ROMANCE OF THE THREE UNIONS[1]

A Comparative Study of the Identity Discourses of Three Indian Maritime Trade Unions

Peidong Yang

School of Social Sciences
Cardiff University

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[1] This unseemly title is inspired by the epic historical novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, one of the Four Great Classical Novels of Chinese literature. Written in the 14th Century, the novel fictionalises the turbulent political events in the period between 169 and 280 AD, an era known as the *Three Kingdoms* in Chinese history when the country was split into three major powers, struggling militarily for domination. The warring relation among the three kingdoms is found to be an interesting metaphor for the relationship among the three unions under this study.

Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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This thesis is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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Abstract

Located at the intersection of an attempt to experiment a discourse analytical approach to the study of trade unions and a curiosity about the identities of maritime unions, this study comparatively investigates the discursive identity constructions of three seafaring trade unions of distinct characters in India, which is one of the most important maritime manpower supply countries.

Discourse analysis, consisting mainly of analysing documentary materials and interview discoursal data, demonstrates that the three unions through their respective discursive practices construct drastically different organisational identities. Union A, the most established union with the longest history, constructs itself with a sense of superiority, by asserting its 'only-ness', 'highness' and seemingly sidelining its own ordinary members; Union B, the overtly Marxist union, is found to indeed construct itself along Marxist lines through the deployment of radical discourses that are critical of capital and government but sympathetic with labour; and Union C, the union exclusively for maritime officers, positions itself as an elite union above the other two ratings' unions mainly through constructing the image of elite officers. The ideology and discourse of neoliberalism is found to transcend the identity schemas of Union A and C, and this is countered by the Marxism/anti-neoliberalism of Union B.

However, despite the divergence at the discursive level, through examining the actual practices of the three unions, significantly the disciplining of members for organisational survivals, it is found that there is in fact a practical convergence which seems to render the discursive identity constructions insignificant. Yet, instead of adopting a realist dismissal of discursivity, through identifying the ways even fundamental and transcending practicalities are 'deeply pigmented' by identity discourses, the thesis concludes that the relationship between discursivity and practice is deeply interlocking and constitutively imbricated; in other words, discourse permeates and percolates both the ideational and practical aspects of organisations so deeply that it is neither extricable nor compartmentalisable.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.1   Philosophical and Intellectual Background

It has been said that one central feature of the twentieth century Western philosophy is the fundamental problematisation of language (Magee, 1982). Language, which was previously thought as a transparent vehicle/medium for thoughts and meanings and straightforward pointer to reality, is now seen to have a much more ambiguous and much less innocent nature. This movement could be seen as initiated and symbolised by Wittgenstein's ditching of the 'picture theory' of language in his earlier work *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (Morris, 2008) and arguing in his later classic *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein, 1967) that the meanings of words are not the objects or things in the external world that they seem to refer to; rather, the meanings of words are simply the ways in which they are being used by people. Thus, instead of being referential to the 'reality' in which one lives, language is now regarded as a self-referential system (Derrida, 1973) *through* which one experiences and perceives 'reality'. This fundamental philosophical turn was developed by various other philosophers of language such as Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) who further argue that words are also deeds, and speech is also action (thus the Austinean term 'speech act'). In other words, language is not only descriptive, but has concrete effects in our social life/world just like physical action; and hence it plays a vital role in shaping our life/world and our experiences of it. In the later part of the twentieth century, notably the 1980s onwards (Wood & Kroger, 2000), these movements culminated in what is now commonly known as the 'linguistic turn' in the humanities and social sciences which is characterised by an ontological emphasis on the constitutive role of language in our social 'reality' (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Additionally, some suggest that ethnomethodology has also been influential in creating a climate conducive to this significant 'turn' which cut across multiple disciplines (Coupland, 1988).

This emphasis on language's constitutive role coincided with, or indeed could be seen as a part of, the more general intellectual shift towards a constructionist view of social reality during roughly the same period (among early influential works was: Berger & Luckmann, 1971). Various other intellectual strands and schools that emerged slightly later, such as postmodernism/poststructuralism and deconstructionism, though their labels vary, can nevertheless be all loosely accommodated under the general banner of social constructionism, being the broad notion postulating the constructed quality of the social (Burr, 2003). Undoubtedly, this is an extremely complicated theoretical terrain, with much criss-crossing between different schools and strands of thought and ideas. It would be as unrealistic as it is unhelpful here to dwell on the background theories. For the purpose of this thesis, it is sufficient to simply point out that during the past half a century, a major intellectual turn had taken place, which led to, firstly, the intellectual appreciation of the constructedness of social reality; secondly and consequently, the research interests into the roles played by language and discourse in such social constructions.

'Discourse' is a thorny concept. According to Alvesson and Karreman (2000b, p. 1145), this term is 'too frequently used in a vague and incoherent way and functions as a smokescreen for an unclear and ambivalent view on language.' Indeed, it was even remarked that discourse and discourse analysis is a 'field in which it is perfectly possible to have two books (on the matter) with no overlap in content at all' (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 6). Hence, a succinct clarification of the concept from the outset is desirable. Discourse is defined by Wood and Kroger (2000, p. 19) very broadly as 'all spoken and written forms of language use (talk and text) as social practice.' Here the emphasis is on the understanding of language as a socially situated *practice*. Parker (1992) defines discourse as 'an interrelated set of texts, and the practices of their production, dissemination, and reception, that brings an object into being' and Watson (1995, p. 816) provides a very similar but slightly expanded definition of discourse as 'a connected set of statements, concepts, terms and expressions which constitutes a

way of talking or writing about a particular issue, thus framing the way people understand and act with respect to that issue'. Thus, at the heart of discourse and discursive theory is the understanding of discourse as possessing constructive, constitutive and framing powers which bring objects into recognisable and comprehensible shapes. The talk and text in/of discourse, in the narrower sense, can refer to talk, conversation, stories, documents; and in the broader sense could mean almost any artefacts in our living space which have shaping effects on our perceptions and understandings. The ambits of the concepts of 'discourse' and 'text' will be explored further in the next chapter in the context of methodology. Here, it suffices for us to recognise that the central argument behind the intellectual turn around the concept of discourse/discursivity is that:

> Social reality is produced and made real through discourse, and social interactions cannot be fully understood without reference to the discourses that give them meaning. As discourse analysts, then, our task is to explore the relationship between discourse and reality. (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 3)

1.2 Postmodernism, Discourse and Organisational Studies

One research area that has been influenced by this postmodern/constructionist or, more specifically, linguistic/discursive 'turn' in the last one to two decades has been organisational studies (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000a; Musson & Tietze, 2004, p. 1301). In the words of Putnam and Fairhurst (2001, p. 78): 'language analysis has moved into a prominent place in organization studies'.

Iedema (2007) has already provided a broad survey of the developments and issues in/of organisational discourse studies up to fairly recently. Therefore, the purpose here is restricted to drawing out those salient lines relevant to the current thesis. To start with, Cooper and Burrell (1988) provide us with a felicitous summary of the philosophical and conceptual level implications of postmodernist thinking on

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organisational studies[1]. According to them, under the *modernist* model, organisation is viewed as 'a social tool and an extension of human rationality' (ibid., p. 91). Given our Enlightenment mode of thinking with its exaltation of reason/rationality, organisation is pervasively defined as a 'circumscribed administrative-economic function to its formative role in the production of systems of rationality' (ibid., p. 92). In other words, organisations are a means to an end. They are the rational means through which certain goals are achieved and their very existence is a manifestation of the power of human reason/rationality. Thus, it is not surprising that traditionally (in fact very much so today too) much of organisational studies had been primarily concerned with issues such as productivity, functionality and efficiency or, to sum up, organisational *performance* (Brewerton & Millward, 2001, p. 122) 'from a functionalist paradigm and from a neo-positivist epistemology' (Alvesson, 1995, p. 1055). In other words, they hardly escape modernism (Burrell, 1994, p. 16).

In contrast, postmodernism rejects this unreflexive utilitarian view of organisation, arguing that '[s]ystems have lives of their own which make them fundamentally independent of human control. Systems express only themselves and we may understand them only through analysis of their own self-referential workings' (ibid., p. 94). According to this view, organisation should be seen as a production of self-reference and hence the role of rational purpose needs to be decentred (Varela, 1979 cited in ibid., p. 12). This position could be theoretically linked back to Derrida's (1973) notion of *difference* which, in Cooper and Burrell's (1988, p. 98) more accessible words, is 'a form of self-reference in which terms contain their own opposites and thus refuse any *singular* grasp of their meanings' (original emphasis). This refusal of any singular assignment of meanings is central to postmodernism and

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[1] In fact, much earlier there seems to be already a vague prefiguration of ideas in a similar vein, found in Bittner's highly abstract essay *The Concept of Organization* (1965), in which he criticises the Weberian treatment of organisation as purely rational, as a 'normative idealization' (p. 250). Bittner offers several alternative 'methodical use of organizational rationalities' (p. 250) such as seeing organisations as 'gambit of compliance', 'a model of stylistic unity', and as 'corroborative reference'. These ideas subtly echo some of the arguments which I am about to present. For example, under 'stylistic unity', the 'all-pervading sense of piety' (p. 252) which 'works against centrifugal tendencies and heterogeneity' (p. 252) in organisations seems to resemble organisational ideology which I will touch upon shortly. However, because Bittner's essay is otherwise entirely cut-off from the body of literature that I refer to, and it is certainly not part of the postmodernist organisation studies 'movement'—if there was such a thing—footnote seems to be the right place to mention it.

deconstructionism, and enables us to see the indeterminate constitution of meanings in an organisational context. The argument of Cooper and Burrell is precisely that most organisational theorists and analysts have been unable to embrace this refusal, and thus their analyses omit the 'ordinary steps of differentiation or division in social organisation', and as a consequence, in their analyses organisation appears 'already formed' (ibid., p. 103). (Here, the words 'differentiation' and 'division' should be read as the variants of the concept *difference*.) In other words, what postmodernism does is to recognise and appreciate those 'ordinary steps of differentiation and division in social organisation', and look at organisation as constantly *being* formed and constructed, rather than as *already* formed. By implication, the processual characters of the ways in which such formation and construction are done become the foci of postmodernist organisational studies. Cooper and Burrell confirm this by writing: 'it becomes a question of analysing, let us say, the *production of organisation* rather than the *organisation of production*' (ibid., pp. 104-105, emphasis added). This, as Chia (1995, p. 596) points out in a similar early effort to assess the profound implications of postmodernism on organisational studies, includes 'the micro-practices and micro-logics of organising which are realized through local orchestrations of actions, interactions and interlocking patters of relationships.'

Hence, it is important to enunciate that to bring post-modernist and post-structuralist thinking to bear on organisation studies does not equate the study of organisational discourse. This notwithstanding, many (e.g. Alvesson, 1994; Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; Dunne, 1996; Anthony Giddens, 1991; Shotter, 1993; Somers, 1994; Whetten, 2006) have suggested that one important way in which construction, formation, production of organisation is accomplished is through discursive/linguistic practices and activities. In fact, some went as far as to state that organisations are created, sustained and changed through talk (Mangham, 1986). Mumby and Clair (1997, p. 181) offer the following exposition on discursive organisational studies or studies of organisational discourse:

When we speak of organizational discourse, we do not simply mean discourse that occurs in organizations. Rather, we suggest that organizations exist only in so far as their members create them through discourse. This is not to claim that organizations are 'nothing but' discourse, but rather that discourse is the principal means by which organization member create a coherent social reality that frames their *sense of who they are*. (emphasis added)

Alternative foci in discursive organisational studies have been wide-ranging and multifarious. To give some indicative examples, there have been the examinations of the discursive nature of decision making process (Mauws, 2000) and inter-organisational collaboration (Hardy, Lawrence, & Phillips, 1998); the discursive formations of organisational surveillance (Sewell & Barker, 2006); the substantive studies of specific organisational discourses such as the discourses of 'uncertainty' (Shenhav & Weitz, 2000), 'corporate strategy' (Knights & Morgan, 1991), 'total quality management' (Zbaracki, 1998) and so on.

Nevertheless, returning to Mumby and Clair's definition, central to their exposition is the construction of organisational identity (as indicated in the phrase *'sense of who they are'*) through discourses. This bridges our discussion to organisational identity, which is the central concern of this thesis.

While some scholars have attempted to define organisational identity as 'the set of beliefs shared by top managers and stakeholders about the central, enduring, and distinctive characteristics of an organisation' (Scott & Lane, 2000, p. 4), generally, according to Jack and Lorbiecki (2007, p. S80), 'there is a lack of consensus on the meaning of organisational identity'. Fortunately, among the various attempts (see ibid., pp. S80-S82), there seems to be at least an agreement to reject a static and essentialist understanding of identity, but to conceptualise it as a 'multilevel construct' in ongoing processes, namely, a more constructivist understanding. Social/cultural theorists such as Mouffe and Stuart Hall prefer the term *identification* to *identity* (Isin & Wood, 1999, p. 15), exactly because *identification* 'refers to a process of articulation, a suturing, an

over-determination not a subsumption' (Stuart Hall, 1996, p. 3). While the identity with which Mouffe and Hall are concerned is in the realm of politics and culture, it is believed that this principle can be felicitously borrowed for the current purpose in elucidating organisational identity. Namely, we shall have the sensibility to see an organisation's identity as an identification process which is on-going and is never stable, fixed or unified. Consequently, following Karreman and Rylander's (2008) preference of treating organisational identity as the 'response to the question: who are we?' (p. 120), and very similarly what Alvesson and Willmott (2002, p. 625) call 'central life interest', this study also adopts a generic take on the term 'organisational identity', involving largely posing identity-relevant questions such as: 'who are they (the organisation)?', 'what's their *raison d'être*?', 'what do they believe in and not', 'what do they do and not?' This generic, as opposed to technical or 'reificationist' (Karreman & Alvesson, 2001, pp. 60, 87), definition of organisational identity is flexible and generative exactly because it emphasises not the outcomes but the processes, and this allows for more dynamic analyses of the organisation(s) studied. This characterisation of identity as processual identification is an important one that will reverberate throughout the whole thesis and make connections at various points in the data analysis sections. It also addresses Chia's (2000, p. 513) concern that 'what is less commonly understood is *how* this reality gets constructed in the first place and what sustains it.'(original emphasis)

Regarding the construction of organisational identity, it is important to point out that identity is certainly not constructed *solely* through discourse, and according to Karreman and Rylander (2008, p. 107), scholars from both the traditions of social psychology and symbolic interactionism have proposed what is by now a relatively established idea that identities are created in social processes/interactions which can encompass a wide range of activities which can be non-discursive or extra-discursive. Nevertheless, this thesis accentuates the discursivities of and within social processes and primarily focuses on those discourses which can be seen to actively construct the identities of organisations. The following review of literature is also located at the

intersection between organisational identity and discourse/discursive activities.

1.2.1 Modes and structures of discourse

One interesting and illuminating study of organisational discourse in this vein is Heracleous's (2006) research on the three discourses which characterise and constitute the UK-based global human resource consultancy firm People Associates (PA). In PA, there were found a *dominant discourse*, which is one about corporate success through the means of customer satisfaction and customer value-adding; a *strategic change discourse*, one which stresses the need to make organisational changes in order to serve PA's customers better and thus make it even more successful; and lastly a *counter-discourse*, which emanates from the marginalised support/administrative staff in PA, opposing, protesting, challenging or ridiculing the dominant groups and their discourses in humorous but ultimately impotent and insignificant ways. The *aggregate* of these three discourses, Heracleous argues, constitutes the identities of PA as an organisation, and offers explanations to many of the organisational processes and phenomena as well as human behaviours to be found in PA.

The brilliance of this study lies in that it suggests that 'the constructive potential of discourse is based primarily on its deeper structures, and on the consonance of surface communicative actions with these structures' (ibid., p. 1060). By 'deeper structures', Heracleous meant the deeper level discursive structures which are the 'persistent features of discourse that transcend individual texts […] and pervade bodies of communicative actions as a whole in the long term' (ibid., p. 1061). In the context of PA, the deeper discursive structures are the rhetoric about corporate success and customer satisfaction as the essential path to that success (i.e. the dominant discourse). This discourse is regarded as a 'structure' because it underpins a variety of other forms of communicative texts found to be circulating in the organisation. For example, when a junior consultant of PA fails to attend a meeting, s/he justifies his/her action by arguing that s/he was too inexperienced to make any meaningful contribution to

customer solution anyway; when a senior consultant fails to show up at a training session, s/he provides the excuse that s/he was obliged to serve a particular important customer; and the management team even justifies mistreating support/administrative staff on the (unjustifiable) grounds that the latter do not contribute to customer solution in any significant way. All these varieties of petty discourses or, in Heracleous' words, 'surface level communicative actions', are based upon the foundational discourse of corporate success and customer satisfaction and value-adding as the canonical ways of achieving that success.

Similarly, the *strategic change discourse* which is also prevalent in the organisation 'draws its legitimacy by being located in the structures and constructions of the dominant discourse, exhibiting a co-optive relationship with the dominant discourse' (ibid., p. 1060). Lastly, the counter-discourse is patterned by its oppositions to the dominant discourse, but also exactly because of this antagonistic relationship with the dominant, it is largely impotent, though it does necessarily constitute an integral part of the organisation's identities and processes.

The significance of Heracleous' conception, namely, layerising organisational discourse into the 'deeper level discursive structures' and the 'surface level communicative actions' and understanding the organisation's identities and processes as the dynamic relations between these two layers lies in that it avoids the superficial thematic categorisation of discourses into parallel groups/genres in an organisational setting. Instead, it gives a much more insightful structural view of discourse, which is not only a much more powerful framework of understanding the organisation and its identities and processes, but also a sharp way of making sense of the power relations in the organisation, as Heracleous concludes:

> This study has revealed an organisational field wherein a dominant mode of discourse forms an overarching structure where other discourse must be located if they are to be taken seriously by those in power and by members of the dominant sub-culture. (ibid., p. 1080)

Another important point made in this study is the fact that the discourses in PA, particularly the dominant one, are not stripped of contextuality, but in fact are shown to have drawn from the wider contextual discourses at a societal level. It was rightly pointed out that the dominant discourse on corporate success through customer satisfaction and customer value-adding are connected to what du Gay and Salaman (1992, cited in Heracleous, 2006, p. 1081) referred to as the 'discourse of enterprise, emphasising the ''sovereign customer'' as the basis of organisational arrangements, as well as industry-wide concerns with ''adding value'' '. This highlights to us the fact that organisations do not exist in a vacuum, and organisational discourse should also be studied against the wider discursive contexts surrounding it—a theme accorded also by Hardy and Phillips (1999) in their study of the Canadian refugee system, in which they demonstrated how local level discourses are 'influenced by broader discourses at the societal level that enable and constrain' (p. 1) the local level discursive activities.

1.2.2 Multiple organisations and multiple identities

The study by Phillips and Hardy (1997) on the UK refugee system looks at the construction of organisational identity as situated in an inter-organisational field. But instead of looking at the various involved organisations directly, the breakthrough point of this study is actually studying the discursive construction of the refugee identity by looking at how relevant organisations/institutions (such as the UK government, the NGOs, the grassroots refugee organisations) used discursive strategies in defining and constructing the 'refugee' concept. For example, the government deployed the discourses of 'bogus refugee' and 'economic migrants' to the end of restricting the number of refugees acceptable to the country; in the NGO's discourses, the refugees are fashioned as 'clients' to be professionally served; whereas in the refugee grassroots organisations' discourse, refugees are not miserable creatures to be patronised or suspected, but are equal partners and constituents in the society.

But crucially, from these 'warring' discourses about refugee identity what is also negotiated into shape are the distinct identities of the various organisations involved. As Phillips and Hardy point out: 'because discourse has implications for the ''speaker'' it also produces organisational identities.' (ibid., p. 181) In fact, the various organisations' identities are defined in inextricable relations to their respective attitudes and ideologies about the refugees or refugee applicants. Hence, there seems to be a close link between the organisational identities and the identity of the 'object' which is their concern. The significant theoretical contributions of this study are that: first, instead of viewing organisation as a relatively closed system, it broadens our field of vision by situating the organisational identity construction processes in an inter-organisational environment; second, it highlights the close link between organisational identity construction and the identity construction of an object/entity that those organisations deal with. These two theoretical contributions are derived from a unique feature about this study, which is that these organisations are public institutions rather than private companies or enterprises, which are more often than not the conventional 'target' of organisational research. However, exactly because of this uniqueness, it offers a powerful analytic prototype for discursive studies of organisations that share similar characters, arguably including the type of organisation that this study is concerned with.

1.2.3 Identity construction and space

Remotely echoing the above UK refugee system study is Brown and Humphreys' (2006) research on a UK further education college, because in this study, what the authors discovered was how the constituent groups of the college 'drew on their understandings of place to construct and promote distinctive versions of their, and the organisation's, identities…' (ibid., p. 248). In other words, in this study, the linchpin (or discursive resource) upon which the discourses of the organisational members rely is the spaces and buildings, rather than human objects (i.e. refugees) as in the UK refugee system study. The authors demonstrate how various constituent groups of the

organisation, including senior management team, teaching staff etc, 'discursively problematize' (ibid., p. 248) a particular site of the college by discoursing about it respectively as an economic resource to be efficiently managed and exploited, a dingy dysfunctional place to be demolished, and a place with some fond memories and so on. Through these differential discourses about the site, the constituents of the organisation assert their own understandings of the organisation's identity as either an education business or as a place for education and pedagogy for the local community, and correspondingly their own identities as managers of a business or as educators.

The insights from this study are at least threefold. First, it highlights that artefacts, buildings, or more broadly speaking, space and other inanimate objects can also be a discursive resource upon which organisational members draw to construct their realities and identities. Secondly, it echoes the study of UK refugee system by alluding again that often there is a dialectical relationship between the discursive construction of organisational identity on the one hand and the discursive construction of a related 'object' (a discursive resource) on the other. Taken to an abstract level, it matters not what nature the discursive resource or discursive linchpin is of, be it people or building; what is important is the revelation that there is often a focus which the discursive construction process revolves around, and that focus is key to the understanding of the discursive processes in the organisation. Thirdly, it demonstrates that organisational identity is plurivocal, consisting of different viewpoints and assertions which may be conflicting. The subordinate or peripheral groups within an organisation have limited framing power in relation to organisational identity; yet, within their limits, they *do* assert their influence; and their resistant voices and sub-identities are necessarily an integral part of the total of the organisation's identity. One common criticism of poststructuralist theories has been that it glosses over the subjects' agency to challenge or at least negotiate with the discourses that produce them, and indeed research has been done to illustrate this agency (e.g. Holmer-Nadesan, 1996). This last theme is one already somewhat alluded to in Heracleous' (2006) examination of the counter-discourse in PA, and will be explored

further in the following studies.

1.2.4 Identity construction through narratives

One specific form of discourse that has been identified as particularly relevant to the construction of organisational identity is the narrative.

Chreim (2005) and Brown (2006) contend that while some theories regarding organisational identities seem to imply that organisations *possess* certain identities that are relatively enduring and intrinsic, in fact organisational identities are not intrinsic or enduring qualities. Instead, they are discursive constructs which are continuously constitutive of the organisation; and that narratives are one primary means through which such continuous discursive construction and reconstruction are done. The general idea underpinning this is even reflected in philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre's convincing claim that 'human beings are ''essentially story telling animals'', and that ''there is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources. […]'' ' (McMylor, 1994, p. 149). In other words, narrative is fundamentally the way people *make sense* of things in their society, and this can be inferred to include, specifically, their perceptions and convictions towards their organisations and hence organisational identities. While it has been rightly pointed out that MacIntyre meant narrative rather abstractly than literally (ibid), it should nevertheless be seen as the same line of thought being extended into the field of organisational studies when organisational analysts such as Brown (2006, p. 734) suggest, in more or less the same terms, that 'people are natural tellers and interpreters of narratives', i.e. people think in narrative form and thus the reality people construct is a narrative one.

One understanding regarding the way narratives shape the identities of organisations is that 'narratives structure systems of presence and absence in organisations,

insinuating particular sets of meanings into everyday practices that are represented as authoritative while excluding alternative conceptions' (S Hall, 1985, p. 109). Whilst this is certainly true, Brown (2006) advocates a more inclusive conception by suggesting that the identities of organisations as 'being constituted by the *totality* of collective identity-relevant narratives by the participants' (p. 735), the crucial thing here being that these narratives need not agree with each other. In other words, the identities of organisations need not be founded on *narrative hegemony*. Instead, a given organisation's identities can be characterised by narrative consensus and/or dissensus, and it is through such negotiations, continuities and fractures that a certain *set* of identities emerge. This is also central to the debate between those who see organisations as *dialogical* as opposed to *monological* (Grant, Keenoy, & Oswick, 1998, p. 7). Nevertheless, while the monological view has been largely discredited, struggles for monopoly between contending discourses and narratives can be expected and those that emerge in dominant positions in organisational lives vis-à-vis others are more central to the identities of that organisation. Further more, such 'dialogical struggle' (Keenoy, Oswick, & Grant, 1997, p. 150) often reflects both the power relations within the organisations and also the contextual power relations within which the organisation finds itself entangled.

In a similar way, Chreim's (2005) study of a Canadian bank's organisational identities through the analyses of the lines of continuity, change and confluence in the bank's identity-shaping narratives demonstrates the indeterminate and fluid nature of organisational identities. Such identities are plurivocal and liable to continuity, or change, or both at the same time, i.e. confluence. One example was the narrative (or discourse) of the bank being a 'first bank', referring to the bank's long history and the fact that it had been the pioneer actor in the Canadian banking scene. While traditionally this 'discourse of first' served to emphasise the bank's reliability and stability, in more recent years, the same discourse began to carry alternative connotations, namely, *'first-as-innovative'*. That is to say, there is still the narrative and discourse of the bank being a 'first bank', but the emphasis has now shifted to

'first' in the sense that it has always been an innovative organisation. Through both the continuity and change of the connotation of the discourse of 'first bank', the reconstruction of one aspect of the bank's identities is exhibited. With regard to this, Chreim (2005, p. 586) comments:

> [a]bstract identity attributes allow a variety of applications and interpretations as environments change. […] *First* is an 'umbrella theme' that persists as an identity-defining label under which different attributes can be added or deleted. (original emphasis)

Most interestingly, it is not difficult to recognise the resonance of this statement with Heracleous's layered framework of discursive structures and actions mentioned earlier. Such a resonance suggests that there is certain integrative potential between a more structuralist approach (e.g.: Heracleous, 2006; Phillips & Hardy, 2002) and a more substance-centred approach (e.g.: A. D. Brown, 2006; Chreim, 2005) to discourse analysis, and this potential will be explored and exploited in my own research.

1.2.5 Organisational ideology

Lastly, another angle from which the discursivity of organisation can be examined is through looking at the relationship between discourse and organisational ideology. Historically, the term 'ideology' has acquired a derogative connotation by virtue of the Marxian usage of the term to mean false consciousness. However, in the current context, a more neutral meaning is adopted. As Mumby (1988, p. 71) describes it:

> [i]deology does not simply provide people with a belief system through which they orient themselves to the world, but (that) instead it plays a much more fundamental role in the process by which social actors create the reality of the world in which they live.

Understood this way, it is not difficult to see that ideology and identity are in fact the different sides to the same coin. Put into organisational context, they can both be traced to the fundamental identity-relevant questions as to what the members of an

organisation perceive to be the purposes of the organisation and how that organisation should function, and so forth.

It is further suggested that ideology is also discursive in character (ibid., p. 125), and consequently, by analysing organisational ideology discursively, the causes, formation, working, and implications of organisational ideology could be examined. At a conceptual level, the discursivity of ideology is manifested in that

> Ideologies subject and qualify subjects by *telling* them, *relating* them to, and *making them recognize*: 1. What exists, and its corollary, what does not exist: that is who we are, what the world is, what nature, society, men and women are like. In this way we acquire a sense of identity, becoming conscious of what is real and true; the visibility of the world is thereby structured by the distribution of spotlights, shadows, and darkness. 2. What is good, right, just, beautiful, attractive, enjoyable, and its oppositions. In this way our desires become structured and normalized. 3. What is possible and impossible; our sense of the mutability of our being-in-the-world and the consequences of change are hereby patterned, and our hopes, ambitions and fears given shape. (Therborn, 1980, p. 18, emphases added).

At a practical level, Mumby (1988, p. 83) opines that the goals of telling and making people believe *what exists*, *what is good* and *what is possible* are achieved through 'systems of signification' or, to use another term, discursive practices, which in most organisations take the form of stories, jokes, rituals, memoranda, meetings and so on.

Mumby then went on to analyse concrete examples of organisational discourse, especially narratives, which promote, solidify, and entrench particular forms of organisational ideologies. However, he concludes that all these ideologies are invariably hegemonic, serving to reproduce organisational conditions privileging the interests of certain groups over and above others; and the privileged groups are always managerial in nature. But this should not be seen to stand in contradiction with the plurivocality of organisational narrative/discourse as suggested earlier, because narratives can be hegemonic in intent without being hegemonic in consequence, just

as Oglensky (1995, p. 1042) points out that 'ambivalence rather than subjugation is the more likely result of attempts at identity-imposition'. The important revelation from Mumby's analysis is that ideology should be included in the discursive studies of organisations, and the incorporation of this notion enriches the vocabulary and conceptual repertoire with which we can engage in such studies.

In the above review of literature revolving around the discursive construction of organisational identity, a number of studies are examined and their implications, insights and significance discussed. This can be taken as an extended exposition of what 'organisational identity construction' is supposed to mean specifically in this study, but also as a demonstration of how such construction had been analysed by other researchers. Due to their different approaches, theoretical concerns/priorities and the evident complex criss-crossing lines of commonality, continuity and differentiation among them, it has been difficult to integrate them into a more systematic or thematic format. At the same time, this review of literature is intended to be more indicative than exhaustive—indeed, a huge number of discourse studies have been carried out ever since this perspective made its way into the field of organisational research in the late 1980s to early 90s (M. Parker, 1992), it is unfeasible for this thesis to include more here. However, in Chapters Four to Six, more such studies will be consulted in order to assist the analysis of data and discussions wherever relevant. Nevertheless, it is believed that the mini-review of literature has demonstrated clearly the potential of a discursive approach in generating novel and reflexive ways of understanding organisations and their identities.

1.3   Trade Union and Trade Union Theories

However, one type of organisation which seems to have evaded this 'discursive turn' entirely is the trade union. Research applying constructionist/discursive approaches to trade union studies seems almost non-existent. Undoubtedly, to study trade unions from a postmodernist and constructionist angle is a seriously underdeveloped and

under-explored approach. There seem to be at least two possible reasons for this.

Firstly, it might be due to the almost unchallenged realist ontological and epistemological assumptions underlying the vast majority of trade union related research. It is impossible to cite examples to substantiate this statement because if one were to cite, one might as well end up citing endless cases of trade union research. Fortunately, Hyman in his article *Theory and Industrial Relations* (1994) does confirm that apart from a modicum of empiricism, the major ontological and epistemological frame in industrial relations research has been a 'critical political economy' (p. 171) approach, which is the manifestation of realism or, to be more specific, *critical realism*, in the context of this substantive area (critical realism being the philosophical conviction which maintains that reality could be understood in terms of underlying *structures* which give rise to *generative mechanisms*, which in turn *over*-determine the events and things that we observe (Sayer, 2000, pp. 8-10)). Hyman himself also seems to espouse critical realism, which to him seems the appropriate way of understanding industrial relations. There are surely certain very strong reasons behind researchers' unanimous 'choice' of (critical) realism as the foundational research philosophy in this field. For example, if one were to view the economic/social fundamentals of human society as the underlying structures; and capitalism, political systems, geographical and culture patterns as examples of generative mechanisms, then trade unionism and trade union behaviours (either at national or international levels) can indeed be understood as the observable empirical emergence *over*determined by those underlying structures and mechanisms. After all, central to industrial relations research are the most real and practical aspects of social life: employment, pay, welfare, work-related regulations, etc. When engaging with such practical topics, perhaps there is a compelling case for the (critical) realist worldview. However, the apparent explanatory power of realism does not automatically lead to its claim to 'truth', bearing in mind that according to postmodernist thinking, realism and its explanatory system might well be a/nother 'regime of truth' (Foucault, 1980) which is self-contained and self-fulfilling. As

social/linguistic constructionist perspective is to be applied in this study, the usually taken-for-granted realist premise of trade union research has to be called into question.

A second and related reason might have been that, given the taken-for-granted realism and the discipline's focus on practices and facts, industrial relations and/or trade union research had traditionally been an area of study where the presence or position of theory is not afforded an overt prominence (Hyman, 1989, pp. 120-121). It is thus not surprising that this field had not been influenced much by postmodernism, which is a highly theoretical movement or, indeed, a 'meta-theory' (Hyman, 1994, p. 170; M. Parker, 1992, p. 11).

It would be wrong though to suggest that there had not been theories about trade unionism, for necessarily 'theory is everywhere' (Hyman, 1994, p. 167), and when they are not explicit, they are often assumed. Secondly, some work (e.g. Clarke & Clements, 1977; Martin, 1989; Moses, 1990; Poole, 1984) has indeed been undertaken to review, compare and synthesise the variegated theories that emerged along the historical development of trade unionism. Two interesting points relevant to this research can be drawn from these literatures.

Firstly, central to these works and the trade union theories examined in them are the purpose, *raison d'etre*, functions, and by extension also the identities of trade union. However, without any exception, all these theories are found to be conformant to the 'modernist' view of organisations (as mentioned earlier in Cooper & Burrell, 1988) in the sense that they all accentuate and only accentuate the fact that trade unions are there to fulfil certain rational purposes. In particular, these theories are predominantly concerned with what political objectives and concrete political outcomes trade unions should aim to achieve and how they should craft their strategies/tactics in relation to the state, the workers, and other societal stakeholders in order to achieve those objectives and aims. The following two quotes are typical of these works and

illustrative of my point here:

> […] functions of trade unions within the pluralistic industrial society, and draws attention to the potential that trade unions might have for improving the general quality of life not only for their own members but also for the community at large. (Moses, 1990, p. 3)

> Indeed, the behaviour of trade unions needs to be informed by theoretical insights into their position and role in society so that the goals in the respective programmes might be achieved by means of a rational strategy. (ibid., p. 230)

It is not the aim of this research to deny or dismiss the purpose or role of trade unionism. What it protests is this rather imbalanced, unreflexive and unidirectional way of understanding trade union as organisations. By viewing unions only as political organs at the societal level, a microscopic vision of trade union *qua* organisation has failed to emerge.

The second point emerges from Martin's (1989) comparison of the characters of general organisation theory and the characters of theory of trade union. It is worth quoting his text at some length:

> In the general literature of organization theory, purpose has usually been treated as an empirical problem. The emphasis, in other words, has tended to be on the goals which an organization actually pursues and/or claims to pursue. What that comes down to is the purposes *attributed to an organization by those who comprise it*. Similarly, conflicts about organizational goals have usually been perceived, in the literature, in terms of decisions among *the constituents of the organization concerned*.

> In the case of trade unions, however, their leaders and members have never exhausted the list of those with firm views about union purpose. Outsiders have been perennially eager to proclaim, and often to impose, opinions about the purposes that trade unions *ought* to pursue. (added emphasis)

What these words seem to say is that in general organisation theory the constructedness of organisational purpose and by implication identity has been widely

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recognised whereas when it comes to trade unions this is not the case. The reason for this is probably down to the political character that trade unions have almost always been assigned with, in contrast with the assumed apolitical nature of more quotidian organisations such as companies as they are studied in the discipline of organisation and management studies. What is witnessed here is the thick wall built along disciplinary boundaries which protects the already established epistemological frameworks in a certain discipline, preserves its inertia and prevents the incursion of epistemological positions that are alien. In this regard, the walls around the 'critical political economy' paradigm in the discipline of trade union studies seem particularly thick and nearly impenetrable thus far. The consequence has been that whenever trade union and its purposes become the subject of analysis, the analysis gets performed through a lens the resolution of which remains at a level sensitive only to macro-political/economic/social factors. Right as it is to take into account of these factors, what has received little attention is the micro level examination of trade unions *qua* organisations, to see how its own constituents define, constitute and construct them.

The only trade union related study that seems to have been informed of a postmodernist discursive vocabulary that I know of is Carter *et al.*'s (2003) study on the Liverpool dockers' union, in which the authors applied a rather popular concept in discursive organisational studies, namely, that of polyphony (for examples of this concept in organisational studies, see Belova, King, & Sliwa, 2008 ; Sullivan & McCarthy, 2008 and Issue 29(4) of *Organization Studies* 2008) in their analysis of the discourse and organising activities mediated through the use of the Internet. Suggesting that the Internet allowed dockers to achieve worldwide support and resonance for their actions by drawing on different voices and ideas from members, the authors see the use of Internet as an instance of polyphony in trade union organising which has promising potential. However, drawing on a single concept merely to assist the analysis, this study does not amount to a fundamental attempt to experiment with a discursive perspective in trade union studies. More importantly, as

the authors write: 'Creative organisations, rather than provide strong leadership that silences dissent, should use whatever polyphony they have available or can tap into. The task for leaders of unions is to find strategies that advance their members' interests' (p. 303), it is evident that the authors simply 'borrowed' the concept of polyphony for their study which ultimately has a value-driven goal. The study is thus essentially still modernist and utilitarian.

To be fair, there has been a significant body of literature which looks at the internal dynamics of trade unions as organisations, mainly centred around themes such as union democracy (e.g. Fairbrother, 1984) or the lack of it in the forms of union elitism (e.g. Korkut, 2006) and/or bureaucracy/bureaucratisation (see R. Hall, Harley, & Tomkins, 2000; Kelly & Heery, 1994 for reviews of literature in this vein); member participation, satisfaction, attitudes and commitments (e.g. Goslinga & Sverke, 2003) and so on. There are even studies (e.g. Heery, 2006; Kelly & Heery, 1994) dedicated to studying full-time trade union officers' work behaviours and their internal organisation including work load allocation, hierarchisation, reward and monitor/control systems, process of policy formation, and their interaction with rank and file members. Although these studies are indeed more inward-looking and thus constitute a different strand as compared to the macro political economy perspective, they do not really add to our understanding of union identity due to their obsession with a functionalist and utilitarian outlook (i.e. 'how can one make a union democratic or more participative?' etc). In other words, they did not manage to break away from the modernist paradigm either.

Among the very few who have actually dealt with 'trade union identity' is Hyman, who conceptualises union identities as dialectically relating to 'the intersecting dynamics of interest, democracy, agenda and power' (Hyman, 1996, p. 63) and maintains that such dynamics can be seen to give rise to three main trade union identities in the European context, struggling with each other for supremacy while coexisting uneasily. This idea was further developed into the main theme in his

Understanding European Trade Unionism (2001), in which he further treats 'trade union identity, ideology and strategy as outcomes of a tension between orientations which address respectively the labour market, class relations and the constructive role of labour in society' (p. x). With the assistance of a diagram which he calls the 'eternal triangle' (Figure 1.1), he suggests that there can be three ideal typical trade unionisms. In the first, unions are interest organisations predominantly for the representation of occupational interest. This is most forcefully articulated in the 'business unionism' in the USA and to lesser extents in Britain and other English-speaking countries. A second unionism is what is often called a 'social partnership' unionism, the main lookout of which is the social integration of labour and the advancement of social justice. This, according to Hyman (p. 3), is found more prevalent in the continental European countries with social-democratic and Christian-democratic traditions. Lastly, focusing on class relations is the radical trade unionism in which unions are the vanguard of the working class and 'schools of war' in the struggle between labour and capital.

Market

Class   Society
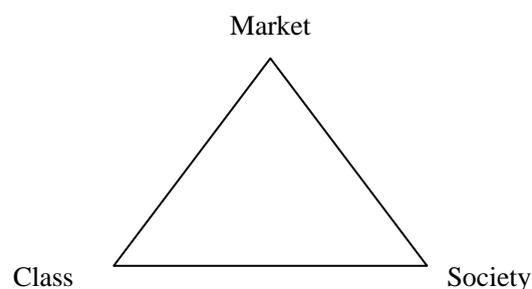
Figure 1.1 The Eternal Triangle of Trade Union Identities (Hyman, 2001, p. 4)

Importantly, Hyman suggests that these contrasting identities can be seen to reflect the specificities of national and historical circumstances and the accumulative effects of these factors. The second half of his book mainly argues that the British trade unionism can be seen as traditionally resting on the market-class axis, the German unionism on society-market axis, and Italian unionism on class-society axis.

It is important to acknowledge that Hyman did cast his typology of trade union

identities in the Weberian term of 'ideal types', and suggest that it should be treated only as an analytic reference system, and that 'in practice, union identities and ideologies are normally located *within* the triangle' (p. 4, original emphasis). However, my criticism of Hyman is that, by casting the contrast of trade union identities in light the of geographically-indexed (either cross-national or cross-continental) contextual differences—as he himself admits by writing: 'I focus on what I perceive as dominant tendencies at national level, largely neglecting differences between levels and sectors' (p. x)—he inevitably lifted his analytic lens to a very high and therefore macroscopic level. The opportunity to microscopically study trade union identities is again lost.

Our earlier literature review indicates that such opportunities have been encountered and profitably exploited at the 'linguistic/discursive turn' in the field of organisational studies. It is perhaps now time to experiment this approach in the realm of trade union studies. The use of a novel theoretical and methodological approach can potentially provide fresh insights, for if 'every way of seeing is also a way of not seeing' (Burke, 1965, p. 49), then arguably the conventional and rather entrenched theoretical and epistemological premises upon which the vast majority of trade union research is based might well be regarded as obstacles on our way of achieving a fresh vision of the matter. In fact, this new vision need not even be antagonistic to the conventional vision, but can 'appropriately be a complementary practice to other modes inquiry, over which it will have specific but not total advantages' (Coupland, 1988, p. 5). Thus, this study, by applying a postmodernist and, specifically, linguistic/discursive-constructionist approach to trade unions and their identities, seeks to see things in a way(s) that they had not been seen before.

1.4   India as the Research Site and Indian Trade Unionism

This study focuses upon the identities of trade unions in India, because this country is recognised as a very exciting field on which to explore union identity construction by virtue that pluralism and diversity are believed to be the hallmarks of Indian trade

unionism. I give below a general overview of Indian trade unionism before introducing the specific type of trade union to be studied.

According to Pandhe (2009), the modern Indian working class was a creation of the industrial capitalism largely brought to India by the British colonial power in the early 19th century. As one could imagine, working and living conditions at that time were extremely harsh, and spontaneous outbursts of workers' resistance against employers were recorded, with the first large scale industrial strike reported in 1862. Informal trade unions were formed since this period, and in 1920, when the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) was formed as a response to the formation of International Labour Organisation (ILO), 125 unions came under the banner of AITUC (ibid., p. 8). Subsequently in 1926, the Indian Trade Union Act was passed by the British Government, for the proper registration of trade unions. There were also said to be various intersections and mutual reinforcements between the trade union movement and the Indian Independence movement (ibid.). Alongside the militant trade union activities during this period, it is also observed on the other hand, perhaps somewhat counter-intuitively, that 'Mohandas Gandhi's strategy of moral resistance to colonial rule…gave impetus to a tradition of trade unionism that opposes strikes' (Candland, 2001, p. 71). Thus there were both a radical and a peaceful element to the Indian trade unionism tradition.

The post-Independence (1947) Indian trade unionism is characterised by what Candland calls 'involuted pluralism' (Candland, 2001, p. 85) and patterns of divided political allegiances. On the one hand, trade unions have flourished thanks to a relatively high level of political freedom. The number of registered trade unions increased steadily from 11,312 in year 1961 to 64,817 in 1999, and the membership of these unions increased from around 4 million to almost 6.5 million during the same period (*Manpower Profile India Yearbook 2004*, 2005, p. 285). On the other hand, a pattern has emerged for political parties to develop or enfold trade unions loyal to their respective causes and ideologies. To the political parties, these unions are not

only deep vote banks, but are also powerful weapons because of the unions' capabilities to mobilise the masses. Each major political party maintains what is called in the Indian parlance a 'Central Trade Union', which is a confederation of numerous trade unions in various industries and sectors that are in line with a particular party's ideology. For example, the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) is the trade union wing to the Indian National Congress (INC), and the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) is the trade union wing of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), or CPI(M) as is commonly known in India. There are also central trade unions which claim to be independent of any political party, for example, the Hind Mazdoor Sabha [2] (HMS).

Currently there are in total eleven government-recognised central trade unions in India, and at least a dozen more which do not enjoy such recognition. The countless trade unions together with their centres are entangled in extremely complex networks of struggle for political and economic interests. The scene has been described by some of my informants as 'very messy'.

Political unionism is believed to be both the strength and weakness of the Indian trade union institution. For instance, through the influence of the political parties, although an IMF Structural Adjustment Program was imposed in India in 1991, the trade unions had been potent in resisting privatisation, and by 2001, it was said that the Government of India had not been able to complete the privatisation of a single central public sector unit (Candland, 2001, p. 81). However, in more recent times, political unionism is widely viewed as a hindrance to trade unions' social relevance. According to Candland, 'the contention that political unionism fails to adequately respond to the deep changes that have been occurring in late-industrialising economies, societies, and cultures is now commonplace even among unionists' (2001, p. 84), and Pandhe suggests that the wide division of the trade union movement along political lines has considerably reduced the bargaining power of the working class

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[2] Hindi, which approximately means 'Workers Assembly of India'

(2009, p. 19). Given such vast diversities in political inclination and ideological positions of trade unions in the country, India seems to provide an exciting and conducive environment in which this research can take place.

1.4.1   Indian Maritime Unions

Among the countless sectors and trade unions in India, maritime unions representing seafarers are chosen as the subject of this study. The first reason for this is purely circumstantial, because this MPhil research project has been funded by the Nippon Foundation with the purpose of investigating issues related to seafarers worldwide. But the second and more exciting reason for this choice is that the three ITF (International Transport Workers' Federation)-affiliated[3] maritime unions in India, which are anonymised in this thesis as Union A, Union B and Union C, seem to exhibit so drastically distinctive characteristics that the comparative study of their respective identity construction promises to be an interesting and potentially fruitful enterprise. Greater details of the three unions will be the subject of Chapter Three, but, since this research ventures into the substantive area of maritime trade unionism, it becomes necessary to also succinctly summarise the state of research in this field.

