

The Filipino Seafarer

A Life between Sacrifice and Shopping

by

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Michel Foucault, *Of Other Spaces*, 1986



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Part I

Introduction

An outline of the argument

This thesis is about the seaman and his family. A returning theme in every part of this work, is how the Filipino overseas seafarer is interwoven with his family. Both in the sense that the family appear as the major motive for leaving - to improve the financial situation of the family, is *the* most typical migratory motive - and in the sense that close kin often play an intrinsic role as facilitators for the actual departure. Also the extensive and complex financial contribution of the seafarer towards his family, together with certain extraordinary knowledge obtained through his occupation, finds its place in how I will portray the seafarer, namely as a *family based enterprise*.

From the moment a young Filipino man, in one of the provinces in the country, sees himself as a future overseas seaman and a provider for his beloved one's back home, members from his family will be of vast importance. He will most certainly have to rely on financial support from people around him when facing the expenses at the maritime college. And when he eventually reaches the level of applying for an actual overseas contract at one of the many maritime recruitment agencies in Manila, the family will once again play a crucial role. They could, among other things, support him with the necessary knowledge for how to perform the actual process of applying, and it is often maintained that if the applicant have a family relation towards someone at the agency, the chances for a successful outcome of the application will be radically improved.

When the financial remittance from the employed seafarers eventually reach the native soil of the Philippines, the strong family orientation is once again very apparent. Besides a comprehensive distribution of gifts among family, friends and neighbors upon arrival, it is common among seamen to engage in different investments which objective among other things is to improve the standard of living of the family. It is especially in the fields of education, housing and small-scale business projects that these expenditures take place.

At the core of the Filipino maritime labor migration, lies an admirable ability and willingness to endure hardship or make *sacrifices* in the name of the family. I will maintain that this is by far the most fundamental and meaningful inducement factor for choosing a maritime overseas career in the Philippines. It gives sense to the act of leaving, when the decision essentially is seen as an act of concern for the family. As we will see, however, to uphold such a meaningful motive or horizon, seems difficult when the context of their efforts - the ship - is taken into consideration.

This thesis is also about coping, in the sense that life at sea is portrayed as extreme, it is a universe which demands the use of certain coping strategies, in order to make the daily universe appear meaningful for the seamen. In my outline, I tend to concentrate on a rather pessimistic perspective of the seafaring experience. The approach is pivoted around the strong element of repetitiveness and routine in the daily life on

board, which gives everyday life a deprived character that may leave the seamen with problems in upholding a meaningful horizon in what they are doing.

At the core of their strategy or struggle for significance, lies once again the family. I maintain that the Filipino seafarers, at a more fundamental level, never actually leave their families. They constantly see themselves as delegates from their kin back home, and during their contract period on board, they put a lot of effort into upholding this orientation. Besides an explicit communication with the family through mediums such as letters and cellular phones, the seamen are able to bridge the geographical gap between themselves and their beloved one's in the Philippines through an extensive engagement in the purchasing of gifts or so-called *pasalubongs*. In order to fully understand the element of coping in this shopping, one must be aware of the mnemonic qualities of the gift. In brief, I argue in relation to this discussion that the gift has the function of reminding the donor and the donator of each other. During his time periods at sea, the seaman will seek to find foreign items which are capable of meeting his longing for the family members back home, and he keeps these items on board the rest of the sailing period. At a fundamental level, expressed by this wide range of physical signifiers, he is able to bring his family with him on board, so to speak. Moreover, these objects serve as a reminder for *why* he is out at sea in the first place - to help his family.

Thus through his effort in the cherished and legitimate field of shopping, he is given an opportunity to repeat to himself - in a very explicit and direct manner - *why* he is doing this in the first place, and *who* relies upon his effort on board.

In order to understand the importance of the *pasalubongs* in connecting the providers on board and the remaining family members back home - that is, their crucial role in the struggle for meaning among the seamen - it is also significant to include the presents' function as a double for the seaman in the domicile. The idea is simply that over the years, the seaman will leave a wide range of items among family, relatives and friends. These artifacts have their foreign origin in common, just as the *overseas* experienced seaman - they are things which are capable of reminding those back home of the absent and generous seafarer. I will maintain that since the man on board knows that he has left behind physical traces of his existence, this will ease the pain of

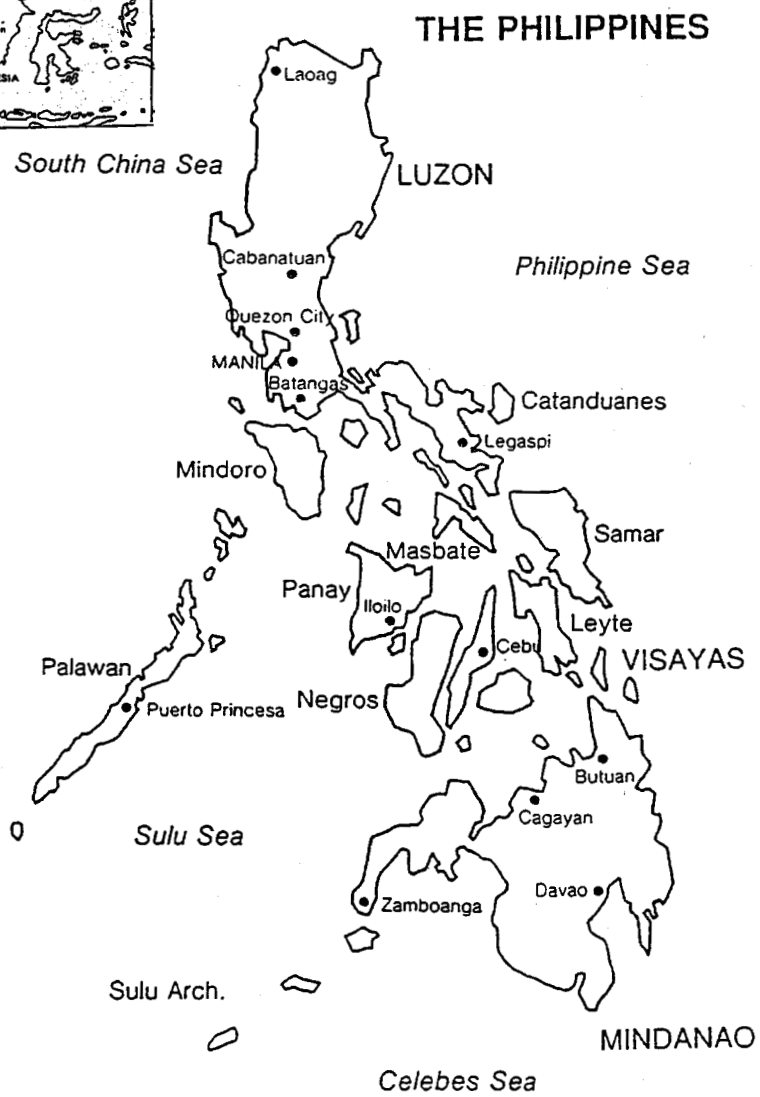
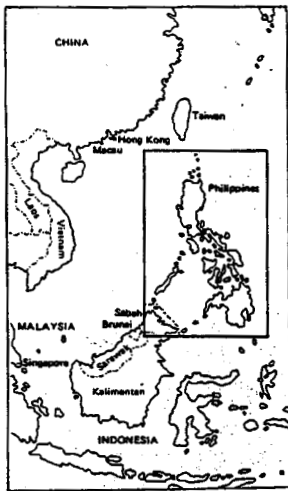
being away for ten months in a stretch every year. He can be sure that his social network remembers him, despite his absence. Shopping can therefore be understood as a profound strategy among the seafarers while they are on board. Shopping makes them recall the basis of their sacrificial commitment as providers for their families.

The field and method

This thesis has been created gradually over a period of six years. On the way, a broad range of different sources of information has been exploited. My first trip to the Philippines took place back in 1994, and the main objective of this trip was to meet some of the representatives from the international shipping industry represented in the country, and to look for a suitable area for a fieldwork. Later the same year, I was conducting my first interviews with those this work is about, namely the Filipino seafarer. In the fall of 1994 I joined a NIS registered vessel with a mixed crew on a voyage from Rotterdam to Singapore. During the three weeks on board the ship, I interviewed all the Filipino crewmembers, besides taking part in some of the daily tasks and duties on board.

It is not an easy task to perform a typical anthropological fieldwork on a category of professionals that live such fluctuating lives as the seamen. The common time span at sea for the ordinary seaman is 10 months per year (for high rank officers the period is a bit shorter), and thus they are home only 2-3 months a year. In order to establish a minimum of continuity in this fluctuating pool of informants, I re-visited some of the informants in between two contracts.

The main fieldwork took place in the city and province of Iloilo, where I visited overseas seamen who were back home on vacation. All in all, I stayed for almost a year in Iloilo, during the first half of both 1995 and 1996. During these two periods, I conducted about 50 interviews with returned seafarers. The interviews usually took place in their homes or on neutral ground, such as a restaurant. The majority of those I met were employed by Norwegian companies, or had been so in the past.



In 1995 I interviewed as many seafarers as possible, and during my stay in 1996 I re-interviewed (now with a tape recorder) some of those I had met the year before. The people I met again in 1996, had since the last time we met been out at sea, terminating another contract period. In this way I managed to meet some of the same faces many times; the arrangement guaranteed a minimum of continuity among all those people I met.

Who to visit and interview, was a question I had to ask myself at an early stage in my work. Before I arrived in Iloilo City, I knew that a lot of seafarers have their home in this region, and this definitely proved to be correct information. But I also knew that most of the maritime workers - about 80% to be accurate - were out at sea at all times. What I therefore in sum did, was to rely upon the well-known snowball effect - one interview or contact, led to another. In this way I accomplished to be introduced to a wide range of people which already knew a little bit about me when I came to their houses, and which were positive to the idea of being interviewed by a foreign anthropologist. Still, far from all my interviews took place with people brought to me by this arrangement. During my stay I also met several people more accidentally, for example through the maritime academy in the city (John B. Lacson), or from living in the same neighborhood as some of them (for example, a former chief mate had his residence only 30 meters from the house I rented). I also want to add to this picture that I didn't discriminate between the seamen, whether they were officers or ratings, my topic of interest was more or less the same. Behind this practice, lies the idea of treating a seaman as a seaman; in the sense that at a certain level of experience, rank can be treated as more or less irrelevant. And it is this deep and shared level of experience which is the major concern of this thesis.

After a short visit in Iloilo City in 1997 - where I conducted some interviews with old and new informants - I was able to join *Project Alpha* in 1998. *Project Alpha* is a four-year recruitment program located at the University of Cebu, which is based on a more comprehensive selection and monitoring process. The main aim of the project is to educate tomorrow's high rank officers in one particular Norwegian company. My most important task in this project has been to monitor one particular class, namely the so-called Class 02, which counts 49 cadets all in all. In my interviews with these maritime students I covered a range of topics such as occupational motivation, social

background and plans for the future. From 1998 and up till now (2000), I have interviewed all the members of this group of students twice, I have visited 32 of them at home with their families, and 20 during their on board training (their second year in college). In between the autumn of 1999 and the spring of 2000, I was able to join 10 merchant vessels that were the arena for their maritime training (two cadets in each ship). If possible, I joined the ship on shorter voyages between different European ports. The time spent on board gave me a unique opportunity to discuss a wide range of occupational topics - in it's right context - not solely with the cadets, but also with the more experienced personnel present on each ship.

My involvement in *Project Alpha* has definitely represented a substantial source of information to this thesis. For example, I was present when the birth of a maritime career took place so to speak, and my presence made it possible for me to conduct my first interviews just a week after the cadets were selected to the program. The fact that I have had the opportunity to follow the same people over a very long period of time (the project will be finished in 2001), has had a profound influence on my understanding of the Filipino seafarer in general.



A cadet (left) during his on board training (the second year at college).

Part II

Migration - a Philippine specialty

Although the overall theme in this thesis is the situation of the overseas Filipino seafarers, it is also necessary and relevant to discuss labor migration in general. The reason is simply that the seafaring profession, at one level, must be treated as just another type of labor migration. In other words; I will argue that beyond the surface of the migration stream towards, for example, the Middle East, and behind, for instance, the choice of becoming an overseas seafarer, there are, in many ways, the same mechanisms and processes at work. This outline will take place in section 2.1.

The aim in section 2.2 is to draw a picture of the Filipinos as a mobile people. The idea behind such an operation is that the Overseas Contract Workers (OCWs), who include the seafarers, can be said to exist inside an old migration tradition in this archipelago.

2.1 Different perspectives on migration

The migration phenomenon can be treated in many different ways, and every angle can be said to reveal some of its components or aspects. In other words: not every perspective will draw a complete picture of this phenomenon, but the different perspectives can be said to isolate or cultivate some of its characteristics.

Among the major problems we are facing inside this field of research, is firstly how we should deal with the micro and macro level of migratory behavior, and secondly, how to turn the different aspects of the decision making process. Should the attention be directed towards the single migrant - there are obviously individuals who are actually leaving for work abroad - or should the attention be pivoted around the aggregated patterns these persons are creating? Is it perhaps possible to combine or bridge these two levels, in other words to make the analysis into a blend of the micro - macro perspective? Further, who makes the migratory decision? Is it invariably up to the single individual to make such decisions, or does the family, or perhaps the household, play a role in this process? And what about the reasons for leaving; is it always up to the individual, or the family for that matter, to actually choose migration as a way of coping with problems in everyday life? Or is it also sometimes necessary to take factors which are beyond the control of the decision-making unit into consideration, if the aim is to understand the motives and forces behind migration? I will briefly pay attention to these questions in the following pages.

A common approach to the migration phenomenon is to emphasize the social or aggregated dimension of people's migratory movements, and link this to the historical-structural basis for the movement. Seen from this angle, the discussion of migration turns into a question of structural conditions, such as demographic factors, unemployment rates, systems of production and governmental or international politics and legislation. According to Charles H. Wood, patterns of migration should be seen in relation to "*changes in the organization of the production that unequally affect the fortune of different social classes*" (1982:307). In this perspective, individuals can be said to have a minor position, if any at all, and they are taken

into consideration primarily as class members. In other words, people are seen in relation to a larger system, a system which exceeds them, and in which they are considered only as pawns.

A well-known theme inside this perspective is to look for factors which coerce personnel into circulation inside the international labor market. Migration is not, seen from this angle, based on voluntariness, but is rather treated as a question of coercive necessity. Charles H. Wood quote Samir Amin to illustrate the lack of calculative voluntariness in population movements: *“Would anyone dare to explain the migration from Europe to North America in the nineteenth century as having been caused by the motivations of the migrants with reference to differences between potential incomes without pointing out that the migrants were peasants who had been driven from their lands by the development of agrarian capitalism...?”* (1982:306).

This quotation can, at the same time as it explains by example some external forces behind migration, be a way of introducing the next perspective, maybe the most well-known of them all, in which the keywords are: individuality, cost-benefit calculations and, eventually, equilibrium.

In this perspective, migration is seen primarily as a matter of choices made by single individuals, rather than a statistical, aggregated entity. The basis for this viewpoint is that people are free to choose and that they possess sufficient knowledge that guides them in their decisions. In some ways, this turns migration into one strategy among others, and it is based on a cost-benefit calculation. People leave so that they can make improvements in their lives, that is, a positive, usually monetary, net return. For instance, big regional or international differences in the wage rates, which again lead to a stream of people trying to take advantage of this gap, is a typical focus in this perspective.

The weaknesses of this model, according to Charles H. Wood (1982), are primarily connected to the ahistorical and reductionistic approach to the inducements behind migration. The historical context, which constitutes the setting and the foundation for the choices of the individualistic actors, is not withdrawn as a part of the analytical picture. Many researchers criticize also the importance given to the relationship between migration and a state of equilibrium inside this perspective. The argumentation is as follows: This model, founded in micro-economic thinking, regard international wage differences as one of the strongest

motives for migration. People offer their skills and capacity for work in countries where the wage rates are higher, with the intention of improving the standard of living back home. According to the equilibrium perspective, however, one of the results of this migration will be that the foundation for the actual migration will, after some time, be reduced or removed. After a while, and because of the remittances from the migrants, the low-wage country will undergo an enhancement of the standard of living. The sending country will after some time be balanced with the receiving country - a relationship marked by equilibrium has been created - which again lower the importance of migration as a strategy for people.

One intrinsic problem with this way of viewing migration - namely as an instrument for developing countries to cope with the economic differences in the world - is that a lot of research shows that this equilibrium does not occur. As a matter of fact, many of the sending areas or countries undergo a slump in the economy, rather than experiencing prosperity after some years of participation in the international labor market. The remittance, for example, will very often be used for articles of consumption rather than for long-term investments, a trend that gives rise to inflation in the region and, in the worst case, migration *from* that area. This tendency is exemplified in the work of Tor H. Aase, which deals with the situation in the Pakistani countryside (for example 1979 and 1985).

We have so far seen two rather different ways of approaching the issue of migration. One that emphasizes the external, coercive forces surrounding the migrants, and another one which underlines the possibilities for the single migrants to make calculations inside this framework. The third and last perspective I want to bring focus on in this discussion - even though other perspectives could have been included as well - is based on combining the two perspectives outlined above. The bridge is built by the use of an analytical entity that is considered to be posited somewhere between the micro and macro level. I am here referring to the *household*.

The household can be seen as something that takes part in two different worlds or realities. On the one hand this type of organization belongs to the outside world, that is, it is subordinated to the laws and forces which are beyond our control - what corresponds to the structural or macro level. On the other hand, it would be equally correct to say that the household bears traces of the dispositions of the single member, rather than exclusively of the outer world. In

general, one can therefore say that by focusing on the household entity, one may achieve to take both the obviously important domains into an analytical consideration.

In such an endeavor it is common to let the attention be pivoted around the so-called “*sustenance strategies*”. These strategies can be referred to as solutions to the household’s main problems or challenges, which are “*to achieve a fit between its consumption necessities, the labor power at its disposal (both of which are determined by the number, age, sex and skills of its members) and the alternatives for generating monetary and non-monetary income*” (Schmink 1979, in Wood 1982:313). These sustenance strategies, which are dynamic in their nature, reflect the household’s adaptation towards external forces - such as inflation, taxes, job opportunities and interest rates - which are beyond this social unit. But, as already mentioned, these strategies mirror at the same time the composition of the household as far as the variables number, age, sex and skills are concerned. In other words, a household is offered a certain number of sustenance strategies as answers to a wide range of every-day problems, but can only make use of those which are consistent with the members’ age, skills, etc.

One of the strategies a household can choose to make use of is *migration*. Given the external, coercive forces and the internal restrictions, a household unit can decide to hand over personnel to the international labor market, with the aim of improving the standard of living. I am well aware of the fact that this approach to the household organization has an economic bias. The household is in many ways seen as a “*collective income fund*”, to use an expression from Charles H. Wood (1982:312), which again makes, according to critics such as Bach and Schraml (1982), this social unit similar to a family-based enterprise or a firm. Still, taking this bias into account, I find this household definition useful for my purposes at the present stage.

In the discussion pivoting around the migration performed by the Filipino seafarers, I will insist on the household as the basis for this movement. I will assert that the single seaman must be seen as a *family-based enterprise*. The complex mechanisms behind this overseas contract work, however, will involve much more than mere economics. There are obviously more factors than just monetary calculations at work in a seafarer’s home, and this will be outlined later.

Before I go on with my outline, let me dwell a bit more on how migration may challenge the household concept. The idea of migration as a choice that involves a movement from one particular city or country to another is in some ways misleading. Instead I agree with those who also see a strong element of transnationalism in today's migratory patterns; in the sense that the migrant is born and raised in one place, settled and employed somewhere else, but his everyday life is a universe which covers both these places. They live abroad, but to a large extent they take part in the daily life back home. Or to quote Schiller et.al.: "*Their lives cut across national boundaries and bring two societies into a single social field*" (1992:1). I also find the term "*shadow household*," from the work of Caces et.al. (1985) useful in this discussion. The expression refers to the situation in which the household "*consist of all individuals whose principal commitments and obligations are to a particular household but who are not presently residing in that household*" (p. 8).

As we will see later on in this thesis, this perspective is not fully compatible with the situation of the seafarers. The problem lies in the fact that also they leave, but not in order to settle in another *country*. They leave only to be at sea for ten months a year, in a floating, repetitive universe which gives rise to a type of experience which have emptiness as one of its qualities. In other words, the seafarers are not able to settle and have an ordinary life in which they have their livelihood; it is a question of how to struggle with boredom and deprivation. One of my informants put it this way: "to be at sea, is just a state of mind."

Nevertheless, even though the professional life of the seafarer takes place in a totally different universe, it should be of no doubt that the money that is generated through their efforts is real. To see this labor migration as a family concern - both in the sense that it is a collective process to bring a family member into a foreign job, and that the overseas employment has as its overall purpose to meet needs within the family - will be one of the returning topics in this thesis.

The objective of the next chapter, however, is to examine a possible link between the present situation in the Philippines - as far as migration is concerned - and the geographical movement patterns in previous years. As we shall see, today's overseas contract workers are a part of an old tradition in this archipelago.

2.2 The Filipinos - a people in motion

The 1973 National Demographic Survey shows that among the adult population in the Philippines (those who were 15 years of age or older), about 35 % had been through a geographic movement. In other words, more than one third of the adult population in the Philippines can be treated as migrants. Even though 82% of these persons had moved only once between birth and 1973, and the figures for those who had left two and three times are 15% and 2% respectively, the tendency should be clear: The Filipinos are a relatively mobile people - they show a remarkable ability and willingness to break up and resettle during a life span (numbers taken from Pernia 1975:2, in Trager 1988:57).

This mobility – when the Philippines is seen as a whole and when the country's recent history taken into consideration - tends to follow three different patterns. First of all, there is a movement from rural parts of the country to what we may call the frontier areas. This stream of personnel was first and foremost important up till the 1960s and 1970s, when people from the Luzon area and the Visayas were heading for a new life in the sparsely populated areas in the south on the Mindanao island (Abad 1981:131). Even though this tendency was weakened during the seventies, the idea of starting a new life in the wasteland has also later played a crucial role as a motive for people to move. Recent figures from the World Resources Institute (WRI), for example, show that among the people living in the highlands of the Philippines in the year 1985 - more than 17 millions in number, that is, about 32% of the total population - 70% was considered to be migrants from the lowlands and the cities. A high unemployment rate in the cities and a growing number of farmers without land, due to a strong increase in population, are according to WRI, two major factors in explaining this revival of the migration to the frontier areas.

Nevertheless, even though the frontierward migration has continued up to the present, it is still to be considered as a minor tendency in the Filipino migration pattern at large. This becomes evident especially if one considers the tendency over the last 20-30 years, because, as already mentioned, the movement headed for the marginal areas declined in the 1970s, according to Ricardo B. Abad (1981). In short, we can say that this decrease happened in favor of an urban attraction - the jungle was replaced by the city lights.

