MARITIME MATTERS IN THE 21st CENTURY

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## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speaker biographies</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Risking marriage and family: maintaining women seafarers' gender identities</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Momoko Kitada</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maintaining Transnational Connections</strong></td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Iris Acejo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Global environmental concerns: local shipboard practice - the seafarers' ordeal</strong></td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capt Mohab Abou-Elkawam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The impact of high fuel costs on the shipping industry and world trade</strong></td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Nguyen Dang Ben</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The effects of globalization on maritime security in the wider Caribbean and Central America</strong></td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Johnnie Borland</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Speaker Biographies

Ms Momoko Kitada - SIRC-Nippon Fellow
Ms Momoko Kitada comes for Japan. She is a former seafarer and completed her one year onboard training as a deck cadet in 2005 after graduating from the Faculty of Maritime Sciences, Kobe University, Japan. She commenced her PhD studies at SIRC under the Nippon Fellowship in 2005 and is currently working to complete her thesis on Women Seafarers and their Identities.

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Ms Iris Acejo - SIRC-Nippon Fellow
Ms Iris Acejo comes for the Philippines. She graduated with a Business Economics degree (Dean’s Medallist) at the University of the Philippines (U.P.). She also has a Master of Arts degree in Economics from the same university and has been involved in various policy research concerning labour, employment and migration. Iris was a teaching fellow at the U.P. School of Economics from 2005-2006. She commenced her PhD studies on the Nippon Fellowship programme in 2006 and is currently working on her thesis on Transnational Communities and the Assimilation of Filipino Seafarers.

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Capt Mohab Abou-Elkawam - SIRC-Nippon Fellow
Capt Mohab Abou-Elkawam comes from Alexandria, Egypt. He Graduated from The Arab Academy for Science, Technology & Maritime Transport (AASTMT) 1985 and has worked for 15 years as a seafarer on board tankers and Gas Carriers in various ranks from Third Mate to Master Mariner. Mohab is a member of the teaching Staff of the Integrated Simulators Complex in the AASTMT where he has six years experience in teaching and training relating to Oil Spill Crisis Management and Practical Ship Handling. He obtained a MSc. Degree from the World Maritime University, Malmo, Sweden, 2003, under the ‘Sasakawa Fellowship’, and specialized in Maritime Safety and Environmental Protection. His research interests are focused on seafarers and their connections with the marine environment. He joined SIRC to undertake his PhD under the Nippon Fellowship in October 2005 and is currently nearing completion of his thesis on Seafarers and Growing Environmental Concerns.

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Mr Nguyen Dang Ben
Mr. Nguyen Dang Ben comes from Vietnam. He currently works as the Operations Manager at the Premier Container Terminal of the DP World container port in Saigon. He has previously worked at the Vietnam Transport and Chartering Corporation (Vietfracht) as Marketing Manager and later as Managing Director of the same company. He studied under the ‘Sasakawa Fellowship’ programme from 01/2006 – 10/2007 at the World Maritime University.

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Lieutenant Commander John Borland

Lt Com John Borland comes from Belize. He currently works as the Vice Commandant for the Belize National Coast Guard. He has had extensive military training as well as obtaining a Masters degree from the World Maritime University under the ‘Sasakawa Fellowship’ programme in 2007. His work experience in the military includes Platoon Leader and Training Subaltern, Coxswain and Navigation Officer on board a 65 foot Patrol Boat, deputy Intelligence Officer and Operations Officer of the Maritime Wing, and later Executive Officer of the same.

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Abstract

This paper focuses upon how women seafarers maintain their gender identities in relation to their marriage and family lives. Seafaring is traditionally male dominated and women seafarers are likely to feel a need to minimise signs of femininity onboard the ship. This results in their development of gender identity management at sea and women seafarers also have to adjust to the shore culture where they are expected to play a certain gender role, for example, being a wife or mother. This study examines the ways in which women seafarers maintain their gender identities between ship and ashore and describes some of the difficulties which they have to deal with. Although there are a lot of challenges for women seafarers to work at sea, this paper concludes that some of the difficulties faced by women working onboard the ship could be ameliorated with appropriate support from the industry and wider community.

Keywords: women seafarers; gender; sex; marriage; family; gender identity; gender role; mother; occupational culture; employment

1. Introduction

An increasing number of women are participating in the seafarer labour market, an arena formally dominated by men. Seafaring is not an exception in this respect many traditionally male occupations are now employing women. The shipping industry itself has become more interested in employing women as a potential source of highly qualified officers. It is often reported that women or men in the non-traditional occupations are likely to be masculinised or feminised to a certain extent in order to fit into the workplace where the opposite sex is dominant (Cross and Bagihole 2002; Kvande 1999; Williams 1993). My research, therefore, addresses the question of how women seafarers cope in this male-dominated environment and explores how their gender identities are affected by their work experience. This paper particularly focuses upon how women seafarers maintain their gender identities in relation to their marriage and family lives based on my findings. The paper
presents several suggestions for supporting the currently active women seafarers as well as for attracting more women who would potentially be interested in working at sea.

2. Background

The international shipping industry today is facing a shortage of highly qualified officers (BIMCO/ISF 2005) and as such greater attention has recently been paid to the place of women seafarers in the labour market. According to the Shiptalk (2008a) survey, a majority of Captains and Chief Engineers acknowledged that to employ more women seafarers could be one of the solutions to make up for the shortage of officers. There is, however, very little information about women seafarers in general, including the actual population size. The only available statistic is the estimation of the number of women seafarers reported by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) in 1992 (Belcher et al. 2003), which suggested that only one or two per cent of the total seafaring population were women. Whilst the figure is liable to be slightly higher today, women are still a minority group at sea. The only significant piece of research on women seafarers was conducted by Belcher et al. (2003) and revealed that many of them found it difficult to work in the male-dominated workplace of the ship, because their gender often became an issue. How women seafarers continue to cope with the situation, however, remains unknown.

Seafaring is undoubtedly one of the non-traditional occupations for women, others include, for instance, fire-fighting (Yoder and Aniakudo 1995), mining (Maggard 1991; Ilic 1996) and engineering and carpentry (Goodwin and O’Connor 2005). Kvande’s study of female engineers in Norway (Kvande 1999) describes how women, in the engineering organisations studied, attempted to de-feminise their appearance to be regarded seriously by their male colleagues, and some strategically kept a low profile in their work to make themselves as invisible as possible. A similar phenomenon has been observed in my research on women seafarers and I will offer some illustrative examples from my interview data in the findings section.
There is crucial difference, however, between seafaring and other similarly ‘male’ jobs, namely, that women seafarers are required to work away from home for an extended period of time. Importantly, this work-related absence limits their opportunity to fulfill certain domestic roles, such as being a wife and/or a mother. In my research, I understand ‘gender roles’ as being socially and culturally constructed. That is, what constitutes a good mother or wife can vary depending upon the accepted social norms and values of the local community. These ‘gender roles’ may not match what women necessarily feel about themselves in terms of being feminine or in terms of their own attitudes towards marriage and motherhood. Women seafarers’ ‘gender identities’ can be affected by their work at sea and the norms that dominate that space, therefore I speculate that they may experience more variations in their ‘gender identities’ than other women ashore. For women seafarers, the need to occupy different roles of seafarer and wife/mother may place great strain upon their relationships with their partners and family. While women may have different experiences depending upon their cultural backgrounds and personal family situations, this challenge was highlighted by many female participants in my research.

This paper, therefore, focuses upon the ways in which women seafarers manage their gender identity at work and at home. In presenting this paper, I seek to give voice to women seafarers and discuss what support could be provided in order to improve life for this group of workers. Such changes, should they be implemented, might also attract more women to seafaring as a career and go some small way to addressing the current shortage of qualified officers in the seafarer labour force.

3. Method

Women seafarers in this research are understood to be those who work in operational sections of the ship, for example, the navigation and engine departments. These workspaces tend to be overwhelmingly male-domains and have a unique occupational culture. During my fieldwork in 2006 and 2007, 36 women current and former
seafarers from Portugal (9), Germany (11), Sweden (12), Poland (1), Ghana (1) and Japan (2) were contacted through a process of snow-ball sampling. I started by contacting some key actors through the Seafarers International Research Centre (SIRC) and I could utilise women seafarers’ personal and organisational networks. Of these, 34 women participated in the in-depth face-to-face interviews, which were mostly conducted in public places like a café, restaurant, office or ship. One interview took place in the participant’s house. I also conducted one telephone and one email interview according to individual participant preference. All the interview data were transcribed and analysed. Transcripts were anonymised and individuals were assigned a pseudonym.

Of my sample of women seafarers, all were heterosexual and almost half were either married or cohabiting, the rest were single, and one third were mothers. Approximately 70 per cent of them worked in the navigational department and the rest were engineers and radio officers. This is reflected by the fact that more women are likely to be found in navigation than in engineering. One third of participants held a Captain’s license, nearly a half had more than 10 years sailing experience. A half of interviewees are no longer active and their shore-based periods after leaving the sea vary from a few years to five or six years, except for the case of radio officers who had disappeared in 1990s due to technological and industrial changes in shipping. While some were keen to leave the sea and pleased to be ashore, those who gave up sailing due to pregnancy often expressed the wish to return to sea when their children were grown up.

In addition, I also interviewed 8 male seafarers with a mixture of Captains, deck officers and engineers from Portugal (1), Germany (2), Sweden (1), United Kingdom (1), Netherlands (1) and Japan (2) in an attempt to explore, and better understand, the occupational culture of seafaring particularly in relation to gender issues. However this paper will focus upon women’s experience in terms of their gender identity management between the periods onboard and ashore.
4. Findings

To maintain a balance between work and home life is not easy for either female or male seafarers, especially if they have young children. However, there is a specific difficulty that only women seafarers face and this concerns the need to actively manage their gender identities. The data show that many women seafarers tried to de-feminise their appearance and hide stereo-typical behaviours of femininity when onboard the ship. This was partly their deliberative strategies to fit into the male culture of the seafaring community at sea. Vicki, for example, described how she managed her appearance so as not to draw attention to herself:

‘On the ship, I was always tied up my hair. Always no makeup, nothing. Always minimum here and already much. Yeah, everything female showing what I have, I tried to cover it up.’ (Vicki, Age20, Deck officer trainee, German)

Equally concerned not to draw attention to herself, Marina, a German deck officer trainee, tried not to show emotions and feelings on the ship. She felt that to do so would be viewed as too womanly and that as such she would not be accepted as a normal member of the crew. Steps taken to manage their identities when onboard, however, continued to reverberate through the lives of these women even when they returned home. As Marina explained, when she signed-off the ship and came back ashore, she found it difficult to show her emotions and feelings in front of her boyfriend:

‘Because two weeks ago, I came back from the vessel. So uh, actually in the relationship it is the most difficult thing. Because on the vessel, I always have to make my way for myself. So I never showed my emotions and feelings, anything. […] But you are yourself there. Then you are coming back. And then there’s somebody you have to take care. You have to show your emotions.'
And you also want to show your emotions, but it is not so easy, because you are not so used to it any more.’ (Marina, Age 22, Deck officer trainee, German)

Whilst Marina adopted a deliberate strategy of minimizing or downplaying outward signs of femininity, other women seafarers adopted different strategies. For example, some women actively portrayed, ‘acquired’ a masculine type of identity by behaving in ways seen as manly while onboard the ship. Sue, a Swedish female engineer, for example, had experienced unwanted attention from her male colleagues, so actively adopted a more masculine personality by copying the behaviour of her male colleagues:

‘I have been more macho than many men actually, because of course I become sort of a copy cat…I copy their behaviour, and if they are rude, I am a bit ruder. If they swear, I can swear too. Maybe a little bit more than they can. So I think I adapt the male behaviour.’ (Sue, Age 45, Junior Engineer, Swedish)

Many of these masculinised women seafarers to a certain extent experienced difficulties when attempting to switch out of their shipboard mode of behaviour when they got ashore. They found it difficult to reinstitute feminine behavior appropriate to their gender roles as perceived by those at home. Even if they could approximate in their behaviour to the expectations, many reported that such personas were felt to be alien to them and that they were living a ‘lie’ in the shore community. As a result they described experiencing the sense of a gap or gulf within their self, which was problematic and unsustainable. This identity management issue of women seafarers needs to be taken into account when looking at the following difficulties of finding a suitable partner and maintaining a relationship of marriage and family.