1.5   Research on maritime/shipping trade unionism

Interestingly, characteristics of existing research on maritime trade unionism seem to further affirm the overall rationale of this study. Within the relatively limited body of literature in this field, one problem seems to be that so far researchers have chosen to focus primarily on the transnational/global dimensions of maritime unionism, with a particular interest in the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) and the

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[3] Being affiliated with ITF gives a union a significant boost of strength both in terms of its organising power and financial resources. In terms of organising, once a union joins the ITF's global network of affiliates, it may be able to request through ITF solidarity actions or other forms of co-operation from transport unions around the globe. On the financial side, if a seafarer is working on an ITF agreement ship, a portion of the seafarer's salary is automatically deducted and transferred to ITF as a seafarers' fund. ITF then distributes this fund to its affiliates according to the seafarers' membership. In addition, affiliates can also apply separate funding from ITF for special projects or actions.

European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF) (e.g.: Lillie, 2004, 2005, 2006; Turnbull, 2006, 2007). This is not surprising, because global unionism, as embodied in supranational union organisations such as the ITF and ETF, is a prominent feature of unionism in this field; and it has been argued that this globalism as a strategy of revitalisation has been especially powerful, with concrete cases of effective resistance. For instance, under the auspices of the ITF, the first and so far only working transnational wage bargaining mechanism that actually sets wage standards was established in the shipping industry (Lillie, 2004). Furthermore, in light of the keen academic interest in 'global unionism' in the recent decade (see for example: Borgers, 1999; Bronfenbrenner, 2007; Fairbrother & Hammer, 2005; Gordon & Turner, 2000; Lillie & Martinez Lucio, 2004; Thorpe, 1999), the case of global maritime trade unionism is believed to be illuminating, bearing potential positive implications for other industries. Not only is the ITF system believed to provide a possible prototype for the advancement of global unionism in other industries; the current global regulatory/governance framework in maritime shipping which owes significantly to ITF's constructive efforts is also believed to supply a template, however tentative, for the possible emergence of similar regulator/governance frameworks and models in other globalised or globalising industries (Lillie, 2006).

Yet, it would take perhaps no more than a second thought to realise that all these are again the 'symptoms' of the modernism and productivism that overwhelmingly characterise the current trade union research 'paradigm' (Kuhn, 1962, sees the rationales of scientific disciplines as 'paradigms', which are subject to shifts and replacements in non-cumulative, and even non-rational ways). The presumptions that trade unions must fulfil certain normative objectives and responsibilities and that they are positively political entities which should participate in policy, regulation, and governance could not be more evident in this existent body of literature.

The downside to this has been that seafaring unions are severely under-researched from a localised, internally-reflexive and microscopic perspective. For example,

negligible research has been done to understand what national level seafarers' unions are like, what are their identities and behaviours and so on. This research gap is uncomfortably conspicuous not least because it is these unions which *are* the direct experiences of millions of seafarers worldwide.

Even under the modernist and productivist paradigm of trade union research, there is enough reason to demand a better understanding of the local national unions. As Lillie (2006, p. 4) points out, although 'without the ITF system, many seafaring unions, including those in low wage labour supply countries, would have no influence in the labour market at all', it is equally true that transnational working class resistance, such as that demonstrated by what the ITF system has so far achieved, is 'mostly a construct of national labour union activity (ibid., p. 11)'. Therefore, instead of attributing a sense of superior importance to ITF by conceiving of it as the 'head union' commanding the multitudes of 'body unions' at national and local levels, it is perhaps more appropriate to view the relationship between the two as a symbiotic one, namely, that their survival and efficacy are mutually dependent. This more balanced view of the current trade unionism structure within the maritime scene demands a balanced understanding of both sides of the equation. Exactly because so far most research has focused on the international, transnational and global dimension of maritime trade unionism, there is now a compelling case for attempting at an understanding of the national/parochial aspect of it. This particular study takes a first step towards this end through examining the unions' identity construction from a discursive perspective.

In the next chapter, the methodological issues involved in this research and an account of the fieldwork will be presented.

CHAPTER TWO

2.1   Methodology: Discourse Analysis

As the overall objective of this study necessarily implies, the overarching methodology to be adopted is Discourse Analysis (DA). Having already clarified the definition of discourse in the previous chapter, by extension, *discourse analysis* is then the structured investigation and analysis of the set of texts, concepts and their practices such as their production, dissemination and circulation which bring objects into being. Two fundamental characteristics of DA, according to Hardy and Phillips (1999, p. 2), are that 'they are interested in the constructive effects of texts and they are necessarily interpretive'. It is of paramount importance to stress here that, as they (2002, p. 3) also point out, discourse analysis is really more of an *methodology* than a *method*. It is an analytic ontology and epistemology which involve a set of assumptions concerning the constitutive effect of discourse/language/talk (p. 5). In other words, it should be understood 'not as a delimitable technique or method or level of analysis, but as an orientation to social explanation' (Coupland, 1988, p. 6). Therefore, discourse analysis should not be treated on the same level as the specific techniques/methods concerned with specific forms of data. Just as Phillips and Hardy further assert, 'what makes a research technique discursive or not is not the method itself, but the use of that method to carry out an interpretive analysis of some form of text with a view to providing an understanding of discourse and its role in constituting social reality' (2002, p. 10). Consequently, the specific data collection and analysis techniques and methods to be dealt with in the section after this should be considered subordinate to discourse analysis which is the overarching methodological perspective.

However, discourse analysis itself also has its own 'internal' complexities because as a general analytic approach, it is multi-dimensioned. The model proposed by Phillips

and Ravasi (1998) as reproduced by Phillips and Hardy (2002, p. 20) is a powerful and relevant one to my research (Figure 2.1).

Context

Interpretive Structuralism	Critical Discourse Analysis

Constructivist — Critical

Social Linguistic analysis	Critical Linguistic Analysis
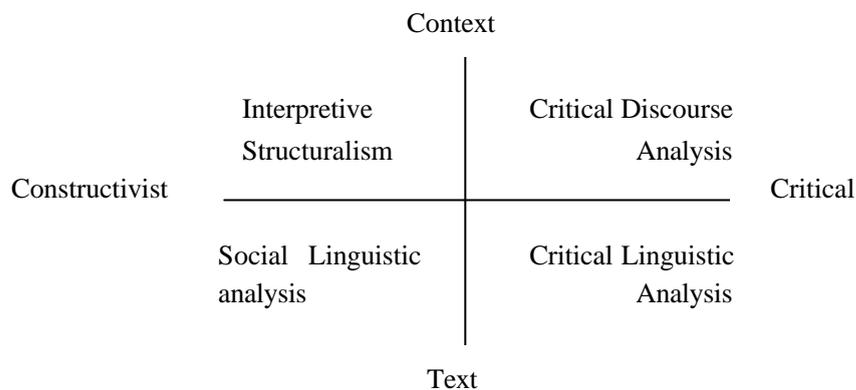
Text

Figure 2.1 Different Approaches to Discourse Analysis (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 20)

This model suggests there are two main dimensions to discourse analysis and they are first, the relative importance of text versus context in the research; and second, the degree to which power dynamics form the focus of the research (namely, a more 'critical' approach) versus studies that focus more closely on the processes of social construction that constitute social reality (namely, a more constructivist approach) (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 19).

If a study is more text-oriented, emphases tend to be placed on the local texts found in particular settings and they are studied in a relatively de-contextualised way. This type of approaches, which has also been designated as 'endotexual'—with 'endo-' meaning 'within'—usually 'confine themselves to consciously working with the text without recourse to what is outside the text—including authorship, authorial intention, and writing/production processes' (Barry, Carroll, & Hansen, 2006, p. 1092). Hence, it tends to become rather restrictively linguistic analysis which attends to the structural, syntactical, metaphorical, thematic, rhetorical qualities existing in the de-contextualised text alone. Conversation Analysis (CA) which is sometimes considered a sub-category of discourse analysis is an example of primarily text-oriented approach. While this type of discourse analysis is valid in its own right, as a type of *social* analysis—which the circumstances of the current study mandate it

so—its weakness is that text/talk could be 'presented as occurring in a rarified social context and sometimes in a world where all but talk is suspended' (Coupland, 1988, p. 5). On the other hand, a context-oriented discursive approach (also designated as 'exotextual') takes into consideration the broader social contexts in which the research subject matter is located in addition to the localised textuality. This broader context is also referred to as 'distal' contexts, which is considered by some to include factors like social class, ethnicity, institutional and cultural settings and so on (Wetherell, 2001, p. 388). Although my study is an attempt to break away from an epistemology that exclusively focuses on distal factors such as political-economic ones, it would be naive to assume that I could study the identity discourses of trade unions without paying attention to these distal contextual factors. Therefore, a context-oriented approach seems more appropriate.

As to the horizontal dimension of this diagram, I argue that there is a compelling case for inclining towards the critical end rather than the interpretive-constructionist end. Whenever attention is given to the distal factors as just mentioned, one is unable not to see the pervasive operations of power. The distal or contextual relations can be political, economic and cultural, but at the root of such relations very often lie imbalances in power relations. Over the years, the vast 'popularity' of what is known as the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in social research (For detailed and dedicated treatments of CDA, see N Fairclough, 1992, 2003; van Dijk, 1993) attests to its validity and relevance in our social analysis.

In the specific context of this research, CDA also seems to be the more appropriate approach, given that shipping industry itself and seafarers' work and lives are so deeply enmeshed in the complex processes of globalisation and the plethora of political, economic and social relations (all of which imply power) that it entails.

However, pointing out the relevance of CDA does not mean to confine oneself strictly to the upper-right quadrant of the diagram without the flexibility of using certain other

analytical techniques as and when such endeavours might be fruitful. Barry *et al* (2006) have argued for a more flexible 'diatextual' approach whereby the analyst moves in between and links the endotextual and the exotexual, or the linguistic and the critical. I agree with and remain open to such an approach in the sense that linguistic analysis will be performed when data so lends itself; but ultimately attempts will be made to interpret the linguistic properties in connection with the contextual power relations. In other words, discourse and text are considered important in their own right, but are also treated as clues to extra-linguistic issues (Karreman & Rylander, 2008, p. 109). Alversson and Karreman (2000a, 2000b) have also aptly called this approach *discursive pragmatism*. It suffices to summarise by saying that the general discourse analytical approach in this research will be one proximate to CDA but not to the exclusion of warranted flexibilities.

2.2   Methods

Having expounded on the overall methodology, this section deals with the specific data collection and analysis methods/techniques to be used in the research.

2.2.1   Interview

It goes without saying that one primary form of discourse is oral discourse, namely talk, speech, utterance. To elicit and record such talk, speech, utterance for the purpose of analysis, the most frequently used method is recorded interviews. According to Bryman (2004, p. 318), there are two basic forms of qualitative interview, the *unstructured* and the *semi-structured*. (The *structured* interview which rigidly follows a set list and does not allow any 'ramblings' or digression controverts the very aim of capturing rich discoursal data.) As the terms imply, an unstructured interview begins with some broad notions and questions, but allows the interview to develop rather freely like a casual conversation or narrative, without having to follow much of an agenda. The interviewer also applies least amount of interference, letting

discourse unfold naturally from the interviewee. In contrast, in a semi-structured interview, there is usually a list of questions or fairly specific topics to be covered—often referred to as an 'interview guide', although there is also a good degree of flexibility as to how the conversation goes and how the agenda is to be covered (ibid., pp. 320-321). The choice between unstructured and semi-structured interviews depends on the nature of the research question and the general research design. Bryman suggests that 'if the researcher is beginning the investigation with a fairly clear focus, rather than a very general notion of wanting to do research on a topic' (ibid., p. 323) and that if the research design involves some comparative dimension (ibid., p. 324), then some degree of structure in the interview is desirable. Clearly, the comparative nature of my research matches well with Bryman's descriptions above, and therefore, a semi-structured form was initially adopted for my interviews. After all, I had to make sure that the interviewees talked about the kind of things that I am interested in investigating.

Nevertheless, 'semi-structured' as it is called, one great strength of this form of interview is that it still allows the interview conversation to develop in an, to borrow Mason's (2002b, p. 64) expression, 'organic' way. In other words, although as an interviewer I have a guide, I can never precisely predict where the conversation will go, and some unexpected utterances from the interviewee may well be of great significance to the research. Thus, as the interviewer, I also took heed to Mason's (ibid., p. 67) advice for interviewers to 'think on my feet' and make 'on-the-spot' decisions when interesting opportunities emerge in the course of the interview.

At the same time, as the researcher gains a better understanding of the subject matter as the research deepens, it is inevitable that the researcher will need to modify and add new questions into the guide for future interviews. Pre-fieldwork preparatory research, no matter how well thought out, can never cover all the important issues related to the research question. New questions and lines of inquiry are bound to emerge, and that requires the researcher be constantly reviewing and updating the interview guide

along the entire process of research. Indeed, this was very much the case during my fieldwork.

Formulating effective questions and questioning strategies is another issue worth discussing. Mason's (ibid., p. 64) suggestion that the interview method is heavily dependant on people's capacities to verbalise and interact leads to my first concern. Seafaring is an overwhelmingly male-dominated labour intensive occupation (Belcher, Sampson, Thomas, Veiga, & Zhao, 2003) and there is a widely held stereotype that working class masculine or macho ethos does not celebrate verbal articulateness or masterly interpersonal skills. Although some research suggests that the real picture might be much more nuanced and complex (Seale & Charteris-Black, 2008), I was prepared that there could be an element of truth in such stereotyping. This is made worse by the fact that English is the first language for neither the interviewees nor myself. These facts make the framing and phrasing of interview questions a particularly treacherous task. In order to be able to communicate most effectively with the interviewees, I must convert my research questions into questions that 'make sense' to the interviewees both *substantively* and *formally*, and this involves contextualising the questions in relation to the interviewees' real life/work situations and putting them in jargon-free, accessible language. In short, when drafting the questions or asking them spontaneously during the interview, I always remembered to first put myself in the shoes of the interviewees and ask myself: 'what kind of questions would make sense to them?' Regarding how to ask questions during an interview, Spradley (1979, pp. 55-68) also has some interesting advice. He suggests that an interview should be like a series of friendly conversations into which the researcher slowly and gradually introduces the more explicitly research related question. This means to use certain strategies to make the interview feel less like a formal interrogation and more like a friendly chat where the informants can talk in a relaxed way. Expressing interest, ignorance and amazement from time to time are all important ways to encourage informants.

Picking up this thread, it is important that I now reflect more explicitly on my own role in the interactive dynamics of interview. Apart from the questions, language and 'encouragement strategies' I use, personal style and demeanour are also important factors. Given my cultural background, personal and educational history, the way I talk, my accent, my manner and subtle body languages may well turn out to be alien to my interviewees, coming from their own cultural and institutional backgrounds as they do. Foddy (1993, pp. 112-125) points out that all such factors, let alone my 'status' as a researcher and the institutional and epistemic 'authority' supposedly attached to it, all constitute potential threats to the interviewees. In order to reduce the threat caused by my presence, it is probably a good idea to emphasise my status of being only an inexperienced research student.

Furthermore, concern with the researcher's own role in the interview process can actually be raised to an epistemological level, namely a concern regarding the tension as to whether qualitative interview is simply the *excavation* of facts and knowledge or actually also the *construction* and *reconstruction* or even *creation* of facts and knowledge (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997; Manning, 1987; David Silverman, 1993). In agreement with Mason (2002a), I take the latter view, admitting that as the interviewer, I am actively involved in the process of not only eliciting but also to some extent 'producing' the data. The implication of such a reflexive view is that I can in fact become a considerable 'hazard factor' to the research due to my constitutive influence on data. Yet, to give the argument an optimistic twist, I can also be a considerable facilitator and the very instrument through which insights could be generated (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 18). With careful deliberation and rigorous execution, I also believe that I can be the 'success factor' to my interviews.

2.2.2   Narrative Analysis

Because narrative is an inalienable aspect of discourse and it is more than likely that in the course of the interviews the informants will tell stories, about themselves, their

families, their colleagues and, not least, their organisations, it makes sense to mention narrative analysis (NA). As has been touched upon in the review of literature in Chapter One, many believe that narrative is central to organisation because 'most organizational phenomena are told, described and redescribed in the narrative form' (Vaara, 2002, p. 216). Some even suggests that narrative is the most appropriate vehicle for representing events and actions in organisations (van Maanen, 1988). Hence, seemingly banal stories told by research participants might contain meanings deeper than they first appear to contain, serve functions more profound than they first appear to serve. In order to analyse these stories/narratives more than naïvely, it is helpful to review briefly just a few theories related to narrative analysis and their implications for the practice of it.

Firstly, Cortazzi's (1993) examination of the Goffmanian and Labovian approaches to NA is interesting. The Goffmanian approach is predicated on the idea that narrative is self-expression and/or performance; it involves the management of information about the self, or 'impression management' (Cortazzi, 1993, p. 37) as we often know it. This approach directs our attention to the impression that the narrator is trying to create for the listeners. On the other hand, the Labovian approach focuses on the structural features of the narrative but ultimately quests for its social function. It attempts to analyse narratives according to six structural elements i.e. abstract, orientation, complication, evaluation, resolution and coda, but it ultimately emphasizes that it is the evaluation that the narrator is trying to convey to the listener, and thus is essential to the narrative. Similarly, Coffey and Atkinson (1996, pp. 54-81) argue that narratives should be assessed in terms of the *social function* that they serve. For example, 'moral stories' serve didactic functions.

It is not difficult to see that these narrative analysis approaches have some immediate bearing on my research. If indeed stories/narratives are self-presentations and impression management techniques, then it is important that I paid attention to how the stories told by my informants paint a particular picture of themselves and the

organisations they belong to. Indeed, to take it one step further, it can be said that their very identities (be it individual or organisational) are constructed in the process of telling these stories. Also, the social functions of these stories might be analysed in terms of how they maintain such individual and organisational identities, and the power relations and structures implied by such identities.

There might be those who argue that narrative analysis is a separate method from discourse analysis. To the extent that a field of narrative research has developed and evolved into almost a sub-discipline under social research (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998) such a stance is valid. In this thesis, however, discourse is understood in its broader sense, and inasmuch as that when people narrate they are also discoursing, it seems unnecessary and unprofitable to draw a thick line between the two. There is clear evidence that some scholars (e.g. Grant & Hardy, 2004, p. 9) explicitly treat the analysis of narrative as one kind of discourse analysis, and this is the implicit approach adopted in not a few discursive organisational studies (e.g. A. Brown, 2004, 2006; Golant & Silince, 2007; Robichaud, Giroux, & Taylor, 2004). Therefore, it should be emphasised that narrative analysis is treated here as merely a data analysis technique, confluent with and *subordinate* to discourse analysis, which is the overall data analysis perspective of this research.

2.2.3   Documentary Analysis

In this modern bureaucratic society, where there is organisation, there are documents; and this is certainly true also for the trade unions. Therefore, apart from oral discourse, another promising field from which to gather discoursal data is that of organisational documents. Prior (2003) offers the following explication of 'documents' which affords it a broad definition:

> […] if we are to get to grips with the nature of documents then we have to move away from a consideration of them as stable, static and pre-defined artefacts. Instead we must consider them in terms of fields, frames and

networks of action. In fact, the status of things as 'documents' depends precisely on the ways in which such objects are integrated into fields of action, and documents can only be defined in terms of such fields. (p. 2)

In accordance, documents are not coterminous with the text laden forms and documents that we conventionally know of (although this type still remains the major form of documents), but can be extended to include any object that resides and functions within fields and networks of action. Using the example of cemetery as a 'social document' to changing human sensibility to the issue of death in the western culture (ibid., p. 6-7), Prior demonstrates how the boundaries of definition of 'document' can be pushed.

One obvious benefit of such a liberal treatment of the definition of documents is that the field of vision of the research gaze is significantly broadened, allowing the possibility of more novel ideas and richer analysis. Conversely, one potential pitfall of not quite Prior's conceptual proposition *per se* but rather of applying such a proposition blindly without considering the local facts and situations of the specific research in question is that a floodgate might be opened, and the focus will be lost because now anything and everything looks like 'documents'.

Prior's definition does not only broaden what can be counted as a document, it has arguably even greater impact on how documents should be analysed. He points out three main aspects of a document, namely its content, its production and its use (ibid., p. 4). Traditionally, it is the content aspect which has received most attention from researchers, for the simple reason that content contains textual information, which enables the conventional thematic content analysis. However, in light of the more liberal definition, the production and use of documents seem to promise equally exciting opportunities for investigation. To succinctly reiterate Prior's ideas, documents are social products, and therefore they are constructed according to social rules and structures that surround them; and such rules and structures are reflected in the documents themselves. In addition, documents are also agents and actors. They

produce facts and structure/mediate social relationships and behaviours. Thus, documents produce and are produced; documents construct and are constructed; documents act and are acted upon. Consequently, it is through investigating documents in action and interrogating the ways in which they are produced and used that one gets to see the social relationships and structures in any particular field or situation. And this field can well be an organisation, or more specifically a trade union that I am interested in.

One example in which documents are found to function in social organisation and social relations is the case where they are used as instruments for assigning people into different categories, i.e. documents as 'membership categorisation device' (D Silverman, 1998). Another example Prior gave is that in medical institutions such as a clinic, the clinic folder is constructed in a medico-legal framework to show that the 'right' things were done to the 'right' patient at the 'right' time (Prior, 2003, p. 51). In other words, it can be said that here documents are being used as a 'prop' to perform medical care (Goffman, 1990). Lastly, from a Foucauldian perspective, it has been suggested that some documents which first appear to be nothing more than technical documentation or manuals can actually be used to exercise surveillance and discipline in organisational life (Gurchill, Gordon, & Miller, 1991). These examples demonstrate that documents can be an invaluable medium through which to study social relations, and in my case, the construction of trade union identities.

2.2.4   Observation

Apart from gathering discoursal data through interviews and documents, any fieldwork also offers the opportunity of observation, and it would be unwise to miss out the complementary value that observational data could add to the study of discourse. The interpretation of discourse and text should not and cannot be performed independently of the contextual circumstances and meanings, just as the hermeneutic interpretive tradition maintains that meaning does not solely reside in the

text itself but is conditioned by its context (Palmer, 1969). This idea has already been discussed in relation to the concept of CDA, so it suffices to say here that, to the extent that contextual circumstances and meanings must be drawn upon in interpreting the discursive activities as instantiated in texts, it is important to understand those contextual circumstances and meanings through a broader cast of attention that exceeds our focus on the targeted discourse. For those non/extra-discursive activities, Giddens (1979, p. 43, 1987, p. 106) helpfully suggests the use of ethnographic inquiry into the setting and circumstances that surround the production of the discourse/text that is the target of analysis. For example, to understand a union officer's discourse during a certain union event/incident, an observation of that event reduced to field notes might serve my research well. Also, while I mainly intend to use interviews to elicit research participants' discourse, it is foreseeable that at some other 'naturally-occurring' situations, the research participants might do or say things that are highly relevant to the research questions. To be able to capture such data, either discursive or not, observation is believed to be useful. However, it must be disclaimed that this research is mainly about organisational identity discourse, and the fieldwork does not fulfil the more rigorous requirement of extended periods of immersion to qualify as ethnography (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 1). Instead, it is spontaneous and opportunistic observations that this study will draw on.

To summarise the foregoing sections, Discourse Analysis as a methodology inextricable from the theories behind it does not involve any rigidly specified sets of procedures when coming to its execution—indeed, if one were to examine those large bodies of literature which call themselves 'discourse analysis', one is likely to find a hugely disparate collection, employing a huge variety of specific analytical methods or approaches, the only loose link connecting which is perhaps no more than a common commitment to the exploration of the relation between discourse and the social. To that extent, several specific methods both for the collection and for the analysis of data are summoned, including interviews, narrative and documentary

analysis and using observational data complementarily. The next section presents a reflexive account of what actually happened in the field, into which are incorporated discussions regarding access negotiation, field relations and ethical aspects of the research.

2.3 Fieldwork

The fieldwork of this project was completed in a period of two months from November 2009 to January 2010 in the city of Mumbai, where two of the three unions have their head offices. Although Union B's head office is in Calcutta, I was told by UB officials themselves that due to the concentration of shipping activities in this traditional port city, the Mumbai office assumes a uniquely important role, and to have chosen to come here to study the union was the right decision. Constraints of resources in terms of both time and finance precluded travelling to other branches of the unions, which were less important in any case.

Initial contact with the unions was done through email before I travelled to the field. While Union B gave positive responses very shortly, it took longer for the other two unions to respond, but by the time I set out for Mumbai, I had obtained indications of willingness to participate from all three unions. Nevertheless, such indications did not in themselves constitute the granting of access. Far from it, the real negotiations were invariably my initial meetings with the leaders of the various trade unions. Just as Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, p. 34) suggest, these 'gatekeepers' would actively assess me as a researcher, my motivation and the level of threat that my activities might pose them. Therefore, it was necessary for me to present myself in such a way as to minimise the gatekeepers' perception about my threat while not misleading them regarding the nature of my research. Fortunately, after our initial negotiations and mutual assessments, gatekeepers of all three unions opened their doors to me, though in varying fashions, as shall be discussed later.

My research activities mainly involved going to these unions, identifying and interviewing key officials/functionaries in the respective organisational structures. At the same time, because I was lodged in a local Seamen's Club with a history of accommodating maritime officers since the late part of the 19th Century till this very day, I also had ample opportunities to interact with the Indian seafarers who stayed there. In addition, I also gained access to a nearby Seamen's Hostel which accommodates at least 1,500 Indian seafarers, predominantly ratings. This afforded me the chance to interact with many ratings. By the end of the two month fieldwork, I have collected 34 tape-recorded interviews, 26 of which were taken from the officials of the three unions, 2 from independent parties working with the unions and the rest 6 from the seafarers in both the Seamen's Club and the Seamen's Hostel, who were members of the three unions under this study. It is worth mentioning that all interviews started off as semi-structured ones, but I had always tried to be flexible, pursuing whatever emergent themes which seemed interesting and important. In the case of those trade union leaders with whom I had more than one chance of interviewing, I usually framed the guidelines of subsequent interviews in light of what I had learnt from earlier interviews as well as from my increased understanding of the field as the research deepened.

Apart from interviewing, I also observed the unions' functioning and interacted with the union officials and members in more casual and opportunistic ways, which culminated in a sizable amount of fieldnotes. Some opportunities for observation occurred while I was waiting in the union premises for being received by the union officials—after all, they had their own business and I was not exactly on the top of their priority list. Neither was there any guarantee that I would always get an interview when I showed up at the appointed time—in not a few cases, I had to wait for hours and hours together before getting to speak to a particular union official (usually the boss), only to be told to come another day. However, these hours spent waiting were not wasted, because whilst waiting, I was able to observe quietly what was going on, and I believe that my data was considerably enriched by such

observations. In other cases, opportunities of observation arose when, as gestures of hospitality, I was invited by the unions to join their functions or events. This was especially the case with Union A. For example, on my first visit to the union, I was invited to sit in the General Secretary's office and observe one audience session that he held with trainee ratings; I was invited to join a whole team of senior UA officials who went to their union resort for a weekend; and I also attended one of their monthly Trade Union Workshops.

No translators/interpreters were used during the research, because most of my research participants speak English with fluency almost comparable to native speakers. In the interviews, communication difficulty seldom arose due to language. This is in addition to the fact that for a student research project, using translation service would not be financially viable. Language did become an issue, however, in the case of observation, for the research participants naturally spoke local languages amongst themselves. To an extent, this is a drawback that has to be tolerated, yet it is hoped that contextual and cultural interpretations will make up for some of the 'loss'. This is also another reason why observational data is used as supplements.

With regard to the collection of documents, I limited the scope by generally excluding documents which were too technical or too confidential that the union would not release, such as the minutes/summaries of meetings, collective bargaining agreements, and various other forms of legal and technical document. Meanwhile, I mainly collected documents which are of publicity or promotional nature, such as the unions' brochures, pamphlets, newsletters, in-house publications and so on. Since these documents were meant for public consumption anyway, there is no ethical issue involved, and whenever such documents came my way, I usually requested to have copies successfully. Also, following Prior's (2003) inclusive definition of documents as mentioned earlier, the physical appearances and features of the union premises and artefacts were also documented. These were either described in my fieldnotes or taken pictures of, in the latter case with permission.

While on the whole I had been able to collect data to my satisfaction, the extent and pattern of access granted by the three unions differed from each other significantly, owing to the unions' distinct identities, characters, and probably also their different attitudes towards my research. In what follows, I describe the varying patterns and degrees of access I had with the three organisations respectively and discuss the implications.

Among the three unions, Union B had been the most supportive. From pre-field negotiations to the last days of the field trip, UB had consistently extended their cooperation enthusiastically. In fact, on my very midnight arrival at the Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport, it was the Organising Secretary of UB Kuldeep (pseudonym) who came to welcome me and arranged someone to escort me to my accommodation. During the two months, whenever I went to Union B, I was always made to feel welcome, with most of my research requests met. Not surprisingly, the data collected in connection with Union B has also been the most extensive, with 17 interviews and a good collection of documents. Apart from several administrative staff, I interviewed all the officials based at Union B's Mumbai branch, including the Secretary, the Organising Secretary, two Organisers and an Office Assistant. In addition, I also had the opportunity to speak to the Calcutta-based Vice President and General Secretary when they visited Mumbai. On top of that, owing to UB's cooperativeness, I even spoke to some independent third parties who work with the union such as the union's legal advisors and a manager from a crewing company. The documentary data includes several issues of the union's monthly trilingual magazine, various publicity materials and even a few samples of UB's email communication to various parties.

While UB's keenness to help is nothing short of a blessing, there are also treacherous ethical and political issues that I need to deal with. Just as during one of my early interactions with him Kuldeep 'slipped his tongue' by saying 'in fact this (your

research) also suited our purpose', it became gradually clear to me that UB considered my research to be an excellent publicity opportunity for them. At various points of my interactions with Union B officials, I realised that they were trying to influence my opinions and sometimes I felt they went 'a bit too far'. For example, once during an interview with the Vice-President of UB to which Kuldeep was also present, the VP mentioned that CITU, the central trade union to which UB is affiliated, had five million members. At that time the recorder had already been switched off and I did not make note of this figure. Kuldeep went out of the way to repeat the figure and specifically requested me to write down the number in my notes so that I would not forget this 'important information'. At the same time of feeling most grateful towards UB at a personal level—and understandably so—my realisation of Union B's politically related 'ulterior motives' heightens the need for me to travel extra miles to make sure that at the academic/professional level I remain neutral. As I wrote in my research diary that day:

> I felt a little more strongly that Kuldeep is trying to use my research as their propaganda, because he specifically reminded me to record down that CITU has 5 million members, whereas such figure is not really relevant to my research. Anyway, I will maintain a very cordial relation with UB and Kuldeep, but what I put into my thesis is solely my own decision.

This requires me to report and interpret my data as 'objectively' as possible, though admittedly there can be no hard and fast measure of such objectiveness.

On the other hand, Union A and Union C's cooperation with this research had been notably less enthusiastic. In the case of Union A, though the gate-keeping General Secretary had promised me every support during our first meeting, it turned out later that access to informants and information was not always smooth. Being a well-established union having celebrated its centenary way back in the 1990s, a bureaucratic defensiveness or self-protectiveness seemed to have developed so that getting to speak to some non-top level officials proved to be impossible. I was repeatedly told by some union officials that they were 'not in a position to comment'

on certain things, or that I should take the questions to the 'boss'. On some other occasions, they kept on saying politely that they were busy and would speak to me 'some other day', in effect refusing to cooperate. In the end, nine interviews were obtained in connection with Union A, with the informants including the General Secretary, the Vice President, the Public Relations Officer, Assistant Secretary, a newly joined Organiser, and several other ordinary members of the union. In particular, the General Secretary took two interviews with me, with almost 50 minutes of recording each. Documentary raw data included the union's website, publicity brochures, union 'circulars' and some of the decorative objects to be found in the union premises of which I took photos under permission.

Notwithstanding the lower overall number, data collection with Union A should not be considered deficient for at least three reasons. First of all, though access to discourse in the form of interview had been less due to reasons beyond my control, good supplements come in the form of observational fieldnotes made of various events which afforded me a good understanding of UA's culture and identity. Secondly, as Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, p. 54) rightly point out, the very fact that some UA officials felt apprehensive about talking to me, and suggested that they were 'not in positions' to say things constitute part of the data pertaining to the union. The similar refusals I got from those officials regarding requests to interview in themselves constitute part of the union's discourse, and reveal certain facets of their identities and culture. Thirdly, much argument has been made regarding the inherent oligarchical nature of organisation and the commonplaceness of organisational leaders' supplanting of organisation itself. For example, Michels (1962) writes about the oligarchical tendencies of democracy as a way of organising, and implies 'whoever speaks of organisations speaks of oligarchy' (quoted in Korkut, 2006, p. 72). In a very similar vein, Converse (1964) discusses the nature of belief system in the mass publics, asserting that it is usually only the elite stratum in society that tends to have clear-cut and strongly held political or ideological positions; those being led tend to have rather ambiguous ideological inclinations. For trade unions, this means that it is

those leaders who will tend to have much stronger and clearer views regarding the organisations' identity/ideology compared to the lower ranking officials and common members. In the context of business organisations, corporate ideology has also been commonly defined as the 'explicit and publicly expressed beliefs and values of an organization's key *decisions-makers*' (Goll & Zeitz, 1991, p. 191 emphasis added). And it seems there are ready examples of organisational studies which rely on data extracted pretty much exclusively from the leaders or high echelon of organisations (e.g. Clegg, Rhodes, & Kornberger, 2006; Karreman & Rylander, 2008).

Furthermore, based on my immersion, albeit short, in the Indian culture and interactions with the unions, I argue that in a highly hierarchical and paternalistic culture such as India, organisation and personality are often inextricably fused and must be treated as such. The General Secretary is the much revered boss of the organisation and therefore only he, together with maybe another one or two veteran leaders are allowed to speak *about* and *for* the union. On very many occasions I was amazed at the kind of deference that union staff showed to their leaders. This helped me comprehend the famous remark made many years ago about the legendary female Indian Prime Minister—'Indira is India, India is Indira' (Kapoor, 2009). It is not an idiosyncratic or condemnable instance of personal aggrandisement, nor merely a detestable act of sycophancy by one of her admirers, but testimony to a cultural trait of this country, namely, the extraordinary extent to which people are ready to see institutional powers being invested in and embodied by personalities and how the two seem to become mutually substitutive and exchangeable at times. Understood this way, that fact that one has to rely heavily on the discourse of one or two especially powerful figures in an organisation is not only a pragmatic solution, but also a logical argument. This principle also applies to Union C.

Research with Union C was not any smoother than UA. The initial meeting with the General Secretary alone took me significant perseverance and patience before it materialised. Although I had always been shown a good deal of politeness, it

transpired extremely difficult to even fix appointments with key union officials for interviews. Hours and hours went by with me sitting on the sofa in the reception area, not being attended. As the length of fieldtrip was fixed and there was a pressure to gather data, UC's attitude caused me considerable frustration at times. On reflection, it was perhaps a narrow escape from disaster, as I one day jotted down in my research diary in relation to one of my experience with UC's Superintendent Mr Panu (pseudonym), who was in charge of the day to day running of the office:

> I was invited to sit in Panu's office for more than an hour, and Panu went in and out, and he certainly was not in any hurry. What serious matter can come to this union for God's sake! And he simply just did not want to speak to me, comfortably leaving me just sitting there, getting more frustrated minute by minute. At one point, I was almost going to snap, and my language towards them could turn rude. But knowing that's only going to do harm to myself and my research, I told myself to tolerate this once, and see how things pan out the next week.

I choose to quote this temperamental outlet of frustration to show the kind of difficulty that could be involved in maintaining a working research relation with research participants sometimes. But more than anything, the lesson is perhaps that patience and calmness are crucial qualities that a social researcher needs to possess.

Reluctance to participate, however, is not the only burden encountered in relation to UC. Because of the maritime officers' general sanguine employment situation, the scope of Union C's work is narrow, and apart from two/three key officials, the rest of the office staff are but clerks involved in constant paperwork which seemed extremely routine and repetitive. When I approached these staff members, they were all puzzled why I would be interested in their work, because what they did was usually nothing more than issuing membership cards or processing welfare benefit claims. On the matter of the union's policy and opinions, similar to the UA staff, they baulked from commenting, and suggested that they only dealt with their very restricted functions. Consequently, I was not able to extract any useful data from the ordinary office staff

of UC, and eventually, the data collected includes two long interviews (80 minutes and 40 minutes) from the General Secretary of the union, one group interview with the Joint Secretary and the Office-in-Charge, and one interview with an account executive. In addition to that, I interviewed four Indian officers who were either current or former members of the union. Documentary data includes the Union's Constitution, four copies of the Union's quarterly journal, documents which explain the welfare benefits of the union and some other miscellaneous materials.

The comparative lack of data in the case of Union C is not so much a failure in data collection than a mere reflection of the realities of the union. In fact, in the face of the initial frustration encountered due to both UC's reluctance and an apparent lack of identity judged from the union staff's blankness in their opinions, I even considered dropping Union C from this study altogether. However, based on the discoursal data that I was eventually able to obtain, it is clear that Union C does have a clear set of identities and cultures distinct from the other two unions, the juxtaposition of which sheds intriguing lights on the circumstances of the seagoing officers in the Indian context. Contrasting the identity construction of UC with that of two rating unions also results in a dynamic analytic schema which generates insightful interpretations of the unique forms of unionism in the Indian shipping context, as will be shown in later chapters. For this reason, Union C remains an integral part of this research.

Two months is not an awfully long time, and I realise that even after all the work, there are still many facts with regard to the unions and the Indian seafaring scene which remain unknown/untold to me, particularly when the revelation of such facts does not put the unions in favourable lights. However, insofar as the research is primarily concerned with the unions' identity constructions, what is needed is precisely the unions' own self-representations and projections, whereas although the hidden facts and realities are highly relevant, they are not the primary concerns of this study, not to mention that those hidden facts are extremely difficult to reach to, and may, if I so endeavour, entail difficulties and troubles that could possibly jeopardise

the entire project. Insofar as the research question of this study is concerned, I maintain that more than sufficient data has been gathered.

Next, in agreement with Davies (1999) about that a researcher cannot be isolated from the investigation s/he makes, a few reflexive words ought to be said regarding my own role as a researcher and the dynamics of interaction between me and my research participants. Initially, it has been my worry that being a complete outsider, i.e. a Chinese national coming from a British university who doesn't speak a word of Hindi and knows embarrassingly little about India, or shipping/seafaring, for that matter, would prove to be a huge obstacle to my research. This worry corresponds to what Styles (1979, p. 148) calls the 'insider myth' in ethnographic research, the assertion that only an insider can conduct valid research on a given group. However, in concurrence with Hendry's (2003) suggestion that it is rarely the requirement that researchers carry a specific identity or biography and Venkatesh's (2002) assertion that being an 'insider' or an 'outsider' is not absolute and sometimes there can be considerable value in being an 'outsider', my actual experience in the field had proven to be rather positive.

First of all, being a foreigner clearly turned out to be more of an advantage than a disadvantage. To almost all of the seafarers that I interacted with, my Chinese origin has been apparently a matter of great interest, and this, I believe, ensured their enthusiasm in talking to me, sharing with me information. While more experienced seafarers tended to tell me about their visits to Chinese ports and praise China for being a 'good country', I was also very often asked by young and inexperienced seamen about whether I was good at Chinese martial arts like they have seen Bruce Lee performing in films. Being an alien in a country which has a reputation for hospitality has proven to be very positive in helping me get access to informants and information. I argue that this was even the case on occasions where I requested assistance from Indian educational institutions and government departments. Whereas the insouciant attitude of the Indian bureaucrats is famous (or infamous), at least my

requests were entertained, and I attribute this at least partially to my being a foreigner and thus a subject of interest.

My identities as a non-white and a relatively inexperienced researcher, in fact, a research student, also generated power dynamics that I consider on balance positive. Research participants' subconscious perceptions of power distance in connection with race, seniority, organisational designation and so on might translate into their feelings of being threatened. While, for example, a British Caucasian will certainly be treated with greater distance and more deference, my being Chinese led to one of my interviewees to show friendliness by saying: 'India and China are all developing countries, we are friends, we should come together!' Also, the very fact that I was often left sitting in receptions to wait for hours and hours was a clear indication that they did not feel much threatened by my presence, and this, I believe, has much to do with my age and position as a postgraduate student. Such attitudes of course created certain frustration from time to time, which was nevertheless offset by patience and perseverance from my part. The net gain is that they did not become so overly self-protective as to frustrate my research, and their 'guard level' was, I would argue, generally low. It is imaginable that had I been a Caucasian professor in his 40s or 50s serving as the director of a research centre, it will be a completely different story.

On the whole, I maintain that although as an outsider I suffered to some extent from language barriers and cultural unfamiliarity, my identities and attributes had given me various advantages that outweigh the disadvantages, thus contributing to the successful execution of the research. In fact, one concomitant benefit has been my heightened consciousness and enhanced understanding of myself as a researcher, just like the improved mastering of an instrument, which will definitely prove to be useful in my future research endeavours. That is also why I cannot agree more with Morgan (1983) who says that the researcher discovers him/herself through the act of research.

Lastly, with regard to research ethics, I generally hold the view that while certain

fundamental principles must be upheld, when it comes to specific actions in the field, often times there is no hard-and-fast rule, and decisions have to be made contingent upon the contextual specificities of the research matter, based on the researcher's sound judgement. Before entering the field, I had familiarised myself with the ethical code of the British Sociological Association ("Statement of Ethical Practices for the British Sociological Association," 2002) in addition to submitting research plan to the university ethics committee for scrutiny. The principles that I stuck by during the research process include the following: a) Informed consent. This involved explaining the nature of the research both verbally and through information sheets, and obtaining written consent before proceeding to research actions. b) Minimising potential harm. In situations where my research activity could possibly cause harm to informants, extra care was exercised. For example, I made sure that interviews with ordinary union members took place independent of the unions, just in case the members who spoke against their organisation or leaders might attract retaliation from the unions. c) Confidentiality. Although by giving all informants pseudonyms from the stage of transcription individual anonymity is guarded, it must be admitted that the organisations, in contrast, could be relatively easily identifiable by people familiar with the local setting, i.e. the maritime circle of India, because of some of the basic facts about these organisations. In fact, this is almost an insoluble issue, because in order to study these organisations, it is impossible not to faithfully describe them and report what they say and do, and yet, when these are done, the identities could hardly be kept under wrap. However, I argue that trade unions, to a large extent, are public institutions and the anonymity rule usually applied to private institutions such as private companies or even universities does not apply here. Indeed, in the field of conventional industrial relations research, no anonymity of organisation is observed at all—in fact the very point is to find out what and how are the *real* unions doing in the *real* world. Examples of study of other public institutions, such as the NHS, further confirm that as far as such public institutions are concerned, the anonymity principle need only apply at local and individual level. In our case, what is also interesting is that none of the unions requested anonymity for their organisations—as a matter of

fact, one of them even expressed the wish to have their name clearly spelt out in my 'report'. Taking into consideration all these factors, I maintain that anonymising the names of the unions and all the participants is a sufficient measure of ethical research behaviour in this context.

2.4   Data Analysis

In section 2.2 were discussed the intended methods for collecting and analysing data at the theoretical level, and the foregoing section has reported the fieldwork. As to how the data was actually analysed, this will to a large extent become self-explanatory in the coming three chapters where the analysis itself is presented. Therefore, it is necessary here only to touch on briefly some of the principles and procedures followed in the process of analysing data.

Similar to the study conducted by Thornborrow and Brown (2009) on the identity discourse of members of the British parachute regiment, in dealing with the large amount of discoursal data, I have also adopted a fairly conventional qualitative analytical approach, namely, that of thematic analysis. Reading through the data and generating categories comprise the main analytical activity.

Thematic analysis requires the analyst to achieve a very high level of familiarity with the data (Boyatzis, 1998) before proceeding to coding, which is the process of generating concepts (using tags and labels) which describe the nature and character of segments of data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 209). To that extent, nascent analysis starts at the stage of transcription. In my case, painstakingly transcribing heavily accented English spoken by my informants was a blessing in disguise, because having to repeatedly listen to the recordings ensured that I was very familiar with my data. I estimate that by the time I printed out proof-read transcripts on paper, I had listened to the content of all my interview recordings at least four or five times on average. By this time a very deep impression had already been left in my mind of

the data, and I started coding by reading through the printed data once more.

In the initial coding process, I adopted a policy based partly on the 'grounded theorising' of Glaser and Strauss (1967) and the 'inclusive coding' of Becker (1968, p. 245) by generating codes rather intuitively and copy-pasting data segments under the relevant codes whenever they seemed to fit even if this meant some duplication at times. As the coding went on, however, the problem emerged that there were just too many codes and some of them seemed to overlap or contradict each other. These codes needed to be modified (sometimes splitting sometimes amalgamation) and reorganised under different categories, and here, Bloor's (1978) discussion of the inductive techniques was helpful. Whenever a segment of data failed to fall into an existing category neatly, namely whenever a 'deviant case' arose, the question was asked whether the existing category should be modified to include the deviant case or whether a new category should be created. Thus, the coding process was a constantly iterative one where codes were created and collapsed, data segments shifted back and forth until eventually a categorisation/structure that seemed to make best sense emerged. It has to be stressed that my analysis of data is not entirely the same as 'grounded theorising', because in the latter the categories and later on theories arise entirely from bottom up, whereas in my case, as Chapter Five will show, a pre-conceptualised analytical framework is utilised, drawing on a few theories covered in the literature review. The coding process served to add flesh to the bare bones. To that extent, my analytical process can be seen as one worked from both ends and meeting in the centre.

In the next brief chapter, some factual background information on the Indian maritime industry and the three trade unions are given, followed by short accounts of my 'first impressions' of these unions. This will serve to more smoothly bridge the readers to data analyses to be presented in Chapters Four, Five, and Six.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 Indian Shipping and Indian Maritime Labour

If countries such as Great Britain, Denmark, Norway, and Germany have been commonly referred to as 'traditional maritime nations', India can be properly called a 'traditional maritime labour supply nation'. Though Indian maritime history stretches far back (see Behera, 1999) due to the simple fact that the Indian subcontinent has a coast line of some 4000 miles, the systematic supply of maritime labour from India in an industrialised fashion came into existence probably in tandem with the Western colonial activities in India. The massive seaborne colonial trade based in India meant that significant labour force had to be sourced locally, and that led to the existence of a large number of Indian seafarers.