Since the 1960s, the most important national migration patterns were those directed towards urban centers, primarily Metro-Manila. This rural-urban migration must primarily be understood in relation to advances in the country's industrialization, but demographic factors are also part of the picture. According to Ernesto M. Pernia (1975: 3-4, in Trager 1988:58), this type of migration represented nearly 46% of all internal moves between the years 1970 and 1973, of which 34.4% only to Metro-Manila. However, figures from Abad (1981:131) show that of all movements between 1965-1970, more than one third were of this rural-urban type.

Generally speaking, the most remarkable feature of the internal migration in the Philippines is its *long-distance character*. For example, it has been more common for people in Negros Oriental to leave for Mindanao, rather than for just across the island and to Negros Occidental. The same tendency can also be seen in Cebu, where more Cebuanos have left for Metro-Manila during the years - which is 600 kilometers away - than for the nearby Cebu City (Concepcion and Smith 1977:41).

This inclination can in part be explained by the very uneven distribution of population and opportunities in the country at the beginning of this century. While more than five persons per agricultural hectare was common in for instance Cebu, it was just above one in for example Cagayan Valley (Luzon). Also when looking at the size of the farms, we discover some significant regional differences. The average farm in Cebu and Bohol consisted of just 1.5 or less hectare agricultural land, while in Mindanao and Cagayan Valley it was typical to possess more than 4 hectares (Concepcion and Smith 1977:41).

The third migration trend to be mention here, is the one which concerns the movements of the people who are the issue in this report, namely the *overseas contract workers* (or just the *OCWs*). It can be maintained that the mobility directed towards the outside world is similar to the internal patterns mentioned above, in the sense that outmigration is also an old tradition in the Philippines. Already in the 1700th century, for example, when the Spaniards were colonizing the country, it was common for Filipinos to leave for Mexico, with the purpose of finding work and sometimes with the purpose of settling (Martin 1993:642). Later, in the 1920s, a considerable stream of people, mostly men, went to look for work on plantations in

Hawaii and California. According to Lasker (1969:347, in Concepcion and Smith 1977:40) there were about 100 000 Filipinos who saw this as an opportunity for increased prosperity in this decade. One important reason for this particular type of outmigration was the passing of a liberal US immigration law in 1924, a law motivated by the fact that the Japanese were no longer available on the international labor market. It was also possible for Filipino women to take part in this export of labor force, but this never took place on a very large scale. Nevertheless, after some time this flow of people across the Pacific formed the basis for a permanent settlement of Filipinos - or *Pinoy*s¹ as they were called - on the West Coast of USA and in Hawaii (Concepcion and Smith 1977:40).

In 1965, after some quiet decades as far as outmigration from the Philippines to the USA is concerned, something that can be described as an explosion took place. Besides leading directly up to what we see today in the field of overseas contract work, this had a profound effect on the colony of Filipinos in the United States of America. Figures from recent years show that there are currently about 1.4 million Filipinos living in the traditional immigration countries, that is, Australia, Canada and USA. 93% of them are living in USA alone (Martin 1993:642).

In 1965 an even more liberal Immigration Law was passed in the USA. This opened for a new, comprehensive type of labor export. While the migrants so far had consisted mostly of non-skilled workers, there was a shift in the composition of the job seekers in this decade. What we saw happening in the 1960s, was the introduction to what has been the Filipino trademark in the field of labor migration ever since; a supply of unrelated individuals on the basis of their occupational skills. In 1971, for example, 76% of all annual occupational migrants from the Philippines with USA as their destination, were professional, technical, and managerial personnel seeking to convert their skills into US Dollars, while the same figures for the year 1964, had been only 43% (Concepcion and Smith 1977:40-43, table 12). The

¹ As early as in the 1930s, *Pinoy* became a common term for the Filipinos residing in the USA. The term was also used by the Filipinos themselves (Alejandro and Florentino 1998:7). One explanation for the origin of the term is that it stems from the *Leyteño* (from the province Leyte) word *Sunoy*, meaning aggressive fighting cock. A well known comedian Vicente Yerro, saw the male Filipino agricultural workers in California, as roosters in the way they approached women in the dance halls (Alejandro and Florentino 1998:8).

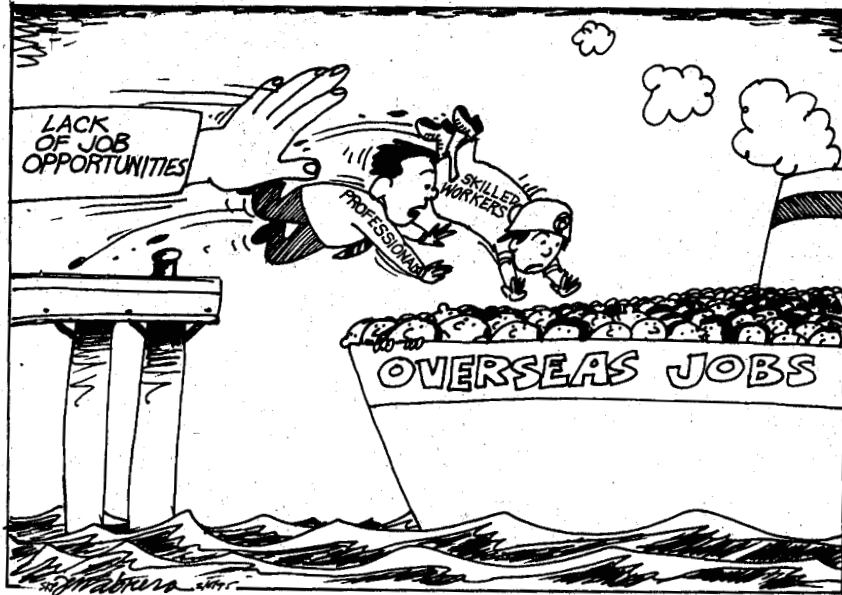
newspaper illustrations on the following page show that the labor migration is a central issue in the public arena in the Philippines.

It must be emphasized, however, that despite the fact that it traditionally has been a close relationship between the Philippines and the USA, and that many Filipinos even today have a dream of going there for a shorter time or on a more permanent basis, other areas or countries have over the last years become more important than the United States. A survey from the year 1994, published by the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), shows that only 2.4% of the OCWs deployed were executing their work in USA, while as many as 55.3% were annually hired in the Middle East.

What I basically have tried to do throughout the previous pages, is to draw a picture of the Filipinos as a mobile people. In other words, the last pages can be seen as an attempt to describe a environment in which migration is seen as an intrinsic opportunity for a better life, in the broad sense of the word, for the people involved, both the single migrant and his or her family. The basic idea behind this focus on the migration aspect of the Philippine society, is to make explicit the connection which presently exists between the enormous annual stream of OCWs across the borders of the country - maybe as many as 6 million - to the types of movements which took place among earlier generations. I will argue that the latter patterns, which primarily were long-distance, national movements, paved the way for the movement patterns in the present situation. It is hard to imagine that nearly 10% of the population show an ability and willingness to leave for overseas work in the first place, without the presence of a social climate which open up for migration as one way to cope with, or solve, everyday problems. In other words: one cannot isolate the decision of the single labor migrant from the context in which he or she is raised and live, whether it be the external, structural and coercive forces beyond individual control or the internal restrictions, and of course opportunities, with a basis in the household. This complex issue is also discussed in relation to the so-called *migration industry* (section 7.1).

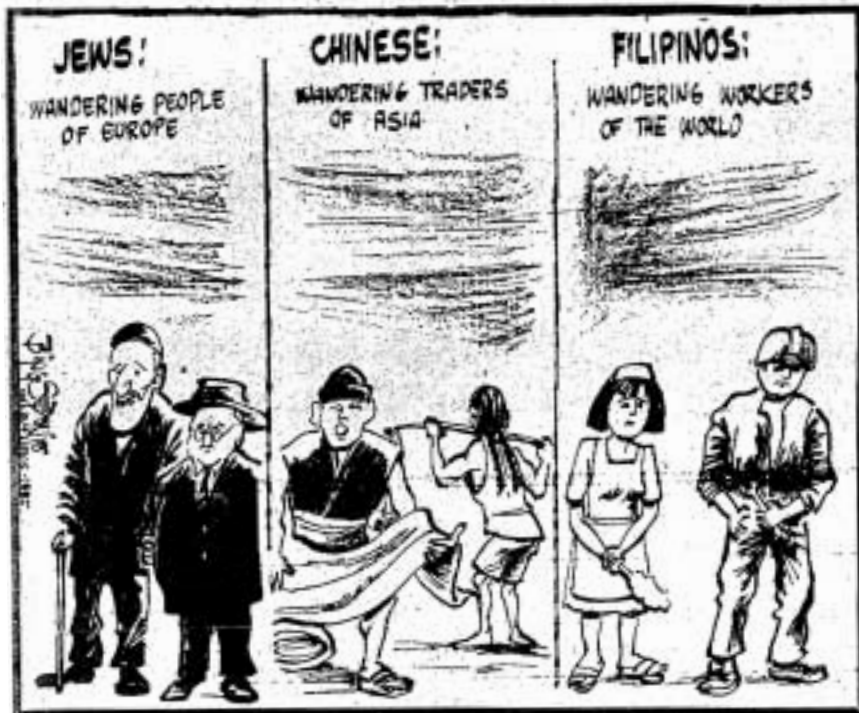
OPINION

JORGE V. ARUTA, Editor



6 Panay News

EDITORIAL/OPINION



III Part

Why do people go and who are actually leaving

In my endeavor to reveal some of the motives behind Filipino labor migration, I will, as referred to earlier, insist on looking for these inducements inside the household organization. For the sake of order, it should be underlined that the household unit is in this context seen as being tantamount to the nuclear family. However, this does not mean that it is just the parents and their children that are covered by the terms family and household in everyday life. The family in the Philippines is commonly referred to as residentially nuclear but functionally extended; that is, the Filipino nuclear family shares many of the characteristics of the extended family - which includes relatives other than father, mother and unmarried children - despite the fact that it is residentially nuclear (Castillo 1991:245). Also Hansen (2000) emphasizes the vast importance of the family organization in Philippine society, and quote in that respect: *“The Filipino family [] provides social security, old age pension, jobs, unemployment*

benefits, income redistribution [] and social stability” (Castillo, in Arce and Abad 1986:62). Mulder, on the other hand, expresses the position of the family this way: “In the Philippines, belonging to and deriving a sense of security from the family appear to be the cardinal things in life, those most worth striving after. The family is the wellspring of a meaningful existence, of obligation and fulfillment ”(1992:93). It is against this family oriented backdrop that one should understand the encouragement and ability for involvement in labor migration.

Even though the answers to *why* the Filipinos choose to become migrants are to be found in the family based household, I find it convenient in my analytical approach, to split the focus into three different parts. I will first of all try to trace some migratory reasons - or more correctly, aspects of migratory motives - which might be considered as strictly individual and non-monetary in their character. In other words, is it possible to single out some migratory motives that do not necessarily have a genuine basis in the household organization, and at the same time do not derive from some kind of monetary calculation? This is the theme of section 3.1. Secondly, after an account of potential inducements on a micro level, the focus will be fixed on a macro or structural level. The idea in section 3.2, and especially in section 3.2.1, is to look for factors which are beyond the control of the single migratory actor - whether it be individuals or households - but which can be said to stimulate and/or to have a coercive influence on the decisions behind migration. Thirdly, the final field for my investigation is at the household level. One of the questions asked in section 3.2.2 is: is it conceivable to reveal some distinctive feature of the household which encourages or makes it possible for the members to become migrants?

3.1 Inducements for migration

In this chapter I will focus on the motives and inducements that can be considered to be present in the first stage of the labor migration process. The following questions have to be asked: Why is it so that millions of Filipinos choose to leave their home country and live and work for a longer or shorter period abroad? Is it just a matter of money or dollars, or is it possible that there are other inducement factors too, behind their career choices? Can the flow of personnel across the borders of the Philippines, which consists of nearly 10% of the total

population, merely be seen as a search for a higher salary for the single individual, or is it also necessary to take into consideration factors such as love of adventure?

To look solely for individual motives behind migration is not an easy task, since, as emphasized many times already, migration is a family concern. Migration in the Philippines is initiated by the household, and with the purpose to meet family needs. Nevertheless, there are still individuals who are actually leaving for work abroad. It should therefore be possible to isolate some kind of individual aspect of migration, if for nothing else as a theoretical operation.

What can possibly be said to be the motivation behind migration for the single Filipino, male or female? A high salary is of course one extremely important reason. To return home after an ended contract, and then be able to “irrigate” the surroundings with exotic gifts and strange stories - that is, to stand out among previous peers - is of course one personal reason for leaving. Furthermore, to distinguish oneself through extravagant self-decoration is a part of this picture. Expensive watches and sunglasses, golden rings and necklaces, are for instance typical parts of the OCWs “uniform”. Nevertheless, to be in a position which in the Philippines normally is reserved for the wealthy persons or families, is to be considered as an effect *of* the work abroad (this is something I will give a detailed account of later on in this thesis), and perhaps not a reason for *leaving in itself*. A question which therefore can be raised is: is it sometimes possible to view the process of breaking up from the native soil as a theme *in itself* among the migrants, or is migration always based on the prospect of coming home - of improving life back home?

I will come up with two possible answers to the first part of this question. One is connected to the adventurous aspect of migration, while the other one is part of the strong tradition in the Philippines of making sacrifice.

3.1.1 The “explorer” and the “escapist”

I will maintain that human beings are, generally speaking, considerably conservative. That is, in the long run, we prefer routine to alteration. However, there are some exceptions that are

equally valid. There are always some people who choose to chase foreign horizons, rather than settling with a habitual life back home. I am convinced that a common way for these people to fulfill their aims is through labor migration. In other words: within the stream of migrants, we will always find some people who take part in such movements, basically because they want to leave their life back home. In doing this, they contrast for instance migratory acts based on cost-benefit calculations. These “explorers” do not use their position as migrants exclusively as a way of raising the standard of living back home, one can rather say that they have a bias towards the adventurous aspect of migration.

While working among the Filipino seafarers, it was very common to hear the words “see the world for free” as one explanation for their choice of career. That is, they chose to become seamen because this profession includes a free ride around the world. To see the world was “*included in the contract,*” as they put it. It is difficult to establish the exact origin of this slogan-like expression, “*see the world for free*”. It probably has something to do with the fact that some of the maritime colleges use this phrase as an eye-catcher in their advertisements, in their effort to attract new students; or maybe this happened just because this slogan already is established as a way of summing up the sunny side of this profession. No matter which, what I know for sure is that most seafarers I have interviewed used these words as an illustration of the adventurous element involved in a seafaring career.

Just as Helms insists on an element of curiosity for new places in such a seemingly profound act as pilgrimage (1988:76), Rafael refers to a kind of adventure as one aspect of the labor journeys of the OCWs. He explains this by stating that “*to go abroad is to find one’s fortune, as well as to take risks. One seeks to convert the products of one’s labor into “gifts” with which to endow one’s kin at home and thereby gain their respect and recognition. At the same time, one also risks uncertain conditions and the prospect of becoming alienated abroad and at home*” (1997:4).

The fact that many of the seafarers I interviewed emphasize the component of sightseeing in their profession, should indicate the importance of seeing this non-monetary aspect of the seamen’s life as one of the intrinsic motivating factors for this type of labor migration. I can illustrate this point with the following story: One of the seafarers I met told me that he was originally planning to study engineering, with the intention of applying for work in the

Middle-East. But after some time in college he changed his mind, he said. Instead of engineering he decided to study *marine* engineering. The reason he gave for this shift in orientation was that a seaman is able to see more of the world than the land-based engineer is. The fact that the average seafarer earns more than most of the engineers, is of course also a part of such a decision, but this will not be taken into consideration in this context. The purpose of the last sections has solely been to emphasize the importance of love of adventure as a potential driving force behind migratory behavior.

It should be brought into focus already at this stage that a central element in the adventurer's motives for migration, and especially among the seafarers, is connected to a freedom in the field of contact between the sexes. I will maintain that stories told by experienced seamen back home on vacation, about how this profession can include encounters with girls or women in foreign and exotic places, can work as a teaser for novices. I do not suggest that some people choose this career only to take part in this old seafaring tradition. However, I will state that this activity can open up the eyes of young men, help them to become aware of this profession in the first place. "*To have a good time*", as this often is called, will be a central issue later in this thesis, when the theme is the *recreation* of the seafarers (section 5.2.2.3).

Finally, it can be maintained that among the migrants who are motivated by a strong wish to leave, we will not only find the adventurous ones, but also those we can call the "*escapists*". That is to say, migration is not only a channel out for the explorers, but it can also be treated as a way of leaving behind already existing problems and conflicts, or to avoid the eruption of them. I remember for instance how one of the seamen I interviewed referred to independence as a reason for choosing this profession. He said: "*I want to go far from my family. To be independent, you know. To take decisions on my own. Free. At home my mother always tell me to do this and to do that. I am a mamas boy you know, that is why.*"

3.1.2 Migration seen as sacrifice

The last individual motive for leaving which I would like to bring forward at this stage, is connected to the long and strong tradition in the Philippine culture of making sacrifice. The idea is simply that migratory behavior contains an element of sacrificial efforts. People make a

sacrifice simply by the fact that they work abroad, a career that requires an absence from family and friends. Furthermore, the idea is that migrant work in this country is an appreciated and legitimate way of undergoing sacrifice, and to such an extent that it can, for some people, actually be an intrinsic motive for choosing this kind of career. As we shall see later on, however, migratory sacrifice is inseparable from the seemingly religious sense of the word, due to the fact that it is impossible to differ between the spiritual or religious domain of this society, and the more profane or everyday-like sphere. The elaboration of the connection between migration and sacrifice will therefore not only contain a description of renunciation related to overseas work, but also a description of the religious counterpart of this phenomenon or effort.

I admit that it is problematic to juxtapose a sacrificial act with migratory work. Even though the individual seamen regard their profession as a “*sacrifice for my family*” – which was a typical phrase among my informants – I don’t think they necessarily have a divine understanding of their employment on board. For instance, the commonly used expression “*the fruit of my sacrifice*” – said by the seaman for example as he pointed at his house or car – is in Tagalog *bunga ng pagsisikap* which literally means “*the fruit of my effort or striving*.” In other words, their use of the term sacrifice may from time to time rely upon a convenient translation of their provider duties on board, rather than actually being linked to the sacred meaning of the word.

Nevertheless, it is a fact that the Filipino seafarers frequently make use of the term *sacrifice* when they are asked to phrase the reasons for their choice of profession in English, and that they therefore find the term useful in expressing aspects of their careers. What we are witnessing, of course, is the metaphoric qualities of sacrifice.

I will maintain that what the seafarers have in mind when they denote their careers as involving sacrifice, is *separation*. They are willing to live a professional life - which has as its overall aim to improve the well being of the family - *away* from the family. In other words, they sacrifice themselves, in the name of their families. Despite a strong family orientation, the seaman is willing to face solitude and hardship on board, just to ensure that his family is better off as a consequence of this arrangement. Put simply, the parallel to a more theological view on sacrifice should be clear. In both concerns, we could say that someone carry the

burden of the majority on their shoulders. The seaman can see himself as a voluntary remedy for his family, while the sacrificial lamb is treated as a redeemer for a whole community. In both cases, certain acts are given specific qualities on behalf of a majority.

I immediately also acknowledge that seeking to locate sacrifice as a migratory motive among the strictly personal ones, is quite problematic. There is definitely something in the character of the sacrifice that turns this phenomenon into a social act. As already emphasized, to make a sacrifice is basically an act directed *towards* someone. One always gives oneself up to certain ideas in the *name of* someone - whether be it a God or one's family.

I will insist, however, that this type of atonement - expressed through a voluntary, temporary (annual) exile - has a strictly personal dimension, due to the fact that it evolves around these individuals who are leaving for work abroad and at the same time leave everything behind. Despite the fact that the main reason for their effort or sacrifice is their families, the single migrant must be prepared to pay the highest price in this migratory drama. It is the single man or woman who is the leading actor in this tremendous annual family based Passion play which takes place across the borders of the Philippines.

To compare migratory sacrifice with the sufferings of Jesus Christ is not as implausible as it perhaps seems. For instance, one of the leading newspapers in the country, the *Inquirer* (1995), explicitly did so during the Holy Week in 1995 (see the illustration on the next page). They paralleled Jesus' road to Calvary and typical characteristics of his life to OCWs. For example, at station three, where Jesus falls the first time, they portray a poor Filipino farm girl who arrives in a foreign land, and how she virtually is a prisoner, with little contact with the outside world, imagining the worst things that can happen to her in that place. At station seven, where Jesus falls the second time, they give a description of a seaman who finds out too late that the salary he will receive from his employer is much lower than what is specified in the contract. The execution of the Filipina domestic helper Flor Contemplation in March 1995 in Singapore - which effected tremendous reactions in the Philippine society where people claimed her innocence - is obviously the *Inquirer's* inspiration for making this comparison.

A Filipino OCW's Via Crucis

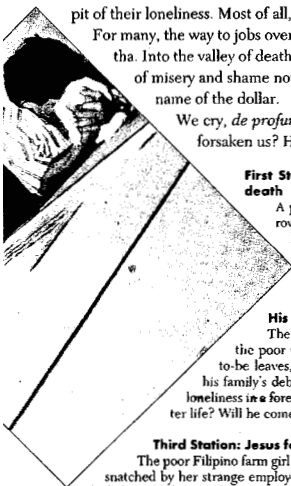


Sunday Inquirer Magazine April 9, 1995

This Holy Week, put aside the good old devotional prayers and walk the road to Calvary via the path of the Filipino overseas contract workers (OCW). Carry their burden, wear their crown of thorns, drink from their empty cups, feel the stripes on their backs and the fever on their brows, broil in the desert sand, be tossed at sea, descend to the pit of their loneliness. Most of all, enter the cave of their hearts.

For many, the way to jobs overseas has been a road to Golgotha. Into the valley of death many have been led, into lives of misery and shame not a few have been lured. In the name of the dollar.

We cry, *de profundis*, ahhhhh Father, have you forsaken us? How have we come to this?



First Station: Jesus is condemned to death

A poor Filipino sells properties, borrows money at high interest rates so he can go abroad and find work. Even before he leaves, his family is already deep in debt.

Second Station: Jesus carries His cross

The labor recruiter exacts a high fee but the poor worker has no choice. The OCW-to-be leaves, carrying with him the burden of his family's debts. How long will he slave away in loneliness in a foreign land so his family can live a better life? Will he come home to find his family intact?

Third Station: Jesus falls the first time

The poor Filipino farm girl arrives in a foreign land and is soon snatched by her strange employer and taken to a home where she finds herself alone with no one to share her burdens. Held a virtual prisoner, and having little contact with the outside world, she imagines the worst that can happen to her.

Fourth Station: Jesus meets His mother

Filipino maids in Hongkong gather on their Sunday off days to share with one another their experiences and to find links and solace from compatriots in a strange land. In the Middle East maids have no regular way of getting in touch with other Filipinos.

Fifth Station: Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry His cross

Filipinos help other Filipinos who are victims of abuse. The Philippine embassies are supposed to be places of refuge but many

Sixth Station: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

Nongovernment organizations, religious groups and women's centers come to the rescue of OCWs in distress. They provide a haven, an oasis for battered Filipinos, and help them go home safely.