4.1. Finding ‘Mr. RIGHT’

To find a suitable life partner is one of the most difficult tasks for many people. In the case of women seafarers, this is made more difficult by their repeated work-related absence which makes it hard to maintain a relationship before marriage.
If their partner is a shore-based man, he may not understand why his girlfriend leaves him behind and travel with many men other than him. If he is a seafarer and their work shifts between ship and shore do not match, they may find it very difficult to ever see each other. In such circumstance, the relationship would almost certainly wane. Not surprisingly, many of the married women seafarers in my sample still chose a seafarer to be their husbands, because they could understand this unusual lifestyle. But, there were a few active women seafarers who had nearly given up on the idea of getting married and they felt it extremely difficult to find a suitable marriage partner.

‘I can say that my social life is ruined. Even though I have a very very nice life in one kind of way, you ruin your social life. Because maybe I could have been married…I don’t know, but anyway, the men I meet now are very suspicious about this strange work. They want to have a woman stay at home.’

(Vera, Age54, Senior deck officer, Swedish)

Finding a partner is only the first such difficulty, sustaining a marriage posed particular and unique problems for women seafarers.

4.2. Marriage and seafaring

To maintain a balance between seafaring and marriage poses a significant and unique challenge to many married women seafarers, because they need to move between two different gender roles, i.e. those of seafarer onboard and wife ashore. One woman seafarer explained how she felt during the transition period between the two different spaces which placed very different expectations upon her in terms of fulfilling different gender roles.

‘I think it was getting increasingly difficult in the adoption pattern between onboard periods and shore-leave periods. […] I was sort of switching my roles from being an engineer, who was starting in the early morning in the engine room, giving the motor mans if they are working, to do this, to do this …
to coming home, becoming a nice wife. It’s a different role. Make it to soften up a little bit when you get home. (Olivia, Age36, Junior engineer, Swedish)

Some women seafarers mentioned that they were sometimes unconsciously slipping into the more masculine identity at home, which could cause tensions. Their behaviour was seen to be too manly and threatening at home as they tried to be assertive and not sufficiently feminine especially in relation to their husbands, as Sisi, a Ghanaian Captain commented:

‘Actually, to be honest with you, that was one of the problems I had with my husband. Because he felt that when I come home, I like to control everybody. Honestly I try, I try not to, you know, but it is like, uh...you are controlling everybody. You are coming back and giving instructions, you know. That was a problem. But I wasn’t aware. I mean maybe I was doing, but I wasn’t aware. You switch, you switch, you switch, sometimes you couldn’t do this. You cannot even switch any more. You feel that you are stuck in one place, you know. It is difficult. Trying to play two roles.’ (Sisi, Age52, Captain, Ghanaian)

Sisi tried to switch on and off between the multiple identities, that of ship’s Captain and a wife/mother, but she sometimes found it very difficult to move between these identities. In fact, her identity as a Captain came out in front and she unconsciously tried to control everybody and give instructions at home. It was very difficult for her husband to accept her controlling manner. When a husband is a Captain and he comes back home, the similar thing can happen too. One male seafarer explained that he tried to switch off his Captain persona at home, but he felt that he automatically slipped into Captain-like behaviour. While such behavior might be accepted by the ordinary shore woman, unfortunately his wife was also a Captain. Inevitably, he could not avoid some conflicts, having two Captains at home. This situation was similar to that of Sisi who played a Captain’s role at home in front of another authoritarian, her husband, and it did not work well. The other female
Captains from Sweden and Germany had also experienced a failure in relationships for similar reasons.

4.3. Where is Mommy?

Leaving children behind is tough regardless of gender and many seafaring parents find it a painful and emotional experience not to see their children for several months. It is also acknowledged as one of the main reasons why seafaring is no longer so popular amongst the young men in most countries where other career options of good salary are available ashore (Shiptalk 2008b). From my research, at least in the cultures of my interviewees, it is likely that women are the ones who normally leave their job when the couples decide to start a family. Depending on the community she belongs to, there may be a certain level of social pressure upon her to stay home after becoming a mother. A young German deck trainee, for instance, described how she thought that it was impossible for her to combine a seafaring career and having a family:

‘For a man, it is not so hard to be onboard and have family. But for a woman, how can you manage this? When you are a woman, you cannot have your family or you can have family, but which man would stay at home and take care for the kids? This is not easy, I think.’ (Gloria, Age 22, Deck officer trainee, German)

Another woman engineer in Sweden commented that a mother seafarer would be criticised as being irresponsible by her neighbours and family.

‘I think we are still not ready for, I mean the society does not allow girls go away for three months. I think that the neighbour sometimes or family around would think that you are a bad mother. Men can go away.’ (Olivia, Age 36, Junior engineer, Swedish)
It is a very heavy burden for many women seafarers to live as a working mother and seafaring requires them to be away from home for extended periods of time up to six or seven months; a fact that may not sit easily with societies’ view of the role of mothers.

However, despite the social pressure upon them, the final decision to give up their seafaring career was often related to their own understanding of what it is to be a mother. It was often when women seafarers had children that they realised that the new responsibility of motherhood would not be compatible with their seafaring activity. A Swedish senior deck officer, Angela, observed that her female colleagues had changed their minds once they had children:

‘I have heard before you have a child, you always say, “Yeah, I would start working immediately afterwards.” But then, when you have the child, you change your view or the world. Something is more important like family and work is not so important any more.’ (Angela, Age 43, Senior deck officer, Swedish)

A Portuguese Captain, Vidonia, used to think that she would continue seafaring as a Captain when she was pregnant. However, once her child was born, she changed her view and she felt that it would be irresponsible of her to continue in her seafaring career.

‘I have to admit that I find it completely incompatible. When I disembarked 7 months pregnant, my idea was to continue at sea. However, the minute I looked at my baby I realized that I was being foolish and irresponsible. Children need care, emotional stability, a mom, a dad, lots of love and if we decide to have kids they have to be our biggest priority, above our own interests.’ (Vidonia, Age 51, Captain, Portuguese)
A Swedish senior deck officer, Rebecka, was one of those who left the sea after giving birth and got a shore-based job in the shipping industry. Although she loved seafaring and had an ambition to sail again, she felt that to continue working at sea would be an act of selfishness on her part. Thus, she chose to give up the pursuit of her dream and ‘sacrifice’ her own ‘selfish’ idea for her daughter.

‘That is my personal view and to be very selfish, yes, I love to go to sea. But I don’t know if I can cope with leaving her behind. […] Because she is very relying on me and everything. We are very very strongly connected each other. […] when my daughter came, so I’ve been at sea for many many years and I’ve been doing things which was really really nice to myself…and kind of “selfish”. So I felt that…I mean, as I was lucky enough to get a job with shipping, […] I could kind of “sacrifice” myself for her, sort to say. I mean, if I turn out to be a mother when I was twenty years or something, maybe the world I would have can be in totally different view, because I was kind of done my things.’

(Rebecka, Age44, Senior deck officer, Swedish)

Mothers tend to have this feeling that they are very ‘selfish’ if they pursue their dream or ambition and leave their children behind while they continue their career. Father seafarers as breadwinners, on the other hand, have historically been more appreciated in many countries. By contrast, a woman breadwinner who does not also fulfill her domestic female duties at home, such as taking care of children is liable to criticism. There seems to be a strong stereo-typical idea or concept of what culturally makes a good father and good mother. A Swedish junior deck officer, Sofia, pointed out that a mother culturally tends to be blamed more than a father:

‘I think you can be sailing, having families, it’s your choice. I wouldn’t have like that. […] It’s cautious to say, it’s automatically we should judge the women who are leaving their kids. […] you CAN do it, if you want to. You don’t have to sacrifice more than men actually.’

(Sofia, Age25, Junior deck officer, Swedish)
By contrast, many fathers who are away from home for many months would be regarded with feelings of pity that he is a poor father who cannot see his family for a long time. A sympathetic feeling towards his children or wife does not come immediately, but people’s sympathy is always likely to go onto a father because of his gender role which justifies his long absence.

It seems to be extremely difficult for mother seafarers to keep working at sea. There were, however, a few examples of women seafarers who continued sailing after giving birth. In those cases where their husbands were also seafarers, they often asked the company to put them at sea in the same period so that they would be able to stay at home together. Whilst the parents were at sea, their children were looked after by their grandparents or other relatives. In a very rare example, one father seafarer quit seafaring and found a new job ashore while the mother seafarer continued sailing. It was because the mother was a Captain and the father was a lower rank, so they decided that the lady Captain who gets more money would stay at sea instead of living with his lower salary. Likewise, there were two other examples of the fathers staying at home. In one case, the father was unemployed and the other a student. What these cases show is that the families’ financial situation could reverse the common power relationship, and produce a dependent father and breadwinner mother.

The findings point to women seafarers as subject to considerable social pressures which can make the lives of seafaring mothers very difficult. However, a few strong-minded women were able to withstand these pressures and continued to work at sea. However, by doing so, they had to pay the cost of being an absent mother. They did not see how their children had been growing up and this became problematic in their family lives. A young German deck trainee acknowledges this point by stating:

‘When you are a mother, I want to know how the children are developing, how they grow up. […] Because I decided to be a mother. Then, I want to share
time with them. Always with them. See what’s, how they grew up and how
the school was working, all the kindergarten, all the stuff. I want to relation to
them.’ (Gloria, Age 22, Deck officer trainee, German)

4.4. I am your Mom!

It was frequently heard from women seafarers that the most difficult part of being a
mother seafarer would be the maintenance of the feeling of attachment to family.
Although mother seafarers could catch up with their children during vacations, they
would miss out a huge amount of life which could have been shared with them.
Rose used to sail for four months and a few months off at home even after she became
a mother. She has three children and after the birth of the first two, she continued
sailing and they were looked after by her mother and aunt. However, she quit
seafaring before the youngest child was born.

‘I didn’t watch them growing up. My older two boys, I didn’t watch them... I
didn’t... No, I was not here. So only when the oldest one was ten years old, I
said myself, well...I must end my career. [...] And I got a job shore side,
starting a new time. And the youngest one is 6 years old. Uh...very good
difference between them. For this one, I feel myself as a mother, because I was
emotionally going on. The other ones...well...they were born and then I saw
them in ten years old. One was 10 years old and the other one 9 years old.
It’s very strange because in some ways, I am not exactly a mother. Sometimes
I am the oldest sister or even the sister around their age. So, we have
problems with them making myself feel as a mother and say this is what
Mama...Mother or Father wants to do. It’s very difficult.’ (Rose, Age 45,
Radio officer, Portuguese)

This heart-aching story tells how difficult it was for her to maintain her identity as a
good mother during the period she was still going to sea and her older sons were
growing up. This experience is contrasted with her time spent with her youngest
child. Rose had to go through this painful and emotional experience as an absent
mother. Moreover, this lost feeling of attachment to her children loosened the bond between the mother and children. Their relationship was not able to mature emotionally because of her absence from home. Karolina, who had an unemployed husband due to his poor health, confessed her feelings of guilt at leaving her children behind at home:

‘Sometimes I was thinking what I was doing here? Why I am not at home?’

(Karolina, Age 52, Senior deck officer, Polish)

Sisi, a Ghanaian Captain, similarly felt emotionally estranged from her children. In this case, the husband was working ashore and staying with their children while she was sailing as a Captain. She found it very difficult to gain affection from her children, because she was not at home for them. As a consequence, her children emotionally got closer to the father than to her. Because the contact between the children and her was less frequent, it did not encourage them to foster the feeling of affection for their mother.

‘There might be at sea costs me love of my children. Because what happened was they got closer to their father. You know, because he was always there for them, so they got closer to their father rather than to me. It was...Mummy was always the one who brought good things, you know, beautiful things from sea, chocolates and this and nice clothing. And that was it. I didn’t realise until I (stopped sailing and) came home. I realised that there was something missing very much in my life. That was when I decided that I am not going again. So I really missed that. And well, thankfully now I am here with them. I manage to work very hard to get their trust and their love, you know, affection. So I am not letting that one go any more.’ (Sisi, Age 52, Captain, Ghanaian)

Such an unusual situation was confusing for her children and they found it strange to have a mother when she was on vacation at home. Because they were not used to have a mother close enough to express their feelings and emotions, they always chose
their father to cry on when something caused them pain. Even when the mother gave them an instruction, they would seek confirmation from their father. The children were totally confused by their mother’s presence at home and this made her jealous of their relationship with their father.

