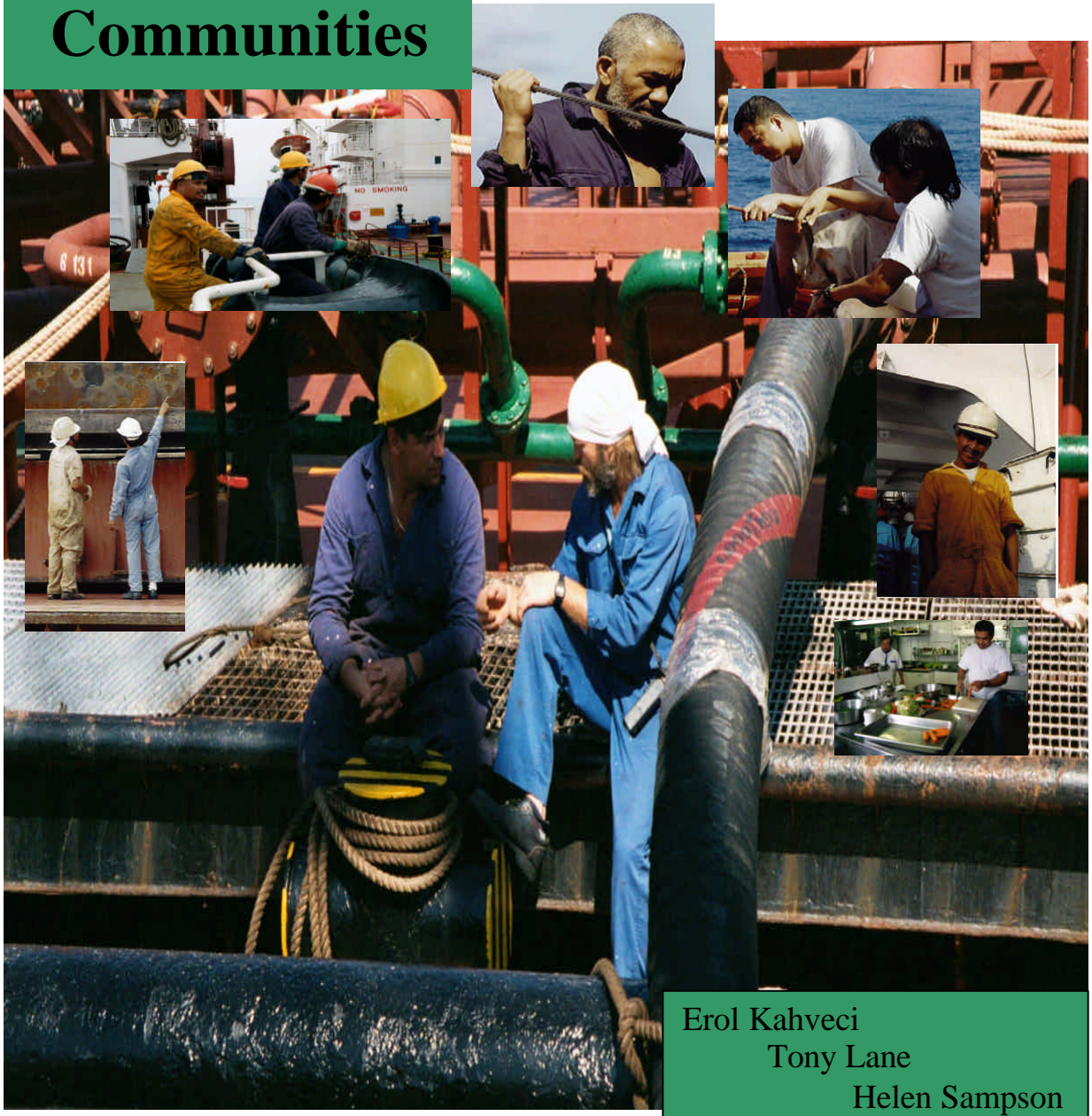


Transnational Seafarer Communities



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Seafarers International Research Centre



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Without the co-operation of these, and other organisations, we would not have been able to carry out a study of this scope. We hope that ship owners and managers feel that the project was worthwhile and that they are able to make effective use of our findings.

Executive Summary

Introduction

In 1998 the Economic and Social Research Centre (ESRC) awarded the Seafarers International Research Centre (SIRC) at Cardiff University a grant to consider the social dynamics of multinational crewing aboard merchant cargo ships (Kahveci, Lane, Sampson). The three-year project commenced in 1999 and was completed in 2001. This report summarises the main findings of the research in a form designed to be of interest and use to the general maritime community.

The methodology employed by the project was unusual in that it allowed researchers to board vessels and live alongside multinational crews whilst utilising a combination of observation and interviewing techniques in data collection. In total the project focused on fourteen ships and included taped interviews with 242 seafarers aboard these vessels. In addition the study incorporated findings from interviews with crewing managers in ten companies, 141 seafarers in North Germany and Holland, and 131 interviews with seafarers' families in India and the Philippines.

Main findings

- Approximately 65% of the world merchant fleet have adopted multinational crewing strategies. Just over ten percent of the fleet is staffed with crews composed of five or more different nationalities.
- Whilst many companies introduced mixed nationality crews solely on the grounds of cost and competitiveness, owners and managers indicated that there are a number of unanticipated additional benefits associated with multinational crews.
- It became apparent that stereotyping diminished with contact. Thus seafarers were less likely to have stereotyped understandings of the nationality groups with whom they had sailed regularly and were more likely to generalise about national groups with whom they had little contact.
- There was no evidence of a correlation between nationality and behaviours or qualities such as leadership or initiative taking.
- Teambuilding and personnel management depended on the skills of individuals aboard and were largely neglected in terms of the supply of corporate or college-based training.
- The project found that co-operation and integration increased amongst mixed nationality crews as the number of nationalities aboard increased. Amongst crews composed of four or more nationalities there were higher levels of mixing and better collaboration, than amongst crews with two or three nationalities.

- A remarkable degree of cross cultural tolerance was evident and it was noted that, in order to foster good social relations, seafarers carefully avoided discussing a number of specific, 'sensitive', topics whilst concentrating on widely accessible subjects for 'story telling' and joking.
- Some senior officers reported that the minor degree of social distance frequently existing between members of different cultures, combined with an acceptance of 'difference', assisted with the maintenance of respectful relationships between super-ordinates and subordinates.
- It was apparent that in most cases members of multinational crews exercise care in attempting to avoid imposing their own values onto other cultural groups.
- Different cultural practices and forms were a topic of interest for seafarers who often discussed and explored these differences (carefully) with one and other.
- It was noted that where crews were composed of fewer nationalities occupational hierarchies tended to be 're-aligned' to synchronise with differences of nationality.
- Whilst discrimination on the basis of nationality was not commonly observed there were some disturbing accounts of the practices and prejudices of a small number of officers and ratings.
- Social isolation correlated more strongly with company policies (e.g. alcohol prohibition) and the on board practice of senior officers, than with crew composition in terms of nationality
- Language was found to be a critical issue for multinational crews. Use of first languages rather than a common language fostered suspicion amongst multilingual crews. Poor use of the working language of the ship could result in frustration and militated against the use of humour, which was found to be a key element of social interaction and integration.
- Catering for multinational crews was reasonably well managed on board. Food was least problematic where all ranks of seafarers were granted maximum access to food (e.g. provided in fridges or pantries so seafarers could help themselves at any time, day or night) and choice.
- Faith was a fundamental part of many seafarers' lives. However religious differences within crews were respected and religious practices were generally privately observed and did not give rise to concern or conflict. However some seafarers regretted that only Western religious holidays were marked aboard many vessels.
- Seafarers contributed to local economies to a significant extent, but in a very uneven manner.