Seventh Station: Jesus falls the second time

A seaman finds out too late that the salary he will receive from his employer is much lower than what is specified in the contract.

Eighth Station: Jesus consoles the women of Jerusalem

Women come to the aid of other women. A runaway maid with burned hands and face comes to tell a horrible story of constant battering. She becomes insane and is shipped home without money and sanity.

Ninth Station: Jesus falls the third time

An OCW falls ill or is injured in an accident. He finds himself helpless and with no health benefits. He is sent home. A dancer in Japan finds herself prostituted and held as a sex slave.

Tenth Station: Jesus is stripped of His garments

An OCW is accused of a crime. Guilty or not, he finds himself stripped of his rights. He has no counsel, he has no visitors, he is alone in a foreign prison.

Eleventh Station: Jesus is nailed on the cross

A maid is pinned to the bed by her male employer and raped repeatedly. She becomes pregnant and is sent to prison for having gotten pregnant! A woman kills her beast of an employer and faces a death sentence.

Twelfth Station: Jesus dies to the cross

A Filipino worker is accused of a crime he did not commit. He is detained, tried, convicted and sentenced to die by beheading. His family does not know anything. He dies alone, unmourned and unsung.

Thirteenth Station: Jesus is taken down from the cross

A domestic helper jumps from the window of a fourth-floor apartment to escape the brutality of her employers.

Fourteenth Station: Jesus is laid in His tomb

A dead Filipino is brought home in a box. His family does not know how he died, why he died. An autopsy is performed and tell-tale signs of torture are found on his body. His wife and children are deep in debt, with no one to turn to for deliverance. How will they go on with life?

Let us weep. Let us pray. Let us arise.

— Ma. Ceres P. Doyo



It is also pertinent to see this comparison - the one between divine suffering and migrant work - in relation to other domains of the Philippine society. What I allude to here is the dramatic Passion plays during the Easter season.

It is of common occurrence in the Catholic Philippines to perform different types of imitations or expressions of the suffering and ordeal of Jesus Christ, a tradition that finds its peak during Lent and Easter. It must be emphasized that these performances take place outside the church, in the sense that they belong to a sort of popular or non-institutional religiosity. Although these dramas are only performed by a very limited number of people - very often people from lower social segments in society, such as jeepney drivers and small-scale farmers - the rituals can be said to affect many. According to Fernando N. Zialcita, these rituals are by many people regarded as "*legitimate, albeit uncommon, options*" (1991:297). These performances - such as voluntary crucifixion and self-flagellation - may at one level be treated as religious ones in that they affect the relationship between man and some sort of spiritual being - God or one of the many saints. For instance, the majority of the flagellants in the work of Zialcita did the ritual because of a vow (*panata*); they had promised an ethereal being to undergo these sufferings because of a feeling of gratefulness. One of them put it this way: "*I contracted a debt with Christ. He healed my loved ones. I have to pay back my debt.*" (Zialcita 1991:306).

Why is it relevant to give an outline of the Passion plays, if the aim is to understand migratory sacrifice? The immediate answer to the question is that these quite different activities are the same at an experiential level. If one makes a vow to God, expressed through for instance the participation in an Easter ritual, or if one chooses to renounce in the name of one's family by choosing an overseas career, it is at one level experienced as the same endeavor. This may derive from the fact that it is more or less impossible to draw a line between the so-called sacred and the profane in the Philippine society: "*The supernatural dimension is omnipresent and enter into all activity and thinking. [] The sacrifices entailed in migrant work are just as "religious" as the sacrifice on Good Friday is "profane"*" (Rugkåsa 1997:172). I will give some examples to illustrate this blend.

The significance of the Easter-dramas is not exclusively centered on a spiritual reality, just as important, again according to Fernando N. Zialcita (1991), is the implicit inter-personal or social element in these rituals. In numerous cases, for instance, the penitents were participating in the Easter suffering because of family-related problems, rather than complications in one's relationship to God. One man, the black sheep of the family according to Zialcita, was told by his wife to have himself nailed, as a way of paying the penalty for his reprehensible behavior. Another characteristic of these rituals is that a major part of the participants are young boys. This is a trend which "*magnifies the importance of parental authority, rather than of God*", according to Zialcita (1991:303). In sum, it can be argued that "*relations with kinsmen influence the individual's decision to do the ritual [and] undergoing the ordeal may strengthen existing bonds between kinsmen*" (Zialcita 1991:305). To insist on an obvious profane element in such a ritual context, is similar to how Helms treats inter-personal concerns as a major inducement factor for pilgrimage (1988:76-77).

The mixture of the sacred and the profane is also explicitly seen when it comes to the use of family metaphors within the field of popular religiosity. What I am referring to is the concepts and ideas that in a tangible way tie the nuclear family to some spiritual being, such as the Holy family. The latter designation refers to the Trusted Father (God), Mama Mary (the Virgin Mary) and *Kuya* or Older Brother Jesus (Jesus Christ). These are commonly used terms, and they should all indicate the intimacy and closeness that exists between the earthly and the divine family. According to Niels Mulder, one can actually regard, the Holy family as "*an extension of one's own family, part of one's identity as it were, with whom one feels in direct emotional contact*" (1992:44). This intimacy, one might also add accessibility, is visible in the daily life in the Philippines in a wide variety of ways. Besides the family terms already mentioned, it is expressed in for example bumper stickers on cars saying "*God is my co-pilot*"; organizations named "*Friends of Jesus*"; and poetry with lines such as "*God my brother*" (Mulder 1992:43).

How does migratory sacrifice appear in the light of the last sections? How does the blend between the sacred and the profane relate to overseas work? As stated above, migrant work can in some senses be compared to the biblical tale of Jesus and the road to Golgotha. At least this coupling was done in a Philippine newspaper. However, I do not, by referring to the newspaper article, mean to say that this is a comparison that is constantly and explicitly

present in the minds of the overseas workers. I even doubt that the labor migrants frequently see themselves together with Jesus on his walk to Calvary. What I will maintain, however, is that a comparison between overseas work and divine suffering is valid in a more general and not so literal way. I am convinced that this is a combination which is crucial when it comes to understanding how the OCWs perceive and understand themselves. In effect, one can suggest that religious suffering represents a source of strength and inspiration for the OCWs, which can guide them through and enable them to cope with their everyday life on foreign territory. The theological tale may represent a backdrop which adds one extra layer of meaning to their overseas, professional life.

Taking the last sections into consideration: how is it possible to locate the wish for sacrifice among the driving forces or motives behind migrant work? What is it with suffering that makes it serve as an invitation for overseas work?

As we have seen, sacrifice is not an unknown matter for the Filipinos. During Lent and Easter they see this theme dramatized through processions and rituals in their neighborhood, and there are many people who make use of this theme as an explaining factor when it comes to interpersonal and everyday-like matters. We might say they impose meaning onto situations characterized by stress and anxiety, assisted by the idea of renunciation. For example, an unmarried woman I met said she was expecting to suffer in her future marriage, due to the fact that she could not hope for more than a lazy husband could. Niels Mulder's description of the Philippines as a nation existing of "*self-flagellants*" also finds its place in this picture (Mulder 1996:181-204). Mulder's term refers to what we frequently can see in for instance Philippine newspapers: pictures of car accidents and corrupt politicians along with comments such as "*only in the Philippines*" or "*typical Filipino*".

I will maintain that this awareness of renunciation and sacrifice as a central element in what it means to be a Filipino, creates an environment where migrant work can be treated as a way of fulfilling or accomplishing this notion. In other words, I do not see the idea of sacrifice merely as something that comfort people in stressed situations. I will maintain that it also functions as a highly appreciated value or ideal among a lot of people. One conclusion to draw from this may therefore be that some migrants have chosen this career based on a wish to be a good Filipino, that is, in this context, one that lets separation be a part of his/her life. In other

words, it is possible to see willingness for sacrifice as a motivation in itself for overseas work. One thing is that migrants by the act of leaving achieve status as one of the “*new heroes*”, as the OCWs are commonly referred to as in the public debate in the Philippines², another fact is that they through overseas work are able to consummate one of the fundamental values in the Philippine society.

At a more theoretical level, the essence of this matter can be denominated as the aesthetics of asceticism or renouncement. It is not difficult to see this parallel in human beings which on purpose seek a state characterized by an absence of familiar comfort and delectation and still they are able to find that life a desirable one. This is due to the fact that the satisfaction is on a different level. Perhaps the figure that best illustrates such a life is the monk, at least in the way monastery life appears to us in the western world, but also the Indian ascetic can serve as a useful illustration of this phenomenon (see for example Bjerkan 2001).

Before I proceed to the next topic, I find it timely to emphasize the fact that I have all the way been talking about *aspects* of migratory motives. The idea behind the introduction of the “explorer”, “escapist” and now finally the one that finds satisfaction through sacrifice, has not been to say that these are *figurae* that one can find alive in the real world. The purpose has rather been to treat these ‘ideal type’ notions as central elements in the reservoir of reasons for leaving.

It is however possible to imagine moments where these notions, in a sense, come into being. For instance, the flagellants who appear in the work of Zialcita (1991) claim to have a light and happy feeling during the painful rituals. In the line of this statement one can assume that the migrants also will have corresponding moments; glimpses featured by existential comprehension, where their position as migrants appears as absolutely meaningful, despite the hard work and the fact that they find themselves far away from the native soil.

² It was the President Cory Aquino, who first named the OCWs as the country’s “*new heroes*”. More precisely, she said to a group of domestic helpers in Hong Kong that: “*You are*

One final remark should be made regarding the connection between migrant work and sacrifice. Even though it is possible to pinpoint sacrifice as an individual reason for leaving everything behind, in actual life the case is that the migratory renunciation first of all has a purpose beyond satisfaction of individual needs. One can view migrant work as suffering with an inter-personal or social cause. Just as often as the seafarers said the already mentioned words “*this is the fruit of my sacrifice*” while they were pointing at for instance their house, they explicitly stated who the suffering was meant for: “*for my family*”.

Still, not every Filipino is able, or willing for that matter, to go. Not every family is in the position to be favored by high remittance and exotic stories caused by migrant work. This is due to the simple fact that not all families have members which can be handed over to the international labor market. In other words: not every family is composed of potential migrants. Beside the family’s demographic situation, an equally important issue in the migration process is to what extent the family possesses the necessary resources to take part in this drama. By resources I primarily mean money and personal contacts.

The purpose of the next chapter will be to reveal some of the factors which constitute the basis for the decision making process. To put it differently, the theme so far has been centered around the *motivation* of the single migrant for choosing an overseas career, while the following chapter will focus on the framework in which the decisions are made. Both the family-related preconditions for migration, and the potential driving forces at a more structural level, will be discussed. The latter differ from the former in the sense that the structural framework is basically beyond the control of the single individual, compared to the migratory preconditions based in the family organization.

3.2 Preconditions for migration

The Filipinos are, as discussed earlier, a relatively mobile people. Why is it so? Besides the fact that a love of adventure and a wish for sacrifice most likely have a profound influence on

the new heroes”, a statement which *must* be understood in relation to the major dollar remittances from the OCWs that the Aquino administration benefited from (Rafael 1997:4).

why individuals choose to leave, and that a climate for migration is maintained in the population at large, what can explain the fact that some people actually are *able* to leave in the first place while others are not? In other words: which characteristics do migrant families share? Before answering these questions I will focus on an even more fundamental level of the migration process, namely: What is it that makes it relevant for them to go? What is it with the Philippine society that makes millions of Filipinos wish for and actually choose an overseas career?

3.2.1 Preconditions for migration at a structural level

According to G. Ranis (1993, in Martin 1993:641), the Philippines is "*perhaps the country with the largest gap between potential and actual economic growth*". In line with this statement the Philippines has recently been called "*the sick man in Asia*". This diagnosis is meant as an illustration of the present situation in the country, where both the unemployment-rate, the population growth, crime statistics and inflation are high, while the growth of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Gross National Product (GNP) per capita is relatively low. One can also add the problems the country is facing in the fields of corruption, pollution and infrastructure to this pathological picture of the Philippines.

Mercedes B. Concepcion (1994) argues that the Philippines has witnessed, over the last decades, an economic stagnation and a declining standard of living. This recession is evident in a negative percentage change in the GNP per capita, and one that is considerably below what some of the neighboring countries underwent in the same period. It is here first of all referred to the situation in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand.

Figures from the work of Philip L. Martin (1993) can also illustrate the lack of economic growth that characterize the Philippine economy. He mentioned for example that the Philippine GNP growth rate in the year 1992 was only of 1%, while the average real per capita income in 1991 only amounted to 740 US dollars. Martin also mentions that 50% of the population in 1992 was said to live in poverty.

In viewing the Philippines as *the patient* in Asia, a notion of a preceding wholesomeness is implicated. To be named sick usually presupposes a previous good health. The Philippines is not an exception from this conception. For example, in the first decades of independence, the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, the agricultural sector in the Philippine society had a formidable annual growth compared to for example Indonesia and Thailand (Concepcion 1994:142). We may also add that this domain used to be the most internationally competitive and export-oriented sector of the country at that time (Martin 1993:640). The educational system in the Philippines is also something that belongs to the more successful sectors of the country. Actually, the Philippines has one of the highest shares of college-educated people in Asia, higher than both in Japan and Singapore, according to Martin (1993).

The second element in the "*the sick man in Asia*" notion of the Philippines, is that the other countries in the region are healthy and prosperous. And to a certain degree this is the case. For example, if one compares the situation in Thailand and Malaysia to the one in the Philippines, one can easily see some significant differences. However, it is worth to bear in mind that the patient's situation has improved in recent years.

In the fall of 1995, the growth of the GDP in Thailand and Malaysia was 8.5% and 9.3% respectively, but in the Philippines it was only 4.9%. Furthermore, when we juxtapose the inflation rates in these countries, the new economic "*tigers*" - as the Newly Industrialized Countries (NICs) in South-East Asia are often called - are better off. The prices in the Philippines went up by more than 11% in the year 1995, while the same figures for Thailand and Malaysia were 6.2% and 3.6%. The same tendency is also clear when it comes to the Gross National Product per capita. In Thailand the GNP per cap. was US\$2315, in Malaysia US\$3530, but in the Philippines only US\$1010 (numbers taken from Asiaweek, Oct. 1995).

Figures from other sources also emphasize the contrasts between the countries in the region. For example, from 1980 to 1992, the Philippines had a *negative* annual average per capita growth, and when it comes to the growth rate in the GNP, the Philippines annually achieved only 1.4%, while countries as Laos made 4.5%, and Vietnam made 6.2% (Gonzalez III 1998:69).

One of the effects of not being able to fulfill the criteria of a NIC, as is the case for the Philippines, is that the country will be a major exporter of labor. The lack of foreign investments, due to major internal problems in the area of corruption and infrastructure, and the fact that the Philippines has a massive surplus of labor, in other words a high unemployment rate, may in sum lead to a massive exodus across the borders. One can easily imagine that people who are facing an unemployment rate as high as 10% in their own country, and an underemployment of nearly 25%, regard an overseas career as their best, if not only, chance to prosperity (numbers from Gonzalez III 1998:64-65). One can also add to this picture the fact that a lot of Filipinos actually possess the necessary - that is, demanded - professional skills and knowledge for an overseas job, due to a relatively well-functioning educational system. In other words: many Filipinos actually go because they are able to convert their know-how into an overseas contract.

To draw a simple, clinical picture of the present situation in the Philippines, with the help of figures from the national economy, is one way of illustrating the preconditions for the migratory milieu which I have argued elsewhere exists in this archipelago. To put it differently: I will argue that the country's disease paves the way for a climate in which labor migration is seen as the best way out for the people concerned. Not only out of the country, but also out of the economical impasse of the single migrant and his or her family.

3.2.2 Preconditions for migration at a family level

As mentioned, an overseas contract worker must be regarded as a family based enterprise. It is almost unthinkable to imagine a migrant worker that is capable of leaving for a career abroad, without help and support from close kinsmen. The family is at the same time the main reason for leaving. In short, the family is thus the entity that initiates the actual migration, and simultaneously it is the reason for this choice of strategy. But, and this is an important point, it is a fact that not all families are able to hand over personnel to international labor migration. As we shall see, some fundamental factors must be present in this social unit to make this happen. The next sections will also contain a more precise definition of who the typical Filipino migrant is, regarding sex, age and educational level.

The typical Filipino migrant is relatively young (a feature he or she shares with other job seekers in the world today). According to Ernesto Pernia the bulk of male migrants in the Philippines are between 20 and 40 years of age, while the majority of women usually are between 15 and 35 years of age (1977:114). Also the works of Mercedes B. Concepcion (1994) and Kathrine Gibson & Julie Graham (1986) illustrate the fact that labor migration belongs to the younger segments of the population. Concepcion argue that most male migrants are between 25 and 34 years old, while the females are generally younger, often in their late teens or early twenties (1994:141). Gibson and Graham, on the other hand, speak in more general terms and say that the vast majority of OCWs are under 35 years of age (1986:144).

The information in this section can help us to reveal at least two distinctive features regarding the composition of the typical migrant family. First of all, one can assume that if a family should be able to take part in the migratory movement, it needs to contain one or several young members. It is difficult, but by no means impossible, to imagine a family consisting of a newly married couple with only small children, or for that matter an old couple without any children at all, being participants in the migratory movement. Statistics from the work of Sally E. Findley tend to support such an assumption. She claims for example that the number of children below the age of ten in migrant families, is lower compared to the situation in non-migrant families, and that a migrant family generally has more adult members than the non-migrant ones (1987:154).

Secondly, one can also infer from the information given above, that a family in which all the children are girls or at least where the first-born is a girl, will earlier than more male dominated households be able to participate in the mass exodus. This is due to the demand that obviously is present for the labor force offered by young women and girls.

This does not mean, however, that it is uncommon to find married people among the Filipino overseas workers. According to Mercedes B. Concepcion, about 77% of the male OCWs were married, while less than 50% of their female counterparts were in the same position (1994:142). This tendency has obviously something to do with the fact that the women who leave on an average are younger than the men - that is, the majority of the women are simply too young to marry - and also the well-established notion of the men as the provider of the family.

Besides young members, a typical migrant family will also have to have access to a minimum of financial sources. In short, the line of argument is as follows: In order to clear or prepare a member of the family for the international labor market, it is necessary, or at least this will increase the chances for success, to pay the person's way through the educational system. It should be mentioned here that schooling in the Philippines is free up to the high-school level, so payment will only be required at college- and university level. For OCWs, a considerable amount of money will also be spent during the registration process in the manning agencies in Manila. These expenses will not be discussed explicitly at this stage, but they will be a central theme in the next chapter. Still, let me briefly repeat what Findley (1987) claims in relation to this issue: she says that *"the dream of sending a family member overseas, is only realistic for those who have 7.000-10.000 pesos for payment of the "recruiter's fee or who have relatives from whom they can borrow the requisite amount"* (1987:146).

What does the need for an educational and financial fund tell us about the character of the average migrant family? First and foremost, the poorest part of the population will not be represented in the stream of contract workers across the borders. To be a migrant requires initially a certain amount of money, money which, if destiny is smiling, will be multiplied through an overseas contract. So, if a family does not have a minimum of assets, that is, not enough to pay the entrance fee for this household strategy, it is also sentenced to be kept outside the opportunity for increased prosperity, which *can* be the result of migration for the people involved.

Let me briefly link the question of education to the situation of the seafarers I met during my time in the Philippines. Many of the people I interviewed told me that they became seamen because their families could not afford to pay for an education of a longer duration (earlier on, the maritime education lasted for only two years). So the length of the maritime courses - seen of course in relation to the potential for a relatively high income - appears to be an important factor in selecting seafaring as a household strategy.

That overseas work in general is reserved for families that already are at a certain level of financial security, can be illustrated by the fact that a majority of the overseas workers were employed in other jobs before leaving abroad. According to Jon D. Goss and Bruce Lindquist,

more than 90% of the departing OCWs were employed before going abroad (1995:323), while figures from the work of Sally E. Findley show that families containing migrants on an average had 1.7 workers as members, compared to only 1.2 for the non-migrant ones (1987:155).

However, as we shall see in the next chapter when the focus is on exactly how the migrants leave, the assets that the family spend on educating one or several of its members, represent a high price for the single migrant. In short we can say that when he or she leaves, liability is what characterizes his or her relation to the family. In addition to a heavy burden laid on the migrant shoulders, due to the strong expectations from the remaining family members to receive remittance, the worker is also confronted with different kinds of debt. Not only in the monetary sense of the word, debt of gratitude is also an element in this context.

A final distinctive feature of the typical migrant family, which can be brought up at this stage, is pivoted around the strategic know-how needed for successful employment away from home. Apparently, for a family to be able to hand over members to overseas employment, the unit needs to possess certain kinds of knowledge or experience. In short, we can call this stock of knowledge the *recipe of migration*. Exactly what it means to be familiar with the best way to maneuver in the migratory landscape, so that the migration actually takes place and hopefully will be successful, is one of the main themes in the next chapter. Nevertheless, I might mention already, just to foreshadow a little bit of what will be outlined below, that personal contacts inside the manning agencies in Manila and relatives with migration experience play a crucial role, functioning both as gatekeepers and informants in this recruitment process.

Part IV

How they actually go - the broker

We have so far seen an outline of some of the motivating factors that are present at an individual level in the Philippine labor migration. Then a description was given of the preconditions - both at a family level and a structural level - which constitute the framework for these motivated actions. The aim of this chapter, however, will be to describe, in an explicit manner, the actual process of leaving. As we shall see, to choose an overseas career includes a great deal of maneuvering, especially when it comes to how the potential migrant should be able to actually found a relation to the overseas labor market. To become a migrant is not just dependent on a willingness to go, equally important are factors such as the personal relationships one is able to establish or plead, directly or indirectly, inside the manning offices in Manila.

If potential migrant families shall be able to hand over personnel to the international labor market, they need to get in touch with those who provide this type of employment. In other words: the families, or the migrant, need assistance from someone who can help them articulate their own wishes, and who has the authority to actually land an overseas contract. The answer to this problem is the *broker*. The chances of succeeding without a contact with such a gatekeeper, is small. If the potential migrants go to the agents in Manila on their own, as unknown quantities, the chances that they will get an overseas contract are very small, though this may happen sometimes. The trend is that those who want to go need to pass their application through people or institutions which convey their wish to the overseas labor market.

To fully understand the need of a broker, it is important to bear in mind the enormous gap which exists between the metropolis Manila, the seat of the political and financial elite in the country, and the rest of the 76 provinces which constitute the Philippines. Manila is in many ways a world of its own, seen in relation to the rest of the archipelago. At least this is the impression one is left with after some time in the Philippines. For instance, a typical way to categorize the country is to make a sharp distinction between the capital on the one side and the rest of the country on the other. For example, if you are looking for a person, and you wonder if he is located in Manila, a highly likely answer is: "*No, he is out in the provinces.*"

So, despite the fact that the educational level is relatively high in the Philippines, we can not escape the impression that a majority of the population in the country lives very provincial or "local" lives, far from the international metropolis Manila. It is not just a matter of distance in the geographical sense, between for instance the financial district of Metro-Manila, Makati, and the rice fields of Panay or the sugar plantations in Negros. It is rather a question of completely different worlds or universes.