While it has been impossible to put together a comprehensive overview of India's historical supply of maritime labour, some very rough lines can be drawn based on the fragmentary literature available. According to the *Maritime Statistical Handbook* published by ILO (1936, p. 125), in year 1935 there were already 59,000 Indians who were employed at sea. This number was then the fourth largest in the world, after Britain, USA, and Japan. The number of the unemployed was estimated to be 113,000 at that time, thus giving a total of 172,000 Indian seafarers. Desai (1940) however, based on his own observations and alternative ways of calculation, further suggests that this number could actually be as high as 235,000.

That India was primarily a labour supply nation is demonstrated by the fact that although significant numbers of seafarers in the world have been and are still Indians, the country's own ship-owning interest has been minimal. In the 1930s, Indian tonnage accounted for just 23 per cent of India's coastal shipping, and only 1.15 per cent of its overseas trade (Desai, 1940, p. 18). After Independence, the Government of

India adopted policies explicitly aimed at developing India's national shipping industry (Rao, 1965), but it seems the effectiveness has been unimpressive and rapidly diminishing. For example, the share of Indian tonnage in the country's overseas seaborne trade has declined from around 40 per cent in the 1980s/90s to just 9.5 per cent currently ("INSA Annual Review 2008-09," 2009, p. 82). Also, according to the *Annual Review* of the Indian National Shipowners' Association (INSA), in 2007, the percentage of Indian tonnage was only 1.18 per cent of world total based on country of registration (ibid., p. 30), and 1.29 per cent based on nationality of owner (ibid., p. 22). The *Review* also shows that these figures have actually been declining since the 1990s.

Meanwhile, India remains a significant supplier of seafarers worldwide. According to one source (Barnes, 1999, p. 50 Table 3.2), by the end of the 1990s, the total number of Indian seafarers was 49,551, including trainees and the unemployed and inactive. Out of these, 8,522 officers and 15,155 ratings were sailing on ships owned by foreign companies.

It is also relevant to this thesis to mention some important changes that took place in the Government of India's policy on shipping and seafaring. Prior to the 1990s, the shipping industry in general and seafarer training in particular were controlled by the Government of India, in the context of a planned economy. However, as market-oriented economic reforms began in the country in the 1980s and intensified in the 1990s (Anant, Hasan, Mohapatra, Nagaraj, & Sakikumar, 2006), as symbolised by the Indian Government's embarkation on the IMF Structural Adjustment Program in 1991, there was considerable deregulation of the shipping industry, leading to the privatisation of seafarer training and the liberalisation of employment practice, among other things. Since the late 1990s, private maritime training institutes flourished as a lucrative business, and the output of seafarers, particularly ratings, has increased rapidly. The number of training institutes at the moment is 125 (Directorate General of Shipping of India, 2010).

In the current millennium, an estimate in 2002 suggests that 14,000 out of all 20,000 Indian officers were working for foreign companies (Handa, S., & Shahi, 2002). The *Global Labour Market for Seafarers Working Aboard Merchant Cargo Ships* (Ellis & Sampson, 2008) establishes that as of year 2003, Indian seafarers accounted for 6.6 per cent of all global seafarers, and Indians accounted for 5.9 per cent and 7.8 per cent of the world's senior and junior maritime officers respectively. By the end of 2009, it is believed that the total number of Indian officers has increased to 35,000[4]. Assuming the proportion of Indian officers working under foreign companies has remained constant—though it is most likely to have increased (see "INSA Annual Review 2003," 2003, p. 19)—then at least some 25,000 Indian officers are in the international seafaring market. On the other hand, according to one official from the Directorate General of Shipping of India[5], the total number of ratings in India is likely to lie in between 100,000 to 120,000. Thus, a total population of 150,000 Indian seafarers can be estimated.

3.2   The Unions and the First Impressions

3.2.1   Union A

Union A can trace its origin to as early as 1896, though it was formally registered in year 1927 under the *Indian Trade Union Act 1926*. The union represents Indian ratings and petty officers employed by both Indian and foreign shipping companies. Union A claims to be independent of any political party, and at the national level they are affiliated with the Hind Mazdoor Sabha.

Throughout its 114 years of history, Union A has been arguably the most influential

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[4] Based on personal conversation with trade union leader.
[5] Directorate General of Shipping (DG Shipping) is a directorate under the Shipping Wing of the Indian Ministry of Surface Transport. DG Shipping is the overall regulator of the shipping industry in India, and its authority scope covers issues ranging from the development of Indian shipping industry, to maritime safety, to the training, employment and welfare of seafarers. For more information, see: www.dgshipping.com

Indian seafarers' trade union organisation, and was involved in most industrial negotiations and agreements in the sector. Starting from the 1950s, it has signed the biennial National Maritime Board (NMB) Agreements with Indian shipowners, as represented by INSA. From the 1980s, Union A has signed ITF agreements for Indian seafarers employed onboard FOC[6] ships. UA also enters into collective bargaining agreements with non-FOC foreign shipowners from traditional maritime nations such as Denmark, Norway, and Italy. Altogether, the union claims to have collective bargaining agreements with over 60 shipping companies, the majority of which are large foreign companies whose ships trade worldwide. In addition, because of the premier status of Union A, it has also wide connections with seafarers' unions around the world.

Today, apart from the head office in Mumbai, the union has branch offices in thirteen port cities in India studded along the coastline, boasting a membership of 80,000. The union is under the stewardship of a President, a Vice-President, a General Secretary (cum treasurer), an Assistant General Secretary, and an Organising Secretary. According to the union, these five so called 'office-bearers' are generated by direct election, and they in turn appoint the executive committee members and other functionaries in the union's structure, such as organisers, accountants, clerks and so on. In Union A's Mumbai head office, there are altogether 45 staff members, including the General Secretary and Vice-President. The Presidency of the Union is mostly an honorary position, and the current President is an ex-Member of Parliament of India and ex-Mayor of Bombay. The General Secretary is the most powerful person in the union.

With its industry-wide recognition, and the financial strengths that followed, Union A over the years, but particularly within the last decade, has been able to come up with a range of services and welfare programmes that perhaps no other seafaring union in

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[6] Flag of Convenience (FOC) are the registries which often significantly more lax regulations on vessel, thus enabling shipowners to lower operation cost by avoiding costly regulations such as having to employ national seafarers or stringent safety and inspection regimes.

India could compete with in breadth or depth. Some of the major programmes are mentioned below.

Firstly, Union A offers several medical schemes, including one which covers petty officers, and another initiated in 2003 which affords financial assistance to seafarers during their sign-off period. In 2001, Union A also opened its own hospital in another major coastal city not far from Mumbai, and offers a 50 per cent concession of medical expenses incurred by union members and their families in this hospital.

Secondly, with funding from ITF, Union A had established two resort facilities near Mumbai in the 1990s. These two resorts are equipped with decent accommodation facilities, and charge minimal fees for seafarer members and their families who come to have a relaxing time. One resort has a lodging capacity of 32 rooms, whereas the other could accommodate up to 70 people. The latter has also a 'Care Home for the Aged', which has a capacity of over 100. Retired seafarers who are destitute can live there free of charge until the end of their lives. But due to a typically Asian stigma attached to such facilities, this Care Home has been chronically under-utilised.

Thirdly, UA has its own maritime academy, imparting training to more than 300 ratings per year. This is claimed by UA themselves to be one of the best maritime academies in India, and its students enjoy better employment prospects than students from other training establishments.

Finally, just before I arrived in Mumbai for fieldwork in late November 09, the union had announced two welfare schemes which would be effective from 2010. These two schemes are a *Financial Assistance to Ratings to Become Officers* and a *Financial Assistance for Higher Education for Children of Seafarers*. The former is in the form of interest free loans of up to about 5,000 US dollars each, and the latter is in the form of a scholarship. There are of course guidelines and limits that apply to these schemes.

It is perhaps a point of interest that the founder General Secretary of Union A in 1920s is the great-grandfather of the current General Secretary, Mr Gupta (pseudonym). Mr Gupta's grandfather was also the General Secretary of the union, while his father was the Assistant General Secretary. In other words, four generations of the same family have been on the helm of Union A.

First Impression: Union A

Union A is located in the shipping district in South Bombay. Many important shipping organisations are concentrated in this district, ranging from government bodies that regulate the shipping industry, to port authorities (including the port itself), and to private shipping companies. The three unions in this study are all located in this district, and so close to each other that I could visit all three of them on foot within just five minutes. South Bombay refers to the southern part of Mumbai, an area vicinal to the famous Gateway of India. In this area can be seen numerous grand Victorian style buildings left from the British Raj. This also applies to the shipping district, and most government shipping agencies occupy such grand buildings.

Nevertheless, the street on which Union A is found is devoid of such grandness. It is relatively untidy, and along the street there are many small shops. The union has a small building of its own, named 'UA Bhavan', with 'bhavan' meaning 'house' or 'building' in Hindi. It is a small building of four floors, with the first three housing various departments and the top floor being an empty space for gathering and functions.

On the front side of the ground floor there is a small reception area monitored by a CCTV camera. On the door, there is a small poster, featuring the current leader of the union, General Secretary Gupta, in full body length. In the poster, he is dressed in white dhoti and kurta, with a scarf in the colours and design of the India national flag. His posture is that of walking forward, and below his figure are the following words:

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┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│          Shri[1]  Gupta          │
│  General Secretary-cum-Treasurer │
│           (Union A)              │
│        WE ARE BLESSED TO         │
│        HAVE YOU AS OUR           │
│          GUIDING LIGHT           │
│   From: ALL SEAMEN BROTHERS      │
└─────────────────────────────────┘
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Later I discovered that this poster could be found on almost every door inside the UA Bhavan.

One interesting thing about Union A is that I always found dozens of young people dressed in office attire sitting or standing outside the union building, seemingly loitering. They either sat on the edge of the pavement or rested under trees, but looking at the union office most of the time. Later I learnt that these were young trainee seafarers who wished to find their first seagoing jobs with the help of the union, and they were there for a chance to meet and speak to the General Secretary, who, to them, was omnipotent and could deliver them from their agonising wait.

Similarly, inside the union building, about a dozen seafarers could always be seen waiting for something outside the organising department and the membership department. They were there either to pay membership fees or discuss some matters such as grievance. Their presence and coming-and-going made the atmosphere in the union a busy one.

3.2.2   Union B (UB)

Union B was first established in 1954 by a retired seaman in Calcutta, although the official registration did not take place until some time in the 1960s. Like Union A, it is predominantly a union for ratings and petty officers, though the Union says they also look after the interest of any seafarer who approaches them for help including officers.

In its early decades, Union B's presence was mainly felt in the east part of India centred around Calcutta, whereas in west India centred around Bombay, Union A had a stronger foothold.

Union B is overtly Marxist. It has been affiliated to the Marxist CITU from the very inception of this central trade union in the 1970s, and currently the Vice-President of UB is also the President of CITU, an 84-year-old veteran unionist.

By the 1980s, it was believed that UB accounted for roughly 30 per cent of those Indian ratings being represented by unions, with the remaining 70 per cent belonging to UA. This was also the reason why starting from 1986, in the NMB agreements with INSA, the employee side had been represented by both UA and UB, which had seven and three seats respectively. Today, the union's strength is mainly in the offshore/coastal sector of Indian shipping, and majority of the union's collective bargaining agreements are signed with Indian companies operating in Indian waters.

1996 was considered a watershed year for Union B, because in this year the union established its branch office in Mumbai, the 'heartland' of Union A. According to one UB leader, after 1996, Union B had gained significant membership strength which ate into Union A's 'market share'. Currently, the union has nine branches all over India, and according to my interview with one union leader, membership strength at the end of 2009 stood at 32,000, with the Mumbai branch alone accounting for nearly 12,000.

UB claims to be the largest maritime union in India, discrediting UA's claim to have some 80,000 members. Based on a national trade union membership census conducted in 2002, which is also the latest such census available, UB had more than 19,000 members, whereas Union A had just over 14,000. This was also the basis on which since 2002 Union B had contested the majority status held by Union A in the NMB negotiations, which led to a prolonged dispute that went up to the court. Eventually, although the matter was never officially settled, the situation had

temporarily reverted to the pre-dispute situation, namely Union B is involved in the NMB forum, but still with a minority status.

As Union B is a relatively 'late entrant', and had been under the shadow of Union A, the welfare service it provides currently is also very limited. Apart from 'fighting for the members', the one service that Union B boasts is its rotation system. Similar to what was previously implemented by the government Seamen's Employment Office (SEO) under planned economy, this system functions by registering the names of seafarers on rosters and giving them fair and secure employment. Usually two or three seafarers rotate around one vacancy, so if the seagoing contract is a 4-month one, each seafarer on the roster at least gets employed for one contract per year. According to Union B leaders, this rotation system is very well received.

The most significant development in recent times is Union B's affiliation with the ITF in year 2005. Before UB's affiliation, only two seafarers' unions in India were affiliated to the ITF, with Union A representing the petty officers and ratings and Union C representing the officers. Thus, Union B's newly-forged ITF affiliation is perceived, particularly by Union A, as a threat.

Union B complains that when its affiliation with ITF was obtained, a five-year 'embargo' period was imposed as a condition, during which Union B was not to sign ITF agreements and receive ITF funding. However, the five-year period will soon come to an end in year 2011. With this new financial source, the union says it hopes to initiate a range of other welfare programmes. The union has very recently purchased the premises for a proposed hospital with the capacity of 20 beds, half of which will be dedicated to seafarers with the rest open to general public.

First Impression: Union B

Union B is located on a street merely one block away from Union A. The street looks

just like Union A's, but the appearance of Union B's office is humbler. It occupies the space of one shop unit by the side of the street on the ground level, just like any other small shops. Above the ground floor are what seem to be simply residential apartments, but in somewhat poor condition, with stained cement walls and electricity cables running through all the space wildly.

Entering the union office, there is a very small square-ish reception area, with a desk and computer on the left side, and a sofa-bench enough for just three people on the right side. When I entered for the first time, there were about six people sitting in this room, plus two or three standing by the door, and some others going in and out.

After this first reception room is an equally small middle room, with a work station on the left side, and two chairs. A desktop computer rests amongst piles of paper work, and on the shelf above the desk there are more paperwork, files and books. This is where the Organising Secretary and the Office Advisor work from.

Further beyond this room is the office of the Secretary of Union B. This office is more than three times the size of the middle room. Nicely decorated and equipped with air-conditioning, it hence looks more like a typical director's office in corporate setting. Having said this, I guess this room is no more than 100 square feet in area, and when I first entered, several chairs were still placed in front of the Secretary's desk. This space is also often used for holding meetings.

As with UA, about a dozen of seafarers could always been seen loitering outside UB's office.

3.2.3 Union C

Union C is a union exclusively for Indian maritime officers. It was founded in Bombay in 1939 by Indian officers then employed onboard Indian Merchant Fleet

vessels under British control. The union was officially registered in 1941, and it got affiliated to ITF soon after in 1944. In 1947, the union concluded the first collective bargaining agreement for seagoing officers in India, which was considered by the union as a landmark event. In 1956, after a successful 16-day strike against a major Indian shipping company in order to obtain wage rises and other benefits, UC's status as the sole bargaining agent on behalf of Indian maritime officers was widely recognised.

Apart from these early milestone events, the history of Union C is murky, due to the lack of informants and literature, though, from whatever material that is available to me, it seems that the union in its early decades had a vociferous character that was typical of a trade union under a democracy and had engaged in various disputes with the industry and government.

At present, Union C has its head office in Mumbai, another office in Calcutta, and three 'Liaison Offices' in three other port cities. According to the General Secretary of the union, today there are in total roughly 35,000 serving Indian maritime officers, and the membership of UC usually fluctuates between 18,000 and 20,000, though the actual paid-up membership in any year is about 15,000.

Being the only officers' union in India, UC is thus the union to which a wide range of collective bargaining agreements concerning officers have been made with both Indian and foreign shipowners. For the Indian shipowners, UC enters into a biennial INSA-UC agreement, which covers Indian officers working for INSA member companies. For the foreign flagged vessels, UC enters into collective bargaining agreements with FOSMA (Foreign Owners Representative and Ship Managers Association) and MASSA (Maritime Association of Shipowners, Ship-managers, and Agents). FOSMA and MASSA are associations of those companies operating in India but whose principals are foreign, and vessels under such companies are usually registered with FOCs. Hence, the agreements UC signs with FOSMA and MASSA are

also based on ITF proforma. Altogether, 19 Indian companies and 44 foreign companies have agreements with UC. It is UC's policy that officers who are not covered under these agreements will usually not be under the scope of the union's concern.

In terms of welfare services, UC has registered two charitable organisations, through which all the welfare programmes of the union are delivered. These two charities cover those Indian officers employed by Indian shipping companies and by foreign shipping companies respectively. Upon joining Union C, an officer will be directed to register with either of them, according to the nature of his employment.

These two charities receive contributions from those companies which have agreements with UC, and they deliver virtually the same welfare programmes to its members. Firstly, there is a Medical Scheme which provides reimbursements to the member and their immediate families (spouse and two children) for medical treatment. Secondly, an Education Assistance Scheme has been established since 2006, which reimburses the expenses a member officer incurs in relation to the education of solely dependent children. Lastly, both charities share some Convalescent Homes facilities, which allow member officers and their families to stay for leisure at low costs. For the Medical and Education schemes, various conditions and limits apply.

In the case of disputes which fail to be solved through negotiation, Union C also assists its member officers with court cases, provided that such cases are deemed 'worth fighting'. According to the union's Joint Secretary, annually there would be around five such cases. Finally, Union C also provides legal and income tax advice to its members, and an insurance scheme which gives an officer some financial protection should their Certificate of Competency (CoC) be withheld or suspended due to maritime accidents and so on.

First Impressions: Union C

The building in which UC's head office is located is a five-storeyed corporate building in good condition. Most of UC's neighbours are private companies, amongst which is the famous global property consultancy company Knight Frank. The location of the building, though within walking distance from Union A and Union B, has a very different ambience. This used to be the heartland of the British colonial rule in Mumbai, with grand Victorian buildings one next to another. In fact, the Indian Ministry of Finance occupies one such building and is just some yards away. That the union representing officers is located in a cleaner and grander environment, as opposed to the dirty, untidy neighbourhood streets on which the other two ratings' unions are situated seems indicative of the different class position of its members.

Union C's office space was also very different from the two unions I had so far seen. Although not extravagantly decorated, the office space could be described as spacious and comfortable. The front reception area alone is about 300 to 400 square feet, with nice suite sofas. Equipped with air-conditioning, the General Secretary's (GS) office was particularly comfortable and airy one, with its own balcony overseeing the port terminals nearby.

The office atmosphere of Union C is pretty relaxed compared to that of the other two unions. Whereas a good number of seafarers can always be seen in and around Union A and B, barely any was seen at Union C. Nobody was seen loitering around the union, and based on my observation from about 2.30 to 5pm during my first visit, only three or four people who seemed to be seafarers visited the office, and none of them stayed for more than a few minutes. They came here to pay their dues or fill out some forms and then left. Thus, the sense of busyness and 'happening' present in UA and UB seemed absent. It is also perhaps interesting to note that while the UC office had twenty official staff members, there were six office boys who were responsible for making tea, running errands, carrying bags for, and driving the cars for the senior staff.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 A Shared Foundation: 'We are all for the members!'

By its very definition, a trade union is an organisation which represents and advances the interests of its constituent members, be they from certain trades, professions, or industries. Thus, it is no surprise that all three unions lay the foundation of their identities by claiming that it is only for the members that they exist. The three unions express their respective *raison d'etre* in rather similar terms.

The Vice President of UA put it as follows:

> See, trade union, when trade union is established, when labour is there, trade union is there; labour is not there, trade union is not there. What is trade union? Trade union is labour! Labour's union!
>
> See, the philosophy of the union, is one thing: you work, work, take decision for the labours, favouring to the labours only, not anybody else, not the shipowner, nothing, no, labours! Favouring to the labours!

In the case of Union B, the Organising Secretary said:

> [t]he union, we always think the union is because we have members, we are sitting on the chair because there are our members are supporting us, and we have membership.

And, when asked about the most important thing for a seafarers' union, the Superintendent-in-Charge of UC claimed that:

> We have to safeguard our members. The sincerity is what matters, because ultimately this union exists because of seafarers. If you look at it, at the end of the day, it exists for them, and by them, so that is the primary factor which we always remember.

Despite the similarities across the above quotes from all three unions, the discourses, images, conceptual categories and various arguments and logics that the unions deploy or draw upon to establish their respective union as a special and unique one different and distinguished from all the others are vastly diverse. Though resting on the same foundation, the unions next take on drastically divergent, sometimes antagonistic courses, and construct their distinctive identities through discursive activities.

4.2 Diverging Identities

4.2.1 Distilled Identity Discourses from Documents

With regard to the discursive identity constructions performed by the three unions, the documentary material is believed to provide the salient clues first and foremost, and may thus be treated as the entry point for our investigation. Compared to the discoursal data gathered in the form of interviews, which are mostly extemporaneous and therefore less considered/regulated/organised, the information put by the unions down on their documents, such as communicative or publicity materials, can be viewed as highly concentrated and purified versions of their self-representation, distilled manifestations of identity construction, in the sense that written materials are naturally more carefully thought out and scrutinised before going to print. Hence, the documentary materials collected in this research provide us with the ideal points of access into the unions' identity constructions.

UA: the 'Only union'

Although only a very limited number of documents were collected in relation to UA, a publicity booklet titled *WHY ONLY UA* proved to be a treasure trove. A small booklet of A3 size and just 20 pages, this little publication explains to the reader why a seafarer should choose to join and follow UA by way of explaining what UA has

been and is doing for its members. The front and back covers of the booklet are collages of various images of the union's activities. The central image on the front cover is the four-storey 'UA Bhavan', surrounded by pictures of UA's mass organising events, showing many people raising arms in protest marches, or carrying red banners bearing the union's name. The back cover is a collage too, with similar pictures, two of which feature the President and General Secretary of UA surrounded by supportive union members. Given that UA is a trade union for ratings, the choice of such pictures is not surprising, and the general idea presented is that UA is an activist labour union with mass grassroots support.

However, a more interesting read is to be found when one turns the pages. The particular ways in which the content of the booklet is arranged and the language through which the presentation is delivered reveal some of the central pillars of UA's identity construction. No doubt, the central idea that the booklet aims at promoting is that UA is the Only Union, a union which no other can dream of comparing to. The following are selected examples of the texts around the 'Only Union' theme (all bold is original in the booklet; same applies to later quotes):

1. Seafarers, the Indian government, Indian and foreign shipowners, national and international bodies have accepted the fact that the UA as a union has achieved the best not only for the seafarers but also their families. **That is the reason we confidently give the details of our achievements and say 'WHY ONLY UA'.**

2. **Union A of India (UA)** is the only union to celebrate a century in the year 1996. UA has now completed 109 years in the dedicated services of… Over the years there has been nothing but improvement in working conditions of….

3. For years UA has been single handedly working with determination to get jobs for our brothers.

4. **Keeping this in mind UA established on international standards its own UA Maritime Institute… Many of the trainees are serving on board the vessels and many have also become officers.**

5. **It is a matter of pride when we mention that our UA has its own hospital.** Have you ever heard of any union in the whole of India which has its own hospital?

6. **It was only due to the Protest March under the banner of UA in 1964 that led to the establishment of the Seafarers Retirement Fund Act in 1966 in the Indian Parliament.**

7. Since then, UA is the only union which has taken up the case with the Government of India for replenishment of nearly Rs. 100 Crore. [7] [8]

8. **It is only because of the efforts of UA that the matter is now before the Union Cabinet in New Delhi.**

While all the above excerpts, and many others which could not be reproduced here, are directed towards constructing UA's 'only-ness', it is noticeable that the only-ness is based on different premises, or logics. In quote 1, UA is the only union because it is widely recognised by various shipping stakeholders as having achieved the best. In other words, UA is the only union because of its wide public recognition, not least the recognition and approval from the officialdom such as government and international bodies—here primarily referring to international agencies such as ITF and ILO. In the second quote, however, UA's only-ness comes from its unparalleled long history and its dedication of service—no other union have been there for this long. In excerpt 3 and 4, UA is the only union that has been working towards providing jobs for seafarers, and UA's trainees are having good employment prospects and career future. What is highlighted is not only that UA is doing this 'single-handedly', it is also the underlying assumption that providing job is recognised by UA as a primary concern. Similarly, quote 5 constructs UA as the only union with the kind of recourses to provide good services to its members, something which no other union in the whole country can dream about. In quotes 6 to 8, revolving around the scam, it was UA

---

[7] In 2002, a fraud was discovered, involving one staff member of the Seafarers Retirement Fund embezzling somewhat one billion Indian rupees of funds. UA claims an instrumental role in forcing the Indian government to refund the money. As will be revealed later, this Retirement Fund Scam narrative is also a central building block to UA's identity discourse.

[8] Crore, Indian numeric unit, equals ten million.

which in the first place helped establish the Fund, and when the Fund was in jeopardy, it was only UA which was able to salvage it. All together, these few quotes contain the instantiations of UA's identity construction, relying upon discourses such as 1) the union is widely recognised and respected; 2) the union has an unparalleled legacy and stature; 3) the union is concerned with providing seafarers jobs as a priority and is able to deliver that effectively; 4) the union is unchallengeably the strongest union in terms of resources; and finally, 5) the union is such a strong one that it is capable of forcing the Indian government to cough up one billion rupees to replenish the Seafarers Retirement Fund.

While it might be argued that these quotes could be random and the above interpretation some form of 'over-reading', I maintain that none of what appears in the above is accidental or insignificant. It is in the contrastive light of other unions' documentary self-representation that one realises that these above themes are truly unique to UA; and it is upon comparing UA's documentary discourse with UA's discourses in other forms that one realises the non-coincidental nature of the above interpretation, namely that those themes are indeed central pillars of UA's identity discourse.

However, before moving on to the documentary discourse of other unions, there remain other important points to be made about the *WHY ONLY UA* booklet.

In the booklet's section explaining UA's collective bargaining activities and agreements as well as its international affiliations/connections, a couple of pictures are printed, showing the General Secretary (GS) of the union shaking hands or signing agreements with various important persons from the shipping industry worldwide. One picture captured the moment of the GS presenting a lavish traditional Indian style garland to the General Secretary of ITF. Another one showed him sitting on the same table and signing an MoU with a shipowners' representative from Italy. Again, it might be asked 'how else can such occasion be depicted?' Yet, it is maintained here

that the depiction of the UA GS being together and shaking hands with other worthies in the shipping industry is of significance, for, imagine, if only the scan copies of the actual agreements reached by the union were reprinted in the booklet, no doubt it would have achieved a very different impression and 'feel'. Relating to the observation that the GS's portraits were found on various prominent places in the union premises, one possible reading of these pictorial presentations is that it reflects the culture of reverence to the leader in UA, and the importance and respect afforded to personality. A second possible reading is that by depicting the GS cordially reaching agreements with both the industry and other international stakeholders, UA is being constructed as a union that maintains a good relation with the industry and enjoys respect and recognition from high-level international organisations and bodies.

The first reading seems to be confirmed by some further documentary evidence from the union premises. Following Prior's (2003) inclusive approach towards the concept of document, physical appearances or even decorations of the union's offices could be considered discursive materials not only reflecting but structuring social perceptions and relations. In addition to the numerous portraits of the union's previous and current leaders in various prominent positions inside 'UA Bhavan', one most extraordinary example is two framed pictures hung against the wall in the organisers' office. For obvious reasons, the actual pictures cannot be shown, but will be explained with the help of the following illustrations (Figures 4.1 and 4.2).
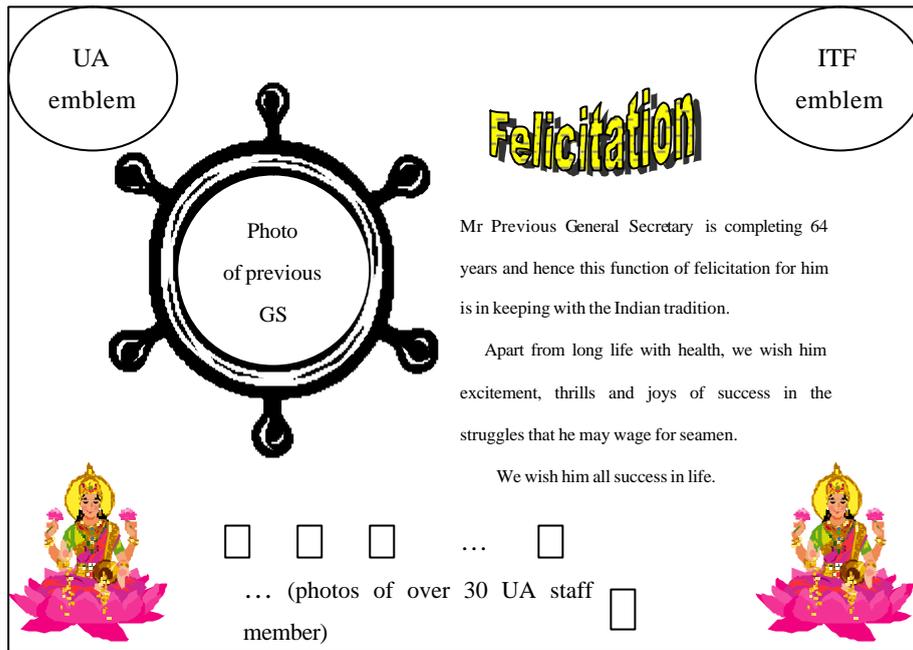
Fig 4.1 Illustration of picture one
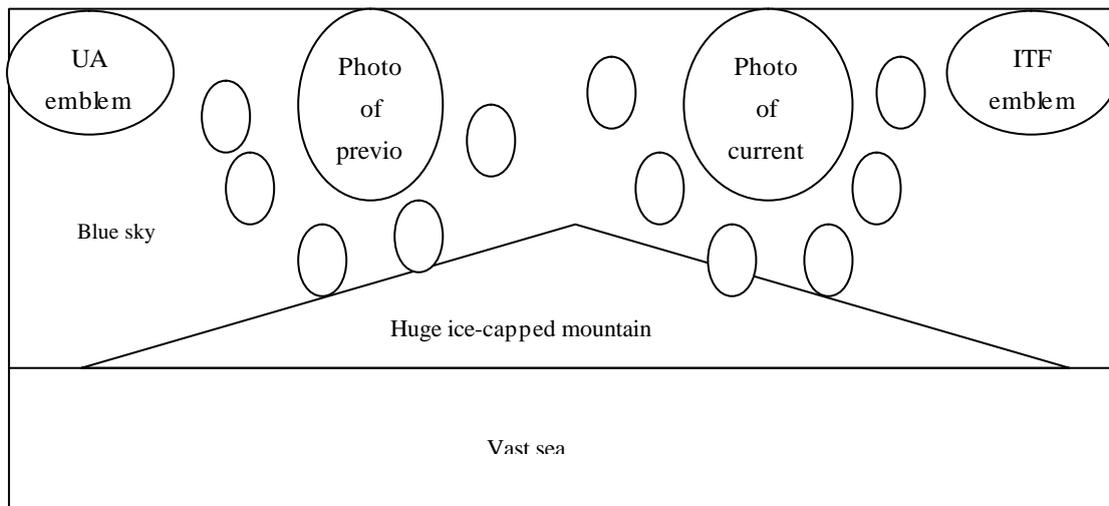
Fig 4.2 Illustration of picture two

In both framed pictures, the photos of the leaders of the union were placed in prominent positions, in sizes many times larger than the photos of other union staff members. In the first picture, which was a gift presented to the previous GS on his birthday, the photo of the GS dominates the entire layout. The photos of the staff members are neatly arranged at the bottom. The background to the second framed picture is a breathtaking landscape, though one probably artificially composed. A

gargantuan ice-capped mountain, one which immediately conjures up the imagination of the majestic Himalayas, rises out of a vast sea, with the limitless blue sky above studded with the pictures of the union leaders and staff members. Putting ones' pictures on such a background, majestically overlooking the beauty of nature could almost be interpreted as a deity fantasisation in the Freudian tradition. Even without going that far, the reverence and perhaps cult for leader, and the union's self-perception or construction of a position of superiority are evident.

The second point, namely the surmise that UA has a predilection for associating itself with 'high-level' organisations/bodies, and hence putting itself at a high level is not unfounded either. In page 19 of the booklet, a paragraph is written about UA's efforts in facilitating Indian seafarers obtaining US visas, the issuance of which had become significantly more problematic since the security alerts following 9/11. The paragraph goes as follows:

<u>UA Organises an Industry Meeting with The US Consulate:</u>

> Our brothers are aware that seafarers are facing lots of problem regarding the visa of the United States. While UA supports the security concerns of the United States, non-issuance of US visa is a big problem for the seafarers for gainful employment. UA organised the shipping industry meeting in which we are proud to mention that four vice Consul's (sic) of the US Consulate visited the UA office. This was a very positive development, which has benefited Indian seafarers a lot.

Not anywhere in this paragraph is mentioned what agreement or understanding was achieved or reached between UA and the US Consulate, and therefore the reason why there was a 'very positive development' and that benefits had befallen the Indian seafarers remains obscure. It is equally extraordinary that the fact that four US vice Consuls had visited UA office was in itself considered a source of *pride*.

Below the paragraph is a picture of two UA officials, the GS and Vice President (VP), sitting by a bouquet-decorated table with red table cloth, having a discussion with the

four US Consuls. A banner indicating the nature of the meeting is also in a prominent position in the picture. Arguably, instead of really telling what UA has done in relation to the US visa issue, the paragraph and picture seem to really emphasise UA's high level connection and recognition. And UA does not hesitate to pronounce its pride in just getting the American diplomats down to their office.

What is also discovered in *WHY ONLY UA* is that UA demonstrates tendencies of self-importance through the use of condescending language. For example, in the booklet's opening greeting given by the GS is the following sentence:

> Let us give you a brief note of our achievements and activities to improve the lives of Indian seafarers and their families. **You will no doubt agree that you are a proud and fortunate member of UA**.

In later sections regarding UA's industrial agreements:

> Every single Indian seafarer has accepted that the agreements of UA has helped him and his family in some way or another.

In regard to one of UA's welfare schemes which distributes 200 rupees (roughly £3) per month to each of over 2000 widows of UA members, UA states:

> **We want the blessings of these old widows of seafarers**.

What is striking in these sentences is that the members who are supposed to either 'agree', 'accept' or 'bless' are actually not given an option. Their voices are absent, and their agency exercised on their behalf. In the first sentence, the members are told how they should feel about the union: proud and fortunate; and not only does UA has no doubt about it, it is also sure that its members do not have any doubts about it either. In the second sentence, UA goes so far as to claim that *'every single* Indian seafarers has accepted…'—which is a daring conclusion to make; and in the last example, blessing is *demanded* of those benefiting from the union, however limited

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that benefit might be. By totally foreclosing the members' own representation of feelings and opinions and imposing the union's, UA distances itself from its ordinary members and places it over and above them. Members are no longer the ones who decide what the union should do, just like depicted in those pictures on the cover pages of the booklet, they support the leaders and take actions as instructed. Such condescending attitudes also reinforce and are reflected in the union's obsession with itself, completing the image of a union whose existence seems to have become an end in itself, as is evinced in the final concluding slogan in the booklet:

Make UA stronger
Proudly say you are a UA Member
Long Live Seamens Unity
Long Live UA

Analysing the logical structure of these few lines, the first and last sentences reveal that UA's continuation as an organisation is the aim, the *end* itself: to make it stronger, so that it could live forever. In order to make it stronger, a member should feel proud, and should also keep up the seamen's unity, but eventually, this is all in order to serve the end of a UA which aspires to perpetual existence.

UB: the 'fighting union'

When it comes to the documentary materials from UB, the difference from UA could not be more glaring. First of all, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the cramped, if not downright shabby, office space of UB compared with UA's four-strorey purpose-built house is already a straightforward symbolic evidence that UB in its status and resources could not hold a candle to UA.

Being in a lesser position in addition to being strongly affiliated with the communist Central Trade Union (and the Indian Communist Party) perhaps explain the overall image and identity that UB seems to be constructing of itself, which is that of a

vociferous, radical, activist and militant trade union organisation based on Marxist ideology.

UB's image as a radical combative union is represented very straightforwardly in the 'About us' section of its website, which contains the following text:

> Union B of India, commonly known as UB, was established on 30th May, 1954. Prior to that, seamen were subjected to inhuman torture, victimization and hire and fire by the shipowners. There was no seamen's employment office. Unemployed youths used to stand in the queue for jobs. Gangsters and musclemen alongwith shipping agents were preferred mostly the non-Indian seamen. Young Indian seafarers were left out for a job. These tortures, created anger and resentment amongst seamen. There was constant desire amongst seamen to lodge protest unitedly. This desire and urge amongst them brought them together to initially form Merchant Navy Trainees' Club. Soon the seamen realized that without a trade union it would not be possible to combat or counter shipowners' virulent attack. That was the starting point with the formation of UB in 1957 as stated above.
>
> UB is an organization committed to defend and protect the interests of the seafarers and save them from the onslaught of the shipowners.

The polemic tone of this text is obvious with the choice of expressions such as 'inhuman torture' and 'onslaught of the shipowners', not to mention the image of a vulnerable Indian seafarer that emerges from these descriptions. Clearly, UB identifies itself as the agent of change when it said that prior to its establishment those exploitations were going on, implying that its coming into existence was the salvation of Indian seamen. Perhaps conforming to its communist ideology, one distinctive character observed of UB's website is also that all senior committee members of the unions are referred to with the prefix: Comrade.

In a souvenir booklet published to mark the 45th Indian Merchant Navy Week, one page contains a tribute message from UB. Below the scarlet emblem of the union is the following passage:

We Believe:
- Obstacles are those frightful things you see
- When you fail to FOCUS on your GOALS, but…
- The Union B of India
- FOCUSes on GOALs, plan strategies and…
- Fights hard and untiringly…………Thus,
- The Seamen achieve what they want, one by one.

In contrast to UA's discourse which seems to put itself above any difficulty and beyond any challenge, here in this passage, UB is seen to be deliberately acknowledging and emphasising the existence of obstacles and challenges. However, because UB 'focuses on goals' and 'fights untiringly', it is able overcome all difficulties. The combative character is instantly formed out of these few lines.

Five issues of UB's monthly magazine *SeaWorld* (pseudonym) provide further insights into the sort of discourse from which emerges the identity of the union. The front cover design of the magazine is the same across five issues, with only variations in the colour scheme. It is composed of the black simulacrum of a ship in background, with a group of abstract human figures dancing and rejoicing in front of the ship. The leading figure of the group is holding a flag, with the letters 'UB' written distinctively on it. The flag also overlaps with the image of the sun. The overall first 'feel' is that of optimism and vibrancy. The magazine is in fact a very humble publication, evidently printed on moderate budgets, though the impressive feature is that it is trilingual, with the same contents printed in English, Bengali and Hindi. Such a feature should be interpreted as UB's efforts in reaching out to seafarers who might not be comfortable enough with reading English, which could be easily the case with rating seafarers. In comparison with UA's publications which are only available in English, a more inclusive and less elitist impression can be formed of UB.

This study only analyses the English content in the five issues, which contain altogether 54 separate articles. A thematic content analysis is performed on these

articles, resulting in the following categorisation.

Category one, eight articles, theme: seafarers as the very unfortunate victims of various villainous parties such as shipowners/shipping companies, the government, and piracy. For example, accusing one major Indian nationally-owned company for sub- contracting and privatising, one article states:

> When globally, private sectors are playing havoc with the lives of the workers denouncing all rights and privileges of the workers, the public sector undertakings and governments owned companies are expected to play positive role and restrain themselves from precipitating crisis in the industry. […] The management has a tendency to flout all labour laws and laws of the land applicable for the seafarers.

Not only are the companies accused here, underlying the statement is also UB's anti-neoliberal stance. The neoliberal reality of the Indian shipping industry, according to UB, is the reason why 'seafarers are employed as per whims and fancies of different employers through bargaining' (from the same article)—'bargaining' referring to the employers' alleged corrupt practice of bargaining wages with individual seafarers instead of following set wage standards in the industry. And, in all these foul practices, the Indian government is constructed as a co-conspirator:

> The question arises as to what is the power of strength behind such organized corruption by the shipowners or their agents? The power and center of strength is the office of the DG Shipping. … DG Shipping's office strengthened the hands of the employers.

Various concrete examples and incidents were also reported to substantiate these charges. At one point, sympathy is expressed to the seafarers in an emotive way, such as in the following song written by the editor, sharing the agony that seafarers experience in trying to obtain US visas and port permits:

Stop ISPS[9]

<div align="center">

I am just a seaman looking for some fun
Sailing from east to west
Always doing my best
Helping the world's economy
By earning a bit of money
But now we are imprisoned in the ports
With no access to the folks
Working day and night
Nobody wants to hear our plight
It's the seamen's mission
With its good vision
Who has ears to listen to us
And helps us by consoling us
It's only after the 11th of September
Laws were passed as I can remember
It's my human rights
Of which I am deprived
I am no terrorist or crazy beast
Pleas stop this bloody prejudice

</div>

Clearly, here, the seafarer is constructed as the innocent honest worker victimised by the ISPS regulations. 'Helping the world's economy, by earning a bit of money' further confers on the seafarer a self-sacrificial nobleness, to which the depravation of basic 'human rights' is starkly contrasted, further forging the image of a seafarer who is indignant about this injustice but at the same time utterly helpless. By publishing such a song in its magazine, UB is thus to be perceived as a union which is really on the side of the seafarers and can truly understand the pains and miseries of the seafarers. This is a very different representation of seafarers as compared to the seafarers in UA's booklet, who are content and proud members of that union, thankful for what the union has done for them.

Furthermore, UB also seems keen to be understood as an activist union eager to do things to change the situation. In the second category, seven articles contain stories

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[9] ISPS: International Ship and Port Facilities Security Code, is the regulation implemented since 2004 which made obtaining US shore leave extremely difficult for seafarers.

about how UB and its related sectoral unions have agitated and achieved tangible results to the advantage of seafarers. Following this, there is a third category of articles, three of them in total, which report on seafaring union activities around the world. These reports are clearly written in a tone that cannot be described as neutral or dispassionate. Maybe adhering to one central tenet of the Marxist/Communist theory, namely all workmen across different industries and countries should unite, five articles on industrial tensions and actions in the coal and steel industries in Indian and other industries abroad consist the fourth category. The time of the magazines' publication was also the time when the world economy was mired in the aftermath of the global financial meltdown. The domino effects and the unemployment resulted were seized upon by UB, incorporated into its discourse, augmenting its anti-capitalist rhetoric, as is evident in the following excerpt:

> The global economic depression created a situation which many consider to be identical with the crisis of 1930 known as the Great Depression. Lakhs[10] of workers and employees lost their jobs… Now the workers have started retaliating by organizing demonstrations and strikes against such vindictive measures of the employers fully backed by the capitalist governments.

And when it comes to the Indian government, the language is equally uncharitable:

> …the central government instead of providing relief to workers doled out Rs[11]. 1 lakh crore to the capitalists to come out of the crisis…

Altogether, the 15 articles in categories two, three, and four can be interpreted as UB's expression of its belief in militant style industrial struggles, and through communicating this belief to the readers, it can also be seen to be educating its members of a militant anti-capitalist attitude.

At the same time, UB does not restrict its discourse to the realm of shipping alone, but

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[10] Lakh, Indian numeric unit, equals 100,000.
[11] Rs, shorthand for rupees.

expresses critical opinions on political issues in general. Category five contains then polemic articles which attack the Indian government scathingly, clearly indicating the union's radical anti-establishment sentiment. For example, one article criticises the three-fold pay rises of the Indian High Court and Supreme Court judges in 2008; another exposes the 'exorbitant' transport expenses claimed by the Minister of Shipping; and still more allude to the gross incompetence and rampant corruption of the government. One article actually launched onto the shipping minister what were clearly *ad hominem* attacks by ridiculing him based on his educational background and personal history. Such overtly political contents and techniques can be explained in light of UB's close ideological alignment with the Indian Communist Party. UB does not shy away from overt party political polemics either. There are three articles in the magazines directly commenting on party politics in India and the back covers of two of the five issues actually contain the following propagandist message:

Defeat Congress – Defeat BJP[12]
and
Their partners
Cast your vote in favour of left, democratic
and
Secular forces
Strengthen third front
for
alternative economic policy, democratic rights
and
communal harmony

In addition, yet another category contains articles expressing progressive opinions on social issues such as racism and discrimination. In total, only 14 out of all 54 articles are relatively neutral, being news stories related to the shipping industry.

All in all, the content of the *SeaWorld* magazines of UB reflects UB's identity, or its attempts to construct its identity, as overtly polemic, activist, radical,

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[12] Both Congress and BJP are major Indian political parties. Congress is generally perceived to be centre-right, whereas BJP is further to the right, with its neoliberal policies.

anti-establishment and perhaps even combative. The adoption of a Marxist vocabulary and the pervasiveness of political messages either related to shipping or not also suggest that UB is a union with an agenda more ambitious than just struggle within the shipping sector. The readiness of UB to identify with seafarers' miseries and predicaments, meanwhile, constructs it as the true vanguard for the common seamen, ready to take on the class enemies, i.e. the companies and the 'capitalist' government.

