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Transnational Crews and their Ways of Belongingness

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I. Introduction

The ways of living and working of seafarers, a highly mobile group, present an interesting situation with regard to the nature and quality of their social participation and inclusion. Certain features of their work, particularly location, content and routines, are highly distinctive from other temporary migrants. Their exposure to two different scenarios, on land and on shore, can provide substantial insight on their social participation and inclusion. The potential to understand the degree of their incorporation or embeddedness is useful to understanding how they are accepted as part of the community to which they belong to and the manifestations thereof.

Using the lens of transnationalism, this study endeavours to explore the ways of living and working of seafarers. By examining the transnational connection and depth of embeddedness in their communities, it will be possible to delineate or extend the borders by which transnationalism can be applied to seafarers. Consequently this will be helpful in pondering whether seafarers show double belongingness by virtue of their transnational interactions. This will also illustrate the pattern of transnationalism as applied to seafarers – its extent, direction and importance. In particular, this involves looking at their social relationship that is over and beyond national boundaries. Equally important is the reflection of this on their level of participation, particularly on the exclusionary or inclusionary manifestations of this onboard and ashore. The interplay of race and ethnicity, transitory work arrangements, well-defined hierarchical set-up lend insights on the seafarers' level of vulnerabilities and experience of marginalisation. This paper can hopefully enrich theoretical understanding of transnationalism while extending and developing its scope as applied to the highly mobile occupational group of seafarers. Alongside traditional themes, understanding transnationalism



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in the perspective of temporary migrants can not only further enrich and stimulate its conceptual and analytical appreciation but also draw attention to the creation of a supportive environment for seafarers.

II. Background on Transnationalism

The majority of the studies of transnationalism pertains to permanent migrants and is therefore unable to distinguish the fundamental but significant premises by which temporary migrants operate. Temporary migration varies in nature according to skill capacity, level of mobility, length of stay and mode of incorporation of the migrants involved. As the bulk of such migrants have become sizable, this has caused increased attention on factors surrounding the sustainability of their actions. Ruths (2003) expressed concern regarding their condition as “inherently more vulnerable to deprivation of even their most basic rights than the citizens (and permanent residents) of both sending and receiving countries.” This is even more intensified when situated among sea-based profession such as seafaring. Although both permanent and temporary migrants are potentially the same concept and often lumped together when analyzed, a different framework on temporary sea-based migrants is necessary to deepen understanding of seafaring and transnationalism in general and its implications on their participation.

Pinpointing the ways in which participation of seafarers have been carried out by them requires analyzing, if not extending, the borders of transnationalism. As Nancy Foner (1997:23) puts it in Vertovec (1999), ‘some groups [and places] are likely to be more transnational than others – and we need research that explores and explains the differences. Within immigrant groups, there is also variation in the frequency, depth and range of transnational ties.’ Seafarers, as they are known to operate in a global shipping industry, represent a special case. By the virtue of their regular contacts with their family and relatives, seafarers maintain the frequency of contact and remittances. When on land, their intermittent presence influences the nature of their participation in family decisions and also the broader community by which they occupy.

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In seeking to understand this further, a basic question arises as to the extent of seafarers' transnationality and the manifestations thereof. For instance, the short-term work arrangements of seafarers prevent them from assimilating in any countries they come in contact with. Their high level of mobility that is, extensive global movement as they flit from one port to another, hardly exposes them to complete incorporation to a certain country. The seafarers' confinement in their ships and rigid work schedules prevent them from nurturing a healthy social relationship with other seafarers. The multinational crewing typifying most ships lends perspective on the level of autonomy and general occupational environment. The distribution of nationalities within the ship affords seafarers a better working environment such that there is "a lack of ethnic identity attached to ships, as places, which allowed people to occupy them without being culturally dominated or oppressed (Sampson, 2003). However, single nationality ships or those with only two or three nationalities aboard are confronted with the problem of social division. According to Lane, Kahveci and Sampson (2003), "cooperation and integration increased amongst mixed nationality crews as the number of nationalities aboard increased". This becomes stark when faced with the fact that around two-thirds of the world merchant fleet are multinationally crewed.

In seeking a coherent expression of transnationalism to seafaring, it is imperative to look at the crucial factor, that is level of assimilation, raised within the theoretical discussion of transnationalism. The concept of assimilation operates within a well-defined political border where given an adequate length of time, migrants adjust to the norms of a nation (see also Brubaker 2001)). This is obviously atypical in the context of seafarers whose likelihood of becoming incorporated to a certain culture is undermined by short time duration and lack of political boundaries. It may be argued, however, that the flag state of the ship likens to the traditional conception of a host country. How they then interact within their host country under a limited amount or time, albeit regularly, remains inadequately unexplored. Relatedly, similar questions turn up such as: how does their participation within the ship affects their behaviour? To what extent do they feel connected with other seafarers of different ranks and nationalities? What are their awareness of certain rules operating within the ship? Viewing the ship at sea as a total institution serving the dual function of being a place of residence and work largely affects the seafarers'



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social behaviour (Zurcher, 1965). Essentially, this also highlights one of the areas where transnationalism's scope may be extended. For the seafarers, "fitting in" occur primarily within their bouyant workplace for the duration of their contract and the re-integration once they go back to the shores of their respective countries.

