

Chapter 2

A Taste of the Sea: Artisanal Fishing Communities in the Philippines



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Introduction

The Philippines remains one of the top suppliers of seafarers to the global merchant fleet. In the 2015 BIMCO Manpower Report on seafarer supply countries, the Philippines ranked first for ratings and second for officers with 363,832 Filipino seafarers deployed to ocean-going merchant vessels in 2014 and accounting for 28% of the global supply of seafarers (MARINA 2015). Seafarers are crucial in keeping the Philippine economy afloat and in 2018, Filipino seafarers sent home USD 6.14 billion (Hellenic Shipping News 2019), accounting for about a fifth of the USD 32.2 billion overseas workers sent home that year (Inquirer 2019). The Philippines has developed as a major player in the crewing sector of the global maritime industry primarily because of its maritime history (Giraldez 2015; Mercene 2007; Schurz 1939), its maritime geography and the continued centrality of the sea to many people's lives (as attested to by the presence of the myriad fishing communities dotted around the many islands of the country) (Warren 2003, 2007), the economic liberalisation of the 1970s and the concomitant institutionalisation of the labour export policies as enacted by Philippine governments since the presidency of Ferdinand Marcos whose latter policy saw many Filipinos seeking employment overseas (Asis 2017; Kaur 2016; Wozniak 2015).

This concatenation of circumstances can be seen to have produced the dominant contemporary role of Filipino seafarers. Some of these have been drawn from traditional fishing communities where precarious lives are endured, by many who are subject to exploitation and at times violence on board commercial fishing vessels. This provides a backdrop to the economic and geographical context of how the

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Philippines became a leading provider of seafarers to the world. This chapter reviews the existing literature on the topic including international and Philippine government reports and statistics on seafarers and the maritime industry. Previous interviews with fishermen and data from fieldwork in the fishing community which contributed to a PhD thesis by the author are also used.

The Importance of the Sea

As an archipelago of 7107 islands, the Philippines has an extensive coastline of 17,460 km in length and about 26.6 million ha of coastal waters and 193.4 million ha of oceanic waters. The country exercises authority over 2.2 million square kilometers (or 220 million ha) of territorial ocean waters including its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (BFAR 2014). Prior to colonization, the sea and bodies of inland waters provided a means of transportation and trade for indigenous people.¹ All over the country, archaeological finds attest to the extensive connection of the archipelago to ancient kingdoms like Siam (now Thailand) and the Middle Kingdom (now China) and the far-reaching travels of the native people to other ancient realms like Srivijaya (largely in what is now Indonesia) (Corpuz 2005). In Butuan in Agusan del Norte (a province in Mindanao, one of the Philippines' three major island groups) massive wooden boats called 'balangay' pre-dating the arrival of the Spaniards by hundreds of years, were unearthed in the 1970s, clear testimonies to the mobile ways and sea prowess of the ancient Filipinos (Clark et al. 1993). By riding the crest of waves in their wooden boats, they established connections to their Southeast Asian neighbours, learnt of their cultures and imbibed their ways of life (Warren 2003, 2007). Later under the rule of Spain, from 1815 onwards Philippine products were sent to the Spanish empire via Mexico in what historians call the galleon trade. In this intercontinental exchange, many Filipinos served as crew and had a taste of foreign cultures and the joys and perils of life on board (Aguilar 2012; Guevarra 2011; Mercene 2007). When the Philippines became a US territory at the beginning of the twentieth century, Filipinos were recruited to serve in the US Navy. In 1903 just nine Filipinos were recruited to join the US Navy; but by the First World War their number had risen to 6000 (Aguilar 2012, p. 384). Given this continuing engagement by Filipinos with the sea across time, it is not surprising that Filipinos have come to dominate employment at sea, bringing with them hundreds of years of sea-going tradition and culture.