In general, we may say that a broker is someone who is able to combine or convey appreciated information and/or experience from two separate sectors of society, or more precisely: he is in a position to utilize the comparative advantage which implicitly is present in these two different domains of society. In the case of the Philippine labor migration, we have, according to Jon D. Goss and Bruce Lindquist, three different types of gatekeepers: the local patron, the returned migrant and the private recruiter (1995:341-344).

4.1 The patron and the *compadre*

The term *local patron* refers to those people who initially possess certain conspicuous positions in a local community. In other words, it is not necessarily their function as brokers which has brought them into different leading roles in society, gatekeeping is often just something that is added to an already prominent position. Goss and Lindquist bring forward employers and local politicians as typical representatives for this category of people. These brokers' way of bridging the gap between potential migrants and the overseas labor market does not necessarily involve a direct contact with the Manila based agents. Just as often a connection is achieved indirectly, through their network with other patrons.

Goss and Lindquist also emphasize on why these gatekeepers are named patrons. It is fairly obvious that the position of the patron presupposes the existence of clients. In daily life, a client can appear for instance as employee in one of the patron's enterprises, or as a devoted voter in the local elections, while the clients in the migratory process are constituted by the potential migrants or the job seekers. In line with this, we can therefore describe a client as a person exchanges his/her loyalty or support to the patron, in return for different kinds of remuneration, such as a job in the local community or an overseas contract, for that matter.

To become a client in the first place can be a long and complicated process. According to Goss and Lindquist, the potential client must for instance be prepared to put a lot of effort into a self-presentation in different contexts in the local community - contexts they know include the patrons - whether it be in more formal settings such as the church and the local political institutions, or in everyday life situations in the streets and marketplaces. Therefore, what the job-seekers basically try to achieve with their self-presentation - whether it be in the execution of occasional work, doing favors or just hanging around - is to indirectly provide the gatekeepers with information about themselves, an operation which in turn hopefully will induce an overseas contract. Put differently, the potential migrants will through this presentation try to sell a favorable picture of themselves to the patrons, an effort which in turn can make these brokers use their social network which involves overseas employers directly or at least manning agents in Manila.

The overall goal for the potential migrant is of course an overseas contract. But in order to reach this objective, he is more or less forced to involve himself with a mediator, the broker. In essence, the job seeker tries to establish, in the first stage of the migration process, a *routinized relationship* with one of the gatekeepers. One way of achieving this is by becoming a patron's client, as described above. Another direction this routinization process can take, one that is more permanent in its character, is through the institution called ritual kinship, known as the *compadre system*. In short, seen from the job seeker's point of view, the object of this effort is to establish a relatively durative relationship with one of the gatekeepers with the help of or through arrangements of *sponsorship*. According to F. Landa Jocano (1989), it is common in the Philippines to make use of sponsors in connection with pre-baptismal rites, formal baptism, confirmation and marriage. It should be mentioned that both kin and non-kin may be employed as *compadres*. To illustrate what it means to be a sponsor or what a sponsorship implies for the people involved, the focus can be directed towards the christening of a child or godparenthood.

Ninong and *ninang* are the Tagalog terms for godparents, for the godfather and the godmother respectively. The godchild is referred to as *inaanak* by the *ninong* and *ninang* (Jocano 1989:9). There are a wide variety of expectations circulating between the different contractants; that is, first of all among the godparents and the child, but also the nearest kin of the contractants, such as the parents of the child, are met by some anticipation. In other words: to become a *compadre* or *comadre*, in this case a godfather or a godmother, implies strong mutual obligations between the people involved. As time goes by and the child grows up, the godparents can expect loyalty and respect from the child, expressed through, for instance, visits and tokens of esteem. The child on his/her part can hope for different kinds of support during the years to come, such as a financial contribution to education, or to be offered the opportunity of an overseas job.

The phrase "*hope for*" is used because of the voluntariness or flexibility that after all characterizes this asymmetrical reciprocity. Ritual kinship is, according to F. Landa Jocano, structurally amorphous (1989:9). Nobody can for example force a *compadre*, such as a godfather, to contribute to the well-being of one of his ritual kin, for example a godchild. This, of course, also goes the other way: if a person has not received anything from his

compadre, he does not have to show him the expected respect; he does not owe him this, as it were. One way to sum up the ritual kinship institution is therefore to say that it represents a *potential* for mutual loyalty and support between ritual kin, but that the relation has to be awakened or triggered before it can be an actual channel for this type of inter-personal exchange. However, it is important to notice that the moment the seal is broken, for instance the moment a job seeker exploits his relation to his *compadre* with the aim of getting hold of an overseas contract, a long and complicated process of mutual exchange is started. For example, F. Landa Jocano refers to a person who deliberately avoids starting this process, because, as he or she says: “*once started, the reciprocal exchange of goods or services becomes complex and cumbersome*” (1989:10).

It can briefly be mentioned that *utang na loob* or debt of gratitude obviously is a central issue in this back-and-forth process. This non-monetary debt is by many seen as a fundamental element in the Philippine culture. Therefore it is crucial to take this into consideration if the aim is to reveal some of the motives behind the Filipinos’ choices and behavior.

Nevertheless, *utang na loob* will explicitly be discussed at full length on a later occasion in this thesis. (See for example in section 7.2.1).

Before focusing on a different type of gatekeeper - the returned migrant - a final remark on the amorphous character of ritual kinship is needed. Filipinos have at least one strategy to reduce the uncertainty connected to one’s ritual kin. Instead of establishing a compadreship to non-kin members of the community, such as a local patron, they can choose to make use of a “real” kin also in this position. Among other things, this is motivated by the fact that it is easier to ask favours of compadres to whom one is already related to through blood ties and marriage, than *compadres* who only belong to one’s ritual kin. Why is it so? By relying on one’s relatives for the selection of the sponsors, one will achieve to ease the feeling of shame (*hiya*) which often is connected to an inquiry for help and support. In other words: one does not have to feel so ashamed if the request for assistance is addressed to one’s own flesh and blood.

Once again the work of F. Landa Jocano can be used as an illustration. One of his informants argued: *“You are not bound to give an elaborate and expensive feast if your compadre is your cousin, or, better still, your sibling. Also in time of need you will not be ashamed (mahiya) to approach your kin for things you need”* (1989:9).

4.2 The returned migrant

According to the findings of Sally E. Findley, migrant families can be characterized by the fact that they already have members who have been overseas as contract workers. Statistically speaking, about 1.1 persons in a migrant family have had previous experience from migration, while the same figure in the non-migrant families was only about 0.5 (1987:155).

This piece of information can be used as an indication of the important position migrants hold within their families. In addition to a substantial financial contribution to the well-being of their relatives - expressed through for instance different kinds of sponsorships and educational support - the returned migrants also represent a reservoir of knowledge and know-how which is relevant to the migratory process. In a sense one can say that the experienced overseas worker has already walked down the path which leads to a contract in a foreign country. In doing this, the worker has acquired experience of how to act or which strategies to choose, when facing the many obstacles which go along with this operation.

The returned migrant knows for example which offices one should visit to receive the different kinds of clearances for a job abroad, who to address in these offices and of course where these institutions are located in the urban jungle of Manila. But the perhaps most important element in the experience possessed by the returned migrant is connected to the personal relationships they have established inside the manning agencies in the capital. As we shall see, after some years and due to their personal contacts, the contract worker will be in a position to recommend applications addressed to these agencies from potential migrants, and it is this recommendation practice, besides the more technical know-how mentioned above, that turns the returned migrant into a broker.

One of the main informants in this project, a retired officer with many decades of experience from overseas sea service, can be seen as a typical representative for this type of broker. His son told me that over the years his father had recommended applications from more than a hundred potential seafarers. This son, who is also a seaman, also told me that he has taken up the gauntlet from his father and that despite his relatively young age, he had already managed to recommend about 3-4 rookies to his agent. Moreover, the impression is that this effort is not just something that favours relatives, that is “real” and ritual kin, but also sometimes friends of the family and people in the neighborhood. It should not be difficult to imagine the extremely strong position this particular seaman holds among the people he has helped over the years. It can be sufficient just to remember what is mentioned above regarding *utang na loob* or debt of gratitude.

To become such a “*backer*,” which is also a common term for these gatekeepers, one first of all need to be in the files of an agent for some years, and at the same time of course have a good reputation. Some informants said to me that at least 4-5 years in the same agency is needed before one can start recommending applications. Secondly, and just as important, one should also have a personal friend or a relative among the leading actors inside these institutions, before one can start to put in a good word for some selected applications. This will at least help the applicant in succeeding. It stands to reason that, for instance, an employee in a crewing company, who is handling a lot of applications from potential but, to him, mostly unknown seafarers, will at least dwell upon, and most probably grant, an application which is blessed by one of his best men or friends.

As we shall see in the next section, when the focus is strictly on the private recruiters, to have strong social ties straight into the manning agencies is also decisive for those who are dealing directly with the agencies, that is, without the help from, for example, a returned migrant. Nevertheless, before an outline of those people who can be seen as brokers by profession - the private recruiters - is given, some last remarks will be made concerning the widespread recommendation practice described above.

One way to view this practice is to say that it mirrors the importance of personal relationships in the Philippines when it comes to achieving certain types of favours or advantages. For example, a common way to look at business in the Philippines - or in most Asian countries for

that matter - is to say that it almost always takes place inside one's social network, which again turns these matters into personal affairs or a question of personal favours, rather than just something that strictly concerns monetary issues. Therefore, when an official responsible for dealing with applications in a crewing company selects the application that is accompanied by a recommendation, rather than one without this approval, he is acting in accordance with what it means to be a proper Filipino. The official chooses the potential migrant which in one way or another is associated with or connected to his or her own social universe. As we shall see in the next section, however, applicants that belong to one's own flesh and blood have a priority in this selection process.

Nevertheless, the practice of picking those one feels connected to obviously has something to do with what we may call safety precautions. The recommendations these applicants carry are, besides a proof of some sort of attachment or connection, also a guarantee for the agents. The agents can to a certain extent rely upon those who bring such an approval - they will do a good job, behave properly etc. - due to the fact that these workers are within reach of at least a minimum of social control.

However, it can also be maintained that this selection process results in a wide range of asymmetrical relations, and as discussed earlier, this is a social constellation which contains a potential for retribution on a later occasion. In other words, it is possible to imagine that some of the people who are involved in this allotment are gaining something from the maneuver. Most probably, those who are favored with overseas contract must be prepared, in some way or another, to pay tribute to the people who helped them to achieve this possibility.

4.3 The private recruiter

A private recruiter is a professional broker. That is, to mediate in/on the international labor market and the potential migrants' desire for an overseas contract, is what they do for a living. According to Philip L. Martin there is more than a 1000 private recruitment agencies in the Philippines (1993:643), and this number includes about 300 agencies with a specialty in maritime contracts (Chapman 1992:24).

In 1974 an overseas employment program was instituted as a major government policy in the Philippines. This was meant as a decision to temporarily solve the problem of unemployment in the country (Go and Postrado 1986:125). The intention was also to exclude private enterprises from operating in the recruitment arena, and thus ensure that the government would be the only actor in this field. However, this monopolization was abandoned just a few years later. In 1978 the last restriction for participation of private agencies in this market was removed (Chapman 1992:25). This is not to say that the Federal authorities completely handed over the labor trade to the private companies. Even today, an agent must have a license in order to operate in this market, and if a Filipino or a Filipina shall legally enter into the foreign labor market, he or she has to go through or be registered in the files of a wide range of governmental institutions. For example, a Filipino seafarer must tackle at least 13 federal agencies before he is clarified for an overseas contract (Chapman 1992:25). The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, or just POEA, can be considered as the main federal actor in this arena.

To be cleared by the official authorities for a job abroad also involves payment of fees. The stream of migrants across the borders is therefore also, seen from the government's point of view, a matter of "money in the public purse". But of course, as we shall see later on in this thesis (for example in section 7.1), the money the government acquires through these fees, is close to nothing compared to what they achieve by sending these people abroad. By maintaining a considerable number of hands overseas, the government of the Philippines can expect that billions of US dollars will pour into the national economy annually. This figure refers of course to the remittance from the overseas workers.

Nevertheless, the private recruiting agencies are the single group that has profited the most on the labor exports (Chapman 1992:24). Their business is partly based on people who by themselves look up and demand their services, but the agents also often make use of their specialist knowledge to actively seek potential migrants and markets. Goss and Lindquist describe how personnel from private recruiter companies leave for the provinces with the aim of recruiting new migrants for their businesses. Sometimes they involve the local patrons in this effort, in order to achieve credibility and trust in the local community (1995:343).

However, as always when there is money involved, hustlers appear on the scene as well. Some people take advantage of the desire among potential migrants to go abroad, and they pretend to have the solution to their problems. Goss and Lindquist refer to incidents where people pay recruiting fees to visiting gatekeepers, just to experience that these “*brokers*” disappear from that time onwards (1995:344). This corresponds to what is earlier treated as the necessity of gatekeeping in the migratory movement. People in the provinces are forced to make use of a broker due to their own lack of knowledge in the migratory field. And this of course opens up for a number of “pretenders” and unfaithful servants; they know that the potential migrants themselves cannot easily verify the truth in the information and prospects they have been offered.

To develop overseas markets for contract work is sometimes also an aim of the private recruiters. Paul K. Chapman gives an account of how the private recruiting business, in cooperation with the POEA, has sought out employment opportunities for Filipino seafarers abroad in the last couple of decades (1992:25-26). In cooperation with the government, the agencies have directed aggressive worldwide campaigns towards the shipowners, with the aim of increasing the demand for Filipino seamen. One of the recent results of such a salesjob is, again according to Chapman, the considerable number of Filipino personnel one finds on board Norwegian merchant vessels.

It is not only the recruiting agencies that have profited from the mass exodus in this country. It is an indisputable fact that employees in these agencies sometimes accept or demand extra payments - so-called “placement fee” or *lagáy* (Tagalog, meaning “place” or “position”) - for qualifying applicants for overseas work. One of the informants for this project, a second officer with two decades of experience in foreign companies, said to me that some are charged as much as 15,000.- pesos or about 3,750.- Norwegian kroner for having the papers processed by the agent. This “under-the-table payment” is, however, a matter strictly between the agent and the migrant, that is, the shipping companies, or the “*principals*” as they often are called, need not have to know about it all. Nevertheless, the same second mate did also mention that the principals sometimes are informed and even involved in the sharing of bribes. How widespread is this practice of grease payment then? This is certainly a domain from which it is difficult to get a certain knowledge. People, both the agents and the migrants, do not for obvious reasons easily talk about these illegal matters. Nevertheless - just to be given an idea

of the magnitude of this problem - a survey, conducted by the Christian Maritime Association in 1986, concluded that 38 percent of the selected persons admitted to have paid illegal recruitment fees (Chapman 1992:26-27).

To be favored with an overseas contract does not completely depend on the financial situation of the applicants. As discussed earlier, strong social ties into these organizations will also be an intrinsic factor in achieving this. These two elements put together - personal relationships and money - is what constitutes the basis for a successful return to the migratory arena. The financial aspect of this complex does not of course only refer to the demanded bribe one must be ready to satisfy as an applicant. Usually, official fees will also be a considerable part of the total expenses. The social relations, on the other hand, can profitably be multiple in their character. That is, the agent should know the applicant as more than just an applicant. It should be conceivable to call upon information that ties the two of them together as more than just a potential migrant and a manning agent. It will advance the chances for the applicant if he and the agent somehow share the same social universe, for instance through common friends, acquaintances or relatives. In general, it can be argued that social ties based on kinship have a paramount position among these alternatives. This was at least what many of my informants claimed in the interviews with me. It is therefore preferable to have a relative in the agency rather than one who is just a friend. Blood is thicker than water in the Philippines, as anywhere else in the world. Therefore, the obligations the relatives feel towards each other will most likely be of a more durable character, compared to relations based on friendship. At least blood tie relations have initially a *potential* for such a duration.

One way to approach the significance of kinship in the interface between the migrants and the recruiting agencies, is to emphasize the fact that most of the seafarers investigated in this project also had other family members who were seamen. One of my informants, for example, had five brothers who also were sailing, four of these in the same Norwegian company. One possible way to understand the rise of such maritime families is to say that several members become seafarers due to a personal access to a broker. Most probably the seafarers themselves will be the most suitable ones in performing this gatekeeping, at least the experienced ones who can recommend the applications from the rookies. But this does not weaken the fact that in addition to their own experience, they also need a person which they can refer to within the recruiting company, such as a relative.

To have access to such “referable” contacts among the manning agents is not only of vital importance for whether one can obtain overseas work or not, the *quality* of the contract also depends on this. One informant told me that if you know a manager in a manning agency he will see to it that you are placed on board a ship of high standing, or in a company of good reputation. This is made possible due to the fact that a private recruiter is often doing placement tasks for several companies. A certain degree of flexibility regarding *who* to place *where*, is therefore conceivable.

As we have seen so far, to attain an overseas contract is a long and complicated process for the potential migrant. From the moment he makes the decision to leave, there is a wide range of obstacles that he must tackle before he can even begin to hope for a foreign contract. Perhaps the greatest single obstacle an overseas contract worker faces in this migratory process is the private recruiting agencies. While the migrants main concern, when they finally reach their destination abroad, is to fulfill the job instructions, they must be prepared to play their cards in a much more subtle way when facing the private recruiters. As discussed above, an OCW must be prepared to make use of strategies which involve personal relationships and considerable financial resources before he hopefully eventually is registered in the files of a recruitment company. A part of the outcome of these efforts is often debt, both financially and socially.

The high and complex entrance fees for overseas employment, accompanied by the fact that the procedure involves personalized contacts, may explain why some of the migrants regard the agents as their real employers, and not the companies that actually pay for their work performances. The agent appears both as the greatest obstacle for the migrants, and as the focal element in this process. It is a common practice for the seafarers to execute the contracts on board different ships. In other words, within a certain period of time they have met and adjusted to a wide variety of people, not only to fellow Filipinos, foreigners will also often be a part of this particular social environment. The agent, on the other hand, may often be the same person during these years. So, while the vessels may vary from contract to contract, the agent can and often will be one and the same. If one in addition to this also takes into consideration that the wages, technically speaking, are paid out by the agents and that the

migrants most probably have relatives or friends in the organization, it should be clear that it is the agent the migrants feel attached to, and not just any impersonal and fluctuant company.

Paul K. Chapman also emphasizes the importance of this strong identification with the agent in the recruitment process (1992:32-33). Moreover, many of the informants in this project gave up the name of their agent when I asked them who they worked for or were employed by. As far as this project is concerned, the strong attachment to the manning agent can be explained by the fact that many of the interviewed seafarers were recruited by the same agency, a recruiter who had put a lot of effort into arrangements whose aim was to make the seafarers feel at home and actually feel that they were taken care of. The agency had established associations or clubs in three different Philippine cities where the family members of the seafarers could come together and discuss everything from practical matters concerning their family life to who should be their delegates to the annual party in Manila, a party arranged by the agent for their associates and business contacts.

When the associations gathered, usually once a month, representatives from the agency in Manila were also often present. Questions regarding their husband's or son's contracts, salaries or how to best communicate with the ship where they had their loved ones, could thus be addressed *directly* to those who could influence or provide information on these matters. In addition, the general manager of this recruitment agency contributed personally to create strong ties between the seafarers, their families and the agency. It can be stated that the general manager had been able to personalize a lot of the contracts this organization were handling, in the sense that the seafarers themselves, and their families, felt that it was him personally who had provided them with a job and not just any impersonal agency. This is why the members of this association or club felt obliged to attend to these meetings. At least, this was what they told me. Their sons and/or husbands had been given a chance by this man or by his agency, and they were expressing gratitude or paying off some of the debt of gratitude towards him by joining this association.



A gathering of wives and mothers in Iloilo. They all have that in common that their husband's or son's are employed through one particular manning agent in Manila. Their association usually organizes a meeting once a month.

Besides giving an illustration of what has been described above regarding the significance of personal relationships in the migratory process, the last sections also exemplify some of the reasons why the seafarers identify with the agent. Why should the seafarers not stick to this recruitment agency, with an agent who besides providing jobs, even takes care of their families when they are away? The seaman has so much to be grateful for. Some may argue that arrangements like the association club described above do not affect the seafarer since he is away most of the year. But of course it does: as emphasized over and over again, a seafarer is a family based enterprise. Things will take a bad turn if one starts to look at the seafarers without including the social environment he operates or lives within. Therefore, what this agent does for the seaman's family is also indirectly addressing the one at sea.

In sum this might lead the discussion into what elsewhere has been referred to as fundamental issues in Philippine culture. The keywords are once again *asymmetrical reciprocity* and *utang na loob*. The idea is to maintain that it will be in the interest of this agent to help and support

the families of “their” seafarers because this results in a loyal stock of seamen. One should not, however, disregard the fact that the agent *might* also have a genuine interest in the well-being of the seafarers and their families. What is pointed out here is just some of the social mechanisms that most certainly will be part of the picture in addition to such noble intentions of the agents. In short, the connection is as follows: do someone a favor, and you can expect something in return. If you help a seafarer to find a job and you are supportive towards his family, you can expect a grateful and therefore loyal seafarer in return.

Finally, it must be emphasized that far from all interviewed seafarers felt like those described above. Many of the seamen I talked to were absolutely certain in these questions; the companies were their employers, and the agents, on the other hand, were “*only processing the papers*” as one stated. Nevertheless, in other contexts, the awareness of the significance of the agent once again became clear. One seafarer, for instance, mentioned to me that on board the ships it occurred that the name of the superintendent, the one who was responsible for crewing this particular ship, was used as a call-sign for passing vessels, that is, crew members from other ships knew about and could use the superintendent’s name as one way to achieve contact.

4.4 The broker - some general and concluding remarks

The focus in the last sections has been on three different types of gatekeepers, positions whose main function is to bridge the gap between an articulated wish for an overseas contract among potential migrants and the foreign labor market. We saw further that it is decisive for the migrants to be related by strong ties to these brokers, whether it be directly through the private recruiter, or indirectly through the local patron or the returned migrant.

It is important to notice, however, that it is not always possible to draw a line between the various types of brokers. For instance, sometimes the returned migrant is also the local patron, and from time to time personnel from the professional agents in Manila also leave for the provinces to recruit migrants for their business, an effort which often takes place in

cooperation with a local patron. Therefore, to differ sharply between these dissimilar brokers does not always properly reflect the actual process.

One should also be careful of putting these types of brokers in a juxtaposition regarding their significance in the mass exodus. As stated earlier, the private recruiter can be considered as the main obstacle for the migrants, and it is the professional agent who takes care of most of the actual placements in the overseas labor market. This places the agents in a paramount position in the migration drama, while the local patron and the returned migrant can be considered as suppliers to their work. Nevertheless, should the private recruiter grant an application from a potential migrant, it must be accompanied by some kind of recommendation unless the applicant has a friend or a relative employed in the organization. One could therefore say that also the so-called feeders constitute a decisive element in this process, if not the ultimately deciding factor.