Apart from the union magazines which mainly give us a flavour of UB's ideological and political identities, four opportunistically obtained cards that UB sent out on festive occasions provide interesting insights from another angle. These cards are probably part of UB's PR practice, to be received by parties having dealing with the union. The choice of the design, theme and messages on these cards contain significant meanings. The scanned images of these cards are produced below.
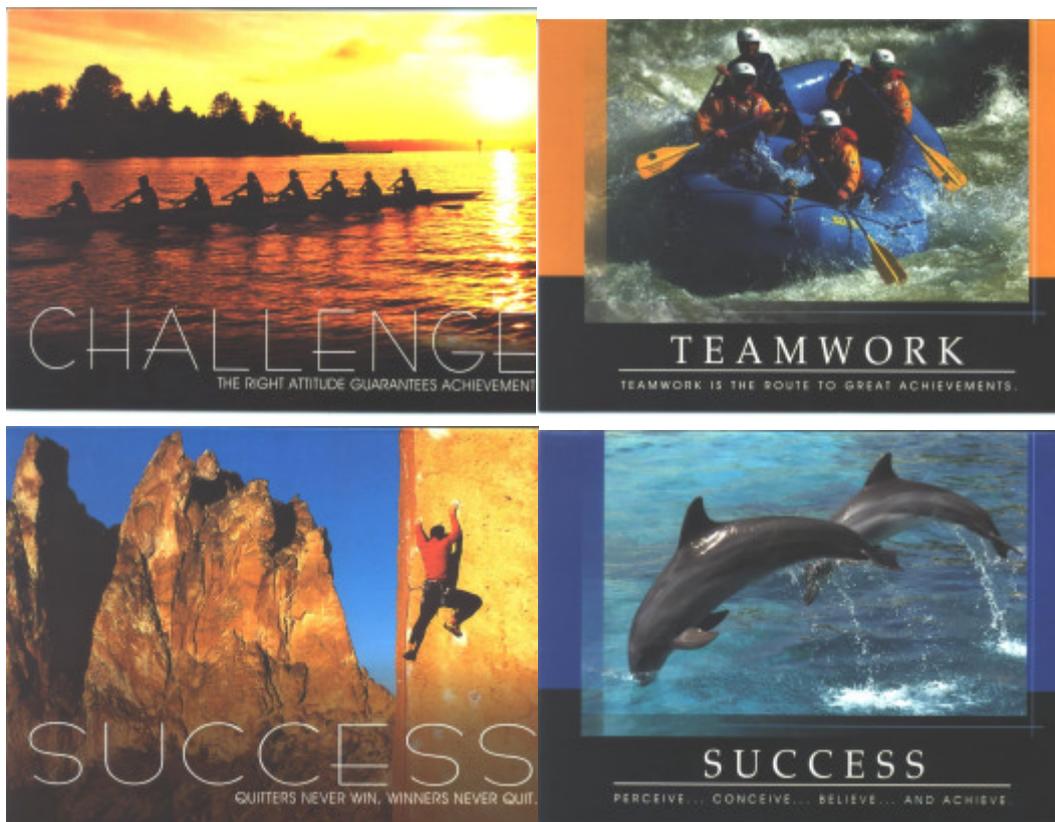
Fig 4.3 Message cards of UB

The above four were spare copies of the cards sent out in year 2008 and 2009. Clearly,

the themes of the cards involve forward-looking, self-encouraging, achievement-oriented ones such as 'teamwork', 'challenge' and 'success'. While the order of the cards can not be ascertained due to the absence of dates inside, an obvious logical narrative emerges: the union faces challenges, and through teamwork, it attempts to achieve success. The images and words found on the cards are self-explanatory, and so it suffices to summarise that another side of UB's identity is also expressed through struggle stories. The union presents itself as one that faces tremendous challenges but through heroic struggles based on teamwork, which at the same time implies a degree of grassroots activism and egalitarianism, finally manages to attain success. As is to be shown in the next chapter, such an image is not only congruent with the Marxist radical union image that UB presents, it is also constructed in diametrical opposition to UA's identities.

Finally, although in all the documentary material of publicity nature UB's image has been consistently constructed along the line of a 'fighting' union, one small point of variation which can only be said to have flashed up ephemerally merits mention. Inside one of the four cards is the following message (original bold):

<div align="center">

The price of **Discipline**
is
always less than the pain of regret.

Self **Discipline** is the Biggest investment
and
Returns on this investment is **Success**

The Union B of India

</div>

One might naturally be interested to ask what self-discipline means for a trade union. Is it self-discipline so that the union does not defect to the enemy's side, so to speak? Or is it self-discipline in the sense that a union should also be well-behaved? Among the 54 articles and the wealth of UB's opinionated comments, only one sentence seems to provide a clue. At the end of the same article in which scorching accusations

were made to an Indian government owned company which was attempting at privatising and sub-contracting was the following sentence:

> As a responsible trade union UB is always committed to peace, harmony and healthy employer-employee relation. UB is committed to ensure progress of the company but never at the cost of the workers' interest.

This is the only incidence in which the word 'responsible' appear in the entire collection of publicity material of UB. Although such a statement sounds completely sensible, it coexists with the rest of the content somewhat uncomfortably—probably also the very reason why it only appears once. In what seems to be a qualifier to all what UB has aggressively asserted, profit of the company is euphemised as 'progress', perhaps aiming at glossing over the tension between such a 'revisionist' stance and the vociferousness with which UB has 'banged on' about class struggle.

UC: the intellectual union

Moving finally on to UC, the officers' union, again, the difference between the image that emerges from its documents and those of the other two unions is striking. In the same souvenir booklet in which UB has contributed its 'fighting'-themed tribute message, there is also a page containing the message from UC. Instead of the vociferous scarlet emblem and scarlet letters in which 'Union B of India' is printed, UC's page is set in the background colour of turquoise, exuding an aura of calmness and classiness. Whether the choice of turquoise, which is close to blue, as against the red theme in UA's page, is by any chance deliberate cannot be ascertained. (Interesting enough, both the emblems of UA and UC are in blue-ish colours whereas UB's is in an aggressive red.) However, the choice of an elegant artistic font to print the union's messages as compared to the plain Arial black in which UB's message was printed only seems to further emphasise the class distinction between the two unions, which was already alluded to at the end of Chapter Three. The following is the scan image of UC's page. For confidentiality reasons, only the upper half could be shown.
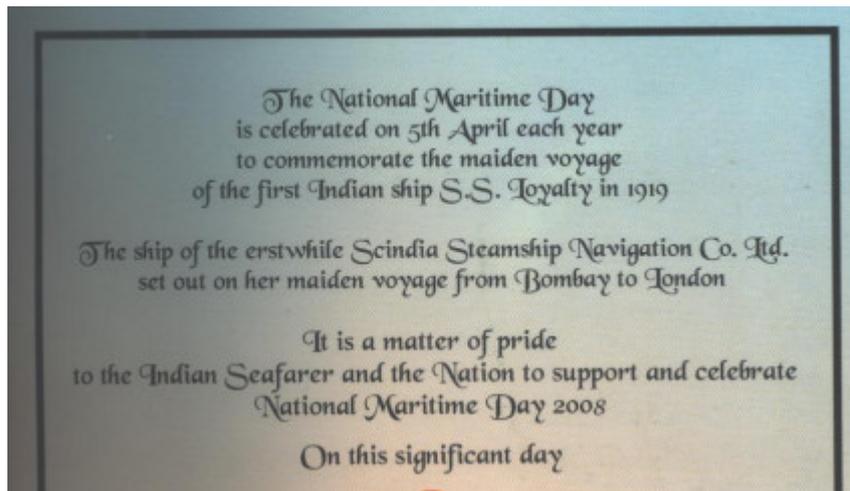
Fig 4.4 Tribute message by UC on maritime publication

Clearly, such a visual scheme allows little room for a 'fighting' language, as none indeed was found in the passage.

On anther tribute message that UC published in honour of the Indian National Shipowners' Association (INSA) on its 80th Foundation Day, more or less the same colour scheme and layout were used, with the following message in the centre of the page:

Members we once served
are today's leaders
in all facets of Shipping industry

In fact, this short sentence can be seen to contain the very cornerstone of UC's identity—the construction of seafaring officers as elites. The reserved colour scheme and elegant fonts can be seen as expressions of the taste of an elite class of members who are neither victims, nor mere workers, but 'leaders in all facets of shipping industry'. Although in both the above two tribute pages, UC declares to be 'serving Indian Merchant Navy Officers and working towards seafarers solidarity' and 'committed to Merchant Navy Officers Welfare and Solidarity', the clandestine shift of officers' position from being seafarers/workers in the shipping industry to that of

leaders of the shipping industry—and presumably leaders of shipping companies too— insinuates the potential transmogrification of the entire meaning of existence of UC as a labour union.

The surmise that officers are being constructed and treated as an elite class seems to be well supported by the analyses of four issues of UC's in-house quarterly journal *Thalasa* (pseudonym). *Thalasa* is an A3 size publication printed smartly. Not failing its claim to be a journal, all of the four issues obtained are 56 pages in length, as compared to UA's one or two-page leaflet circulars issued every few weeks and UB's flimsy monthly magazine. Turning the pages of the journal, one realises that this is certainly a publication catered to people who are at ease with texts and reading, because all content appears in rather small print, arranged in very professional -looking layout.

Small print also implies a large amount of information, and it seems one definitive character of this journal of UC's is its informative nature, and thus also the assumption that its readers are interested in and capable of processing the copious information provided. A thematic content analysis of the journals suggests the following findings.

Among all 159 articles appearing in the four recent issues of *Thalasa*, the biggest category is actually that of government notices, containing 52 items. These are usually notices or circulars issued by the Indian Shipping Ministry or DG Shipping or other government bodies, regarding changes in rules, regulations, administrative procedures and so on. Due to the nature of their work, seafarers usually spend significant periods of time cut off from the land, and thus keeping them updated is important. This category is mostly of practical utility.

A second group of equally practical information contains ten articles addressing issues of immediate concern to seafarers. These articles are not issued from government

bodies but are cited or compiled from other national/international maritime sources. For example, there is a complete list of the contact details of ITF inspectors/affiliates worldwide. Such information equips the readers with valuable resources to tackle problems when they are in trouble. Similarly, there is also a complete list of all government approved maritime training institutes in India. With fraudulent institutions sprouting all over the country, such knowledge means discerning power. And when a map is given showing the area of the Gulf of Aden with highest rates of piracy incidents, knowledge perhaps means more survival/life than power.

The third category of articles may be called 'self-education', for the ten articles in this group deal with more complicated matters, and aim at educating the reader at a higher level. The primary example is an article series called 'Taxation and You', written by a Chartered Accountant, giving surprisingly detailed explanation of applicable tax laws, illustrated with sample calculations. In fact, one suspects if these articles might really be of any interest to anyone other than practicing accountants. Other examples in this category include an article which explains the 'Long-Range Identification and Tracking' (LRIT) system and a summary of the newest scientific discoveries regarding the riddance of unwanted marine life in ballast water. Although these articles are not academic in the strictest sense, they are definitely catered to the very technically savvy and intellectually competent.

Aside from technical articles, one other big category contains information on the developments in both Indian and world shipping. This category has 49 entries, consisting of a vast variety of articles with topics ranging from the shipping economics of India to international piracy. Many of such articles have been directly quoted from organisations such as the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) or other maritime periodicals such as the Lloyds List. In fact, as far as this category is concerned, it is no much different from many other professional-oriented maritime publications.

Following this category is another more general non-shipping news and commentary group, including seven articles, touching on topical issues as broad-ranging as the climate change, terrorist threats to India from Pakistan, and American immigration laws. The inclusion of such themes and issues clearly assumes the readers, namely the officers, are people from a social stratum (usually called 'middle class' in the Western context) likely to be concerned with such issues and educated enough to be able to understand them.

Most interestingly, there is even a small category of literature and culture themed articles, including three poems contributed by readers and one book review on a seafaring themed fiction written by a currently serving Indian 2nd Engineer! Though small in number, the presence of this category is of no mean significance. The consumption of culture, literature, and higher forms of literature such as poems is not only associated with education, but also the 'taste' and cultural capital belonging to people of particular social 'distinction' (Bourdieu, 1989). Though as mentioned earlier there was one rhymed song in UB's monthly magazine, none of the poems in *Thalasa* shares any of its polemic tone. Two of the three poems dwell on philosophical topics, one titled 'Love' and the other 'The Experiment', the former being a passionate description of the psychological effects of romantic love on a person, and the latter a slightly playful account of the poet's 'experiment' of trying to live without God, but resulting in the eventual strengthening of his religiosity. Perhaps it need not be disputed that these are rather 'bourgeois sentiments'. The third poem is titled 'A Tribute To Defence Forces of India', one which can be interpreted to convey sympathy with authority and power.

Furthermore, there is also an entertainment category. Thirteen articles fall into this category, and they are further divided into sub-categories such as: 'Do you know?', 'Word of Wisdom', 'Brain Teaser' and 'Take a guess'. Instead of blue jokes and portraits of semi-naked female models which are found in some other commercial maritime journals/bulletins prevailing in the Indian market, *Thalasa*'s entertainment

section is notably more highbrow, and clearly assumes considerable intellectual curiosity from the readers' side. For example, in 'Take a guess' in one issue, the five questions asked and given answers to are:

1) Why are some bugs and insects attracted to light?
2) Why do bats hang upside down?
3) What is the origin of the concept of El Dorado?
4) Why does pure water has no taste or colour?
5) Which is the oldest language in India?

In the 'Words of Wisdom' section, a variety of terse, witty and inspiring quotes are printed. The genres covered spread from self-encouraging, aspirational quotes about 'success' and 'winning in life' to ones which teaches values such as frugality, perseverance, optimism, and love. The bourgeois, gentry tenor in the collection of quotes is readily discernable.

Finally, only fourteen entries out of all 159, that is, less than a tenth, are ones directly related to union matters. Eight of these fourteen are duplicate tear-off forms for member data update or CoC insurance application. The remaining six articles are statements made by UC regarding some of the maritime incidents, such as hijack and wrongful criminalisation of seafarers occurring during the times of the journals' publication. Though these articles register protests, they are invariably written in a language and style conformant to the general style of the whole journal.

So, what does the above analysis of the contents of the journal tell us? Clearly, based on the contents, one comes to recognise the journal readers, namely Indian maritime officers, as a particular kind of people, possessing particular sets of qualities. However, more than just telling us what *are* this group of people, the journals in fact also reflect what the journal's editor, namely UC, actually *sees* the officers as, how it *constructs* an officer as a person of particular interests, concerns, tastes, and capabilities. It can be argued that there is actually a dichotomisation in the

construction of officers in *Thalasa*. On the one hand, the significant number of entries serving purely practical purposes can be seen to construct the officers as people who are pragmatic and needy of practical information and knowledge. Not only are they to be kept up to date of the regulatory/administrative changes, they are also to be informed of the general development in shipping industry and be educated of particular technical matters that might be of interest to them. On the other hand, the non-shipping related information such as world news and commentaries hails the officers as general intellectuals who are concerned with issues such as climate change and terrorism. This intellectual image of officers is reinforced and elevated by the appearance of, though in a modicum, literature, poems, and witty learned quotes. This aspect of the journal contents assumes the Indian officer to be not only someone who is educated, but also someone of good taste, intellectual appetite, and, to use the most unspeakable of words, high social class—he is not just a technocratic philistine, he can appreciate the finer things of life.

However, is this dichotomy not a contradiction too? Is it not somewhat counter-intuitive for someone of good class who has an appetite for poems also to need to learn the technical nitty-gritty of 'how to enter enclosed spaces onboard a tanker'? It is argued here that this dichotomy, far from being a contradiction, is actually the simultaneous reflection and construction of a singularly aspirational character. The dichotomy is bridged and reconciled by understanding the officer as someone who is foremost pragmatic, rational, educated, but at the same time constantly engaging himself in the activity of self-education and enrichment, and who ultimately aspires to higher forms of accomplishment and cultivation, as is symbolised by poetry.

One deliberately suppressed element of this current content analysis has been the various adverts pages in the *Thalasa* journals. These adverts are not shown in the index and not counted in the 159 entries, but total 37 entries in all four issues. Fourteen of these are adverts that promote maritime training institutes, and the rest

being ones either generally publicising shipping companies or specific positions and vacancies. These ads can be seen to provide the crucial 'missing link' between the dichotomy of pragmatism and aspiration, namely, that it is only through gaining training and then getting a job can one officer realises his ambitions.

Summary

To sum up the above analyses of the documentary constructions of identity of the three unions in a comparative light, it is clear that identities distinctive from each other are found to emerge, and all these are accomplished through either written texts or texts in a wider sense. In the case of UA, the union is constructed as the Only Union based on a variety of elements, which might be its history, its financial strength, its capability in securing jobs for members and its organising power and influence. Through the way UA fashions itself and the way its imperious discourse seems to silence the voice of its members and denies them their own opinions, UA can also be seen to be involved in a self-elevating construction. The concomitant leadership-worship/cult only seems to resonate with and solidify its construction of an identity based on self-promoted superiority. In the case of UB, through its abundant fired-up, radical and anti-establishment oratory, the union seems keen to be seen by others as a combative Marxist union. Through discourses identifying with the victimised seafarers and recognising their miseries and problems, the union constructs itself as the champion and vanguard of seafaring labour. Such a combative image is augmented and evinced even in UB's choice of message cards on festive occasions. In the case of UC, the contrast with UB could not have been sharper. Although there is relatively less direct reference to the characters of UC as a union—in the sense that UA's claim that they are the Only Union is a *direct* claim—UC's construction of identity is more subtle, and in fact relies heavily on the construction of its members: the Indian maritime officers. In other words, the characters of the members determine what sort of union UC should be. Although little is said about UC itself, the construction of UC members as aspirational an elite intellectual is surely to have

profound implications for the construction of the identity of UC.

Due to the limitation of collecting documentary materials as a method, it is not always possible to achieve high level of across-the-board consistency and comparability in the forms of documents examined. For example, while in the cases of UB and UC, in-house periodicals were available and comparison was possible, the same does not apply to UA. Similarly, in the case of UA, the publicity booklet has proven to be an invaluable source of data, whereas there is no such exact equivalent publication in UB or UC. However, this should not be seen in any sense as a flaw, because, it is maintained here that one principle behind discourse analyses, and in particular, documentary analyses, is that whatever that is said or written should be taken as significant. Across different forms of documents and texts, the important point is to discover what is there and what is not. Consistency in form is hardly a necessity, so long as in each form of texts examined the discursive elements that facilitate the emergence of the unions' respective identities have been analysed and compared.

Having said the above, the analysis of documents is used only as the entry points of our effort in assessing the unions' discursive identity construction. It only gives us concentrated and purified 'flavours' but do not show a fuller picture and the details about how the varying and contrasting identities of the unions are constructed and sustained. In the next chapter, we turn to discoursal data gathered through interviews, with the assistance of observational data, to allow the story to fully emerge.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 Full-fledged Identity Discourses

The immensity and complexity of the substance of the unions' identity discourses and the ways in which the unions discourse their identities are intimidating. Hence, it becomes urgent to impose certain structural framework on the analysis and presentation of data. The first major inspiration comes from the study by Phillips and Hardy (1997) as reviewed in Chapter One which, among other things, suggests that discursive identity construction of organisations often dialectically rests on the construction of certain objects/concepts related to the organisation. In the case of the identity of UK refugee administration, the organisational identity is seen to have emerged from the ways in which refugee status seekers are being constructed. Alvesson in his study of the identity management of an advertising agency through discourse (1994) utilised the concept of 'conceptual figure' which helps us refine the insights from Phillips and Hardy. According to Alvesson's usage, conceptual figures are considered to mediate between socio-material base and discursive surface. One invaluable insight from this approach is to see the otherwise orderless and countless chaotic and amorphous eruptions of discourse as loosely organised around a finite and limited number of conceptual figures. Grasping and articulating these conceptual figures proves to be one effective way of making sense of discourse. Combining the above two insights, the identity construction of one organisation can then be seen as founded on the simultaneous construction of various sub-categories and/or sub-concepts that are related to the concerned organisation. I call these sub-categories/sub-concepts *sub-constructs* in this thesis.

The second major inspiration comes from Clegg *et al*'s (2006) study on the organisational identity construction in an emerging industry, in which they argue that

organization identity is best understood in terms of the relationship between *temporal* difference (i.e. the performance of a stable identity over time) and *spatial* difference (i.e. by locating organizational identity in relation to other firms, both similar and different). It is the relationship between these two forms of difference that enables the construction of a legitimate sense of organizational identity. (emphasis added)

The important upshot is, put simply, that that one central task of constructing one's own identity is to tell how one is either different from or same as others and how one is either different from or same as one's own past/future. This point is most convincingly confirmed by my data, as will soon be shown, which demonstrates how organisations construct themselves by constructing each other.

Applying the above discussion to the data collected in this research, five central sub-constructs emerge. As my main concern in this research has been to find out how the unions construct their identity construction through discourse, one blatant question that I always confronted the unions with was basically: 'what sort of union are you?' which prompted a large amount of self-description, or what I venture to designate as *auto-discourse*. Thus, the first and foremost sub-construct in the union's discourse is none other than itself, or 'this union'. And based on Clegg *et al*'s theory on spatial difference (temporal difference can be seen as already subsumed in the first sub-construct), the second sub-construct can be expected to be the other union(s). Aside from these two, other essential entities that a trade union directly come into dealing with are inescapably the employers (shipping companies/manning agents etc.), members of the union (seafarers: rating/officer), and the government. It is found in the coding process that huge portions of all the talk in interviews gathered in the field are also directed at or connected to these sub-constructs. All these above-mentioned are 'constructs' in themselves because they are subject to each union's unique ways of presentation and representation, and it is the totality and summation of such sub-construction that culminate in the identity of the discoursing/discoursed union. Consequently, our analytical attempt here can be essentially seen as guided by the task of filling in table 5.1. This is also what I meant by the top-down pre-conceptualised

analytical framework at the end of Chapter Two.

	This Union	*Other union(s)*	*Companies*	*Seafarers*	*Government*
UA					
UB					
UC					

Table 5.1 Guiding analytical framework

5.1.1 UA

● *This Union*

With regard to UA, many aspects of the union's auto-discourse have already been revealed in earlier analysis of its publicity brochure. In fact, the self-promoting nature of UA's discourse is confirmed throughout the interview data as well. One central discourse of UA regarding itself is that of 'highness' or 'advancedness'. On multiple occasions, the General Secretary (GS) of UA was recorded saying 'we believe in a very *high* level of collective bargaining', with the emphasis unmistakably placed on the word 'high'. The GS explains what this 'high' approach actually means:

> GS: Because usually when you think about a union, the first thought which comes to the mind of a person, any common…layperson, will be that, that the union is a trouble-making body. Union is a one…this is the common people (thinking): union is a trouble-making body, just demonstration, this obstructing traffic, breaking window pane, and breaking furniture, that is mob psychology. […] As far as UA is concerned, I think, as an industry, as a union, we have passed that stage of agitation, demonstration, or something which can be termed as a 'volatile' aspect of a union. We have passed that stage. But, that does not mean that we regret that stage. No. Okay. It is also part and parcel of a union activity which is also required. Nothing is free in this world, nobody listens to you just for the sake of listening. If you have power, you have might, only then the people opposite you will tend to listen to you. Ok. We have shown now that the industry, the shipping industry knows what we are able to do, what we are capable of, in terms of that volatile activity…

Interviewer: Muscle strength.

GS: Muscle strength. But we don't…that is why I say we have passed that stage. We have come on a *higher* level understanding with the shipowner, because that could be…you know, issues can be sorted just a call away.

In this quote, we can see that the 'highness' is explicated by the GS as a civilised and mature way of union working, without having to resolve to militancy. The 'highness' is constructed here both *spatially* and *temporally*. On the spatial dimension, the GS introduces an imaginary of a 'common/lay person', in whose mind unionism is just about trouble-making and militancy. By suggesting that this thought belongs to the common and lay, the GS firmly claims the superiority of his or his union's expert attitude and understanding. The following quote from the Vice-President (VP) of UA confirms this interpretation:

See that today, the government, all the government over the world, they don't know the trade union. They don't know […] Trade union means a trouble-maker body, that's the image. Everyone, all over the world, they don't know the trade union.

The equating of unionism to militancy and trouble-making is the thought of the lay people, amateurs, and therefore is unworthy and low. By conjuring up a contrasting image which is low, the first dimension of UA's highness is accomplished spatially. Given the militancy or at least militant *image* of UB which is well-known in the Indian maritime scene and UA's competitive relation with UB, one is not speculating when saying that UA is attributing the lowness to those militant mob unions of which UB is considered to be an archetype.

On the other dimension, the GS interestingly repeatedly said that UA has 'passed that stage', suggesting that the union has now matured and reached a 'high' level of understanding with the industry. In other words, UA also used to be 'low', but now it

has advanced and is 'high'. Since lowness used to be UA's past, the GS probably felt that it was worth defending it, hence those qualifying remarks. But ultimately in this differentiation and distancing from its own 'volatile' past, the GS temporally constructed the highness and maturity which are the union's current defining characters.

This 'highness' of UA can perhaps be interpreted as the more rational side to the 'Only Union' discourse, for it provides at least a rationale and validity. Since the only-ness of UA has been well investigated previously, here it perhaps suffices to add just one more quote from the VP:

> VP: One union has come up, other union want to fight with them. See, I will tell you: our union, nobody have the guts, nobody dare, nobody have the dare to minimise UA! UA is always up!
>
> *Interviewer: Nobody dare to minimise UA...*
>
> VP: Nobody is there in the world! I am talking about the world, forget India!

Lastly, although not overtly expressed, accompanying the highness and only-ness of UA seems to be an indispensability discourse, one that constructs itself as a strategic leading organisation that the 'shipping fraternity'—as it is called in Indian parlance—cannot do without. The GS used the phrase 'good luck' in a condescending way towards those shipping companies which do not cooperate with UA:

> you don't want to sign an agreement with me, fine, that is your good luck, you know, you do on your own…

He carried on to suggest that UA is a 'strategic union in a strategic industry':

> we have to be responsible, you know, because we are not…means we take into consideration the totality of the industry. We are aware we are a very strategic union in a very strategic industry. Ok. If something happens in

this particular industry, shipping industry, it is going to have far-reaching effects in the national economy. That is the reason political parties want to come and take over our union, political parties. Ok. But we are…our union we are not affiliated to any political party, we are an independent union on our own. Just imagine if a political party has a union like us under its control, day in and day out there will be agitation, ship stopping, it is going to have far-reaching effects on the national economy, Indian economy, because goods won't get transferred. If there is no oil coming in…these are all strategic. Offshore and other thing… But if they don't bring in oil…so these are all strategic industry.

And, in the Public Relations Officer's following words, UA is almost talked about first as the supreme arbitrator and then the collective leader of the whole shipping community in India:

> We cannot be biased with the shipping fraternity, we are part of the shipping fraternity, you need to take everybody together and move forward, shipping, the seafarers, government…all together.

In this short utterance, the highness, only-ness and indispensability can be said to have fused seamlessly. In establishing the union's strategic position, the GS also reasserted the political independence of UA. Here, political independence is attributed as the essence of UA's being responsible, for politically affiliated unions will be used for political ends and thus become trouble makers. Again, although not a word is mentioned of UB, it is clear that UA's articulation of its own identity very much involves the imagination of a kind union that UB apparently resembles.

- *Other Union*

As various quotes from UA show, in UA's construction of its own image, it has erected a stereotype of militant, trouble-making labour union which is assigned with a very low opinion and low place. The GS also commented that such unions are a 'nuisance element', since what they do is irresponsible and unfair. He suggested that these unions, using their barbaric styles of operation, take bribes from seafarer

members on the one hand and then force shipping companies to accept their members for jobs on the other. Describing these 'nuisance unions', the GS said:

> When I signed the agreement with that new company, I tell them that we will not interfere into your selection process. You can take who of your choice, because you have to run the ship, you have to take people of your choice. […] But other unions also which have come up, despite the fact, what they do: they insist on the seafarers being taken who are their member. I tell the company should have their own choice in making the selection. But there are these so call association and union, who go about taking a group of seafarers, (saying) that you take these seafarers only, otherwise we will do, you know, in your offices we will break the window, we will break these, the mob psychology…they do with that.

Obviously, this is another evident example of spatial differentiation, in which UA, a respectable, responsible and 'high' union, is contrasted with those 'nuisance' ones. The nuisance ones are nuisances because they violate what UA seems to imply as a cardinal principle of unionism, that of non-interference with the employers' selection process. Being its arch rival, it is hardly surprising that UA counts UB into those nuisance unions as well:

> GS: Other unions which are engaging in this activity, they would interfere and entirely in the selection process of the (company)…You can make your own independent research on that. And that also includes the Union B also, in the area where they are having control, so they interfere too much into the selection process, which is not fair. We have to give the shipowner a choice, to put their people onboard.

Back on a more general level, the VP of UA has also given the pejorative title 'street union' to all unions other than UA. Lamenting on the ease of establishing a trade union in the liberal political climate in India—apparently any eleven workers can come together and register a trade union—the VP insists that there is no comparison between any of those unions with UA:

> VP: But they cannot compare with us! UA and other union, No! Because

our union is last 118 [*sic*] years! Not one or two days. We knows what is a trade union, what is trade union philosophy—they just came up on the street only! That is other unions are the street union. We call them street union.

- *Companies*

In UA's construction of the other unions also partially emerged the discourses of UA with regard to employers, namely, shipping companies and/or manning agents. Nuisance unions are accused of being 'unfair', but whom to? In fact, one other often recurrent word in UA's identity lexicon has been the word 'fairness'. Though it could have been included in UA's auto-discourse, it was felt that this identity attribution is so closely related UA's discourse on the companies, it could be more profitably discussed here.

Across many interviewees in UA, there was a consistent discourse that sympathises or even identifies with the shipping company and a *complete* lack of criticism.

The GS said the following in my first interview with him:

> **We** have to be reasonable, **we/you** have to be logical in **your** reasoning, **you** have to be fair! And as a union, UA believes in fairness! Ok. We will also go to an extent if our member is at fault, we will be the first person to tell him that he is at fault. We are not that union that even he is at fault (we) still take up the issue...pressurise the company…so we believe in a lot of fairness. That is the reason I mentioned 'high level' collective bargaining.

The first interesting point here is that this quote which elaborates on the concept of 'fairness' was somewhat surprisingly tied to 'highness' at the end. This is one indication of the chaotically inseverable relations between the sub-constructs, an issue which I shall revisit with much extended discussion later. The second interesting point is the first sentence in which we see the transformation of 'we', a collective reference to the union, of course, to 'you', the pronoun which the shipping companies or

shipowners will use to address the union. In the digital recording, the second instance of the pronoun was pronounced so ambiguously that it was impossible to distinguish whether it was 'we' or 'you', but by the third and fourth it had clearly turned into 'you'. Arguably, what went on here was the surreptitious shift of the UA GS from the union's side to siding with the shipowners by adopting their voice and requesting his own union to be 'logical' and 'fair'! This is certainly one striking piece of evidence that the GS identifies with the interest of the shipowners/companies.

If the above reading may be challenged as an isolated incidence or the GS's personal speech style, then the consistent 'siding' with shipowners by way of putting forward arguments in their favour exhibited across a range of UA officials cannot be so easily dismissed. First of all, in explaining the 'fairness' principle further, the GS gave an example: the cargo carried onboard a ship is wheat, and before the next cargo, say, sugar, could be taken in, the cargo space must be cleaned properly to avoid contamination. In such a situation, the seafarers charged with cleaning the cargo holds can be said to 'hold a ransom' against the shipping company. If the cleaning is not properly done or delayed, the shipowner is to suffer from financial loss. The GS then suggests that some seafarers exploit situations such as this and demand 'exorbitant' overtime payment, and this is certainly unfair to the shipowner and must be disciplined. While this is just a hypothetical scenario given by the GS to illustrate the point, the GS's consideration of the hypothetical company's financial situation is evidence of UA's sympathy and identification with the company's interest.

Similarly, regarding collective bargaining of wage, the VP commented:

> you have to see the other, other parts also, see the shipowner, maybe he is earning ten per cent, all his expenses going, net profit is ten per cent, if he propose to give two per cent three per cent (to labour), you should accept. You should not tell them give fifteen per cent, twenty per cent, from where he will give you? His net profit is ten per cent, that ten per cent he have to see his own living standard everything and that if you say you give me fifteen per cent to my labour, from where he will live? Trade union should

have the clear mind, fully support to the shipowner, after supporting only he is able to work, gain more and more profit from the industry…

He further suggested that this was in order to maintain relationship with the owner:

> If you are the owner, if you are earning 500 dollar, if I ask you to give me 600 dollar, where are you giving? You are giving from whom? Maybe trade union by force he maybe forcing to the owner, maybe once twice he will be giving his own money to your people, but not forever, then you are breaking your relationship.

The Assistant Secretary, who was also the head of all organisers of UA, worried for the shipowners whether they were making enough profit to 'have food':

> At the same time, while the owner is not…he is not taking the food, you understand, he could not making the food everyday, how will you afford the food for us? Then you have to think also. That's called…you know…this is our…you know…the owner, our union have understanding on that. If you benefited 100 rupees, I will ask 10 rupees pays to my crew. If you are not getting any, zero, union has to keep quiet! That's why UA, Mr Gupta is having a very good reputation with the owners also.

Finally, the PRO of the union, when prompted, spoke about those irresponsible seafarers who make unjustifiable demands which put unfair financial strains on the company:

> there will be some jusitificable reactions from the union which may not be taken on the positive sign by certain seafarers, because these are unjustifiable demand, ok. Now, if a seafarer telling I need to get down from the ship immediately and he will put a call to UA to say 'I need to get down!', ok. But then the company has put so much money behind training the seafarer, the seafarer has certain commitment towards the company, but just because he is a member of UA, he feels 'no, I think I should…I should…The union will tell the company and my thing will be granted'. But we don't go along with that kind of seafarer, whose intentions are not clear. We say 'no, you have a contract, you finish that contract and come down'. Provided the reason what you provided is justified, now he just wants to get down because it's son's birthday, not

justified!

Although the actual examples given by various UA officials vary, it is clear that they all tend to discourse somewhat in favour of the shipowner, sympathising with their situation, understanding their difficulties. Hardly a word was found against the shipping companies in the entire data collection in relation to UA. Hence, apart from this fairness discourse, UA's reference to shipping companies is actually scant. It is not until later an opportunity to observe one major UA event that greater understanding of UA's attitudes towards and relations with companies is attained.

● *Seafarers*

So far, along the way of examining UA's constructions regarding itself, other unions, and the companies, clues and references are already revealed and made of the seafarer sub-construct in UA's identity schema.

Recalling our analysis of UA's publicity booklet in which there was an absence of seafarers' own voices, UA's attitude towards its members is further illustrated when the VP claims that a union's task is to take decisions *for* labour, because 'they don't know what they want', since:

> the labour is not educated, uneducated labour. If you are to tell them to do this thing, they are doing, they don't know what is the ramification, what is the in and out, what you are getting and not getting…they don't know.

This construction of ratings as uneducated simpletons who are easily subject to influence and manipulation seems a bit cruel. In the GS's mind, the Indian ratings are not much better—they are basically seen as deficient in their capabilities as well as lacking in aspiration to improve themselves:

> we have had a technical school, but some time back we had to close it

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down, because at that time the response was not very good. That technical school we had was for the seafarers, for already accomplished seafarers, those already been seafarers with experience onboard the ships. If they wanted to come down and improve their capabilities, that technical institute was for that…we also thought about that! But we found that you know the seafarers, despite all the publicity, they were not coming in, to upgrade their skills, because that was the old mentality of the seafarers. You must have noticed that there was one seaman who came who was around 57 years of age, he is still a Seaman One! Seaman One is a low category, okay. In the earlier days if you ask, some 15 years back, 15, 20 years back, if you ask a seaman 'what is your rank?' he would proudly, he will be very proud to say, despite the fact that he was 50 years, that 'I am Seaman One!'. So, you ask him, 'why don't you come up after Seaman One, you could have become an Able-bodied Seaman, you can become a bosun, you could have become a serang, why didn't you do that?' 'No no', he's very happy because there are…those kinds of majority was, they don't want to take up a higher position, because that position came with responsibility, so they were happy with doing the chipping, painting…the small work…doing that job and going back…you know…going back (home)…not the responsibility one, in the sense not the one which needed them to take…you know…get the work done.

Constructed in this fashion, the rating cannot actually complain about not having jobs or not getting good pay, because their own deficiencies have in a way already sealed their fate. The VP's response to this issue was even more merciless. Noticing that not a negative word about shipping companies was spoken by UA, I prompted by suggesting that some seafarers are being mistreated, for example, being given unjustifiably low wages, something that inevitably revealed itself to me during the fieldwork process. The VP's answer was most interesting. 'See, you are asking me a good question. Very valid question', he started, but instead of answering the question directly, he used an illustration based on myself:

See that you are a postgraduate, you just think, why someone is given the low wages? See that you are the postgraduate, you go as an apprentice, you go to the good company, you get good atmosphere, good stipend, and everything, you are getting. Same time, maybe you are postgraduate, maybe you are having 80 per cent, 80 per cent marks, overall, first class, you are a first class postgraduate student. Somebody is only for the passing, 35…only pass, pass out. The company, they are not appointing

him, where he can go? He have no job, then he go to the low companies. He can (only) go to low companies (because) nobody will be appointing him. Same thing in the shipping, so many seafarer is there, they are having the fake documents, that is bogus.

In other words, it is the right price for the right goods! Many seafarers are either deficient or bogus, and they are even holding fake documents. The low salary and bad treatment given by the 'low companies' are perhaps just what the seafarers 'deserve'. It is striking that instead of criticising the unethical companies, the VP evoked what is essentially a Darwinian reasoning in response to my prompt.

To further elucidate UA's relation with its member seafarers, one event which I observed on my very first visit to UA and the GS seems to supplement very important materials. The event was a weekly audience that the GS holds with young seafarers who are seeking jobs—and many for their first jobs too. These mostly young seafarers—known as 'trainees' or 'freshers'—encounter great difficulty in getting their first jobs because the general oversupply of rating at not only the Indian but a global level. Believing that UA, such an established union as it is, has the best contacts and connections in the industry, particularly with foreign shipping companies, these trainees stand outside UA office day in day out in the hope of speaking with the GS and to get recommendation from him for 'joining ship'. My first visit to UA fell on the day that Mr Gupta would usually see these trainees. The following is my fieldnotes of this observation, written on the very evening of the event based on vivid reconstruction. Since this was my very first meeting with Gupta, taking notes in front of his eyes was deemed to be overly risky. In any case, as Bloor (1978, p. 546) rightly points out, all observation is necessarily selective, and those scribbled fieldnotes taken on spot, without any meaning attributed to them, would be merely a 'babble, a senseless jumble'. Thus, the observer/researcher's conscious effort to reconstruct the scene and make interpretations is unavoidable, and I choose to declare that I have attempted at a responsible interpretation in the description of this event (my account of the event begins a bit earlier than the trainees actually came in):

When I entered Gupta's office, he was still talking with someone, later known to be Mr Wajid (pseudonym), the Vice President of UA. I shook hand with Gupta and presented my business card. When he returned with his card, I noticed that the card was considerably smaller than a usual business card. I thus commented 'oh, this is a very smart card'. Gupta did not pick up my 'chat-up lines' for small talk, as he would neither in several later occasions. But Wajid seemed to have a more cheerful disposition, and commented: 'smart card, but big man ah!'—he pointed at Gupta. While Wajid and Gupta wrapped up their conversation in Hindi, I had a few moments to take a survey of the office. This is an air-conditioned office of about 200 square foot, nicely decorated with various objects. It is elongated on the west-east direction. Gupta's work station occupies the west end of the office, with a large desk and a computer and some paper work on it. Behind Gupta's chair is a decorative cabinet with transparent glass windows. Inside are kept numerous trophies and objects indicating the awards and honours that UA had amassed over the years. Some bigger trophies have to be put outside. And there were also two enlarged pictures of Gupta shaking hands with the current Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and the former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. On the wall on the north side are again hung objects indicating UA's awards. There was also an objet d'art on the east end of the room, a beautiful wooden craft sail ship kept in a glass casket. Later, more careful observation revealed that this was presented to the GS as a gift by one colleague of his, the Assistant Secretary. It did not look cheap.

After a short conversation with Gupta about my research, he suggested that today was the day that he usually saw the trainees, and that this was one important part of his work, and that I could sit aside first and observe it. I was very excited that on the very first day I was given such a golden opportunity. Gupta then pressed a buzzer under his desk, and the servant in the reception area brought in seven young seafarers from all those who have already queued up in front of the building. They came in one by one, and upon seeing Gupta they touched their chest briefly with their right hand as a greeting, nodding their heads at the meantime, saying: 'Sir'. The seven of them stood in a line silently, ready to be spoken to. Gupta introduced me to them, saying that I was a researcher from UK, and thus they had to speak English today.

Gupta then started from the right to left, asking each of the young seamen to say their name, and what sea experience and/or special skills they had. When the boys opened mouth to answer in Hindi, Gupta would impatiently say: 'English!' When they failed to answer in English, Gupta would be quick to reprimand: 'Your English! You can't even speak

English properly how can you expect a job! Nowadays owners want people who speak English!' This even made me feel a little bad because the seamen were bearing this criticism only due to my presence; or put it another way, my presence seemed to have provided Gupta a handy opportunity to lash the seafarers on their incompetence.

Throughout six batches of such seafarers who came in during the morning, Gupta's attitude towards them could be described as condescending and indifferent. Those young seamen looked just equally intimidated and deferential. Gupta also quite often showed impatience in listening and talking to these young men. When the phone or his mobile rang, as they did quite often, he would straightaway pick up, leaving the seaman who was speaking rather awkwardly hanging halfway, not knowing whether to continue or not. In fact, on the whole, he did not speak much with them, and when he spoke, it was usually in a voice/tone of impatient superiority. Scant traces of sincerity or care or service spirit could be detected from his manner.

Altogether six batches of seafarers came and went in the whole morning, with each batch consisting of roughly seven people and lasting for about ten minutes long. These approximately 40 young seamen could be divided into two categories, according to the outcomes of their audience.

There were five lucky ones, who had some sea experience, especially in watch-keeping, and working on tanker ships. When such a seafarer came up, Gupta would take out a piece of A3 size paper, enquire the seafarer's name, and then write a few lines on the paper, with his Montblanc pen[13]. He would then fold it into half, and sign his signature again on the blank side and then pass the paper to the seafarer in a regal way. The seafarer, receiving this piece of paper which is so dear to him, would nod and touch his chest again with the right hand to show gratitude, and leave cheered up.

However, for the unlucky majority, their audience with Gupta today seemed fruitless. If the seaman was a trainee, namely one without any sea experience, he would be told straightaway that currently there was no vacancy for trainee seamen. They would be asked to keep on looking for job themselves, and be in touch again with UA. Gupta would ask them when they finished their training, and what special skills, such as welding, they had. One seaman completed his training in Chennai in 2004, and when asked whether he had any special skills, he said no. Gupta then said: '2004! Now is 2009, 5 years! What have you been doing? If you don't

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[13] GS Gupta does seem to have a taste for luxury goods. On another occasion later, I used to see a carton of Dunhill cigarettes on his desk.

learn new skills along the way, how can I help you? You are all the same, completed training, but with no experience, no special skills…there are just too many of you. Those with some special skills or sea experience will have an advantage over you. How can you find a job if you are not improving you skills?' The boy was left speechless.

Another boy spoken to later could not string a single sentence in English, and he seemed to be known previously to Gupta. Gupta asked: 'you can't even say a sentence in English. What did I tell you to do last time? Did you take the four month English course?' The boy shook his head slightly in a peculiar way, which in Indian body language meant yes. Gupta asked: 'Then how come you can't speak English? Did you complete the course?' The boy then said no. 'So, who to blame?!' The boy had to show remorse and indicated that himself was at blame. Gupta said: 'Ah! If you don't help yourself, how can I help you? Nowadays employers want high quality seamen who can speak good English!...'

Mostly in such a way, the majority of those who came for today's audience with Gupta were turned away, and asked to keep looking for job themselves as well as to be in touch with UA again. It was not difficult to see the disappointment on their faces.

Among the fourth batch, the boy standing at the far right end of the line seemed particularly desperate. He spoke better English than the rest of the seamen who came today. He told his story: he took his seamen's training course back in 2004, and had subsequently paid 5 lakhs rupees[14] to a manning agent in order to get a job. However, the manning agent was cheating, and did not provide one and ran away. His family had borrowed that huge sum of money from relatives and neighbour villagers. The boy then came to Mumbai to work in a call centre to repay the debt. Now he is staying in the Seamen's Hostel in Mumbai, in search of a seafaring job, like so many other young trainees from all over India, among whom are those who came today. But because he has no seafaring experience or any special skills, Gupta had no job for him. He ordered him to go. But the boy remained in the office when the rest of the batch had left, and he was desperate for a job. He said: 'I have been waiting for a year at Bombay now…I speak good English, I can speak British and American…' his voice started shaking, and he produced a handkerchief from trousers pocket to wipe his tears. Most probably having seen such scenes before, Gupta seemed unmoved and asked him to go. 'Jalo' he said, which I later learnt means 'go'. The boy went closer to Gupta, bowed, and put his hand briefly on Gupta's thigh, a kind of servile gesture, probably for begging for leniency and favour in local culture. However, there was simply no job

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[14] Roughly equivalent to GBP 7,000

for him, and eventually he had to go.

Among the last batch the boy on the far left side was lucky enough to get a recommendation letter, but that was not the only thing he came here for today. He said he was owed several months' wages by his employer. However, seeing this is the last batch, Gupta was evidently less patient, and was ready to dismiss the batch when the boy suddenly brought up the issue. Having already given this boy the letter, Gupta's facial expression and body language were such to the effect of saying: 'I've already given that to you…what now?' What he actually said was: 'but that's another matter, separate', and then he dismissed the whole batch with minimal body language. With everybody else going, and the office servant opening the door to invite everyone away, the boy had to go too, and said: 'okay, thank you sir'.

After all six batches had been seen, in came a group of older people in their 40s and 50s, who did not seem to be seafarers. I was not instructed what to do next, and therefore was left listening to their conversation. My state of being intimidated and the consideration of not spoiling the research relationship meant that I did not remind Gupta of my presence. The group of guests spoke with Gupta in Hindi, and of course, the nature and content of that meeting, which lasted pretty long, or at least so it seemed, remains a myth. The only meaningful observation from this meeting was perhaps that Gupta was much more lively and talkative. He even smiled and laughed occasionally, which he never did during the audience with the seafarers.

This observation experience supplements our understanding of UA's discourse regarding seafarers very well. One clearly realises that there is hardly any sympathising discourse with seafarers. The seafarers, or ratings, to be specific, have been variously constructed as uneducated, irresponsible, but above all, deficient in their abilities and lacking in aspiration, the corollary to which is that they cannot blame others for their misfortune and mistreatment received.

With respect to methodology, the incorporation of an observational account here should not be suspected as a deviation from the discursive framework, but rather as complementary. And it must be stressed, during the entire audience, it is through language, argument, and illustration that the GS demonstrated to the trainees

themselves that they were deficient, and it is also his languages, both bodily or verbal, that reflected and structured the relationship between him and the seafarers. In addition to the GS's interaction with the seafarers, this observational account also allows us to revisit some of the earlier themes, such as UA's obsession with its own image, its superior attitude and pride based on achievements and the worship of leaders.

