (Waters, 2018). To explore place-belonging, we start with the association it conjures: feelings of being at home, of emotional attachment and of safety (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Of course belonging might not be restricted to the place in which one lives and might refer to distant places (Olwig, 2007; Skrbiš, 2008). However, for the purpose of our study, we employ belonging to the places in which our participants live to understand their decisions to live where they do.

As a concept, belonging has increasingly come into use in contrast to that of 'identity' (Anthias, 2018), which some argue might represent too stable and fixed a category, and "which moves the analyst away from context, meaning and practice" (Anthias, 2002, p. 493). Waters (2018) further adds that belonging as a term is active and continuous by means of the *-ing* form, which underpins our argument that aquapelagic belonging is relational and constantly in the making. Similarly, Probyn (1996, p. 19) argues that belonging captures "the desire for some sort of attachment, be it to other people, places or modes of being, and the ways in which individuals and groups are caught within wanting to belong, wanting to become, a process which is fuelled by yearning." Understood this way, emotions are central to belonging (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2011).

Human geographers have theorised the relationship between people and places through various concepts such as sense of place, place-attachment, and place-belonging. Despite being interconnected, we differentiate between these concepts for analytic purposes and to clarify our perspective on place-belonging. A sense of place, Cresswell (2009) argues, relates to the feelings and emotions which places can conjure in people, and from which meanings are ascribed. The related concept of place-attachment is generally taken to refer to emotional bonds to place, yet bonding may not conjure feelings of being at home in place. By the same token, people can live somewhere, but not necessarily feel a sense of connection or belonging (Gillespie et al., 2022). Emotional bonds of place-attachment, however, are necessary to develop feelings of being at home, as a "sense of fit" with the environment, also referred to as place-belongingness (Malatzky et al., 2020, p. 3). Thus, a sense of fit is intimately bound with emotions of living in specific places, and key to our approach to explore island belonging.

Aquapelagic belonging

Thinking about whether *island* belonging might be special leads to the concept of islandness. Islandness, Baldacchino (2004, p. 278) argues, is an "intervening variable that does not determine, but contours and conditions physical and social events in distinct, and distinctly relevant ways." One distinct aspect of islandness is the interconnected nature of islands and the sea (Hau'ofa, 1995). Calling for a holistic approach to understanding island perspectives, Hau'ofa emphasises the difference between islands in a vast sea and what he terms a "sea of islands" (Hau'ofa, 1995, p. 150). Along this vein, island studies has moved from studies of is-*lands*, with land and shore boundaries, surrounded by sea, to islands as places *with* sea. Conceptualising the significance of interactive land/marine environments, Hayward (2012a, p. 5) proposes to move from thinking of archipelagos, to thinking of island societies as aquapelagic, which he defines as:

> a social unit existing in a location in which the aquatic spaces between and around a group of islands are utilised and navigated in a manner that is fundamentally interconnected with and essential to the social group's habitation of land and their senses of identity and belonging.

This definition provides a lens on islands which includes marine environments in the conceptualisation. Emerging from this debate, we suggest that the concept of aquapelagic belonging can provide insight into belonging in islands. To understand our participants' (re)settlement in islands, place-belonging engages island and sea relations. Sea and land spaces, and their associated connectivities (Grydehøj & Casagrande, 2020), therefore form part of our study of place-belonging in islands.

Later, Hayward (2012b) pointed out that the air above islands and sea, with its species, weather and climate are equally part of the aquapelago. In the above definition Hayward further emphasises the importance of how aquapelagic spaces are *utilised* and *navigated*. In her discussion of aquapelagic societies, Alexander (2015) usefully

underlines the diversities of how islanders utilise the sea. Direct economic uses of the sea include fishing and maritime transportation. Alexander (2015), however, expands on this by including indirect utilisation of the sea, naming tourism and the cultural industries as examples of economies trading in representations of the sea. She also considers the emphasis on *navigation* in Hayward's definition, and she especially discusses mobilities as island commuting. Movement between small islands and central urban areas can be fundamental for islanders to participate in wider society. In his definition of aquapelagic societies, Hayward (2012a) argues that the interconnected nature of land and sea spaces are *essential* to belonging. We therefore argue that the lens of aquapelagic belonging lends more analytic leverage to understand what is particular about island belonging. In addition, we suggest that attention to mobility, which in this context means navigating land/sea environments, is key to understanding aquapelagic belonging.

Various studies have emerged in the past decade within the interdisciplinary field of island studies which take account of what has been termed the "relational turn" (Pugh, 2016; Grydehøj, 2020). Some of these focus on islands as practice and "doing islandness" in bringing about a sense of place (Vannini & Taggart, 2013), through mobilities (Vannini, 2011a; 2011b), immigration (Randall et al., 2014) and young people's future orientations (Alexander, 2015; Gaini, 2017; 2019). Vannini and Taggart (2013, p. 228) suggest that islandness is "an outcome of what islanders do, and in particular how islanders move." Whilst this provides insight into assemblages of islands, mobilities and practices, we are not necessarily presented with the emotions of belonging in islands and how these might emerge.