III. Methodology

The conduct of this research mainly involved Filipino seafarers both officers and ratings, particularly to those on land. On the ship, interviews with other nationality were also conducted. Three research sites were utilized for this study: a seafarer's dormitory in Manila, a rural community in Miag-ao, Iloilo, Philippines, and a container ship. The semi-structured interview, the main method used for this study was complemented with structured questionnaire and non-participant observation. The use of these methods helped to counteract the potential weaknesses inherent to each of the methods when utilized separately.

The conduct of a semi-structured interview at the Pier One Seafarer's Dorm in Manila led to a total of 30 seafarers composed of 16 officers and 14 ratings. Being a migrant shelter, most of those who stayed in this dormitory were from the rural areas and sent by their manning agencies to undertake particular trainings. The sample therefore consisted of transient seafarers who were in-between contracts. Visits to the dormitory occurred for the whole of month of February. On weekdays, interviews were done in the afternoon up to around early in the evening to ensure that seafarers were finished with their trainings. On weekends, where most seafarers were in the dormitory, interviews started in the morning.

In the community, 49 seafarer wives were interviewed of which ten were couples. The seafarers' wives were sought first. If their husbands were present, then they would be included in the interview. I lived in the community for 3 months commencing March 2008. The community in Miag-ao, Iloilo was chosen because of the high number of seafarer concentration in the community. Observations were mainly of the various interactions in the community, along with the community-based social events within the community. This method was utilized in order to gain access to natural settings in order to understand



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how social norms, values, roles and culture are carried out in the community in which seafarers live. Most of the wives interviewed were housewives but the sample also included wives who worked as teachers, nurses or businesswomen.

The onboard fieldwork onboard a container ship lasted for 41 days (30 March – 10 May 2009). All 25 seafarers on the ship participated in the study. There were three nationalities onboard the ship. Out of 25 seafarers, there were about 13 ratings of whom only one is not Filipino. Among the 12 officers, there was one Filipino second mate, a Sri Lankan third mate and a Filipino electro cadet. Hence, onboard this ship there was a total of 14 Filipinos. We sailed from Europe to Asia via Cape of Good Hope in order to avoid the looming piracy at the Gulf of Aden.

The operational definition of seafarers in this ship pertained to those who had experienced working on commercial ships particularly ocean-going vessels. Those working in luxury ships were excluded from the study. This also excluded fishermen from the sample because the study aimed to look at the manner of social integration aboard a vessel that undertakes long-haul voyages. In terms of seafaring rankings, the study will focus on both officers and ratings. Cadets, although they will become future officers and ratings, were not part of the study. Onboard the ship, however, cadets were also interviewed in order to capture the general perspective of the life on the ship.

IV. Life in the community

When it comes to understanding the lives of Filipino seafarers, it is important to look at their hometown to understand the various ways in which they maintain connections with those they have left-behind. The system operating in the community and the behaviour this elicits from him is important in re-evaluating his position as a member. By and large, this highlights that the nature of a seafarer's linkage depends on the characteristics of his community. Community-level factors can offer new perspective on the opportunities, form and type of membership, modes and outlook on social connection. Exploring the form of attachment maintained by seafarers with respect to their community such as maintaining



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communication, gift-giving and remittances, illuminate the local conditions affecting their participation at home and the factors crucial for forging a sense of belonging. How these three major activities mediate the seafarers' presence will be discussed accordingly.

A. Communication

Seafarers in this sample communicated with their families back home in order to sustain ties and participate in decision-making. Through mobile and satellite phones and emails, seafarers were able to maintain relationship with family, relatives and friends. as they exhibited what Szerszynski and Urry (2006) described as multiple mobilities. By using communication technologies, seafarers can participate in even the most mundane activities to serious financial undertakings. They were involved in a new form of social orientation wherein being away did not hinder them from maintaining their family and community networks. By keeping in touch, the bonds they nurtured while on land remained within their influence. As such, sustaining ties and participating in decision-making were highly regarded.

This finding was also similar to the results of other studies on migration and its consequence. However, certain characteristics of the community highlighted local structures affecting seafarers' communication patterns. Maintaining communication was important in keeping abreast of family matters, undertaking important decisions and in providing, as well as seeking, emotional solace and support for loved ones. Use of satellite calls or telephone calls was important for a seafarer as this closely resembled his presence on land. For instance, a third officer related the importance of keeping in touch with families back home and therefore ignoring the high cost of phone calls:

"I call at every port. With my last ship, I used satellite phone and it charged me \$4 per minute. I spend about \$100 in a month." (2nd officer)



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Understandably, the ratings had lower frequency of calls because of their lower salary. Where officers may be more likely to utilize satellite phones, most ratings waited for the ship to reach the port and purchased call cards in order to save more of their money. As one rating working on a tanker put it:

“You budget your calls. If you don’t budget, then your salary will just be used up because of calls.” (OS)

In terms of how calls were regarded, there seems to be no difference by rank. Both officers and ratings put a high value on making calls. An obvious reason for this was the way these technologies enhanced their capacity to keep their family intact. The more they contacted their families, the more they were able to make their presence felt. On the other hand, this also reflected the importance of his family which formed the major motivation of continuing in the seafaring career.