Some may wonder how the selection process carried out by the brokers influences the quality of the migrant workers. How can a foreign employer such as a shipowner be sure that not only those with personal contacts and extra money get a job abroad? How can the companies assume that the employees also possess the necessary skills? One cannot escape the fact that this has been and still is a problem. Potential migrants apply for an overseas job apparently with all the papers, licenses and certificates in perfect order, just to be exposed later on as impostors due to a lack of actual skills and know-how, which again stems from a widespread practice of test cheating. Nevertheless, the main picture is still that the migrants, such as the seafarers, also possess the necessary and demanded skills when they take up a position in the foreign labor market. So despite the selection criteria mentioned above, the one based on social relations and financial resources, the migrants who make it all the way and actually achieve an overseas contract are also most commonly capable of performing a proper job. In order to understand that this broker-performed selection is not influencing to a great extent the quality of the labor force, it is crucial to remember the high number of educated personnel found in the Philippines. For example, the number of potential seafarers who every year graduate from the more than 50 maritime colleges in this country, exceeds many times the number of potential jobs. Some even maintain that more than 90% of the graduates will never make it to sea.

This does not mean, though, that all the students from nautical and marine engineering courses could be turned into actual overseas seafarers. Among other factors, shortcomings in most of the maritime education offered in this country contribute to this. Still, despite an imperfect educational system, a surplus of competent graduates is a fact, at least if one includes different kinds of up-grading courses offered by the companies or the agents. This surplus allows the broker-related selection to continue. As long as the agents are not able to find work for every competent seafarer, they will pick applicants who they in some way or another feel related to and/or applicants who can let under-the-table payment be a part of their application. In line with this, the role of the professional brokers in the migration process can be described as follows: due to the position as providers of labor force to the international labor market, the private recruiters will first of all select the competent applicants. But because of a surplus of skilled workers in the Philippines, they can allow themselves to pick those with certain types of social connections and/or financial resources. It must, however, be emphasized that the present situation is characterized by a surplus only when it comes to ratings. According to the BIMCO study (1995) the international shipping industry is currently experiencing a shortage of officers, and this is a scarcity which will even increase in the years to come.

Part V

Life at sea

“We were all waiting for something to happen.[...] And now here in mid-ocean when decision don't mean a damn because we've got no reality to test their efficacy; only here and now we realize telling ourselves with an obvious conviction, we want a better break”

(George Lamming. *The Emigrants*, 1954)

“[He] wanted to take her hand. But all he did, all he could do was to look at her, and through his fevered mind, she was his sister, she was his mother, she was his sweetheart, she was his wife, ministering to him, talking to him with love, and he was home again”

(Bienvenido Santos. *You Lovely People*, 1955)

A ship is a peculiar arena for social interaction. Besides being highly restricted as far as physical space is concerned, this is a social universe which contains a limited number of people, personnel possessing positions within a rigid and formal hierarchy. I would also like to add that since the whole “place” is constantly moving, a ship constitutes an odd locale for human societies to develop.

This part is divided into two main sections. First, the aim is to point at some selected factors which appear as constitutional in the creation of the working community on board. This includes a brief outline of the formal social organization on board and a description of certain other elements which also are presuppositions for or cornerstones in a maritime world. The idea is that the totality of these rather tangible factors constitutes a framework for a social universe in which certain very interesting and genuine experiences are generated. In other words, the first section will contain an overview over the *arena* or *context* in which the seafarers live the professional part of their lives.

In the second section, however, the spotlight will be directed towards some very significant though less evident layers of the framework outlined in former section. While the first section will be rather cartographic in its character, the second one will contain a dissection of some of the many facets of the *experiences* a life at sea can bring about. The aim is to strive for a deeper understanding of what it means to be a seaman; a comprehension which goes beyond such things as division of labor, rank and perhaps even nationality. Implicit in this discussion I therefore argue that at a certain level, or in terms of certain experiences, a seaman will always be a seaman. Whether a man belongs to the senior officers, or he performs his duties as a rating; when it comes to what I will name a particular attitude or ethos, "*they are all in the same boat*". In other words, I will maintain that since they literally share the same horizon during their time on board, they will also in a metaphorically sense share the same horizon. In this section, I will argue that this social milieu has qualities which are similar to those of a *prison*, and that this is an approach or experience which periodically or permanently is shared by many, if not by all, crew members on board a ship in the Merchant Marine.

The following sections are partly based on my own experiences from life on board – of special importance here is the NIS-registered vessel with a mixed crew I joined in the fall of 1994 on a voyage from Europe to Asia - and partly on how other writers have conceptualized these issues. However, also the seafarers' reports of their periods on board in the interviews will play an intrinsic role in my outline and discussion of these matters.

5.1 What characterizes a ship in the merchant marines?

Over the years, several attempts have been made within the social sciences to establish a list of different criteria of what actually characterizes a ship in the merchant marines. One of the pioneering works in that respect, by Aubert and Arner, was titled “*On the social structure of the ship*” (1958-59:200-219). This work contained a discussion of five various and typical hallmarks of the social organization on board a ship. The first one was related to a notion of the ship as a *total institution*.¹ The term refers to the fact that a ship is not divided into isolated arenas for interaction, but instead it represents a collapse in that respect. This in the sense that the seafarers on board spend 24 hours a day in the same place, and the activities they engage in - both related to work and leisure - are done simultaneously and with the same people. Second, the ship is *isolated* from the families back home, and from the local community and the nation, for that matter. To be on board the ship may lead to a feeling of alienation among the seafarers, since most of the time they are not taking part in the land-based world, and they may even be left with the feeling of being outsiders during their short visits in the society which used to be so familiar.

A third hallmark of the community on board a ship, once again according to Aubert and Arner, is related to the *high turnover rate* among the personnel. The authors suggest a number of explanations for this lack of stability. Among these are problems related to taking a vacation and returning to the same ship, or to see this as one way to prevent conflicts from arising among people who after all live their professional lives on just a few square meters for months or years at the time. The fact that it was not common among the Norwegian sailors in the fifties to receive a permanent appointment or in other ways to become too closely related to one particular company in particular - to be named a “company sailor” really had a negative ring among maritime workers - is also an important element related to this restlessness.²

¹ A more comprehensive discussion of the term total institution, and in which manner this may shed some light upon certain aspects of the community on board, will take place in section 5.2.

² This situation has many similarities with the how the Filipinos formally are employed by the foreign shipowners today. The seafarers are after all Overseas *Contract Workers*, and are therefore, technically speaking, unemployed every time they sign off and go home after a contract period.

Fourth, the ship is a highly specialized social system. According to Aubert and Arner the complex *distribution of positions* on board follow five different principles: rank, function, salary, watch-time and sex. (I will comment on to what degree these classification patterns are valid in the present situation later on in this section). The fifth and final point made by Aubert and Arners is related to the trend that the officers on board were yesterday's ratings. That is, it is very common that an officer's career follow an *unbroken line* from the lower to the higher ranks; they work their way up, so to speak.

Many years later, Sørhaug and Aamodt (1980) claimed that the list made by Aubert and Arner still to a certain extent was valid, even though they saw it as a necessity to add to this framework an extremely complicated system for *wage contracts*, in addition to this comes fact that the vessels are almost exclusively manned by *men* (p. 23-24)³. Sørhaug and Aamodt's objective was further to illuminate what these all in all seven factors were hiding as far as values and meaning - that is, *culture* - was concerned. In other words, according to Sørhaug and Aamodt these seven points denotes a framework for a certain cultural content, which again was something they paid special attention to. What they saw as crucial cultural elements or aspects of the society on board, was related to issues such as the specialized hierarchy in the organization; how a totality in the situation on board is expressed in a variety of ways; the paramount position of work and work ethics among the seamen and likewise how money appear to be *the* strong inducement factor for choosing this profession. Sørhaug and Aamodt also emphasis how a maritime culture comes into being through the seafarer's involvement in values and behavior such as individuality and independence, and also from the way they speak and the topics they pick for discussion. Also the manner in which the Norwegian seamen tend to split the world into two separate parts, sea vs. land, was by Sørhaug and Aamodt treated as a cornerstone in the seafaring culture.⁴

³ As we see, gender studies has made its way into academic communities since Aubert and Arner had published their work.

⁴ In the next section I will go deeper into different cultural aspects of the life on board. As we will see, some of my concerns in that respect will differ slightly from the list above. This is partly because I choose to focus on other things than Sørhaug and Aamodt, but also because the Norwegian shipping industry has undergone some major changes during the last two decades. For instance, the comprehensive substitution of Norwegian personnel with Filipinos on board Norwegian vessels, has brought about some alterations in the seafaring culture.

A slightly different outline of what characterizes the seafaring profession, or more precise the life on board, has been introduced by Estellie Smith (1977:10-11). Smith does not divide her classification into two parts, like the one above; that is, one pivoting around the structure and one around the so-called culture. Instead she come up with eight different factors which she see as typical for life on board, points mentioned independent of their ontological status in an analytical structure/cultural dichotomy. Besides what is already included in such a list - for instance the total character of the social environment and the isolation the seamen experience on board - Smith in her analytical operation also stresses the importance of a vessel's particular architectural features, and herein the limited possibilities for recreation while the seafarers are on board.

The aim of the outline so far has been to give some brief examples of how the seafaring profession and life on board has been a topic for discussion among members of the scientific community. With this framework in mind, I find it pertinent to be more specific or go more into detail on some of the main points given above. However, as will become evident in the following sections, some new factors are also taken into consideration. This is done because of certain alterations in the situation in the maritime industry. For instance the fact that it is today very common to have personnel from different nations or different parts of the world represented on board a ship, is a relatively new element in the social organization on board.

The social organization of the ship

The social environment on a ship is far from homogeneous. Rather, this is an institution which contains several lines of demarcation; formal and informal markers which crisscross the organization and in different ways divide, group and categorize the people staying there. The first and most obvious way to approach this fragmented social setting, is to have *the division of labor* as a point of departure.

The overall purpose of a ship is to transport cargo from one place to another. The seafarers on board - approximately 20-25 in number - are there to make sure this happens smoothly and on time. In other words, a ship is first and foremost a work place. The specific tasks, on the other hand, are performed within three different departments. The people in the engine department

are responsible for all the technical equipment on board; primarily the main engine which propels the ship, but also equipment like air-condition installations and the stoves in the mess (Serck-Hansen 1997:20). The main concern of the personnel in the deck department is navigation, maintenance and handling of cargo (both to load and unload, and to avoid damages while the vessel is at high sea). However, the current contact with the shipowner, agents and the ship chandlers is also the deck department's responsibility. The third and last section on board is the mess department in which the chief cook is in charge. He is responsible for preparing the meals - often assisted by the messman and perhaps a messboy - and for handling the supplies (in consultation with the captain). The chief cook helpers are also those who take care of all the cleaning; the cabins of the officers, the living room etc. (Serck-Hansen 1997:20).

If I were to come up with some general comments in relation to the division of labor on board, I would relate these to two rather different perspectives on this issue. The first bundle of arguments will focus on the *openness* or the element of *publicity* in how knowledge is managed on board. The second approach towards the maritime division of labor, however, is more in line with how it has been presented so far in this section, namely as a constellation of highly *specialized* positions.

In the book *Between the devil and the deep blue sea* (1987), the historian Marcus Rediker emphasizes how extensive the distribution of knowledge used to be on board a sailship in the eighteenth century. He claims for example that the seamen, regardless of which position they occupied on board, were able to know, to judge and even to a certain degree perform the different tasks on board a ship⁵ (1987:95). Moreover, a split between manual and mental labor, which we later on will see implemented or practiced in land based industrial production, was never a very tangible hallmark with maritime work (1987:87). Is there reason to believe that this high level of knowledge also is a reality among sailing personnel today? The situation with a strong public element in the work performed on board may have changed slightly when the ships gradually became more technologically advanced. Perhaps it is so that the need for highly specialized skills has lessened the general level of know-how among the

⁵ Joseph Conrad's (1995) description of the young captain who should be in charge for a ship for the first time, and the dilemmas he is facing when taken into consideration that his crew

seafarers. I will maintain, however, that a seaman of today still to a relatively large degree is informed about and able to perform a wide range of the tasks on board, regardless of whether these tasks are within his specific area of responsibility or not.

Experience is one of the explaining factors for this. It is after all an unalterable fact that to be a professional seaman means to live and work together with a limited number of people and on just a few square meters for a rather long period of time,. In sum, this should pave the way for a far-reaching exchange of information among the people on board. In other words, the *on board totality* which Rediker describes from his historical angle, is to a certain extent or at one level a reality even today. I also see the contemporary and well-informed seafarer in relation to the existence of a standardized maritime educational system. An officer of today has after all been under the influence of a formal maritime education for some years, in which he also has learned about ship management on a broad basis and not just what is related to his future department or position on board. A seaman will also in this respect know or be aware of what his fellow men are doing when they execute their different tasks on board.

The aim of the discussion so far has been to emphasize on the fact that the maritime community on board *do* contain an apparent element of shared horizon among the seafarers, at least as far as professional knowledge or work related tasks are concerned. However, a ship is perhaps better known for its hierarchy and fragmented organization. The following discussion will be pivoting around some aspects of this complex maritime classification system.

Let me start with a brief outline of the actual situation on board. Up to the present, *rank* has been the central organizing principle within the different departments on board (although it might be so that new communication technology will challenge and change this picture somewhat in the future). It has already been mentioned that the chief cook is in charge of the mess department. In the engine room, the chief engineer is at the top, followed by (at least on board Norwegian vessels) the 1st and 2nd engineer, the fitter, the oiler and the wiper. In the deck department, ordinary seaman (OS) is the position of lowest rank. Above the OS we have the able-bodied seaman (AB), the bosun, the 3rd and 2nd officer or mate and the chief officer or

are far more experienced than him, is an excellent illustration of the visibility of the different working tasks on board.

mate. At the very top of the deck department, and at the top of all the departments for that matter, we find the captain or master.

Peter H. Fricke illustrates the rank situation on board by claiming that no crew members actually are on the same level (1974:23). And even though this statement may be a topic for discussion - for instance, I guess some will agree with me on letting the status of the officers in the deck and engine department roughly correspond to one another - Fricke does, by emphasizing the complexity, point at an intrinsic aspect of the organization on board. The sailing personnel are classified both in terms of their rank and in terms of their function or work on board. In sum, this constitutes an organization that is far more complex and subtle than what characterizes a land based industrial plant, this according to Aubert and Arner (1958-59:212). While the workers on shore are - at least when these are treated in a very ideal typical or traditional manner - seen in contrast only to the management of the plant, the crew on board are divided into several layers or different rank levels. As we shall see, this challenges the idea introduced above in which the ship was seen as an arena for shared or well-distributed knowledge. Perhaps we can state that the organization of a ship first and foremost is a refined *bricolage* as far as function is concerned, and not so dispersed or fragmented when it comes to the distribution of the knowledge which is needed to perform the different work related tasks? This statement is in line with what Edwin Hutchins one place claims in the book "*Cognition in the wild*" (1995): "*All divisions of labor, whether the labor is physical or cognitive in the nature, require distributed cognition in order to coordinate the activities of the participants*" (1995:176).

Nevertheless, the same book by Hutchins is also a good illustration of the complexity that after all is a constitutional element in ship management and the maritime organization. Hutchins's main concern is to see how navigation is performed and coordinated by a team on board a vessel from the US Navy, and the cognitive operations or processes involved in such a task. He stresses in that respect that certain navigation duties are so complex that they cannot be performed by a single individual, and are therefore executed by a team. In other words, the analytical unity in the work of Hutchins, is located beyond the single individual and instead it consist of a collection of persons involved in solving tasks which are so elaborated that they demand cooperation.

Sometimes Hutchins makes use of lively descriptions to illuminate the cognitive aspects of this type of work. One of his narratives, one in which the complexity really comes into life, gives an extensive description of how a team, consisting of at least 6 persons, were involved in navigating a ship from open sea and into port (1995:43-48). Through this example, Hutchins manages to bring out how every man involved give a genuine contribution in solving the actual task. Every crew member, whether it was the two pelorus operators or the one in charge of the fathometer, gave important bits and pieces of information, and when put together by the officer in charge, they produced the relevant knowledge so the whole navigation operation could be successful.

In general terms, this leaves us with an impression of the ship as a highly specialized working place, but at the same time as an organization which after all, and in different ways, requires cooperation and coordination, as well as concentration and accuracy from its members in order to fulfill its purposes. Moreover, this working community is not only challenged by the rigid division of labor and by the emphasis on rank, but also what might be hidden of potential conflicts and misunderstanding in miscellaneous nationalities or cultures, can modify or threaten a sense of shared understanding.

Nationality is therefore the third dividing principle on board. Seen in relation to the ethnographic field of this thesis, this means that to be a Filipino vs. a Norwegian is in certain situations and within particular domains turned into a relevant issue as far as the frequency and the quality of the social interaction is concerned. Take for instance the leisure time on board the vessel I joined for three weeks back in 94: during the journey, I seldom saw the Norwegian captain or the Norwegian chief engineer for that matter, engage in some of the typical off-duty activities together with the Filipinos. Typical activities for the Filipinos are for instance watching a movie, enjoying a game of chess or making use of the karaoke gadget. Also, in the coffee breaks this trend was obvious; the Filipinos in the duty mess, the Norwegians in the hall.

The fragmentation based on cultural differences must also, of course, be juxtaposed with or seen in relation to rank. It is not that common for the Filipinos to be hired as high rank

officers on board Norwegian ships⁶, so the distance between the Norwegians and the Filipinos might just as well stem from disparities in rank rather than from the different colors of their passports. Nevertheless, the broad picture is still that national differences frequently constitute a dividing factor in the social interaction on board, and it is therefore also relevant to emphasize on this issue as a central aspect of the ship society.

I will not elaborate further on the importance of cultural differences in the onboard community. It should go without saying that a heterogeneous cultural setting may lead to cliques and communication problems among the crew. As we have already seen, rank can also influence on the knowledge dispersal on board. Nevertheless, compared to what a life-long internalization of a strongly diverging cultural horizon do with peoples worldview and appearances, rank is of secondary importance. In other words, no wonder that people from very different backgrounds often or from time to time have problems in establishing a shared understanding of certain phenomena or in certain situations, and that this characteristic therefore represents potentially an important demarcation line in the organization on board.

This rather static outline of some of the dividing and uniting principles within the ship society, must be seen as just one attempt to illuminate some aspects of the framework which surrounds the Filipino seafarers 10 months a year, and which, to a certain degree, dictates or sets restrictions on their everyday life on board. In the next section we will also see - in addition to rank, division of labor and national or cultural differences - how the position of absence and seclusion are important elements of the ship society as well. Also the fact that a contract period seldom includes more than just a few hours or perhaps days in port will then be taken into consideration as an intrinsic premise for the character of the seaman's profession.

The intention of this section has therefore not been to give an extensive and lively description of the daily life at sea - such a task would require a more comprehensive fieldwork on board. In the following pages, I will instead give a more generalized outline of the character or the

⁶ This has changed slightly over the last years. It is now more common to also make use of Filipinos as senior officers on board. This can partly be explained as a result of a "natural" succession in a seaman's career; those who started as low-rank crew members some years ago, has now gained a top officer's experience and certificates. Also the fact that it is a serious scarcity of naval officers in the world today - which may lead to higher degree of employment of educated personnel - is a part of this picture.

quality of the life at sea. Or, to put it slightly differently: the spotlight will not be on how the seafarers in detail live their lives on a day-to-day basis, the focus will rather be on a more existential level of their time at sea. Perhaps we can say, as I already have suggested in the introduction to this part, that the next section is partly operating on a level in which a seaman is a seaman, independent of rank, function or nationality. What is actually hiding behind such a root theme in the maritime culture, will be illuminated in the following section.

However, the informants are not forgotten or neglected in this approach either. The main source for the elaboration below is how the seafarers chose to describe or sum up their profession in the interviews I conducted both on board the ships and in the Philippines. Matters of particular interest are the metaphors they applied when they wanted to grasp what they saw as the nerve or the essence of their contract periods at sea.

5.2 The seafaring experience

Let me start with the conclusion: the life at sea can be named a *state of exception*. To be a professional seafarer involves a membership in an alternative society or reality. In other words, a ship is, in short, an extreme and abnormal place to be; it is almost impossible to find a corresponding society elsewhere. A ship is therefore in its character an exceptional or an unexampled place, and the experiences the seafarers obtain after completing the contract periods on board may be unique.

When I refer to a ship's abnormal qualities, I first and foremost relate this to the following components: it is floating and constantly in motion; it is populated by a limited number of people - mostly men - who are replaced from time to time; the space on board is very limited, and the division of labor and the social organization is rigid and hierarchical. All these elements considered in isolation is of course not enough to reveal the exceptional character of the merchantman's conditions - small and hierarchical working organizations are quite common throughout the world - however, the potential for unexampled *experiences* will become clear when we see them all together. In other words, it is the combination of these factors which *might* nourish or generate certain unique experiences.

Nevertheless, in order to properly illuminate and discuss this uniqueness, I find it necessary to uphold a fragmented presentation of this social universe. But, I have chosen to group or arrange the different components in a slightly different way, compared to the list given above. The basic idea is simply to interpret the way the seamen conceptualize their life at sea within a wider frame of reference. This elaboration will comprise to see the seafaring experience in relation to what take place in total institutions in general, and a prison in particular. The coming description of the seafaring profession will also include a discussion in which it is maintained that the seafaring experience corresponds to a special experience of time or duration. The focus will among other things be pivoted around how the extremely routinized life on board might generate a sense of timelessness among the seafarers. However, my point of departure will be to give some concrete examples of the metaphors used by the seafarers themselves when they should describe everyday life at the seven seas, and to suggest some theoretical implications of this way of communicating.

5.2.1 The ship seen as a prison

"I basically see myself as a prisoner on board", said a retired chief engineer to me once. This statement was his way of summing up what he saw as an intrinsic element of his seafaring career. He was not alone, though, in making use of terms and metaphors which linked life on board to what takes place in a prison. A question might therefore be: why is it so common among the seafarers to expose their working place in such a manner? Or in what way can the prison metaphor illuminate aspects of life at sea? Before an outline is given on how such a connection is common and quite understandable, let me present certain other typical statements and examples.

Some of the seafarers I interviewed claimed that it was common to name the working contract *"a sentence,"* and in line with this joke about how many months they have left of their judgment on board - for instance when chatting with people on board other vessels. One seaman told me about the letter he wrote to his girlfriend, in which he wondered what he had done to deserve this sentence; he could not remember that he had violated the law, still, he was out there serving a ten-month *senténsiyá* (Tagalog).