Belonging and emotions

Emotional geographers have for some time recognized the importance of emotions in sensing space, the most immediate "*felt* geography" being our body, in which emotions come to be expressed (Davidson & Milligan, 2004, p. 524). Despite the importance of emotional experience, the literature using a social and intersubjective perspective on emotions often does not define the concept or what emotions actually are (Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015). In his writings, Burkitt (2002; 2014) starts by examining the connection between feelings and emotion. He argues that individuals become aware of "structures of feeling" (Burkitt, 2002, p. 151), which are embodied in our relationship with objects in the world (human and non-human). Yet, although words and emotions are intimately linked, when feelings are expressed in an emotional vocabulary, "the feeling goes through a transformation as it finds utterance in words—it becomes like an object that can be reflected upon" (Burkitt, 2002, p. 155). As such, feelings and emotions are not the same, but cannot be separated. Rather, feelings belong to practical consciousness while emotions, in their articulation, belong to discursive consciousness (Burkitt, 2002; 2014). From the perspective of our qualitative material, we rely primarily on words and therefore, the emotional experiences of islandness. This may not capture the full breadth of aquapelagic belonging, however, we believe it can give some insight.

In her writings of transnational life, Svašek (2010, p. 868) finds it useful to think of emotions not so much as what they *are*, but as "dynamic processes through which individuals experience and interpret the changing world, position themselves *vis-à-vis* others, and shape their subjectivities." In the same vein as Burkitt, Svašek points to the importance of emotional encounters, specifically referring to examples of non-human others including animals, material objects, and landscapes. To this, we add sea and airscapes in line with our argument about aquapelagic belonging. Svašek (2010) further points out that emotional processes can be viewed from the theoretical perspectives of discourse, practices and embodied experiences. These, she acknowledges, are hard to separate, and we find elements of all these in our empirical material.

Emotional geography has contributed to an understanding of the role of emotions in socio-spatial relations in a range of areas (Davidson & Milligan, 2004). Antonsich (2010, p. 654), however, points out that although this field "significantly contributes to exposing, elucidating and engaging the role of emotions in re-producing socio-spatial relations, it does not seem to have so far expressly addressed belonging, both in its meanings and performativity." There are of course exceptions (e.g. Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015; Skrbiš, 2008; Svašek, 2010; Waters, 2018). Conceptualising emotions as active responses to a relational context (Burkitt, 2002; 2014) includes relations both at the micro-level (engaging with humans or non-human beings 'here-and-now') and at the macro-level, where wider social relations and expectations about morality and behaviour *also* influence (but do not determine) which emotions we express. This means that our "socio-physical space" (Burkitt, 2002, p. 165) is co-constitutive of which emotions are (or can be) articulated.

Here we return to Hayward's (2012a) notion of the aquapelago, to reiterate that a defining feature of the socio-physical space of islands is proximity to the sea. We propose that the interconnected nature of land and sea spaces in islands are fundamental to socio-physical space, and as such may be co-constituting emotions of belonging in island spaces.

Locations, data and methods

The project this paper is based on was a close collaboration between the authors, with the aim of researching settlement patterns and employment in Suðuroy (Faroe Islands) and Læsø (Denmark). Belonging emerged as a strong theme in the semi-structured interviews from the outset, most likely because both islands are characterised by out-migration, and because living in them poses challenges for mobility, employment, and access to welfare and education. Given the open-ended nature of our interview format, the data is rich in descriptions of belonging, emerging out of our questions about settlement patterns. Data collection was closely coordinated, yet the two islands differ in important respects, which impacted possibilities for and outcomes of data collection efforts. Below, we account for key features of the two islands, before presenting our data and analytic approach.

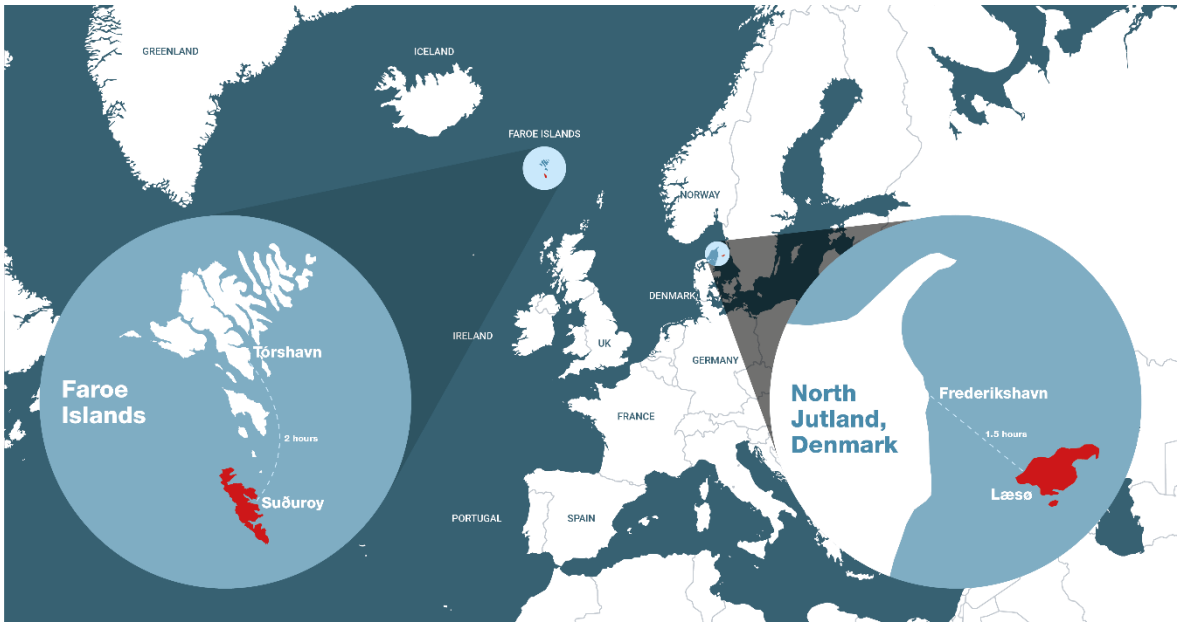

Figure 1. Suðuroy and Læsø. © Erika Anne Hayfield & Helene Pristed Nielsen.