The topics of communication ranged from those that involved the seafarers’ wives and kids, to those of distant relatives and neighbors. For instance, a captain pointed to the following topics when he calls:

“Health conditions, that is primary. Status...news...who died, who gave birth? Time is lacking...and ofcourse, your sweet nothings.” (captain)

Offentimes, Filipino seafarers wanted to know the events and circumstances happening not only within their immediate family. It was also important for them to know what was happening outside their families. For instance, weddings of their childhood friends, deaths or pregnancies within the community. Even the smallest of news was given equal weight in terms of knowing the changes in the community. In short, a seafarer wanted as much information as possible while they were away and out of reach. Viewed this way, it became understandable why seafarers dedicated a large amount of their time and money to calling back home.

The importance of communication was also related to participation in decision-making within the household. Oftentimes, decisions on his children’s welfare and financial investments were the main

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topic of discussion between husband and wives. For financial and investment decisions, seafarers can be consulted and can be fairly active in making decisions. The range of a seafarer's involvement in financial matters at home varied significantly between the arrangements he and his wife managed to come up with and the life-course of the family to which he belonged. Generally, however, for seafarers who just started-out, involvement in house construction was an important consideration. A ratings' wife related the following:

When we made the house plan, he was in the ship and I was here. We communicate by talking. He will draw there and then will mail it to me. (rating's wife)

Contributing to the decisions in house improvements and construction had a special meaning to the seafarers. In this community, the yardstick of success was measured by having a house. There was therefore a high level of aspiration among seafarers to show tangible proofs of their labour. A renovated or newly built house served that purpose.

This was perhaps the most common feature in this community – big, extravagant houses with Mediterranean-inspired architectural design. Since this was a place historically oriented to migration, many of those who were able to earn and saved money abroad, built houses in this town. Owning a house became a showcase of wealth, a status symbol and is therefore a “must.” However, owners of most of these houses permanently resided abroad. Only the designated relatives looked after the house. It was only during important festivals, that they could return home from places like the United States, to celebrate and join in the revelry and merry-making.

The type of businesses favored in the community also followed from the need to achieve recognition and prestige. Where most seafarers readily invested in farm lots, they also ventured into transportation businesses such as purchasing and operating tricycles, multicabs and jeepneys. Normally, seafarers wives or very close relatives would be asked to look after the business. Getting updated on the financial status of their business was therefore of utmost concern to them when they managed to call home.

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B. Gift-giving

Gift-giving was a common practice for Filipino seafarers. Typically, they would never pass up the chance to give presents, cash or in kind, whether they were on the ship or on the shore. A typical seafarer would have a mental list in his mind of the people he ought to give gifts to even before he was onboard. The names on the list would be in order of decreasing importance. Hence, those who were instrumental in the achievement of his current status would rank high on his list and could probably get more expensive presents. These were people who helped him finish his education, referred him to manning agencies, lent him money when he was wanting and other relatives who helped him and his family, financial or otherwise, when it was most needed (i.e., emergency situations etc.). The practice of gift-giving allows him to sustain ties and to retain his status.

At home, seafarers mingled with their relatives and friends. They may take the initiative to call up all their close relatives including neighbours for a gathering. Alternatively, the initiative might come from their relatives or friends who would visit them in their house and invite them to drink. It was important for a seafarer to be get reconnected with those he hadn't seen for a long time. This was glimpsed from a second engineer's wife account when she said:

"ma, don't be angry..can I keep 10,000 php for safety?" I asked him, "For what?" He replies, "so that when I go to the store and see my friends then I can share drinks with them." His friends even tell him to treat them for a drink." (2nd engineer's wife)

By way of this practice, the seafarers made their presence felt to their comrades, neighbours and relatives. In this community, rekindling bonds with friends and relatives was done through hanging out in the store or what is known as "sari-sari" store in local parlance. "Sari-sari" means assorted and this refers to the assorted items sold apiece. This retail store was very much smaller than a supermarket and was often built in front of a house, usually the garage. These were really convenience stores that sold small items to nearby household. In terms of their social value to the community, it is a site for exchanging small talk. Townfolks in this community spent time in the stores or talked to passers-by.



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Benches provided outside the store makes it a venue for drinking and socializing. Thus, a seafarer seen hanging out in the store would be expected by his neighbours and close friends to at least buy them drinks such as a bottle of beer. This form of gift-giving functioned as a “token” for reconnection which ensured his position within the social circle and the fulfilment of what was expected of him by its members. Apparently, the perception of wealth to those who worked abroad and the expectations from them to give gifts allowed seafarers in this community to maintain their relationship with the family and it also increased the level of their social mobility.

The practice of gift-giving took on a more formal character by way of godparenting. In the rural areas, it was impolite to refuse request to be a godparent. Most of the seafarers in this study were asked to stand as godparents for the children of their friends or relatives on land and their fellow Filipino seafarers on board a ship. This becomes an avenue for widening his social circle. As one seafarer recounted:

“My neighbors will always request me to be godfather of their babies. You also get more invites to birthday parties. On weddings, they will also ask you to attend.” (2nd engineer)

He then became visible, a constant fixture in the parties held by his relatives since he started earning enough money to sustain not only himself but also his family. This arrangement was a common practice such that a seafarer may be surprised to know how his godchildren had grown in numbers despite his absence. It was a common practice for seafarers who were onboard a ship to get “reserved” as a godparent. His absence on land did not prevent him from being a godparent. The couple would just get someone to “proxy” for him during the baptism.