‘There was a little bit of jealousy, to be honest with you. Because I saw the way they were with their father and you know, with me it was like I was a stranger in my own house. The moment I stepped in, I could see that strange feeling, you know, the children sometimes look at you like that, “So...this is my mom?” They were always want me to pick them from school, because we were always buy goodies for them. I realised “No, No, No, No, No. This is not working. This is not good.” You know, I missed the best part of it. [...] when you tell them to do something, they have to go and ask their father. I was jealous, you know. How? If I told them to do something, why should they go? And if they want to cry, they go to their father to cry. You know. Why not come to me? I am your mom!’ (Sisi, Age52, Captain, Ghanaian)

Indeed, she felt that the children only loved her for what she could buy them. Thomas and Bailey (2006) have made the same point about male seafarers. As such, she realised that their relationship was not what it should be and that to be recognised as a mother required a close relationship and long period of engagement with her children. In this sense, seafaring as an occupation seems to make it difficult for mothers to maintain their identity as a mother. A long absence from home costs them a lot in their relationships.

5. Discussion/Conclusion

As I started to develop the argument of women’s difficulties in the male-dominated workplaces, the case of women seafarers also seems to present an extreme version of challenges to manage their gender identities between ship and ashore. The reason
why I call it extreme is their intensive period of time, without going back home, to be immersed in a male culture, which requires them to transform their gender identities to fit into the ship environment. It is, therefore, more problematic for women seafarers to adjust themselves into the shore culture and their home life when they return ashore.

The interview data show mostly the current disadvantages of women seafarers in their marriage and family life. It is very difficult for them to maintain both their work life and home life as a seafarer. Yet, arguably the real issue underlying this series of problems is a lack of suitable support. Based on the findings presented above, it is clear that there are three principal areas that are worthy of further attention, the length of work-based absence, the shipboard culture and the culture of the home society.

Firstly the absence from home can be problematic for seafarers, particularly women seafarers, but it could be eased with the implementation of shorter or more flexible work patterns. For example, some of the more forward-thinking companies allow seafarers to opt for a particular length of trip with those working shorter contracts earning relatively less but more time for family. Likewise companies may consider allowing seafarers to work part-time during the early years of child-rearing, for instance, working every second voyage. Equally companies could consider employing these seafarers as additional officers for busy coastal periods. This would benefit all onboard and may aid retention more generally.

Furthermore, separation and isolation from family could be eased by the application of technology. For example, the introduction of modern communication systems onboard ships, such as internet and email services accessible in their cabins would help families to stay in touch and alleviate some of the hardship associated with separation. Likewise, organising gatherings of seafarers’ families to share their experience and difficulties – this may take the form of a company web-based forum - may be beneficial.
Secondly, the presence of more women aboard ships is the most obvious way to modify the exiting seafaring culture. As such, owners could consider, where possible, deploying those women seafarers employed within the company to the same vessel. Furthermore, given the current officer shortage, women represent an under-utilised pool of labour and so actively recruiting women would benefit the industry. From the data, it is clear that many women see absence from sea during child rearing as a temporary phase in their sea-going careers. Thus, the industry could be encouraged to facilitate the ongoing employment of these women, by perhaps providing shore-based employment or helping with the return to sea. For example, companies could be encouraged to provide loans or supernumerary positions onboard to allow women seafarers to revalidate their certificates of competency.

Culture is also an issue of awareness, and so a programme of education to raise awareness of the issues of working in a mixed gender environment could be promoted within companies and the wider industry.

Thirdly, as for the larger issue of societal attitudes towards women seafarers, campaigns to make the industry more visible may not only aid recruitment in general but increase general awareness and understanding. In addition, the family situations of seafarers could be regarded as being more or less similar to a single-parent home while they are seafaring. There will be a number of social supports which could be done by the governments, for example, a reduced rate of using the nurseries for child-care and national (or company) insurance applied to the seafarers’ families. Such benefits and support will encourage both male and female seafarers to stay at sea for a longer period.

While the focus of this paper has been on women seafarers, the aim is to improve the situation for all seafarers but with women occupying a central place, in what has for too long been a male-dominated work space. All the women seafarers who I interviewed were proud of their profession and enjoyed working at sea. Thus it would be to the shame of the industry if, because of difficulties associated with the need to manage their gender identity, women were prevented from continuing in their career.
at sea. Further sustained consideration needs to be given to the three principle areas mentioned, to clarify the ways to improve the work situation for both male and female seafarers. As a starting point, I would suggest that companies could create a better work environment for women seafarers by working towards greater balance in the gender of crews.

References


MAINTAINING TRANSNATIONAL CONNECTIONS

Iris L Acejo

Abstract

The growing number of Filipino seafarers focuses the attention on the nature and mode of their participation at home. This paper aims to explore the particular forms of attachment maintained by seafarers with reference to their community. By looking at prominent practices undertaken by seafarers such as the regularity of remittance transfers, gift-giving and communication, a closer look at their economic and social activities are highlighted. The 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 points to its importance in maintaining connections and social position at home.

Keywords: community, communication, remittances, gift-giving

I. Introduction and Preview

Being part of a globalised occupational group which is seafaring, a Filipino seafarer encounters unique realities different from other temporary migrants. His onboard ship experience differs according to the type of vessel, route and work conditions. Similarly, the way he relates to those at home differs according to the community’s history, economic condition, tradition and aspirations. A seafarer’s experience of migration, therefore, is entwined with these two major processes – on-board the ship and on the land. Understanding the connections they maintain with their homeland provides not only a new perspective on their social and economic realities but also a broadened understanding of the nature of their relationship.

Despite their intermittent presence, seafarers perform a range of practices which continually keep them rooted at home. It is through participation in the home community where his experience of connection is formed and continually challenged, maintained or transformed. 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 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.

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. By specifically looking at the situation in the home communities, distinctive characteristics of the community to which he belongs can proffer better understanding of his motives and actions. This is the objective of this paper. To look at the particularities of experiences of Filipino seafarers situated in a particular rural community in Central Philippines.

This paper explores the particular forms of attachment maintained by seafarers with reference to their community, and specifically look at the seafarers’ diversified participation in the following:

1.) communication
2.) gift-giving
3.) remittances

By illuminating the local conditions affecting seafarers’ participation at home, I will show the factors and conditions crucial for forging a sense of belonging in the home community. Where studies of migration have pointed to a variety of practices that serve to attach seafarers to their community, the above practices chose to highlight the specific ways in which Filipino seafarers function in their community.

II. Background

The importance of maintaining connections to home has never been less true for seafarers. The high degree of mobility they exhibit and the prolonged separation from their families move them to maintain links with those that they have left behind.
Their intermittent presence at home is complemented, if not compensated, by a variety of relationship-enhancing practices such as regular communication, gift-giving and sending remittances. Explaining how these practices are carried out and conceptualized in the community where they live highlights the difference it makes to their lives and the meaning they ascribe to it. The form of their engagement is important in determining how they are constituted at the local level and the social realities surrounding their existence.

The advent of advanced telecommunication technologies allows seafarers to communicate with their families and relatives. Usage of satellite phones, mobile phones and e-mails emphasizes the desirability of social interaction with those they have left behind. Castell (1996) pinpointed new technologies as vital to reinforcement of pre-existing social patterns.

Access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) opens up opportunity for migrants to be virtually present despite being physically away. The instantaneous feature inherent in these technologies, specifically the use of telephones and mobile phones, allows migrants to participate in the activities in their hometown, thus achieving a kind of double presence in the sense of being both “here and there” (see also Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004; Vertovec 2003, 2004; Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt 1999). In the same way, research has demonstrated the importance of such technologies. Use of technologies allows seafarers to continue to be a part of the social and economic realities in their homeland whilst on-board a ship.

Against a background of recurring reunions and partings between seafarers and their families, the use of communication technologies allows seafarers to be virtually present whilst away. Studies that dealt with the advancement in ICTs highlight the significant role it plays “to allay fears, to maintain close relationships, to improve seafarers’ morale, to relieve stress (onboard and at home) and to maintain relationships with children (Thomas et al. 2003: 68).” Effectively, seafarers’ constant communication with their family, friends and close relatives allows them to maintain a foothold not only within the family but also within the community.
Another important practice, gift-giving, also characterizes the activities of seafarers. Lamvik’s (2002) study of Filipino seafarers and their effort to distribute gifts to families and relatives back home is viewed as a way for them to be remembered. In this way, “he can be sure that his social network remembers him, despite his absence (Lamvik 2002: 4).” An act of remembering and strengthening of social alliance become one of the many functions of gift-giving for seafarers. Where gift-giving enhances pride and self-worth among seafarers, this allows them to reassert their importance within their social group.

Sending remittances is also important in maintaining and enhancing social status. Previous studies on migrants and their contributions at home illustrate how monetary contributions enhances their social reputation (see also Goldring, 1998; Itzigsohn et al., 1999; Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt, 1999; Landolt et al., 1999). This is similar to seafarers’ experience. Apart from carrying out his breadwinner role to his family, a Filipino seafarer also becomes highly regarded owing to the benefits his financial contribution extend to his community. For instance, emergency loans to neighbours, sponsorships of festivities etc. More than the remittance itself, the act of sending the remittance for the purpose of social support reveals attachment to kin and community.

By looking at the intensity and regularity of the practices of maintaining constant communication, giving gifts and sending remittances, we can develop an enlightened understanding of the multiple dimensions of the seafarers’ relationship with home. Exploring remittances, along with the institutionalized practice of giving gifts and constant communication, shines light on the salient economic and social realities the seafarer and his family are constantly facing on a day-to-day basis.

The nature of a Filipino seafarer’s participation in his home community and the ensuing mode of incorporation run parallel to the local processes in his own community. Within communities there is variation in the frequency, depth and range of ties. Evidence from the community highlights the considerable variability in the ways by which seafarers maintain their connection to home, further broadening understanding of migration and its particular effects at the community level.
III. Methodology

Non-participant observation was undertaken in Miagao, a town in Central Philippines. The community was chosen because of the high number of seafarers in the community. I lived in the community for three months commencing March 2008. 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 how social norms, values, roles and culture are carried out in the community in which seafarers live. Interviews were also conducted with the wives of the seafarers and with their seafarer-husbands if available at the time of the visit. Most of the wives interviewed were housewives but the sample also included wives who worked as teachers, nurses and businesswomen. Data was also gathered through interview with different key informants, and primary and secondary documents were also examined.

IV. Findings

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 is 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)

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 neighbours. 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 of course, your sweet nothings.” (captain)

Oftentimes, 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 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 rating’s 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.

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 would 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.” (2\textsuperscript{nd} 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. Despite the small size, a lot of things ranging from shampoos in sachets, soaps, soy sauce, catsup, crisps, canned goods, bread, alcoholic drinks, soft drinks, candies, medicines, paper, pencil etc. can be bought from this store. Almost anything that could be sold individually could be found in a sari-sari store. In the rural areas where markets and groceries are often far, sari-sari stores save its customers unnecessary trips to the town. In terms of their social value to the community, it is a site for exchanging small talk. Townsfolk in this community spent time in the stores or talked to passers-by. Where benches were provided, and this was common, customers, often the men in the community, can also have a drink while in a conversation. Some also put a gridiron just outside the store to barbecue pork or chicken on an open fire. Hence, this provides a venue for drinking and socializing because food and alcohol are readily available. 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. Hence, it is important for seafarers to have many in reserve to meet these demands.

Giving presents therefore 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 is impolite to refuse request to be a godparent. Most of the seafarers in this study have been 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 neighbours 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.” (2\textsuperscript{nd} 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 enaction of their varied roles as 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 seafarer’s 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.” (2\textsuperscript{nd} 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 chief mate’s wife enumerated the number of relatives they financially support:

“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.” (chief mate’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 is a male, he would most likely study seafaring courses. In this way, it would be easier for the child to find work after he graduated 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 is the month of fiestas or religious festivals. It was therefore possible that there was a fiesta being 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 honour the patron saint. During fiestas, each household prepared food for a good number of visitors. The number of visitors can include just about anyone as the fiesta tradition is much like an open house where everybody is automatically invited.

*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 is also the municipal fiesta. During the municipal fiesta, another round of solicitations will 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.” (chief mate’s wife)

Funds contributed for the fiesta will be earmarked for the various activities within the community. Seafarers do not go through a decision process in determining whether to celebrate fiesta for it is simply a must. In fact, in order to ensure that fiesta will be celebrated, those whose incomes are low, resort 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.

V. Summary and Insights

In this paper, I have focused on Filipino seafarers’ attachments to their home county. My aim was to show what are the crucial factors affecting Filipino seafarers’ social standing when at home. I concentrated mainly on migrants’ salient social practices in their home country. Thus far, the consequences of maintaining communication, giving presents and sending remittance are explained along with their significance to the development of family and community ties and the local structures in place.