Island locations

Suðuroy is the most southern island of the Faroe Islands and has a population of 4,660, spread over 11 villages and two towns (Statistics Faroe Islands, 2020). The island is 164 km^2 and the topography is characterised by high mountains, sea cliffs, bays and fjords. The fjords form long indentations in the landscape, and most settlements are located in fjords or bays. The subarctic oceanic climate and frequent heavy winds oftentimes entail rough seas and ferry disruptions. The infrastructure within the Faroe Islands is highly developed, with roads, tunnels, bridges and three subsea tunnels, the fourth soon completed. Once the fourth subsea tunnel is completed, over 90% of Faroe Islanders will be connected by road, making car mobility easy. However, islanders of Suðuroy rely entirely on the ferry. The ferry has two or three daily departures, taking two hours each way. These limited connections between Suðuroy and the central hub of Tórshavn are increasingly positioning the island as outlying, relative to the rest of the Faroe Islands.

The sea is an important source of work in Suðuroy, and the island has a long history of fishing. Today, many still work in fisheries and maritime industries, however, their employers are not necessarily local companies. As many as one-third of the working population are directly employed in fisheries, fish-farming, fish processing, maritime transport, and ship building (Statistics Faroe Islands, 2021). However, the aquapelago is also evident in the many small leisure boats owned by islanders. In Suðuroy, 34% of households have access to a boat for use (Statistics Faroe Islands, 2011). These are primarily small boats (18-38 feet) used for fishing, hunting sea birds and leisure sailing. While Suðuroy has a sufficiently large population to offer upper secondary education many out-migrate for further education with relatively many returning post-education.

Læsø is situated in the Kattegat Sea between Denmark and Sweden. The population comprises 1,776 inhabitants (Læsø Municipality, 2021), and the municipality has the lowest population density in Denmark (Statistics Denmark, 2018). Over half of island residents live in the three villages of Byrum, Vesterø Havn and Østerby Havn and the remainder in small settlements and farms dispersed across the island. The land area is 118 km^2 with a flat topography and maximum elevation of 24 metres. The climate is warm temperate, although conditional of maritime variations, which entail that ferry disruptions due to strong winds are a common occurrence. The only public connection to and from Læsø is by ferry, which sails between Frederikshavn and Vesterø Havn. From Vesterø Havn, there is a free bus service to the other villages. The ferry journey is 90 minutes each way and departs between four and seven times daily, depending on season and weather conditions. The ferry schedule means that commuters working an eight-hour workday in Frederikshavn are away from home for at least 12 hours.

Due to the island's size, the scope of the labour market in Læsø is limited. Historically, Læsø is well known for salt production, and today, one important industry is fishing—compared to the rest of Denmark, fishing and farming are relatively more important for employment (Region Nordjylland, 2020). Læsø is characterised by relatively high numbers of small businesses (Region Nordjylland, 2019) of which many depend on tourism. During the summer season, the island is a thriving tourist destination with much activity in restaurants, shops, summer houses and camping sites. Therefore, work rhythms during summer differ from the winter months, as the island population substantially increases during the tourist season (Pristed Nielsen, Hayfield & Arnfjord, 2020). In terms of education, Læsø is not sufficiently large to cater for secondary education. This means that young people generally leave the island to attend secondary school aged 15-16.

The islands of Suðuroy and Læsø exhibit important similarities and differences, but we consider both aquapelagic societies due to their strong dependence on the sea for employment, cultural life and mobilities. Both have small populations and the out-migration of young people over time has led to demographic vulnerabilities (skewed age and sex ratios) (Pristed Nielsen, Hayfield & Arnfjord, 2020). The difference in population size makes a considerable impact, as educational opportunities and welfare sector jobs are more available in Suðuroy. Both islands are crucially dependent on ferries for access to urban areas. Furthermore, Suðuroy and Læsø are islands from where it either untenable or difficult to commute daily. The islands differ in terms of climate and industries, and although Læsø is a cold-water island, the summers are warmer, unlike the cold conditions in Suðuroy. Another difference pertains to island economies. Læsø depends heavily on tourism, whilst employment in Suðuroy depends more on maritime industries. Finally, a large proportion of Læsø and Suðuroy islanders have lived off the islands, usually for work or education. Both islands are therefore characterised by migration. However, Suðuroy is more characterised by return-migration, whilst Læsø also has some in-migration of newcomers with no family history in the island (Pristed Nielsen, Hayfield & Arnfjord, 2020).