Others again made explicit use of the prison term or at least found it adequate when they highlighted certain negative aspects of the life at sea. For instance, an AB I interviewed agreed on linking the society on board to a prison-like arena since *"you live only on a small place. You meet every day the same people. You see every day the same places. You see the land, you see the sea, and you see the clouds, the stars, and the moon. Every morning when you wake up, you go to the kitchen, take a cup of coffee, talk about the same things - about work. And then after that, 08.00 start working, 10.00 coffee, 12.00 lunch, 13.00 start working again, 15.00 coffee, 17.00 dinner. Then after 18.00 [you might have some] overtime, if not you go to the recreation place, listen to some music, watch TV..."*. Another seafarer I met came with similar assertions. This man referred to the ship as a *"mobile prison"*, and explained what he meant by saying *"you go out, and you know that you have to come back again"*. A third seaman I interviewed phrased his experience this way: *"[Yes, it is a prison on board] because you have nothing to do, only to work, work and work"*. He continued by saying, after giving me an elaborated description of a typical day on board, similar to the one above, that *"[on*

board we have] no Sundays, only Mondays". A fourth seaman said to me that: "*If there is 24 hours a day, we spend 25 hours while we are on board*". What he meant was that a seafarer always has to be prepared for an emergency situation while he is on board. Even when he is off duty and at sleep, this is the case.

Not all the seafarers I interviewed made use of such poetical words and expression to tie their experiences to a prison-like reality. The majority of the people who agreed on using this term - it is important to notice that some did not find it applicable at all for what they saw as essential for their experience at sea - simply pointed to the fact that a vessel is similar to a prison in the sense that both constructions involve seclusion or isolation from the outside world. For instance, one of the seafarers I met, who had his daily work on a tanker - a type of ship which is seldom in port, maybe just 3-4 times during a 10-month period, the cargo is instead discharged at buoys perhaps as much as 10-15 nautical miles from the seashore - described the seclusion as follows: "*imagine, to be forced to just look at the buildings at the shore*".

How should we understand the seafarers use of the term prison in their descriptions of how the life at sea can be like? To what extent can we base our comprehension on some kind of face value - maybe the ship and the prison actually share so many similarities that it is pertinent for the seamen to speak of a prison on board? Or perhaps we should solely be concerned with the seafarer's presentation of the life on board in a strictly metaphorically manner, that is, to name the ship a prison is exclusively meant as a *picture* of certain aspects of the contract period on board? The discussion on the following pages will make use of both these angles. The aim will on the one hand be to accentuate some of the attributes the ship society obviously have in common with the public run institution called a prison, while the object on the other hand will be to investigate somewhat further the content of the prison metaphor. For instance, what the seafarers explicitly point at or what they refer to when they name their working place a prison, will be one of the questions asked in this context.

Before I go on with this rather complex, twofold operation, let me once and for all state that at the bottom line of this issue lies the *metaphor*. To draw a line between a social universe on board a ship and a prison reality cannot be anything else than a metaphoric operation. This is due to the simple fact that a ship in the merchant marine is *not* a prison, and a seaman is after

all *not* a prisoner. These organizations differ sharply when it comes to questions about what constitute the basis and overall goal for their activity - profitable transportation vs. punishment and isolation - and in what way the single individuals become parts of these organizations. For example, it is common to claim that the decision to become a seafarer ultimately is deeply rooted in some sort of individual voluntariness, while the conclusion of being jailed or not, is located at a macro or conventional level, and therefore it is something which is in many ways beyond the influence of the single individual. To put it in an even more obvious or banal way: to become a seaman is something people usually want and therefore strive for, in contrast to a life behind bars, which is, perhaps with a few exceptions, a situation people do a lot to avoid.

Despite the fact that a prison and a ship - both seen as specialized institutions and as motives for individual behavior - in certain profound ways are in sharp contrast to one another, it is still possible to draw parallels between these two entities. As we soon will see, there are some aspects or qualities with the ship society, and hence with the seafaring experience, which are similar or identical to the situation in a prison. Below I will draw a picture in which these matching qualities will be the running theme. This elaboration is inspired by the work of Erving Goffman, and his focus on the type of organization commonly referred to as total institutions.

Nevertheless, first I would like to emphasize that the link between the ship and the jail also is unveiled by the seafarers when they apply the prison metaphor to indicate how life can be like on board. In this case, it is important to bear in mind the following: a metaphor is not an arbitrary entity since it cannot be viewed or understood isolated from the way people make use of it. In other words, the fact that people apply concepts and expressions "*which allow us to understand one domain of experience in terms of another*" - to quote a definition of a metaphor developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980:117) - should indicate that there is an *actual* connection between the fields which are combined. This is not necessarily an objective or "real" similarity, however, the connection might primarily be based on how people view or experience certain issues.

For the sake of curiosity, let me already at this stage mention that life at sea also can be a helpful image for people located at the opposite end of the metaphor, namely the prisoners. At least this was the case for Jimmy Boyle, a long-term prisoner who published his diaries back in 1985. In one of his many reports, addressed to his girlfriend, he pessimistically describe the life behind bars as “*I’m so at sea in this place that I’m trying not to be drawn into it*” (1985:238).

It should also be stressed that even though a metaphor is not an arbitrary entity, this does not mean that it is a one-dimensional and tangible part of our vocabulary, and hence of our way of conceptualizing our stock of experience and communication with our fellow beings. To highlight, downplay and hide particular properties of the so-called domains of experience, which is the source or the basis for the metaphor, will always be part of the process of metaphorization (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:149). In other words, through a recurrent use of a certain metaphor, its potential as a signifier is revealed and narrowed, since a limited content or a bounded direction is ascribed to the metaphor. Or to put it in a slogan like manner: a metaphor contains a potential for *some* signifying abilities, not *all* and not *one*.¹

Recall the starting point for this discussion; namely the seafarer's use of the prison metaphor. It is apparent that this particular metaphor is not picked out at random by the seafarers. There is something about the content of the term *prison* which makes it suitable for the purpose of illustrating some of the qualities of the life on board. For instance, I did not hear anybody say “*I feel like a farmer on board*”. This phrase seems utterly meaningless in this context, or at least it demands a great deal of clarification and explanation before it can appear as an appropriate illustration of what the life at the seven seas can be like. To locate a land bound farmer on board a floating vessel, would be to combine two domains which usually are regarded as unrelated, except perhaps as contrasts or opposites to each other. To juxtapose a farmer and a seaman would create a constellation in which it is very difficult or even impossible to see any preexisting or experienced similarity. A farmer is therefore not applicable as a metaphor of the life at the seven seas.

¹ I have elsewhere suggested that the signification process in general can be seen as something which includes *motivert flertydighet* or motivated arbitrariness (Lamvik 1994:109).

However, this does not mean that a metaphor always is conventional or based on well-established connections. Seemingly new and unexpected similarities or metaphors do occur, although it would be equally correct to claim that these *new* constellations solely are entities based on a similarity at a different level. In other words, metaphORIZATION may involve an eruption of new reality, but new reality in the sense of unconventional similarity. To create new reality with the help of metaphors is basically to juxtapose some entities which according to convention are not seen in relation to each other.

In accordance to this preliminary discussion, and bearing the work of Lakoff and Johnson from 1980 in mind, the metaphor can be viewed as follows: To metaphorically link or combine two domains or sectors of the human world, is not solely a matter of language, although this is important. That is, to make use of this particular signifying entity - the metaphor does not only involve an objectivized message stored in a certain language. It is essential to also include the nerve of real life in the understanding and analysis of the metaphor. In other words, since a metaphor is an important tool in the ongoing effort of imposing meaning onto the world, people's first hand experiences from their own everyday life should definitely be a part of this analysis as well.

Some critiques might say that, with this particular view of the metaphor entity, I am flirting with what is commonly referred to as the objectivistic approach. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), the objectivistic perspective presupposes the idea of a disembodied or objective meaning, that "*the world is made up of distinct objects, with inherent properties and fixed relations among them at any instant*" (p. 210), which again turn the metaphor into "*matters of mere language*" (p. 211), and the similarity created by the metaphor is based on *inherent* properties rather than *interactional* properties (p. 215). The latter characteristic corresponds basically to what I above referred to as "*the nerve of real life*".

What I am trying to achieve by including some ideas from the objectivistic perspective in my analysis, however, is once again to point at or accentuate the fact that a ship and a prison are identical as far as some constitutional elements are concerned. The aim is therefore to seek support within the objectivistic view for an operation which goal solely is to emphasize the obvious, objective similarity between these different social institutions. There is something in the stored or inherent meaning of the term prison and the term ship that generates some of the

same associations in most people, provided that they are able to understand the words in the first place. For example, notions such as lack of freedom and isolation, and tediousness in a throughout male and uniformed world, are recurrent ideas among a lot of people when they are facing or think about these institutions. In other words, I will claim that a prison and a ship belong, in the minds of many English-speaking people, to the same domain of experience or stock of knowledge, which again direct the prisoner and the seafarer into the same sort of social universe. It is common to denominate this particular type of social universe a *total institution*.

5.2.2 The total institution

Put simply, we can claim that a prison and a seagoing vessel are similar to a certain extent, since both can be denominated *total institutions*. As mentioned above, this expression was introduced to the scientific community by the sociologist Erving Goffman, in his famous book *Asylums*, published in 1961. My intention in the following pages, however, is neither to introduce and to give an outline of all the concepts and ideas present in Goffman's work on this issue, nor to view the society on board from every angle he make use of in his endeavor to unveil some of the secrets of the total institution. Instead the aim will be to highlight just a few of what is said to be the constituting elements in the total institution as such. First, a brief, general account will be given for exactly what characterizes a total institution; for instance, one of the questions asked is related to what the term *total* refers to in this case. Secondly, what are the implications of these institutions for the single individual; what happens to the people inside this particular social environment? Thirdly, with this general approach towards the total institution in mind; why is it relevant to see the ship as a total institution?²

² I'm aware of that regard a vessel in the Merchant Marines as a total institution can create problems. The community on board differ in many ways sharply from other and perhaps more typical total institutions. There are for example – as Fricke points out in his outline – no clientele or inmates on board such a vessel, instead it is correct to treat the seafarer as a occupational category (Fricke 1974:99). Nevertheless, despite the potential problems in this perspective, I still see qualities with the term total institution which makes it useful when approaching certain aspects of the seaman's everyday life.

The so-called seamless web, which consists of man-made threads of significance that makes the world appear as meaningful for its creators and inhabitants, is an extremely complex construction. We live our lives by, along and inside a wide range of dimensions, different levels of reality, and imagined and factual places. During a day, or an hour for that matter, we might physically find ourselves in one place while we mentally blend into a number of other moods and realities. If we narrow this multitude down to more well-known terms and entities, we can say that in an urbanized society of today, it is common to work in one place, sleep in another and play in a third place. *Differentiation* might therefore be a keyword for those lives lived in societies distinguished by a potential for organic solidarity, to make use of the Durkheimian expression.

To enter into a total institution is to leave this multitude behind and instead be surrounded by and eventually be part of an universe which is “*something more than a formal organization, but [...] something less than a community*” (Goffman 1961:103). In brief, a total institution contains a social environment where the split between a private family life, work and leisure has disappeared. “*One monolithic social experience*” (Morgan et.al 1991:279) is instead occupying the space of the multitude of the civil society.

Before we take a closer look at this deprived type of experience, I will give a brief outline of the total institution as a phenomenon in the society at large. Goffman chooses to divide these institutions into five rather different categories, where each type corresponds to the type of overall program or purpose the institutions have for their existence (Goffman 1961:16). First of all, it is fruitful to talk about a type of institution which objective is to take care of certain helpless and harmless people. Homes for the blind and the aged may stand as examples of this category of institution. Secondly, while the inmates in the first category were reconsidered to be harmless in their helplessness, the people in the second class are looked upon as a threat to the civil society, at the same time as they are in need for care. The mental hospital is the example *par excellence* of this type of total institution. The third category in Goffman’s cartography on this issue, refers to the people that society or the moral community has agreed on are dangerous or a threat and therefore not wanted as members of the civil society. Sometimes this is a permanent exclusion, in other cases it is just for limited period of time.

The concentration camp and the prison may be two tangible examples of how the civil society is sheltered from certain individuals or certain categories of people.³

The fourth type of total institution differs to some extent from the former. While category one, two and three presupposes, in some way or another, the use or threat of force, or at least extensive persuasion, the fourth category is to a larger extent based on voluntariness. In his description of these institutions, Goffman emphasizes that they are “*established [...] to pursue some work-like task and justifying themselves only on these instrumental grounds*” (1961:16). Merchant ships, military barracks, work camps and boarding schools, are some of the examples given by Goffman in this connection. *Renouncement* may be the running theme for the people who live their lives in the institutions, which is the fifth and last category in Goffman’s classification scheme. What I am aiming at with this term is the voluntary seclusion that is a consequence of choosing a life in for instance a monastery and a convent.

We should now have an idea of which entities in the society the term total institution is referring to. Moreover, we notice that the prison and the ship are considered to belong to different categories in this brief outline. I do not find it particularly interesting and relevant, though, to uphold this classification system in the following discussion - nor did Goffman himself as a matter of fact. The aim should instead be to identify some of the characteristics that we are able to find in almost every institution represented in the five categories, including of course the ship and the prison. In other words, the focus in the following will be on what a vessel in the merchant marine and a jail has in common, which again constitutes the background for the seafarer's use of the prison metaphor. Section 5.2.2.1 will have as its point of departure the transformation people need to go through when they are supposed to stay in one of these institutions, while section 5.2.2.2 will contain an outline of how the monotonous life inside is structured, as far as time scheduling is concerned.

³ The concentration camp is very applicable as an illustration of some of the processes taking place in total institutions in general. Since the social environment in these camps were so extreme - with both its stump and subtle terror, performed on the shoulders of a bureaucratic or industrial mentality - some of the constituting elements in this type of organization may more easily appear. Still, I have this hunch that the reason the “KZ-lager” so frequently is

5.2.2.1 A total institution is a secluded place

A total institution is usually surrounded by tangible borders. They can be made of everything from a barbed wire fence, oceans of seawater or solid bricks. Since this type of institution presupposes some sort of enclosure, people usually know this when they have entered this particular social universe, or they are made aware of this fact from the people who are already there. It is prevalent to split the latter class of people into two categories, staff and inmates. The staff are those who are just partially involved in this secluded place - their presence corresponds to their wage working hours. Inmates, on the other hand, are inside these tangible borders on a more or less permanent basis⁴. The discussion on the following pages will, unless something else is explicitly stated, have the inmate as its running theme.

A large portion of Goffman's work on total institutions can be viewed as an attempt to understand how this inmate is created or how he or she is molded in accordance with the ideology or the character of the total institution.⁵ The transformation a person undergoes from the civil society and into this enclosed social environment, is by Goffman named *the moral career* of the inmate, "a career composed of the progressive changes that occur in the beliefs that he has concerning himself and significant others" (Goffman 1961:24). An important element in this process is the so-called *mortification of self*, an intentional or unintentional effort from the one in charge of the institution, which aim is to *undress* the newcomer so the threads towards the civil society is cut off or at least weakened; made less significant. To

applied by Goffman as an example has *also* something to do with his own Jewish heritage, and of course of the fact that when *Asylums* were written, the war was just 10-15 years behind.

⁴ I do not find the terms *staff* and *inmates* very applicable in illuminating the society I myself experienced on board, or in relation to how others have described life on board for that matter. Nevertheless, if we still should classify the organization on board a vessel with the help of these concepts, it could be claimed that the Westerners, for instance the Norwegians, are reminiscent of the *staff*, while the personnel from a third world country, such as the Philippines, share some similarities with the *inmates*. The Norwegians are after all the directors of this floating community - they share the citizenship with the owners and they are often the officers in charge on board - and their sea duty per year is often just one fourth of what is common among the Filipinos.

⁵ There should be no doubt about where or among whom the heart of Goffman is to be found, namely the inmates. According to Morgan et.al. (1991:278) Goffman's work on this issue can be viewed as an explicit condemnation of the effect the total institution has on the lives of the inmates. We also sense his concern when counting the number of pages in *Asylums* which he spend on an outline of the life of the inmates, in contrast to for instance the staff. The respectively numbers are 50 vs. 15.

literally and symbolically undress a person - that is, to expose self for “*abasements, degradations, humiliations, and profanations*” (1961:24) - is accomplished so that the person relatively smoothly can be re-created as an inmate in the name of the authoritative *horarium*.

To reassemble genuine persons into more uniformed *inmates*, is by Morgan et.al. called the second aspect of the inmate’s moral career (1991:279). This *reorganization of the self* is exemplified by the patient in a hospital and how he or she here is equipped with things such as new clothes, hospital friends, a new status as patient, etc. (1991:279). The third and last element in the moral career is made up of the “*different personal lines of adaptation*” (Goffman 1961:61) employed by the inmate in the various phases of this career. Goffman refers to four different adaptation patterns (1961:61-63). The first one he names *situational withdrawal*. The inmate undergoes some sort of regression - he does not pay attention to his surroundings except perhaps for what takes place in his immediate physical presence. The second type of adaptation is referred to as the *intransigent line*. The inmate appears as a rebel who constantly challenges the system and refuses to cooperate with the staff. *Colonization* is the third way of adaptation, according to Goffman. The inmate feels actually *at home* inside the institutional borders. He prefers to be surrounded by this rather narrow and stable social universe, instead of having an everyday life out in the civil society. The fourth and last line of adaptation put forward by Goffman is named *conversion*. When the inmate is acting in accordance with this ideal type he is adopting the staff’s view of himself. He surrenders to the system by appearing for instance as the perfect inmate: “*as someone whose institutional enthusiasm [...] always [is] at the disposal of the staff*” (1961:63).

The reason why I’m emphasizing the expression *moral career* in my discussion, is that this might help us understand that to spend a considerable period of time - primarily as an inmate - inside a total institution, demands “*progressive changes*”, to use Goffman’s own words. When on the inside, one cannot go on as one did outside. The total institution is a different world that requires a change on part of the inmate. At least will a transformation in accordance with the institution’s rules and regulations ease the pain the inmate might experience behind the bars.

Before I continue and focus on some of the important aspects of this particular social milieu, let me briefly recollect the starting point for this discussion - namely the seafarers use of the prison metaphor - and clarify a little bit in what way the effort so far can shed some light on that issue. I will maintain that the physical boarders which surrounds the total institutions, simply in themselves represents a possible explanation of the linguistic phenomenon found among the seafarers. Let me be more specific. It can be claimed that the seamen, when including the prison metaphor in their vocabulary, juxtapose the ocean and the concrete bricks as intrinsic constituting elements of their respective social environments. It is as if they are stating that what the sea does to the life on board, the man made walls presumably do with everyday life in a jail. Both the seawater and the walls are something which put constraints on or enclose their respective social worlds. In other words, because of the water that constantly surrounds a ship, the freedom of movement is rather limited on board. It is actually *as if* the seafarers are locked up in a prison.

5.2.2.2 A total institution follow a certain pace

A total institution is not only constituted by its boarders, and the use of the prison metaphor does not only stem from the element of or *de facto* isolation the seafarers are facing during their time on board. Just as important, when the aim is to comprehend some of the processes in these institutions - the ship included - is to accentuate/focus on the *content* of what the boarders enclose. Over the next pages, I will attempt to isolate certain aspects the experience generated inside a total institution in general, and what takes place on board a ship in particular. The enclosed, encompassing and highly routinized character of the reality in this type of institution, which all together might generate a deprived type of experience, will be of special interest. Also how these elements give life to a certain "*beat*" in the social organization will be an important part of the discussion.

As already mentioned above, a total institution is characterized by an absence of the three different parts or sectors which divide the civil society in to various arenas - sleep, work and pleasure. The removal of the multitude of the civil society, in favor of one single arena and a number of internal rules and regulations, is basically what the term *total* refers to. A total institution is *total* since it aspires to meet or handle all or at least several aspects of a person.

The totality is apparent both in relation to the different needs of a person and what concerns the scheduling of the everyday life inside the institution.

The former type of totality corresponds in certain ways to the first stages in Maslows famous outline of the various human needs. The model describes human needs as something that follow the pattern of a staircase, where we have the basic or primary needs at the bottom, and the more secondary ones as we gradually approach the top. In general we can say that a total institution pays attention to the more fundamental human needs. The inmates in these institutions are cared for primary in a basic manner. For some institutions, the objective is simply to keep the inmates in custody for a certain period of time, and this will not involve any efforts at all except perhaps for sufficient food, some cloths and a shelter. The prison, at least the way it used to be, can be applied as an example of this type of institution. Other types of total institutions, however, will try to include in the organization as much as possible from the civil society and a family life outside the walls⁶. In other words, the people in charge of these organizations will meet or care for the inmate in multiple ways; they will strive to satisfy, relatively speaking, many of the inmates needs. Institutions in the health sector might be an illustration of this type of totality. For instance, who haven't heard that it is no longer *comme il faut* to talk about "*the kidney in room 304*", people in the health sector are nowadays instead supposed to make use of a so-called *holistic* approach towards the patients.

A total institution is also total in terms of the *scheduling practice* in these types of organizations. A total institution can briefly be named an "*around the clock world*", in the sense that the institution - with its tasks and routines - concerns the inmate 24 hours a day. Everything he or she does during a typical day takes place at a particular point in time. In other words, the inmates are facing an encompassing schedule in which there is a fixed time for sleep, for food, for work and for relaxation. Sometimes even the time spent at the toilet is fixed in these places. Another important and closely related element in this encompassing schedule, is what we may call *synchronicity*. The people of the institution (first and foremost the inmates) are not only told what to do; they often do it simultaneously as well. This is basically what Goffman thinks about when he denotes the life of the inmates as *batch living*

⁶ To such a degree that the institutions even are named *homes* just to underline the similarity or the link between the world inside and outside.

(1961:22). I also regard the work of Victor Turner, and his term *communitas*, as useful in the context of approaching this synchronicity (see for example Turner 1974 and 1969).

I can briefly illustrate this togetherness with an example. A seafarer on board a vessel in the merchant marine can assume as a matter of course that his various actions during a day or a week are performed simultaneously by the fellow next to him. Whether or not his tasks are related to the job on board or take place during relaxation time, he will most certainly have company from the colleagues who are in the same (duty) situation as him. Most probably they will go to sleep at the same time, eat their breakfast at the same time, start working at the same time, perhaps do exactly the same working task at the same time, have their breaks at the same time etc. In other words, if you are an overseas Filipino seaman you will for ten months a year simultaneously *do, see and listen* to a lot of the same things as a number of your colleagues. In short, since the seafarers are spending almost a year on board and are taking part in the same rhythm during this time, their experience will, to a relatively high degree, contain the same elements.

Of great importance is also the fact that the internal rhythm of a total institution does not have to be attuned to the surrounding civil society. The institution can on the other hand be metaphorically viewed as an isolated clockwork which is not necessarily adjusted to GMT time at all. A total institution might therefore be “*out of phase*”, to make use of an expression from Zerubavel (1981:67). It is perhaps timely to recall what takes place on board a vessel in the merchant marine in relation to this issue. With the entire world as their field of operation, the seamen are exposed to a wide range of different “*times*” during a year or a contract. In an attempt to let daily life and work be executed in the same hour every day, it is common to consecutively adjust (or “*pins*” as they say on board) the time on the vessel, related to where in the world they are at the moment.⁷ The life on board, seen from this angle, can therefore be “*out of phase*”, in relation to one particular place on shore in mind - for instance where the shipowners have their main office - but quite attuned related to the location of the vessel at a certain moment in time.

⁷ Also the local time inside the monasteries in medieval years, was adjusted during the year.