- Some seafarers were not the affluent ‘big dollar’ earners that they were perceived to be locally and lived precariously on the edge of destitution.
- The impact of seafarers’ absences on community and family life is considerable.
- Company policies and practices (contract lengths, wages, communication facilities, demands on leave time, partners sailing, etc.) can alleviate the problems of seafarers and their families or, indeed, may contribute to them.
- Expatriate communities of seafarers are less viable today than they have been in the past. Nevertheless they continue to contribute, in a minor capacity, to the local seafarer labour markets of hub ports such as Rotterdam and Hamburg.
- Immigration and social security laws may be critical in determining the continued viability of expatriate seafarer communities.

Conclusions

The main research findings demonstrate that multinational crews are not only viable but can operate extremely successfully. Multinational crews are popular with both companies and seafarers. A number of unanticipated advantages were associated with their introduction and these were highlighted and illustrated by both employers and employees.

Seafarer families had generally been positively affected by the growth of multinational crews. Most associated advantages related to finance but some companies had introduced other policies and practices that impacted positively on seafarers’ families. These tended to relate to the provision of on board telecommunications facilities, shorter contracts, positive practices in relation to partners of seafarers sailing, and so forth. Seafarers exposed to other nationalities sometimes brought new habits and ideas back to their communities. However, there was also evidence that the lifestyles of some seafarers encouraged them to maintain a conservative cultural outlook on return to their homelands, regardless of the influences they encountered at sea and abroad.

Transnational communities of expatriate seafarers in hub ports such as Rotterdam and Hamburg are either in the process of being dramatically transformed or are in decline. Social security and immigration laws are critical in determining the long-term viability of such communities. The availability of expatriate seafarers continues to serve the labour market needs of a small number of local employers.

Recommendations

The research indicated that multinational crews operate effectively and harmoniously given the right conditions on board. In order to create such conditions there are a number of policies and practices that could be successfully introduced or developed by ship owners and managers. Briefly these include the following:

- Ensuring high levels of fluency in the working language of the ship amongst both officers and ratings
- Pursuing policies encouraging stable crewing
- Promoting social activities on board via Masters and senior officers
- Adopting and implementing anti-discrimination policies and practices on board
- Developing the personnel management skills of senior officers including existing as well as newly appointed Masters and Chief Engineers
- Avoiding the circulation of materials reinforcing cultural and national stereotypes

Further recommendations, relating to the support of seafarers and their families, may be inferred from the main body of the report and are discussed in greater detail in other SIRC publications (see for example Thomas, Sampson Zhao 2001).

Introduction

In 1998 the Economic and Social Research Centre (ESRC) awarded the Seafarers International Research Centre (SIRC) at Cardiff University a grant to consider the social dynamics of multinational crewing aboard merchant vessels (Kahveci, Lane, Sampson¹).

The methods employed by the project were unusual in that they required researchers to



Researcher aboard an oil tanker

board vessels and live alongside multinational crews whilst utilising a combination of observation and interviewing techniques in data collection. Such techniques are well known in anthropology and sociology and are designed to yield detailed data that

reflect the understandings, feelings, thoughts, and beliefs of the research population in ways in which questionnaire

surveys/opinion polls can never achieve. In order to gain insights of such depth however there is an inevitable trade-off in terms of the size of the survey population. In total the project focused on fourteen ships and the data presented here derives from observations and interviews aboard these, as well as interviews with seafarers in North Germany and Holland, and seafarers' families in India and the Philippines.

¹ Bloor, M. Boerne, G. Schroeder, T. and Thomas, M. have also contributed to data collection aboard ships and their contributions are gratefully acknowledged.

Method

The project had six evidence-gathering elements. The methods used in each case are outlined below. Tape-recorded, depth interviews were used extensively and transcribed verbatim. They were translated as necessary and organised into thematic files for collation and analysis.

- The global labour market survey utilised a random sub-sample of 1000 ships incorporating 20,000 persons, drawn from a non-random sample of 10,000 ships and 200,000 seafarers constructed in the period, 1997-2000. Raw data came from crew lists, mainly supplied by immigration and other state agencies, ship owners, and trade unions in North America, Europe, Central America, Asia and Australasia.
- The research voyages took place aboard ships of different types including for example, a modern sophisticated LPG tanker, two oil tankers subsequently sold for scrap, and a small, elderly, bulk carrier that subsequently capsized and sank after her cargo shifted. The basic ship/crew characteristics are summarised in *Table 1*.
- Research data collected in the course of voyages consisted of observations recorded in fourteen fieldwork diaries and tape-recorded interviews with two hundred and forty-two volunteer crewmembers of all ranks.
- The survey of senior managers (using tape-recorded interviews) involved ten large companies based in the USA, UK, Germany, the Netherlands, Monaco, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Singapore. These companies employed a total of 27,000 seafarers aboard 1,200 ships.
- The expatriate seafarer community studies carried out in the Netherlands and North Germany produced 141 taped in-depth interviews - 50 Filipinos, 25 Cabo Verdeans, 30 Indonesians, 27 Ghanaians and nine other informants, mainly German. All interviews in the Netherlands were in English. In Germany 40 per cent were in German.