Communication with those at home allowed the seafarers to sustain ties and participate in decision-making. Calling home meant getting updated on all levels of concern – family, community and general news about the country. Seafarers valued stories and updates on their neighbours or childhood friends’ life course such as weddings, deaths etc. They wanted to know the changes that had occurred while they
were away whether these were small news or otherwise. Participation in decision-making primarily highlighted the importance for Filipino seafarers to self-build their own houses. A house was a status symbol and this accorded the seafarer an enhancement of his social status. It was this prestige which gave them a tendency to be involved in status-enhancing enterprises, for instance, transportation ventures.

The institutionalized practice of gift-giving, although less obvious when compared to maintaining communication, was also a way to regain their social standing in the community. This practice was a form of re-entry to the community. The giving of gifts to friends and relatives was an announcement that he was back home again. With this, he could renew friendship and goodwill with those in the community. In the rural areas, hanging out in sari-sari stores can be one effective channel for giving-gifts. A more formal way of giving-gifts was through godparenthood. This practice widened the seafarer’s social circle. This also pointed to his increasing popularity as he became more socially visible to a wider group of people. Avoiding this practice was practically impossible in a town where everybody knows everybody. Strong social pressure was obviously a factor affecting seafarers when they re-establish their position in the community.

Another way by which Filipino seafarers maintained their position at home was the sending of remittances back home. This practice, compared to the first two, may be less obvious but easily quantifiable. Yet, more than the productive potential of remittances, it was also a medium through which seafarers fulfilled their obligations and maintained their connections with their families and friends. Remittance spending of seafarers set into motion a variety of relationships which encompassed not only his immediate family but also those he had sponsored. Remittance commitments, particularly on education and health of the sponsored kin or non-kin, were forms of investment in human capital stock with spillovers to other households. Remittances were spent for the basic needs of the family but other incidental expenses such as those for fiesta celebrations and sponsored individuals were also major considerations of Filipino seafarers in this community. Earmarking for fiesta celebrations was highly prioritized by seafarers as this formed part of the community expectations they had to fulfill.
The particular forms of attachment undertaken by seafarers such as maintaining communication, giving gifts and sending remittances in the community provided a more coherent picture of how they managed their links to their homeland. The differing ways they stayed connected at home were crucial in ensuring their social position. Greater awareness of the community structure including customs and traditions emphasizes specific issues vital to maintaining their place at home.

References


GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS: LOCAL SHIPBOARD PRACTICE - THE SEAFARERS ORDEAL

Mohab Abou-Elkawam

Abstract

This paper presents some findings of a research study focusing, in part, on how seafarers understand and respond to marine pollution and their efforts to protect their own countries’ marine and coastal environments. In this respect, this study provides a better understanding of how seafarers as a professional group perceive and react to the ‘global’ rise in environmental concerns. Data was gathered by conducting interviews with seafarers onboard ships whilst in port or at a maritime education and training institution. The overall aim of this paper is to examine and locate the difficulties that seafarers encounter in trying to comply with marine environmental conventions and to present their aspirations and perceived solutions to such difficulties.

Keywords: seafarers, ships, marine pollution, compliance, shipping, deregulation.

Introduction

This paper examines and presents the perceptions and practices of seafarers in relation to maritime environmental regulation such as the Marpol convention (Convention of Prevention of pollution from ships known as Marpol 73/78). The importance of presenting such perceptions is to open a communication window where researchers and policy makers can see the impacts of current regulation in an exemplar of a deregulated globalised industry. At the shipboard level, the argument is that seafarers are experiencing a number of difficulties in their daily interactions with complex technology in their attempt to fulfil their statutory and professional environmental protection obligations. On the wider global, national, and institutional compliance levels, seafarers are also affected by the different - and occasionally deficient - environmental enforcement strategies of various flag states, port states, and shipping companies. Such factors lead to different ‘framing’ of environmental pollution and compliance issues among seafarers that reflects on their established daily environmental practice as explained throughout this paper.
1.0 Methodology and Methods

‘Framing’ has been a key analytical approach in understanding intractable environmental debates (Bickerstaff and Walker 2003; Demeritt 2001; Gray 2003; Lewicki et al. 2003; Taylor 2000). It is important because it allows us to explore environmental problems as seen through the eyes of the parties involved by capturing the diverse interpretations that create the conflicts or problems themselves (Lewicki et al. 2003). ‘Frames’ in this research act as lenses through which seafarers interpret the dynamics of the marine pollution issues and construct the problem as more or less tractable.

Frames are seen to organise people’s experiences; that is to say they enable lay or expert people to recognise what is going on, providing boundaries and defining what counts as an event or feature, consequently frames define what really should attract attention and assessment (Perri 2005). The use of the term ‘frame’ is to refer to the set of rules governing a given type of activity. Put simply, Goffman (1974) contends that ‘frames’ define people’s actions in a given context or situation. In his view people can easily adjust to any perceived appropriate frame and operate within it, without even recognising any principles involved (Goffman 1974). Moreover, frames could also be seen to bias action and call for particular styles of decisions or of behavioural response. This point raises the importance of identifying how the research participants in this research ‘framed’ the issue of marine pollution as this, most probably, affected their decisions and behaviour towards the issues of complying with marine environmental conventions.

My choice to use the ‘framing’ concept in this research was primarily inductive, although I developed the process of detection and analysis of interpretive frames from extant literature (Gamson 1992, 1995; Goffman 1974; Snow et al. 1986). My chosen initial unit of analysis is the ‘concept unit’; that is, the words, sentences, paragraphs, or story lines used to express identifiable concepts. The use of ‘framing’ in this paper has the following aims:
To clarify or refresh the perception of Marpol compliance issues, in order to promote information change and examine the seafarers’ perspectives.

To identify how involved parties view the pollution problem differently in order to more fully appreciate the compliance dynamics and to seek ways to address them.

To examine the impacts of different implementation and enforcement levels in various geographic and organisational arenas on the perceptions and environmental practices of seafarers.

A set of qualitative interviews (total of 40) were conducted with seafarers from various parts of the world. The interviews were conducted when the participants’ tanker ships were in port or while they were attending courses at a Maritime Education & Training (MET) Institution. Participants worked for various shipping companies ranging between national flags, second registers, and open registers. Data analysis identified that participants are utilising two particular frames in providing their responses namely ‘socio/political’ frames and ‘value’ frames. The following sections present my findings in relation to the environmental practices of seafarers and potential implications to shipping companies and coastal states.

2.0 Socio/Political Frames

Any regulated entity weighs the costs of compliance with its marginal benefits, such benefits often relate to the expected value of fines avoided, which in turn is a function of the probability of inspections conducted, the likelihood a violator is found and magnitude of penalty assessed (Brehm and Hamilton 1996). The limited literature that focuses on the regulation of marine pollution at the international level suggests that maritime policy makers had to choose between “effectiveness oriented” and “compliance oriented” information in order to chart future marine environmental conventions. The former is mainly used to assess whether regime members (i.e. state parties) are achieving regime goals, while the latter is used to assess whether particular actors are fulfilling regime commitments (Mitchell 1994, 2003; Mitchell 1995, 1998; Raftopoulos 2001). Initial observation of IMO’s policy concerning MARPOL compliance deficiencies shows an inclination towards the “compliance oriented” notion. This approach is displayed by international responses in the form of
amendments to the convention and the addition of new protocols to help induce compliance among actors failing to fulfil the treaty requirements either due to inadvertence or in-capacitance (Levy et al. 1993; Mattson 2006a).

Following this theme, in the case of Marpol compliance, many governments - while being member parties of the Marpol convention – are either unwilling or unable to fulfil their obligations according to the convention (Brookman 2002; Mattson 2006b; Sahatjian 1998). However, such practices by governments combined with the cost saving practices of some shipping companies in some cases leads seafarers to adopt polluting practices. For example, where companies attempt to save on the expense of installing reliable technical equipment and display a reluctance to use shore reception facilities some seafarers see such behaviour as providing an excuse to resort to dumping oily residues at sea. That is, the need to deal with this type of operational difficulty can ultimately undermine seafarers’ trust in the entire international legal framework with multiple negative consequences on environmental practice as explained further below in this paper.

2.1 The Global Stressors

Most participants in this study stressed the importance of a country’s political will to materialise and enforce the adopted marine environmental conventions. Many seafarers from different backgrounds commented on the importance of political agendas and various regional and local levels of implementation and enforcement. This theme (unanticipated at the beginning of the study) may be considered as a source of stress and pressure on workers in this global industry.

From the interview data, seafarers were observed to be evaluating the effectiveness of marine environmental conventions and especially the Marpol convention in their own ways. Specifically, their comments tended to focus on two main themes. The first concerns attitudes and behaviours of countries, companies and their peers in relation to Marpol compliance practices. The second relates to their assessment of the success of implementing Marpol by drawing comparisons between different parts of the world in terms of which are more polluted.
What is more, it is clear from the data that many respondents are falling under the influence of global public discourses and linking the contemporary issues of ‘global warming’ and green house gases ‘GHG’ emissions to marine pollution and the role of the shipping industry in protecting the marine and coastal environments in a rather confused way. The running together of all these issues is clearly evident in the following comment by an Asian Second officer. When asked about why we should protect the marine environment in general he stated that:

“Well, it is what we know at the moment about the global warming; that is the main issue I think there are so many phenomena happening because of this global warming and marine pollution is contributing to the escalation of such problems”

Such confused comments were typical and point to how general mass media discourses about environmental issues are being perceived collectively as interconnected especially with lay public. In this respect seafarers are considering the rising demands to save the environment as another sort of moral pressure exerted on them as individuals that is added to their professional obligations. This is clear from the explicit account of this North European Master:

“The more talk out there about the environment…the more you feel the pressure to apply the rules and you don’t want to do things that will result in a pollution, you want to behave as good as you can…”

Another Asian Chief Engineer feeling the growing normative and statutory pressures comment:

‘…regarding these pollution incidents or accidents that are happening, I can say things are going to be harder in the days to come as we have all these environmental issues and everything. Of course it is important, I didn’t say that we don’t need to care about environment but with all these rules and regulations coming in and when something happens it will always speed-up on the seafarer. They are always looking on one side not
on the other side it is as if we are being judged as criminals without any further investigation….’

It is clear, however, that seafarers locate the source of these pressures as deriving from press and international media presentation of environmental campaigns. Moreover, they expect that such campaigns will eventually result - or have resulted - in adopting more stringent marine environmental instruments that would add to their daily compliance difficulties and could even lead to them being prosecuted.

In this context, my argument is that the addition of a global ‘macro’ socio/political stressor to the ‘micro’ situational compliance atmosphere on board ships represents a considerable pressure on the individual trying to fulfil his perceived social and professional role (Collins 2000; Haines and Sutton 2003).

Such pressures are further amplified by the ways in which seafarers perceive different countries in terms of their political will or capability to protect the marine environment. This framing is usually extended to their colleagues onboard from these countries. Thus, for example individuals may be viewed as ‘careless’ in environmental terms because they originate from countries that are seen as pariah states. In the context of environmental compliance, the argument is that framing some counties, companies, or seafarers as not willing or not able to comply tend to spread around among ships’ crews. This research suggests that these frames build-up over time provide excuses for passivity in dealing with dumping pollutants fuelled by this perceived unwillingness or in-capacitance of countries and/or individuals. These tensions are further explained in the following sub-section.

2.2 Geographic and National Segregation

Many seafarers when asked about compliance levels to marine environmental regulations referred to their nationality as a key factor explaining their personal and professional environmental practice in what could be termed a ‘national frame’. In so doing, they prioritized the role of the environmental awareness gained from their country of origin over the role of existing legislative instruments in eliciting better
environmental practices. However, there are differences among the opinions of respondents from different nationalities. On the one hand, some European respondents suggested that their care for the environment is due to how they were brought up in their home countries and taught how to preserve the environment. In employing such frame they are acknowledging their countries’ efforts in environmental protection in general concluding with highlighting their national concern about environmental issues. This can be seen from the following account of a North European Chief Officer in which he describes his country’s superiority in environmental protection:

“…for example (country name), we divide our garbage to glass, paper, what do nine million people do, we do our best, but you think what are they doing, nothing, what are billions of people doing in (country name), nothing…”.

On the other hand a number of Asian and Arab seafarers reported their despair at the environmental policies followed by their countries in protecting the marine and coastal environments (i.e. territorial waters, beaches, ports, etc.). They further identified poor environmental knowledge or education within their home countries as an important factor in raising awareness among people who are accustomed to pollution and dumping practices. The following account by an Arab Chief Engineer, for instance, depicts the state of his local marine environment and the associated despair he feels:

“… I feel great pain when I see our Arab countries’ ports…the pollution in it can be easily seen with your bare eyes, who is responsible for this, any one can dump… where are the law?…..in our areas…I mean the developing countries regions…our seas have no respect…have no value…even the Europeans when they come to our waters…they do whatever they like”.