● *Government*

In contrast to all the preceding sub-constructs which are characterised generally by a degree of unequivocality, government is the one category about which UA seems to be ambiguous. In the first place, there was not extensive mention of the government. On some occasions, neutrality and disinterestedness were the tenor of speech. The Assistant Secretary spoke of the government as 'neither enemy nor friend' while demonstrating cordiality in his personal rapport with the government officials when he took me to visit the Government shipping office and introduced me to officials. The GS and PRO were also found to speak about the government in disinterested ways. On a few occasions, however, support and deference were paid. For example, when asked whether the government was at fault in being inefficient, incompetent and corrupt—a view that seems to be almost universally held in India—and has resulted in detriment to seafarers' interest in many cases, the VP defended the government by suggesting that the government has protocols and rules which must be followed, and that the bureaucratic system means that there can be no quick decision making. Thus, 'that they are slow is not their fault, you see' said the VP. At one point, he even said 'the government is the government. You cannot force them. Government is the king.' In one more instance, the VP was keen in projecting the image of a UA which is invincible and unbendable before any forces. He suggested that UA even dared to defy ITF in the mid 1990s, leading to its temporary suspension by ITF. The reason for this conflict was that ITF was pushing for certain global wage standards that were deemed by the Indian government as undermining the cost competitiveness of Indian

seafarers. The VP commented as follows, rather unbelievably constructing UA as a staunch and loyal ally of the Indian government.

> We don't want to sell our principles, any cost. We don't want to undermine our government. No, what the government say, we have to obey the order.

However, it is not always indifference, deference and support. When it seems to suit the purpose of UA, the government is also liable to be constructed quite differently. The PRO gave an example of UA's efforts in countering piracy incidents which involved Indian seafarers:

> The vessel which was at that time 2008 was the vessel XYZ, it has 18 Indians onboard, we identified the ship, we got the family members of the seafarer who were hijacked, we brought the media association which are associated with the shipping fraternity, we brought the Directorate General of Shipping, you know, all under the one roof of UA, and we had press conference. Now, the press, for them it was something new, you see, piracy, Indian seafarers being attacked, so they promoted it, they took it to the maximum level. They brought it to the notice of the government. [*Interrupted*] Now, media took it to the highest level, the Government of Indian noticed the development that has been happening in the industry, what happened later on was, due to the media pressure, involvement of all the shipping associated bodies, for the very first time, Indian government sent two naval ships to the Gulf of Aden. Now, unfortunately, Gulf of Aden is a lawless land, there is no government existing there, but then, though with all these difficulties, still the Government of India sent the two vessels. Now, this thing is historic! Never in the history of maritime shipping Indian government has sent its naval forces out of Indian waters. Now, why this happened? This is because of the sole initiative UA has taken. This is because we have brought the media to the limelight. We have provided with information, we have brought everyone under one roof. So, this is how we tackle certain situation with the press. But it's a delicate situation, you have to be very careful with what you provided with the press. Press, to be very frank with you, is interested in spice. They need spice. So it's how you dish it out to them—if you just tell them piracy is happening, nobody is interested, nobody is able to touch it, but then if you tell them Indian seafarers are involved, emotions of the family members, then you get the notice of the press, then you see that press become interested.

In the PRO's description above, the central idea is actually UA's prowess in utilising media, something the PRO and the union evidently take pride of. However, in illustrating this media savvyness of UA, the government had to be constructed as totally passive. Firstly, it was only under UA's efforts that all parties were brought under one roof—and UA's roof too. And it was through clever utilisation of the media that the government was pressured into sending its warships—an unprecedented, 'historic' event. What is implied here is that without UA and UA's utilisation of media, the government would have remained inactive, and sending the warships would not have happened. Hence, in this incidence, the government is thrown on an unfavourable light, and is seen to be manipulable, subject to the mobilisation and enlistment by UA, which is in turn an indication of its capability, savvyness and perhaps, after all, power.

The 100 Crore Scam

The '100 Crore scam' is a further instance in which the government is unfavourably constructed in UA's self-heroic discourse. But it is also a narrative that seems to be central to UA's identity and mystification. The story is actually a very simple one: in year 2002 it came to light that about 100 Crores of Indian rupees in the Seafarers Retirement Fund disappeared due to fraud committed by a government custodian of the Fund. UA initiated agitations on large scale in order to pressurise the government into accepting responsibility and replenishing the funds, which the government eventually did. Proud of this achievement, the GS said:

> The victory was an unprecedented, unparalleled one. Who else can force the government to do this? 25,000,000 US dollars[15] of tax-payers money to compensate the seafarers who have been victims of the scam! What was UB doing at that time? Nothing. At the end, they took the matter to the court also, suing the fraud, but it was us, through consistent agitation and protests over a period of 5 years, that eventually got back the money!

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[15] Speaking in terms of US dollars instead of Indian rupees certainly shows that the GS was very aware that he was telling the story to a guest not familiar with the Indian environment. Such consideration perhaps further shows that the GS has been quite used to telling this story to foreign guests.

However, if just told like this, the story cannot help but sound a bit vague, and perhaps even, short. Here comes in the indispensable component and climax of the story, namely the 'letter bombardment' of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). As the story goes, after earlier demonstrations and protests turned out to be less than effective, UA initiated an ingenious campaign by giving a standard petition letter to each of its thousands of members and asking them to individually sign and post it to the PMO. As a result, hundreds of letters arrived at PMO daily, and because, according to GS Gupta, the Government of India is statutorily obliged to correspond to each and every inquiry made to them, they had to open all the letters one by one. The GS triumphantly described the poor PMO staff while mimicking a gesture of tearing letters:

> So they had to tear the envelope one by one, until their hands were tired. There were so many letters that they had to allocate some separate staff just to open these letters.

Clearly, in this narrative, the Indian government is at the receiving end of ridicule and defeat. The more stupid and ridiculous the government looked, the more marvellous, heroic and capable UA could be seen. At the same time, it is clear that this story occupies a prominent position in the identity discourse of UA. Not only is it reprinted in various publications—for example, it is mentioned in the *WHY ONLY UA* brochure; it has been printed as a stand-alone leaflet ready to be given away to any guests; it has also been printed in larger posters and put up on the walls inside UA—it is found to be equally alive in members' discourse. Apart from the VP's almost identical description of the scam as the GS's, the story also seem to be cited by both ordinary members of the union and other staff of the union to justify their belief that UA is a great union, and the leader GS Gupta is a superb leader. For example, when asked why all staff at UA seems to respect their leader Gupta so excessively, one organiser, Satish (pseudonym), who had newly joined UA for five months, replied:

Four years before, four years five years before this our…some RF, Retirement Fund, All Seafarers Retirement Fund, and this one commissioner, he had taken. It was like, what I call, whether I can remember the word…a 'scam'. That time our General Secretary fight, very good fight, fighting like a leader quality! Some strike…he talked to minister…100 crore rupees, Indian rupees, bring back! That is the quality of leader nah! Not easy! This is not easy!

In this instance, the scam is used to instil loyalty in one junior staff member of UA. On another occasion, a young fresher seafarer gave his version of the story when asked why UA was the best—as he believed so—:

UA is the best union because there was a scam after 92.70 crores…There was a scam of about 100 crores then…that was the Seafarers Retirement Fund, there was a person, who did this scam about 100 crores, and UA go against it. UA was trying too much, and at 2004, in 2004, it was trying…I am sorry, I don't know the date…it was trying...So UA firstly…there was a strike[16] in Delhi, Delhi is the headquarter of the…this organisation. After doing the strike, the Prime Minister, they asked for the CBI[17] investigation. Then after CBI they found that the scam of 100 crores by other staff person. Then UA demand I want back the 100 crore rupee from the government. Government told no, why should I give, I am just doing the inquiry. UA told them no I don't want this, whatever you want to do with the culprit you do, but I want the 100 crore rupee from the government… And at that time, after two year, government changed, then next government come. Then they said UA was sending the letter by 80,000 letter was write to the Delhi headquarter, per person per person, government had to put some different person for tearing the letter, because there was too much…flood of the letter (laugh). Then the government changed, the next government come, they accepted, ok, they will think about this to give you the money. And after that, UA contact to all the organisation of the world, Australia, China, Japan and whatever, and they UA requested to send them the fax through this that you must help the UA, you must give the 100 crore…and like that finally, UA got 100 crore rupee, from the government, and that is for the Fund of the seamens. Thus, UA did a great job.

As these two cases demonstrate, the 100 crore scam narrative is not only one

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[16] He probably meant demonstration.
[17] Crime Branch of India

celebrating UA as a capable and committed union, it is also used by members of the union as a discursive resource on which they found their loyalty and commitment. The union leaders tell the story to show people that their union is great, and the union members retell the story to believe that their union is indeed great. If one examines the narrative more closely, however, it is not beyond some doubts. First of all, as it can be imagined, for a scandal of this scale, the true 'ins-and-outs' of the story must have been significantly more complicated. However, whenever the story is told, it is only an elegantly presented and, no doubt, censored version—no unnecessary detail is given, no complication to blur the central message. This is certainly also the only version that most people would have known, either through reading publications or listening to the narrative. Particularly, regarding the climactic detail of PMO staff tearing thousands and thousands of letters, it should be said that it is rather unlikely that any of the UA staff or any recitors of this story had ever been allowed into PMO to witness the alleged mess created by the letter 'bombing' campaign. Thus the truth of this detail can be speculated as a mere imagination, maintained only through UA members' frequent and faithful recital of it. The quotes from Satish and the young trainee shown above further illustrate this point. Satish had only joined the union for just 5 months, and was not really involved in the campaign. However, he cites the story, or perhaps better called a myth, as the grounds of loyalty to his organisation and leader. The young trainee's recital is even more questionable. First of all, as he had only completed his training a year ago, and had come to Mumbai to become a member of UA primarily for the sake of seeking a job, he was barely involved in any of UA's activities, not to mention that the scam was more than 5 years ago. In his telling of the story, lack of knowledge and incoherence were also evident. For example, that UA should have contacted China for international solidarity is highly unlikely, for no Chinese labour union is affiliated to ITF, although it is possible that UA approached the other ITF affiliate unions in exerting external pressure on the Indian government. Yet, at the same time, he faithfully retold that the PMO staff had to 'put some different person for tearing the letter', and this was convincing enough to induce laughter from him.

Two major points could be made of the above analysis of the 100 crore scam narrative of UA.

Firstly, contrary to UA's earlier indifferent, neutral and sometimes deferential discourse towards the government, in this story, a ridiculed and defeated image of the government was desirable to the construction of UA's heroic and capable image, and that was exactly how government was represented. While there might be some validity in the argument that these different attitudes are again idiosyncratic and perhaps personally based views, the very lack of a coherent and unified discourse regarding government from UA is significant, and should be interpreted as the relative unimportance of the role of government as a sub-construct in UA's identity schema. The flexibility of the discursive image of the government seems to be contingently subject to the needs of UA's discursive regime under specific circumstances, indicating the overall marginality of government as an element of the identity construction of UA.

Secondly, what is also revealed in the analysis is the importance of narrative in sustaining the identity of UA among its members. Although the narrative does not seem to pass rigorous examination in terms of its validity and the members only seem to recite the story even less convincingly, at the same time they all seemed happy to believe it. A little lack of detail, or even coherence/logic does not seem to impede the recitors' belief in the story and the ideas behind it. Human beings are creatures that think primarily in terms of narrative (A. Brown, 2006, p. 734) and, as this instance illustrates, they can even be slightly irrational when it comes to it. The 100 crore scam narrative remains one prominent example of the discursive construction of UA's identity to both its insiders and the outsiders.

5.1.2   UB

- *This Union and 'The Other Union'*

In the preceding discussion of UA's discursive identity construction, various instances are shown where UA's construction of itself relies on its construction of an imaginary other. Occasionally, UA pointed directly to UB, but most of the time the comparison was subtle and implied. Perhaps in order to keep intact its image of an infinitely higher and superior organisation, UA feels the need to disengage with organisations which are low and unworthy of its attention.

However, in the case of UB, it engaged in such extensive, direct and scorching criticism of almost all aspects of UA that its efforts of constructing itself seem to hinge more or less entirely on marking out the differences between the two unions. Put simply, UB seems to define itself as everything UA is not. In the vast majority of UB's identity discourse, UB staff or members talk about itself in comparison with UA, which is also the reason why in this section the first two sub-constructs of UB's discursive schema are combined.

Firstly, when it comes to the fundamental ideological positions, UB incorporates an extensive Marxist and militant vocabulary. For example, the phrases 'working class', 'class struggle' and 'exploitation' are among the most frequently heard from all UB staff, as the UB Vice-President (VP) said:

> We never compromise on working class issues, we'll never compromise. On many issues, even with the National Wage Agreement, even on the question of issues of workers…continuously sustained struggles have been carried. *The other union* doesn't carry struggle at all. We are…on issues we are fighting with the management…continuous struggles, we are doing both talking to the management and at the same time fighting against the policy of the management. On many issues we face problems like this. So Marxist tendency…we believe in class struggle.

In this quote, UB's fundamental policy of class struggle is contrasted with the policy

of 'the other union' which is to not struggle at all. In UB staff's discourse, the name 'Union A of India' or UA is seldom mentioned. Replacing it is the convenient shorthand 'the other union' or 'that union', and this poignantly captures UB's perception of UA as its sole comparative reference. In fact, commenting on the opposition and rivalry between the two unions, the VP said:

> *The other union* we are ready to unite with them, on class struggles. We are prepared to unite with them, on the basis of class struggles. But they don't believe in class struggles. They believe in class collaboration. That is why we cannot join hands with them. We'd like to join hands with them, on the principle of class struggle, but they don't believe in class struggle you see, what can we do about it? They want class collaboration, so we can't combine with them.

It is worth mentioning, perhaps, that such vocabularies informed by Marxist theory are totally absent in UA's discourse throughout. Since UA and UB are the two major ratings' unions in India, and UA has now been designated as the 'class-collaborator', it leaves only UB to be the sole genuine union, the true vanguard of the thousands and thousands of seafarers. For instance, the Organising Secretary (OS) of UB lamented once that during one Indian maritime seminar 'I was alone! I was the voice of all shipping industry seafarers!' It is nothing unexpected, of course, that a labour union should claim that it represents fully the interest of workers in the industry/sector in which the union is operating, but both members and staff of UB are also found to be equating UB alone with the interest of all Indian seafarers. One seafarer member of UB who was obviously very satisfied with the union was asked what else he thought the union could do to improve itself, to which he replied:

> Yeah, if they… Now they already have ITF registration ([*sic*] meaning: affiliation), and they are coming slowly slowly up, but in my opinions, if they go through these companies, and talk with them 'ok, we also have ITF membership, so you give all this…you can take all this crew from my union only. Not from other union'. Maybe this way they can go more up, and if they will go more up, maybe all seamens will also go more up.

> *Interviewer: So you want this union to be more…to have a bigger share of the market?*

> UB member: Bigger share of the market! If they have bigger share of the market, it means seamens also have bigger share in the market. If they have small share, seamens again have small shares.

Clearly, the interviewee simply equated Union B with all seamen, ignoring the fact that UB might not even be the largest seafarers' union in India. Also, the Office Assistant (OA) to the Secretary of UB made the following remarks:

> Those who don't approach us will be exploited naturally, those who don't approach here, this union, or they don't go through this union, they will be let to…exploited, they won't be paid proper…

Such claims of UB as a genuine and the sole true vanguard of seafarers is contrasted and reinforced through the construction of 'the other union' as bogus. A large amount of discoursal data was recorded of UB accusing UA of various forms of impropriety and downright corruption. As a researcher who only had limited access to the unions during a limited period of time, it is for me to clearly state that I was not in a position to verify any of those claims. Yet, from the point of view of analysing identity building discourse, the truth and validity in these allegations are perhaps secondary to their mere presence. The important thing is to demonstrate how through constructing the opposite as bogus and illegitimate, UB asserts its own identity and legitimacy. Among the numerous instances where UA is talked about unfavourably by UB, we can only afford to show a few illustrative examples here.

For example, one core point made is that UA is not really interested in utilising its funds to help seafarers but only interested in its own publicity. Mittal (pseudonym), a young organiser of UB in his late 20s, said:

> *that union* which get affiliation for the last 50 years, 30, 40 years of ITF affiliation, they are having huge amount of money, which they have

collected from the seafarers, from the companies… But they are not exactly…really they are not trying to *do*.

Giving an example of what UA did (not) do for seafarers living in the Seamen's Hostel, a concentrated seafarer accommodation facility near Mumbai, he continued:

> They will put a 10,000 (rupees worth) TV over there, and just utilise that fund amount around 50,000 just to publicise the name that we have put a TV in the Seamen Hostel. 50,000 rupees just for that campaigning! They put banner, they spread the paper, that 'we have put a TV in the Seamen Hostel'. Like this.

According to him, UA also helped renew bed sheets for seafarers living in the Hostel, but that was again considered a shamble:

> Putting the bed sheet, and they had given a letter to ITF that 'we have put the bed sheet over there'. The bed sheet was donated by some other company, by the Shipping Company of India or INSA, they just put their name on the sheet—'UA'. And if you remove that bed sheet, you will find so many lice and lice and bedbugs and all that… The condition of the bed is very very bad. Just they will put the bed sheet, take a picture, send to the ITF. Immediately next day you will find press release from the ITF that UA did so much…

Another staff member of UB, Jack (pseudonym) who was a seafarer previously commented on his experience of being a member of 'that union':

> Before coming on here, I am a member of *that union*, *other union*, Union A. They didn't do nothing for us. Just time pass. Then I decide to join this union. And we started (with) this one.

In contrast to UA's constructed insincerity, UB has been keen to project the image of a union that is totally devoted to the service to its members. 'We are by the seafarer, of the seafarer and for the seafarer' as the General Secretary's catch phrase goes. It is also found that UB incorporates a self-sacrificial discourse in order to further show that other unions are out there for selfish gains. According to the OS Kuldeep, all the

main officers working with the UB Mumbai branch are taking tokenistic salaries. Talking about Mittal, he said:

> Nothing is commercial in this. Nothing is commercial, he is not paid anything. He often got to work onboard the ship, he is put into one of the ship which is under repair. His name is there.He is having his night duties, so evening after the work he goes to the ship.

Clearly, the OS is keen to stress that their union has nothing commercial in it, so much so that they do not even get pay. Regarding himself, he said he is getting an 'honorary payment' of 7,000 rupees, and:

> It is not a salary. When I was working onboard the ship I was getting about 80,000, 70,000, 80,000 rupees. And if I want, if I wasn't working here, I could have gone to ship, and earned that much. So this is, I told you, the word I told you, 'service'. So we are doing a service to the seafarers. We are not working here for salary, we get satisfaction if we do something good to the people, once they say that ok we are doing so much good, and I thank you, and they are having that belief that we are there to protect them. We should actually maintain their belief, that is our success.

According to the OS, other staff members such as the OA are also getting 'honorary payments' of 3 or 4,000 rupees. The OS is again quick to mark out the difference between them and us—

> I am not that ambitious, that I should earn so much…big house, two three cars, and all…I am not that ambitious, so things are working for me. If I was ambitious, I should have gone to UA! Not here.

—hence clearly suggesting that UA is the union to work for in order to make personal financial gains. By claiming the noble characters of self-sacrifice and devoted service, the OS brings the gravity of morality to bear on the illegitimacy of Union A. Even more scathing allegations include accusations of UA demanding bribe from seafarers in exchange for providing jobs or senior UA staff misappropriating seafarers' funds for personal use. However, as these charges can never be verified—at least not in my

limited capacity as a postgraduate research student—it is inappropriate to go into them.

One more dimension on which UB marks itself apart from UA is its relationship with seafarer members. The following comments of GS of UB summarises this point, again, in contrast with UA:

> We are working on the ground level. And *the other union*, they are working at apex level. We want to be always in ground level work, so even then we will be the only union in future certainly we'll manage ourself in that way that we are the…on the ground.

Being a Marxist union also implies a spirit of egalitarianism and UB does claim to have such a character. In the discourse of UB staff, members of the union are frequently likened to family members, who feel a deep attachment to the union. According to the OS, whenever UB members sign off at Mumbai or are going to sign on from Mumbai, they will always come to the union to speak to the union leaders, to greet them, and let them know where they are going, how they are doing. The OS even proudly suggested that the members keep such close contact with the union that when a ship is approaching the port, UB is the first to know, even ahead of the shipping company which operates the vessel.

In UB members' discourse, they confirm this family metaphor, and not surprisingly, this is again contrasted with 'that union', as is illustrated in the following quote from an AB (Able-Bodied seaman) who used to be a member of UA:

> Especially in this union UB, they have some good relationship with everybody, not for especially…not for special people. They have some good behaviour and they make relationship good for everyone. If anybody who they know either don't know, go straightaway with any people, and he told 'ok, I am seeking helps, I have some problem…' Here no have any restriction, no have any type of the restriction to meet anybody. If you want to meet Jack, you can straightaway go, and meet Jack, and whatever

you have you can told him, either if you want to meet Kuldeep, no need to take permission with any security guard either any other people…Nobody can tell you 'no no, you are not from this union…' You can go anytime, sometime there is no office time, and if you have some big problems, you can make phone call, and they will help that time also.

With regard to 'the other union', he said:

when you go there, you can see that everybody has their personal securities. Sometimes only for a few seconds, either for a few minutes they will come out from that (building), and they will talk with seafarers. Again, that is not personal personal, that is like a crowd. […] They don't want to go, with…too much close with the seafarers. UA, they don't want to go too much close with seafarers. They have some…reasons…excuses! And I don't understand why they not doing like this (UB), they don't want to come more closer with seafarers, either they want some other things, what is the reality, I don't know…

In this member's words, UA is a labour union that does not seem to want to get too close to the workers, whereas UB is one which is truly opening its doors to the members and ready to help all the time. The respective bogusness and genuineness of the two are well established by the members, resting on people's commonsensical expectation that a union should at least be an organisation ready to serve its members. Given our previous analysis of UA's self-serving discourse, there is probably a good degree of truth in this dimension of UB's contrastive construction. Nevertheless, the important point here is that this difference has been discursively utilised by UB to its advantage.

Recalling our analysis of UB's greeting message cards in which the union is being constructed consciously with well chosen imageries and messages as a union that struggles hard for success, it now seems this reading is further confirmed and could well be regarded as part of a larger discourse of UB which centres on protests against injustice, constructing the union as one that has fought its way through. Although the history of the Mumbai branch of UB is not told on the union website, the OS on my

first day at the union narrated to me the struggles involved in establishing this office. As Mumbai has traditionally been the stronghold of UA whereas UB originates from the more communist West Bengal, there was resistance. Again, though I am unable to verify this, the OS claims that UA attempted to purge UB through violence:

> But being the biggest shipping hub, Mumbai was not able to be touched upon, because of the resistance and rivalry of the incumbent union here, the one which was already in force here, Union A. So, in the 80s, there was an attempt to open an office, which was literally beaten away, and with the bloodshed, everybody has to run back to Calcutta. So there was no chance… […] Even people are thrown from the first floor of the building. So that much it was violent.

Apart from such violent exclusion, UB also complains that although it has the largest number of members its status as a majority union was never recognised. In the initial years, UB was not even involved in the institutionalised maritime industrial relations of India. The officials of UB seem rather indignant about this, and use this partially as the justification for being militant. For example, the GS of UB said:

> Because our recognition as trade union we were, that time, and we were having maximum majority with us, nobody was listening our grievances, nobody! Neither shipowners, nor the government representative, nobody, so what to do? So, what to do!?

At one point, the GS even used the unusual metaphor of UB being an unwanted child ousted from the shipping community in India. In the collective psychology of UB, being excluded seems to amount to something of an emotional trauma, and this added to the vociferous, rebellious and combative tendencies of this organisation.

However, just as the mood exuding from the message cards is one of optimism, hope and progress, UB's traumatic and excluded past begets an optimistic outlook which is the collective mood of the union currently. Having been gradually recognised by the Indian shipping community and claiming rapidly increasing support, UB at the

moment is a confident organisation, ready to take on challenges and 'enemies' and finally to achieve success. In a sense, this is another instance of identity construction through temporal differentiation, except that different from UA's temporal distantiation which is one of breaking away from its 'volatile' past which is nearly regrettable, UB's temporal construction is one of continuity and inference, namely, that they have been oppressed in the past, and struggled through, therefore they will live on their legacy and continue to struggle to attain success. In some of UB staff's words, we can find a sense of aspiration and ambition. The following quote in which the OS talked about the union's office space is perhaps an excellent symbolism of the union's ambition and optimism:

> At that time our union were just establishing, in those days, I am telling about maybe 1999. So, we did not have any fund, initially we have to put from our pocket to actually establish this organisation, we did not have any office like this, we had to be initially with that little table space we have to start our union, then we have bought that side office, slowly slowly then many years we have been working in that office, then this office, now we are searching for a more bigger and better place, and with our name, 'UB House', like you have 'ITF House'. Hahaha

What is most interesting about this quote is that not a hundred yards from UB's office in which the above utterance was recorded is the 'UA House', whereas the ITF House is thousands of miles away in London, which none of the union staff has visited. Quoting ITF House is of course another indication of UB's aspiration to the power and respect commanded by a union such as ITF, yet one cannot but also wonder whether this is not a subconscious expression of UB's anxiety to match and surpass its arch rival in India, UA. Given that UA has been consistently the referential framework against which UB constructed itself, this reading seems plausible.

Overall, our above analysis illustrates that for UB, its construction of itself and 'the other union' go tightly hand-in-hand, and each sub-construct serves as the contrastive reference for the other, culminating in an identity of UB constructed indispensably

and indivisibly from that of 'the other union'. The GS supplied a witty word play, which encapsulates this situation essentially. Alluding to UA as an organisation only interested in its self-interest but not the welfare of the seafarers, the GS concluded: 'We call them union trade, and we are the trade union!'

- *Companies, Seafarers and the Government*

Just as the first two of UB's discursive sub-constructs are found to be interdependent and co-existential, the constructions of companies, seafarers and the government under UB's discursive schema are also recognised as interwoven.

As has already been partially analysed through documentary materials in connection with UB, the shipping companies, the seafarers and the government are constructed primarily as villainous exploiter, victim and co-conspirator respectively. This configuration is found to be consistently and extensively expressed in interview data collected from UB staff as well.

One most powerful and persuasive way in which this framework of images is constructed is through telling stories. UB officials are very often found to be citing to me various cases that they have dealt with involving injustice done to the seafarer by unethical companies. In all fourteen interviews collected from UB officials, eight specific stories were identified. Although the substances of these stories vary, the central message that they serve at broadcasting remains by and large the same. The following is a brief summary of all these stories:

> Story 1:
> A young man with a degree in computer science elected to train as a seafarer. His family, through contacts of his ex-seafarer father, paid 150,000 rupees[18] to an agent from a manning company who promised both to enrol the young man for training and to secure him a job afterwards.

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[18] roughly GBP 2000

No receipt was issued for that payment, and the cost of training was actually only 85,000 rupees. The young man changed his mind, wishing to withdraw from training, and did not turn up for enrolment. The agent, who was an acquaintance to the young man's father, claimed that he had paid the money to the training institute, and denied receiving more than 85,000. The father is unable to get the extra money back, and the young man is unwilling to train as a seafarer now.

Story 2:

The Master of a ship employed by a manning agent had not been paid salaries for the period from July to November 2009. He brought the matter to the knowledge of government authorities such as the Shipping Master and the DG Shipping, but these agencies had not taken any concrete actions against the manning agent. To avoid the payment of salary, which had by now accumulated to 1,000,000 rupees[19], the manning company falsified evidence suggesting that the Master had stolen equipment from the ships on which he served. On the ground of these charges, the company dismissed the Master and took possession of the key to the Captain's cabin onboard the ship, in which the Master's personal belongings are still stored. The Master was then no longer allowed to board the ship.

Story 3:

A seafarer gave a bribe of some 80/90,000 rupees[20] to a man from a shipping company in order to have a job from that company. The man then provided a post on a ship which was heading to being scrapped, which not only meant that the ship was old and in bad condition, but also that the contract was short and would not be a gainful employment. The seafarer decided not to take this assignment, but as always, there was no evidence of the bribe, and the agent refused to return the money. The organiser, Mittal, tried to contact the agent, but phone calls were not answered. The seafarer was left distressed.

Story 4:

This is the personal experience of Mittal. When he worked onboard a coastal ship, some of his fellow seafarers were not getting paid the same salary as he was getting, though their ranks were the same. The reason was that Mittal was unionised, with UB, whereas the others were not. Upon being suggested by Mittal to join the union, his fellow seafarers declined, suggesting that they knew if they joined they would be sacked. They had been threatened by the company not to be involved in any union activity.

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[19] roughly GBP 15,000
[20] roughly GBP 1,100

Story 5:

A 27-year-old Indian seafarer was reported to have hung himself while the ship was in South Korea. In UB organisers' words, he had just married two years back and had at home a 'cute small baby' six months old. The wife sought support from the union and suggested that 'everything was normal' and there was no sign that her husband was in trouble. Pictures of the death scene had been sent to UB, and the union suspected that it was a murder instead of a suicide, because hanging oneself from a hook in a low ceiling cabin with the knees of the deceased touching the floor was implausible. The company, a reputable one based in Singapore, refused to pay any compensation on the grounds that it was suicide. The union has made a formal request for inquiry into the matter. The wife is left devastated.

Story 6:

A 31-year-old Chief Engineer died of an accident when the ship was in the US. The shipowner was from Qatar, and it is stereotypically known among the seafaring circle that shipping companies from the Gulf area do not even provide written contracts in the employment of seafarers, and many companies are of a 'fly-by-night' nature. In this case, the wife of the Chief Engineer had not yet got any compensation. The colleagues of the Chief Engineer onboard that ship contributed from their own pockets about 10,000 US Dollars to the wife. There is not even much the union can do in this case, because ITF has no representation in that area, and there is no way to go after the responsible company.

Story 7:

Previously, catering staff onboard ships owned by the Shipping Company of India (SCI) were not classified as seafarers, and their salary scales were very low, usually 5-6,000 rupees. Union B 'took their cause' and 'fought' against the company, demanding the recognition of these workers as seafarers too. Eventually, under pressure, the SCI conceded and granted the recognition and relevant salary increments.

Story 8:

This is Mittal's own experience: when he worked onboard ships, he was an activist seafarer, trying to unionise other seafarers and oppose unfair treatment meted out by the management of shipping companies. The Master of the ship, receiving instructions from the shipping company, harassed Mittal by giving him unreasonable duties. When Mittal protested and refuse to work, he was sacked on the ground that he 'disobeyed the lawful commands' of the Master. He was sacked twice in such manner.

Eight stories is not a large number in absolute terms, however, this should be seen in

contrast with the case of UA's discourse, where *not a single* story were told of the victimisation of seafarers. This further reminds us of the UA VP's extraordinary response to my probe regarding unethical companies and the way the GS constructed the seafarers as incompetent and unaspiring workers. What is present and absent in the two unions' discursive realm are in themselves the most important data.

In addition to concrete and specific stories told by UB officers, more prevalent are what may be called 'pseudo-stories' or vignettes, involving the caricaturistic description of typical scenarios which seafarers fall into. These are not really stories because they are usually a type of fictional illustration that the speaker improvises based on his experience of numerous similar situations. Fourteen such pseudo-stories can be found from UB staff's discourse, depicting how seafarers might be exploited. In particular, one distinctive character to the telling of such pseudo-stories is that they usually contain vivid and verisimilitudinous descriptions of the seafarers' situation and encounter, often involving citing imagined conversations or speech of either the seafarer, the villainous company and the complicit government. The following example in which the organiser Mittal explains how the government's devolution of its previous responsibilities has left seafarers in the exploitative hands of the companies is a good one:

> Today's situation is like that, one fellow met an accident, but no record is there with the Shipping Master and all the things. Today vessel got hijacked, all these Shipping Master, DG Shipping they will say 'I don't have any record', because they are not going through the Employment Office. Once the person who will go through the Employment Office he should have all that written over there, sometime…not sometime, most of the time the people are not even getting the compensation, once they have fallen accident, met an accident, fallen into the sea…their family is not getting proper compensation, because they don't have any proper agreement, they don't have any documents, that is the main reason. If you go through the Employment Office, definitely you will get all the details from here, and the company is liable to pay the compensation and all the things… So (currently) it's just like between you and me, you are the seafarer I am the company, I am just bargaining, 'I'll give you 100 dollar, are you ready to

sail? If you are not, there are so many people standing in the…' He is not going to, you are not going to ask me that show me the agreement, show me the papers, 'what I will give you, you sign', because of the flood of the industry. If I say to you are you ready to go for 100 dollar, whether I have signed agreement with the union for 1000 dollar, but I am giving you 100 dollar. And the people is ready to sail with that! And what sort of agreement is there? What sort of documents are there? It's between you and me only, if you met an accident who is going to take your claim? You are onboard ship, it's my ship, I can ask my Master and other people don't give any sort of papers, only your body will come to India. Tomorrow after one month two months you family is going to claim to the company, company say I don't know who are you, because other than me, no one was having the agreement copy, or any sort of agreement, nobody knows, nobody knows, Shipping Master doesn't know which vessel you joined, when you joined, where you joined; DG Shipping don't know, union don't know, that's the reason.

Frequently quoting the imagined speech of all parties involved not only increases the persuasiveness of the account by enlivening the description, it is also an indication of the union staff's familiarity with the seafarers' circumstances, their affinity to the seafarers' position, and ultimately their identification with the seafarers' interest. Again, this could be contrasted sharply with the characters of UA officials' discourse, in which, as we have shown, very often they are found to speak from the employers' standpoints.

5.1.3   UC

If the identity discourses of UA and UB can be seen as very engaged with each other, the case for UC is drastically different. Being a union for maritime officers instead of ratings puts the union in an entirely different position, where the relation between UC and UA/UB is not a competitive one. Thus, the discourse constructive of UC's identity is found to be more stand-alone, inward-looking, with limited reference to the other two unions. Nevertheless, the five sub-constructs are still the weight-bearing pillars of UC's identity schema.

- *This Union*

First of all, UC clearly sees itself as a union coming from an entirely different realm compared to that of UA and UB. The General Secretary's (GS) response to the question whether UC was ever a militant union was revealing:

> we were a strong union at that time. It is not that we have not threatened the industry, we have done it. But we have *really* not behaved like a ratings' union. We have not…

Hence, in the GS's mind, there is an essential distinction, one that is unbridgeable and irreducible, between the natures of the ratings' and officers' unions. As to how the ratings' union behaves, the GS provided a comparison based on a highly stereotyped image of a ratings' union as irrational and even unable to distinguish right from wrong:

> And we do fight, as I say, gentlemanly… Because we try to explain…we have got a system, first we talk on phone, then we go and talk to them, we try to pacify that, and then we try to take help from the international unions, we take the help of ITF union, we go to…Whereas the workers' union, whether they are right or wrong, they use the power, muscle power or whatever you see, and they get…this is two different thing.

This distinction, as the GS perceives, stems from the ratings' lack of education. Evidence is found when he said:

> See, union are getting weak, are getting weaker. Because, see this is the…so called…even the workers today are educated, even in UA when you go to seamen, they are not uneducated, they are educated people, they understand! They can discuss with you…

In fact, in this patronising comment lies also the GS' equation of unionism with uneducated workers, hence the suggestion that with education level improving, unionism is weakening. Therefore, it is evident that the GS does not even see UC as a

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typical union, for it is 'gentlemanly' and reasonable. Through such a comparative construction, UC is immediately presented as an elite organisation not in the same category with the 'workers' unions'.

Though the above contrastive construction is one relying on constructing an imaginary other, a technique that we have encountered previously, UC actually relies less heavily on this discursive technique in its identity construction. Rather, it is found that UC staff's description of themselves, namely, auto-discourse, provides the most intriguing clues to their identity construction.

As our earlier analysis of *Thalasa* revealed, members of UC, namely, Indian maritime officers, were constructed as elites and intellectuals. The union seems to take pride in the fact that staff members of UC are of equal intellectual standing. Indeed, the academic credentialism exhibited by the union leaders can be viewed as the centrepiece of UC's discourse about itself. The Joint Secretary, the second most senior officer in the union who has the role equivalent to a chief organiser, proudly told me about the qualifications of the people working in his organisation:

> I am a Bachelor of Engineering, I have some other degrees also. He (Superintendent-in-Charge) is BA? He is BA. Everybody is degree holder. That Simon (pseudonym), he is B.Comm, and Suhil (pseudonym), he is M.Comm, Master of Commerce. And that Nick (pseudonym) who is sitting there, he is MBA. Like that…He is also B.Comm, this checker. So everybody is a degree holder here, it's not that only 10 pass, 12 pass[21] will come and work here—they cannot do it also! So that's why officers they come, they like…are dealing with a union where all officials are intellectual also.

Not only is there the emphasis on academic accomplishments, even very modern and current concepts seem to have found their ways into certain UC staff members' language. For instance, an Account Executive seems to have been influenced by the corporate discourses associated with modern professionalism and knowledge

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[21]   10 pass, 12 pass, Indian academic qualifications, roughly equivalent to GCSE and A-level.

economy and/or 'knowledge worker', stressing the practical application of knowledge in work and continuous self-education in order to improve the quality of service:

> Yes, I am an accountant, but I am not a practicing accountant. I am learning in accounts field, because I am specialising in the finance field. I am doing my business management degree in finance. So I can collate both my studies, as well as work, I can collate and then I apply my mind logically and ask my consultants, and then I prepare a report.

> we know how to…what's happening in our area in our environment, so we can upgrade ourself, we can knowledge ourself, and then we can pass information to the seafarers, like income tax: what are the income tax returns are there, what are the income tax deductions are there…so we can educate ourself and we can pass this knowledge to officers so that he himself get educated, and then he can do the needful: so how to get tax rebate, how to save the money from income tax deductions, just like that.

Similarly, when asked what kind of employee is desirable to Union C, the Assistant to the GS gave the following reply:

> He should be very dynamic. He should be very laborious, because…He should have a good rapport with the people, because the officer which comes to the union, sometimes officer comes in a very angry mood, and sometimes officer comes in a very good mood, so the person should be capable enough to tackle the officer when he is in a bad mood…so this type of…And he should be self-motivated also.

Most interesting of all is perhaps that he said that he would prefer an MBA holder if he were to recruit new entrants into the union:

> because in MBA this quality is how to understand the knowledge, how to understand the people, how to motivate the people, how to understand the problem, how to tackle the problem, so these are the key skills which are…students learn in the business schools…so he can apply his logic, he can apply his mind, and he can tackle the officers.

The significance of the suggestions by trade unionists to employ MBA holders who are 'dynamic', motivating and 'self-motivated', who exhibit the interpersonal

savvyness to tackle clients—the officers—must not be underestimated. At one level, the presence of these modern management concepts in a trade union staff's discourse immediately forms an organisational persona that is not usually associated with, or, one may even say that is higher or more sophisticated than the typical image of a union. This is congruent with UC's self-representation which puts itself in a completely separate and higher category from other 'workers' unions'. Furthermore, the existence of vocabularies from a managerialist discourse also reveals identities at a more fundamental level, a topic which will be returned to at a later stage.

- *Other Unions*

Apart from the stereotyping discussed earlier, there is very limited mention of other unions in the discourse of UC. Being the sole officers' union, UC does not face any imminent rivalry, and therefore when it comes to other unions, the leaders of UC appear relaxed. Worthy of mention though is the opinion of UC that political unionism is bad, which effectively provides the basis of UC's divided judgements on UA and UB respectively. The Joint Secretary (JS) said:

> UC, this is only one union in India for officers; for the ratings, there are almost 12 to 16 unions, every…12 to 16 unions, and every union has a political connection, except UA. Only UA and UC *we* don't have any political connections. That's why all the unions…some political connections will be there, the radical unions supporters will there for all the union…that's why the political leaders…every political leaders they will…their own will for the benefit of…not for the benefit of the seamen, but for the benefit of themself.

Hence, although UC does not opine expressively on UA and UB, the fundamental belief that political unionism is to be disapproved implies that UA is more acceptable than UB. In fact, since the mid 1980s, UA and UC had formed a federation between themselves, nominally representing the entire seafaring workforce in India. My observations during the fieldwork also suggest that UA and UC are close allies—a

fact perhaps 'given away' by the JS's use of the word 'we' above—something that UB interprets as a conspiracy aimed at excluding itself. Yet, despite this implicit preference between the two ratings' unions, the belief that UC is entirely above the level of rating unions seems to take precedence, as the following quotes from the GS clearly illustrates:

> if you can paralyse the transport, if you can paralyse the dock, by the workers, and your men is sitting in the assembly or sitting in the parliament has got words. So that is their trump card. But as far as officers are concerned, see, we are dealing with *intelligent* people.

Finally, the leaders of UC including the General Secretary, the Joint Secretary and the Superintendent-in-Charge have all in interviews expressed awe towards UA. 'Their union is very big, very powerful! Equally rich! They have a lot of money!' and 'their activities are massive, their welfare programmes, because they receive a lot of money from ITF' are two example sentences that they have been recorded saying. The rich and established status of UA seems to command a great deal of respect from the officials of Union C.

● *Companies*

Consistent with the gentlemanly image of an officers' union, UC takes a gentle approach towards the shipping companies/shipowners too. In fact, in this respect, there is a recognisable parallel between Union A and C, namely, UC also seems to view the company as a partner to keep a relationship and to sympathise with. For example, the Superintendent-in-Charge commented:

> We have to also keep a rapport with the shipping company, we just cannot isolate them. They are not…we don't work against them. It's not that shipping companies are…We are on good terms with shipping companies.

Whereas the GS put it more straightforwardly:

UC depends on the cordial relation and mutual respect with the shipping industry!

In illustrating the gentlemanliness of the union, the Superintendent took a sympathising stance towards the companies by suggesting that sometimes the union members might not be right in what they claim or demand:

It is not that every time the officer is 101% correct, he may be misled, or he may be under some wrong impression, about his rights, about his duties, so it is our duty to show the correct facts, and the reality to the officer, and the company. That is how we come to an amicable solution.

Again, the GS expressed views which can be seen as more pro-company. In fact, in a tenor strongly resonating with the way in which UA officials are considerate of the financial survival of shipping companies, the GS of UC said the following regarding the fact that he has to convey his member officers' unreasonable demands to the shipping industry:

They (officers) say you must get so much. Now the difficulty (is) because when I go to the shipping industry, you think that shipowners are just going to buy your ideas and give you the money? Because the shipping industry has got their difficulty…they take loan from the bank, they take loan from the US to buy the ships, they take credit to…for a new built ship, they have to give money…Money they make but that money also goes away. But this officer, you see, he said: No! Mr General Secretary, you please prove it! Oh, why you say, you are not capable! You are not fit to be the leader of the Merchant Navy officers, you should be able to get (our demands)!

Clearly, in this quote, the officers are being constructed as overly demanding, unreasonable, unsympathetic to the circumstances of the shipping companies. In fact, on various occasions, the GS explicitly said that officers are 'very difficult to deal with' because of their tendency to demand unreasonably. This is further reinforced when he suggested that some shipping companies in India take good care of officers:

And some of the shipping company feel insulted, if you go to union. They said 'no, we are better than the union! We look after you better than the union.' This is the feeling in India. Officers of India origin, and Indian Merchant Navy officer, will settle all his problem with the shipowner and the shipowner thinks 'we are better than the trade union. We want to solve all your problem, we want to give you more benefit than the union agreement'. And it is a fact! This is happening. This is something good in India.

This idea of shipping companies being good organisations that are caring to the seafarers cannot be more distant from the image constructed of the shipping companies by staff and members of UB. Suffice to say, in UC's discursive regime, the sub-construct of shipping company is one similar to that under UA, namely, a partner to work with, to keep a cordial relationship with and to sympathise with. Nevertheless, one additional attribute that UC has attached to the company is that of gentlemanliness. Union C works well and cordially with the companies because both are gentlemen, as the GS put it:

we are lucky, officers are lucky that we deal with…gentlemen dealing with gentlemen.

- *Seafarers*

Our analysis of UC's quarterly magazine *Thalasa* has already provided significant insights into the construction of maritime officers as elites and intellectuals who are aspiring as well as pragmatic. In this section, with additional material from interview data, a refined understanding of the sub-construct of seafarer is possible, because analysing the journals is necessarily 'indirect', interpretive and consequently to an extent speculative, whereas interviews provided the opportunities for the union officials to directly articulate their representation and construction of what is *the* Indian maritime officer under their framework of meaning.

The eliteness of officer members seems to be constructed mainly in two interrelated dimensions under the schema of UC.

Class-based Elitism

The first dimension may be termed 'class-based elitism' where the officers are seen as elites who belong to a higher social class. Class-based elitism, as it appears in the discourse of UC, seems to be further divisible into two categories. For example, explaining to me why there is not a tinge of radicalism in UC, the GS said:

> they are officers: they are mostly coming from a class of family that the bringing-up is different. They are educated, coming from a respectable family…so it's not in their blood, majority of them; it is not that all the officers are docile, all the officers are soft, no, not necessarily; but majority of them *are*.

In this quote, the high class status of officers stems mainly from their background and lineage. The emphasis on upbringing and 'respectability' of their family suggests that the elite class status is 'in their blood'. Cast as a hereditary docility, which probably means self-discipline and respect and deference to authority and power, it is a blue-bloodedness that these officers are believed to possess by birth.

Yet, high social class needs not be inherited. Through accession to respectable occupations by means of education is another way of ascending the social ladder and attaining high class status, and this constitutes the second category of the class-based elitism. For example, the JS draws a very clear and thick line between officers and ratings:

> we are officers, a gentlemen's union. It is not plebiscite…all officers are well educated. They don't want to go into the labour problems, or into the radical side. And Marxist and all that…this is for the labour, basically, not for the officers.
>
> officers have their own dignity. If you go to the crew union, the rating…he

may not even be 10 pass. Officers who are highly intellectual, they don't want to work under that fellow, who is not his equal.

Good education is considered to have conferred upon the officers a social status so much higher that to be involved with the rating/labour is considered an insult to the officers' dignity. Clearly, in the identity framework of UC, officers cannot be further removed from 'labour', a word the officials of this union spoke with recognisable distain. The officers' restrained behaviour and gentlemanliness are seen by UC as a consequence of the responsibility that comes along with their status, as the JS further suggested:

> they are supposed to be the office-bearers, labour is just…they are labour, they can call for the strike, they can do anything; here officers means he is having a responsibility, he cannot do that!