Table 1: Ships and Research Voyages

Ship	Ship Type	Ship Size (dwt/TEU)	Crew Size	Number of Nationalities Onboard	Days Spent Onboard	Route
1	Container	1400 TEU	17	3	17	Liverpool Mediterranean
2	Ro-Ro	11,000	36	4	34	W. Europe West Africa W. Europe
3	Reefer	15,000	26	2	42	Europe Latin America Europe
4	Oil Tanker	250,000	37	3	30	Gulf Philippines
5	Bulk Carrier	3,000	7	3	14	W Europe
6	Gas Carrier	72,000	29	4	26	Gulf S E Asia
7	Bulk Carrier	31,000	26	3	21	S. America W. Europe
8	Car Carrier	26,000	26	3	12	W Europe
9	Oil Tanker	99,000	25	6	21	Norway Canada
10	Oil Tanker	25,000	34	5	14	Gulf India
11	Reefer	17,000	25	4	16	W Europe S America
12	Bulk Carrier	2,500	7	6	12	W Europe
13	General Cargo	40,000	29	14	12	India Egypt
14	Oil Tanker	32,000	26	5	18	N America C America
Total	-	-	350	-	289	-

- The studies of seafarers' families in the Philippines and India produced 131 taped, depth interviews with wives, ten with retired seafarers, and five focus group discussions with wives and children. Access in the Philippines was arranged and negotiated with the assistance of the Apostleship of the Sea, through local priests and parishioner groups. Half of the interviews in the Philippines were conducted in Tagalog or Cebuano with simultaneous translation provided by three Filipina fieldwork assistants recruited locally. In India (Mumbai and Goa) all interviews were carried out in English and contacts were made with the help of shipping companies, trade union members, training colleges, seafarers, and journalists. In both countries proportionate numbers of ratings' and officers' family members participated in the study.
- Seventeen serving seafarers and ten seafarers' partners agreed, on request, to keep tape-recorded diaries. Seven of these seafarers and all of the partners returned these for analysis.

Context

The research was set in the context of recent structural change in world shipping and its associated labour markets. Ship ownership and management today is still concentrated in OECD countries but offshore registration and defensive responses by the governments of established maritime nations in the 1970s and 1980s have resulted in the transformation of crewing practices. By the late 1990s, OECD-owned ships, almost regardless of flag, were sailing with crews of transnationals supplied within a highly organised global labour market. (Lane, 1996a, 1996b, 2000)

Seafarers are embedded in three types of transnational communities: ships, expatriate communities in ports such as Rotterdam and Hamburg, and 'homelands'. Earlier studies of merchant seafarers have tended to be conducted in a different global and historical context. The best known of these focused on Norwegian seafarers and was concerned with explaining high rates of labour turnover (Aubert & Arner, 1959). A decade later a British study produced a statistical analysis relating to the same issue (Hill, 1972) whilst a more recent study aboard a Norwegian ship focused on industrial relations (Schrank, 1983). In addition to these contributions to the literature on seafarers, Lane has previously published a collective biography of British merchant seafarers in the declining moments of UK shipping (Lane, 1986) as well as other related historical accounts. Whilst different, in many ways, from these earlier works, the research reported here draws on the theoretical insights of previous studies, particularly those concerned with the structures and processes of shipboard social order.

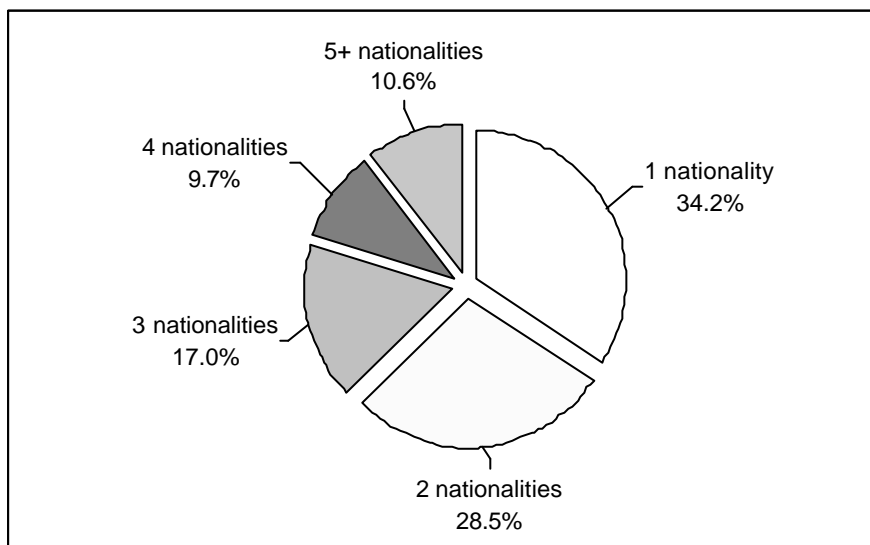
Findings

The Labour Market and Crew Managers

The labour market survey results are significant in their own right. Apart from providing essential profiling of seafarer nationality and crew composition, they form part of the first reliable, detailed, and accurate, global survey of crewing (Lane et al 2002). Previous studies of the seafarer labour market have been unable to deliver data that is sufficiently robust to allow ship managers, and owners, to rely on it in making informed decisions relating to crewing strategy.

The survey findings demonstrated the full extent of transnationalism in world shipping and identified a distinct set of crewing patterns (see *Figure 1*).

Figure 1. Number of different nationalities (all shiptypes)



The findings confirmed the existence of a well-organised, nationally-layered, labour market. The statistical findings were qualitatively amplified using interviews with crew managers. These revealed the extent to which industry representatives actively scour the world for newer and cheaper sources of well-qualified sea-staff. The following comment by the director of a ship management company is illustrative:

We looked at Romania where we now have a contract in place and we also have a contract in Bulgaria. In other words, we have the ability to take people from

there if we need them. We have looked at Ghana, Senegal and Cote d'Ivoire. We have had another look at Indonesia and we have recently set up a joint venture crewing agency in China .We have looked at Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Cuba, Jamaica. So we are always looking.

Such practices are routine amongst effective managers and owners throughout the industry.

The survey revealed a preference among many crew managers for the recruitment of senior officers from OECD and East European countries and for junior officers and ratings from the Far East and Southern Asia as well the Middle East. This regional pattern of rank-nationality preferences was experienced at first-hand during the shipboard studies where eleven of fourteen ships had OECD nationals serving as senior officers, and ratings and junior officers were from the Far East, Middle East, and Southern Asia.

Interviews with managers and owners highlighted the extent to which many companies had found that they enjoyed *unanticipated* benefits, unrelated to direct crew costs, in hiring multinational crews. Many described the ways in which different nationalities had brought with them different, and sometimes, improved practice. They were impressed by the way in which this had contributed to the overall up-skilling of their fleet personnel as seafarers had passed on new skills and knowledge to others who had never been exposed to such ideas before. Some managers felt that the respect and distance between members of different nationality groups facilitated good learning environments. In trying to explain this phenomenon one manager likened learning aboard ship to learning within families. He suggested:

I cannot teach, or my wife cannot teach my daughter to play [the] piano – even my wife she can play very good – but she [my daughter] can learn from tutor. I mean the crew they don't like to listen to the Captain from their own place. But you put [...] other nationality, they listen!

Such examples demonstrated that whilst many companies initially employed multinational crews on the grounds of cost, they had generally come to regard them as

having additional, and often unforeseen, positive features. There seemed little doubt in the minds of our interviewees that multinational crews, whilst not entirely unproblematic, could function as well as, or if not better than, single nationality complements of seafarers.