This respondent is referring to the poor status of the marine environment in the waters of developing countries. He perceives that ships and individuals dump pollutants in these ports and coastal waters without fear of being detected as these countries don’t care about the environment. These feelings resulted from observing oil dumping
activities by seafarers in their own countries’ ports and territorial waters without being detected and/or prosecuted. A situation contrasted with that perceived to be the case in a more developed nation. As a result, seafarers from developing countries often blame their governments accusing them of giving a ‘license to dump’ to any ship navigating in or near to their coastal or territorial waters or even entering their ports.

It is clear that such feelings contribute, to a large extent, to the establishment of ‘interest based’ interpretive frames that negatively impacts on the environmental practices of many seafarers from various nationalities. In other words, seafarers, in this study, perceived some geographic areas of the world to be ‘free for pollution’ zones while establishing other areas as ‘dangerous to dump’ as a result such interpretations are spreading among seafarers from various parts of the world. As time passes such interpretations gain in force to become established frames. As a consequence, this leads to more distrust and despair in the validity of the marine environmental legal system in general, opening the window for more non-responsible environmental behaviours in certain parts of the world.

Another closely related study looking at environmental behaviours among people in different parts of the world suggests that there are differences between people’s perceptions of the environment within a certain country and between countries (Inglehart 1995). On the one hand, in developing countries people usually wait for their governments to act and assume that they, as individuals, don’t have any role to play. On the other hand, more developed nations’ citizens aided by environmental NGOs believe that if they actively participate on the individual level, the status of the environment will eventually improve (Inglehart 1995; Rice 2006). These studies clearly suggest that witnessing polluting activities going un-punished in some parts of the world serves to undermine the seafarers trust in such international environmental instrument as Marpol. This study also suggests that feelings of helplessness either by seafarers from developed or developing countries usually result in complacency towards the witnessed pollution activities as some seafarers conclude that they have no role to play in rectifying the deteriorating situation.
2.3 The Economic Element

Another important element contributing to the seafarers perceptions about marine pollution is the economic element in terms of their differentiation between ‘rich’ or ‘poor’ countries. Seafarers attempting to interpret the implementation and enforcement difficulties encountered by some countries often refer to economic factors as one major cause for such difficulties. First, on the country level, they tend to differentiate between affluent European countries and developing countries in terms of the impact of the country’s environmental policy on the environmental practices of ships transiting their waters or visiting their ports. (i.e. compliance to marine environmental regulations). They often linked the political will of nations to protect their waters from pollution with the availability of economic resources to monitor the shipping movements in these countries’ coastal and territorial waters using costly surveillance technologies.

At the company level seafarers are differentiating between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ companies in terms of their will to spend money on installing new technical equipment on board or according to their policy regarding the frequent use of the port reception facilities (PRFs) in port. The perceived ‘good’ companies are the ones which either install state of the art technology on board or the ones that agree to use the costly PRFs unconditionally thus facilitating the daily compliance tasks of crew and staff.

However, the problem takes a different form according to the ship’s area of trade and in relation to whether the ship is navigating through Marpol special areas during their voyages (i.e. discharge prohibited areas). For example, a European Chief Officer (trading in EU waters only) commented on non-compliance practices that he witnessed by saying:

“…a lot of us have to deal with the fact that maybe some of these companies have a prohibitive cost, they don’t want to pay the cost and the seafarers are finding it very difficult to get rid of certain waste products, the only place you can get rid of it in the continent (Europe) is in the barges, but for a charge and not cheap either….“.
This senior ranked officer, while reporting the limited availability of appropriate facilities in many of the ports his ship visits (mainly western ‘developed’ countries), identified the very high cost that shipping companies incur by complying with existing regulation and using the port reception facilities (for discharging oily waste). He also talked about the multiple difficulties that seafarers face in trying either to treat the oily effluents on board tankers using old versions of oily water separators (OWSs) or in legally discharging them using oil detector monitoring systems (ODMEs). He claimed that the cost of renewing such technical equipment could be the reason behind by-passing such equipment and polluting offences committed by some seafarers as they perceive themselves to have ‘no other choice’.

Indeed for some seafarers working in shipping companies trading only in developing countries the situation was worse. They contend that ship owners in this part of the world, especially those owning ships flying flags of convenience (i.e. open registers or FOCs) take advantage of the lack of labour protection legislations and require that seafarers handle the onboard oily effluents without cost to the company. This places the seafarer in a difficult situation especially if the technical equipment on board are old fashioned, non operable, or faulty which is a very common complaint. That is exacerbated if the ship is on a coastal trading route or navigating in a Marpol special area. In such cases, seafarers may find themselves required to breach the regulation or face the threat of losing their job.

Taking the above point further, it is clear, on one hand, that corporate and management environmental strategies in some shipping companies (mainly FOCs) impose stressful work experiences on seafarers, which disrupts their basic social and moral identities as individuals and professionals. This in turn results in feelings of tension, anxiety, contradiction, confusion, and distrust, explicitly and implicitly as expressed in this study’s data (Jack and Lorbiecki 2007; Willmott 1993). These mixed feelings of ambivalence may be the reason for the seafarers frequent resorting to moral and equity terms when discussing their personal motivations to protect the marine environment as discussed in the following section.
3.0 Seafarers’ ‘Pollution Risk’ Perceptions

The accounts of respondents showed clearly their engagement in the assessment of the risks of dumping oil and other pollutants to the marine environment, on their own and children’s health, their food, their country’s beaches, coastal environments…etc. To serve this goal they are observing and assessing the status of the marine environment in various parts of the world, aided by the extremely mobile nature of their job, and especially making comparisons between the water qualities in different ports, port approaches, and coastal waters they visit. For example sighting sheens of oily effluent floating on the water surface in a specific port was framed as ignorance to detect and/or prosecute violators by the port authority and hence that country is unwilling to protect its marine resources. Nonetheless, respondents provided a mix of anthropocentric and ecocentric interests when talking about how they conceived the risk of pollution to the marine environment. Arguably, the perceived rise of such personalised risk assessments could be attributed to the growing distrust in the international legal system governing marine pollution as discussed below.

In this context, European respondents reported a significant improvement in the water quality inside ports and harbours and in the territorial waters of their countries (as they assumed these are monitored areas). A Nordic Master reported that:

“I think when you come to a fjord in Norway…it has improved yes…it was…it was polluted 10 years ago…now I think they’ve got salmon up the river”.

In contrast, some respondents from developing countries went as far as explicitly framing marine pollution as a more imminent risk to their own and children’s health, to future generations, the fish they eat, and the cleanliness of the beaches they swim in. It is important to highlight that even seafarers working in precarious conditions on board FOC ships in the developing world voiced very similar concerns to their European peers. They all felt that they needed to have a role in protecting the marine environment but they felt in despair at discovering their inability to participate practically and ‘do their bit’ for the sake of their children, their country, and future generations.
In contrast to seafarers’ understandings which are very much based on their own experiences, maritime policy makers treat pollution risk as an analytic concept (Gray 2003; Lewicki et al. 2003). They compare statistical averages before and after the implementation of a certain marine environmental conventions based on a ‘counter factual’ principle (i.e. if the conventions didn’t exist things would have been much worse) rather than in terms of specific qualitative experiences of seafarers. This usually results in adopting new environmental instruments that are either highly reliant on sophisticated technology which seafarers are unfamiliar with, or trying to generate new audit or inspection schemes to properly enforce the existing ones. Clearly, both choices are perceived problematic to seafarers who are already complaining from being over regulated and over inspected. Such divergent perceptions of environmental risk between seafarers and policy makers not only alter preferences for environmental decision making on board ships, but also aggravate disparities, confusion, and the general sense of distrust in the legitimacy of the legislation. It is hoped that evaluating which risks are perceived by seafarers as having direct impacts on environmental practice would inform the regulator-regulatees communication and inform the policy making process (Elliott 2005; Lewicki et al. 2003).

Conclusion

Within the context of enhancing environmental compliance to marine environmental conventions, seafarers view dumping pollutants overboard as a non-professional as well as non-ethical. However, as professionals in the current competitive shipping market, they lack autonomy regarding their environmental practice decisions. Their attempts to balance between such professional demands (e.g. compliance to statutory instruments) and personal aspirations to save the marine environment with operational demands may prove incompatible. This results in deepening their distrust of the international environmental regime and in the efficacy of the resultant instruments such as Marpol.

Driven by their economic revenue and competitive agendas, shipping companies require seagoing staff to solve waste disposal problems in the most ‘economic’ way,
which in the absence of suitable cheap facilities may lead to illicit discharge activities. This theme was anticipated to be limited to the developing part of the world only at the beginning of the study. However, it is clear that well developed western nations and oil rich Gulf States share this problem of the lack of adequate reception facilities, a long-standing problem that puts many seafarers in a critical professional situation. These implementation and enforcement difficulties clearly reflect on the seafarers’ ‘framing’ of the marine pollution issue by deepening distrust in the whole environmental legal system.

The ‘sociology of professions’ literature highlights that professionals usually act in a way that defines them as such through appearance and behaviour (Gunz and Gunz 2006; Sciulli 2005). However, this literature suggests that trying to cope with such incompatible demands not only creates a conflict between seafarers, as a labour group, personal interests, professional excellence, and being ‘compliant’ to Marpol as an example of an established marine environmental convention, but also with general environmental values dominant in today’s world. As a result, seafarers appear to suffer from ambivalence in their attempt to satisfy the economic and cost concerns of their employer and cope, at the same time, with rising normative and statutory environmental demands. However, the data suggests that the situation gets worse when the seafarer is employed on a ship flying a FOC and trading in areas lacking basic implementation and enforcement resources, resulting in a dilemma situation for the seafarer.

From the above, I argue that the established ‘frames’ utilised by experienced seafarers from different parts of the world, different shipping companies and different areas of trade vary to a large extent. This variation is clear in relation to the framing of countries, companies and peers and is a result of global, managerial and micro-situational compliance experiences that - at times - force the regulatees to re-interpret the whole legislative process and question its legitimacy. It is hoped that an awareness of how seafarers make sense of regulation could aid the maritime policy makers when considering the compliance difficulties associated with current and future marine environmental conventions. Clearly, the assumption of a homogenous shipping sector worldwide which is implied in most international environmental (and other) instruments created chronic implementation and compliance problems for countries,
companies and seafarers. With the current emphasis on environmental agendas seafarers are fearful of their future capability to comply with the growing number of such instruments. This study suggests that one way of doing this is to open a communication window for seafarers to ‘voice’ their concerns regarding environmental compliance issues to maritime policy makers. I argue that due to the specific nature of environmental compliance problems, this topic clearly needs to be treated separately from other issues such as safety, living and working conditions, labour and salary conditions….etc. The perceptions of seafarers regarding marine environmental legislations presented in this paper may provide one step towards achieving this goal.

Bibliography


IMPACT OF HIGH FUEL COSTS ON THE SHIPPING INDUSTRY AND THE WORLD TRADE

Nguyen Dang Ben

Abstract

In the dawn of 21st century, temporarily without any substitution, oil is still the necessary fuel for our life and bunker fuel is playing a vital role in ship propulsion. However, when the oil price increases by triple-digit and results in the ever high bunker fuel costs for the shipping industry, it places negative impacts on the shipping industry and “pose the greatest challenge for trade” (Benjamin & Rubin, 2008, p.4). As a result, this paper, after presenting the current trends of oil price, bunker fuel price from 1990 to 2008 as well as the causal relationship between the oil price and bunker fuel price, then applies the correlation coefficient method to investigate the relationship between the bunker fuel price and other decisive factors in the shipping industry such as fuel consumption, speed of vessel and freight rates to know how the higher bunker fuel costs impact on the shipping industry. From such analysis, the paper then investigates the possible impact of higher bunker fuel costs on the world trade by examining the correlation coefficient between the bunker fuel price, freight rates and the volume/pattern of international trade today. To draw the conclusion, it is found out that higher fuel costs contribute to the dis-economics of scale of vessel size (saving on the unit cost by increasing vessel size may not cover the operating cost increase because of the higher fuel consumption, the increase on the freight rates may not cover the higher fuel costs because of required higher speed of vessel) and higher fuel costs may reverse the trend/pattern of international trade today.