In addition to travel, the sea has presented a myriad of opportunities to Filipinos providing the means to barter with people in other locations as well as furnishing them with a much-needed regular diet of protein for everyday sustenance. Thus,

¹The Philippines was never called by its present name until 1543 when the islands Samar and Leyte, two big islands south of Manila, were named after Prince Philip, Prince of Asturias, by the explorer Ruy Lopez de Villalobos and the name stuck until it referred to the entire archipelago.

fishing communities are a regular feature of many islands in the Philippines. Currently, it is estimated that there are over 1.5 million fishermen in the country whether large-scale (meaning commercial and on the high seas) or small-scale (within the municipal waters) (BFAR 2018).

The Philippines is one of the major producers of fish in the world and in 2016, it ranked 10th amongst the top fish producing countries, with a total production of 1.87 million metric tonnes of fish, crustaceans, molluscs and aquatic plants including seaweed (FAO 2018). Some nine million more Filipinos indirectly depend on the fishing industry through fish trading, fish food production and the manufacturing of boats, fishing gear, and related products (PSA 2017). In the fourth quarter of 2018, the fisheries sector contributed 8.9% to the country's GDP (DTI 2019).

Fishermen in the Philippines can be divided into two types. The first type comprises those employed by big fishing companies whose fishing vessels are engaged in commercial² fishing outside the country's municipal waters. The second type is made up of small-scale fishermen whose fishing is limited to the country's municipal waters³ and could be characterised as 'subsistence', does not require fishing boats or whose fishing boats weigh not more than three gross tons (see also Kurien 1998, 2003; Stobutzki et al. 2006). In many cases, the former earn a monthly wage of PHP12-15,000 (USD250-315) a month with add-ons and bonuses depending on the volume of catch per fishing season⁴ while the latter's remuneration is governed by a system unique to the fishing industry called clear or broken lay (see also St Martin 2005, 2007). The cited monthly income of fishermen aboard commercial fishing vessels is based on an assumed wage arrangement prescribed by the national government for fishermen working on commercial fishing vessels. However, reports state that in many cases, "fish workers" all over the country receive an average daily pay of between PHP150-180 (\$3.30-4)—way below the minimum wage set by regional wage boards for agricultural and non-agricultural workers in rural Philippines (Corpuz 2014).

Poverty remains a constant defining feature of many, if not all, fishing communities in the Philippines (Eder 2005; Guieb 2009; Mangahas 1993, 2000; Turgo 2010; Ushijima and Zayas 1994). According to Pamalakaya (an NGO working for the welfare of fishermen in the Philippines) surveys conducted by the National

²Commercial fishing involves catching of fishery species by passive or active gear for trade, business or profit beyond subsistence or sports fishing to be further classified as: 1. small scale—with passive or active gear utilizing fishing vessels of 3.1 GT up to 20 GT; 2. medium scale—utilizing active gears and vessels of 20.1 GT up to 150 GT; 3. large scale—utilizing active gears and vessels of more than 150 GT. Commercial fishers cannot conduct fishing activities within the 15 km municipal waters unless the local government concerned allows them from 10.1 km to 15 km. They can also operate in foreign or international waters. (Primer RA8550, p. 2).

³Municipal waters as defined in Republic Act 8550 are marine waters 15 km from the coastline including streams, rivers, public forest, timber land, forest reserve or fishery reserve within the municipality except those under the NIPAS Law (BFAR 2015).

⁴Targets are usually set by fishing companies and if these are met and at times surpassed, bonuses are paid to fishermen. On the other hand, skippers are paid differently depending on the arrangement they have with company officials.