Data and methods

The aim of our project was to research how job opportunities and settlement patterns mutually influence each other in small islands. During interviews, feelings of place-belonging emerged as a strong factor in explaining settlement, even in the absence of job opportunities. Considering the dominance of youth out-migration, we strove to include youth perspectives. Furthermore, we aimed to include both men's and women's perspectives on local labour market opportunities. Therefore, data collection strategies involved interviewing working couples, while also allowing for flexibility through interviewing singles and people whose partner was unable to participate in an interview.

The data collection plan furthermore involved collecting essays from 8th grade school children (aged 14-15). This was accomplished through collaboration with three schools in Suðuroy, where we also conducted five group interviews. In Læsø however, the only school in the island declined our request for collaboration, and instead we organised a focus group interview with youngsters (aged 14-15) attending the youth club. Furthermore, a 'hanging out strategy' (Woodward, 2009) was practiced in the Læsø youth club (and elsewhere) to add depth to impressions from the focus group interview. Thus, we ended up with substantially more data from youth in Suðuroy compared to Læsø. Informed consent was obtained from both the youths themselves and their parents. In both islands, it was clear that youth perspectives differed from those of adults, insofar as both groups generally articulated emotions of safety and security, while youths more so than adults also expressed boredom and a sense of surveillance.

Erika Anne Hayfield went on three trips to Suðuroy in the spring of 2019 to interview residents about employment and settlement decisions. Spending a total of two weeks in the island, she also talked with local school children about the same topics and collected essays about their thoughts on the future, including employment and residence. In total, she conducted 20 interviews with 32 individuals, five group interviews with 41 youngsters, and received 32 essays from youngsters aged 14-15 years. Helene Pristed Nielsen went on two trips to Læsø, examining the same research topics. Also spending two weeks in the island, she conducted 19 interviews with 33 individuals. In addition, she talked informally with approximately 50 others. The informal talks took place for example in the local youth club, the knitting club, the fishing association, and the tourism agency. She also participated in two social get-togethers arranged by members of the local business association, and an open debate evening in the town hall, organised by herself and advertised in the local paper. Finally, a few months after our data collection, we gathered 12 of our respondents (five from Læsø and seven from Suðuroy) for a joint two-day workshop in Tórshavn in the Faroe Islands. This was done both to illicit more responses to our research questions, but above all to give participants a chance to exchange experiences and ideas.

The analysis draws on what residents in each island told us about their sensations of place-belonging. According to Burkitt (2002, p. 151), feelings are articulated through speech or discourse, which gives them form as specific emotions which find a place in our vocabulary. Following this argument, it is therefore possible to research emotions

of belonging through verbalised expressions. Burkitt (2014, p. 5) also argues that "we cannot separate out feelings, or emotions for that matter, from our bodily ways of perceiving the world," which entail that our senses such as seeing, hearing and touching are integral to how we experience emotions. He further argues that "humans find meaning in bodily metaphors that help to make sense of both physical and social affects working upon us" (Burkitt, 2002, p. 166). Although our analysis is dependent on data which was verbalised, we are also interested in examining that in which language finds its limits, when respondents were attempting to express emotional aspects of their personal sense of belonging. This involves analysing instances where words are lost, where silences emerge and the flow of meaning production is interrupted (Müller, 2015). Following Burkitt (2014), we also take it to involve analysing instances where bodily ways of perceiving the world are (metaphorically) articulated as elements in belonging.

It was in such instances, when words were lost or emotions were conveyed through reference to embodied perceptions that the focus for this paper emerged. In our interpretation, our respondents attempted to convey something about aquapelagic belonging. As pointed out by Alexander (2015, p. 42), the aquapelago is a *performed* space. Hayward (2012a, p. 6) argues that rather than an 'objective' geographical entity, the archipelago is a space "constituted by human presence and the utilisation of the environment." As we shall discuss in the analysis, engaging with the sea (sailing in it, swimming in it, making a living off it, etc.) seems to be one fundamental avenue for expressing aquapelagic belonging.

Findings: Belonging in an aquapelago

The analysis of our data is presented according to two overarching themes of aquapelagic belonging: embodied emotions and mobility. These two themes overlap. However, in the former, we focus on aquapelagic belonging as an emotional, sensed and embodied phenomenon. In the latter, we turn our attention to mobility practices as dominant aspects of aquapelagic belonging.

Aquapelagic belonging through embodied emotions

Several island residents referred to their senses or body parts in expressing their sense of belonging in the islands and surrounding seas. For example, a woman from Læsø said *I carry Læsø in my heart* (individual interview, Læsø), although she had in fact spent most of her life off the island. A man from Suðuroy said that *I think that here in Suðuroy, one has much more legroom* (couple interview, Suðuroy) in the sense of being free to choose what to do with one's life but also having sufficient physical space. Room to stretch one's legs (metaphorically and literally) is felt as being important for a sense of belonging. In some cases, the realisation of how important such aspects of embodied belonging could be, did not occur until leaving the island. For example, a woman from Læsø explained how she in her youth had travelled to the mainland for education and work, but found herself unable to sit still behind a desk, *not being able to be outside*

when the weather was nice, having to…(pausing) *I simply couldn't stand it!* Although she was keen on attracting new residents to the island, she also had a particular conception of what a 'true islander' would be like, namely someone who felt *having nature so much under our skin that we find it hard to live without it* (couple interview, Læsø). To her, such a disposition would be a mark of truly belonging in the island.