Keywords: Bunker fuel price, oil price, costs, impact, correlation coefficient

1. Introduction

Adding more vessels, reducing speed of ship, re-routing service, and increasing surcharge and bunker adjustment factor (BAF) are such solutions that shipping companies are now using to cope with the triple-digit bunker fuel prices to save their costs (Roberts & Jameson, 2008). Even other companies, Stena Line for instance, has no choice but to stop some of their services to reach the same end of saving any costs originated from the booming bunker fuel price as well (Dixon, 2008). On the trade side, some economists, notably Rubin & Benjamin, argued that “the cost of moving goods, not the cost of tariffs, is the largest barrier to global trade today” and they also
emphasized that “in a world of triple-digit oil price, soaring transport costs, not tariff barriers, pose the greatest challenge to trade” (2008, p.4). Moreover, environmentally speaking, soaring bunker fuel costs may contribute to the reduction of emission from ships as, in order to save fuel costs, shipping company should think about lowering vessel speed and fuel consumption. In order to have some ideas on the prevailing situations, this paper, after presenting the current development of bunker fuel price as well as causal relation between it with oil price, then deploys the correlation coefficient method to analyze the causal relationship between the bunker price and other decisive factors such as freight rates, vessel speed and fuel consumption, and the sea-borne trade to know how the high bunker fuel costs place an impact on the shipping industry and the world trade today.

2. Current trend of bunker fuel price and causal relationship with oil price

Bunker is the oil-based marine fuel. It is the final product in the refining process after taking out other higher components such as Gasoline, Aviation spirits, Kerosene and Butane. Before 2003, oil price was only about US$30/barrel and bunker cost was just a “minor consideration” but now when oil price and bunker price are reaching the triple-digit levels, they have turned into a “major headache” for shipowners and shipping companies (Corbett, 2006, p. 2). According to Stopford, bunker costs now become one of the major operating expenses of any shipowner and account for 50% of voyage costs (Stopford, 1997, p. 166) or even recently 60% (MIMA, 2008, p.6) and this portion tends to become bigger and bigger. From the economic aspects, booming bunker fuel price will place negative impact on cash-flows and profit margins of shipping company. For example, A.P. Moller-Maersk states that the change of +/- US$1/ton in bunker price could lead to change of +/- US$12 million in their revenue (Hansen, 2007, p. 15). Moreover, in May 2006, NYK (Nippon Yosen Kaisha – a Japanese shipping company) reported that high fuel costs shaved $242 million off their profit (Roberts, 2006). On the environmental aspect, however, it may contribute to reduce the emission as shipping companies should reduce speed, fuel consumption to save possible costs therein. This part, after presenting the current situations of bunker price, will investigate the causal relationship between oil price
and bunker price to know how the oil price decides the pattern of bunker price in the last years.

2.1. Current bunker fuel price development trend

From 1990 to 2008, the bunker market is dotted by two main trends: quite stable development with a low level from 1990 to 1999 and a boom in level with high fluctuation from 2000 to 2008.

2.1.1. 1990-1999 period: low bunker price and stable development

The calculation of mean, standard deviation, Min and Max of bunker price on the weekly based data (see Appendix A) in Table 2.1 suggests that, in the period 1990-1999, the average bunker price was quite low and stable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Market</th>
<th>Rotterdam</th>
<th>Singapore</th>
<th>Houston</th>
<th>Los Angeles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990-1999</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
<td>20.86</td>
<td>23.56</td>
<td>20.44</td>
<td>21.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Min</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Complied and calculated from various issues of Fairplay Weekly from 1990 to 1999

The mean is only in the range of $84–$89/ton at four main ports: Houston, Rotterdam, Los Angeles and Singapore. In addition, the standard deviation of bunker price at four main ports in this period is in the range of $20.44–$23.56. This means that from 1990 to 1999, bunker price was quite cheap and there was not so much change/sudden fluctuation of price in this period. Two notable exceptions, however, exist from July 1990 to March 1991 and late 1998.
The sudden sky-high bunker price in late 1990 and early 1991 is explained by the fact that Iraq invaded Kuwait (the two leading oil producers in the world) in this period (Stopford, 1997, p. 58). This invasion tied up the crude oil supply and resulted in the shortage of bunker supply thus sending the bunker price up. Moreover, bunker price was at its bottom in late 1998 and early 1999 (only $55-$60/ton). The reason for such a decline was the impact of the Asian financial crisis that broke down the financial system in some Asian countries (BP Plc, 2007b, p. 16). These are also supported by the trend shown in Figure 2.1.

![Figure 2.1 Bunker prices (IFO380) in four main markets (Jan 1990 –Dec 1999)](image)

Source: Compiled from various issues of Drewry Monthly from 1990 to 1999

**2.1.2. 2000-2008 period: high bunker price and fluctuation**

This period of high bunker price was triggered by the invasion of the USA of Iraq in early 2000. The invasion led to a shortage in supply of crude oil. Consequently, bunker price in early 2000 was nearly twice that of late 1998, 1999 as shown in Table 2.2 in all three main ports ($163-$185 versus $84-$89).

It can be seen from Table 2.2 that the maximum bunker price in 2000-2008 is almost thirteen times higher than the minimum price in 1990-1999. For instance, the
maximum bunker price in 2000-2008 was $743.5/ton (in August 2008 at Houston) while the minimum price in 1990-1999 was only $50/ton (in Rotterdam, Dec 1998). The minimum bunker price in period 2006-2008 is US$209.5 (Rotterdam, Jan 2007) compared with the maximum price of period 1990-1999 of US$200 (Singapore, Jan 1991). Such trends are clearly detected in Figure 2.2 in which bunker price tends to continuously increase with the booming pace from early 2000 to Sep 2008 and reaches its record for the last 18 years of US$743.5 in Houston (August, 2008). Such exceptional booming of bunker fuel price from mid 2005 to Aug 2008 can be explained as follows:

Table 2.2 Behavior of bunker price from 2000 to 2008 (weekly base)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Market</th>
<th>Rotterdam</th>
<th>Singapore</th>
<th>Houston</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000-2008</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>170.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
<td>126.38</td>
<td>130.83</td>
<td>131.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max</td>
<td>704.5</td>
<td>742.5</td>
<td>743.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Min</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>83.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2008</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>323.5</td>
<td>343.5</td>
<td>334.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
<td>117.93</td>
<td>122.91</td>
<td>123.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Min</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max</td>
<td>704.5</td>
<td>742.5</td>
<td>743.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Complied from various issues of Fairplay Weekly from 2000 to 2008

On the supply side, OPEC and other oil-exporting countries were trying to tight up the supply thus sending the oil price sky high. For instance, oil price was increasing from only US$60-70/barrel in mid 2005 to US$80-90/barrel in mid 2007 and reaching its record by US$142.52/barrel in mid 2008. As a result, booming bunker fuel price in this period is partly explained by the tight-up in bunker supply reasons.
On the demand side, high freight rates and fast development of world tonnage also contribute to send bunker fuel price as much as its record (US$743.5/ton).

During this period, shipowners’ revenue and profit margins were negatively affected by this rise. For instance, in May 2006, NYK (Japanese shipping company) reported that high fuel costs did shave $242 million off its profit (Roberts, 2006). Moreover, during the first half of 2006, due to the increasing fuel costs, A.P. Moller-Maersk reported a $607 million loss in its container arm alone (Roberts, 2006).

### 2.2. Causal relationship between bunker fuel price and oil price

As the matter of fact, bunker price moves in close relationship with crude oil price. Many explanations for this phenomenon exist. Firstly, and from the demand side, crude oil and bunker are two primary commodities and essential energies with limited substitutes at least in the short and medium terms. Secondly, and from the supply side, bunker is the final product in the distillation process of crude oil, thus both have the same primary source. The correlation coefficient between oil prices and bunker price will decide how close relation between them.

As the bunker demand is limited at sea ports and bunker supply is limited by refining capacities, a slight difference still remains between bunker price and crude oil price.
at different ports (Figure 2.2, 2.3). The correlation coefficient between the WTI oil price and the bunker price in Singapore is 0.98257 (*this means 98.257% of case the bunker price in Singapore will behave in the same way with WTI oil prices*) while between WTI oil price and bunker price in Rotterdam is 0.98249.

**Figure 2.2 Correlation between crude oil prices and bunker prices**

Source: **Bunker price**: compiled from various issues of Fairplay Weekly from 1990 to 2008. Oil price (weekly base) retrieved 15 Sep, 2008 from [http://tonto.eia.doe.gov/dnav/pet/pet_pri_spt_s1_d.htm](http://tonto.eia.doe.gov/dnav/pet/pet_pri_spt_s1_d.htm).

A similar calculation with the Brent spot oil price shows that the correlation coefficient with the bunker price in Singapore is 0.98245 and in Rotterdam is 0.9834. Such slight differences in correlation coefficient between the oil prices and the bunker prices at different ports are later on stressed by Kavussanos & Visvikis who state that bunker prices usually follow the trends in the nearest oil cargo market centre (2006b, p. 290).
Figure 2.3 Correlation between crude oil prices and bunker prices


Moreover, it can be seen from Figure 2.4 that oil price did not fluctuate as much as bunker price. This is mainly explained by the fact that crude oil is sold almost everywhere while bunker transactions only take place at certain ports and are mainly controlled by multinational oil companies.

Figure 2.4 Development of bunker price and crude oil price (1990 – 2008)

Source: bunker prices are compiled from various issues of Fairplay Weekly (1990-2008); crude oil prices are retrieved 15 Sep, 2008 and compiled from http://tonto.eia.doe.gov/dnav/pet/pet_pri_spt_s1_d.htm.
3. Impact of higher bunker fuel costs on the shipping industry and world trade

Bunker is the propulsion energy of ship without any substitution at least in the short and medium terms. Bunker cost is accounting for almost 60% (as presented by previous part) of the voyage costs and plays an important role in the Profit & Lose (P&L) account of any shipping company. As in the shipping market today where it is hard to increase any revenue, saving cost is said to be the most important way for any shipping company to make profit. As a result, it is true that the higher the bunker fuel cost the narrower the profit margin that shipping company can expect. In the connection with the world trade, Ma states that shipping does not create demand itself, its demand is derived from the development of trade in goods (2006, p. 5). At the same time, the development of shipping can create new opportunities for international trade (Hansen, 2007). It can be understood from this connection that the more the shipping industry develops the more it can support the trade development. However, it is argued today that it is the cost of shipping, not the cost of tariff, is the largest barrier to the global trade (Benjamin & Rubin, 2008, p.4). In order to know other impacts of higher bunker fuel costs on the shipping company other than the profit losses, to know the causal relationship between shipping and the world trade, this paper applies the correlation coefficient method to investigate the correlation between bunker fuel costs and other supply and demand factors to know the causal relationship among them thus draw possible conclusion on the subjects.

3.1. Impact of higher bunker fuel costs on the shipping industry

Bunker fuel costs account for almost 60% of voyage cost thus it has a direct impact on the daily operation of any shipping company. During the time with the triple-digit bunker fuel price level, shipping company has tried any possible room for cost saving. On 6 Aug 2008, a conference held by the Maritime Institute of Malaysia (MIMA) titled “High oil price and its impact on the shipping industry...” in which speakers agreed that reducing vessel speed (adding more vessels), lowering the fuel consumption, improving engine efficiency –propeller, re-routing service are such solutions that shipping companies are using to cope with the triple-digit bunker fuel price today (MIMA, 2008, p.4-9).
3.1.1. Correlation between freight rates and bunker price – Impact of higher bunker fuel costs on freight rates policy

As mentioned previously, bunker cost accounts for almost 60% of voyage costs and, with the bulging bunker fuel price today, this portion tends to become bigger and bigger. Normally, shipowners will compensate an increase in bunker costs with a higher freight rate (by passing such increases on to the shippers) when bunker fuel cost is bulging due to the increasing of bunker fuel price. Consequently, the higher the bunker price the higher the freight rates. As a result, bunker price and freight rates are positively correlated. This is true in the key bunker price-setting centers like Houston, Singapore and Rotterdam where bunker prices are highly responsive to changes in the bulk spot freight market (Kavussanos & Visvikis, 2006b, p. 297).

Calculations of correlation coefficient between bunker prices with different time charter rates also support the above argument. However, results stress some differences. The correlation coefficient (Figure 3.1) between Handymax charter rates and bunker prices in Singapore –Rotterdam –Houston are respectively 0.8618 –0.8627 –0.8643 while for Panamax charter rates are 0.8105– 0.8101– 0.8150. The reason for a closer correlation between Handymax charter rates and bunker prices compared with Panamax’s might be explained by the bigger size of Panamax vessels (60 -80,000 dwt) and by the long-term contract that they are used for with the key commodities like Iron Ore, Coal and Grain. Panamax charter rates would therefore be rather inelastic to bunker price changes. In contrast, Handymax (45–50,000 dwt) that are carrying a wider range of commodities (steel products, steam coal, scrap, and bauxite) with rather short-term contracts might be more affected by the day-to-day bunker price changes.
Figure 3.1 Correlations between time charter rates of Handymax and Panamax and bunker prices

Source: Bunker price and representative charter rates of Handymax and Panamax: compiled from various issues of Drewry Monthly from 1990 to 2008.