Statistical Coordination Board (NCSB) in 2006, 2009 and 2010 revealed that the *fisherfolk* sector has the highest poverty incidence in the country. Furthermore, the NSCB revealed that the *fisherfolk*, farmers and children comprised the poorest segments of the population across the country with poverty incidence of 49.9%, 44% and 40.8% respectively (Corpuz 2014). This is not new and a visit to many fishing communities in the country reveals the appalling quality of life for most fishermen and their families. They live in houses where basic sanitation is almost non-existent; there is no running water and no electricity. Hygiene is, to say the least, dismal.⁵

These communities are also the most vulnerable to the consequences of climate change. Since they live close to the shore, their houses and properties are prone to destruction brought about by strong wind and tidal surges. Fatalities are therefore an inevitable consequence. This vulnerability was clearly displayed in catastrophic events in the Philippines and other countries like Thailand, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka, during the 2004 tsunami, caused by an Indian Ocean earthquake. Recently, typhoon Haiyan's (locally known as Yolanda) land-fall in the Philippines in November 2013 further illustrates the extreme vulnerability of people living in fishing communities. A report produced by OXFAM, stated that 30,000 boats were lost to the typhoon. Furthermore, in the aftermath of the typhoon, the Philippine Department of Agriculture estimated that 202,410 fishing households, a total of 865,305 individuals, had been affected (OXFAM 2014).

Fishing is considered to be the most dangerous occupation in the world (FAO 2018). In this regard, commercial fishing is more prone to accidents and deaths at sea. Furthermore, exploitation, violence and slavery characterise employment in the commercial fishing sector (Couper et al. 2015; Pocock et al. 2018). The length of time out at sea and the intensity of fishing activities taking place on commercial fishing vessels make it more open to fatal accidents. In addition, while small-scale fishing recruits people of the same kinship network, which limits if not constrains the likelihood of exploitation, abuse and violence, commercial fishing does not.⁶ Commercial fishing operators recruit personnel from the provinces and require them to fish for weeks and months on end which limits, if not totally cuts off, their communication with people ashore (Couper et al. 2015).⁷ This increases the

⁵In the fishing community that I studied, I once interviewed a couple in their living room that was so dirty and the smell of dried feces and rotten animals (maybe rats, I thought) was so nauseous that I had to terminate the interview at some point before I got overwhelmed by the smell. This is of course not generic as some other houses tried to be as clean and orderly as possible.

⁶In most fishing communities, fishing is usually conceived to be a family enterprise, and crews are drawn from within the family or immediate relations. In such an arrangement, as fishermen come from the same family or kin (both real and fictive), exploitation is almost nil as taking advantage of others could create rifts amongst family members and endanger close relationships in the community.

⁷Unlike modern day merchant vessels, commercial fishing vessels rarely have internet provision or any other means of communication to the shore aside from satellite phones which are kept most of the time by the skipper or captain and can only be used in emergency situations.

possibility of exploitation since fishermen are at the mercy of owners. Cases of exploitation of Filipino fishermen aboard commercial fishing vessels registered in Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore, New Zealand, the UK and many others are well documented (Couper et al. 2015; Howard 2012; Yea 2014).

As attested to by many studies, working conditions in many commercial fishing boats are appalling (see, for example, Couper et al. 2015; Simmons and Stringer 2014; Brown 2009). Sleep is a scarce commodity on board; fishermen may be required to work 24 hours a day regardless of the weather and their levels of fatigue. Sleeping quarters may be equipped with simple hammocks and rooms are not insulated from the cold weather. A fisherman I interviewed told me how he had to endure sleeping in a very cold room (or very hot depending on the season of the year) together with some five other men for one entire year. In 2019, I visited a fishing vessel anchored in a port in Taiwan and saw for myself the very basic and uncomfortable living quarters of fishermen. A Filipino crew member told me that on some fishing vessels that he had been on, they had to schedule their sleeping time since the room was very small and could only accommodate five people at a time. Medical treatment was also non-existent for many of fishermen falling ill on the vessel. The same fisherman also told me that when a young fisherman from Vietnam (14 years old) fell grievously ill (he had a recurring stomach ache), the owners of the fishing vessel did not allow them to moor the boat to unload the sick fisherman to seek treatment. They were told to make use of the available medicine on board instead. The young fisherman soon died and again the owners did not allow them to berth in the nearest port. They kept his body in the cold storage together with their catch. Before going back to the Philippines (they fished mostly in the area between the Philippines and Indonesia), they were ordered to dispose of the body since it was considered by the vessel owners to be too costly to repatriate it to Vietnam. The company then reported to his family that he absconded in a fishing port and was not seen again.⁸