Crews of Transnationals

Cultural difference and stereotypes

It has been suggested that cultural differences impact upon initiative, submission to authority, and rule following (Moreby 1990). However, data from the transnational communities project suggest that such cultural generalisations are misleading and unhelpful. Unfortunately, they are sometimes sustained by on board literature provided by well-intentioned crew managers, and ship owners, concerned to ‘inform’ seafarers from one national group about the culture of others. Much of this literature is heavily stereotyped and fails to clearly differentiate between cultural habits, and norms, and stereotypes of individual behaviour. It therefore reinforces stereotyped understandings and prejudices rather than reducing them and may contribute to poorly informed perceptions of the potential of individual seafarers. The research showed that given exposure to other nationalities seafarers’ stereotypes tended to break down. Many seafarers became aware, over time, of the inapplicability of stereotypes and generalisations to the real people they had encountered and befriended on ships and ashore. Nevertheless where they had limited exposure to a particular nationality they did exhibit a tendency to fall back on stereotyped understandings of others.

Initiative and rule-following



The occupational hierarchies that are often formally observed aboard ships, can cause problems and dangers regardless of the national make-up of the crew. The loss of the *MV Green Lily* off the South East Shetland Isles with the associated death of a helicopter winchman, in 1997, is illustrative. The vessel’s Master, Chief Engineer, Second Engineer, Third Engineer, Chief Officer, and Second Officer, were all Croatian

nationals. Nevertheless, the MAIB report into the incident (MAIB 1999) suggested that junior officers were unwilling to challenge the decision of the Master, to sail in very poor weather conditions, despite their unease and concern that he was making a potentially dangerous error of judgement. The report concluded that the Master's autocratic style of management was a causal factor in the accident. Where similar management styles were encountered by researchers on the Transnational Communities (TNC) project it was noted that junior, and sometimes even senior, officers were reluctant to challenge Masters. However there were no grounds to support the view that such reluctance related to nationality. Aboard several ships, clear examples were found of junior Asian officers properly 'correcting' European senior officers and sometimes Masters.

Teamwork



Ships' crews today are subject to constant change as individual members sign on and off at different times and after different periods at sea. As a result crews tend to consist of strangers-become-shipmates and consequently the social relations of seafarers' employment are experienced as a series of discontinuous encounters. This is indexed in the commonplace seafarer remark, 'friendship ends at the gangway'. Aboard ship we found few routinised attempts to counter such discontinuities through the organisation of team-building routines and rituals. Yet where these were in place they had a clearly beneficial impact. Regular informal meetings of the 'top four' senior officers were held aboard one ship and these had an evidently integrative effect. This was particularly remarkable as the four officers concerned were of three different nationalities. 'Teambuilding' practices such as the scheduling of whole ship social activities and events were also unusual and where they existed they tended to be a result of the enthusiasm of a particularly sociable, or unusually aware, officer, rather than resulting from company policy or encouragement. Paradoxically, whilst such effective 'management techniques' depended upon the initiative of individual officers, few had received instruction in team-management during their professional training and education. In general, it seemed that companies tended not to regard their crews as whole entities, perhaps because of the fluidity of their workforces. For example, they

had not usually adopted procedures for assessing crews' team performances, although *individual* appraisal schemes for all ranks were widely used.

Nationality and social order



The research ships were all communities of transnationals in the sense that they were 'territories' occupied by people of different nationalities. Nevertheless, we found contractual engagement and occupational culture to be of vital importance in understanding shipboard social order. Regardless of crew nationality and composition, ships do not house organic communities marked by population and social network continuities. Indeed, as we have observed, they are generally bodies of people who lack personal familiarity with one another. In this context ships are only effectively held together as a consequence of the prevalence of universally familiar integrative social mechanisms. The fixity and limited number of shipboard roles, the boundaries of permissible variation in role performance, the simplicity of the formal and normative rules patterning conduct, provide sufficient conditions for the relatively easy transfer of personnel between ships, and between companies. The impact of these conditions is amplified by the resilience of an occupational culture that in many cases (and especially aboard genuinely multinational as opposed to bi-national vessels) makes national identity aboard ship largely redundant in the course of everyday life. Conflicts on other grounds may, of course, reactivate national identities but we found little evidence of the primacy of nationality aboard truly multinational ships and a good deal of evidence to the contrary. Indeed, approximately eighty per cent of our seafarer interviewees expressed a preference for working with mixed nationality crews.

Social integration and 'story-telling'

Living aboard similar ships, doing similar work, visiting similar places and experiencing a regular stream of encounters with strangers who are nevertheless 'people just like us' all encourage the regular maintenance of a dense occupational culture. The manifestations of these may in themselves seem insubstantial - but they are powerful when taken together. One example of this relates to the narrative accounts

of serving seafarers. We observed that story-telling aboard ship remains an important part of the lives of seafarers even aboard today's modern vessels equipped, as they are, with sophisticated entertainment and communication systems. Story-telling was generally a relatively accessible activity that typically took place during 'snatched' moments of sociability. In content, stories tended to consist of short accounts of bars visited, women met, favourite ports, sad shipmates, weather encountered, good captains, bad captains, and evil crewing agents etc. Such story-telling appeared to encourage inclusion. It was not based on elaborate narratives, designed for a fluently monolingual audience, but on snapshots of moments that anyone could relate to regardless of who they were or where they were from. These tales had 'solidifying' effects both in the telling and in the enactment of shipboard life.

Hierarchy, nationality and social space

Ships have formal hierarchical structures where officers form approximately 40 per cent, and ratings 60 per cent, of total complements. Accommodation and messing arrangements reflect this layering. There are some exceptional ships where officers and ratings eat in the same space - and we sailed on one of them - but in general officer/rating separation is normal and off-duty social interaction between ranks is infrequent.

We noted a curious practice on ships with two or three nationalities on board which contrasted to that found on ships employing more than three nationalities. Where ships had fewer nationalities, transnational solidarities were weak and sometimes had a disturbingly 'colonial' character. Aboard these ships we found that spatial divisions between officers and ratings were 'reinterpreted' along nationality rather than occupational lines. Thus aboard one ship everyone beneath the rank of second officer and chief engineer was counted as a 'rating', and denied access to officer facilities, because they belonged to the same nationality. Aboard a different vessel, everybody from fitter upwards was given access to officer facilities on similar grounds of nationality. Our shipboard research strongly suggests that mixed nationality crews work best when crew complements are made up of more than three nationalities. Seafarers themselves appear to have reached similar conclusions and overwhelmingly expressed a preference for working with genuinely mixed nationality crews.

Discrimination and racial prejudice

In general there were low levels of racism reported by seafarers at interview. However some accounts of racism by white officers towards both officers and ratings of other ethnicity were given and occasionally discrimination and prejudice was also found amongst ratings. For example, aboard one ship, ratings collected and marked their cutlery prior to the arrival of new crewmembers of different nationality. Once their new shipmates had arrived, they kept ‘their’ cutlery in their cabins and expressed fears about contracting HIV from the new crewmembers who were ‘required’ to eat their meals at a separate table.

Such attitudes and practices are clearly highly divisive and are unhelpful in developing reasonable work and social relationships on board ships. Their existence highlights the need for companies to be more proactive in encouraging good multi-ethnic relations at sea as well as ashore.