Still, there is more about this floating universe which rather resembles an “out of phase” reality, than the opposite. Just consider the fact that on board there are people at work 24 hours per day, and most certainly 365 days per year. In other words, when people with a land based occupation end their day and go to sleep, or enjoy the company of family and friends, you can be certain that thousands of seafarers are in the middle of their working day or duty period on board. Moreover, a factor which strengthens this tendency of marginality and isolation is the fact that while the different working tasks are executed on board, the ship might be heading for another remote port at for instance an estimated speed of 18 knots. I will not at this stage go into how speed or movement may have implications for the community on board, but I have argued elsewhere that speed in general has the potential of making the outer world appear slightly blurred and less factual or even present (Lamvik 1996:167).

Another point of interest is the importance of speed and movement in understanding how some seafarers find themselves somewhat *mentally* out of phase. I will follow up on these ideas later on, and I will among other things propose to see this mental state in relation to some sort of transition; a sense of constantly being in motion, which again paves the way for a certain type of anonymity. Nevertheless, before I go on and point at some important differences between the monastery and the maritime world on board, let me highlight certain aspects of the monastic community.

Zerubavel exemplifies the total institution’s inclination to be “*out of phase*” with the rest of the society, by looking at the Benedictine monastery. The monastery is a social universe that is commonly referred to in order to illuminate the fact that the total institution is an organization with a certain beat or a tangible and an encompassing order. The extensive set of rules in the monastery makes this social universe appear as a highly, if not entirely, regulated society. The organization seems to leave few or even no decisions to the inhabitants of the monastery. Perhaps the rules can be viewed as something that ease the burden or weight of all the practical tasks involved in an ordinary life - for example as in a family based organization outside the monastery - instead the monks can concentrate on primary chores - to pray, work

This should be understood in relation to seasonal shifting and to the general governing of time which were sequentially rather than directed towards abstract points in time (Dohrn-van Rossum 1996:35-37).

and study (Zerubavel 1981:51). Or to put it slightly differently, it is pertinent to expose the rules of the monastery as facilities in the monks overall objective; to create, in a morally sense of the word, a perfect life (Zerubavel 1981:51). This turns the various practical and profane rules and regulations - such as punctuality - into a question of moral. To be on time, in the right place together with the rest of your Brothers - that is, to be synchronous with the internal rhythm - will not solely be a practical matter, it is just as much a question of whether or not you are a morally superior human being. The idea that strict rules may have a redemptive effect upon inmate's lives, is what Zerubavel has in mind when he underlines in general the aspect of *convenience* in the routinized life of a total institution (Zerubavel 1981:51). However, in the case of the monastery, what kind of rules are we talking about?

The Rule of Saint Benedict offers a recipe for what should be done by the monks at different times of the ecclesiastical *year*, and which liturgical activities should take place during a *week* (Zerubavel 1981:33). Still it is the *horarium* - the daily schedule - which really illustrates the synchronous and rhythmic life of the Saint Benedict monks (Zerubavel 1981:34). The importance of punctuality has already been mentioned. Still, according to Zerubavel, it was the celebration of the Divine Offices that really gave the life in the monasteries a certain beat (p. 35). Eight times a day - every three hours - the monastery bell rang and one of the following Divine Offices was celebrated: Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers and Compline.

It should be mentioned that the overall objective in Zerubavel's work on this issue is to shed some light on how the monastic world played an intrinsic role in introducing the practice and the idea of a rigid time schedule in the western world in general. Or to use his own words: "*it is in the medieval Benedictine monasteries that we ought to look for the genesis and source of diffusion of the particular type of temporal regularity that is so characteristic of modern life*" (Zerubavel 1981:32). He emphasizes for instance how *the Rule* itself (*the Rule of Saint Benedict*) contained elements of a so-called utilitarian approach towards time - that is, time is a scarce entity which it is important to utilize - an idea which later on appeared for example in the Protestant Reformation. According to Zerubavel, it is primarily as a part of the foundation of the Reformation that the Benedictine legacy is introduced to the modern world(1981:54-55).

Zerubavel is not the only one, though, who saw crucial elements in the medieval monastic communities re-appear as constructive ideas in modern society. The historian Lewis Mumford is perhaps the most renowned representative in this connection. Mumford is famous, among other things, for making use of machine metaphors as an illustration of this particular link. Statements about how monasteries can be viewed as “*etherealized and moralized megamachines*” (1967:264) and how “*through its regularity and efficiency the monastery laid a groundwork for both capitalist organization and further mechanization*” (1967:266), are famous and unavoidable when dealing with this particular topic.

However, criticisms do occur. Dohrn-van Rossum, for instance, maintains that the basis of Zerubavel and Mumford’s work on this issue contains some errors. Among other things, he insists that their focus on the importance of the mechanical clock in the repetitive monastic life is exaggerated. Dohrn-van Rossum thus gives an alternative description of everyday life in a Benedictine monastery. Instead of entering a discussion that solely pays attention to the internal beat and how this has moral implications for the people living there, he dwells on the strong element of flexibility and improvisation in this organization. He emphasizes for instance that time indications in the Rule very seldom refer to an abstract idea or comprehension of time, instead time was seen in relation to the duration of the different sequences of the internal rhythm (1996:36-37). In other words, Dohrn-van Rossum is among other things criticizing Zerubavel and Mumford when they view the monastery as a machine consisting of a rigid clockwork-like organization. The main problem, according to Dohrn-van Rossum, is that these terms and/or metaphors presupposes an abstract and objective *zeitgeber* or “*time giver*” (a machine or clock), devices which hardly existed or at least had a minor position in Medieval Europe. In fact, Dohrn-van Rossum argue, that the life in monasteries and according to the Rule was to a large degree relying on natural time givers (daylight and the seasons), rather than being influenced by such artificial constructions (1996:38).

Nevertheless, independent of the accuracy of the historical description of monastic life, it should still hold to say that a ship and a monastery have a lot in common as far a temporal regularity is concerned. This juxtaposition is after all the starting point of the discussion. Both the monks and the seafarers take part in a certain daily circularity, although the first category of people follow a daily schedule marked by strongly moral and religious implications,

whereas the seafarers have their working rhythm modulated by tradition and negotiated by their unions. I will maintain, however, that a seaman differs from his monastic counterpart when it comes to how one deals or copes with the future, that is, what is related to the notion of linearity in the comprehension of time. What I'm aiming at here is that in addition to the repetitiveness of the daily activities, the people on board also need to encompass - in a very explicit manner - the differing things that will take place tomorrow, the day after tomorrow or next week for that matter. Since the purpose of a ship in the merchant marine is to transport cargo from one port to another, it will always be necessary to think some days or weeks a head of the present course. This is what I refer to as the strong element of linearity in the maritime industry.

Let me illustrate this with an example. After a few days of my journey from Rotterdam to Singapore, when we still were in the Bay of Biscay, the captain on board started to complain about problems of reaching the Suez Channel on time. The problem, he explained, was that if we arrived too late to take part in a certain convoy through the Suez Channel, we would arrive almost a whole day too late in Singapore. In other words, the relatively slow speed of the vessel across the Biscay worried him, since it most probably would influence the arrival date at the designated port which after all was scheduled almost three weeks ahead. I guess it goes without saying that to spend an extra day on such a journey, will have substantial financial implications for the company. The turnover rate per day for this type of ship can easily be more than 150.000,- NOK.

The reason why I'm emphasizing this aspect of linearity in relation to the perception of time among the seamen at work, is of course the considerable consequences this far-sighted attitude will have for the life on board. Moreover, to stress the element of linearity in the maritime world can also be a fruitful illustration of some important differences between the ship society and the monastery. We can in short say that a year on board a vessel in the merchant marine is *a tale of the unexpected*. Where the ship is heading the next day is often not known to anyone, and which "trials" they will face during their voyage - that is, rough weather, engine problems and disagreements among the crew - is not predictable either. All this uncertainty makes this environment differ sharply from what takes place in a monastery - at least in a very ideal typical description of the monastic world. What takes place behind the walls of a monastery on one particular day, will to a large extent be a replica of the day before. The

monastery seen from this fairly static point of view highlights the scarcity of variables that could disturb or induce the beat or rhythm of this particular social universe. So, in accordance to this argument we might claim that besides the various daily tasks and routines - which the monastery and the ship surely have in common - the seamen are forced to simultaneously also take into account the uncertainty which always lies ahead of them. Although both these total worlds pivot around a certain beat, the monastic universe will be more deprived than the maritime, in the sense that the inhabitants - that is the monks and the nuns - to a relatively large degree will be in control of or aware of what tomorrow will bring. As we will see later on, the uncertainty which characterizes the life on board - what I above denoted as the element of linearity in the approach towards time in the maritime world - may pave the way for a type of *anonymity* among the seafarers. I will, among other things, argue that the promiscuous behavior that characterizes at least *some* of the seamen's performances in ports around the world can in part be linked to this experience of anonymity.

Before the searchlight is directed towards some of the consequences of this regime for the people who live there, let me give some final remarks regarding a ship's capability to combine the linear and the circular. I will maintain that it is the capability to blend these two dimensions or different approaches towards time, which turns the ship into such a pregnant and strong illustration of life itself. There is something about a vessel constantly on the move, heading for another remote port, at the same time as the life on board follows a day-to-day schedule, which makes the maritime universe exceptionally fitting/particularly apt when the aim is to comprehend certain aspects of life itself. Who haven't heard the ship applied as a metaphor for the passing of the time? Independent of what takes place in the man-made world - which is on board - time will inexorably be marching on (often expressed by the wake). A similar though rather pessimistic saying in relation to this is one about Titanic. To emphasize the meaninglessness of a certain action someone says: "*it is like rearranging the chairs on board Titanic*".

To be on board a ship is also in a rather naive way used as a metaphor for the fact that the whole of mankind after all are stuck in the same situation. An environmentalist might say, "we must soon realize, and act on the basis of the fact, that we are all in the same boat". Also the conditions of single individuals may be illustrated with use of a ship image, for example as in "*I feel like a lonely ship in the middle of an ocean*".

A more sophisticated approach to the metaphorical qualities of the ship, was done by Claire Alexander in her work on some of the novels by George Lamming (Alexander 1995:57-69). In relation to Lamming's description of Caribbean emigrants crossing the Atlantic on a ship bound for England, Alexander notes how the passengers on board "*are marked by both linear and circular actions*" (p. 61). On one hand they all undergo a push into the unknown or the "beyond" [England], on the other hand the mingling on board gives rise to a type of social fusion among the emigrants; a collective West Indian identity is created (p. 61). What Alexander basically emphasizes here is the "*ambiguous spatiality of the ship. [The ship provides] both the boundaries of activity and the medium for crossing*" (p. 61).

The outline above of sayings and expressions with a basis in a maritime setting is of course not complete. The reason why I mention some is simply to remind the reader of how vessels and the life on board are well-known illustrations of certain situations in life. It is as if this context gives us a simplified existential reminder of how we live our lives. For instance, as already mentioned above, a propelling ship in the middle of the ocean - which is leaving just a tiny and highly temporary wake behind - may be a very clear-cut visualization of one of the indisputable facts in life; that time passes on.

I acknowledge that to be on a long journey which for example involves crossing an ocean may influence the way you look at certain matters. For instance, I remember, when I joined a car-carrier for 21 days, how strange it was to experience to be on the way for such a long time stretch (except for a few hours of anchorage in Port Said before we entered the Suez Channel, we were on our way for exactly three weeks). During the journey, I often had to remind myself of the fact that we actually were heading for Singapore at a speed of 18 knots. Every now and then, during these three weeks, I was given a reminder of this fact through alterations in local time and changes in the light, sky formations, temperature, the humidity in the air, the landscape at shore, the color of the sea, the different accents of the radio operators who from time to time called up the vessel, and of course from the constant murmur from the engine.

Let me end this section by saying that the reason why I emphasize on certain aspects of life in total institutions, such as tight scheduling and synchronicity - a batch way of living which moreover might be out of phase with the outside world - and a linear versus a more circular

attitude towards time, is that these types of arrangements will have considerable *consequences* for the people living there. Unless you constantly appear as one of the “*rebels*” mentioned above, - in the description of the different lines of adaptation to a life as a inmate - an exposure of for example a recurrent and encompassing rhythm will involve “*progressive changes*”, once again to use Goffman's expression.

Which consequences or changes are we talking about here? The following section can be viewed as an attempt to grasp or conceptualize *some* of the typical experiences among the people who either voluntarily or against their will, spend a considerable portion of their time inside of one of these institutions. I also find it fruitful to give life to this outline with some first hand statements from the seafarers from my fieldwork.

5.2.2.3 Some running themes in the inmate culture

In the space of only three pages, Goffman is able to conceptualize what I see as *the* most interesting dimension of or element of the inmate experience. From pages 66 and to 68 in the book *Asylums* (1961), he basically focus upon the *effect* of what I so far have included in the discussion of total institutions. If we combine or mix all the factors I above have emphasized as important aspects of these institutions - such as the seclusion, the moral career of the inmate, the totality and the encompassing rhythm - it is conceivable to imagine that the inmates struggle with a feeling of self-pity, boredom, isolation (from the “real” life), exile and a profound waste of time. In brief, this is what Goffman claims are the dominant themes in the inmate culture.

It is peculiar how my own empirical material corresponds with Goffman's general outline on this issue. Take for instance what he refers to as the widespread feeling of *self-pity* among the inmates. Goffman sees this in relation to a strong wish among the inmates to explain to their fellow beings their present situation, a situation which often is characterized by a decline in the social status or some sort of personal failure. Further, Goffman claims that it is common among the inmates to make use of a sad story or an apologia in this explaining effort, some words about how their dreadful past brought them into to this pit. And as an effect of these

frequently told tales, the inmates are overwhelmed by a sad sense of self-concern or what is already named as self-pity.

It is not difficult to find parallel stories told among the Filipino seafarers. Although their social position undergo an elevation rather than a decline when they chose this profession, it is obvious that the seamen also need to come up with a brief explanation for what they basically are doing out at sea, and why they became seafarers in the first place. Phrases such as: “ *to sacrifice for my family, I do this for my family, I’m here to support my family*” etc. were quite common answers among the seamen, when they were asked to give the reason for choosing this profession in the past.

To portray the Filipino seaman as a family based enterprise, has been (and will still be) a running theme in this thesis. It is therefore pertinent to see the answers above as just another exposure of the strong family orientation among the seamen. Nevertheless, I will insist on an aspect of self-pity in these statements as well. In the same way as a prisoner perhaps blame the educational system or the society at large for his misfortune, the seafarer repeats to himself in these answers the reason why he went overseas - the family. To be away from home for 10 months a year, and in addition to this to be surrounded by salt water most of this time, makes sense, so to speak, when he remember those who rely upon his efforts. The seafarer impose meaning on the present situation, when he see the link between his hardship on board and the well-being of his dearest ones back home. The seaman will, however, at the same time as he is referring to the people back home as an motivating factor for his migration, once more be aware of the dreadful facts of the situation; he is out on the seven seas, they are not. I will maintain that this is how a sense of self-pity among the seafarers might be nourished. The family made him leave, and because of that he endures sacrifices and hardship on board.⁸

⁸ The relation between this outline and what elsewhere in this thesis is discussed regarding the element of *sacrifice* in the stock of migratory inducements factors in the Philippines, should be clear (see section 3.1.2). In other words, there is a connection between a sense of self-pity and a constructive idea of committing sacrifice in the name of one’s family. Perhaps we can say that the seafarer, when for instance stating “*I do this for my family*”, nurture a potential for some sort of martyrdom in this particular migratory situation. This view is based on an idea of the *martyr* as a figure which obviously contains both of the concerning aspects; both the dramatic self-concern and the wish to give one self up in favor of certain others.

Homesickness is another keyword in the discussion of self-pity as a theme in the social universe on board. To miss the native soil or family and friends, appears to be perhaps the greatest expenditure included in the seafarer's contracts, at least if we take into consideration how many times this privation is mentioned by the seamen themselves. Just as often as the family is referred to as the main reason for them to be at sea in the first place, the wife, children and other relatives are put forward as their main loss. An AB I interviewed described homesickness like this: *"Lonely. After your work you take your dinner, watch some videos and then after that nothing else. You go to your cabin, listen to some music. Nothing. Watch the ceiling of your cabin [while you are thinking]: how is my family?"*

It can, however, be argued that *"homesick"* is a word of honor among the Filipino seamen. Christoffer Serck-Hansen claims for instance that at the center of their own understanding of what it means to be a seafarer, lies the notion of being a respectable father and a husband (1997). Therefore, when the seamen say that they are homesick, this is just a way to link their own secluded life at sea - when they actual perform their sacrifice or *pagsisikap* ("effort") - to something which is of superior importance: being a good provider for your family. In other words, to say you miss your dear ones, is to say that you are not a selfish and independent person. Instead, you are here in the name of someone else: your family. To approach the expression *"homesick"* in such a manner - as a slogan-like word of honor - is a notion which fits very well with the notion of the Filipino seafarers as a wide range of family based enterprises.

I am of course fully aware of the fact that when the seafarers phrase this kind of deprivation, it might reflect a genuine experience or a real feeling of loss. It is an indisputable fact that the seafarers are away from their families about 9-11 months per year. It is therefore not difficult to imagine that they during this period of time wish they could be someplace else, that is, back home. The main point in the discussion above, however, has just been to underline that the commonly used expression *"homesick"* might *as well* or in addition contain a message to their fellow beings; they are proper Filipinos when they tell for instance the anthropologist about their loss. They only do or say what is expected of them as husbands, fathers and providers.

To look at the time spent in a total institution as a complete waste, as something which just has to be written off so to speak, is by Goffman introduced as another common theme in the inmate culture. So, besides a sense of self-pity, he sees a certain experience of time and duration as another major constituting element in the horizon of the inmate. Goffman's objective in this connection is to emphasize that the *moral career* or the transformation process of the inmate, together with fact that the inmates usually cannot obtain anything from the institutional life which they gainfully can bring with them to the outside world - such as money earned and improved or new educational skills⁹ - may generate a strong feeling of marginality among the insiders. In other words, when the inmates gradually are socially separated from the civil society, and hardly experience or learn anything they can utilize when they at some point in the future leave the institution during the stay, it is no wonder that they can be left with a feeling of being kept apart from real life or to be "*exiled from living*" to use Goffman's own term (1961:67).

Once again it is worth noting how my own ethnographic material corresponds with Goffman's description of this issue. I will start out by stating that I fully support Goffman in his choice of letting this exile-like experience be an important part of the inmate culture, although, as we will see, my own comprehension of this issue has a slightly different basis. While Goffman in relation to this accentuates the importance of the "*social disconnexions caused by entrance*", and the uselessness the daily activities in an institution (1961:67), I will insist on a close-up on the obvious strong element of *routine* in the floating universe on board.

The idea is simply that when a task is done a sufficient number of times, and it is no longer necessary to have a high level of attention when performing the actual task, a routine has been created. A routine is therefore, seen from my point of view, a type of act which demands just a minimum of emotional and intellectual involvement to execute, which again, on one level, leaves the actor unoccupied. Let me push the argument a little bit further: a situation characterized by repetitiveness or routine might leave the actor alone so to speak; with a lack of input and without nothing to tackle or act on. It is this kind of solitude and boredom which

⁹ I guess it goes without saying that this description does not cover the present situation in the maritime industry, an industry which contains for instance a relatively high wage level and a high degree of specialization as far as technical skills among the seafarers are concerned.

I will insist on may lead to a sense of exile and marginality among inmates in general, and seafarers in particular.

I am tempted at this stage to remind the reader of how similar this approach is with how the famous German theologian Rudolf Otto (1923) describes the expressions of the *numinous* in art. Otto emphasizes for instance how darkness in architecture, silence in music and emptiness in Chinese painting can operate as three different patterns into the sublime and the numinous. What these entities have in common is that they represent some kind of negation, a quality which prepares the ground for something else to take place. What Otto is aiming at in this connection is the introduction of what he refers to as the “*wholly other*.” In other words, according to Otto, such phenomena as darkness, silence and void contain a potential for the numinous to be expressed, or to put it in a slightly different way: in these negations the numinous may be scentable.

I admit that it is rather problematic to see the routinized life at sea in relation to how darkness, emptiness and silence may pave the way for the “*wholly other*”. Otto, in his endeavor to find the sources of the numinous in art, is obviously out in another errand than I am. Nevertheless, I will still maintain that his universe and mission can shed some light on what might take place on board a ship. In brief, Otto’s ideas made me see the position of routinization in the social universe on board as something similar to how he denoted darkness, silence and emptiness in his argument, namely *as something which can empty the horizon of the people who are concerned*. That is, to be exposed to a very routinized everyday life on board, month after month and year after year, and to experience the potential for contemplation and solemnity in for instance the dim light of a cathedral, are obviously different fields of experience, but still fields which may sustain a limited or a sober comparison.

However, the problems which lies in juxtaposing the sacred universe of Otto and the repetitive world on board, arises when the concern is what this mental emptiness is replaced with. When the consumers of art in Otto’s work are facing or introduced to the “*ultimate concern*¹⁰”, when for instance listening to Bach’s Mass in B minor¹¹, the seafarers will most probably not

¹⁰ An expression which stems from the work of Paul Tillich (1955).

¹¹ A piece of music which is brought forward by Otto himself as one with a potential for an expression of the Divine.

be offered or provided any satisfactory substitute for the nothingness they might experience in their routinized life at sea. In other words, when Otto's list of different negations may pave the way for a divine reality, the daily replication on board might generate a sense of emptiness or void among the seamen¹². In short, a feeling of being exiled or kept apart from real life.

What I'm aiming at with this outline is to draw a picture of *routine* as *the* significant entity, when the objective is to conceive the quality or the content of the experiences obtained by the seafarers on board. It can therefore, in line with this, be pertinent to ask the following question: what is the fundament for these repetitive activities?

I will claim, as far as the seafarers are concerned, that the element of routine or regularity in everyday life stems first and foremost from the following components: the rigid division of labor, the batch living and the restrictions on the freedom of movement. In other words, there is something with how the work/life on board is organized (see section 5.1), and the relatively few square meters they have at their disposal, which turns the ship into a monotonous universe which again makes the seamen feel fundamentally bored and perhaps, in the end, regard their time on board as something which are besides or outside the "real" world.

Let me underline the significance of the division of work in this connection. As discussed in section 5.1, the seafarers are organized in different departments on board, and they occupy different positions within each of these hierarchical spheres of duty. In other words, the personnel on board are responsible for just a tiny part of the whole menagerie; they only have a partial involvement in the working organization. If we in addition to this remember that the actual job-related tasks executed on board often are solely a matter of routine - whether it is to navigate in open sea day after day or performing some maintenance work on the deck - it is conceivable that the way the work is organized, is a very important factor in creating the monotony on board. The division of labor can in short be said to narrow down the span of an already limited world.

¹² To fully understand how some sort of emptiness can be the result of routinization, it is significant to remember the fact that the recurrent tasks we here are thinking of, are performed on board a ship; a social arena which in itself is rather limited and marginal.