In many places in the Philippines, fishing communities have become a fertile ground for recruitment to these fishing vessels. With their experience at sea, many small-scale fishermen are lured to working on fishing vessels overseas with a promise of a better salary than they would get working on small scale fishing boats or local commercial fishing vessels. In recent years, for example, Scotland has seen the rise of Filipinos employed in many of its commercial fishing vessels (Howard 2012; Ross 2015). However, many of them have been victims of exploitation both by their employers and their recruiters in the Philippines (Couper et al. 2015). For example, their monthly salary is lower than their European counterparts

⁸However unfortunate, I was told that this is the usual practice on most commercial fishing vessels operating in the Philippines, Singapore and Taiwan and employing fishermen from the Philippines, Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam. In his first day on the fishing vessel (the vessel was moored in Singapore and he flew there from Manila), he was told pointblank by the Taiwanese captain not to fall sick or otherwise they would have to throw him overboard if he dies. He thought it was a joke until it happened to one of their crew. He stayed on the ship for a year and when he signed off, he did not renew his contract.

though they perform the same job on board and may work longer hours. In addition, instead of receiving their monthly salary in full, it is often remitted to their recruiters in the Philippines who then send the money to their families' bank account, with large, unaccounted deductions. To illustrate, another Filipino fisherman I interviewed told me how his supposed salary of GBP1000 per month became GBP600. When his wife confronted the management of the recruitment company, she was told firmly that the deduction would continue until the expenses incurred by the company to find him a job and send him to Scotland were fully reimbursed. However, the amount of this expense was never specified, hence the deductions continued until his contract was terminated due to some problems with his work visa. He worked for 16 months.⁹ In terms of small-scale fishermen, while the abuse and exploitation associated with their experience may be less visible than in connection with their counterparts working on commercial fishing boats, their working lives are also replete with unmitigated dangers and difficulties. For example, in the fishing community that I studied, there had been a number of incidents involving men overboard. Their bodies were never recovered.

From Fishing to Seafaring

The precarious socio-economic conditions of fishing may explain the aspiration of many young Filipinos to look beyond the shore of their localities for better opportunities. Whilst many would not be able to pursue a career in seafaring due to poverty, others, whose families are not so dependent on fishing as their main source of income, but nonetheless exposed to the thrills of seafaring because they live near coastal areas, have found ways to pursue a career in the maritime industry. With a love and fascination for the sea, many young people troop to the city to further their education and obtain the credentials required of maritime professionals. In 2019, there were more than 90 accredited maritime schools and academies in the Philippines (Geguiento 2019). Maritime schools have an average annual enrolment of 71,200 students in 2006–2010, with about 16% or 11,386 students graduating after 4 years of school work (MARINA 2013). However, there is more than a desire for adventure and a better life driving many young people of the Philippines to pursue a career in the maritime industry. There are also a number of historical, economic and structural factors that have paved the way for the Philippines to become the world's crewing capital.

Thus, while I have explained in some detail the possible geographical, historical and cultural underpinnings of many Filipinos' connection with the sea, it is also necessary to highlight other factors that have helped them realise their dream to work

⁹The expenses of recruitment companies sending Filipino workers overseas varies from one place to another. However, most of the time, employers pay the recruiters for the recruits' expenses and therefore, what was done to the fisherman I interviewed was illegal.

in the world's merchant vessels. One factor that needs further elaboration here is the economic context of the 1970s which drove much migrant labour overseas.