Although difficult for some, the realities of growing up in Læsø entail that youth may feel pressured to leave at a young age and *cut the umbilical cord,* as one middle-aged man said. He explained that his own decision to become a fisher was partially motivated by his reluctance to leave home. In his day, deciding to fish meant being able to stay in the island at an age, when he had felt too young to leave. In his case, the assemblage of land and sea clearly provided a distinct avenue for belonging. Nowadays, even those opting for life as a fisher move to the mainland for schooling to obtain certificates and permissions to fish. Fishing is a profession described as full of bodily toil and associated with danger and security issues. As one fisher explained, *you must be either smitten by it or have grown up within the profession—like your dad owning a boat you can inherit or something like that* (individual interview, Læsø).

The idea of inheriting bodily belonging either through artefacts such as boats (or farms, as mentioned by some) or dispositions, such as having nature under one's skin, also took expression in other ways. For example, one woman from Læsø had started up a food brand based on seaweed products. Seaweed has been in use for centuries in Læsø, as roofing and insulation, rather than foodstuff. Being met by local scepticism, she realised it is challenging to change long-standing practices and come to regard seaweed as a source of nutrition. *It is difficult to teach people to eat seaweed, but it will come, I am sure of it* (couple interview, Læsø). Digesting things local is a quite literal way in which embodied senses of belonging may arise. This was also evident in Suðuroy, where the practice of domestic farming is widespread and highly valued. A couple from Suðuroy spoke of time spent on farming, and the importance of geese, ducks, and sheep in their lives (despite both holding other full-time jobs), to which the wife added: *as you can hear, the animals take up a fair bit of room in our lives, but when it comes on the table, I am pleased* (laughs) (couple interview, Suðuroy).

Eating locally grown products, for some, was a way of nurturing their sense of embodied belonging, but besides taste, other senses, especially seeing and hearing, figured in expressions of belonging. For example, a schoolchild wrote in an essay, *here it is so very beautiful when the sunrays are let through* [the clouds] *and we see the green mountains and valleys and the large cliffs, which are ideal to let the imagination decide if there are hulders or pixies living there* (essay, Suðuroy). Evidently, sights can be very inspiring and may leave one with the impression that the island is full of life. In a somewhat different sense, Læsø was alternately spoken of as being either 'dead' or 'alive', with more youth tending to speak of it as 'dead', while one shopkeeper expressed the following sentiments about seasonal variation in island bustle:

> *Also what I like about the island, I like that diversity. I like insanely when it's just swarming, it's just so cool, but when you've had a period that's been like that,*

> *then it's also nice if you go into a period that's a little quieter, I like the difference* (individual interview, Læsø)

The sensation of being in the island and how the island made itself felt certainly made an impression on people we talked to. Yet sometimes they struggled to explain exactly how this made them feel: *Because you come onto an island, and then there is the feeling of being in an island, yeah, but then you are here, there is sea all the way round, and yes then you live here* (couple interview, Suðuroy).

Not only does belonging feel in a particular way because there 'is sea all the way round', belonging may also have a different sound, for example because of local dialects: *We have our incredibly beautiful nature and our mother tongue* [the dialect in Suðuroy] *is distinct from the rest of the Faroese language* (essay, Suðuroy). Sometimes, however, it is not sound but silence which signifies belonging. Thus, a man living in Læsø argued that to be able to 'fall in' to the island, one had to *thrive on the silence that is and find peace and contemplation in it* (individual interview, Læsø). This emotion was indirectly echoed in an essay from Suðuroy: *Here it is beautiful to walk in the outfield if you go on a mountain walk, and here there is not so much noise as in a city. If you find it too quiet, then you can take a trip to Tórshavn into town, where there is a lot of noise* (essay, Suðuroy).

Other descriptions were less directly about sensuous experiences, yet clearly and graphically described memories of navigating the natural surroundings, which we also see as expressing embodied belonging. Several of these descriptions focus on the role of sea relations, through activities like swimming, rowing, sailing or simply being at that liminal place where land meets sea. In Suðuroy, children are encouraged to experiment with being by and in the sea:

> *Boys who are 10 years old are permitted to play in the fjord themselves and sail and things like that* [...] *when you grow up in a village, then there is a lot of that* […] *they go out a lot with their fishing rods with three-spined stickleback* [small fish] *and* [...] *it is very popular here in Suðuroy to own a wetsuit amongst children who are 10-14 years old, well to swim at the river mouth* (couple interview, Suðuroy)

Owning a wet suit is somehow embodying, as the body has a better 'fit' with the coldness of the sea. Fitting in with the sea as a kind of bodily and mental escape, a man from Suðuroy also spoke of drifting in his rowing boat: *I could easily just go onto the fjord, just switch off the telephone and lie there by myself, nothing to think about. Now I am here and cannot get anywhere* (couple interview, Suðuroy). While the sea may be a source of calm and quiet, it may also figure as a source of excitement and attraction, perhaps especially for youngsters growing up to dream of a life at sea. One fisher from Læsø related his childhood memories of harbour life: *We ran around Vesterø* [harbour] *maybe 10-15 of us. And it was not only those who became fishermen who ran there, but we were quite some. Because you wanted to be part of the environment, see? There were*

three times as many fishermen, too [compared to now] (individual interview, Læsø). Implying that the mood or feeling at the harbour had changed since his own childhood, this fisher took pride in trying to uphold 'the environment', and later in the interview spoke enthusiastically about inspiring children to become fishers or learn more about fishing. Feeling welcome at the harbour, helping to unload fish crates, and running for beer and cigarettes for captains had immensely contributed to his own feeling of belonging in Læsø.