At this point, it makes very interesting comparison to counter check Union B's stance on this issue, since class is at the very heart of the union's (at least so far apparent) Marxist radical identity. Adhering to orthodox Marxism, one fundamental tenet of which is that those who do not control the means of production are all on the opposite side of the capitalists who do, UB unequivocally dismisses the idea that officers are not labour or a gentrified/embourgeorised working class. Confronting the way UC sets officers apart from the labour, the VP of UB remarked:

> We consider officers also part of the working class. They are not free to make decisions. They are directed to take decisions. In Bombay for example, in the Shipping Company (of India) office, the officers give strike notices also, we supported their struggle. So officers they are also fighting, struggle with the top management.

This is another obvious example where the same object, or idea/concept, is being constructed totally differently, by parties of different political and ideological proclivities. In fact, this is also the central idea that runs through this entire chapter analysing the three unions' contrasting discourses.

Knowledge/intellect-based Elitism

The second dimension on which the officials of Union C construct their member officers' elitism is based on their superior intelligence, knowledge and the consequent independent-mindedness, individualism and rationalism. For example, as part of the explanation to why this officers' union is not a radical one, the GS said:

> As far as officers are concerned, see we are dealing with intelligent people. If you tell them we want to go on strike, or we want to stop the ship, they will put you twenty question: why, when, how, why not… As far as these people are concerned, no…. if I tell them, 'ok please come (for strike)', you will find not even five people will come to me.

Obviously, the officers' intelligence level is believed to make them very rational and not easily mobilised for radical action. At this level of education and intelligence, the union also sees them as very self-dependent and individualistic:

> GS: today, my member and UC definitely not militant—I am giving a statement!—only because the officers are on their own, look for the job. Like IT people, information technology people, like doctors, like engineers, they go on Net, they look for the job for themselves. They find the job for themselves, they discuss with the shipowners themselves.

In this instance, the officers are compared to other highly-skilled and high-earning middle class professionals. Such attributes are then seen to afford these individuals greater freedom and better prospects in their career, hence rendering traditional trade unionism largely irrelevant.

Meanwhile, class-based elitism and knowledge/intelligence-based elitism are also closely interrelated because class status and education/intelligence provides the condition of possibility for each other. The officers through education attain a respectable career and thus social status/class, but the inherited social status/class also equips them with the social capital, so that they do not need the help from

organisations such as a trade union, as the GS said:

> And our officer any problem they have they are trying to solve themselves, because they are coming from a family where they have their own father is a doctor, uncle is a lawyer, are all connected people.

These twin elitisms that UC officials attribute to the construct of an Indian maritime officer thus build up to what can be considered an ideal type of their members: a 'blue-blooded' person coming from a 'respectable family', who is well connected and cannot be bothered to be associated with 'labour'; a gentleman who by virtue of his intelligence and education has obtained a respectable career who is at the same time highly rationalistic, individualistic and self-dependent. This image is then extended further in the discourse of UC to that of an economic animal who is dispassionate, pragmatic, calculative, and above all, ambitious. There is no red blood and revolutionary ideas in them, but only the desire to make personal and financial advancements. The following are some quotes from UC officials that illustrate this point:

> JS: they are not bothered who is Marxist, who is Congress, who is…whatever it is. For them, they want the money, that's all. That's why they form a union also—only for this benefits they become a member.

> JS: as they are intellectuals, nobody wants to stay in the bottom range… What will happen is that he will become the Master or the Chief Engineer. Ok, now, that means I have respect onboard ships, on the engine side it's Chief Engineer, and the deck side is Master, so they achieve this one in the span of maybe 6 years. […] Now within 10 to 12 years he will jump to the land side, maybe in this marketing companies or something… So that means he is not going to stay at the same level. His aspiration is much higher, and whatever…not like a regular fellow, regulate graduate, he is having added qualifications, so he can move faster…

> GS: And today Merchant Navy officers, our retirement age on ship is 65 years, today the young officers who join, he doesn't…90 per cent don't work (until) more than 45 years (old). So they want to make that money at an age of 35, 40, which they could have made in 65 years (old). And now today Merchant Navy officers are qualified in India, they are

engineers, they are graduates, so they know they have a job waiting for them (on land). And at the same time, in this 15 years time 20 years time they build up a bank account very strong, that's what it is.

Thus, despite being constructed as elites, it is not a kind of romanticist or idealist image of elite that UC is conjuring up. Rather, this is a kind of elites that are extremely ambitious and pragmatic, a kind that is perhaps best described as technocrats, given that all maritime officers are technical specialists. Needless to say, the construction of seafarer members as a technocratic people who are individualistically ambitious and are pragmatic when it comes to fulfilling their financial/career ambitions has profound implications for the identity of the union that represents them. A member constructed in such a fashion of course implies that the union must also be elitist and gentlemanly as our study already confirms, but as our various foregoing quotes illustrate, it seems to even shake the fundamental necessity of the union's existence, particularly to the extent that UC describes some companies as very good and caring for its employees and that most officers are contented, with hardly any problem:

> GS: you see, they get more than what they want today! They are supposed to get 100 dollar they are getting 500 dollars!

> JS: Now, officers they don't…what they want/require is the money. As long as they are getting their money, they are not bothered. And they are getting enough money!

> GS: 95 per cent of the officers have got no complaint, not (just) with UC, they have no complaint with their (ship)owners also.

In the end, the way officers are being understood and represented as a people by UC effectively restricts what the union can possibly be and needs to be at all. The construction of the identity of the union is inextricable from the construction of the officers' identity; and in the case of UC, it is clear, amongst all five pillar sub-constructs, this 'seafarers' is the most prominent. The maritime officers, with their clearly defined sets of qualities and characteristics, and their central role in

constituting the identity of their organisation, seem to resonate strongly with MacIntyre's (2007) concept of 'character', namely, 'an object of regard by the members of the culture generally or by some significant segment of them' who 'furnishes them with a culture and moral' (p. 29). In fact, replacing the wider cultural/social context with which MacIntyre was concerned with the smaller context of organisations, the image of the maritime officer constructed under the discursive regime of UC is exactly such a character, which carries the values/moralities sanctioned under the organisation, and thus manifesting and constituting the identity of the organisation in question, i.e. UC.

- *Government*

Finally, the role played by the sub-construct of government is a very limited one in the union's identity. Unlike in the cases of UB and to certain extent UA, unsolicited comments on the government authorities are rare in the discourse of UC. When probed, the comments made are of generally negative nature, suggesting that the Indian government is interested in neither the welfare of seafarers nor the promotion of shipping industry. For instance, when asked what the Indian government can do in order to improve the general condition of seafarers in the country, the General Secretary simply remarked that: 'you see, it is unfortunate, government play no role in this.' However, unlike the more forthcoming and detailed nature of UB's critical discourse on the government, the critical opinions held by UC seem more of a general nature, showing signs of being merely an alignment with the typical views that the Indian public holds of their government. Suffice to say, government is a largely irrelevant and inconsequential party under the discursive identity schema of Union C, and neither respect nor particular passionate criticism is shown by the union.

Table 5.2 Discursive Identity Schemas of UA, UB and UC

	This Union	*Other union(s)*	*Companies*	*Member Seafarers*	*Government*	*Essential underpinning Discourse*
U A	the only union; high; mature; indispensable; independent; responsible; fair	low; trouble-maker; nuisance; 'street union'; unfair; irresponsible	to be sympathised with; to maintain relationship with;	sometimes irresponsible; making unjustifiable demands; uneducated; lacking aspiration; deficient;	king: to be obeyed; ridiculous; to be defeated; → ambivalent and thus unimportant	neoliberalism
U B	agent of class struggle; true vanguard of seafarers; genuine union; self-sacrificial; egalitarian; unfairly-treated; struggling union; aspiring; 'trade union'	class-collaborator; bogus; obsessed with cosmetic publicity; pursuing self interests; distancing seafarers; violent oppressor; corrupt; fraudulent; 'union trade';	exploitative; devious; irresponsible; unethical;	victims; vulnerable; helpless;	co-conspirator; incompetent; inactive;	Marxism(*?*)
U C	gentlemanly; reasonable; elite; professional; modern;	ratings union: irrational; uneducated; unintelligent; militant; mostly political and thus to be disapproved UA: non-political; super-rich; established; powerful; UB: political	to work with; to keep cordial relationship with; to be sympathised with; gentlemanly; good; caring	elite: • class-based elite • knowledge/intellect-based elite → individualistic, technocratic, rationalistic, calculative, pragmatic, ambitious, dispassionate, apathetic contented; happy	irrelevant; inconsequential	neoliberalism

The results of the foregoing analysis are summarised in Table 5.2, in which the stark contrasts, as well as occasional similarities and parallels between the discursive constructions, of various sub-constructs under each union are laid bare. While the analogy of seeing the identity edifice of each union as resting on five essential weight-bearing 'pillars'—sub-constructs, that is—has enabled a more structurally limpid understanding of the identity discourses of these organisations, in the course of filling in this table, I was also often painstakingly reminded of the complicated and criss-crossing interlinks that exist between the 'sub-discourses' which weave into self-confirming, self-reinforcing and inseverably inter-dependent webs of meaning and discursivity that ultimately constitute the identities of the unions. None of the boxes in Table 5.2 stands alone; instead, in order to fill in one box, clues often can/need be found in other boxes. One most obvious example has been that when UA claims itself to be 'fair', this immediately implies that one aspect of their construction of the company is that the company is worthy to be 'fair' to, and one aspect of their construction of seafarers is that the seafarers might not always be 'fair' and need to be disciplined to be so. A single tag under the 'this union' sub-construct becomes the reverse sides of two other tags under two other sub-constructs. In the case of UB, some sub-constructs are so discursively coextensive that to present them in combination was deemed to be the far better solution.

The compartmentalisation and categorisation necessitated by the attempt to logically and orderly analyse, present, and communicate the data is therefore a pragmatist solution, a less than entirely satisfactory compromise which always contains the sinister seed of reductionism and injustice, imposed onto what is in nature a chaotic and perhaps even irrational system—that of language and discourse. The rescue to this unsatisfactory effect was in fact already prefigured in the earlier description of GS Gupta's audience with his trainee members. In the next section, I extend this approach by utilising further observational data gathered alongside interviews and documents. The concepts of Summative Observational Event (SOE) and Summative Discursive Event (SDE) are developed and illustrated through two summative events that will

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serve to integrate our respective understanding of the discursive constructions of Union A and C.

5.2 Summative Observational Events (SOE)

Karreman and Alvesson (2001) have already in their study of a newspaper publisher demonstrated the methodological significance of 'doing in-depth studies of micro events as a way of making organizations visible' (p. 59), arguing that:

> [s]ome situations in organizations may be seen as the organization 'written small' and the close and detailed interpretation of these may, if combined with sufficient background and context knowledge, open up a window for a broader understanding of organizations.

In agreement with this point, several events that I had had the serendipitous opportunity of observing in connection with UA are found to be significantly meaning-laden, and can be viewed as the *summative expression* of various central dimensions or facets of the union's identity and culture work. One good example given earlier was the GS's audience with seafarers, which not only illustrates the relationship between UA and its members but actually gives us a wider summary or summative expression of many of UA's identity and culture. Because in such events, an ethnographic approach is used, with observation being the main method, I recast what Karreman and Alversson call 'micro-event' as Summative Observational Event (SOE).

Now that a comprehensive analysis of UA based on thematic categorisation has already been accomplished, an even better SOE is available, which is a Trade Union Workshop that UA organised for its new members which I was invited to attend as a guest. The following is my record of this event in fieldnotes:

> The workshop took place in a function room at the top floor of 'UA Bhavan'. A small stage had been set up, and on the floor were about 40 seats. Participants were all seafarer members of UA who were attending this

workshop for the first time. The current session was the twelfth session, which meant this workshop had been running for the past one year, since it is always held on a fixed date of each month. Participants arrived around 9.30, and were each given the *Why Only UA* booklet, a notepad, and a sheet of the day's programme.

I attended the early half of the day's session, and that included an opening address by the Vice-President (VP), a talk give by the General Secretary (GS) about the importance of trade union and the famous 100 crore Seafarers Retirement Fund Scam case, a speech given by the President of UA, a brief review of UA's history by the union's ex-Public Relations Officer (PRO), and finally a talk given by a manager from the Mumbai branch of a globally prominent crewing company, under the title: 'the employer's expectations of seafarers'.

More than 95% of all content was delivered in Hindi, and naturally I did not really understand most of what was said. However, thanks to some English phrases that propped up occasionally, and my recently gained knowledge of the union, I was able to follow through.

The VP's opening address was made in English, which I managed to record only partially. The following are two excerpts:

> …We are proud of our union. Our union is not only nationally but internationally strong. [*applause*] See, why we are starting this workshop? […] Today we are here, tomorrow you may not be here. But you have to run this organisation, only seafarers, not outsider! [*applause*] You are the young leaders! We are calling everybody is leader. We are running our workshop training the leader. We are training the people who is the best…if you want this union strong and strong day by, yourself, among the seafarers, come to the union, not outsider. You should not give any chance outsider enter the unions! [*applause*]

> Our union is now completing 119 years, but I am sure, this union, will be not hundred and many…thousands of years is waiting! If you are united, nobody having doubts, nobody have [an inaudible word] at this union, this union is always forever literally giving the bread and butter. If union is not there, nobody listens to what labour says, nobody gives the justice.

Following this, the GS took over, and started his speech. The first few sentences were in English, presumably out of courtesy to me. He ran through the by now familiar lines regarding the common imagination of

trade union as a trouble making body, 'chasing buses and throwing bricks', 'blocking the traffic' and 'breaking the window panes'. Denouncing such mob unionism, he suggested that what UA does as a trade union was correct. The speech soon became Hindi only, and I could gather the topic was the 100 crore Provident Fund scam, undoubtedly the highlight of the morning's session. Frequent bouts of warm applause erupted during the story-telling, either spontaneously, or sometimes initiated by other UA staff sitting aside. The GS had a very powerful and contagious style of speech, consisting of skilful variation of the volume and tone of his voice, body languages, and frequent interactions with the audience. From the way the audience replied and interacted with the GS, it was clear that they were all very motivated. In fact, the occasion strangely reminded one of a peculiar type of evangelical church gathering in which when the wonders of God or Jesus are mentioned, the audience rejoices and clap hands enthusiastically out of appreciation and admiration.

The participants came to the workshop with a lot of respect/admiration for the union and its leader, and they would probably leave with even more. The sentence 'you have to be proud of being a member of UA!' was repeated several times in English, and perhaps more times in Hindi.

The ex-PRO of the union was a man in his 60s. But he was too a very energetic and expressive story-teller. From the few English sentences/phrases and other clues, I could establish that he was giving an oral history of UA's past hundred odd years. During his narration, the audience was also obviously very drawn into the story.

Even after several hours of listening, the audience did not seem to show much tiredness. Instead, they were in high spirits, and when interaction was demanded, they reacted dutifully. It seemed to me that such a gathering catered well to the seafarers' psychological need for security and support, and they were told that the union is able to provide this to them.

After the morning's programme, I interviewed two participants, seafarer 1 (S1) and seafarer 2 (S2) during lunch break. Both S1 and S2 were inexperienced seafarers in their mid-20s, attending this workshop for the first time. When asked whether they knew much about UA before today's workshop, they both replied no. The following are parts of our conversation:

Interviewer: You've been told about UA's previous activities and history, so what do you think of UA now?

S1:   All problems, all seafarers' problems, go to UA. UA, this is our unity! Unity, security, all our help, all our seamen's help is there.

Interviewer: Before today's event, do you know much about UA at all?

S2: No no…actually there are so many freshers…

When asked for their feedback on the workshop, the two respondents started reciting what they have been told, but in very disorganised way because firstly they did not speak English well enough, and secondly a story being retold is bound to be somehow altered and damaged.

S1:   Before, there is no RF (Retirement Fund) accounts, UA struggling, too much struggling, all seafarers' account opens, all seafarers' account opens, RF accounts.

Interviewer: So what do you think of UA's work done in that RF scam? Is it good work?

S1:   very good, very good work, because UA is all seamen's unity.

S2:   They thinking about your family…When you go for retirement…

S1: Always thinking about myself, my families…because this is our union. So UA is human power, our power. This is all seafarers' power.

Interviewer: Before today you didn't know so much about UA, did you?

S2: No no.

Interviewer: So today you learnt a lot about UA?

S2: Learnt a lot about UA, and last history, what about UA…what good activities doing…and what's a union…what's UA better other than union. This is the best.

They also mentioned examples of UA's good work such as that it provides interest free loans and scholarship grants for seafarers' children for education. Clearly, these two seafarers' opinions expressed immediately after the workshop is no more than a recital of what they had been told/taught earlier. The two schemes they mentioned were still in the pipeline, to be effective only from January 2010. And when both participants mentioned that UA is the best union because it cares for them, their families and so on, it must be remembered that so far none of them had actually enjoyed any of these benefits from the union. This is certainly not to suggest that the union's claimed benefits are not real. The point is that the

opinions of the participants—seafarer members of UA—in this case were formed purely out of the discursive activity in which they have been immersed during the past few hours. The energetically, humorously and skilfully told stories have not only constructed UA as a certain union, it has also persuaded the audience with regard to that particular construction. In my interaction with other members of UA on other occasions, they frequently recited UA's fight over the scam case as a proof to their conviction that UA is the best union for seafarers.

Apart from the 'educational' aspect as is seen in the above description, there was clearly a disciplinary aspect to the discourse going on in the workshop, and this is found in the speech given by the manager from a global crewing company. Because the manager spoke in Hindi, I only got to know this from my interview with the two seafarers.

Apparently, during his talk, the manager, whose title is Captain probably due to the fact he was an ex-ship Master, mentioned some undesirable behaviour of some Indian seafarers. Seafarer 2 said:

> Captain say, Indian so good, but Indian got some problem before joining. He will tell you after joining: my sister is going for marriage, I want to sign off, I want to go to home…something.

This refers to some Indian seafarers that the manager had encountered who had already signed a contract for a certain period (typically nine months for foreign-going ships) with the manning agency, but halfway through serving the contract, he decided to leave the ship to attend to some family matters. This is certainly a nuisance from the employer's perspective, and the manager warned that this should not happen. The lesson seemed to have been well learnt, as the other seafarer recited:

> Bosun is earning 1400 dollars something salary. Bosuns all Indian people agreement signs, nine months and also contract signs paper 1400 dollars. After that, one crew saying: I have a problem, his sister, cousin is going for marriage. You already signatured nine months contract, after you saying my family problem, I want to go home, why you sign contract nine months before joining?! You thinking before! After your contract signed!

In reciting the discourse of the manager, unknowingly, the seafarers is speaking in the voice of the manager.

The manager then introduced the fierce global competition for seafaring jobs into the picture, and stepped up his discipline of the seafarers. S2 said:

Filipino crew all better. Filipino crews so better…so much better. Indian crew want 1000 dollar, but he (Filipino one) wants 500 dollar, he is very poor. Why not go for Filipinos…Filipino so better.

The manager also told a story in which one Indian seafarer resigned from his job prematurely in order to attend family matters, which caused the ire of the shipowner. Three days after his resignation, all Indian crew onboard that ship was sacked, and replaced by Filipino crew, who cost less, and caused fewer troubles. The idea that the Filipino seafarers are an imminent threat to the livelihood of Indian seafarers was well remembered by the participants of the workshop. When asked about what he was going to do, now that he had been told that the Filipinos were so much 'better', S2 said, though in rather poor English, which I have attempted to mend:

Actually, I am also Indian; the Filipinos are also better, because company is paying me about 1000 dollars, 1000 plus…something. And I (still) got some requests, (saying to the company) 'you are not paying me properly salary.' Even I want OT (overtime). Actually company is paying hundred (per cent), but I am not happy…but Filipino persons are good nah, if you are pay 500 dollar, he also ready for work, any work, you know.

Clearly, the seafarer now 'realised' that some of his requests were unreasonable and exorbitant in light of those Filipino seafarers who are eagerly waiting. Even a sense of remorse and self-criticism could be detected in the above seafarer's revelation. It is perhaps important to point out that at the time of interview, S2 had only one ship experience and that was onboard an Indian coastal ship. He had never even worked on a foreign-going ship, and thus receiving 1000 plus dollars had never really been his personal experience.

The discipline that the interviewees received was further confirmed by the following utterance which immediately followed:

Interviewer: So should you also be happy with less money? And be working hard?

S2: If your salary 1000, you are so good, anybody Filipinos still better.

S1: Filipino go with 600 dollars, 700 dollars, Indians more than 1000 dollars! So thinking about the matters, who is the best? Suppose you are a owner, I am going 600 dollar, and he is going 1000 dollar, who you send (for)?

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Interviewer: I will send (for) the Filipino...

S1: Not Filipino. You will send 600 dollars! 600 dollars!

Interviewer: yes yes

S1: Who is much better?

Interviewer: The cheaper is better.

S1: Then? It's a business!

Interviewer: As an Indian, what are you going to do then?

S1: Admit I am wrong! So I accept I am wrong! ...

Interviewer: So you are more lucky now (than Filipino)?

S1: Yeah yeah, lucky! Why lucky? Because I have our union! They have too much struggle. After 6 days working, one day holidays…[22]

Most interestingly, as the last part of this conversation shows, the educational discourse by the union and the disciplinary discourse by the manager were found to have converged in a mutually strengthening fashion, not to forget that the workshop was organised by the union, the manager invited by the union, and the two discourses were conducted under the same roof. The message cannot be missed: it is the union which through collective bargaining agreements that has given Indian seafarers over 1000 dollars per month, so much higher than what Filipino seamen demand, thus the Indian seafarers must feel grateful to the union, and behave themselves properly, to the satisfaction of both the union and the employers' expectation. They have to be 'good' seamen. S2 commented, as if drawing a conclusion from what he has leant during the whole morning:

> Our union wants good crew. Should have good attitudes, and behaviour, like bow to your captain, senior sirs, officer and second officer, third officer…

Given our previous understanding of UA's identity construction, more explanation on this above event would be unnecessary. It is clear that almost all aspects of UA's

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[22] On reflection, this last sentence suggests that in the morning's talk, the union had probably also been telling the audience how hard they are working on their behalf. Unfortunately I wasn't able to pursue this line further since it only dawned on me after transcription, and at that time there were just too much on my hands.

identity construction and even their culture get a condensed expression in this small but significant event—hence, a Summative Observational Event (SOE). One point worth highlighting here, though, is the relation between UA and the shipping companies and their combined efforts in disciplining seafarers. Although in the documentary and interview data there is a discourse sympathetic towards the shipping companies and disciplinary towards seafarers, it is the above event that really illuminates this relationship to a far greater extent. Our earlier structured analysis of Union A's discourse combined with this SOE thus accomplishes our understanding of this union.

5.3   Summative Discursive Event (SDE)

When it comes to UC, unfortunately, due to the more limited cooperation granted by the union, there was not really the opportunity to observe an event similar in nature to UA's Trade Union Workshop. Yet, pushing the boundary of definition of 'event', I argue that an event may be in the conventional sense but needs not be so; it can also be discursive. If a certain instance of discourse, say, a chunk of relatively uninterrupted utterance, can be identified as to encompass the essential elements of the entire organisation's discourse and the identities that emerge therefrom, then the faithful reporting of such a discoursal instance has the same effect as the description of SOE, except that in this case it may be more appropriately termed a Summative Discursive Event (SDE). For UC, the following interview excerpt can be seen as a good SDE:

> *Interviewer: I remember during our first meeting you also mentioned that because these officers are from well educated backgrounds, they know a lot of things, they argue very well, so it also makes working in this union a little bit difficult sometimes. Can you tell me how, in what ways, and how do you tackle them?*

> GS: How to tackle the officers?

Interviewer: How to tackle them. How do they make it difficult to run the union? I think you mentioned running the union could be difficult…you know…

GS: Now…for example, what I feel in my mind is…you definitely will understand when you go to the court, and you fight a case: two lawyers are fighting the case, both are educated, both are lawyers, they fight it out, one against another, and (the) judge who may be superior in knowledge will try and see and do the judgment. In officers' case what happen, for example, I am talking about agreement. When we want to go for the agreement—we have got two-years agreement, now we sign…send a proposal to the ship, (saying) we want to sign an agreement with so and so years, for 2 years, please send your proposals. Now, they will send a proposal…because they are so highly educated, they will give you the Charter of Demand in such a way, honestly…because (they are) very qualified, they will give the statistic: the economy of the shipping, the economy of the India, the economy of the world shipping…all that, and they say you must get so much. Now the difficult (is) because when I go to the shipping industry, you think that shipowners are just going to buy your ideas and give you the money? Because the shipping industry has got their difficulty…they take loan from the bank, they take loan from the US to buy the ships, they take credit to…for a new built ship, they have to give money…Money they make but that money also goes away. But this officer, you see, he said No! Mr General Secretary, you please prove it, oh why you say, you are not capable! You are not fit to be the leader of the Merchant Navy officers, you should be able to get! Now, it becomes difficult to…I cannot take my people and take my red flag like Marxist and try to break the window and all that, our members do not believe in that! So it becomes impossible for me. They will call the income tax section, they will call shipping section, everything looks good in the law, but have to take from you pocket that money, which is not possible, that becomes very difficult for me. So what do I do? I've got the executive committee member, I discuss with them this is the problem, this is the problem I am facing, but I cannot talk to 18,000 members and tell them this is the problem, then there will be 18,000 views coming from them, it will make me suicidal! So…and what happen to industry? I can write anything, I can say anything. They (member officers) are doing it for doing sake. They are getting a big package. In honesty they are not bothered! Now, you will be working and sitting here, I hope not after I telling you, most of the people don't come with their problem, they don't come and shout and do anything, because they are satisfied! They are getting more than what it is. So I try to…some of the officers…I try to convince them: 'you see, this is the situation, now the shipowner doesn't want to pay this money, this is the money they are being paid. But as it is

you are getting, now what is your problem?' Now, this time is going to be the first time we are going to sign an agreement where in our agreement which is far low benchmark agreement, we are going to put a clause that this contract wages, wages you are getting, will be put into that part of the agreement. Now tomorrow those people have got any problem, UC can look after their contract, between them and the owner. But today when an officer come on a contract to me, and telling me I have got a problem with so and so company…I said you are not my member, secondly I don't know what contract you have got with the shipowner, now you tell me you must fight because you are a union, I say how can I fight? You tell me how can I fight? If I have got an agreement with you contract with this shipowner I can go to you, but I am not in the picture! But we still have to take their cases, and try to fight it out. I cannot convince these people, they are adamant! And we…see, live on…so called subsistence, we (the union) cannot…if we start fighting 100 cases a month there will be no money left. So officer otherwise is a very…any intelligent person, any intelligent person, why Merchant Navy officer, if you tell them because the junior officer is suffering, this third officer is being badly looked after by the shipping company we must help him, stop the ship! The senior officer will never support. They cannot support their own Third Officer on their ship, how you expect them to support the union? They are far away. My members, about 70 per cent of my members are from Delhi, or maybe from North of India, they never come to Bombay. For last 10 years they have not come to Bombay, because the arrangement is this: that man apply for the company, that ABC Ship Management, through the Net, he got a reply: 'ok, you are selected', about 2,500 US dollar, then he send a message ok you go to my medical doctor so and so place, you go to my agent take a ticket and fly, and join a ship…So that man doesn't know what is UC, because…when you ask him, some will say 'yes yes, UC is signing the agreement…but I don't know much about that'. It is because of the good money.

Evidently, all major themes and aspects of UC's identity discourses mentioned previously in distinct categories get expressed in this sustained utterance in a seamlessly fused fashion, an effortless 'stream of consciousness'. Such seamless fusion and effortlessness are also evidence to the entrenchment and naturalness of the identity constructing discourses embedded in UC and its key leader's psychology.

At the same time, also represented in this SDE are several new themes which were previously not mentioned due to limit of space. For example, while the construction

of officers as independent intellectual elite has mainly served the union well so that it has apparently less burdens, here, we also see the GS's complaints that intelligent officers make his work more difficult and him, 'suicidal'. The complaints about members who insist they be served by the union despite that they have not informed the union of their contracts (namely they haven't joined the union and paid union fees) further reveals the union's identity not as an organisation based on a devoted spirit of service, but more a business from which service must be *bought*, an identity that we had already a glimpse into earlier through the way the JS described this union as providing 'coverage' for a minimal fee.

Methodological implications

The presentation of these two summative events, one observational and one discursive, while refreshing and supplementing our understanding of the two unions' discourses, also provokes contemplation in terms of methodology. A simple question at times may prompt a highly encompassing and caricaturistic answer from Union C just like single small events of Union A could reveal much about the whole organisation. If these events, be they discursive, action-based or both, are as Karreman and Alvesson (2001) suggest 'organisations written small', then they should for this very reason be 'read large', and this requires one to preserve the entirety and wholesomeness of the data and present it very much in its original form, as is done here. It can be handy to dissect the quote from GS of UC into different smaller quotes which easily fit into the various small sub-categories, as analysts usually do. However, such a treatment under this condition does injustice to the data because it ignores the naturalness of the flow of the discourse and the effortlessly woven web of connectivity and relationships among the discursive themes which hold together the identity constructs. The same also applies to UA's Trade Union Workshop. Such connections and relations are cut off and brushed away if the data is dismembered. In relation to such summative identity events, the analyst's pitfall is precisely to analyse too much. It is not always an analyst's duty to micro-guide the reader as to the significance of data. At times it is equally profitable to let the data tell its own story. And, in particular, pertaining to UC

General Secretary's above utterance, this can be said to be an ethnographic approach to discourse too. The application of such summative event will be illustrated further in the next chapter, and a fuller discussion of this method will be made in the second part of Chapter Seven.

5.4   Union B: Marxism vs Neoliberalism?

With the SOE and SDE presented above, a relatively comprehensive understanding of UA and UC has been achieved. Norman Fairclough (1992) suggests the idea of 'intertexuality', one implication of which means that discourses do not stand alone, instead, they draw on each other and rely on each other in the constitution of meaning and social relations. There is further the idea of 'grand discourse' or 'mega-discourse' (Motion & Leitch, 2009; Symon, 2005; Zanoni & Janssens, 2004, p. 59) which are discourses more fundamental and pervasive, from which discourses at more specific levels can be seen to derive and on which they rely for legitimacy. From a post-structuralist point of view, many of the our general beliefs, social and economic thoughts, instincts about right and wrong, and the fundamental consciousness and perceptions that prevail at a certain historical era can all be seen as discourses or discursive formations. Often these grand discourses are so dominating and deeply-embedded that their presence and operation are not felt, yet they provide the very ideational cornerstones of our social construction of reality.

Reflecting on both the discourses of Union A and Union C, we find that among the numerous similarities that they share are a common sympathy towards the business/industry, a common apathy towards and sidelining of the government, and a shared disapproval of leftist politics and unionism. And, although the two unions' discourses on seafarers diverge, where under UA the seafarers are constructed as somehow deficient and unaspiring thus must be responsible for their own miseries and under UC they are competent and individualistic elites who do not even need the union much, the essential idea that transcends such divergence is actually a

neoliberalist stance on labour market relations. The substantive divergences reflect the specific conditions of the ratings and officers in India (and possibly globally), which are different in that the former are in oversupply and many are not properly trained or downright bogus, whereas the latter are in short supply and are usually well educated and competent. Meritocracy is the tenor of both discourses, and combined with the two unions' resonating stances on private industry, industrial relations, government and political unionism, it is appropriate to state that the common grand discourse that underpins both UA and UC's discursive identity constructive schemas is essentially one of neoliberalism (see Table 5.2 again). The diversities of the specific discourses that make up the colourful identities of both unions can be seen to have stemmed from a core idea that is neoliberal, a seed of seminality that blossoms differentially in different soils, yet retaining certain essential and transcending features. Importantly, it is also on this essential neoliberal discourse that the two unions draw for legitimacy. One prominent example is when the General Secretary of UA tries to discredit UB, he said the following:

> The Union B is backed by political party, the communist party, they are under the dictates of the party, which we think is very detrimental to the trade union movement. Because we have to look into the issues of the people whom you represent, not the political agenda, that is my view. And the union was…the very fact that, the record will speak for itself as I said, more and more shipowners when they wanted to do business with Indian seafarer, they preferred those seafarers who are under our membership, that is the membership of UA. There has to be a reason for that, isn't it? It doesn't happen over night, it is a process over the years. Some way or other, Union B had projected an image of a very highly militant union, that could be one of the reason. Militancy is part and parcel of any trade union activity, and at certain tough point it does come up, I for one do not regret it at all. But, after a certain point that militancy should…a *high* level of collective bargaining should take over that militancy. We don't need to be agitative and always having a militant approach, *in that way you kill the industry*, you kill the area, like whether it is a factory, a production or car factory.

> The job situation was more positive in Calcutta than in Bombay, but now it is the other way around, why? Why?! So that has, to a large extent, from

other factors, one important factor was the union activities over there, which was aiming *killing the shipping industry*, and if your aim is that, then you reap what you sow.

In these two quotes, which are among the very few instances where UA directly criticised UB, the GS of UA condemns UB for aiming at killing the industry and jobs. He further legitimises his own union and his philosophy based on the popularity of his union with seafarers and employers alike. Thus, here political and militant unionism is seen to kill private industry, the sacred cow of neoliberal economy. Clearly, the GS understands that 'kill the industry' is an accusation sufficiently strong in discrediting a union under the current wider discursive environment so that no more needs to be said. Whether UB is really trying to kill the industry or is solely focused on political ends is a moot and less relevant point here, the important thing being that the pervasive neoliberal economic thinking and a societal approval or even desire for private industry for the prosperity it is supposed to bring has lent UA the legitimacy it needs. This is, of course, in addition to many other specific discourses that UA deployed in its identity construction, such as that of 'fairness', 'not interfering the selection process' and so on, which all bare the hallmark of a neoliberalist line of reasoning and rhetoric. Similarly, UC's construction of an elitist, individualist, independent-minded officer who is apathetic to radical politics and only interested in personal career/financial advancements can also be seen as an idea-typical economic animal under the neoliberal economic/social regime.

If both Union A and C have their discursive identities derived and developed from the grand discourse of neoliberalism, what then is the fundamental discourse that underpins UB's identity discourses? Our analysis so far shows that UB constructs itself discursively more or less to the diametrical opposite of UA. The profusion of Marxists and radicalist vocabularies seems to imply that it is a Marxist understanding of social economic condition that drives the union's identity discourse. For sure, there is no lack of anti-neoliberalist discourse from UB's part. When asked about the privatisation of public sector which has been going on in India for the past two

decades, there is a unanimous opposition towards it:

> Office Assistant (OA): globalisation, privatisation, liberalisation policy of Government of India is opposed by unions who are affiliated to Left parties, including us. Because those policies in India are increasing the…increasing the unemployment. … And massive outsourcing, instead of permanent employment, massive outsourcing is there, contractual workers are there. Work is being awarded to contract system. Like that, permanent jobs are less. These are the policies which are creating…having adverse effects on the workers' conditions, and other social benefits and all that.

When I quoted the cliché argument about privatisation improving efficiency and eventually benefiting everyone, the OA replied:

> What happen in private sector, yes, efficiency increases, efficiency increases at what cost? At the cost of repression, repression of the workers!

Talking about the privatisation of the seafarer training system in India, Organiser Mittal remarked:

> Privatisation is never a good thing. Because once the private market is open, there are so many peoples who are just taking the disadvantage of that sort of… The private institutes charging double what exact fees of the institutes should be (charging).

Very interestingly, as the time the fieldwork of this study took place was one when the global economic recession was still a very current topic, UB officials were also seen to be utilising this to augment their anti-neoliberalist argumentation. According to the OA, India was relatively unaffected by the recession mainly because:

> our banks our economic sector was in government hands, in public sector. Had it been in private sector, you will have the same fate what America had.

This is another brilliant case illustrating that legitimisation are often done

inter-discursively, namely, by relying on a grander and more forceful discourse to back and validate the specific discourses and arguments. At that time, and arguably still today, the attribution of the global financial meltdown to an over deregulated banking industry during the neoliberal era was one grand discourse that has significant purchase and currency, one which also lends validity to UB's anti-neoliberal discourse.

However, is thus UB quintessentially a Marxist union that everything UA and UC are not? Is UB really the union that it constructs of itself, with all its radical vocabularies and ideas? Data shows, despite the way UB attempts to discursively distinguish itself from the other unions—particularly UA, there is another side to UB which can be seen to unsettle its discursive self-representation. This is also precisely the reason why no summative event pertaining to UB is presented in this chapter, for our analysis of UB in Table 5.2 is an incomplete one. In the next chapter, the other side of Union B will be shown, with the aid of further data. Renewed insights into the comparative positions and relations between the three unions will also be provided.

CHAPTER SIX

6.1   UB: The 'Confused' Union

The wisdom of the traditional Chinese idiom *Dang ju zhe mi* which loosely translates as 'he who is most closely engaged/confronted with a situation is the most confused' perhaps finds its perfect expression in Union B. Discursive construction, if seen as a deliberate enterprise, not only convince outsiders or beholders of the identity or image of the matter concerned, it is even more an effort of internal constitution; more than a rhetoric or illusion made for internal consumption, it is the genuine way that the matter, or in our case, the organisation, *be*. In other words, you are *what* and *how* you talk. Given the enthusiasm and devotion found in UB staff's discourse, there seems to be little ground to suspect that the radical aspect of the union as revealed in Chapter Four and Five is simply a load of lies told to a naive foreign researcher. Instead, that is what they genuinely believe they are. However, having been an underdog union and an 'aggrieved' organisation but currently on the rise, UB is also the most enthusiastically and passionately engaged with the situation and 'the other union', and this possibly dims its vision of itself. Having had the opportunities to study all three unions independently, I am therefore in a far more advantageous position to assess the unions' respective identity discourses. Whereas UA and UC, as have been holistically considered in the previous two chapters, both exhibit generally coherent and consistent discourses throughout and even a parallel between them, UB is a union whose identity discourse is in fact profoundly ambiguous, confused and even conflicted. Despite all the vociferous condemnation of companies/government, emotive cries on behalf of the seafarers, and not least, its enormous efforts in constructing itself as the polar opposite of UA, there are considerable amounts of discourse which can be seen to achieve the contrary.

'Mature' and 'Respectable' Union

In fact, the first similarity between the discourses of UB and UA is that UB also claims itself to be a mature union. While on the one hand this can be seen as a repost to UA's many indirect allusions that UB is immature, by doing so it also blurs the line between the two unions that UB has been so devoted to drawing.

Describing the union's evolution over the years, the Organising Secretary (OS) of UB commented:

> Previously what happen, to become to this level…initially we had to survive, to survive we have to show some muscle power. So us, it has already that time has passed, we have come in a proper respectable level with other unions and other…and shipowners, means shipping industry, is looking towards us as a responsible union. So at this stage we don't have to use threatening tactics. … Because now what is the Union B of India, is known to the industry, so we have identity! So to achieve the identity, there was a little muscle power to be shown, in those days—the initial stage, the initial days, but now we are not that…we don't actually…We keep the aggressiveness in the backburner.

This chunk of text is evidently reminiscent of some of the comments made by the General Secretary of 'the other union' analysed earlier. Further more, regarding UB's 'identity', the OS said:

> we don't have to create any scenes or…we don't have to…that is only when there is no identity, so once we have respect in the industry, we have to keep the respect.

Clearly, although the interviewee used the word 'identity', what is meant is more *recognition*. It is a hard-fought recognition, so that the union is no longer a 'nobody'—thus having 'identity'—and it must not be spoiled. The GS of UA was actually recorded saying:

> They (the industry) know what we are capable of if we want to do that! We will be able to deliver. But! We don't do that, because a lot of respect has been generated over the years, for UA, and we intend to keep it that

way.

The resemblance between the wordings of these two quotes might be coincidental, but the resonance between them cannot to be ignored. It seems being a mature union is an image or identity that both unions are keen on presenting themselves as.

'Responsible' and 'Fair' Union

With maturity comes responsibility. UB officials also describe their union as a 'responsible' one. While it is perhaps an absurdity to suggest an (apparently) Marxist radical trade union should somehow forfeit their right to call themselves 'responsible', UB's discourse revolving around 'responsible union' again displays such resemblance to that of UA that it effectively undermines its self-construction as UA's opposite.

For example, UB's construction of 'responsible' also seems to be based on the notion of 'fairness':

> OS: what is right always we get. We don't ask anything which is not right.
>
> Office Assistant (OA): If the managements are not listening to *genuine* demands, they are not answering our *genuine* demand, sometimes we take agitational path also.

Even the members of UB seem to cherish the union's sense of responsibility, as one Able-Bodied Seaman (AB) said:

> I never feel any problem with this union, because they are…maybe *restricted*, not too much problem, give any too much problem to anybody, to either like companies, either…not any problem for the seamens also. They just…mediate connections with the unions, with the companies and seamens.

The AB expressly referred to the 'restricted' behaviour of the union, namely, not causing 'problem' to anybody, including the company. Clearly, the discipline of the union is seen with significant values. As the OA put it again explicitly:

> we want to tell the companies, ship management, companies and all that, that we are a responsible trade union, our demands are genuine, logical, legal, and we do not wish to disturb the companies functioning if our demands are met, with negotiations and all that.

In fact, when the OA said they wanted to 'tell' the companies, he meant it quite literally. The length at which UB would go in order to construct itself as a responsible union is perhaps most vividly shown in a series of three emails that the union sent to a ship management company that had been alleged to be delaying salaries of seafarers over several months. The first email dated 5th Oct 09 was standard. It stated the facts, and requested the company to take steps to resolve the issue. Presumably, various telecommunications (or at least attempts at which) took place, and the second email dated 12th Nov 09 was titled 'Final Reminder'. The first paragraph of the email goes:

> After trying through all the diplomatic and democratic channels, the Union B of India, because of indifferent attitude of the management of ABC Ltd., is forced to look towards other means of democratic alternatives to bring the management to act upon the Pending issues of MBCs, Charter of Demands of Tugs and Floating Cranes etc. placed before the management many months back. Sorry to say that even after many official and verbal reminders, the management representative dealing with this union is playing hide and seek and thus, bringing UB to the brink of loosing confidence in the act of delaying/ not commencing any talks on the long pending wage settlement of the Tugs and Floating Cranes owned by the company.

In this evidently mindfully composed paragraph, the effort from UB's side to construct itself as having taken every responsible step is palpable. Rather than serving the function of providing information, which ABC Ltd surely knew, the rhetoric of this paragraph is to such effect that the union will be seen to have been totally responsible, and it is the company, being unreasonable, which pushed the union towards 'brink'. In another six days, the third email dated 18th Nov 09 contained the following wording:

After a thorough examination of the recent happenings, the Union B of India is forced to take recourse to agitation onboard the ships owned by ABC Ltd., the reason being the indifferent attitude of the management towards many urgent and important issues, which is brought out to the notice of the company and the inability of the company management, in place of amicably sorting out them, sitting on the problems, since many months, with out any conclusion. For an example since many months the Wage agreements of the TUGs and Floating cranes are not taken up for discussion.

Before this third email was sent, ABC Ltd had already given a reply, asking for two weeks of time to settle the issue. Of course, experienced unionists will understand that this could well be another delaying tactic, and therefore, UB decided to threaten a one-day token strike anyway. However, in the paragraph following the above, it was indicated that the strike would be at least another 29 days away if it were to happen at all, because firstly, the company requested a two-week period, and the union felt that it 'should give them a chance'; and secondly, union strikes in India are illegal unless notices have been tendered 15 days in advance. Therefore, although agitation is threatened, it is a carefully calculated, reasonable and legally impeccable action that UB is proposing. Most interestingly, the last two paragraphs of the third email read as follows:

Thus, Please reply by return mail, the date and time of next meeting for pending issues. Also kindly note the date of token agitation and you may seriously act on this matter and also look back, in which this union has never allowed any loss of man-hour for the company in the past.

Our co-operation is always assured, if you too reciprocate.

In this instance, the union seemed almost afraid of being looked upon as an irresponsible and combative union that it had to go so far to reassure the company that they were always ready to cooperate. What must also be realised is that these emails, although addressed to ABC Ltd alone, are also being meticulously documented and archived by the union, with each email given a unique serial number. In case the matter could not be satisfactorily resolved and public investigation or inquiry set in,

these emails will be crucial evidence to the development of the incidence. Therefore, it is in the union's interest that in these documents they are positioned on a high ground. In other words, UB can be seen as *performing* responsibility through the wording of these emails. However, such utilitarian/practical values of the wording of the email do not mean that 'responsible union' is no longer part and parcel of UB's discursive identity. In fact, the reason why UB wants to perform responsible on documents is twofold: firstly, it exerts pressure on ABC Ltd because a responsible union deserves a responsible company; secondly and more crucially, in the case that the matter may not be resolved and a higher authority has to be invited to look into the matter, UB wants to be seen as every bit responsible in the whole process of this industrial dispute. To put simply, UB is not just performing responsible, they want to *be* responsible. These emails remain some of the best examples of UB's discursive construction of a responsible self.

Partnership with Companies

Furthermore, despite the predominantly villainous image of shipping companies and 'the capitalists' under the discursive identity schema of UB, there seems to be again another very different side to the story. Although from UB there has never been discourse that directly sympathises with the shipowners or shipping companies *per se*, one accidental interview opportunity provides crucial data here. During one of my visits to UB in the later part of the fieldwork, a manager from a manning agent happened to be having a discussion with the Secretary. Thanks to the union's cooperativeness, I was able to briefly interview the manager after their meeting. The following is the relevant part of our interview:

> *Interviewer: Can you tell me what kind of seafarers do you expect from Union B? Because you have been working together…so what kind of seafarers do they send you?*
>
> Manager: See, today seafarers, what is required: they should work on board. (laugh) That is all.

Interviewer: They should work on board...what do you mean by that?

Manager: Put in the best efforts, not claim about over-timing or various other thing. Just do their work when they are supposed to do.

Interviewer: What's your experience with the seafarers affiliated with the union?

Manager: Ah, it's been good.

Interviewer: It's been good.

Manager: In my last company, I was dealing with them directly, because they manage coastal, off-shores crew, so we had a lot of coastal vessels where the crew affiliated from Union B, and we never had...at least I never had any problem. My company at that time, we never had any problem as such.

Interviewer: Because this union is a more...Marxist one...

Manager: Yeah.

Interviewer: So they might be...so the seafarers might be different from other unions', say...

Manager: No, no no no...

Interviewer: So they are also very disciplined and all that...

Manager: Yeah yeah yeah. See discipline comes from the leadership on top. So the top leadership is good, automatically the discipline has to go down. If you don't support something wrong doing of the crew, naturally they will not.