In the 1970s, as President Ferdinand Marcos struggled to keep the Philippine economy afloat, battered from all sides by rampant corruption, the ferocious winds of high inflation, budget deficits, moribund domestic and international investment (due to the country's volatile political climate brought about by the imposition of Martial Law) and the oil crisis, the Philippine government created an environment in which it became attractive for Filipinos to seek employment overseas (Fajardo 2011; Oishi 2005; Semyonov and Gorodzeisky 2004; Tadiar 2003). Furthermore, with a shift toward agribusiness and export-oriented industrialization, the Philippine state began in the 1970s to actively encourage the export of temporary contract labour (Tyner 2002, p. 100; see also Acacio 2008; Parrenas 2015; Rodriguez 2010). For Marcos, sending Filipinos to work overseas en-masse became an economic stop-gap measure and a strategy to accumulate the foreign exchange necessary for imports and, in the long run, to keep the economy afloat. Thus, though the Philippines had been sending workers to the US for many years, providing farm workers to Hawaii's sugar and pineapple plantations (Boyd 1971) and to professional occupations such as medicine in public and private hospitals (Espiritu 2010), it was only in the late 1970s that other country-destinations opened up for Filipino workers including: the Middle East (Humphrey 1990); Singapore; Malaysia; and Hong Kong (Alburo and Abella undated). By the 1990s, other countries like Israel, Dubai, Taiwan, Qatar and a host of European countries like Italy, Iceland, the UK and Spain followed and became destinations for Filipinos wanting to work overseas (Debono and Vassallo 2019; Hoegsholm 2007; Skaptadottir 2010). In 2017, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), there were around 2.3 million overseas Filipino workers (OFW).

The Philippines' role as a state broker (Rodriguez 2010) of labour to the world was eventually formalized in 1982 when the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) was created. It is a government agency which oversees and facilitates the deployment of Filipino workers overseas. Other state agencies assisting the POEA in its functions include the Overseas Worker Welfare Administration (OWWA) which as the name suggests looks after the welfare of Filipino overseas workers. An important function of these government agencies is to protect Filipino workers from fraudulent employment practices by employment agencies. It is in this context that the international deployment of Filipinos to ocean-going merchant vessels and their positioning as a major global player in the crewing sector of the global maritime industry may be explained.

The growth and development of the crewing industry in the Philippine maritime industry can also be traced back to events shaping the shipping industry in the 1970s, including deregulation and the associated globalization of the industry and the labour market (Sampson 2013). More specifically, however, the dominance of the Philippines in the crewing sector of the global shipping industry started rather serendipitously in the late 1960s. As recounted by Peter Toundjis, the former manager of El Greco Shipping Enterprises:

in 1966, a Greek ship came to Manila and requested his company to provide an emergency replacement crew. Although El Greco usually only helped restock and repair ships, it nevertheless agreed, thus sparking the first placements of Filipinos on Greek ships (McKay 2007, p. 622).

He further added:

Word quickly spread in Piraeus, New York and other international maritime centers that Filipinos were good and dependable. El Greco thereupon launched an information campaign to sell the Filipino seaman, undertaken through brochures distributed to more than 2,000 ship-owning companies all over the world. The brochures generated inquiries from all directions and helped put the Philippine crewing industry firmly on its feet. Indeed, as the word spread, other major shipping firms that were experimenting with foreigners in their lower-rank positions began trying out Filipinos. (McKay 2007, p. 622)

Soon, local shipping owners as well as foreign ones (mostly European) saw tremendous growth potential in the business and started putting up or locating their crewing offices in Manila. In 1974, an association of crewing agencies in Manila was formed and called itself Filipino Association for Mariners' Employment (FAME), probably the first of its kind in Asia and the world. In the 1980s, an industry pioneer, Jacob Stolt Nielsen, made it possible for an all-Filipino crew to man a vessel. Economic developments on the global front also affected the growth of the crewing industry in Manila. By the late 1980s, Manila's transformation into the world's ship crewing capital was complete.