C. Remittances

The contact between the seafarer and his family mainly occurred in the form of remittances. The money sent by the seafarers was primarily earmarked for their families. This is a fact. But the meaning behind the act was also of importance. The act of sending remittance was the enactment of their varied roles as



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a father, a son, an immediate relative, a friend, a neighbour and so forth. Seafarers, therefore, sent remittances for a variety of reasons. Foremost among them was the sense of reciprocity that they feel for their families. In the case of single, unattached seafarers this could be understood as a way of giving back for the hardships their parents went through in sending them to school. The same holds true for other relatives who had contributed in helping him go to school. For instance, a relative might have offered free accommodation for him while he was looking for work in Manila. The seafarer felt indebted and obliged to repay the debt when he had finally found a job. The seafarers' act of sending remittance was therefore recognition of their debt of gratitude for the help extended to them.

"We promised to help each other. For me and my siblings, we help each other out in education. My father is just a farmer. We were able to step into highschool because of my aunt. We owe a lot to her." (2nd officer)

For married seafarers, contribution to his parents continued even after marriage. The primary goal was to fill in the lack of welfare insurance for their parents on top of meeting subsistence needs. In order to meet the basic needs, the seafarers' remittances to parents were as regular as those sent to their wives and children. A captain explained this as:

"...because we are extended family. Our parents are still alive. So maintenance. For my mom, I still give support. Their maintenance is a form of allotment." (captain)

For this community the use of remittances for the purpose of maintenance was not limited to daily expenses such as food, medicine and so forth. More than house improvements, education of siblings and small start-up ventures, remittances were also allocated to those they have sponsored. These maybe their nephews and nieces, children of distant relatives or sometimes even those unrelated to them by blood. For instance, a chiefmate's wife enumerated the number of relatives they financially support:

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“His nephews and nieces. His cousin in college. Also 3 nephews/nieces in college they are graduates now. Then we helped two of his cousins finish highschool. We also helped my nephews/nieces. But they are all finished with school now. Our helper has been with us for more than 5 or 6 years so we told her to at least finish highschool then we can decide if she wants to pursue college.” (chiefmate’s wife)

Sponsorship usually arose out of financial insufficiency of the family of those sponsored. A captain’s wife mentioned how they were asked for support:

“His sibling asked for help...to help nephews. So as long as we give. He gives 20K php..then that’s it.” (captain’s wife)

One way this was practiced was to send money to the family of the sponsored child. Another way would be directly looking after the child by letting him or her stay in the house. It was implicit in this kind of arrangement for the child to render household services or become a companion of the seafarer’s wife. If the sponsored child was a male, he would most likely study seafaring courses. In this way, it would be easier for the child to find work after he graduate due to the established connection of the seafarer. Remittance commitments of this kind stemmed from a sense of duty to families which also functioned as a form of legacy and a demonstration of success. Nevertheless, these endowed the community with more educated and productive members.

In this community, considerable importance was given to the celebration of fiesta traditions. In this town, as well as in the whole of Philippines, the month of May was the month of *fiestas* or religious festivals. It was therefore possible for fiestas to be held everyday for every barangay in the town. This was separate to the celebration of the town’s fiesta. These religious festivals were done to honor the patron saint. During fiestas, each household would prepare food for a good number of visitors. The number of visitors could include just about anyone as the fiesta tradition was much like an open house where everybody is automatically invited.



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People just go there on their own. With the past fiesta, we killed one pig and then the other one was roasted, then 30 pieces of chicken, then 10 pieces of big fish. We also have vegetables, embutido...and other additional food. (captain's wife)

Lavish preparations were done during the fiestas. Well-to-do seafarer wives hired extra helpers for the preparations. Oftentimes these are their relatives living in a different area. Where the number of visitors can swell to more than a hundred, hiring the services of waiters became a likely option, as the wife of a second engineer explains:

"This year, we got a waiter. We experienced it last year...it is very hard if you do all the work from cooking to hosting. So he decided to get a waiter. He said it is fun because we are able to entertain our guests." (2nd engineer's wife)

Apart from the patronal fiesta, there was also the municipal fiesta. During the municipal fiesta, another round of solicitations would be done:

"They ask solicitations. This is for mass, menu, wine (for offering). During fiesta municipal, they ask sponsorship for trophies. I give them cash to buy trophies. Then those having fiesta, they will solicit money to put up the wall of the Church of the Miraculous Medal." (chiefmate's wife)

Funds contributed for the fiesta will be earmarked for the various activities within the community. Seafarers did not go through a decision process in determining whether to celebrate fiesta for it was simply a must. In fact, in order to ensure that fiesta will be celebrated, those whose incomes were low, resorted to borrowing from relatives. My informant told me that others prepared early by buying the ingredients one at a time, usually three to four months earlier.