Our evidence suggests that ethnic divisions are most prevalent aboard vessels with seafarers from only two or three nations. Where crews are more ethnically diverse discrimination and ethnic divisions appear to diminish.

Social isolation

As multinational crewing has become more prevalent some, within the maritime industry, have raised concerns that such practices might exacerbate the existing tendency for seafarers to suffer from the effects of social isolation. Our data suggest that whilst the social life on board merchant vessels is subject to considerable variation this does not relate in a straightforward way to the number of nationalities employed. Rather, we found that the ship’s workload and trade were important factors, and that the single most important factor influencing the ‘happiness’ experienced on board was the approach and attitude of the Master. Where Masters encouraged ‘parties’, sports tournaments, or ‘horse racing’, social integration appeared to thrive. However where Masters were reluctant



to promote such activities seafarers tended to withdraw to their separate cabins and mixed little with their colleagues.

Company restrictions on alcohol were also found to have a negative impact on shipboard social life. Not only do our findings indicate that complete bans on alcohol discourage the scheduling of communal events such as barbecues etc. they also suggest that such restrictions encourage solitary drinking behind closed (cabin) doors. This unhealthy practice would seem to promote social isolation and may endanger the mental health of seafarers. It was also observed to inhibit the development of team relations.

The TNC data reveals that a large part of the social interaction aboard ships involves the use of jokes and joking strategies. The use of jokes is frequently risky in terms of social interaction for a number of reasons. The joker may be offended if the joke is not understood and 'falls flat'; recipients of the joke may feel uncomfortable if they do not understand it; targets of jokes (where they are employed) may be offended; and people may be fearful of laughing at something which they incorrectly believe to be a joke. Joking consequently relies on a fairly sophisticated understanding of the 'rules' of social interaction and beyond this an ability to implement such 'rules'. For obvious reasons, joking in a second language is fraught with further difficulties including the added complexities caused by cultural 'interference'. Crewmembers with inadequate language skills may well avoid the use of jokes altogether thereby missing out on an important aspect of the social life on board.

The decision to avoid joking with fellow seafarers, or indeed the inability to participate in social banter and joke-telling, is likely to contribute to seafarer isolation. In the context of declining crewing levels the effect of social isolation, and the importance of English in minimising such isolation amongst mixed nationality crews, increasingly requires attention. Recent studies have highlighted the disproportionate levels of suicide amongst seafarers (Roberts 1998). These and general mental health problems, such as depression and those resulting in addictive behaviour patterns, may thrive in an environment of social isolation. In view of this, the importance of providing seafarers with skills that enable them to forge and maintain good social, as well as working, relationships should not be ignored.

Language and communication

On many of the vessels included in the research, the stated common working language (English) was a second language for everyone on board (see *Table 2*).

Table Two: Native speakers on board case study vessels

Ship	Number of nationalities	Number of English 'native' speakers
1	3	0
2	4	7/36
3	2	0
4	3	14/37
5	3	1/7
6	4	14/29
7	3	0
8	3	0
9	6	4/25
10	5	2/34
11	4	0
12	6	1/7
13	14	0
14	5	0

Seafarers frequently suggested that communication difficulties were the only, or the main, drawback of mixed nationality crews. One seafarer expressed a fairly typical view when he described how the benefits of working with other nationalities related to exposure to other cultures but the negative side related to communication difficulties.

Sometimes miscommunication caused problems when working together and undertaking job-related tasks. Whether classified as merely irritating or actually hazardous, such problems tended to be exacerbated by the unwillingness of individuals to admit to their difficulty in understanding or communicating. The working culture of most ships may not help here. Senior officers exercise a considerable amount of power over juniors and even more over ratings. Closed reporting systems and practices of 'blacklisting' seafarers combine to create a certain amount of fear amongst all but the

most senior ranking seafarers and most are consequently afraid to be seen as less than competent in *any* aspect of their job, including fluency in English.

Occasionally incidents were observed, or described to researchers, which might have had serious consequences, including a lifeboat drill and communication with shore-side personnel. However the context in which shipboard communication occurs is of



relevance here. The conditions aboard ships, the environment in which work takes place, and the equipment which has to be used for communication all increase the risk of misunderstandings whilst carrying out work whatever language is being used and regardless of

the linguistic competence of seafarers. As a *native* speaker of English it can be difficult to understand what is being said on a VHF radio aboard a noisy vessel. Nevertheless, even in non-working time our data suggest that problems can arise due to miscommunication aboard ships.

Providing seafarers with good basic skills and enabling them to establish effective, social networks aboard, is likely to have a knock-on effect, of a very positive kind. A number of linguists advocate ‘immersion’ as the most effective platform for learning a language. If seafarers join ships with sufficient English to communicate with their colleagues socially they are more likely to utilise English, as a common language, on a daily basis. This will inevitably improve their general skills as well as their understanding of the individual crewmembers around them. This is important as communication does not just depend on a technical grasp of language but also relies on an ability to penetrate accents and indeed to understand new and particular forms of English (Butler 1999). Maritime English may be one such English but aboard vessels with multinational crews you might also have Singaporean English, German English, Filipino English, and indeed Chinese English. Such languages may combine aboard ships and common words and expressions can find their way into the discourse of stable and well-established crews (Sampson & Zhao 2002). However English is only likely to evolve in such ways where crews have basic levels of *general* English which



allow them to establish and importantly to sustain contact across cultural and ethnic divisions, forming social as well as working relationships. On a ship it is all too easy for ratings and officers of different nationality to remain socially separate and to minimise communication if they choose to. They are most likely to choose to minimise contact where it requires a considerable effort to understand and to be understood. However where basic levels of communication can sustain social contact what can develop is a ship based 'language'.

Sadly, contexts in which such ship-based 'languages' develop are pretty rare in today's shipping environment. The global labour market and the drive for cheaper labour sources in themselves militate against the establishment of crews who serve together for significant lengths of time. Once we add company mergers, acquisitions, and bankruptcy, into the equation we can see why seafarers rarely find familiar faces amongst the crews they join on returning to work after leave periods. Such fluidity means that in practice seafarers constantly have to adapt to the English of their fellow crewmembers and this process can be stressful and is often undermined by fear of misunderstanding. In this context the importance of furnishing seafarers with adequate English language skills *before* placing them in multinational crews cannot be overemphasised. Seafarers need such skills to enable them to work and socialise aboard ships using English as a second language. They are thus able to develop and become part of a shipboard system of communication (which may rely on the development of pidgin English). This is essential not only in emergency situations but also in the maintenance of both the physical and mental health of serving seafarers. In any situation and aboard any ship safe working practices depend, in part, on adequate communication between crewmembers. Our findings suggest that such 'adequate' communication implies a lot more than simply an understanding of technical job-related terms or a grasp of a Maritime vocabulary.