As this dialogue reveals, the working relationship between this manager and the union is evidently a cordial and comfortable one. The manager 'never had any problem' with the union, despite his somewhat shocking requirement that seafarers should 'not claim about over-timing or various other thing. Just do their work when they are supposed to do'. Although this is a general statement made without specific context, the undertone that companies expect nothing but very obedient, or even subservient, seafarers is unmistakable. The manager even rejected the notion that UB was Marxist

right out of hand, and confirmed my speculation that UB's good working relation with this company also rested on the fact that the seafarers of this union were very 'disciplined'. (By that time of the research, I had already come to realise that the word 'discipline' was a key one in the Indian industrial relations setting.) What this excerpt of interview reveals is that, contrary to the militant, provocative, 'all-for-the-seafarers' image that UB has been projecting, there is in fact a close collaborative relation between the shipping companies and the union, and this relationship rests on the fact that union leaders discipline their members so that the members meet the expectations of the employers. This cannot but remind us of the section of Union A's Trade Union Workshop in which a manager from a big manning agent was invited to speak about his expectations of seafarers and that Union A was also collaborating and facilitating the disciplining of seafarers.

Disciplining Members

Indeed, UB does not shy away at all from speaking about discipline and actually disciplining their members. Although never have seafarers been constructed as lacking discipline in any part of the union's discourse, discipline seems to be on the priority list when it comes to the union's actual action. In fact, an informal monitoring system is clearly operating within the union, and that serves to make sure that all members of this union 'behave properly'. Under UB, many seafarers are employed on a rotation system (see Chapter Three), and whenever a seafarer finishes his turn, he will report to the union before being relieved by another one. The OS explained to me the system:

> We know that who is to get relieved, so he will be, he will be going and relieving that man, that man will come out of the ship, come back, tell us, that 'I have got relieved, I have completed my turn'. So we will check up with him: he had any problem? Did he have any problem right now? How is his performance. We assess their performance. Suppose if we have got a complaint from ship, that this man is not behaving properly, so we'll warn them, that you have come from this room[23], your behaviour must be

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[23] Probably meant to be 'organisation', referring to Union B.

proper, so you are under watch-list. You have to be careful next time—so give warning. He will go on leave, come back to us, then he will be processed accordingly: if he is a little severely to be punished, he will skip one trip, as a punishment. Somebody else may go in his place. So, he will feel bad: because of his misbehaviour he had to skip a trip, so he will be careful next time. So all these disciplinary things, we are managing, so people are actually very…(disciplined).

The most interesting point in this quote is perhaps the fact that deprivation of further employment itself is used as the most effective punishment for misbehaving members. Although it is common sense that an employer may be able to dismiss an employee on serious grounds of dereliction, in this case, the one exercising this power is in fact not the shipping companies or manning agents, but the union. The union which in our common imagination usually stands up against the employer in cases of wrongful dismissal in this case actually has the power to dismiss. In fact, the disciplinary function that is usually exercised by the employer can be seen as passed down to the trade union. Thus, the trade union not only looks after the rights and welfare of the members, it also exercises discipline and monitoring, resulting in a holistic care system. Organiser Jack compared the union's monitoring system to that of a family:

Yeah, we are like families. We know each and everything of others, their problems, we are keeping a full history of the seamen, we are keeping. These are all seamens [*he showed me a pile of seamen's profiles, with their bio-data and employment records etc*] we are sending from here. Each seaman. And each time…like that…(when) they are going to a company, I am preparing a (slip), and we are getting signature from our secretary, then we are sending. If he is having some bad remark, we'll not allow him.

Although disciplining family members by keeping a detailed record of everyone does not exactly match everybody's notion of family, what is evident from this quote is that the union exercises pastoral care/control of its members, modelled on an Asian (or South Asian more precisely) conception of paternalism. The union leader, in this case the Secretary, holds absolute authority over the members, and if he disapproves of a particular seafarer because that seafarers has earned some bad remarks from

employers, then he will not get a chance to be sent. Regarding the much respected Secretary of the union, the OS said:

> He is like our fatherly figure—he is not that age of course—but everybody respect him like that.

If this is not sufficient evidence, the paternalistic nature of discipline is perhaps at its most obvious, when sometimes seafarers have committed very serious misbehaviour, the Secretary might actually 'slap them also', according to the OS.

Hence, although UB does not seem to spare any effort in setting itself apart from 'the other union'—UA, the reality rather seems to suggest that apart from some discourses that they share, such as 'maturity' and 'responsibility', one most important common function of both unions is the disciplining of members *to the expectation of* shipping companies. This further unsettles the positional contrast between the two unions which is the bedrock of Union B's identity assertions.

Neoliberal 'slips of the tongue'

Even more telling of the ambivalence and confusion that characterise UB's identity construction is the fact that in direct contrast with its pervasive anti-capitalist, anti-neoliberal rhetoric which is apparently essential to the organisation's identity, there is an uncomfortable—though perhaps not so felt by the union staff themselves—presence of pro-neoliberal discourse or discourse that can be deemed to be influenced or informed by neoliberal reasoning.

Despite the multiple proclamations that Union B is the sole genuine union representing Indian seafarers, and the Marxist notion of 'dictatorship of the proletariat' which implies that there should and can be only one true vanguard for workers, when asked what he made of the tension between UB and UA, organiser Mittal replied:

It's a rivalry, it's a rivalry. You can't stop that, that is a human nature (laugh). Rivalry, rivalry means what we are doing…maybe UA is thinking 'what they are doing, that's the right', nobody want to blame himself that I am doing the wrong thing. It's rivalry, you can't stop that (laugh). And there should be one rival, because as per my thinking, the rivalry improves quality, so that is the reason, let it be over there.

This discourse of competition/rivalry improving quality is a commonsensical but essential one to neoliberal economic thinking, which is also the classic argument deployed in favour of market privatisation and liberalisation. The interviewee expressly supports such an idea here, but he was equally express in his opposition against the privatisation of the shipping industry in India as data also records. Such unconscious self-contradictions are not the preserve of this interviewee, but can be found throughout in Union B's discourse. Had the orthodox Marxist ideas been so embedded and entrenched in the identity of the union, such self-contradiction, trivial as it may seem, should not be expected. Instead of approving of the competition/rivalry between the two unions, the Vice President's suggestion that two unions be united on the principle of class struggle, as was mentioned in the last chapter, would be an answer more congruent with the Marxist identity of the union. Yet, such a contradiction did occur, and it alludes to the incompleteness of the union's Marxist identity construction.

One further instance is when I sought the OS's opinions on the government's supposed role in connection with the dire employment situation of Indian ratings, the OS suggested that after the government privatised the shipping industry and employment practices 'they have not concentrated on marketing'. In criticism of the inactive/incompetent Indian government, the OS suggested that the Philippines is a far better example to emulate, saying 'Philippines government themselves they are involved in the process of *exporting* manpower…'

Both the Secretary of the union and the OA agreed:

OA: They are Number One nah!

Secretary: Number One in supplying seamen!

OS: Otherwise in India, Indian can surpass the Philippines, because we have more people in India. More manpower is available. But if manpower is properly trained, not only trained, if it is only trained there is no use, people will be getting backlogged. They must be properly *marketed* also.

The inconsistency in UB's identity discourse is once again seen in the language and vocabulary they use. At the same time of adopting a Marxist language including repeated use of words and phrases such as exploitation, class struggle, fighting etc, the union officials also seemed to find nothing amiss in saying 'marketing' and 'exporting' seamen, mundane phrases in nowadays' human resource discourses the core idea under which is, nevertheless, the capitalist commodification of human beings. The unawareness of the union staff who had always tried hard to project a radical Marxist image to use undeniably capitalist concepts is just one further indication of the profound identity ambiguity that UB unknowingly suffers from.

Although it can be expedient to explain away these contradictions in UB's discourse simply as differences in individual opinions or verbal habits, I argue that the very fact that different individuals in the union hold incompatible and sometimes contradictory ideas and discourses are excellent evidence to UB's identity ambiguity in areas where such contradictions are found. In a highly integrated and ideationally unified organisation, such occurrence should not be easily expected. As our literature review has suggested, organisation theorists have long found organisations to be heteroglossic and plurivocal. Yet, UB's effort to present a particular coherent image is rendered extremely fragile in the face of the various inconsistencies and self-contradictions that arose from within the organisation. At the discursive level, an attempt is discernable to construct a particular identity, though the actual processes and effects remain hugely patchy and schizophrenic. The fragility of these identities

further convinces one of their immateriality and insignificance; what remains solid is those facets of UB's identity that are so strongly determined by social economic conditions, such as the need to be seen 'responsible', the need for recognition and respect from the industry and the society, the need to impose discipline on members in order for members of the union to appeal to employers to get jobs, and all these despite the vociferous and radical rhetoric of the union which tends to lead to another image, or imagined identity. After all, this is perhaps the need to be pragmatic. Indeed, compliant to the principle of *Dang ju zhe mi* (cf beginning of this chapter), it is one lawyer who is actually not a member of the union that pointed out the saliency of pragmatism in the union:

> Though this union is having a communism approach, however, this particular gentleman (Secretary), he is only whatever practical and day-to-day problems, and burning issues. He takes acute priority to those. Though ideology is of communism, but he, this gentleman works very practically. If you are onboard ship, you are entitled to certain benefits, certain salary, certain food, then certain clothing, certain security gears, or other things. This gentleman, he is demanding those things, he say 'you have to give, as per the agreement, as per this thing, you have to provide all these facilities to the seafarer, seamen.

6.1.1   Summative Discursive Event of Union B

Having now attained a deeper understanding of UB, it is the appropriate juncture to apply the summative event (SE) method to it too. In this case, the event that emerges is also a discursive event. However, different from the SDE of UC which was rather specific and bore explicit references to specific themes of the union's identity, the SDE for UB is rather a condensed and symbolic one. When asked about the union's stance on strikes, the General Secretary gave the following reply:

> According to our ideology, according to our ideology, yes, we are affiliated to CITU, it is so that…I mean strike is the last resort. So we are…I mean first negotiation, even we are going to some sort of legal action, if nothing happen, so what to do? To stop the work. It is

everywhere, universally accepted everywhere, even the American, I mean (people say) 'there is no strike', even there also, I can show you this. There are strike also. In Brazil, now one strike is going on, sugar cane workers, last few, I mean months… So what to do? I want to be one of the member in this world! Along with my family members, along with I mean society everybody, but question is this, if you are not being the shipowners, if you are not the owner of any organisation, if you can't give me that sort of access to live, what to do? Only, I used to say one thing, that we are not going on strike, we are just crying! That means, you have right to cry, I have right to cry! And cry means not with work, without work. I have right to cry! The strike means that!

This quote may be viewed as another style of summative discursive event in which mainly the ideational aspects of UB's identity are expressed, or unintentionally performed, in a relatively abstract way. At the beginning, the GS replied that 'according to our ideology…we are affiliated to CITU', naturally leading one to expect that he was going to suggest that confrontational/militant strategy is their policy. However, in what seems an enigmatic turn, the GS suddenly came to suggest that strike is the last resort. Although there is no apparent contradiction between being Marxist in ideology and reserving strike as the last resort, the lack of logic in GS's first sentence is palpable. In the absence of contextual knowledge and data, this incidence can be quickly brushed away merely as the GS's personal style and be argued as to possess no significant meaning. In the context of this thesis and our extended discussion of the identity ambiguity and confusion that UB seems to be suffering, this incidence has to be read as more than a personal trait. In the context of discourse analysis, the analyst turns into a higher sensitivity mode and assumes that there might be something in every discursive instance and that no utterance is purely incidental or arbitrary.

The GS then went on to 'justify' strike—the symbol of union militancy. It was first negotiation, then legal action, and finally, if nothing happens, strike. The gist is, it was not UB who chooses to be militant, it is forced to be so. They are reasonable and responsible. Further, the GS went on to adopt the 'we-are-not-the-only-one' argument,

suggesting that strike is universal, not unique to this country, and particularly this union. Here, the GS can be seen to be asserting the normality of UB, as if claiming: 'we are not the freak'. Immediately, the GS poignantly pleaded that all what they want is to 'live in the society', to be able to live. This discursive tactic constructs UB and its members as outcasts of the society who have been done the gravest of injustice, being denied the right of existence. This clearly resonates with the consistent 'injustice complex' discourse that has been identified previously as central under UB's discursive identity scheme. However, more important is the point that all what they want is no more than the right to live. Nothing else—but the right to live! Thus, far from being a militant, destructive union, UB wants to coexist peacefully with everybody else in the society. In fact, hidden in this manoeuvre is also a justification for UB's 'fairness', 'reasonableness' and being a responsible union. In fact, to live on, it also requires pragmatism, one component of UB's identity as our discussion earlier in this chapter has established, though perhaps not one that they proclaim with the highest possible volume.

In the final twist, strike is no longer strike, it is actually cry. Apart from being the culmination of the previous line of argument of justifying and euphemising strike as normal and an act out of no choice, what is also important here is the 'emotionalisation' of industrial action. True, industrial action can be and probably is always emotional and perhaps sometimes irrational; but the calculative, practical and tactical nature of it must be sufficiently acknowledged too (McIlroy, 2009, p. 37). In the GS's words, strike however is likened to cry, which is predominantly an emotional plea from the powerless, venting their sorrow, proclaiming their helplessness, and begging for mercy. The construction of UB as the ultimately aggrieved union—and seafarers as the ultimately aggrieved workers—and its nature as a non-aggressive, harmless organisation reaches a climax here. At the same time, such an emotional metaphor is also consistent with UB's image as an organisation which understands and identifies with the common seafarers' interests, problems, and sorrows.

As demonstrated above, a seemingly idiosyncratic and otherwise unremarkable quote from the General Secretary of the union actually contains the re-articulation of the central pillars of UB's discursive identity construction, including its Marxist appearance and presentation; its construction of seafarers as helpless victims, and their vanguard UB as the union that has been unjustifiably bashed and excluded; the union's fairness, reasonableness and sense of responsibility; its pragmatism and its readiness to conform to the actual social economic situations of the day. This enriched reading of this small chunk of text would not have been possible in isolation from other discoursal data gathered of UB. The principle of intertexuality seems equally valid within the confines of local data.

6.2 Converging[24] Realities

The foregoing section not only gives us a fuller understanding of the identity construction of Union B as a project that is ambiguous and conflicted in many ways, by gradually shifting from the purely discursive realm to the realities and pragmatics, it also paves the way for a more realistic re-appreciation of the differential identity constructions of the three unions respectively and comparatively. Just as it is highlighted that there are more similarities between UA and UB than both unions seem to 'think' themselves, there are actually fundamental commonalities that can be identified across all three unions.

As earlier analysis shows, one major commonality is the disciplinary function exercised by the unions on seafarers. There are differences in styles when it comes to

[24] Here I use the word 'converge' rather naively without any intention of invoking the 'convergence theory' in political sociology in the 1960s and 70s, as represented by authors such as Bell (1960) and Kerr *et al* (1962), which argued that industrial societies would converge in their social/institutional structures as necessitated by the same industrial rationality. While this theory was largely discredited even at that time—for an example of critique, see Skinner (1976)—its reincarnation seemed to ephemerally reassert itself in the ideas of authors such as Fukuyama (1992), briefly after the collapse of the former USSR. Fukuyama's thesis has hardly anymore purchase now, not least when Huntington's (1998) 'clash of civilizations' seems to have been borne out since the conflict between the West and the Islamic world intensified in the past decade. While in my private opinion the current global environment is perhaps one more conducive to making arguments for a new convergence theory, it must be admitted that grand political and sociological analysis such as these is a rather separate field which, although the current study at various points tantalizingly leads one into, can by no means be satisfactorily dealt with using my data. Such unsalutary temptation must be firmly resisted.

the disciplining in different unions, but the essence of discipline and its objective of making seafarers employable according to the expectations of employers are nevertheless the same. For instance, the difference between the disciplinary cultures of UA and UB is perhaps that in the former the discipline can be seen as more forced upon the members, whereas in the latter the discipline is more inclusivist, pastoral and paternalistic. In the case of UA, the union's superior attitude and its tendency to overbear its members mean that discipline comes in a relatively more coercive manner, whereas the grassroots egalitarian culture and the purported family like bonding that UB staff and members alike pride themselves on indicate that, far from being free of discipline, discipline is exercised differently, in a more paternalistic and bonded way. This difference interestingly reminds us of the Foucauldian ideas of discipline, power and 'governmentality' (Foucault, 1994). Foucault famously opened his seminal work *Discipline and Punish* (1977) by describing the gruesome scene of the execution of Damiens who attempted regicide, but argued that such torturous punishment gradually disappeared and became replaced by more subtle and productive forms of discipline over the next century, indicative of a shift from disciplining by hard punishments to disciplining by *caring* and *enabling*. This also corresponds to the idea of governmentality which similarly suggests a shift from governing through more direct forms of domination to governing through the provision of welfare and the benevolent management of the population. Thus, it can be argued here that the disciplinary system in UB exhibits traits similar to the Foucauldian conceptions and are thus more sophisticated and subtle than the disciplinary regime of UA. Nevertheless, it is the common disciplinary function among both unions that is to be emphasised here.

The question then arises regarding the nature of discipline in the context of UC. The construction of maritime officers as individualistic elites who are only interested in self-advancement precludes from the outset a close relationship between the union and its members. Therefore, the type of discipline that occurs in the case of UA/B becomes non-applicable. However, re-examining the discourse of UC, in fact, it is

realised that this is a union that perhaps values discipline more than any other, or anything else. Underneath the image of an elite officer, be it class-based or knowledge/intelligence based, is the implication that he is already disciplined by his own eliteness—he does not participate in mob unionism because he is of a higher class and does not want to be associated with the 'labour'; he does not strike because he is intelligent and rational, and always calculates things from his own perspective. The colonial legacy of India and the stereotypical perception of a British gentleman as possessing the ultimate 'stiff upper lip' and discipline were invoked when the GS of UC tried to explain me about his members:

> when the Union C of India was founded, it was under the British rule, we were under the British rule. And, one of the reason: our officers, 99 per cent at that time […] they had worked under Britishers. Because, and you know, the Britishers are very disciplined…kind of thing, so that has ingrained in our Merchant Navy officers.

As well as further constructing UC members as elites by attaching them to the higher end of a commonly perceived racial order, this quote also registers the point that, in contrast to the naturally undisciplined labour in UA and UB who thus needs discipline, members of Union C are *already* self-disciplined, like the 'Britishers'. There is no need, neither any room, for union disciplining. The subjectivity of the officers is their own discipline. And this, interestingly, is reminiscent of yet another of Foucault's seminal ideas, namely that of 'the technologies of the Self' (1997), by which he seems to mean a relationship one has to one's self, in which knowing oneself has led to self-renunciation, or, self-discipline.

Hence, although UA exercises a coercive discipline, UB a paternalistic pastoral discipline, and UC relies on members' self-discipline, discipline seems to be the key word in Indian maritime trade unionism, and disciplining members one major function of unions in this field, regardless of their respective cultures and identities.

The unanimous emphases of all three unions on discipline points to the pragmatic

imperative that transcends as well as disrupts the contrasting identities that each union attempts to sustain discursively. The reason why disciplining is a shared imperative is simply that for members to get jobs is of supreme importance to trade unions in this context, and particularly so for the two ratings' unions, whose members are facing a job market with an oversupply of labour.

6.2.1   Job is supreme

Further data demonstrates unequivocally that for all three unions, jobs are of absolute supremacy above any other concerns of the trade unions.

In our analysis of UA's discourse, it has already been touched upon that the union projects its appeal based on its unparalleled ability to provide the best jobs for seafarers, perhaps also the reason why it is so self-confident. However, there are even more straightforward admissions that job is supreme:

> GS Gupta: we have been very proudly, we have been associated, having agreement that bring in more and more jobs for the Indian seafarers. Getting jobs for the Indian…having agreement with different nationality of shipowners, that is also very positive sign which we have been able to do, we have been doing over the years. Getting job is very important, because everything depends on how…you know, a member will become a member provided he has security of a good job.

In other words, the whole point of trade unionism is about securing jobs, and if this cannot be done, seafarers will not join the union.

Along the way, the importance of the ITF to national level unions such as UA, UB and UC has also been mentioned. In fact, anecdotally it is suggested that much of UA's dominant position in the Indian maritime sector owes to the financial contributions to the union that are mandatory under ITF agreements, the coverage of which is global. UB's relatively recent affiliation to ITF is also perceived as one

major triumph by the union, and equally as a concern by UA. Given the dependence of these unions on ITF, the fact that UA was ready to go against ITF wage standards in order to preserve jobs for Indian seafarers was further evidence to the importance of jobs. The GS commented on the tension between UA and the ITF in the late 1970s, which eventually led to the temporary suspension of UA from ITF at that time:

> It was a wage issue. ITF wage was too much high, and Indian seafarers when they took those wages there were issue, less number of jobs. That was not standardised wages. So we thought that we should not agree to that. Because our…any labour supplying country, getting jobs is a key situation for any labour supplying country, it's more important than the wages. Getting the job on fairly good condition is more important than getting wages which are much much much higher.

The PRO of UA also admits without ambiguity that to provide jobs is above everything else in today's fiercely competitive international job market for ratings:

> we understand we have competition, nationally and internationally, the fraternity who is into the seafarer section, there is competition from the Philippines, there is competition from the Bangladeshis, from the Burmese, the Pakistanis, now the primary intention of the union is to secure consistent job for the seafarers, that's the prime intention, all other benefits are added to that. And the intention, that vision states first seafarer should secure their job. If there is no job, 100 families lie weakened, the families are starving. So it cannot be a system that way. So again, we try to convince our seafarers that you when you work onboard the ship, the only intention of you is to secure the chair office[25], because you have 10 other seafarers standing behind to capture the chair office, you know that.

Very clearly, compared to jobs, everything else is secondary, ancillary, or, to read between the lines, not necessary. The union's adamant attitude on ensuring that seafarers know their 'position' and 'priorities' explains the disciplining that goes on within the organisation.

When it comes to UB, interestingly, even the notion of supremacy of jobs suffers a

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[25] (?) seems to mean 'post' or 'position'.

degree of conflictedness which, nevertheless, does not undermine the principle. On the one hand, there is a significant amount of data which indicate that for UB, jobs are indeed supreme, and the union is doing this for its members. Very early in the research process, when asked what the unique points of UB were, since it did not have the wealth of 'the other union' and consequently the series of welfare programmes 'the other union' was able to provide, OS Kuldeep proudly talked about their rotation system:

> So, on and off, a man is coming, so once he is going on leave, say mostly, such ships are having, say, 3 months routine, 3 months off. So those who are go on leave, they are knowing once he comes back, he is having his job. So, because of that one, the proper rotation is maintained. The man who is going on leave, he is with so much…(security)…in mind, he don't have to worry once he come back whether he will have job or not.

Clearly also, the OS understands that the significance of this rotation system lies in the job security that it provides:

> because of this one, our members are happy, happy lot, they are…they get job, once they come back from leave…. Those who are...gone on leave, they are also happy being on leave, they don't have to worry about job.

Organiser Mittal, too, proudly talks about the jobs that the union was able to provide its members:

> We are doing. Some of the company, once a company asking for us, you can ask any of the person, people standing outside, you can ask any of the fresher, we provided them with more than 5,000, 6,000 people job! If company is asking for some candidates, people standing outside are from the union, they are our member, we are sending them, 'just go and give your interview', if you are eligible, they will take you. We are doing. The people who are standing outside they are just got job through our reference only. Companies asking you candidates is good your seafarers are good to our work onboard ship, they are having the knowledge and all that…so that time we can provide.

From this quote is not only possible to see the importance of providing jobs to seafarers—the reason why many of them stand outside the union office day in day out, but also the existence of a collaborative relationship between the union and the companies. According to Mittal, the company will sometimes come to the union and ask for seafarers, on the understanding, of course, that the seafarers to be sent are 'good to work onboard our ship, they are having the knowledge' and perhaps above all, the *discipline*. The union thus becomes, as Mittal said, the 'reference' to the seafarers, a ticket of guarantee that they are well disciplined and compatible with the companies' expectations. If this does not turn out to be the case, the union can always be counted upon to exercise discipline and punishment, because the union has to be a 'responsible' one. And the reason why the union makes sure its members are disciplined lies in the fact that it needs the companies to provide jobs. Jobs are supreme, even for the vociferous and Marxist-appearing Union B of India.

However, on the other hand, it must also be duly acknowledged that at a discursive level, there are also attempts made by the union to deny the idea that to provide work is its most important task. For instance, regarding the rotation system, I suggested to the OS that the number of slots on the rotation list is limited, and given that there are more seafarers than jobs, what if they cannot provide a job to someone who comes to the union? The OS became visibly irritated, and argued:

> See see see see: union is not for giving job. Members are there, those who are going…we have many members…we have members sailing in the foreign going ships, not only smaller ships, but foreign going ships, foreign flag ships, ITF ships, many…see we can not assure any jobs for members. We are there to look after their welfare on the job, on the job. Many of the unions they don't understand this.

He even went on to suggest that 'We don't actually, we don't send any of our member (to) any of the shipping companies, this is the speciality of the Union B', thus directly contradicting what the organiser Mittal said as quoted earlier. Based on my observation at the union, it cannot be denied that many members do come to wait

outside the union office in the hope of getting a chance of being placed on the union's rotation list. And the fact that they persist in their daily waiting probably suggests that such waiting will not turn out futile, and the union will eventually provide jobs. Thus, the OS's denial is somewhat unusual and must be explained.

The answer becomes clear when the difference between UA and UB's respective active sectors within the Indian maritime industry is realised. As the oldest and most established union that had had ITF affiliation since the 1970s, UA had traditionally a monopolising position in India's supply of seafarers to the international market. On the other hand, probably also to do with its indigenous political connections, UB's influence has been mainly among the Indian seafarers who are employed on Indian domestic/coastal shipping. This difference is in fact a significant contributing factor to a sense of inferiority on the part of UB, because for India, an international manpower supply country, job opportunities in the international sector far exceed that in the domestic sector as far as shipping is concerned. Official statistics in this regard are lacking, but according to the opinions of some of my interviewees, the ratio is at least 2 to 1. On top of that, because international standards are being enforced on seafaring labour in the international market whereas domestic labour market is regulated by the national government, the wage and benefit standards are significantly higher for international jobs. To put it very simply, UA is dominant in the sector where there are more and better jobs, with salaries paid in US dollars, whereas UB is in a sector where jobs are fewer and less well paid. In fact, one rhetoric employed by the GS of UA in his Trade Union Worship to allure start-up level seafarers was that he asked them in an incendiary way: 'who wants to earn US dollars?! Raise your hand!' Expectedly, everybody raised their hands; 'who wants to earn rupees?', and nobody raised. The fact that UB has fewer and inferior jobs in their pocket compared to UA is one fact that the officials of UB were evidently reluctant to admit and had repeatedly dodged. The assertion in the previous quote that UB also has members on ITF ships is a deliberate effort to influence my understanding on this issue, because whenever I requested solid figures regarding UB's share in the international seafaring labour

market, I was never really given a proper reply. Thus, the conflicting claim that trade union is not for providing jobs is perhaps more a self-protective rhetoric than reflection of true conviction, given that providing job is the one area in which UB is clearly less competent than 'the other union'. Thus, it is in UB's own interest to claim that providing jobs is not the union's primary lookout, but instead focus on emphasising how unbendingly and persistently the union protects the seafarers' interest and benefits *on* the job.

Opinions from the seafarers themselves firmly confirm the above interpretation, and put it beyond doubt that for member seafarers, it is for the job that they join the union, and it is for the job that they appreciate the union. One most revealing example is when a loyal member of UB, Khaji (pseudonym) told me about his experience with a certain unethical shipping company which blacklisted him and his colleagues after some dispute. Khaji described how he perceived the union was helpful in that matter:

> …so some nearly 50, 80 people they got blacklisted. (The company said) 'ok, you are going with union, so you go with union, union will give you money, and we will not give you job'. After that we told union, union told 'ok, no problem, if they will not give job, no problem, we have more job, in other company'. They will send me to AAA company, so many people they sent to different different companies, so like this type of…if we'll have some problem like this, they will help for us. 'ok, if you don't have job, no problem, we will give…arrange job for you also'.

Evident from what he said, despite the union's claims that their main function is to protect the welfare of the seafarers and not to provide jobs, the union members more readily associate the competence of the union with its ability to provide job than anything else. The union is great because they were able to assure the seafarers that jobs would be available elsewhere, in other companies with which the union had connections. Had the union not had the ability to provide alternative employment for those blacklisted members, the above triumphant narrative of UB could not possibly stand. This further explains why, to put it plainly, the unions depend on companies,

even the highly militant-appearing Union B.

Lastly, for UC, employment is not currently an issue. Interviews and anecdotal data throughout the fieldwork have suggested that the employment situation for maritime officers is rather good, and the GS of UC even predicted that for the next eight years this situation was going to persist. Thus, there is not any need for the union to discipline its members in order to suit employers. In fact, as mentioned earlier, the members are already seen as very self-disciplined and they are so individualistic and competent that they always find employment themselves, without needing to go through the trade union. Even so, however, it is clear that the idea that jobs are supreme is one strongly held by the union leaders. For example, despite the extraordinary lengths and dramatism by which officers have been separated and exalted as elites, it seems in the GS's opinion, all these are liable to be trumped by a change in employment situation:

> Today also, from the day shipping was there, from 1986, there was an acute shortage, 84, 86, there was surplus—my apology, so what has happened, so the officers were almost militant that time. You got my point?

The GS is effectively saying that the lack of jobs may almost turn inherently elite gentlemen into militant mob, just like the lowly 'labour'. Such is the determinant swaying powers of a job. In anther instance, the GS implied that, just like UA has explicitly done, to join a union is just about getting jobs:

> as I told you, ok, they do not wish, they do not like to join union, today. When there is a surplus (of manpower supply), tomorrow they may.

Whether officers were really almost militant in the mid 80s is not verifiable, and whether officers will really become keen on unionism when there is a surplus of officer supply in the future can only be a matter of speculation. What matters here is that, despite himself being the most ardent advocate about the essentialist eliteness of

maritime officers, the GS also seems to acknowledge that all these might be a fragility in the face of changing job situation. The supremacy of jobs prevails again.

6.2.2   Survival is paramount

Following from the discussion about discipline in the three unions, the foregoing section establishes the transcendental supremacy of jobs across the board. It is for jobs that both UA and UB discipline their members and feel the imperative to project themselves as 'respectable' and 'responsible'. It is now perhaps appropriate to push the analysis slightly further by suggesting that behind all three unions' agreement on the supreme importance of job is an even more common and fundamental survival instinct that the unions, in spite of all their projected peculiarities, absolutely share. It is in order to survive as an organisation, that both UA and UB have to try their best to provide jobs for their members and simultaneously discredit each other; and it is for survival that UC must not upset their officer members' expectation of the union and must therefore remain gentlemanly.

For Union A, there is perhaps no better embodiment of this survival instinct than in the union's extraordinary slogan 'Long live UA!' The numerous instances shown in Chapter Four and Five where UA officials were recorded bragging that UA could 'live forever' and that it had 'no equal around the entire world', though previously interpreted as confidence growing out of proportion, are also manifestations of a strong desire of the organisation to survive into posterity and, apparently, eternity. The union's obsession with publicity and its skilfulness and resourcefulness when it comes to dealing with public relations are perhaps just further evidence to their accomplishment of the art of surviving.

As for UB, as our previous analyses have shown, much of the union's identity discourses are in themselves heroic survival discourses. In fact, the survival of the union is deeply infused into the union's discursive identity construction, for the union

has been constructed as one that has to persistently fight and struggle for its existence and acceptance. In one moment where UB discredits UA for doing cosmetic publicity in order to survive, UB also inadvertently discloses its own survival instinct:

> OA: a union never publicises itself, because if someone publicises, it publicises for its survival; this union (UB) need not publicise, this union has survived for so many year, and it will survive, and it is surviving with growth!

The case of Union C is again a peculiar one, for on the one hand the union does not face any major rivalry from other organisations, survival can be seen as a less pressing concern. So long as the organisation remains financially solvent, it survives. In Chapter Five it is mentioned that the fact that UA is very 'rich' seems to be a heightened one in the UC staff's consciousness. This seems to have much to do with survival too:

> UC Joint Secretary: If you are talking about the finance, this thing, we are ok, we are well secure…like, we can continue like this. But if you take the crew in UA, they are having the maximum money in Indian unions! They are having that much money!

The sentences 'we are well secure' and 'we can continue like this' are striking ones to hear from a trade unionist, and they suggest that the survival of the organisation is never far off the mind of the officials. In this regard, its survival is secure at the moment.

From another angle, however, UC faces a much deeper survival crisis because the *raison d'etre* of the union seems to be entirely hollowed out by the ways in which officers are constructed in the union officials' discourse. If the maritime officers are all so competent, individualistic and content with what they are getting, what then is the role left for a trade union? The officials' construction is further verified by counterchecking with how the members of the union actually perceive their

relationship with the union, or rather the lack of it. For example, one Third Officer knew very little about the union that he actually belonged to, UC, and said: 'I don't want anything from a union.' When asked whether in the future he might need the union's help, his reply is striking:

> Honestly I don't. I don't. Because…as long as I find a good company, I am not going to need it, that much I know. When I know that this company is reputed, only that time I will join, and I know one thing, that reputed companies at least, your rights, they take care of your rights. They don't play with your rights. And if they do, they know themselves that they are going to have problem, because they are…see, foreign flag, like German based, or Beijing based, they have good standards, and no company wants to make the standards below. So this is how it is.

Among the maritime officers, there is a considerable amount of faith in the 'reputable/good company'. There seems to be an agreement among the officers I interviewed that good companies take good care of them, and this seems to be, in turn, a reflection of the companies' need to entice these officers because of the competition for talent in the context of a global shortage of officers. One Second Mate said:

> …been working with the company, what I found nothing wrong, all everything goes on its own way. The office they pay your money goes in your bank, never found like that you have to stand up and say something to the company. And they take care of yourself, they pay for your courses, they give you hotels to stay, like if they got their own courses…They take all care of that. […] if you take a two-month leave, they call you in one month, for officers, like that…

Another Second Engineer talked to me about his employment arrangement with his company:

> *Interviewer: But for officers you have no problem finding job…*
>
> Respondent: For officers in India, doesn't have much a problem, because even in India there is a shortage of officers. Global the shortage is there, and even Indian officers are considered to be one good bunch, so there is not much problems. Indian licence is much of value, it is quite good,

so we don't have much of problems, for officers. But for crew yeah, there is a problem.

Interviewer: Your contract with your company is a permanent one or contractual?

Respondent: No, contract base.

Interviewer: So once you finish your current contract you have to look for a new job?

Respondent: No, I don't have to. They call me up…

Interviewer: So basically they will come back to you and sign a new contract with you…

Respondent: yeah, they do, they come back by their own.

Clearly, this is a totally different picture from the case of ratings. The companies are seen as trying to do everything in order to retain talents and the fact that they contact the officers while they are still on leave constitutes a good anecdote attesting to the extent of shortage.

This is not to say that there is absolutely no unethical company when it comes to officers. However, even in cases where there are such companies, the independence and individualism of the officers mean that they tend to shoulder the responsibilities themselves, as a Third Mate said:

> See, right company is very important. Right company is very important, but if your country's union is supporting you, that's like, you know, cherry on the cake. That's like, if your country union is supporting you, it's well and good. But, see, what can your country union do, if you, by knowingly, you are joining a blacklisted company, what your union can do? Nothing. This is your mistake. You are joining a blacklisted company, you know this company is blacklisted, why are you joining it? Maybe you have to struggle a bit, maybe you have to wait for ten months more, maybe you have to wait for one year more, don't join a blacklisted company! But see, sometimes people have troubles there, they don't have money, they are in need of money, so sometimes they join blacklisted companies, so… But

union can't help you when you join a blacklisted company. So, even union can't do anything about it.

In the minds of these self-reliant individuals, it is their own duty to prevent any potential trouble by being discerning, whereas the union is but a 'cherry on the cake', which they either cannot care about or do not believe in.

Under such circumstances, although the practical (financial) grounds of Union C's survival are firm, the moral grounds are crumbling weak. In order to survive such an existential crisis, the union must reinvent its identity and justify its continuing existence. The substance of this reinvention is revealed in the following quote:

> JS: they (officers) want to be covered, as a coverage. So that is what extra benefits they are getting by becoming a member. And what is the membership fee? US 15 dollars per year. It is nothing for an officer.

In other words, forget about solidarity or class struggle, the union mainly provides good value-for-money insurance coverage. It is perhaps important to add here that although over many years UC has been entering into collective wage bargaining on behalf of Indian maritime officers, the benchmark salaries are effectively redundant because market wage levels have prevailed at about three times the benchmark for at least the past decade, according to the union officials themselves. At the end of my fieldwork, the GS commented on the new collective bargaining agreement that he had just sealed on behalf of Indian officers with the Indian National Shipowners' Association (INSA):

> I feel it has got no meaning! Today, they are getting 100 dollar[26], in my agreement, INSA-UC agreement; they are getting 500 dollar there (in the market)!

Such candour by a trade union leader about his organisation's collective bargaining

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[26] These figures are probably made up just for the sake of argument.

also heightens the urge for the union to justify itself on other grounds. In this regard, the GS is equally candid:

> So, what they look (for)? A better packet…or better social benefits. Now, they look at a union, ok, we are the union, what benefit…what is the use of making this union? Are you going to give me my medical expenses to my wife to myself when I am on leave? Will you give me education money to me and to my children? I say yes, you will get this and other thing, we'll fight case for you, we can…it has become a *business* now! I have to give you something to become my member. Today my members who are not under the agreement, like fly-by-night, like for example, in Dubai, a lot fly-by-night shipowners don't pay them all that. They come and want to become the member. Not because they love union, because if I become the member I will get medical benefit, I will get education benefit. If my Dubai owner doesn't pay me they will fight the case for me. They will go to ITF, they will spend maybe 50,000 rupees for me to do it, where he has only paid 600 rupees (union membership fee). You got my point?

As the GS said, the union has become like a business, and that of the nature of insurance. And in order to survive, the union must provide good-value insurance plans, hence the contrast made between the extent of potential benefits and the negligible amount of membership fee. It is also in this context that the managerialist discourse of UC staff members as mentioned in the previous chapter fit in. The unusual remark about preferring MBA graduates to join UC now squares comfortably with the fact that UC is essentially a business. In order to survive, and to justify its continued existence, UC has reinvented itself.

To summarise, this chapter begins with our understanding of a drastically divergent set of identities of the three unions; but as additional discoursal and observational data illuminates, while the unions diverge on a discursive level, when reality dawns, they seem to converge, exhibiting various commonalities that can be seen as more substantial and fundamental than discursively maintained 'personality traits'. Not only is it found that UA and UB are in fact more similar to each other than their respective discourses would have us imagine, the twin themes of job and survival seem to transcend the discursive identity boundaries that set the unions apart. Jobs are

supreme, because that is what the members require of the trade unions, and only by providing jobs can the unions survive as organisations which are by definition founded on mass membership. In other words, the fact that both UA and UB essentially discipline seafarers and provide them with jobs is also a derivation from the survival instinct of the organisations themselves. For UC, under the present situation in India, the provision of jobs is irrelevant as are most other traditional/conventional functions of the union. This eventually resulted in its self-reinvention as an organisation that primarily provides welfare services at an attractive price, on a principle not dissimilar to that of an insurance company, in order to justify its continued existence. This is a varied manifestation of the union's survival instinct. The convergence of UA and UB when confronted with the same realities and the varied response of UC under a different set of conditions only serve to show that to survive is the common paramount imperative that all three organisations share.

In the next chapter, an integrated discussion will be made of the analyses presented up to this point, deepening and refining the insights generated by this study.

CHAPTER SEVEN

In this chapter, two main areas will be discussed upon which this study can be seen to have generated some insights: on the theoretical front, regarding organisation and discourse; and on the methodological front, regarding the use of Summative Events (SE).

7.1   The 'proper place' of discourse in organisational studies

The central question this research aims at answering is how trade unions discursively construct their identities. Through a comparative design of studying three Indian maritime trade unions which were found to exhibit very different 'personas', Chapter Four and Five answered this question. The three unions' identity discourses can be seen to set out from the same starting point—the almost redundant claim that trade unions exist for their members. However, extending from there, the discursive identity paths radically diverge. Based on a framework that sees the discursive identity schema of each union as resting on five weight-bearing 'pillars', or discursive sub-constructs, which, when each differentially constructed, give rise to distinctive totalities that are the respective identities of the unions, both the substance and technicalities to the discursive construction of the three unions' identities have been laid bare. Emerging from the analysis are one union which is distinctively radical and apparently Marxist in ideological inclination, and two other unions which share the fundamental discursive logic of neoliberalism. The officers' union, UC, can be seen as ideologically positioned even further to the right by virtue of the elitism it exhibits.

However, instead of drawing the line there and settling for the fundamentally constitutive power of discourse, the thesis challenges itself by further drawing on data that indicates a convergence of the unions at practical level in addition to the divergence at discursive level. It is recognised that no matter how it attempts to

discursively construct itself as the polar opposite of UA, for example, UB also has to present itself as a mature, responsible, and fair union, and to discipline its members to suit the expectations of employers (just like UA does). It is realised that trade unions, no matter how their identities are being constructed, cannot do without a cordial cooperative relationship with the employers, or the shipping companies or manning agents in this specific case. The clear reason behind this is that both unions need to be able to provide jobs to their seafarer members in order for the organisations themselves to survive. Particularly when two unions compete for members in a job market where there is a clear oversupply of labour, the one capable of offering more and better jobs stands a higher chance of 'outdoing' the other. The oddity of UC, a maritime officers' union, lies in that there is not currently an oversupply of officer labour but instead a shortage, and thus the situation of the two ratings' unions does not directly apply. Nevertheless, it is clear that UC also recognises the supreme importance of jobs, and it is for its survival that the union has to reinvent itself as a kind of insurance provider to the officers—the only role under the present circumstances that seems to justify the union's continued existence. This allows us to draw the conclusion that despite the discursive divergences, in reality, for all three unions, jobs are supreme and survival is paramount. The following figure (Fig 7.1) graphically illustrates the above analysis.
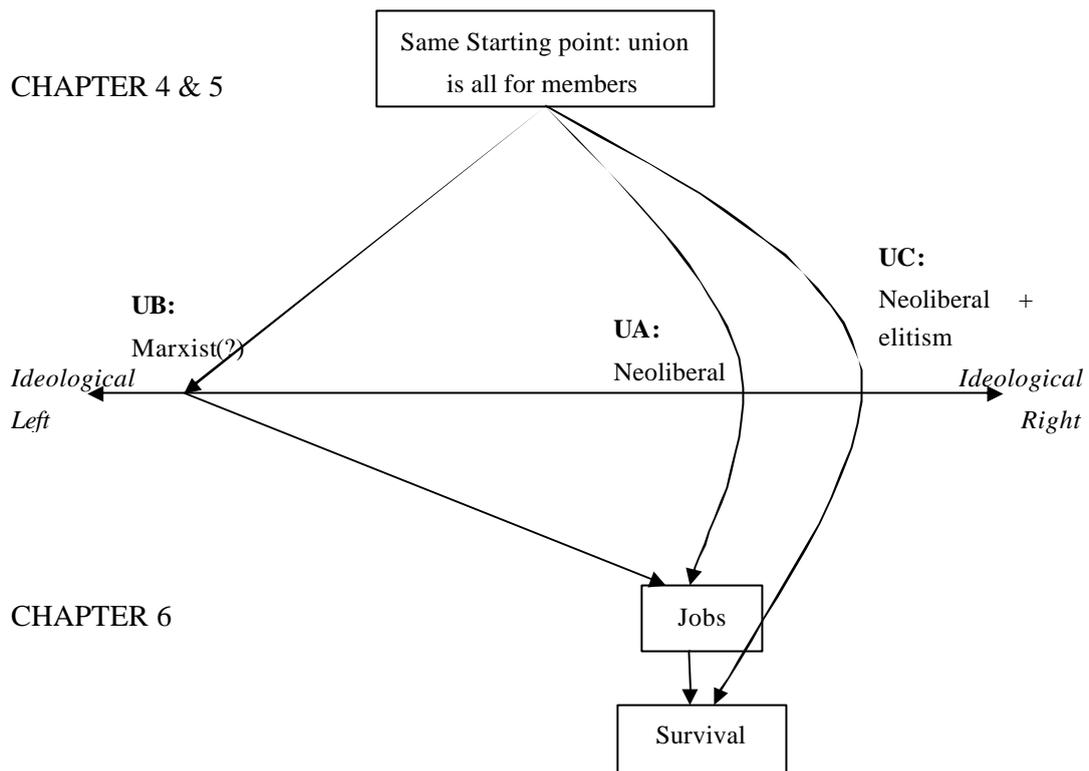
Figure 7.1 Discursive identities and realities of the three unions

Hence, all the diversity of the discourses and the dramatism and ferocity with which the discourses are propagated and the identities so projected seem to be a kind of superfluity, vanquished into insignificance by the overriding imperative of survival. In fact, the discourses can even be interpreted as the unions' tactics that ultimately serve the purpose of their survival. By now it is perhaps redundant to suggest that all unions' discourses examined in this study possess a degree of self-serving character. However, there is even further evidence that discourse submits to the survival instinct even at the cost of glaring self-contradiction. Trade unions are a type of organisation that is fundamentally partial because they are essentially interest groups representing the members; consequently, the moral expectation that the union should always be on the members' side and work towards the wellbeing of the members is at the very core of any trade union. In order words, for a union to *be*, it must be at least perceived as possessing the moral character that is inherent in its name. Thus, preserving the moral character is also at the core of the survival of a trade union organisation, so long as that organisation wishes to exist under the name 'trade union'. Hence, whenever

matters come to the question of the moral integrity of the union or the leaders of the union, it is a matter of survival. In my course of research, I have also received anecdotal feedback regarding UC from officers who are impartial and do not have any vested interest in misrepresenting the union in either way. Some of the feedback suggests that UC is overly 'soft', and has become a 'puppet' of the shipowners. I reported such feedbacks to the GS of UC, upon which he became very defensive. He strikingly suggested that trade union is also a political party and cannot satisfy everyone:

> everyone…you must always remember that no citizen of the world…what is a political party? The government is political party, no citizen of that country will be happy with the government. Because 100 per cent we cannot give him satisfaction. Same way, trade union is also a political party, it is a government, you cannot give it 100 per cent satisfaction.