Aquapelagic belonging through mobility

The ferry journey, which people of Suðuroy and Læsø heavily depend on, is a crucially structuring feature of island life. Connections from the islands to larger, more urbanised areas are vital for work, education, health-services, shopping, social visits etc. We found that our respondents' emotional experiences of sea (im)mobilities are about more than a practice, they are also about aquapelagic belonging. In portraying island life, rhythmic sensations were contrasted to those of Tórshavn/mainland Denmark, as islander experiences of urban rhythms oftentimes evoke stress emotions. One respondent explained how he felt stressed and annoyed driving in Tórshavn, questioning the logic of stopping at red traffic lights, when no cars are in sight (individual interview, Suðuroy). Yet, many of our young respondents in Suðuroy and Læsø actively sought the more pulsating youth culture and travelled to Tórshavn/Frederikshavn in search of it.

Our respondents reflected on the weather, land, ships, and humans and how their mobilities are assembled with the shoreline, the sea, streams and rivers. This was evident when youngsters and adults alike spoke of living in and being brought up in the islands. One youngster wrote in his essay:

> *Most of my free time has been spent along the shoreline…fishing coalfish, catching crabs and any other living thing in the sea. Over the past two-three years I have been lucky enough to get a small dinghy from my father and throughout the summer we have sailed the oceans up and down, within a sea territorial limit defined by my mother* (essay, Suðuroy).

Using vocabulary adopted from fishery policies (sea territorial limit), this boy enjoys a spatial freedom, on land, at sea, and the spaces in-between. He feels highly mobile, positioning himself as a voyager, travelling widely, having "sailed the oceans." His socialization is intimately bound up with an aquapelagic belonging in which growing up and sensing the world is interwoven with navigating land and sea.

The economies of both islands, and especially Suðuroy, depend on fisheries (Pristed Nielsen, Hayfield & Arnfjord, 2020). The island marine spaces, and fishing grounds especially, require skills and knowledge to navigate. Therefore, growing up in the aquapelago involves passing-on knowledge between generations: *Sometimes we go fishing with an old fisherman and he tells us about the fishing grounds. He looks onto land from the sea and shows us the landmarks for the different fishing grounds* (essay,

Suðuroy). This youngster tells a story of his and the old fisherman's mutual emotional engagement in the intergenerational transfer of aquapelagic skills. Aquapelagic belonging entails knowing and sensing not only an island-sea image, but also a sea-island image.

Sea and weather rhythms, we found, become intimately intertwined with belonging. This was especially evident in movements of nature, as the weather and the sea determine whether the ferry sails or not. Even on the Læsø ferry webpage, the heading "The weather decides" [if we sail] indicates the disruptability of island mobility (Læsøfærgen, 2021). Many islanders describe *giving-in* to the sea and the weather. We understand giving-in as an emotional aspect of aquapelagic belonging encapsulated in this statement: *But nature has decided* [that the ferry cannot sail and all you can do is] *give-in and relax completely* (couple interview, Læsø). Through this statement, our islanders are not romanticising islandness. They are adjusting to rhythmic disruption. Being stressed, frustrated or angry every time the ferry is cancelled could entail being in constant conflict with the aquapelago, and impact emotional experiences of belonging negatively. Rather, being in islands often entails a deep respect for forces of nature (Conkling, 2007).

In many respects, therefore, giving-in and aligning to the rhythm of place is a necessary emotional process, which some respondents referred to as *gearing down*, and a feeling which emerges when touching the ferry or the island itself: *I can feel my heart rate slowing down as soon as I get on board the ferry* (couple interview, Læsø); and *I don't know if you can measure stress levels, but you experience…coming onto land in Suðuroy, the stress level is lower than in the north* (couple interview, Suðuroy). In this sense, the island makes itself felt and bodies become primed to feel a certain way when returning to island time (Hodson & Vannini, 2007). Our islanders are all too familiar with disrupted ferry mobilities and hence broken plans, lost work, and cancelled or postponed arrangements. One islander explained that such mobility disruptions entail that for a moment: *the world stops…whilst there* [on the mainland] *you just rush away, no matter what* (couple interview, Læsø). This contrast between mobility flows on the island, as opposed to on the mainland, were continuously pointed out to us. Disrupted mobilities draw attention to how continuity may take on a different meaning as islanders quickly engage in processes of adjusted continuities. As a condition of belonging, giving-in involves *taking it as it comes*…*we must go home and make a cup of coffee and do something else. It is just the way it is* (couple interview, Læsø). In this sense, taking 'it' as it comes means taking nature as it comes, becoming part of its ebbs and flows, somewhat in contrast to urbanity, where mobilities are less disrupted by natural rhythms.