Other global developments also shaped the positioning of Manila as the global crewing capital. Until the 1970s, the international industry was regulated almost entirely along national lines: ship-owners registered or 'flagged' their vessels in their home country, requiring them to employ their own nationals and observe domestically negotiated labour regulations and wages. However, rising competitive pressures led ship-owners looking to lower their costs to 'flag' their vessels in countries that promised minimal interference and low or no taxes (McKay 2007, p. 620, see also Bergantino and O'Sullivan 1999; Bloor et al. 2000; Sampson 2013). Given that these 'open registers' did not stipulate the nationalities to be employed on board, or the terms for employment, ship operators became more autonomous in terms of their recruitment choices. In this context the Philippines was seen as an attractive recruitment base for many ship owners who wanted to save on operational costs without compromising on levels of commitment and professionalism. Filipino seafarers possessed sufficient technical skills, were 'cheap' compared to their European counterparts and they could speak English well, three vital components of a successful crewing strategy.

The positioning of Manila as the crewing hub of the global maritime industry created an add-on effect to other sectors of the industry as well. As demands for Filipino seafarers increased, more and more maritime schools opened. Prior to this, the production of Filipino merchant seafarers was monopolised by the Philippine Merchant Marine Academy (PMMMA), which was established in 1963 although its foundation could be traced back to 1820 with the creation of the Escuela Notica de Manila by the Philippine colonial government. Another pioneering school, the John B Lacson Foundation Maritime University opened its doors to aspiring Filipino

seafarers in 1948. Soon, many maritime schools were established, with the support of shipowners, business organisations, and seafarer unions. For example, in 1998 the Maritime Academy of Asia and the Pacific (MAAP) was set up. MAAP is a joint venture supported by some of the Philippines' most influential maritime business and labour organisations like FAME, Associated Marine Officers' and Seamen's Union of the Philippines (AMOSUP), the All Japan Seamen's Union, the Norwegian Seafarers' Union (NSU), the International Maritime Employers Committee Limited (IMEC), the Danish Shipowners Association, the Norwegian Shipowners Association (NSA), Japanese Shipowners Association (JSA), and the International Mariners Management Association of Japan (IMMAJ). Filipino students who are admitted to MAAP do not pay any matriculation fees. They are also provided with free accommodation on campus and a monthly stipend. Perhaps most significantly they are also promised jobs on board once they graduate from the school courtesy of Japanese and Norwegian sponsors.

These developments demanded action from government which responded with the creation of the Maritime Industry Authority (MARINA) in 1963. This paved the way for the further institutionalization of governmental support for Filipino seafarers. The agency, as well as looking after the development and growth of the local domestic maritime sector, assumes responsibility for managing the professionalization and welfare of Filipino seafarers deployed on board foreign merchant vessels. In 2014, to solidify the status of the Philippines as the prime hub of crewing in the world, President Benigno Aquino Jr signed into law Republic Act 10635 creating a single maritime administration to oversee the training and certification of Filipino seafarers. Prior to this, many public agencies were involved in managing the affairs of Filipino seafarers which made it a bureaucratic nightmare for many Filipinos aspiring to work in the industry. With only one government agency to deal with in relation to matters pertaining to licensing, training and certification, it was hoped that the establishment of the new 'super' agency would improve the competitive edge of Filipino seafarers over their foreign counterparts.

Financially, working as a seafarer provides Filipinos with one of the best ways out of poverty. Though the Philippines has registered one of the highest economic growth rates in Asia since 2010 (Tupaz and Wagner *n.d.*), the country is still mired in poverty. The Philippines has one of the highest unemployment rates in Asia, pegged at 5.8 in January 2016 (Inquirer 2016). In addition low quality jobs persist in the labour market. In 2014, just 58% of workers—in both formal and informal employment—were in paid jobs. Of the rest, 28% were self-employed, with no guaranteed income, and 11% worked on family owned farms or other businesses where they typically receive food and lodging but no actual cash (Salvosa 2015). With a basic salary of PHP10,000–20,000 (USD220440)¹⁰ gross per month for most workers, the quality of life is relatively poor. However, amongst seafarers such problems are less pervasive. The lowest ranked seafarers—ratings—whose income per month, is tax

¹⁰Wages vary though. Workers living in the Metropolitan Manila area receive a higher rate compared to their compatriots living in other cities and the provinces.

free, averages USD1000. As a result, Filipino seafarers are financially better off than their land-based counterparts, including their overseas compatriots in Hong Kong, Singapore and the Middle East. In many rural areas in the country, it is not uncommon for big houses to be owned by seafarers (Acejo 2012). Such economic opportunities fuel the desire of many to work on board regardless of the emotional hardship that it entails (Sampson 2005).