The GS uses the somewhat cliché argument that a partial organisation cannot satisfy everyone, which in itself is not unusual; what is unusual here is that, to the total contradiction of the union's insistence throughout that political unionism is to be disapproved of, the GS now said that the trade union is just another 'political party'. Adamantly the GS had denounced political unionism, just as he would now firmly say that his trade union is also political. There is perhaps no other explanation to this enigmatic U-turn apart from that to defend the moral character of his union and by implication himself is of such priority and urgency that one central identity discourse of the union can also be flipped. In other words, before the discursive construction of identities comes the moral survival of the trade union. In comparison to the survival instinct, identity discourse seems superficial. They might be seen as superstructures built on the foundation or facade attached to the core of the organisation, and if necessary, they could be altered or knocked down at ease.

With this insight, it is perhaps also clear that much of Union B's discursive construction of 'the other union' is in fact moral assassination. The witty wordplay

deployed by the GS of UB in which UB is called the true 'trade union' and UA, 'union trade', is the most convincing illustration. In fact, one might even be tempted to view all the identity discourses of UA and UB analysed so far as mere marketing slogans or advertisements. The fact that UA publishes a dedicated publicity pamphlet lends further support to this point.

The truth seems to be that in at least the maritime sector of India, running a trade union is a lucrative business—in addition to the allusion made by UC regarding UA's huge wealth, UA staff members themselves even pride on the fact that they have that kind of financial resources that would ensure their organisation to 'live forever'. A large base of Indian seafarers working in global shipping means a deep potential reserve of membership fee incomes, which is only to be dwarfed by the welfare funds contributions that flow to the ITF linked unions by virtue of ITF's 'Green Card' system and other welfare fund contribution mechanisms, not to mention that there are also friendly shipowners or manning agents who are ready to reciprocate financially when the union supply well disciplined seafarers who 'do what they are told'. Although the extent of these practices is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is impossible not to reach at least such a rough understanding after spending two months in the field. And the financial gains are topped up by the powers to 'play God': to discipline, award and punish seafarers—powers that are surely alluring to the organisation and their leaders. Hence, in the labour market of ratings where the main players are UA and UB, it is essentially a turf war that is being fought. One union's ascendance would threaten the survival of the other. With this understanding, it may even be suggested that all the identity discourses of UA and UB are propelled by a survival imperative. Indeed, UA does not spare any effort in projecting the image of a mighty union which can do things that no other unions can do. Its long history and the already established connections with the shipping industry are all blended into its discourse and exploited in order to increase its appeal to seafarers and shipowners alike. Facing such an established competitor, the late-comer UB has to pursue a different strategic path in order to gain ground. One readily available analogy is the

business concept of product/service differentiation, namely, each organisation/product should have its unique selling points to lure potential customers. Hence we see Union B's discursive construction which attempts to simultaneously attack the moral core of 'the other union' and construct itself as the only organisation that truly cares for the welfare of the seafarers. Yet, at the level of practice, the two unions do not differ that radically.

The above analysis no doubt fundamentally undermines the position of discourse in our analysis of the three organisations, and can even be seen to advocate the total ineffectuality and inconsequentiality of language/discourse.

As part of the 'linguistic turn' which is closely linked to the wider 'postmodern turn' in the social sciences in the past two decades, the discursive approach to organisational studies has always been liable to being criticised as reductionist and idealistic, turning blind eyes to materiality. Even at early stage of the linguistic turn, Parker (1995) criticised the 'vacuum' behind studying organisational discourse in a postmodernist fad, asserting that: 'language maybe the medium for all forms of enquiry into that social world, but it does not follow from that premise that language is all that there is' (p. 557). Nevertheless, this 'fad' lived on and flourished, establishing itself as a legitimate social science perspective and building up a significant body of literature in this vein. In the general critical realist accusation that discourse studies collapse materiality into discursivity (L. Putnam & Cooren, 2004; Michael Reed, 2004), there seems to be a strong and a mild version. The strong version is perhaps represented by Reed (2000), who proposes a realist version of discourse analysis which regards discourse as 'the objective effects and ontological referents of relatively stable material resources and durable social relations which bring them into existence' (ibid., p. 528) and suggests that attention be paid to 'what a discourse does' (ibid., p. 528). In such a move, discourse is considered as nothing but a superfluity attached to and entirely reducible to the material conditions that are supposed to have dictated the emergence of discourse and the forms of discursivity in

the first place. This accusation which charges discourse analysis with the guilt of reductionism ironically smacks of reductionism itself, albeit a realist one. The mild version only takes issue with the commitment to postmodernism and extreme versions of social constructivism, but is happy to see an accommodation and reconciliation of the study of discursivity and reality. For example, Iedema (2007, p. 936) expresses his concern that much of organisational discourse literature 'pays limited attention to *in situ* interactions and the practical, political and historical complexities that constitute it'. Similarly, critical realist discourse analyst Norman Fairclough advocates a kind of study of discourse that entails neither the reduction of organizations to discourse nor the opposite which totally ignores discursivity (2005). He suggests that this is to give discourse analysis its 'proper place within organisation studies' (ibid., p. 916). Despite all the plausibility and sensibility of this proposition, what actually is meant by the 'proper place' of discourse remains unexplained, and the word 'proper' invokes profound ambiguity. What is more troubling is that the very phraseology of 'proper place' seems to suggest a kind of compartmentability between discourse and materiality, hinting to the detachability of the two. This effectively renders the mild version indistinguishable from the strong version, and the precise relationship between discursivity and materiality has not been addressed. The present study presents an excellent opportunity to reconsider this tension.

Is discourse then a decorative superfluity that matters not? Are the diverging and diverse identities of the unions constructed through discourse but illusions? In my opinion, that would be to push realism too hard and too far, and as far as this study is concerned, such conclusions cannot be supported. Re-examining holistically the cultures and the practical aspects of all three unions, it is realised that much as practicalities transcend the discursively constructed identity boundaries, discursivity similarly percolates and permeates the practicalities. Although it might be said that all three unions do similar things (this more strictly applies to UA and UB) and have basically the same essential concerns, they do so and express so differently. Earlier analysis has already pointed out that although discipline (a practicality) transcends all

three unions, disciplining is done differently according to the cultures and identities of the unions. In the shipowner-sympathising UA, disciplining is done in a matchingly coercive and alienating way, for example, by insinuating that the seafarers are inadequate or by inviting shipmanagers to threaten their sense of security by invoking the competition from Filipino seafarers; in the 'family-like', grassroots-cultured UB, discipline is imparted not through intimidation/scare-mongering, but through paternalistic pastoral supervision akin to the Foucauldian model of governmentality, which is, nevertheless, not any less strict or effective; and finally in the ultra elitist UC, members are considered to be already self-disciplined and need no more. Such differences in styles and manners, far from being superfluous, are, I argue, essential, for they are inextricable rather than detachable from the substance of disciplining.

Another example is the unions' respective perceptions of organisational survival. Although as the analysis has shown, survival is a common imperative shared by the member staff of all the three unions, there seem to be considerable variation in the respective ways survival is conceived in the three unions.

Under UA, an organisation that has been there for more than 100 years and is still dominant in the scene, the senior members of the unions associate its success with a strategic vision. Comparing this union and other 'street unions', the VP of UA sees one major difference as the difference in visions:

> they don't have any programme. That's why they are not capable. Collecting money from certain people, today is 100 dollar come, today's finishing 100 dollar. They don't have the goal, don't have the image[27]. Our…we are thinking, 2009, running year, after 5 years 2014 where we'll be standing, what is our status and all that. We are thinking ahead!

The strategic vision of a union is then realised through strategic planning and financial prudence, as the VP proudly talked about the wealth of the union yet the

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[27] He probably meant 'vision', in the sense it is an image that the union aspire to.

restraint with which the wealth is being handled:

> Maybe you are surprised, our office-bearers, only (working) for the wages, salary whatever we are getting, not anything else. We are having crores of dollars with us, we can eat (it among) ourself, but no. Only wages whatever is there. Our vision is a long vision, not a small vision.

In order to register the point about financial prudence, the VP even made the analogy of personal financial planning during the interview, advising me to save ten per cent of my stipend so that by the time I am 55 I should have a sizable retirement fund.

Recalling the narrative of the Seafarers Retirement Fund Scam which is a central one to UA, we rediscover that this case was being repeatedly trumpeted because of the hugeness of the sum of money involved. When it comes to impressing people, huge figures are always powerful, but the union's unfailing emphasis on tying their credentials to the amount of money won back also easily reminds us of a company keenly defining its success in terms of its financial achievements. In fact, we could compare UA's narrative of this scam case to that of a company which is proud of being able to protect the interest of its shareholders who have invested heavily in the company. This further resonates with UA staff's pride throughout in the union's financial strength, suggesting that liquidity, financial health and growth seem to be at the heart of the union's conceptual visualisation of survival. In fact further data seem to suggest that the union has become a business organisation existing for their own sake. For instance, the VP committed what seemed to be a shocking slip of tongue when he affirmed my suggestion about the union's vision:

> *Interviewer: So you have a vision.*

> VP: Vision, correct! We can able to give my staff salary another ten years or not…[pause]…we can get by…today my seafarer's getting 1,000 dollar whether we can able to give them 1,500 dollar after five years or not. What is the social benefit we are giving them? We look ahead always, not backward.

The first thing when the VP expanded on vision that came out was whether the *union staff* can have salary or not in the next 10 years! After a notable pause, then came the welfare of the member seafarers. This echoes the earlier quote in which he said 'we can eat ourself', meaning that the staff of the unions could actually eat the crores of dollars of the union's assets amongst themselves, but it is only the concern for the strategic survival that prevented them from doing that. If all these seem to be over-reading a small slip of tongue, then a further instance shows that they are surely not. My interview with the VP was briefly interrupted at one point when a clerk came into the VP's office to give him his salary cheque. At that point, our conversation was still about the vision of the union. The VP picked up the opportunity and said:

> When I join the union, I am getting 125 rupees, 32 years back, salary here, 250, two hundred and fifty. Now see how much I am getting now…[showing me his salary cheque, and pointing towards the figures] here here…When I joined the union, I am getting 250 rupees per month, now I am getting the 47,000, that is the differences! My union is having the vision!

This shocking direct association of the union's vision with the salary of a staff member is perhaps evidence enough that the union has somehow transmuted from being an organisation existing for the members to an organisation existing for itself and its 'board of directors'—the staff of the union, particularly the senior ones. Not only is UA's discourse and ideological inclination overtly neoliberal, it seems UA has become a business organisation itself, and conceives of its survival in the most business-like terms such as strategic vision, financial prudence, and long term planning. In other words, it seems that UA does not just sympathise with neoliberalism, it is itself an organisation founded on neoliberalism.

This quickly leads us to contemplate whether the same applies to UC, for this officers' union too exhibits neoliberal tendencies. The answer seems to be affirmative, given that the GS himself has confessed that running UC is like running a business. At this

point, we may realise that one strand of UC's elitist discourse—that of the elite union staff—is perhaps also the expression of its neoliberalist conception of organisational survival. In Chapter Five it has been shown that not only do UC senior staff members pride themselves on the academic credentials of the people who staff the union, even the staff members themselves eloquently deploy managerialist concepts such as that of 'knowledge worker', emotional literacy, EQ, and even suggest that MBA graduates are the most desirable candidates for the union's recruitment. These notions which would usually be found slightly bizarre in the context of trade unions point to the fact that UC now survives as a business that attempts to improve the quality of its services along the popular lines of reasoning in neoliberal business culture.

The acid test now comes down to whether UB, with the conflicted discursive identities it has, exhibits a different and conflicted hue when it comes to its conceptualisation of its survival. Again, as the earlier analysis has also touched on, this seems to be the case. There is a strong element of aggressiveness or combativeness in UB's conception of survival. For them, survival was fought for and consequently won:

> we have fought against all odds and came up in this…this one (Mumbai)

This history of struggle in the earlier part of the union's establishment in Mumbai seems to lead to a conception of survival that is sceptical of the tricks and gimmicks used in the neoliberal corporate culture. For example, there is a distrust of publicity as part of the union's survival effort:

> OA: what happens, union does not need to publicise itself, to publicise itself. Union will be publically known only by its activities, its achievements. So Union B has grown up like that only. Even today you'll find everyday membership is increasing and increasing, why? Because people know that this union can do something, and the members of *that union*, after failing there, come to this union, join this union, it is not because this union has publicised that we are doing this

we are doing that, but people have seen that this union is working for the real betterment of the seafarers, this union is really taking up the issues of the seafarers.

Thus, in the view of UB, UA's various publicity activities and their media/PR savvyness are contemptible tricks that this 'genuine' union cannot care about doing. To survive, for Union B, seems to be a question about fighting and struggling and to surmount difficulties and odds.

Nevertheless, as an organisation, the most basic survival means financial solvency, and even UB cannot be exempted, as the union leaders acknowledge:

> OS: (things) only can happen once we have the resource. We have to see we have 100 rupees, how to spend that? Out of that 50 rupees, we cannot…full money we cannot spend, we cannot spend. Out of that, 50 rupees, how can utilise for a good purpose, for the seafarers. We have to see. Same way, once the ITF affiliation trust is opened, the money comes, so we have to see how we can utilise it.

Hence, the fighting spirit and financial prudence are simultaneously in the framework of perception of survival under Union B. While this is hardly an astonishing discovery to make, it should be pointed out that the element of aggressive struggle is absent in both UA and UC's respective survival framework.

In this way, much as survival is the common imperative of all three unions, when it comes to the conceptualisation of survival under the discursive and practical frameworks of the unions, UA and UC exhibit neoliberalism and pretty much neoliberalism alone, whereas UB is again more conflicted, with the coexistence of the inescapable pragmatism/rationalism and a more romanticist and radical notion of fighting and struggling. In other words, the discursively constructed identities seem to percolate the solid realistic foundations that seem to, at one point, explain discursivity away. The previous diagram may now be modified as follows:

CHAPTER 4 & 5

Same Starting point: union
is all for members

UC:
Neoliberal
+ elitism

UB:
Marxist?

UA:
Neoliberal

*Ideological
Left*

*Ideological
Right*

CHAPTER 6

Jobs

Survival

*Leftist
(romanticist/radical)
conceptualisation*

UB

UA

UC

*Rightist
(neoliberal)
conceptualisation*
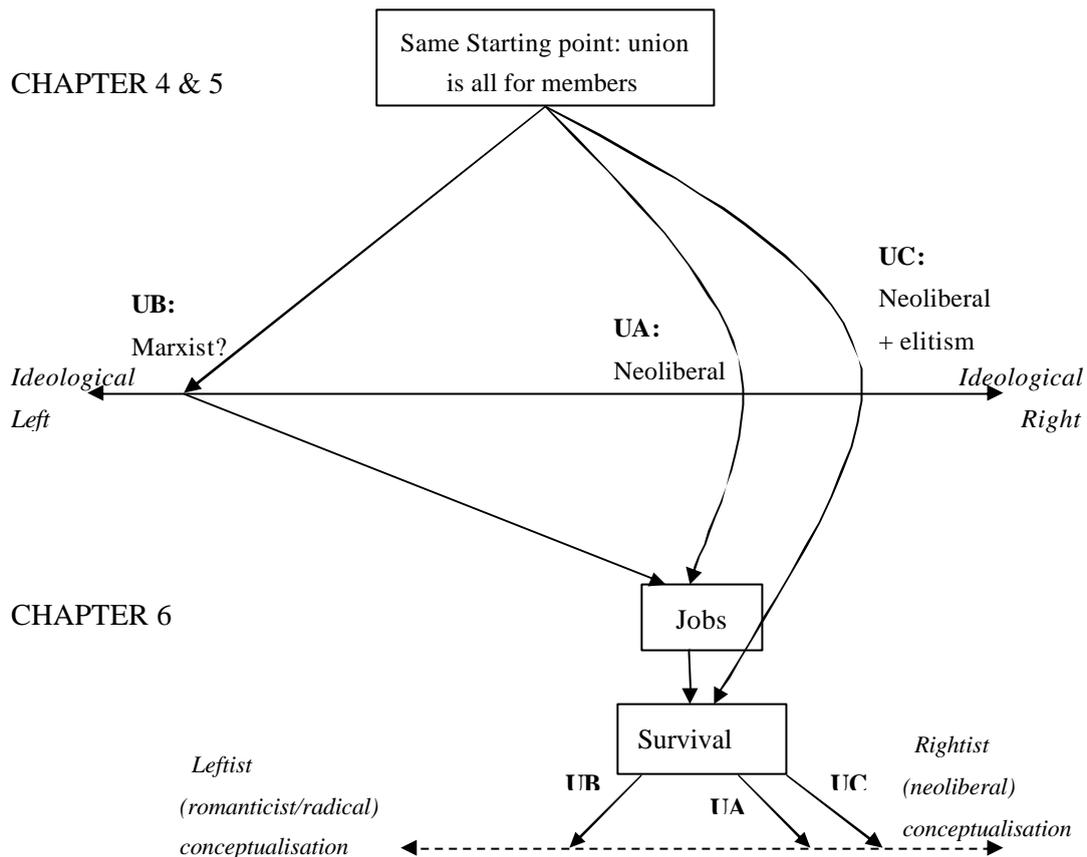
Figure 7.1a. A refined version

The position of discursive identity is thus subtle, elusive and unstable. On the one hand, we seem to find that identity discourses are the means to ends for organisational survival, and evidence suggests that when survival instinct requires, discursive identities can be fragile and twisted with ease. On the other hand, we also find that the discursive identities deeply pigment the ways survival is fundamentally conceptualised in three unions to different effect. Identities constructed discursively are hence simultaneously superficial and fundamental; simultaneously superfluous and profound; simultaneously decorative and constitutive. Just like the pigment of the eye: no matter what colour the eye is pigmented, the universal function is to see; yet, there is also an irreducible difference between the eyes with different colours. They are fundamentally and irreducibly different, because the colour is not superficial nor detachable; the colour resides constitutively and cannot be extracted. Odd as this comparison may sound, it seems to illustrate the nature of the differential discursive

constructions of the three Indian trade unions under this study. The discursively maintained contrasts among them are superficial because they do not alter the real function of the unions in the Indian maritime industry. Yet, the differences are also irreducible because by virtue of their contrasting discourses they are indeed made different unions, possessing different characters. These differences are not just seen and encountered by outsiders who come into contact of the union, like I did, but they are also understood and believed in by the union staff as who they are. Discourse allows the three unions under the particular conditions that they are under to *believe* that they are *different* types of organisation, while doing the *same* things but *differently*. Suffice to summarise, while this study in a way also advocates the 'right place' of discourse in organisational studies by facing up to and acknowledging the reality/practicality straight, the 'place' it proposes is not one that is additional, superstructural and thus detachable, but rather one that is constitutively imbricated, permeating, percolating the realm of practice and reality.

7.2   A Methodological Point

Analysing the three unions' discourses using the 'five-pillar' framework enables a highly fruitful comparison that lays bare the ways how each union through discourse sets itself apart from the others, thereby asserting their respective unique identities. However, to repeat what is already touched upon in Chapter Five, there is also a flaw to this framework. The world of discourse is naturally chaotic and possibly irrational. Imposing orders and structures onto discourse risks overlooking the seamless fusion and intricate connections of sub-themes within discourse as well as the connections and complementarities between discursivity and practice. Discourse does not stand alone and clear of practice; instead the two are often inseverably fused and should preferably be analysed in entirety just as sub themes of the entire identity discourse of an organisation should also be seen in their wholesomeness. The redress to this flaw first suggested itself as I realised that several events in relation to Union A that I opportunistically observed provided rich summative expressions of the organisation in

question. Referring to Karreman and Alvesson's (2001) advocacy of doing in-depth study of 'micro organisational' events to shed lights on entire organisations, I re-cast such event observation as Summative Event (SE).

Apart from Karreman and Alvesson (2001), arguments found in some other disciplines can also be canvassed to support the principle behind SE. For example, Geertz's (1993) seminal cultural anthropological term 'thick description' makes a similar case for using extended and detailed description. Although Geertz's work is more of a classical social anthropology tradition whereas this study does not even employ ethnography as its method, the following argument made by Geertz about not mistaking elements deduced from interpretation for entirety nevertheless strongly resonates with the function of SE to preserve and present entirety and wholesomeness:

> [w]e take, say, a Beethoven quartet as an, admittedly rather special but, for these purposes, nicely illustrative, sample of culture, no one would, I think, identify it with its score, with the skills and knowledge needed to play it, with the understanding of it possessed by its performers or auditors, nor, to take care, *en passant*, of the reductionists and reifiers, with a particular performance of it or with some mysterious entity transcending material existence. […] that a Beethoven quartet is a temporally developed tonal structure, a coherent sequence of modeled sound—in a word, music—and not anybody's knowledge of or belief about anything, including how to play it, is a proposition to which most people are, upon reflection, likely to assent. (1993, pp. 11-12)

The scores and skills Geertz mentioned can be likened to the separate elements in our analysis of the organisations' discursivity and practices, but they are not quite what the music in entirety is. I, as the researcher and interpreter of the organisations, am liable to becoming the 'reductionists' and 'reifiers' who, while imposing a particular method of analysis out of necessity, could have rendered a lesser account of the organisations as a result. It is this argument against 'thin description' and instead for a 'thick description' which supports the endeavour of presenting the summative events.

On the other hand, the SE can also be considered a variation of Rapid Assessment, a research approach which aims at producing relative quick appraisals of particular situation or social problem on relatively low cost and within a short time scale (Bloor & Wood, 2006, pp. 143-145). This method has been used particularly in the work of certain international agencies to investigate health or social problems in developing countries (though not necessarily so) when exhaustive investigation is less feasible (Chambers, 1981). In particular, it is suggested that key-informant interviews, brief observations and group interviews are the main methods employed in this approach (Bloor & Wood, 2006), and this is very much the case of this study too. Relative brevity, financial constraints, and difficulty of in-depth access are the issues that similarly characterise the current study, and the summative events that came along can be viewed as occasions where I performed rapid assessments of the organisations' identities.

Integrating these above arguments, summative event is an event, when faithfully reported and carefully analysed, that can be seen to encapsulate all the salient aspects of an organisation's identity and culture. In this particular study of the three unions, SE has further assumed three varying forms, demonstrating the flexibility with which this method can be applied. As figure 7.2 shows, in the case of UA, the event that can be seen to most beautifully summarise the union was the Trade Union Workshop. This event is as practical as it is discursive. Discourses that operate in the workshop rely on the organisation of the event as well as permeate it. Without the ethnographic approach which involves observation and the thick description of the same, it would be difficult to see the discourses in an integrated and summative manner. This event is thus called a Summative Observational Event (SOE), an event that is largely based on observation and gives a summative expression of an organisation's identity. In contrast, in both the cases of UB and UC, the opportunity for actual event observation did not arise. Nevertheless, certain segments of discoursal data in these cases proved to be of the equal summative effects. These can be equally viewed as significant events of the organisation, hence the title Summative Discursive Event (SDE).

Furthermore, the SDE of UB differs from that of UC in that the former is of a more abstract and symbolic nature whereas the latter more concrete and specific. In spite of this, both SDEs are powerful encapsulations that present us more holistic pictures of the organisations under this study, something which separate categorical analysis falls short of doing.
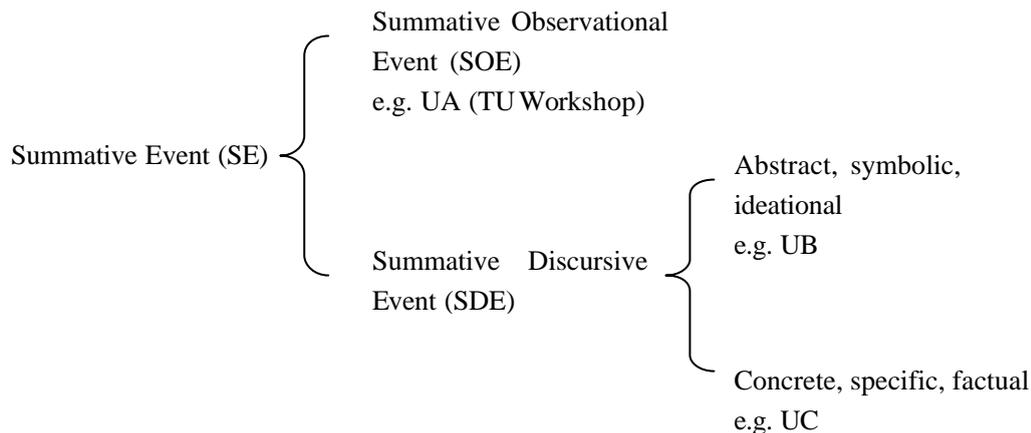
Figure 7.2 Summative Events

It must be noted, nevertheless, Summative Events as an aid in elucidating the matter under analysis should be used in conjunction with more conventional categorical or thematic analysis. A similar point has been clearly made by Fitch *et al.* (2000) when they cautioned that instead of as an *alternative*, rapid assessment ought to be used *alongside* other systematic methods of investigation/evaluation. In this thesis, the SE complements the thematic analysis by presenting a holistic view and amending certain connections that had to be severed or erased when categorisation and thematisation have to be performed; the thematic analysis, on the other hand, is more crucial because it sensitises the analyst to otherwise inconspicuous elements in the summative events. This is the point illustrated particularly by the rather short summative discursive event of UB, which, without preceding understanding of the organisation, can hardly be expected to yield as rich an analysis as this thesis has attempted. It suffices to say, for its flexibility and the supplementary values that it adds to organisational analysis, Summative Event seems to be a method worth further exploration and experimenting.

In the next and final chapter, a brief conclusion is made along with some reflections on the limitations of this study and possible lines of future enquiry.

CHAPTER EIGHT

8.1   Conclusions

This thesis is located at the intersection of an attempt to apply a discourse analytical approach to the study of trade unions and a curiosity about the identities of maritime trade unions. Owing to the 'postmodern turn', and more specifically, the 'linguistic turn', studying discourses has become widely accepted as a unique approach of inquiry in the field of organisational studies, placing emphases on the constitutive role of language, linguistic practices, and discourse in organisational life (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000a; Musson & Tietze, 2004; L. L. Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001). Specifically, organisational identities are not longer seen as enduring and essential qualities; instead, by preferring 'identification' to 'identity' (Stuart Hall, 1996), organisations are viewed as continuous processes of construction/constitution through discourse. This discursive approach, however, has rarely been applied to the study of one type of organisation, namely the trade unions, for a variety of reasons, not least of which is what Hyman (1994) identifies as 'critical political economy'—the dominant epistemological 'paradigm' in trade union research. To explore the potential of using discourse analysis in trade union studies, this thesis has set out to examine comparatively the discursive practices of three Indian maritime unions which seem to possess very distinctive characters. The democratic and liberal political climate in India provides the ideal setting for the study, because this allows diverse forms of unions and union identities to coexist.

In the first stage of discourse analysis, I focused on the documentary materials found in the three unions, on the basis that discourses borne by documents are likely to be ones that have gone through distillation and censorship, which therefore provides a suitable point of access into the unions' identity processes. Through analysing documents, it is revealed that Union A, the most established union with the longest

history, is one which displays a sense of superiority to the extent that its ordinary members seem to occupy relatively marginal positions within the union; Union B, the overtly Marxist union, is found to indeed construct itself along Marxist lines through the deployment of radical discourses that are critical of capital and government but sympathetic with labour, namely the seafarers; Union C, the union exclusively for the maritime officers, is found to position itself as an elite union above the other two ratings' unions mainly through constructing the image of elite officers. This process of documentary analysis has also proven to be a very positive demonstration of the methodological discussions made by Prior (2003), particularly regarding his inclusive definition of documents. It is found that the features of the office buildings, decorations, and surrounding environments of the trade unions are indeed rich texts through which identity discourses could be read; vice versa, it can also be argued that these physical environments are themselves discourse which partake in the identity formation of the organisations, shaping the ways in which they are perceived by their members. At the level of discourse analysis, nothing is quite innocent.

In the second stage of more detailed analysis, which extensively elaborates the findings generated from the first, larger amount of interview discoursal data were systematically analysed using a five-pillar sub-construct framework, mainly inspired by Philips and Hardy (1997), Alvesson (1994), and Clegg *et al* (2006). This framework, which regards the identity of a trade union as comprising the totality of the constructions of five sub-constructs, namely, 'this union', 'the other union', 'the seafarers', 'the companies' and 'the government', allows a clear picture to emerge as to how each union constructs its peculiar identities through discoursing about what otherwise would appear only as quotidian matters. Alongside this systematic approach, I also performed analysis of narratives on *ad hoc* basis, as and when the data allows. This is mainly the case for Union A, in which the narration of a single specific event in the union's history, that revolving around the 'Seafarers Retirement Fund Scam', is found to be performing the central functions of providing the basis of belief in the union, and generating trust and awe in the leader of the union. This further affirms a

common position held by organisational scholars such as Chreim (2005) and Brown (2006), and even philosopher MacIntyre (2007; McMylor, 1994), namely, that narrative is a crucial form of sense-making that underpins the organisation of human activities.

One the whole, the analyses of the discourses of the three unions suggest that through their different ways of talk, rhetoric, and style, the unions do exhibit vastly different identities that set them apart from, and sometimes in opposition to, each other. Union A and Union C are found to be similar in terms of their common neoliberal essence, as illustrated through their pro-employer and pro-market discourses which are at the same time unsympathetic to the seafarers and indifferent to the government. Specifically, Union A has laid emphasis on its uniqueness, 'only-ness' and its superiority in power and capacity, whereas Union C has accentuated its eliteness mainly through constructing maritime officers as rational, individualistic and ambitious elites. In fact, these findings form a parallel to Heracleous's (2006) study of a UK consultancy company, in which he illustrates the dominance of one particular discourse over all others. In the company Heracleous studied, this dominant discourse is one which draws a normative line for the behaviours of organisational members the deviation from which incurs punishment or ignoring, just as in UA and UC, the neoliberal discourse powerfully regulates how union officials and ordinary members behave. Union B, to the contrary of both UA and UC, emerges from its discourse as fundamentally anti-capitalist and anti-neoliberal. Its vociferous promotion of the cause of seafarers also adds a radical and combative element to its identity.

Nevertheless, the above discursively constructed and maintained cross-union identity differentials seem to be disrupted and negated when the practical aspects of the three unions are considered. In particular, UA and UB which were discursively constructed as polar opposites to each other, are found to converge on the issue of disciplining their members to the expectations of employers. This practical convergence, as opposed to discursive divergence, is in turn the reflection of the supreme importance

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of jobs to trade unions, be they neoliberal or Marxist. The supremacy of jobs is further traced to an imperative for organisations to survive, which is shared not only between UA and UB, but also with UC where, although jobs are not the issue, it has to reinvent itself almost as an commercial insurance provider to justify its existence in an environment where maritime officers seem to deem trade unionism no longer necessary.

Hence a slightly 'annoying' problematique arises as to whether the varying discourses of all three unions are superfluous and ineffectual to their identities compared to what happens in the practical realm. While there is indeed a temptation to interpret much of what happens in the discursive realm as superfluous, superstructural and ultimately subordinate to practices—a point asserted by discourse analysts coming from the critical realist background (N Fairclough, 1992, 2003; Norman Fairclough, 2005; Parker, 1995; L. Putnam & Cooren, 2004; Mike Reed, 1998, 2000; Michael Reed, 2004)—this thesis argues that a more nuanced understanding should be adopted, where the realms of discourse and practices are constitutively imbricated, mutually permeating and percolating, instead of as elements that are severable and compartmentable, which the critical realists often seem to imply. This is illustrated by the analysis of the ways in which the fundamental survival itself is conceptualised differently in the three unions. This common imperative which transcends the discursive boundaries seems to be conceived of in each union differently according to their respective discursive logics and regimes. Thus although the practical convergence seems to unsettle the contrasts between the discursively constructed identities of the unions, discourse itself is not extricable or detachable from either the practices or the identities of the unions. Discourse is likened to deep pigmentation which represents an irreducible difference between the unions' identities.

Finally, on the methodological front, this thesis has attempted to fully exploit the value of certain event observations that arose opportunistically during the fieldwork by re-casting these events as Summative Events (SE), which are events observed and

subsequently described in manners similar to ethnography that contribute considerably to the holistic understanding of orgnisational identity and culture. While this method in itself is not a novelty—as I have drawn on the 'micro-event' concept of Karreman and Alvesson (2001), Geertz's (1993) 'thick description' and the Rapid Assessment method (Bloor & Wood, 2006)—in this specific context, it can be seen as particularly effective in mending the losses that have been inevitably incurred in trying to systematically and logically analyse (as represented by the five-pillar framework) discourse—something which is by nature more chaotic and even illogical at times. The 'E (event)' in SE is defined broadly to include discursive events, which can be either extended or concise 'chunks' of utterance which seem to encapsulate the salient identity features of an organisation to the similar effects of more conventional sense of events.

8.2   Reflections

8.2.1   The 'Cognitive Process' behind the Thesis

The development of ideas in this thesis has been slightly convoluted, in the sense that there have been a few 'twists and turns' as the text progresses. In Chapter Four, cursory insights were gained through accessing organisational documents, and these insights were further supported by analyses of full-fledged identity discourses presented Chapter Five; in Chapter Six, the transcendental supremacy of jobs and a common organisational survival imperative across all three unions were 'discovered', pointing towards a practical convergence looking strong enough to render insignificant the discursive divergence that has been established in the previous chapters; however, finally in Chapter Seven, another turn was taken where it was argued that even the transcending imperative seems to have been conceptualised in different organisations differentially, under their respective discursive regimes and in accordance with their specific logics. This structure emerged in line with the development of my thoughts in the process of analysing the data and writing up the

thesis. Structuring the thesis in this way reflects how the idea evolved, and can be argued to have mutely asserted again the notion that organisation is fundamentally chaotic, fluid, and impervious to attempts at gripping and capturing it in staid forms (Chia, 1995, 2000; Cooper & Burrell, 1988). This is a notion, I think, more congruent than incongruent with the idea that organisations are constructed discursively, because discourse itself is chaotic and fluid, and in the specific forms and structures that discourse holds and holds together the organisation, there is always an imminence to change or even simply alternative interpretation. Taking another look at Figure 7.1a, one realises that the same 'game'—if that is an appropriate word at all—can possibly be carried on forever, or at least theoretical imagination allows us to entertain that thought, such as illustrated in Figure 8.1.

Discursive divergence

Practical convergence

Discursive divergence on a
practically converged matter
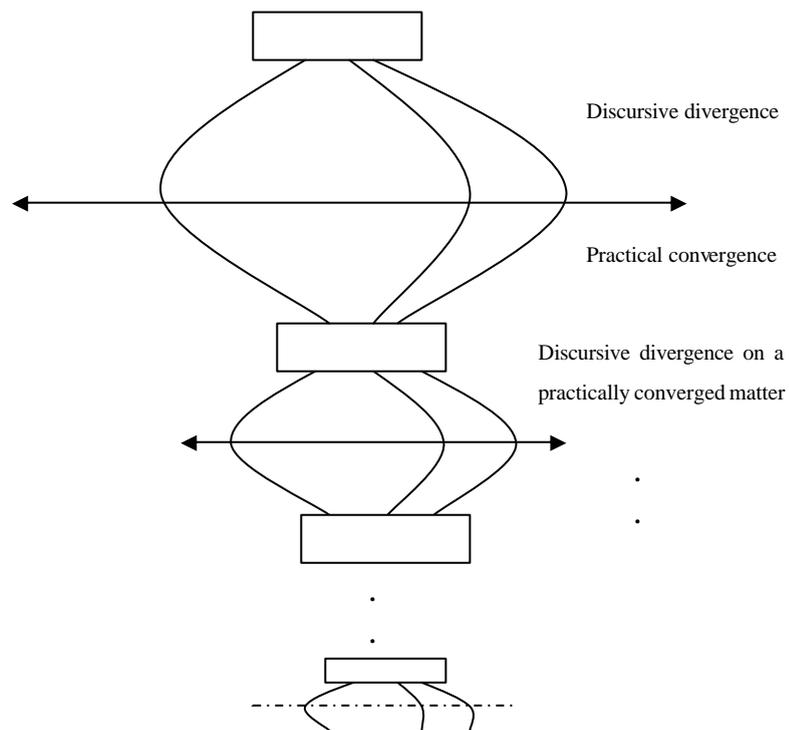
Figure 8.1

In addition, what this 'growing-while-twisting-and-turning' structure allows is the expression of the way in which research inquiry often leads to unexpected places and tends to raise more questions than it answers, and even those answered, not always satisfactorily. Arguably, any research process will involve moments of self-doubt, in

which the researcher questions him/herself whether the findings are final and exhaustive or whether the conclusions reached are really conclusive. Particular answers to particular questions may sound reasonably plausible for a time, but do not usually stay that way. Time, development of the subject matters, or simply revelation of more facts can leave previous conclusions totally discredited, and we are not short of examples in human intellectual history where people overturn ideas of both others' and of their own. The findings and conclusions that I have presented in this thesis are also ones good to the extent that my literature guides me, and my analytic power allows me. In addition, there are also certain obvious limitations to this study which must be unequivocally admitted, as I do next.

8.2.2   Limitations

One major shortcoming of this study is that while some limited attention has been given to the plurivocality or polyphony in the organisations—primarily in the case of Union B—on the whole, it has to be admitted that there has not been a deep enough exposure of the intricate internal dynamics and the plurality and multiplicity of disparate, heterogeneous voices, ideas and forces that exist within each of the three unions. Various references cited in Chapter One point out the plurivocal nature of organisation and organisational discourse, but data collected in this study do not bear out strongly such heteroglossia. For example, at the same time of identifying a dominant discourse in the consultancy company, Heracleous (2006) also identifies a 'counter discourse' which subverts the dominant one, albeit ineffectually. Similarly, Chreim's (2005) analysis of narrative in a Canadian bank also illustrates the plurivocality embedded in discourse in the narrative form—namely, the same central theme can be incorporated into different narratives and therefore be afforded different significance and meaning. With the partial exception of Union B, discourses of UA and UC are treated in this study as by and large internally consistent and unitary. This, I suspect, is due to a mixture of several factors.

First of all, it has to do with the nature of trade union as a type of organisation traditionally directed towards strong political and ideological objectives, which in turn tend to eclipse, or overshadow other contradictory elements, be they discursive or otherwise. This is not to suggest that other organisations such as companies are not directed towards some objectives—obviously they are, at profit—but the ideological element in trade union is arguably much more dominating in relation to the process of identity construction.

Secondly, adopting a comparative research design to study several entities tempts the researcher to reduce the internal complexities of each of those entities so as to enable cross-the-board comparisons. If any of those entities are to be analysed and presented as too complex systems in themselves, the comparability between the entities diminishes. In other words, the temptation has been for me to see the three unions as having relatively unitary identities within themselves, but very different from each other. There is thus an *element* of veracity in stating that the aim of the study was to find out how UA, UB and UC differed from or resembled each other, but not to emphasise how things are complex and diverse within themselves. It should be mentioned again here that most of the organisational studies referenced throughout this thesis were ones focused on single organisations. It is thus natural that they have generated more insights into the internally heterogeneous qualities of the organisations. But this is certainly not to suggest that I have made any deliberate efforts to overlook the internal heterogeneity within organisations just in order to fulfil the research design—in fact that Union B was found to have a conflicted set of identities was evidence to the contrary. Theoretically, of course, it is still possible for each organisation to be studied in-depth, and then be compared; however, for thesis of this scale, a trade-off has been necessary.

Thirdly, the relatively homogenous, unitary appearance of identity discourses gathered of the three unions to a certain extent has to do with the fact that my research participants were mainly leading officials of the unions. In Chapter Two, two

arguments have already been made in defense of this flaw: firstly, Converse's (1964) observation that most people are not ideologues anyway in which case organisational leaders become the only points of access to organisational identity; and secondly, that in a extremely hierarchical society such as India, individuals who lead organisations/institutions are revered to such an extent that they embody them and speak for them. In fact, self-contradictory discourse was identified in Union B only because they were unconsciously 'leaked' out—had the union officials known that I would interpret some of their remarks as un-Marxist, I am sure they will make every effort to explain and defend their Marxist core identity—which means if one were to find more cacophony and heterogeneous voices, it is essential to blend in and experience the most natural and unconscious forms of organisational life, and this leads to the fourth limitation of the study.

An MPhil project, with very limited time and financial resources, which attempts to comparatively analyse *three* organisations inevitably has to suffer in terms of the depth of inquiry. Blending into the unions (or maybe just one union) by immersing for months in them and trying to work together with them or, in other words, doing organisational ethnography, was simply not an option for me; and to the extent that I am a non-Hindi speaking foreigner, it was hardly conceivable that the participating unions would have allowed that to happen in any case. More in-depth study of the unions will probably have to be left for interested researchers in the future, and in order to obtain that level of access, it is likely that they will need to be more of an 'insider' than I have been.

Notwithstanding these limitations, as what I believe is one of the first attempts at introducing a discursive approach to the field of trade union studies, it is hoped that this study has opened a door and paved a way, however insignificantly. In future research of this type, greater lengths of fieldwork, deeper immersions in the environment and closer relationship with the organisations will be required in order for more sophisticated insights to be generated.

8.2.3 Emergent Lines of Inquiry

There are two theoretical aspects which this study has touched on that are worth further investigation. Firstly, this study prompts the interesting and relevant question as to the place and function of trade unions in the context of global 'high pressure' neoliberalism, which currently seems to be the general ideological atmosphere in India too. In the highly neoliberal UK environment (particularly with the New Labour having essentially carried on the neoliberal policies since the 1980s), it has been suggested that trade unions are largely emasculated and have become 'lubricators' of the labour market, fulfilling the government's labour market agenda (promoting skills, 'flexibility' of employment etc) along the neoliberal line (McIlroy, 2009). My observation of the Indian maritime unions seems consistent with the labour market 'lubricator' analogy, but in view of the significantly less stable political climate in India, where unemployment and injustice brew dangerous pressures from within society, it can be further speculated that trade unions in India perform the function of pressure safety valves, by mediating between employers and labour.

A second and related area pertains to the debate of ideology vs post-ideology (for a fuller discussion which cannot be afforded here, see Schwarzmantel, 2004). Although in this study neoliberalism and Marxism were found to be highly relevant in the unions' identity constructions, these two were treated mainly as discursive resources from which the unions draw rhetorical force and intensity. Yet it would be interesting to ask whether the unions' discursive struggle is a manifestation of the ideological countenance of Indian political and industrial scene. Drawing on Gramscian theories of hegemony, Schwarzmantel (ibid.) argues that the distinction between ideological society and post-ideological society is a false one, pointing out that the Western liberal-democracies are, instead of being free from ideologies, effectively under the ideological hegemony of liberalism. What is then the situation of India? As reflected in this study, is it not a plausible proposition to make to say that the fact that even the

Marxist UB officials cannot escape using neoliberalist vocabularies and concepts and hence unconsciously suffer from identity ambiguity and conflictedness is a reflection of the hegemony of neoliberal economic/industrial philosophy in India? The commonality of disciplinary function of all three unions seems to lend further credence to this proposition. Nevertheless, these are hypothesis or propositions the debate or testing of which cannot be sufficiently made from my data. Thus, it had better be merely pointed out here and left for some future research efforts.

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APPENDICES

Appendix One: Participant Information Sheet

<div align="center">

A study of the Identities of Indian Maritime Trade Unions
Participant Information Sheet

</div>

Why am I doing this research?

Globalisation of labour markets has meant that more and more seafarers nowadays come from developing countries such as India. This process has not always resulted in the benefits to the seafarers. Protecting seafarers' rights and welfare has become an urgent issue at a global level. Seafarers' trade unions play an extremely important role in this regard. This research studies the major seafarers' trade unions in India. It aims to find out what do these unions believe should be done for the seafarers, and what they are doing in order to achieve what they believe in.

What would be involved?

I would like to discuss your views on issues related to your particular trade union and also maritime trade unionism in India more generally. This should usually last no more than 1 hour.

Consent and Confidentiality

I will explain to you about the nature and purpose of this research. You will be invited to read this information sheet and ask any questions related to this research. You will then be invited to sign a consent form. You have the right to decline to participate or terminate your cooperation at any point without giving a reason.

The interview will be tape-recorded for transcription. After transcription, the recording will be erased. The transcripts will be anonymised and kept in a secure place.

The information from these discussions will be the basis of my Master's thesis at Cardiff University. The transcripts might also be used to write and publish articles in academic journals and/or for conference/seminar presentation. You are welcome to see the transcripts, the final thesis and/or a copy of the articles before they are published.

Who am I?

I am a postgraduate research student at Cardiff University, the Seafarers International Research Centre (SIRC: http://www.sirc.cf.ac.uk/). This research has the approval of the School Research Ethics Committee of Cardiff School of Social Sciences, and is funded by the Nippon Foundation. If you need any further information concerning the research, please feel free to contact me at:

(email) yangp2@cardiff.ac.uk

(tel) +44 (0)75 5147 0865

(fax) +44 (0)29 2087 4619

Appendix Two : Research Informed Consent Form (interview)

A Study of the Identities of Indian Maritime Trade Unions

Consent Form (Interview)

Name of Researcher: Peidong Yang

	Initials
1. I confirm that the nature and purpose of this study has been explained to me and I agree to be interviewed.	
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.	
3. I consent to the interview being tape-recorded.	
4. I understand that the tape of this interview will be destroyed after transcription, and the transcription will be anonymised as well as being securely stored.	

_____   _____   _____
   Name of participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____
Name of person taking consent   Date   Signature

A Study of the Identities of Indian Maritime Trade Unions

Consent Form (Documents):

Please circle the statement which applies

- I am willing for a copy of the following documents _____

  _____to

a)   be used for this research project (no restrictions)

b)   be used for this research project subject to the following restrictions (please also indicate on the document):

  _____

  _____

  _____

- I understand that no-one will have access to the document apart from the researcher and his two supervisors;
- I understand that any personal statements made in the document will be confidential. As far as possible all comments will be anonymised in any reports or papers that are produced as a result of the research. Names of people and organisation will not be included in publication, but there is a possibility that I may be identifiable through comments that I make;
- I understand that taking part in the research is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent for this data at anytime without a reason;
- I understand that the data from this research will be used for three things:
    1) the researcher's thesis
    2) academic papers and presentations
    3) A summary report to be circulated to all interested participants or other interested parties.

_____   _____   _____
  Name of respondent   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____
Name of person taking consent   Date   Signature