Many of our young respondents exhibited great annoyance at mobility disruptions. Although our youngsters in Suðuroy consider growing up in the island an invaluable gift, they had reached an age when the island had become too small. Several reported feeling bored and travelled regularly to Tórshavn, to participate in youth culture there. Therefore, the struggles of ferry schedules and irregularities left some feeling immobile and disconnected. However, cancelled ferry journeys resulting from bad weather, frustrating as they might be, were tolerated mobility disruptions compared to those

considered to be humanly avoidable. Annoyances with mechanical problems, poor planning, and the departure schedule were evident both in Læsø and Suðuroy.

Mobility disruptions beyond those resulting from weather and waves, islanders find difficult, and oftentimes unacceptable, to contend with. This is especially evident when discussing departure schedules, when a short errand, a dental appointment, or meeting off the island can involve extended stays away from home. One woman explained: *We need to watch the time and run around being slaves to the clock…but that is all we know* (couple interview, Suðuroy). This quote encapsulates our respondents' feelings of navigating between island and urban rhythms. As their lives are organised around ferry schedules, it is for many of our islanders a confining, albeit enabling mobility structure. Yet, the statement "that is all we know" also implies that feelings of mobility become part of their narratives of belonging in the islands. In the collective reference to 'we', islanders position their experiences as different from others who do not rely on ferries. The articulation of feelings of island mobility represent "structures of feelings," which according to Donnolly and Gamsu (2018) can be embedded in place-belonging.

The islanders of Suðuroy of all ages spoke extensively of socialising during the ferry journey, meeting people and catching-up with news. This was less evident in the Læsø data, possibly explained by the many tourists on the ferry. The islanders of Suðuroy described the ferry journey as relaxing and pleasant, and those who travel frequently were light-heartedly referred to as having their own seat. Catching an early ferry may involve extending a night's sleep (bringing a pillow and blanket) while others use the ferry as a place of work. The quote below represents well our findings from Suðuroy:

> *Well it never happens that you sail with Smyril* [ferry] *and you don't find someone to sit down and talk to, have a coffee with, and I think it is really 'hugnaligt'* [meaning cosy/home-like]*. And you can't avoid people knowing; well almost the whole village knows when you leave and get back, because someone has met you on Smyril* (couple interview, Suðuroy).

We catch sight of how emotions of mobility shape and are shaped through ferry journeys as feelings of aquapelagic belonging. In this way, island life is extended to the ferry. Yet, some bodies are identified as being out of place. One woman explained: *And you sit down on the ferry and relax. It is not full speed ahead all the time,* [on the ferry] *you need to sit. Especially people from Tórshavn who come aboard are quite impatient…I sometimes feel like saying* (laughs)*: You cannot go anywhere for two hours* (couple interview, Suðuroy). This woman distinguishes between Suðuroy islanders and Tórshavn people, who are accustomed to urbanity, constantly going somewhere or doing something. Unaccustomed to the ferry, they may be unable to settle. This stands in contrast to the islanders who extend belonging to the ferry. Thus, not just any body on the ferry signifies aquapelagic belonging. For some bodies, the aquapelagic rhythms are not part of their practical consciousness of feelings.

As we have demonstrated, mobilities within the aquapelago give rise to contradictory emotions: annoyances of disrupted mobilities and affection for the ferry.

Islanders of Læsø and Suðuroy, however, are acutely aware that out-migration is a threat to the social sustainability of the islands. Alexander (2015) discusses out-migration of young people as a feature of the aquapelago, causing worry for islanders. During our Tórshavn workshop, the issue of a bridge to Læsø and a tunnel to Suðuroy was debated, and despite deep concern over demographic challenges, they resisted the idea of a bridge or tunnel. An islander in Læsø distinguished between what she referred to as *real islands* with islands connected by a bridge. For her, a real island means being separated and protected from the mainland, a point corresponding to Vannini's (2011a, p. 257) use of the term *insulation*, which he describes as comprising "feelings of protection, safety, distinction, and disconnection."

For our Suðuroy respondents, a potential future subsea tunnel may become a reality. All major islands of the Faroe Islands are connected, and discussions of a Suðuroy subsea tunnel have begun. Some of our respondents were opposed towards a tunnel, however, the majority we spoke to had complex sentiments. On the one hand feeling a sense of loss, should the tunnel be realised; and on the other accepting that the island future depends on improved connectivity. This emotional quandary is encapsulated in the following extract: *If the subsea tunnel is constructed, it will no longer be special to come to Suðuroy. Then it will be possible to decide yourself what time you leave home…* (essay, Suðuroy). In another essay, one youngster writes an imagined future speech (dated February 2029) she is holding as government minister for the opening of the new subsea tunnel named *the road of Smyril* (essay, Suðuroy). In this scenario, the loss of the ferry is mourned, because the young person *grew up with Smyril*, which she seems to hold great affection for. For our islanders, both of Læsø and Suðuroy, belonging is not only extended *onto* the ferry; the ferry also belongs to the islanders as a mutual relationship. In this imaginary future scenario, despite her loss, the essay also reveals hope, as this young woman has returned to the island post-education into a high-ranking job, and in commemoration of the ferry (and islandness), the subsea tunnel is given its name. As such, longing to belong in the aquapelago entails acknowledging that island futures will require changes which go to the core of islander emotions.