Focusing on containerships, a study of Cariou & Wolff shows that a causal relation exists between the bunker price and Bunker Adjustment Factor (BAF) on the Europe/Far East liner trade. BAF follows the main trend in bunker price (2006, p. 193). In other words, it can be understood that owners tend to cover an increase in bunker price rise by imposing BAF or bunker surcharge on the shippers.

Above analysis show that bunker fuel price and freight rates have strong correlation thus they behave in the same way. If the freight rates are high, shipping company tends to put more ships into operation and then result in the bulging bunker demand and it may contribute to send bunker fuel price up. In contrast, if the bunker fuel price is high, the shipping company tends to use the bunker surcharge or bunker adjustment factor (BAF) to cover part of their possible loses originated therein. However, whether the bunker surcharge can cover all the possible loses originated from the increasing bunker price or not is still an impossible-to-answer question that exists long time between the shipping association and the shippers!

3.1.2. Correlation between fuel consumption and bunker price – Impact of higher bunker fuel costs on the fuel consumption and speed policy

Fuel consumption and speed of ship are two factors affecting directly the bunker price. The fuel consumption rate of a ship depends on the efficiency of the ship
engine, the commercial speed and the shipping distance. As the matter of fact, the more efficient the ship engine the slower the speed, the shorter the shipping distance, the less the fuel the ship consumes. Consequently, when the bunker fuel price is bulging, the shipping company tends to reduce vessel speed to control the fuel consumption thus saving possible bunker fuel costs.

![Figure 3.2 Correlations between fuel consumption of bulk carriers, containerships and bunker price](image)

The correlation coefficient between the fuel consumption of containerships and bunker fuel price is 0.8641 while that between bulk carriers and bunker fuel price is only 0.2735. From Figure 3.2, the fuel consumption of bulk carriers would be rather inelastic to changes in bunker fuel price (27.35%). Meanwhile the fuel consumption of containerships is highly responsive to changes in bunker fuel price (86.41%). The reason for this difference is that in liner shipping, to keep pace with published schedules and high service frequency, containerships have to sail at higher speed compared to ships used in the tramping market. Calculations made on 601 containerships and 601 bulk carriers in Appendix B also supports this argument where the average speed of containerships is 21.81 knots while the average speed of bulk carriers is only 13.96 knots. Moreover, because of the improvement of productivity in modern container terminal with higher move/hour, containerships
today tend to spend very short time in port and spend longer time at sea thus consume a larger amount of bunker. For example, at Laem Chabang port, a vessel with about 1,000 containers of both discharging and loading spends only about 10 hours for cargo operation. In contrast, as the loading/discharging of break bulk takes longer time, bulk carriers tend to spend shorter time at sea and longer time at port for cargo operation thus consume little amount of bunker compared with containerships. This may contribute to explain why bunker fuel consumption of container ships has a stronger correlation with bunker fuel price than that of the bulk carriers. In other words, the speed/fuel consumption of container ship responses quicker with bunker fuel price changes than that of bulk carrier.

Above analysis prove that when bunker fuel price is high, shipping company tends to reduce speed of ship (by adding more vessels in to the current service rotation) in order to save bunker fuel costs. The speed and fuel consumption policies, however, is different depending on type of ship (container or bulk carrier).

3.2. Impact of higher bunker fuel costs on the world trade

3.2.1. Development of international seaborne trade

Shipping is the final task in an international trade transaction to bring goods from the sellers to the buyers. Shipping does not create demand itself, its demand is derived from the development of trade in goods (Ma, 2006, p. 5). At the same time, the development of shipping can create new opportunities for international trade (Hansen, 2007). In the past twenty years, globalization with its core term of “specialization in production” – bringing production worldwide to search for the cheap inputs (cheap labor, cheap material) and then shipping finished or semi-finished products back to the consuming sources did create more and more demand for shipping. For instance, such multinational corporations as Nike, Sony, Adidas etc moved their production base from their home countries to China, Vietnam or other Asian countries to tap the cheap labor, good skills and cheap input material.
Table 3.1 Development of international seaborne trade (1990 -2008) (mil. tons)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Tanker Cargo</th>
<th>Dry Cargo</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1,755</td>
<td>2,253</td>
<td>4,008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1,790</td>
<td>2,330</td>
<td>4,120</td>
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<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>1,860</td>
<td>2,360</td>
<td>4,220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>1,945</td>
<td>2,385</td>
<td>4,330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>2,007</td>
<td>2,478</td>
<td>4,485</td>
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<td>1995</td>
<td>2,049</td>
<td>2,602</td>
<td>4,651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>2,127</td>
<td>2,631</td>
<td>4,758</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>2,172</td>
<td>2,781</td>
<td>4,953</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>2,159</td>
<td>2,970</td>
<td>5,129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2,163</td>
<td>3,709</td>
<td>5,872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>2,174</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>2,129</td>
<td>3,819</td>
<td>5,948</td>
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<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>2,226</td>
<td>4,274</td>
<td>6,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2,318</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>2,526</td>
<td>4,846</td>
<td>7,372</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007*</td>
<td>2,630</td>
<td>5,005</td>
<td>7,635</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008*</td>
<td>2,734</td>
<td>5,164</td>
<td>7,898</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* are estimated figures

Source: Compiled from various issues of Review of Maritime Transport (1990-2007), UNCTAD

Table 3.1 shows that world seaborne trades have developed dramatically from 1990 to 2008. Dry cargo accounts for about 65-70%, the rest being mainly tanker (liquid) cargo. In addition, Figure 3.3 shows that seaborne trades grow at more than 4%/year. In which seaborne dry cargo grew at an average of more than 5%/year, faster than the tanker cargo (2.5%/year from 1990 to 2007).

However, when the bunker fuel price is increasing by triple-digit level and resulting in the sky-high shipping costs, multinational companies start to think about the cost trade-off between the savings on the cheap material, cheap labor tapped in the third-world countries and the bulging shipping costs therein. A remarkable example raised by Benjamin & Rubin that in year 2000 when oil price was only at US$20/barrel, the freight rate to ship 1 x 40 foot container from Shanghai to US eastern was only US$3,000 including inland transport. Such cost to ship same container now is as nearly 170% high and reaching UDS8,000 per box (2008, p.4).
3.2.2. Correlation between international seaborne trade and bunker prices – Impact of higher bunker fuel costs on the world trade

Seaborne trade is related to bunker prices in the sense that seaborne trade generates the demand for bunker consumption (Ma, 2006, p. 98). In other words, when seaborne trade is increasing, it requires more shipping demand thus consumes more bunker fuel and it may contribute to send the bunker fuel price up. Figure 3.4 shows that bunker price fluctuates almost in the same way with seaborne dry cargo.

Figure 3.3 Development of seaborne trade from 1990-2008 (Million tons)

Source: Compiled from various issues of Review of Maritime Transport (1990-2007), UNCTAD.

Figure 3.4 Development of seaborne dry cargo, tanker cargo and bunker price

Notes: * are estimated figures

However, when the bunker fuel price is sky-high as today, some economists notably Rohter (2008) and Benjamin & Rubin (2008) state that high bunker costs may contribute to reverse the current globalization trends. Rohter proves evidence that some companies which looking for low prices now have to move some production closer to their consumers, “some electronics companies that left Mexico in recent years for the lower wages in China are now returning to Mexico because they can lower costs by trucking their output overland to American consumer”, he raised.

The correlation coefficient for bunker price with total seaborne trades is close to 0.834, with tanker seaborne cargoes 0.814 and with dry seaborne cargoes 0.855 (Figure 3.5). The reason for these slight differences might be the bigger share of dry seaborne cargo (65-70%) compared to only 30-35% of tanker seaborne cargo in the total seaborne trade (see Table 3.1). In addition, dry cargo is normally carried by the break bulk and container ships with higher speed, more fuel consumption and more time at sea than the tanker carriers which said to be sailing with lower speed and longer time in port. Moreover, for many reasons, shipowners usually fix rather long-term contracts (3-5 years) in carrying tanker seaborne cargo compared to the rather shorter-term for dry seaborne contracts.

Figure 3.5 Correlation between seaborne trade and bunker prices

To sum up this part, it is understood that seaborne trade creates the demand for shipping thus requires more bunker consumption then may contribute to enforce the stronger bunker fuel price. However, when bunker fuel price is increasing and reaching beyond the cost trade-off with cheap inputs, international companies will response by re-arranging / re-locating the production bases by moving their factories from such third-world countries with low labor/material prices as Vietnam, China, Thailand etc back to their neighboring countries to save shipping costs. As a result, high bunker fuel costs may contribute to discourage the world trade and may lead to the possible change in the international trade pattern.

**Conclusion**

In the risk-intensive shipping market, beside such risks related to the freight rates, interest rate, exchange rates, shipping company is also engaged themselves with such risk of fluctuating bunker price which places a direct impact on the daily operation costs thus the cash-flows. When the bunker price was as high as last some months, it forces the shipping company to response by reducing the speed (by adding more vessels to keep fixed schedule) to lower fuel consumption, re-arranging the service rotation, increasing the freight rates, or adding more bunker surcharge to cover some parts of such fuel rise in order to get possible profit. On the trade side, high bunker fuel cost had forced the multinational companies considering the cost trade-off between shipping costs and the savings on low labor and material costs tapped from the third-world countries to relocate their production base as closer to the targeted consumers as possible and to save the shipping costs. In order to reduce some risk related to the bunker price fluctuation, hedging bunker price is said to be an effective solution to help shipping company reduce possible loses originated therein.
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THE IMPLICATIONS OF GLOBALIZATION ON MARITIME SECURITY IN THE WIDER CARIBBEAN AND CENTRAL AMERICA

Lieutenant Commander John Borland

Abstract

If the Caribbean is the soft under belly of the United States then Central America must be its Achilles heel. The implications of globalization on maritime security in both these regions are direct and tangible, active and latent and exist in the political, economic, military and social realms. The systemic weakness that exists in these areas makes them vulnerable to threats from terrorism, drug trafficking, money laundering, weapons trafficking and human smuggling. Globalization has provided the perfect delivery mechanism for subversive elements from distant shores to penetrate the soft under belly, cripple the Achilles heel and strike deep into the bowels of the home of the brave. The maritime industry in the Caribbean and Central America is a target rich environment. It is only a matter of time and choice before this sector becomes the next stage for drama to be played out. It is imperative that those responsible to protect the homelands prevent the key components from coming together to create an incident that would have catastrophic consequences to life and commerce in the region and destabilize relations in the equivalent of a maritime 11 September 2001.

Introduction

The effects of globalization have had far reaching consequences in the Maritime Industry throughout the world and in most cases contribute to efficiency and economic gains by those entities directly involved. However, it has also served as a conduit for transnational threats that have the potential to inflict great harm to many nations. The nature of these threats including terrorism is facilitated by globalization which encourages open borders and free trade. Nowhere is this phenomenon more pronounced than in the fragile and vulnerable regions of the Caribbean and Central America. Both these regions are extremely unique not only because of their mythical beauty and reputation for pristine and exotic vacations but also for their importance as strategic forward defenses for the United States.
The Caribbean which is often referred to as the third border of the United States is the
tenth largest trading partner of the United States with tourism being the single largest
foreign exchange earner in 16 of the 28 states that comprise the Wider Caribbean region.
It is a major source of migration and visitors to the United States and an important
destination for both tourists and foreign investments. Many sectors in the Caribbean such
as air transport, tourism, agriculture, manufacturing and others depend on ready access to
the US economy. Remittances alone to the region amount to approximately US$3 billion
annually.

The Caribbean region suffers from the worlds highest murder rates which is linked
directly to drug trafficking and its effects on crime, violence, corruption, poverty and an
undermining of democracy. The majority of Caribbean states has long unpatrolled
costlines and suffers from weak economies which lead to limited law enforcement
capacity. While drug trafficking is rampant and the residual effect continues to degrade
and weaken nations the situation seemingly will remain unchecked as long as the
lucrative markets remain open in the US and Europe. Terrorism which is the next single
biggest threat to maritime security in the Caribbean is actually no stranger to the region.
Long before terrorism became a buzz word a Cubana commercial aircraft was downed off
the coast of Barbados in 1976 in an act of terrorism.