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These particular forms of attachment maintained by seafarers specific to their community gives important insights about their propensity to earmark for long-term investment, reaffirmation of social bonds and reinforcement to the decision-seeking activities of their families as a whole. Community-specific factors highlight the specific ways by which Filipino seafarers function in their community and emphasized the importance in maintaining connections and social position at home. These social and economic realities induce seafarers to remain connected with their community.

V. Life on the ship

On the ship, the form of work arrangement influences the social order on the ship. The primary point of order in the ship is its hierarchical structure. This delineates the responsibility of every crew member and the roles each has to take in ensuring smooth running of the ship. Position onboard the ship equates to numerous responsibilities including status and special treatments. The relationship therefore revolves around the nature of authority undertaken in the ship and the way in which these are carried out by each of the crew. Expectations, therefore, operate around cooperative role-performance in the workplace along with observance of norms and awareness of sanctions. Enforcement is normally done vertically, according to the guidance and direction of the officer or horizontally, among the ratings themselves.

Resistance

How power is constituted and shared across nationalities and rank is a major theme affecting shipboard behaviour. Owing to the hierarchical structure on the ship, power relations become essential to social stratification on the ship. Authority and control onboard the ship dominates all aspect of lives of the seafarers. This dimension of power could be described as coming from the position itself and not from the people. Interestingly, onboard this ship where most officer-level positions were held by one nationality, authority becomes viewed as coming from nationality. The pattern in segregation evolved



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from ranks to nationality. Greater sensitivity to officer control and discipline occurred due to the power relations on the ship which combined the hierarchical and ethnic nature of the workplace structure.

Instances of resistances on the ship pointed to internal conflicts and the tactics utilized to mitigate, if not thwart, tensions and frustrations. Where its practice was obviously due to power imbalance on the ship, this largely relates to a deeper explanation encompassing hierarchy, nationality and time constraints. These factors would be explained in detail through detailed discussion of forms of resistances on the ship.

Forming Names (Hidden Names)

Localized version of the ranks or position of the officer level crew was used among ratings in making reference to their officers. This local adaptation of their position was used daily whether or not they were in the presence of the officers. According to them, this made it difficult for the officers to know that they were being talked about whether at work or during rest periods such as those in the lunch break. In the mess hall, where they ate together with another guy with Indian nationality, this allowed them to share all sort stories without qualms. In this way, the chance of being overheard through the corridor was lessened. This was akin to hidden transcripts (Scott, 1985) such that “every subordinate group creates... a hidden transcript that represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant.” The use of the localized language gave them the freedom to refer to those in power without fear of risking their position. Lawrence and Robinson (2007) referred to the “disparity between need for autonomy and an experienced loss of freedom” as a potential contributor to frustration in the workplace. Use of these terms gave them a sense of privacy so that “*they wouldn’t know they are being talked about (V0140_r)*.” It made for them an avenue to vent out disappointments about work or share stories about past seafaring experiences or even current news about their families in a relax atmosphere. The versatility of using the local language allowed them to somehow recoup some of the freedom curtailed from them and eased the restrictions onboard.

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Passive sabotage

Given the many restrictions for the rating onboard the ship, they somehow retaliated in unobtrusive and subtle ways. Consider for instance the case of the messboy, the lowest paid crew on the ship. Among the Filipino crew, he was the one with the most interaction with both officers from engine and deck department. In undertaking general concerns about housekeeping and food catering, he dealt with the officers constantly until the end of his contract. Unavoidably, there would be complaints about the food or even the prompt service he gave them. Yet, for all of this, he would be seen to respond respectfully and amiably to grumbles. So he would always be calling them “sir” and saying “sorry” first for every explanation regarding a particular concern. Thus, he adopted a ready tolerance to officers who would eventually have to feedback to their manning office about his performance onboard.

Being powerless, his stance would be that of deference. But he could do a little more than providing service with a smile (whether felt or not). He exacted revenge by withholding service but in a skillfully evasive manner. In one instance, he was called to the ship’s office and was questioned by the Chief Engineer in front of all the officers (captain, chief engineer, chiefmate and electrician) why he didn’t change the bed linens. He politely explained that he did check on his room and found it locked so he left and went to do the other rooms. Later on, when he was asked what he felt about it, he answered, “*I really didn’t want to change the bed linens. I meant what I did. I wanted to get back at them and this is how I can do it, by making sure they sleep with a dirty linen.*”(V0132). Having been onboard for almost eight months, he had memorized the time schedule of the officers and their whereabouts. This knowledge of the officers’ time allowed him to adeptly avoid heavy scolding. By feigning innocence, rather than express neglect and irresponsibility, he avoided punitive outcomes. The claim to unintentional mistake resonated with Prasad and Prasad’s (1998) “careful carelessness” as a form of indirect resistance. It would be difficult to identify this at the onset for its subtlety. This becomes the resistant space by which the mess boy exacted vengeance and regained his lost autonomy.