Concluding discussion

By applying the lens of auqapelagic belonging to our empirical material, we caught sight of the interconnectedness of land and sea and how this interconnectedness plays into emotions and mobilities which produce place-belonging in the aquapelago. We commenced our paper by arguing that feelings and emotions are encapsulated in belonging, yet too seldom directly addressed in research (Antonsich, 2010; Probyn, 1996; Wood & Waite, 2011).

Beyond a land perspective, our analysis involved an aquapelagic approach to belonging through island-sea relations (Hayward, 2012a; Pugh, 2016). The first part of our findings concerned what aquapelagic belonging feels like, in a literal embodied sense. This approach has provided insight into processes through which feelings and emotions arise in what Burkitt (2014, p. 2) refers to as "patterns of relationships."

Patterns of relationships include how we view the world, and result in patterns of activity which can become emotional dispositions (Burkitt, 2014). From our findings, we find some explanation for how islanders come to act in certain ways in specific situations, e.g. when the ferry does not sail, or how the sea or harbour become places of intergenerational transfer of aquapelagic skills. Conkling (2007) has argued that a deep respect for island rhythms, such as storms, waves, and wind, is in fact a survival strategy for islanders. Whilst we do not disagree, our findings show that aquapelagic belonging is more complex than this statement alone suggests. The emotions of belonging are formed through an intertwining of islander bodies and the "flesh of the world" (Simonsen, 2007, p. 177), here the aquapelago.

Despite writings on mobilities often explicitly or implicitly assuming that mobility stands in contrast to place-belonging (Gustafson, 2009), our findings indicate that mobility is intricately entangled with belonging. Our respondents in Suðuroy and Læsø, across all ages, weaved island mobilities into narratives. For them, the emotional feeling of home is not confined to land—navigating and utilising the sea forms part of their belonging. Thus, we concur with Arp Fallow et al. (2013, p. 472) who argue that mobilities "form an important dimension of local belonging. Our everyday performance of mobility practices shapes the meanings and qualities attached to place and how we experience our localities." Perhaps, mobility emerged as so strong a theme in articulating belonging for our respondents precisely because both islands are characterised by out-migration, and because living on them poses challenges for mobility and access to various amenities. Choosing to settle in these islands requires aptitude for mobility to an extent that consciousness about one's bodily dispositions or 'sense of fit' (Malatzky et al., 2020) may increase, hence producing place-belonging.

In the literature, diverging arguments have emerged regarding the causality of mobility and belonging. Mobility may shape feelings of place-belonging, but conversely, place-belonging may also influence people's willingness to practice mobility in spite of challenges and toils often associated with travel (Gustafson, 2009). Based on our data, it seems that willingness and ability to practice appropriate mobility (for example, contending with ferry rhythms or adjusting to cold seas by wearing a wet suit), is a way of performing belonging.

Ferry (im)mobilities conjure various emotions, including negative emotions, which also depend on temporal air and marine environments. For islanders, the ferry is more than an intermittent space between the island and mainland. Island life continues onboard the ferry, extending island rhythms and forming assemblages with sea, weather, and departure rhythms. Belonging in the island is practiced on the ferry, and island life continues during the ferry journey. In this sense, islanders are not merely anonymous bodies in a mobility collective. Their bodies and emotional dispositions are primed to moving with the rhythms of the aquapelago, in which belonging involves island, body, ferry, weather and sea assemblages. Through focus on (embodied) emotions, we found that the emotional spectrum of our islanders' belonging resides within the aquapelago and is not set aside from it. This speaks to the point by Svašek (2008) that one aspect of belonging is about feeling familiarity with

one's lifestyle. Seen from our islanders' perspective, feeling, being, practicing and consuming the aquapelago are about a sense of home. The basics of this argument will likely not differ much from place-belonging in non-aquapelagic societies. The difference, however, is of spatial material. For aquapelagic belonging, the sea, marine and air environment, the island and the spaces in-between bring about emotional dispositions which would appear to form different patterns of relationships compared to elsewhere.

Hayward's (2012a) notion of the aquapelago—in which the utilisation and navigation of the sea are essential for identity and belonging—is of clear relevance when considering our data. Looking at how respondents expressed their sense of belonging to us, both topological aspects of land, mountains, seas, and fjords, as well as non-human items like boats, wet suits, fishing rods or household animals go hand in hand with expressions about belonging through engagement with other human beings. Our interpretation of the data is that human interaction with the surrounding land, sea, and air, and with material objects and other human beings, acquire emotional significance in bringing about the aquapelago. This is in line with Hayward's own subsequent development of his concept of the aquapelago, where he argues that "neither cartography nor Google Earth services (etc) can identify an aquapelago on their own—analysis of human inhabitation of space is central" (Hayward, 2012b, p. 2).

Ultimately, this means that "without human presence and connectivities within island-water spaces there can be no aquapelago" (Hayward, 2012b, p. 2). A necessary, but not sufficient, condition for an aquapelago to exist is therefore the presence of humans who instigate relationships between seascapes and (is)landscapes and develop emotional attachments and a sense of belonging to the aquapelago. The question remains, however, whether the relationship between seascapes and (is)landscapes is transformed when islands are connected by fixed links, a real prospect for islands like Suðuroy in our study. Studies examining the impact of fixed connections, where mobilities are flexible and self-determined, would be fruitful in understanding differences in how place-belonging is shaped in aquapelagic islands that are connected by tunnels or bridges.

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