Food

Food is widely recognised as having a social and cultural importance beyond that associated with nutrition. Multinational ships therefore provide more than a nutritionally challenging environment for cooks, and companies, seeking to cater for the associated plethora of tastes and dietary habits encountered aboard such vessels. In

general the ships included in the research appeared to cope well with such challenges. Seafarers' own attitudes were important in this and they were not especially demanding and appeared tolerant of each others' needs. The purchase of particular foods, such as pork, was avoided altogether aboard many vessels, whilst on some, cooks took care to prepare alternative dishes when they were aware of seafarer preferences or cultural/religious requirements. However, aboard some ships we did find examples of a lack of understanding relating to diet, or more precisely eating habits. These tended to result from the difficulty experienced by European officers in understanding the dietary requirements of shipmates relying on smaller, essentially rice-based, meals. The frequency with which such individuals preferred to eat was not well understood by Western officers and tensions resulted when Masters imposed bans on food preparation outside formally observed meal times. Food was least contentious as an issue where individuals had the greatest freedom in accessing it, and where their food choices were not restricted by their rank or nationality.

Religion

Whilst religious faith was undoubtedly strong amongst many seafarers involved in the study, it seemed that they generally regarded the daily practices associated with religious belief as private. Religious icons and symbols were rarely publicly displayed and on no occasion were religious differences observed to be the basis of conflicts, or arguments, although at times they were the subject of discussion amongst seafarers. Occasionally some seafarers expressed regret that their religious holidays were not observed, or even acknowledged, on board whilst the festivals of other cultures were. This appeared to be a regrettable practice but one that was generally accepted, if not appreciated, by multinational crews.

Seafarers' Families in India and the Philippines

The economic impact of seafaring on 'home' communities

The Philippines Overseas Employment Agency (POEA) values seafarers' annual remittances at approximately \$0.8bn. Our estimates, based on our labour market survey and shipboard and family interviews, suggest, however, that the figure is substantially

higher. We estimate a national total approaching \$3.0bn. This discrepancy can be, partially, explained by the fact that official statistics are based on the mandatory remittance of 80 per cent of *basic* wages. Total earnings, including overtime and leave pay, add considerably to basic pay and much of this is remitted. In India there is no systematic regulation of overseas workers at local or federal state level



Regional migrant families working at a brickworks in Goa

and therefore little foreign-earnings data for seafarers. However the local impact of seafarers' remittances, combined with that of migrant workers' remittances from Gulf States, was clearly visible in areas such as Goa where 'hard labour' was no longer undertaken by local people but by regional migrants from neighbouring States such as Kerala.

Conspicuous displays of largesse are typical of the seafarers return (UK seafarers once wryly described themselves as 'one-day millionaires') and seem ritualised in the Philippines in ways not found in India. In the case of Filipinos, largesse takes the form of gift boxes containing items such as clothing, toys, perfumes, computers, video cameras, stereo systems, tools, kitchen utensils, CDs, TVs etc. Indian seafarers tended to return with souvenirs of their travels but not with portable cornucopias of consumer goods, claiming that they could buy the same goods cheaply at home.

In the Philippines and India, extended and nuclear family members are beneficiaries of remittances sent home by seafarers. Business ventures are frequently funded with remittance payments and are run by brothers, sisters, brother in-laws, and uncles. Loans are made to relatives and trusted community members. The hospital, funeral, wedding, and education bills of close relatives and friends are often met by seafarers who are also reported as making charitable donations to religious organisations and 'needy' people within their local communities.

Seafarers in both countries typically owned their own houses, land, small businesses and even property. Property ownership as a form of investment was particularly popular in Goa, especially among senior officers, some of whom were able to go to sea infrequently and still live comfortably on their investment



Motorman's House (India)

incomes. We also found some ratings who, on the basis of secure employment, had built large houses. However, they had generally accumulated little in the way of savings or investments.

In the Philippines remittances were much more likely to have provided working capital for domestic production. For example, a 2nd officer's wife living in a remote village without mains electricity had turned one of her rooms into a cinema, running shows every evening and reporting regular audiences of around 100 people. The generator, supplying power for the enterprise, had been purchased by the 2nd officer, and most of the films shown were cheap pirate videos bought by him in various ports across the globe. This was one of the more innovative schemes we discovered - but it was a rare Filipino household where seafarers' wives, with the assistance of their children, did not run a small business of some kind. We did not find the same pattern of involvement in India. Nevertheless, there were examples of some family-based business ventures funded through remittances.



Home of less affluent seafarer (India)

In the course of the research we identified a number of Indian seafarers without qualifications and/or an Indian seamen's book who were unable to contribute significantly to the local economy.

These people, at the margin of legality in terms of their labour market credentials for employment, were invariably indebted to family and community members, often other seafarers, and borrowed heavily to buy labour market access through middle men only to find work on sub-standard ships at low rates of pay. They lived very precariously and some were effectively in positions of 'debt bondage'.

The social impact of seafaring on 'home' communities

It was repeatedly drawn to our attention that seafarers', and their families', lives are invariably unbalanced in terms of time and emotion. Filipino seafarers of all ranks reported being away at sea for periods of around nine months and they were rarely at home for longer than two or three months. In India contract periods were subject to wider variation with officers frequently serving four to seven month contracts and

ratings serving for longer periods of up to twelve months or more. In their absence domestic life and family management were the sole responsibility of their partners.

Seafarers generally maintained contact with their families by telephone, when in port. However, dockside telephones were not always easily found and opportunities to call home did not always coincide with convenient times for families. Furthermore, telephone charges were generally too high to allow for much more than weekly or bi-weekly exchanges of news. Accordingly, many wives and children spoke of the difficulties they experienced in adjusting to the repetitive cycle of seafarers' returns and departures. Many wives and children said their lives were more 'normal' when their husbands/fathers were away but they also reported that seafarers' absences were a source of perpetual anxiety. Such anxieties primarily related to seafarers' health and safety however we also identified worries about their fidelity. Wives were generally well informed about the availability of commercial sex in ports worldwide and were often particularly concerned when their husbands' ships were trading in Latin America, South East Asia, or Africa, where port stays were generally longer and shore leave more widely available.

Family life was undoubtedly disrupted by seafarers' return. Marital disputes were reported over economic management and child discipline and were sometimes caused by husbands' immediate attempts to assume 'head-of-household' roles. In Filipino seafarer households it was especially noticeable that seafarers attempted to reproduce some aspects of the organisation of their ships in their homes. We found, for example, a number of written timetables and duty rosters posted on the walls of seafarers' homes. These inevitably cut across embedded but informal systems of organisation, and were sometimes intensely resented. We found few such obvious examples in Indian households although there were said to be some parallels.