Central America is geographically different from the Caribbean but the countries who
share a Caribbean coastline are said to be a part of the Caribbean basin. Their history and
culture which is mostly Spanish influenced has been shaped by wars that ravaged the
countries and left millions dead in Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua and others. With a
legacy of decades of bloody conflict these countries still suffer from social and
economical vulnerabilities with some being among the worlds most impoverished. It is no
secret that Central American countries form major transshipment routes for drugs to the
US and Europe with very little effect from poorly resourced Law Enforcement Agencies
and Criminal Justice Systems. With these vulnerabilities in the Caribbean and Central
America it is not surprising that they are referred to as the soft underbelly and Achilles
heel of the United States.
In a statement delivered by the US Navy Commander Admiral James Stavridis concerning the US Southern Command posture he noted that “We consider Latin America and the Caribbean to be potential bases for future terrorist threats to the US. The conditions in parts of the regions easily skirted borders, black market economies, corruption, poverty, established illicit trafficking routes; all could provide maneuvering room for any form of terrorism to exploit”. In his paper “Caribbean Security in the age of terror” IL Griffith (2003), stated that “no country alone can deal with the problems of transnational crime and global terrorism”. It is in this light that maritime security will best be achieved by blending public and private maritime security activities on a global scale into an integrated effort that will address all maritime threats. The basis for further discussion will be based on the concept of layered maritime security following an integrated approach involving the Caribbean and Central American security forces, the US State Department and the US Southern Command.

**Maritime Security**

The safety, security and protection of our oceans should be everybody’s business. Maritime security is paramount to ensure freedom of the seas, facilitate freedom of navigation and commerce, enhance economic prosperity and freedom, and to protect the resources of the ocean for generations to come. All nations must share a common vision to facilitate the vibrant maritime commerce that underpins economic security and to protect the oceans against related terrorist, hostile, criminal and dangerous acts. As beneficiaries of this collective effort all states must share the responsibility of maintaining maritime security and countering terrorism in the maritime domain.

**Threats to Maritime Security in the Caribbean and Central America**

All nations should strive to develop national strategies for maritime security geared to promoting global economic stability and protecting legitimate activities at the same time preventing hostile or illegal activity within the maritime domain. Shipping may be the heartbeat of the global economy but is vulnerable to attacks in strategic key points such
as ports, canals and straits. Although the oceans continued to be seen as highways for transport of commerce, technology and globalization forces have reduced their effect as barriers and thus they’ve become a vast, ready and largely unsecure medium for a variety of threats by rogue states, stateless groups, terrorists and organized crime.

**Drug Trafficking**

A UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) report in 2008 compared the Caribbean to the “dark side of paradise” and Central America as “a cocaine pipeline to the north”. Neither of these regions produces cocaine nor are they responsible for the trafficking. They are merely victims caught in a battle between the world’s biggest suppliers in the south and largest market in the north. Cocaine is produced in Colombia, Venezuela and Bolivia and is transported in mass quantities to the US via air, land and sea. Ninety percent of the cocaine that enters the US transits through the Caribbean and Central American corridors. Almost all of this is transported by sea either by go fast boats, fishing vessels, pleasure boats, cargo ships, passenger ships or crudely fashioned semi submersible submarines.

Up until recent times the preferred mode of transport was go fast boats capable of carrying up to two tons of cocaine and making speed in excess of fifty knots. These vessels would run from Colombia to Honduras, Guatemala, Belize or Mexico where the drugs would be handed off to continue on its way by land or air into the US. The US Drug Enforcement Agency (USDEA) estimates that approximately 1400 tons of cocaine entered the United States in 2007. Of this 940 tons transited Central America, 240 tons transited the Caribbean and 220 were moved via the European/African route. 1120 tons were shipped by maritime means and 280 tons were moved by air.

The movement of drugs through the Caribbean and Central America has been linked to several negative concerns such as an increase in levels of crime and violence, proliferation of illegal firearms and ammunition, corruption of state officials and
institutions, money laundering, drug abuse and its adverse social consequences, stigmatization of states and their people and narco terrorism.

**Terrorism**

The Caribbean and Latin America has been identified as soft targets for terrorist attacks. However, while it may seem obvious that terrorist have no real interest in carrying out attack against these nations, global tourism and foreign investments that drive these fragile economies must be protected against global terrorism. As bad as the post 9/11economic disruptions were to these regions, it would be catastrophic if a terrorist attack were to be launched against the US by groups operating out of the Caribbean or Central America.

The sheer proximity of the Caribbean and Central America to the US lends itself to an ideal staging area for such attacks. An aircraft can be seized or hijacked in the Bahamas and used to strike the US in less than an hour. Terrorist can seize and destroy a cruise ship carrying thousands of US and European nationals after it leaves port. A tanker carrying LNG from Trinidad to Miami can be used as a weapon of mass destruction (WMD). Terrorist can take advantage of the relative ease with which Caribbean nationals move through the US by utilizing false passports and visas. Increasing links between drug trafficking and terrorism puts the region at greater risk of becoming an operating center for narco terrorism and terrorist organizations.

As the US becomes an increasingly more difficult target to strike the Caribbean and Central America present itself as a tempting target for terrorist. Experience shows that terrorists are willing to look outside the continental United States and strike anywhere in the world at US and European interests. The tourism industry which is largely influenced by US input is the mainstay for most Caribbean states but some others are home to significant industrial complexes with direct economic links to the US. Trinidad and Tobago for example produces large quantities of minerals (ammonium sulfate) and
approximately 50 percent of the US liquefied natural gas (LNG). Inadequate security systems make these industrial complexes vulnerable targets.

Combating terrorism in the maritime domain is extremely complex due its non military, transnational and asymmetric nature. Defeating this enemy demands more than purely military or law enforcement undertakings. Adversaries with transnational capability can cause serious damage to global, political and economic stability. The maritime domain provides mobility for threats to deploy and offers ideal targets that suits terrorist objectives of inflicting mass casualties, causing catastrophic harm and destabilizing political and economic conditions.

Other Threats

Prosperity and growth in international commerce in the maritime domain has been paralleled by its share of problems in criminal and illegal activity. Human smuggling, weapons smuggling, contraband, armed robbery, piracy, money laundering, corruption, environmental destruction, Illegal Unregulated Unreported fishing (IUU) and illegal immigration all pose a threat to maritime security in the Caribbean and Central America. While piracy incidents are far and few between armed robbery has been on the rise. Human smuggling too has been on the increase where illegal immigrants are smuggled into the US by organized groups often with deadly consequences. Weapon smuggling is more prevalent in the Caribbean as opposed to Central America where there is no shortage of weapons left over from previous conflicts.

Money laundering is directly related to the drug trade where huge amounts of money are generated for organized crime syndicates and terrorist organizations. This money is laundered through international financial systems and provides a major source of untraceable funds. This money is used to bribe government officials leading to corruption but is also used to fund criminal activity, continue drug trafficking and support terrorist operatives in their clandestine operations. Illegal high seas fishing fleets wreak havoc on
marine resources where states cannot effectively police the limits of their Exclusive Economic Zones.

The economic security of the Caribbean and Central America depend heavily on the marine environment. The protection of eco systems to ensure conservation and sustainability of marine resources against damage from pollution caused by terrorist act or individuals with no regard for the environment is of extreme importance. International migration is also a threat in the region with the potential to upset regional stability due to the strain migrants and refugees place on fragile economies and political systems. This situation is pronounced in the mass migration of Cubans and Haitians to the US due to the collapse of social and political orders in their countries. This is a situation that could be exploited by terrorists to gain access into the United States.

**Addressing the Issues**

Success in securing the maritime domain is not possible by any one state acting alone. This can only be achieved through building a powerful coalition of nations to guarantee strong international support. Most of the maritime domain is not under no single nation’s sovereignty or jurisdiction thus the need for this effective coalition. Increased economic interdependency and globalization facilitated by maritime shipping, emphasizes the requirement for a coordinated international approach. Maritime Security will only be achieved by integrating public and private maritime security stakeholders into a comprehensive, integrated effort that will address maritime threats. Layered maritime security coupled with national and international coordination, cooperation, intelligence and information sharing and involvement of public and private entities are required to protect and safeguard the maritime domain.

Several initiatives to address the threats of drug trafficking, terrorism and other threats to maritime security exist in the Caribbean and Central America. States have invested heavily in developing National Strategies for Maritime Security fully aware of the importance in policing our sea spaces to protect political and economic security. In the
Caribbean and Central America several states have established Coast Guards or reconfigured their maritime forces to confront the asymmetrical threats of transnational crime and terrorism. Many have upgraded their fleets of patrol boats and redesigned training to face the evolving threats. Some States have invested in Vehicle and Cargo Inspection Systems (VACIS), X-ray machines for container ports and established Port Security Corps.

In the Caribbean region the Commonwealth States have developed a program to assist in strengthening legislations, training in special techniques of investigation and prosecution of terrorism and international cooperation. Besides investing heavily in upgrading the facets of security in the maritime domain ports have been transformed to meet the requirements of the ISPS Code, which while very costly is impossible to remain competitive without. Addressing the social issues that are linked to weak maritime security such as education, housing, health, poverty and crime remain a challenge to the regions. There is too much divide between the rich and poor and the middle class is hardly considered or often overlooked.

**The role of the US and Southern Command (SOUTHCOM)**

The US State Department and SOUTHCOM have embarked on several initiatives to support the nations of the Caribbean and Central America in developing and strengthening their capacity to provide maritime security in the maritime domain. The International Military Education and Training program allows forces from the regions to train in all the premier military institutions in the US alongside American and International students. The program also deploys Mobile Training Teams (MTT) to various parts of the regions to conduct in country training for security forces. It also offers the possibility of attaching US officers on temporary duty to forces in the region that require capacity building and technical advice. The office of International Affairs through the Latin American Port Security Program has stationed Customs Officers at ports in high threat countries. This is known as the Container Security Initiative (CSI) and allows Latin American Customs Officers to also work in US Ports.
The Enduring Friendship Program which was replaced this year by the Operation Enduring Freedom-Caribbean and Central America (OEF-CCA) is a long term endeavor which will create a multi layered counter terrorism posture to mutually benefit the US, the Caribbean and Central American regions. The program in the past has aided Coast Guards significantly in increasing and upgrading their surface fleets to provide counter narcotics and law enforcement operations. The State Department and SOUTHCOM has also provided support in infrastructural development by sponsoring major projects such as Coast Guard facilities, piers, docks, slipways, boats, engines and fuel. Most nations are a part of the ship rider agreement which allows the US Coast Guard to operate in their sea spaces by embarking local law enforcement officers on the cutters to authorize boarding operations. SOUTHCOM also conducts joint counter narcotics operations at least twice annually by providing surveillance assets, rapid response capability (helicopters), offshore patrol capability and cover operating costs. These operations are conducted by local maritime forces, USDEA and Joint Inter Agency Task Forces and often prove successful.

US assets and training teams are also deployed to the Caribbean and Central America to provide training and to embark local members on board for underway training. The Caribbean Support Tender consisted of a mixed crew with 90 percent being from the region. Major exercises are hosted each year in different countries to train in maritime security and safety and to develop interoperability among allied forces. Exercise Trade Winds is hosted in the Caribbean and Exercise Round Up and PANAX in Central America. The US Navy HSV Swift (Regional Fleet Station) also transits the regions and provides training while the hospital ship Comfort provides medical support from time to time to the less fortunate.

The Merida Initiative is a new United States - Mexico - Central America Security Cooperation initiative to combat the threats of drug trafficking, transnational crime and terrorism in the Western Hemisphere. This partnership will support coordinated strategies to produce a safer and secure hemisphere where criminal organizations no longer threaten states and prevent the entry of illicit drugs and transnational threats throughout the region.
and to the US. The program which is estimated at around USD $550 million is expected to fund equipment, technology, communications, technical advise, mobility, surveillance, training and assets for the Central American and Mexican security forces.

Conclusion

Maritime security in the Caribbean and Central America will forever be evolving around drug trafficking and terrorism. Transnational threats from drug trafficking and global terrorism can only be dealt with effectively by a collaborated effort focused on integrating military and non military forces, developing regional and international cooperation, maximizing maritime domain awareness, incorporating security practices into commercial networks and deploying layered security. No single nation can achieve this on its own thus the need for cooperation between all stakeholders concerned. However, it is still incumbent upon states to improve the conditions that lead to a deterioration of human resources. There must be a continuous effort to reduce poverty, corruption, improve education, health care, create employment, strengthen justice systems and democracy and restore faith in their citizens. If the political will and the will of the people are not in par then no amount of international support will guarantee security in the maritime domain and the third borders will remain porous and vulnerable to transnational criminal activity and global terrorism.
References