Conclusion: Challenges and Opportunities for Filipino Seafarers

Fishing communities may be described as the ‘staging post’ for many Filipinos seeking to expand their horizons and have a better life. This is not an overstatement since as the study of Filipino seafarers by Amante (2003) tells us, some 32% of those he interviewed came from fishing families and more than 80% of respondents from the same study hailed from the Visayas and Mindanao, two major groups of islands in the Philippines known for their fishing activities. Whether the archipelagic character of the Philippines and the promise of a better life will continue to inspire many young Filipinos to seek employment in the maritime industry remains to be seen. There is a myriad of challenges ahead. As alternative careers open up to Filipinos ashore providing them with better and safer working conditions and career progression, the sea becomes a less alluring place to work. Though there are now more maritime schools than before, matriculation expenses (charged by private schools and colleges) have become even more prohibitive. In 2003, it was estimated that around 5000 USD would be needed by a Filipino seafarer to complete a maritime degree (Amante 2003). This amount has since increased significantly.¹¹ In addition, as more and more schools and training centres open to meet the rising demands of the domestic and global maritime markets, substandard maritime education and training have become an issue (Bloor and Sampson 2009). MARINA has the challenging task of monitoring compliance by recognised Maritime Higher Educational Institutions (MHEIs) and accredited Maritime Training Institutions (MTIs). In recent years the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) has

¹¹An interview with a maritime student studying in Manila in 2016 revealed the following expenses: PHP25,000 tuition fee (×2 semesters per year ×4 years) = PHP200,000. Other expenses include monthly stipend of PHP10,000 × 10 months × 4 years = PHP400,000. So a maritime student will spend roughly P 600,000.00 to be able to complete a degree in marine transportation (deck and engine) in the Philippines. This is equivalent to USD12,500 (48 exchange rate to 1 dollar), a big leap from the estimate made by Amante in 2003. Students studying in other cities and in the provinces spend much lower than the figures provided here. Training and examinations to obtain certificates and licenses are not included in the estimates made. The last year for maritime students is spent on-board as a trainee. Some shipping companies pay them while they are on-board (usually ocean-going vessels where they ‘work’ as cadets) while others don’t and in many cases, they have to pay the shipping company that provides them with seetime on-board (usually domestic ships).

identified serious deficiencies in the auditing of training and education in the Philippines (Inquirer 2013; Manila Bulletin 2019). To avoid sanctions MARINA has sought to address many problems but this has sometimes been challenging. Failure to address the issues identified by EMSA would have meant some 80,000 Filipino seafarers being barred from joining ships registered in the EU. Additional challenges come in the form of political interventions in running the affairs of the maritime industry. Continuity of programs to make Filipino seafarers competitive in the global market are always under threat given the ways in which every successive president appoints ‘their own people’ to run government agencies. As every administration comes and goes, existing programs are scrapped without due diligence to give way to new ones favoured by the incumbent. This could ultimately prove disadvantageous to the Philippines in the face of stiff competition from other seafaring countries like Poland, Ukraine, and India all of which also provide highly skilled seafarers to the global fleet. For the moment, however, the Philippines leads the way in the crewing industry and is predicted to remain as the prime crewing hub for shipping in the foreseeable future.

In spite of these challenges and others relating to global competition as the sun sets on one of the fishing communities in the Philippines, it seems for the moment that opportunities remain within the global merchant maritime sector and that for the present Filipino seafarers will continue sailing the oceans of the world.

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