Family life in India dominates community relations. Arranged marriages are still common but 'love marriages' have come to be increasingly accepted. Nevertheless a fair proportion of the wives interviewed had arranged marriages and therefore had to 'get to know' their new husbands by mail and telephone when they returned to work at sea. Alternatively, some had to say 'goodbye' to them just as they felt they were beginning to get to know them (husbands often tried to stay ashore for a few months

after marriage). Those women who lived in 'joint' households were left with in-laws they hardly knew, without the protection or presence of their husbands. In such cases some had become isolated and unhappy. Several women described their pleasure at moving out of such joint households into their own homes – something they could only afford because of the well-paid jobs held by their husbands.

In the Philippines there were a number of effective support networks for and amongst seafarer families. In India however, there were not many organisations allowing seafarers' wives to network. There was a marine engineers' society in Goa but nothing much for ratings' wives or the wives of petty officers. Society appeared to be heavily family orientated and whilst community members supported each other – e.g. financially through charities gifts and loans etc. – socialising seemed to revolve more strongly around families than friendships or neighbours. Even community events such as weddings were regarded by some as inappropriate places for women to be without their husbands and many women reported that they would go to church for wedding 'nuptials' but would not attend receptions while their husbands were at sea.

The impact of 'transnationality' on seafarers and their families

Whilst we might expect seafarers to be less traditional in their approach to love and marriage than their shore-bound peers as a result of their multinational 'exposure', this was not always the case. It seemed that in India the difficulties some seafarers experienced in meeting single women encouraged them to rely on their families abilities to find partners for them in arranged marriages. They therefore buttressed tradition rather than challenged it. It also seemed that it was in the interests of some Indian seafarers to maintain a conservative stance on issues such as the social life of married women and their employment. Some men did not like their wives to work, or to go to functions, or even on 'outings' with children, in their absence. Vacations without their 'menfolk' were out of the question for most Indian interviewees, however some did work and some retained active social lives.

In India the clearest example of transnational influences impacting on seafarers and their families related to food. There were reports of cooks wanting to cook European dishes at home and some examples of seafarers wanting their wives to cook

‘continental’, or ‘Chinese and Mexican’ food at home. Where a wife refused, the family would often go to restaurants for such food instead. In Goa and Mumbai ‘international’ food is widely available so exposure ashore should be considered in the ‘equation’, however, a lot of these culinary habits and tastes *did* appear to be rooted in experiences aboard multi ethnic vessels.

Many seafarers’ wives in India were able to sail with their husbands – partly because a significant proportion of Indian seafarers were officers and senior officers but also because some companies operating within India allowed any rank of seafarer to sail with his wife subject to lifeboat capacity. This meant that wives themselves had sometimes had direct experience of multi-ethnic crews. One suggested that this did not change her much as Goa was already quite multicultural (e.g. it is one of the few states in India where women regularly wear Western dress – a result of the relatively recent departure of the Portuguese and of the Catholicism of the region). Others said that it ‘broadened’ the mind.

Drinking did not appear to be fully approved of in Indian society and men as well as women seemed to be expected to exercise restraint in terms of alcohol consumption. Some of the Indian seafarers we sailed with were ‘tee total’, and some of the Indian wives we interviewed reported that their husbands did not drink at all. Some seafarers who drank a lot at sea reported that they drank very little at home. Several wives did drink beer, wine, and spirits, in private, and often with their husbands. Yet at public functions it was clear that this was generally disapproved of. For example, at a wedding attended by a researcher in Goa, women could be seen accepting glasses of beer, ‘hiding’ them under their seats, and taking surreptitious sips from time to time. It was unclear where influences on social drinking were rooted but it did seem that seafarers, and indeed their wives, had a rather more relaxed attitude to alcohol consumption than was reflected in some of the public social practices observed in their wider society.

The impact of company policies and practices on family life in

It became apparent that company practices and policies impact on seafarers’ families in a number of important respects. The most obvious of these relate to wages, leave periods, and length of contract. The length of time spent away from home had an

incremental and deleterious effect on family relationships in many cases. In India, the relationships between officers and their families appeared stronger, on the whole, than between ratings and their wives and children. The explanation for this seemed largely to relate to the fact that ratings tended to serve a much greater proportion of their working lives at sea. In some cases wives had learned to adapt so well to their husbands' prolonged absences that they resented their return and were keen for them to go back to their ships after the shortest possible leave periods, often for emotional, as well as financial, reasons.

Permission to sail with husbands was very important in the maintenance of strong marital relations. Some companies employing sea-staff from India allowed any rank of seafarer to sail with his wife subject to safety regulations. This policy was regarded with great favour by seafarers' families. They described the importance of understanding their husbands' remote, and to some, unimaginable lives. Time aboard often assuaged anxieties about the activities of seafarers on shore leave and generally led to much better communication and understanding between married couples. Wives described being more supportive of their husbands after they had sailed with them. They appreciated how hard the work of seafarers' could be and the hardships and privations that seafarers often endured. They were also better able to support their husbands as they understood shipboard life better and could empathise with the experiences, and feelings, that their husbands might relate to them by telephone, email, or letter. Furthermore, having spent some time at sea, seafarers' wives were in a better position to offer informed advice and support to their husbands, if and, when they experienced difficulties at work.

Company policies in relation to training demands during leave periods and the communication facilities offered to seafarers at sea also had an impact on family relationships and ultimately on the health and well being of serving seafarers. These findings, and those of separate family studies in the UK and China, are discussed in greater length in the SIRC publication *Behind the Scenes: Seafaring and Family Life* (Thomas, Sampson, Zhao 2001).

Transnational Expatriate Communities

The community studies in the Netherlands and North Germany demonstrated that 'classic' communities of transient seafarers are virtually extinct in these countries, but that new and sometimes well-organised social forms have emerged to replace them. On the one hand the development of whole-crew hiring through agencies in seafarers' home countries, and the progressive tightening of border-crossing controls in hub ports such as Hamburg and Rotterdam, have substantially undermined the organisational and legal bases that once sustained itinerant expatriate communities. On the other hand our fieldwork in Germany and the Netherlands showed that there is still a supply of, and some local demand for, expatriate seafarers.

In Hamburg-Bremen and Rotterdam we found that there were still opportunities for seafarers to be engaged individually on a direct-hire basis. Employment on small intra-regionally trading ships frequently continued to depend on 'traditional' local labour markets. It was noteworthy that only the small, European trade ships in our shipboard study used local markets and recruited Cabo Verdean, Indonesian and African crew members giving Rotterdam home addresses. Other shipboard employment for expatriate seafarers depended on the much more unpredictable needs of long-distance traders needing short-notice substitutes. Given these conditions, we concluded that viable expatriate seafarer communities depend upon either strong labour market connections, or the availability of casual employment ashore. The gatekeepers to seafaring employment in Rotterdam were Cabo Verdean ex-seafarers who favoured their countrymen but acted for all comers. Most job negotiations took place in the Rotterdam Seamen's House bar where there were always Ghanaian and Indonesian seafarers (but never Filipinos) to be found passing the time in the hope of finding a ship. This brokered route to employment reinforced seafarer-centred network dependencies.