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Humour

Jokes onboard the ship effectively worked as a buffer to the common drudgery on the ship. It was however utilized to resist forms of domination and control. The value of humour in workplace rested on its capacity to increase morale and create a sense of community. On the other hand, this became an outlet for pent up emotions and therefore allowed them moral reinforcements. Onboard the ship, humour was utilized not only for its entertaining usefulness but also as a way to impose a critical look at a certain person or event. For instance, onboard the ship, there is a conflict among the ratings such that they don't like the kind of management practiced by the bosun. Hence, they made fun of the bosun by calling him names such as "grandfather" to indicate not his superiority but as a derogatory way highlighting oldness in terms of age. For instance, when the bosun was late for a few minutes and one of the ratings would ask "where is grandfather?" The moment the bosun stepped in, they automatically changed the topic and discussed something else. Even the ratings from the engine department took the cue and discussed other things in their table.

Two important aspects of humour occurred in that scenario. The first one was the use of humour to express their contempt without being judged as insubordinate. This was what Noon and Blyton described as "informal triumphing over the formal" (Douglas 1975). The same situation was found among shopfloor workers by Collinson (2002: 270). In there, joking was a way of "coping with deskilled, high pressure and/or physically dangerous work" by manual workers. Going back to the bosun's story, using the word "grandfather" became a way for the ratings to challenge the bosun's authority and the same time a signal of their powerlessness. The issue with the bosun was brought to the attention of the chiefmate whose decision rested with the ratings concerned. He asked the bosun to seek apology from the concerned ratings but the bosun did not acknowledge this. Hence, although the work was back to normal and the unresolved tension was just assumed to dissipate through time. Thus, tensions that couldn't be resolved were coursed through the forms of humour in order to emphasize the existing division onboard on top of voicing out their real feelings. The second one was that it enabled all the ratings to share some form of connection with each other. Although the ratings from the engine



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department were not usually working under the direction of the bosun, their annoyance about the bosun's tendency of "monitoring" their beer consumption when on the day room was a source of tension. Hence, the act of joining in the laughing whenever "grandfather" joke was brought up revealed their agreement with its accompanying undertones as they shared and empathised with the group's general feeling.

Avoidance

Though this was quite difficult to undertake, most ratings in this ship avoided the bosun. Physically escaping from the presence of their superiors was akin to what Collinson termed as resistance-through-distance (Collinson 1994). As a strategy on the ship, this form of resistance made the seafarers avoid sharing the same physical space with the bosun and hence freed them from communicating with him:

"Here, there are things they don't like. They tried to avoid the bosun. He is not makatao (for the ratings)." V0132_messboy

Hence, after work, they just stayed within their cabins and kept away from the dayroom where they could meet the bosun. The lesser the contact, the better. This would then mean decreasing the number of physical spaces where they could actually reside. Most of them would rather stay within their cabins to watch DVDs or videos. Those who wanted to have a little bit of time outside would most likely go to the dayroom. There is nowhere they can really go as they would have to always bump with the bosun whether they go for the gym, table tennis room or in the ship's office (when they want to read the news).

Gossiping

The lack of other things to do beside work, made gossip a very ideal option for those who were onboard the ship. Limited activities onboard the ship and the repetitive nature of work determined the increased levels of boredom and the subsequent need to alleviate it through participation in gossips. Gossip topics ranged from unfair treatment at work to particular lifestyle on the ship (e.g. cleanliness or orderliness of the room etc.). Exchange of gossip information meant spontaneity in drifting from a

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variety of topics often couched in light, cheerful and often humorous interpretation of the contributor. Sharing gossips during meal times or during rest times was very common among the ratings. As simple as absence from the workplace could start a round of gossip exchange among those who were present. That was why most of them mentioned that they should always be present in the recreation room or a gathering to avoid being talked about. Since in the ship peer awareness was instinctively practised by all, the littlest of actions could be a fodder for gossip. Hence, gossip functioned as a form of social control (Merry 1984) under the inevitable conditions of being subjected to acute attention to all sorts of working and non-working behaviour on the ship. Open scrutiny of all actions and reactions was shared by those in the gossip loop whether in the deck or engine department. As a mechanism for getting a glimpse of what was happening in each of the departments, gossip sharing made it possible for them to air their concerns with each other and pore over all sorts of explanation which would most likely end in hasty generalizations about the stereotypes of nationality.

"We talk about them because we know they also talk about us."

A typical feature of gossiping was that it was always done behind the back of the subject, done within their social circle (or the gossip loop) and carried with it an imposition of strong moral tendency. Going back to the case of the bosun, the engine ratings talked among themselves about the bosun's behaviour in order to understand why he imposed his authority into their department when his concerns should be directed to the deck ratings. By talking about it among themselves, the engine ratings were able to solicit a unitary stance and therefore get support from each other with regard to the bosun's behaviour. In effect, being part of the gossip circle allowed them to perform a symbolic trial *in absentia* (Tucker 1993: 31) such that they can give their judgment on such matter and therefore assess the blameworthiness of the person or situation in question. The same thing holds true for those under the direct supervision of the bosun with the added dimension of soliciting advice from those who had more work experience.