In the Netherlands we found Filipino, Indonesian and Ghanaian seafarers all able to find some casual work between ships - flower-picking, house/office cleaning and construction work were all mentioned. Filipinos, however, usually had wider and better-paid opportunities working in ship-repair and the offshore oil and gas industry. Access to these jobs was the result of the wider networks available to Filipinos and

these in turn were the outcome of the prior arrival, and subsequent settlement, of Filipina nurses. Recruited in several cohorts for Dutch hospitals in the 1970s, these nurses unwittingly became pioneer migrant settlers in the same way that Syhleti seafarers prepared the ground for Bengali migrants in Britain in the 1950s and 60s. (Adams, 1987; Lane, 1995; Gardner, 1995)

Despite the fact that the Indonesian and Ghanaian communities in the Netherlands are of longer standing than the Filipino, seafarers from these national groups were thinly connected with the shore-based communities of their fellow nationals. The same applied to Ghanaians and Cabo Verdeans in Germany. Seafarers from these groups lived either in seafarers' hostels or rented houses where up to ten people shared costs and those longest out of work subsidised the others. These circumstances showed a marked contrast with the well-organised Rotterdam Filipinos.

Further research is needed to fully explain the different situations of the national groups studied and the differences we identified in the situations of expatriate seafarers in Germany and the Netherlands. While we are confident that Filipino success in Rotterdam is probably a chance outcome of the existence of an established female migrant settler group, we think it likely that social security and immigration policies in Germany are 'unintentionally' responsible for the isolation of Cabo Verdeans and Ghanaians. Almost all of these seafarers have been employed, in the past, aboard German-flagged ships and through their obligatory social security contributions, have become eligible for unemployment benefits. Receipt of these benefits keeps them out of the casual labour market, and off non-German flagged ships, for fear of jeopardising their benefit status and threatening their homebound remittances. They are not generally permitted, by current German Federal law, to accept employment ashore in other, better paid, or longer-term jobs. This suggests that the economic and political circumstances of transnationals may be significantly affected by social security regulations, and work permit restrictions, in 'host' countries.

Conclusions

The main research findings demonstrate that multinational crews are not only viable but, when supported effectively, can operate extremely successfully. Multinational crews are popular with both the companies who have introduced them and the seafarers who constitute them. A number of unanticipated advantages were associated with their introduction and these were highlighted and discussed by both employers and employees. Employers suggested that they largely related to teaching, learning, and on board discipline, whilst seafarers found it stimulating to work with other nationalities and believed that such environments protected and facilitated the development of healthy personal and working relationships.

Seafarer families had generally been positively affected by the growth of multinational crews. Most advantages they experienced related to finances and household economies, especially where seafarers were hired on ITF rates. However, some companies had introduced a range of other policies and practices that impacted positively on seafarers' families. These tended to concern the provision of on board telecommunications facilities (such as mobile telephones in port and email), shorter contracts, and positive practices in relation to seafarer retention and to partners of seafarers sailing. Seafarers exposed to other nationalities also brought new habits and ideas back to their communities which was generally regarded positively. However in some cases there was also evidence that the lifestyles of some seafarers encourage them to maintain a conservative cultural outlook on return to their homelands, regardless of the influences they encounter at sea and abroad.

Transnational communities of expatriate seafarers in hub ports such as Rotterdam and Hamburg are either in the process of being dramatically transformed or are in decline. Social security and immigration laws are critical in determining the long-term viability of such communities. The availability of expatriate seafarers continues to serve the labour market needs of a small number of local employers, however it seems unlikely that they will continue to do so, in European ports, in years to come.

Recommendations

The evidence from the TNC study suggests that in order to maximise the benefits of employing multinational crews, a number of strategies could be usefully developed by ship owners and managers. Briefly these might include:

- Ensuring high entry levels of English (or other common language) for both ratings and officers
- Adopting policies encouraging the retention of both officers and ratings
- Promoting social activities on board
- Developing the personnel management skills of Masters and Chief Engineers
- Implementing anti-racist practices and policies
- Avoiding the distribution of material encouraging stereotyping

Project Outputs

In addition to this report the research has resulted in a number of outcomes. These include the production, or publication, of the following:

- The global labour market survey, *Crewing the World's International Merchant Fleet*, has been published by *Lloyd's Register-Fairplay*, the world's sole publisher of world fleet statistics.
- Two papers have been accepted for publication in academic journals (**Sampson**, *Transnational Drifters or Hyperspace Dwellers?: An exploration of the lives of Filipino seafarers aboard ship and ashore*, *Racial & Ethnic Studies*; **Sampson and Zhao**, *Jobs Jokes and Jibes: Communication and the Operation of ships with multi-lingual crews*, *World Englishes*).
- A number of other papers for future publication have drawn on the data collected during the project. These include: *Worse things happen at Sea: Safety rules and procedures on merchant cargo ships* **Bloor, Kahveci, Sampson, Thomas**; *The social and cultural identity of serving seafarers* **Sampson**.
- We have negotiated a contract with the publisher Cassell Mansell for a book drawing on the findings of the entire study entitled *Globalisation, Transnationalism, and Labour: The social construction of seafarers' worlds in a global age* **Kahveci, Lane, Sampson**. This should be available in 2003.
- A wholly unplanned output of the shipboard study is a photographic archive of 3000+ prints and negatives, featuring seafarers of various ranks and nationalities. This anonymised collection is currently being indexed on advice from the National Photographic Museum.

Future Research

The research experience highlighted the need for research in a number of areas of policy and theoretical relevance:

1. An extension of the shipboard transnational study would be beneficial in identifying the social dynamics characteristic of single, double, and multiple nationality, crews.
2. In the course of the study we found that ILO and IMO conventions on safety training, certification, and the charging of labour agency fees, were regularly flouted in some world regions. A comparative study of these practices could be of great interest to relevant UN agencies and would contribute to a fuller understanding of the mechanisms of global labour markets for low paid workers.
3. We are hoping to secure funding for a study aimed at clarifying the concept of social isolation and its contributory factors. This should enlarge our understanding of isolated communities and indicate ameliorative policies.
4. We have been awarded funding from the British Academy to conduct a pilot study of the personnel and management training received by, and available to, ships' masters (**Sampson and Fairbrother**).
5. We are preparing a bid to the ESRC to undertake a detailed study of food and nutrition aboard multinational vessels (**Thomas and Sampson**)

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Research Team



*Helen Sampson - 118 days
aboard*



*Erol Kahveci - 72 days
aboard*



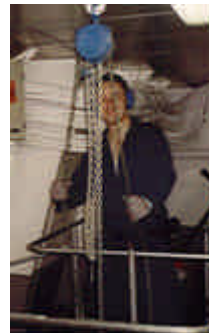
*Michelle Thomas - 26 days
aboard*



*Mick Bloor - 30 days
aboard*



*Geoff Boerne - 14 days
aboard*



*Torsten Schroeder -
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*Tony Lane - 12
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