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Across ranks, there were also gossips among the officers about the budget and its management by the captain. Most of them thought that the captain was making money out of the food provisions. This topic was brought out typically during meal times when food became repetitive and its quantity seemingly monitored by the chief cook. Each would narrate their own experiences about how food provisions were altered when the new captain came. This same grievance was expressed by the engine officers. Their degree of dissatisfaction made them readily discuss the topic. One of the officers disclosed how he raised this with the manning agency. The agency had initiated a survey but as to whether this would translate to installation of a system that would prevent future malicious activities would take time. Noticeably, despite their extreme dissatisfaction with the food budget management, most of them chose to be non-confrontational and just talk about this deceitful practice within themselves. Where food was a common interest among officers and ratings, this made it possible for them to reinforce their position and highlight their togetherness onboard the ship among their respective groups, that is by rank and by nationality. Where work-related gossips were openly discussed, personal issues were avoided among them. There was, in a sense, an implicit understanding of what was an accepted topic for gossip. More sensitive topics such as conflict in family life was not discussed unless initiated by the person having the trouble himself. Where possible, this was usually discussed among small groups only (e.g. deck or ratings group). The possible negative effects of gossip such as disruption of relationship with the third party (Wittek and Wielers 1998) did not materialize in this case. The unquestioned authority of the captain and his capacity to inflict a form of restraint on them made them chose to discuss their grievance within their group.

Clearly, “gossip functions as a hidden transcript that evaluates the normative behaviour of absent individuals” (Merry 1982). More than their need for dealing with boredom, gossip became a way to exchange information across ranks and department. It also emphasized their need to belong by the mere act of contributing to the gossip whether to solicit information or to give advice. It was this common interest that led them to gossip and confirmed their participation on the ship. Overall, this further enhanced group bond and made them more aware of themselves functioning as one nationality versus the other.

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VI. Coping Mechanisms

By considering the strong hierarchical orientation on the ship and its pervasive influence on the forms of interaction on the ship, acts of hidden resistances were recognized. The manner by which the crew of the ship, specifically the ratings, diffused the wield of control by the officers were manifested in the formation of a social space. Within this space, the intensity of authority and power were freely and critically examined, specifically the reasonableness of organizational power. In an environment where nationality became a focal point of reference, sustaining this space was therefore due to its capacity to counter that power to maintain integration and to emphasize unfair treatment. Moreover, the obvious lack of public – private distinction led them to create a variety of private features in order to achieve a semblance of privacy and control on the ship.

Acting Filipino

Filipino ratings were primarily expected to “act Filipino.” The shared expectations about the Filipino value of *pakikisama* (getting along) made everybody amenable to the activities on the ship. Adherence to this Filipino concept of conformity was indicative of their level of sociability and the extent by which they can abide by norms, values and behavioural precepts while on the ship. Within the context of social interaction on the ship, the Filipino seafarer had to show that he was worthy of inclusion. As manifestations of *pakikisama* stemmed from pressures to comply with the general view, this meant showing up in the day room when invited to do so as this reflected his capacity to get along with the rest of the crew and more specifically, being one with his fellow seafarers. Hence, this was related to how “a person is evaluated as good or bad, just or unjust right or wrong on the basis of how (one) regards ...kapwa (the other person)” (Jocana 2001). Failure to show up in the dayroom, unless there were justifiable reasons, created a negative impression of having no sense of camaraderie or fellowship. Thus, a seafarer in the day room would seldom refuse a can of beer offered to him given the risk of being labeled as someone without *pakisama*. Those who were not drinkers just accepted the bottle of beer and then refused the succeeding offers very gently in order to avoid offending not only the one who made the offer but the whole group in general. One of them disclosed the following:

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“It is better if you sip very slowly so everytime they offer, you can refuse them by saying you still have some beer left in the can.” [Fieldnote, 25/04/2009]

The predisposition of Filipino seafarers to conform as they showed a sense of togetherness was also, apart from sending a positive image of unity on the ship, another way for them to fully take part in the group. It removed the barrier from them being different from the rest but someone in tune with the group's general outlook. Moreover, this also came with the expectation that once it was his turn to provide drinks (i.e., during his birthday or any other celebration), he wouldn't be embarrassed by their refusal. Such conventions regarding *pakikisama* expressed the normative dimension of their interaction with regard tacit rules in the ship.

Accordingly, the day room as a site for exchanging views, advices, worries and, as previously discussed, a place for expressing defiance or resistance made it central to the ratings' everyday life. The extent to which Filipino ratings on this ship utilised the day room could therefore be divided into the material and symbolical benefits derived from it. The material benefits such as the use of certain entertainment facilities such as television, DVD player and karaoke microphones especially during weekends determined the enjoyment of making use of the place. A table for card games was also provided for the ratings. The symbolical benefits such as the sense of moral and emotional support derived from it made it important for them most especially during long voyages where work, was again, more or less normalised around the usual routines. At ports, when work schedule were irregular and busier, day rooms ceased to be frequented as they sought their respective cabins for relaxation.

Creation of homelike features

Among the Filipino ratings, the communal utility of the dayroom contributed to the many ways in which they established, stretched and created boundaries among themselves. The reasons for which were related to the creation of an environment that, although temporary, provided relief from the pressures of work and reduced the physical and mental isolation and pressures from living away from home. Despite the lack of distinction between actual workplaces (i.e., bridge or engine room) and the private places (i.e., recreation rooms, day rooms and mess rooms). Filipino seafarers endeavoured to veer away from

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the asocial nature of the ship by getting together during their off hours. Get-togethers in the day room were valued due to the companionship derived from it and also from being an outlet for expressing a variety of sentiments affecting their work and non-work engagements. Being within the group, gave them a chance of articulating a variety of vulnerabilities directly affecting them such as the sense of unfair treatment afforded them by the officers.

The most common way by which seafarers come together was during mealtimes in the mess room. This also gave them the opportunity to interact with each other and talk about various things concerning things that happened during the day including the current news and events back home. After meal times, they would stay in the mess room for a while to chat about a variety of things concerning news at home and current concerns in their particular departments such as encounters with the officers and other work related activities. In there, they freely discussed any issues using their native tongues. Thus, the Filipino seafarers' participation in this story sharing allowed them to reduce the public character inherent in the ship thereby loosening some of the structural (i.e., hierarchy) and social rigidities undergirding their existence. In this way, they inhabited what Lofland (1989) typified as the parochial realm which consisted of overlapping social networks such as networks consisting of workmates and friends. Despite the seating arrangement being reflective of their departmental functions, the form of personal interaction when on the mess room reduced the public or occupational character generally inherent on the ship. The form of togetherness during mealtimes facilitated partial transformation of the mess room into a place of closer, more intimate interaction, as opposed to the formal, professional atmosphere when at work. By putting a sense of interactional characteristics on the ship, they were able to cope with the stress brought about by physical distance and to acquire a sense of the kind of sociality they were used to when at home.

Watching Filipino films in the day room was a favoured, common pastime. One ratings mentioned that he specially asked his wife to send them DVDs of Filipino shows and drama series so that they could watch these shows. They also have Filipino DVDs which varies from drama to comedy. One of them



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mentioned that they didn't really watch Filipino movies when at home but it was different on the ship because it helped in alleviating homesickness. As one ratings put it:

"In the Philippines, I don't really watch videos of Filipino movies, but this somehow takes away the sadness. Well, I do watch it, but only sometimes. Perhaps, I am looking for something Filipino. I think it is the same with food, I don't like bagoong (shrimp paste) but when it is served then I eat it."

So clearly, watching movies was one way for them to feel at home on the ship. Also, the use of the Filipino language helped create this feeling of belongingness. Most of them pointed to its use as very relaxing and soothing for them. While watching these shows, most of them would then contribute with the latest updates on show business. Given their long stay on the ship, they would watch the same shows all over again not just to alleviate everyday monotony but also to be reminded of life back home.

During weekends, they also used the day room to for a little get-together. There will be a Magic Sing, a form of karaoke, that would be used in the dayroom. In this form of socialisation, they are able to know each other and therefore create tacit understanding of how as ratings they are supposed to conduct themselves. Everybody held to the expectations that all would be present to join in the celebration. Non-participants or those who snubbed the occasion were frowned upon and would most likely be criticized as "*walang pakisama*" or no sense of camaraderie or togetherness. For those of deck ratings who had a tiff with the bosun would retreat to their cabins and therefore had that sense of privacy to be all the more attenuated. Nevertheless, the homelike features utilized and created in the ship provided a social sphere where they not only internalised and strengthened the values and norms expected of each other but also managed the social dimensions of working in a ship. Overall, this resuscitated their vigour in work and made them survive work ennui.

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VII. Conclusion

Although this paper briefly discussed the forms of belongingness experienced by Filipino seafarers on land and on the ship, it does draw together the character of transnational assimilation experienced in both realms. The seafarers' absence within their home community mediated through remittances, gift-giving and telephone calls allow them to be virtually present not only to their left-behind families but also to the wider social community. These practices are instructive of the many ways seafarers adjust to the demands brought about by the society by which he belonged along with the nature of his job. Securing a firm foothold in the society not only fosters his social involvement but this also sustains his economic mobility and political contribution.

Onboard the ship a variety of covert and nonconfrontational ways is utilized by the ratings in order to deal with a highly striated work and rank structure. Although this doesn't lead to antagonistic circumstances in most cases, its contribution to resistance and social isolation of seafarers is apparent. Most of them maintain a professional distance with each other as a result of this authority. Where occupational relationship is the primary form of association among the crew, development of intimate social bonds, where present, is kept within limits. Both sets of relationships were confined within the ship's general objectives, norms and values. Duality of membership was primarily initiated by the virtue of their work and then according to their rank and nationality. In a bi-national ship however, it is difficult to disentangle execution of authority as emanating whether from rank or from nationality. Hence, accommodating power and valuing ethnic differences are two influential factors affecting shipboard social order.

Such internal pressures along with the external strain emanating from the global shipping industry in general present to seafarers a variety of risks. This uncertainty although affecting both the officers and ratings was different in terms of its intensity. As what Gallie et al (1998: 14) observed, "managerial groups have become more insecure, but the relative chances of suffering job loss remain the greatest among manual workers (Gallie et al 1998: 14). The same holds true for the ratings whose daily interactions are always within the context of measured risk of losing job due to insubordination.



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Formation of a social space becomes a way to diffuse the wield of control and hence strengthen the seafarers' emotional and relational life on the ship. This also became the place where they talk about some of the perceived injustices they suffered because of their rank and nationality onboard the ship. Open acts of defiance and resistance were allowed to flourish and then explained and rationalized.

This effectively forms a grievance space from which they could rid themselves of disappointments and frustrations but also seek gratification from the fellowship it confers.

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