That some of the Filipino seafarers struggled with a feeling of being kept apart from the “actual” reality during their time on board, became rather obvious when I asked them to describe how life at sea can be like. Actually one of the most significant statements I heard during my fieldwork came in relation to such an outline. When a young and successful chief engineer with years of experience from Norwegian companies was asked to conceptualize everyday life in a seaman’s life, he said that to be able to endure being a seafarer it is necessary “*to produce something out of nothing.*” “*Something*” in this case alludes to what he saw as an adequate life on board, while “*nothing*” basically refers to the same routine or repetitiveness which is discussed above. Some other pregnant statements regarding these issues came from an outspoken AB I once met, and from a chief officer I interviewed several times during my fieldwork. The AB said to me that the lifestyle of the people back home normally changed while he was away “*but [my] life has not changed, because [I] have stayed in the same way for ten months*”. The chief officer, on the other hand, described life at sea in the following words: “*[being at sea is] just a state of mind*”.

We notice here some sort of emptiness, timelessness and deprivation as a recurrent theme in the seafarers’ description. In other words, and according to these men, nothing actually happens while you are at sea, nothing which can break up the monotony. Instead - to repeat some of the statements from the discussion about the application of the prison metaphor - it is all about “*work, work and work*” and “*everyday the same people*”, and when “*you go out, you know that you have to come back again.*” This sense of timelessness reminds me how some prisoners portray their stay behind bars. One describes for example his imprisonment like this: “*When I think back to the time it took for that year to pass, it seems unbelievable that time could go so slow. It is just like so much nothingness, nothing happened and nothing much was likely to happen. A day is not a day, a day is just a nothing in which you don’t do anything at least you don’t seem to do anything*” (Norman 1958:104, in Priestly 1989:160). Also the work of Turner can help to see timelessness as an element in the secluded universe on board. I have already briefly suggested to regard the society on board as containing qualities of a *communitas*, a type of community which may nourish an alternative sense of time. In relation to his discussion on initiation rites and ritual seclusion, for instance, Turner states that: “*Communitas is almost always thought of or portrayed by actors as a timeless condition, an eternal now, as “a moment in and out of time” [...] Every day is, in a sense, the same day, writ large or repeated*” (1974:238-239).

It also became apparent to me in some other instances that the seamen themselves see the ship society as a deprived and secluded universe; a place which might leave you with a sense of being kept separated from real life. For instance, some of the seafarers I met underlined that they had instructed their wives to not give them any negative news from back home since they were unable to respond anyway. In other words, they asked for protection from some indisputable and intrinsic dimensions included in a more complete and “normal” life; they have chosen not to be a part of the negative facets a life back home can offer too. A third mate I interviewed told me for instance that *“it would be nicer if they could write us good news only. Something which could make us [feel] comfortable on board [...] It is very hard for us [to receive bad news on board] since we have this ten months contracts”*.¹³ I also remember in relation to this issue how the bosun I met on board compared the life of a seaman that of an actor. He had recently become a widower, but he told me that the character of his work did not allow him to display and to go into the grief and sorrow that he felt. What is important on board, he said, is *“always to be number one.”*

But not everyone is blessed with the talent of an actor; not all have what it takes to be a seaman. My impression is that almost every overseas seafarer - from the Philippines or elsewhere - has seen how some of their colleagues have failed in pretending that everything is okay. I am thinking of all the cases where the seamen either turn to heavy drinking or, even worse, go insane. A chief mate I interviewed told me a story about one of his subordinates, an AB, who suddenly one day started to drink and throw bottles inside his cabin. The chief mate went to this man and told him: *“Do not bring your problems on board. [...] Do not give ourselves a problem. [...] If you have problems with your wife, do not bring it here. This [place] is different, we are here to work, we are here to earn money. [...] Before we left our house we had a problem [as well]”*. He continued saying *“That is why we are here - we need money. That is a big problem.”*

¹³ To put constraints on or to exercise censorship on the communication between the ship and the people back home, was also something, according to some seafarers I met, which were practiced by certain shipowners and manning agents. For instance one seaman I interviewed, told me that his manning agent requested the seafarer’s families not to write about negative news in the letters they sent to the ship *“because it [will] affect the job [performed on*

What we in an explicit manner see in the latter example is a demonstration of an awareness among the seafarers of a certain genuine *otherness* in the life on board. An otherness which is characterized by *routine*, a quality which again, as we remember from the discussion above, stems from certain organizational principles and objective factors which frame and criss-cross the life on board. We might say, to bring the discussion back to the universe of Goffman, that this marginality is basically about the element of *void* in the life inside of a total institution. A void which by Goffman is metaphorically referred to as *dead time* or a universe which involves a seclusion from real life and which moreover needs to be wrapped in a sad tale to appear as meaningful for the inhabitants. In connection with the discussion on this aspect of emptiness in everyday life on board, it is timely to recapitulate how some of the seafarers in the interviews conceptualize this vacuum: “*to produce something out of nothing*”, “*but [my] life has not changed, because [I] have stayed in the same way for ten months*” and “*[being at sea is] just a state of mind*”.

With this “*monolithic social experience*” (Morgan et.al 1991:279) in mind, it should not be difficult to conceive that a wish and a need for some kind of pastime and recreation is present among overseas seafarers or the inhabitants in total institutions in general for that matter. These “*removal activities*” (Goffman 1961:67) may differ from time to time, from institution to institution, but they have all one particular element in common: their aim is to “*lift the participant out of himself, making him oblivious for the time being to his actual situation*” (1961:67). Goffman underlines that some of these activities may be sponsored by the staff, while others are not. Examples of the latter category are such things as homosexuality, gambling and alcohol (1961:68).

As far as the Filipino seafarers are concerned, I will maintain that some of their daily activities on board do contain a strong element of relaxation. For instance, in their off duty or leisure periods it is common to spend a considerable amount of the time in the living room watching a video tape - or a TV program if the ship is close to shore - enjoy a game of chess, read magazines or books etc. Also sporting activities is an important leisure activity during the time on board. For many Filipinos this means first and foremost basketball, but perhaps also deck golf should be mentioned as one such physical occupation which can help the seamen to

board]”. He mentioned financial problems regarding the studies of the seaman’s children, as a typical piece of news the families should avoid to mention in the letters.

forget about their working hours. I also see consumption of alcoholic liquids - at least when this takes place in a certain scale - as something which obviously may generate glimpses of color into the perhaps rather gray universe on board.

Nevertheless, I will maintain that the amount of and the potential for recreation during the stay on board is fairly limited. Since the ship is a deprived universe, the range of stimuli that the seafarers get is very limited - day after day, the argonauts are surrounded by the same people, occupied with the same routinized tasks while walking around on the same square meters.

But life at sea is not only about the actual life *at sea*. From time to time the seafarers are able to visit different ports around the world, although it is often just for a few hours at the time. These landfalls can be seen as something which in a more fundamental manner breaks up the repetitiveness on board. I will go deeper into this matter in the following sections.

I have already mentioned the chief officer who described the life on board as "*just a state of mind*". If we juxtapose these words with some other statements from my interviews, the fundamental contrast between the ordinary or monotonous life on board, and what can take place in ports, should become apparent. A second mate I once met, described the landfall this way: "*[to stay in port represents] a change of atmosphere or a change of air*". The same man did also notice that a visit in port could include a "*recreation in the red-light district*". I find the last statement particularly interesting in this connection.

It is all probabilities a myth that all Filipino seafarers - or overseas seamen in general for that matter - spend a considerable amount of their time and money on prostitutes while they are in port. Still, it is a fact that some, or should I say quite a few, do so. Why is it apparently so common among the seafarers to look up the red-light districts during their time in port? First of all this is related to *freedom*. Both in the sense that the seafarers are far away from their wives and/or mothers, and that the landfall is often just for a few hours at the time. The latter point refers to a type of freedom which operates under the cover of anonymity. There is something with the nature of brief, accidental and anonymous encounters which might nourish this type of behavior. A seafarer knows that he will be gone in just a few hours anyway, and nobody needs to know your name or who you really are while you are here. You are a "*stranger in the night*" as a chief engineer put it.

This type of freedom - closely linked to anonymity - has obviously something to do with the fact that overseas shipping operates in a worldwide market. The seafarers cannot know for sure where they will be the coming weeks; which countries/ports they will visit next. What they know for sure, however, is that they will stay for just a short period of time in port, and that they most probably will not return to the same port in the near future. What I am trying to achieve with this outline is to draw a picture of the seafaring profession as a transnational one. The seafarers live their professional lives in *transit*. At the seven seas they are often in international waters and when entering a foreign port or city they are equipped with a so-called “shore pass” or a sort of short-term visa. In other words, they are not actually *staying* in every country they visit, it would be more correct to claim that they are just spending a few hours on solid ground while they are passing through. Some statements from the seafarers may help us regard the seafarers as cosmopolitans.

I asked an AB once: “*What do you tell our friend and neighbors about the life at sea?*” After a long description of all the hard work on board, his answer went like this: “*I tell them that it is very nice to go to this place, and go to this place. Meet this girls, buy this things [for] remembrance. [] And all the waves. Low pressures in monsoon areas. Biscay. South of Sumatra Island. North of Ilocos. The cold of the North Sea. The heat in Saudi Arabia in the summertime*”. Also a chief mate I interviewed brought forward the different seasons around the world, he said: “*wintertime, you just don’t know where to hide. Summer again, let us say we are trading in the Middle-East, [it is so hot] we just don’t know where to hide.*” The same man also illustrated the seafaring profession with the following words: “*we circle around the world as if it is small*”. Finally, I would like to mention some odd situations which occurred in some of my interviews. Several of the seafarers I met took the opportunity, when they heard that I was a Norwegian, to name some of the Norwegian ports they themselves have visited. So, imagine the following situation: a Norwegian sitting in the shadow of a palm tree, while listening to what some people experienced in places like Sunndalsøra, Bergen, Narvik and Drammen. I remember in particular a captain I interviewed just after arriving in the Philippines. When he heard the name of my hometown, he told me that: “*oh, you have good shrimps in Trondheim*”. The same captain also visited me in Trondheim once. Two weeks after I came home from my first stay in the Philippines, he called me at home and we had a cup of coffee in one of the hotels in the city. We even managed to take some pictures for

remembrance, before the agent took him to the airport and he went straight back to the Philippines.

It is time to go back to an alternative explanation of the fact that the red-light districts around the world attract the seafarer's attention. Above we have seen how *freedom* appears to be one possible inducement factor for such behavior. In the following sections, however, I will maintain that this seafaring tradition can also be seen in relation to the character of the life on board. What I refer to is the need among the seafarers for something which breaks up the monotony in their everyday life. In other words, the red-light district is basically about what I choose to refer to as *recreation*.

Recreation, in this case, simply refers to what is going on in the red-lighted shimmer of the girlie bars. In these places the seafarers are able to reveal other personal qualities than they do in the everyday life on board. In port they can appear as bigwigs; show what a great dollar-earner can be like. They can buy the girls - who are often by the way Filipinas - a drink or two, and talk about and do something quite else than "*work, work and work*." These encounters can also, of course, primarily be about *sex*. Weeks and months at sea without any female contact can be rather a long time for some of the seamen. I remember perfectly well, from the vessel I was joining, how the smell of after-shave spread on board just after we entered a major port in South-East Asia. Those who were not on duty at the time were granted six hours leave by the captain and were ready for either to do some shopping in the city - which is just as common as roaming around the red-light district - or to look up some female company. I also recollect how the excitement on board had been rising the days before we arrived; how some of the men had been discussing what was waiting for them a few days ahead.

It might be so that a "*re-creation in the red-light district*" is, at a fundamental level, about a search for *peak experiences*. That is, something which differs sharply from or represents something quite different than the monotony on board. An outstanding experience which makes the seafarer feel alive and complete, which might make him forget all the work and the homesickness, and instead carries him away or transports him to a state of mind where the ship, which is, after all, waiting for him at the pier, appears as unimportant or not present at all. In other words, the red-light districts might be an arena for recreation in the more literal

sense of the word; as a place where the seafarers can, at least for some hours, live a completely different life.

Some might find these speculations too far fetched, and those of that opinion may be right. Maybe I exaggerate a little bit the significance of girls and sexuality in the life of the seamen in my approach. Nevertheless, it is a fact that they talk a lot about the girls they have met in ports around the world - the girls in Brazil are nearly everybody's favorites - and even more excessive or radical: they show a remarkable ability and willingness to *physically* adjust to or optimize their sexual activities in ports. What I am thinking of is the phenomenon *bolitas*.

The term *bolitas* refers to the tiny balls - made out of plastic or stone - which the seamen use to enlarge their vital parts, in order to be well-equipped when they socialize with women from other parts of the world. This "*secret weapon of the Filipinos*", as a second mate phrased it, has therefore obviously something to do with the fact that "*the Filipinos are so small, and the Brazilian women are so big*" as another second mate put it. What they actually do is to enter some, hopefully, disinfected balls under the skin of the penis - sometimes as many as 10 or 12 in number - and leave them there, "*floating*", on a more or less permanent basis. How common are *bolitas* among the seafarers? Some of the people I met claimed that almost every Filipino seaman is equipped with these artificial balls, at least until they become married.

This part has highlighted *some* aspects of the life at sea. That is, my discussion has not been an attempt to give a complete outline of how the seafarers see and cope with their contract work. Instead, some elements have been isolated or emphasized. I set out with a description of how the metaphors "*prison*" and "*sentence*" are commonly used among the seafarers, although I claimed that this way of conceptualizing the ship society must not be understood too literally. In the line of this I maintained that it is the aspect of *repetitiveness* which lies at the core of their notions. The discussion was further on pivoted around the *exile-like* experience included in the seafarers' contracts and how this seclusion was conceptualized with the term "*homesick*". It was underlined, though, that this expression might be as well be a word of honor among the seamen. Finally, the life in port was the theme of my discussion. I suggested that there is a link between the nature of the seafarers' work and their behavior in port. The key concepts in this outline were *freedom* and *transit*, and *recreation* and *peak experiences*.

Before I go on to the next part, where the theme is the cultural repercussions of the life at sea, I will present some general and concluding remarks regarding the seafaring experience. What I basically have tried to do in these sections is to draw a picture of the seamen's professional life as a *state of exception*. The seafarers perform their contract work in a universe which differs sharply from a land based life back home. Hardly any flavor of the native soil is discernable on board. Absent are all the family members, friends - members of your own *barkada* - and neighbors. Instead it is all about "*work, work and work*" for ten months a year. We also remember how this highly specialized and narrow society by some of the inhabitants explicitly were denoted as something quite different. For instance the chief mate that I referred to earlier did this in a simple but accurate manner. He said, among other things, to one of his subordinates that "*if you have problems with your wife, do not bring it here. This [place] is different*".

It is time to leave the ship and follow the seafarers back home to the Philippines again. Some referred to the moment, when the contract period was brought to an end, as the happiest day for a seaman. An AB I met, however, emphasized the mixed emotions connected to the moment he walks down the gangway. The expression he used was "*50/50,*" meaning "*50% sad and 50% happy. We are happy because we are going home, but sad because we do not have any more money. No salary [will be received] in the next months.*" But to be a seaman is not exclusively about money. It is not only the seafarer seen as a provider who is returning home to his family after an ended contract. I even venture to say that the one who is going home for a vacation is not exactly the same person as the one who left 10 months earlier. What I am aiming at here is the changes in skills, knowledge and attitudes which take place after some years of employment. So, despite the vacuum and despite the prison-like society on board, something *is* actually happening out there. As we shall see in the next two sections these alternations might either stem from the practical tasks performed by the seafarers on board or from something which is just "*included in the contract*".

Part VI

Cultural repercussions caused by the life at sea

The overall aim in a Filipino seafaring career is to contribute financially to the well-being of the family. I will elaborate on this extensive and complex process in Part VII. The purpose of Part VI, however, is to illuminate what we might call an unintended spin-off effect of the seafaring profession. What I am referring to is the changes in skills, knowledge and attitudes among the seafarers after some years at sea, and, in line with this, how these alterations are expressed in a local Philippine setting. In other words, I will maintain that there is after all an element of change included in the seafaring experience. Despite the vacuum and repetitiveness on board, something actually happens to the seafarers after some years under the regime of the ship society. In the following two sections, the focus will be on how the seamen bring with them back home knowledge and new ideas obtained on board the ship.

In short, we can say that the modifications of the seafarers' know-how and values over the years, stem from two different sources; first of all from the technical competence connected to their profession - this will be the theme of section 6.1 - and secondly, from the social environment in which the actual work is performed. The source of alterations in the latter coincides with how I described the ship society in Part VI. How this is reflected in the seafarers' daily life back home, will be discussed in section 6.2.

6.1 The seafarer seen as a local, technical expert

It is not only as dollar earners and story tellers the seafarers stand out among previous peers - that is, the family, friends and neighbors back home in the Philippines - this also applies to certain types of knowledge. One possible way to group the seamen's technical know-how, is to say that it is partly pivoted around safety precautions and partly around the necessity of maintenance.

Once I visited Manila, I saw a jeepney owned by a seaman which was decorated with the following words: "*Viva Brazil*" and "*Safety first*". Although this in all probabilities was meant as a humorous reminder of how one best should approach the Brazilian women, these statements may also work as an introduction to the strong position of safety and maintenance in general among the seafarers.

How is the awareness in the field of safety and maintenance, mirrored in the seafarers' home and neighborhood? One man I interviewed used the expression "*safety precautions*" to illustrate what he picked up on board; "*we use to apply this [knowledge] inside our own house. [This] to avoid accidents, [such as] a fire or an explosion. [...] For example [we check if there is any] abrasions in the connections of the electrical appliances [in our house]*". This particular seafarer works in the deck department on board, so when he wants to know more about strictly technical matters, he usually consults the people in the "*engine*", he told me. He also sometimes gives advice to some of his neighbors, when he is back home on vacation. He mentioned for instance how he had instructed the man living next to him to renew some of the electric wiring in his house in order to increase the capacity and at the same time enhance the

safety and durability of the wiring. “*How do you know this?*”, the neighbor wondered. “*From my work*”, the seaman answered.

The same seafarer also emphasized during the interview the importance of paint connected to maintaining the standard of a house. He used to paint the roof of his own house every year, he told me. In contrast to this I can mention that the house I rented in Iloilo City, was marked by the fact that it had not been painted for years. But when someone mentioned this to the wealthy landlords, they just answered “*painting is expensive*”.

Let me dwell a little bit on this statement. To fully understand in what way the seafarer’s attitude towards maintenance represents something new or at least an unusual approach, we must bear in mind what is commonplace in the Philippines (I’m fully aware of the fact that this is a rather blunt generalization). Why is it so that many Filipinos seemingly accept that parts of their material world slowly are ruined? How should we comprehend the fact that the need for maintenance is so commonly neglected in the Philippines?

In this respect I’m not thinking about the tolerance which forces itself through because of poverty, both in the financial sense of the word and in terms of skills and knowledge. That is, I’m not referring to the attitude which stems from a situation in which people simply cannot afford to maintain their material surrounding or perhaps lack the necessary know-how to mend particular damages or sustain a certain standard. What I’m basically aiming at here is the tacit acceptance of things falling apart as a result of neglect in the field of maintenance. Why is this so?

It is not an easy task to shed light on this topic. My opinion is that when the searchlight is directed towards such a seemingly concrete and trivial activity as maintenance might appear to be, a wide range of different though significant aspects of the Philippine culture will also be illuminated. People’s attitude towards maintenance can therefore be treated as a keyhole into this cultural universe. My aim, however, is not to describe this phenomenon on a broad basis. The focus will instead be on one particular perspective, namely the one introduced and partly developed by Maurice Bloch in his book *How we think they think* (1998).

In one of the essays in this book, Bloch gives a brief outline of the argument in the work of one of his colleagues at London School of Economics, Fenella Cannell (1998:74-77). According to Cannell the poor Bicolanos - people from the island Bicol in the Philippines - see themselves as people who are molded by external forces, such as rich landowners, politicians and former colonial powers. Supernatural powers are also treated as a part of their constitutional surroundings. Cannell emphasizes, however, that *negotiation* always will be a part of this creation process, even though it involves rather miscellaneous parties. So, as a result of these mediation efforts, the structurally inferior inhabitants of Bicol - and other members of the lowland Tagalog area - manage to establish a relationship with their forceful surroundings, although the exchange is rather asymmetrical in its character. According to Cannell, these *constant proceeding negotiations*, in which the poor may succeed in diminishing the gap between themselves and their counterparts through the obtainment of accepted experiences, represent the basis for becoming a subject in Bicol. This is also what J. Fox has in mind when he states that: “[In] the Austronesian world (which include the Philippines) [...] social identity is not fixed. You are launched [...] you are on a path” (Fox 1987:174, in Bloch 1998:77).

It is further on in this essay emphasized how this throughout fluctuating attitude turns the Philippine material culture into a rather scarce field. I for one acknowledge that it is a striking aspect of lowland Tagalog towns and villages, that almost nothing, such as buildings and monuments, appears to be looked after or preserved for the future generations. Instead the surroundings are marked by years of neglect and the impacts of a rather hostile climate on manmade constructions.

It seems therefore, to return to the work of Cannell and Bloch, that some of the core questions for the Filipinos are: why dwell on what has been? Why spend energy on yesterday's realizations, when everyday life after all is based on a fundamental and omnipresent sense of transformation and becoming? If we take this cultural backdrop into consideration, it should be comprehensible that an idea of maintenance not necessarily is nourished in the Philippines. If hardly anything is fixed around you, and instead is given an existence through a never-

ending molding process, it goes without saying that efforts/operations aimed at preservation, are not that significant among a majority of Filipinos.¹

We can also see, with these ideas of Cannell in mind, how the seafarers can appear as technical experts in the Philippine society. When they return with new ideas in the field maintenance, they will differ from their neighbors and friends, and this gap can lead to some exchange of knowledge in the neighborhood (I will later on go deeper into how the seafaring profession may provide the seamen with a knowledge which gives them an outstanding position back home in the Philippines).

But it is not only in relation to preservation practices or maintenance that the seamen represent something new in a Philippine setting. For instance how to avoid a fire in the house was according to one of my informants, some of the most valuable technical know-how a seafarer brings back home from the sea. This informant did mention though that he also had learned during his time on board the importance of protection clothing - gloves, overalls, shoes etc. - in relation to construction work. He had, for instance, installed fire-detecting devices in his house, something which initially led to amazement and a series of questions from his neighbors. Also one of my neighbors in Iloilo City, a chief mate with years of experience from Norwegian companies, had taken some precautions against fire. He told me that he had bought fire extinguishers for his house, and instructed his family how to use them in case of a fire outbreak (another seafarer I met, took such precautions even a little bit further; he arranged fire drills for his family). This chief mate also mentioned that neighbors sometimes came to his house and asked for advice on, for instance, how they should measure their own tanks of fresh water.

Nevertheless, to draw a picture of the seafarer as a local expert, as a sage, can be quite problematic, first of all because of his absence. He is away most of the year; that is, he is not in a position to be consulted or to give advice to friends and neighbors (in the next section, however, we will see how absence can be approached or understood quite differently; as a presupposition for his possibility for appearing as an expert in the neighborhood, rather than an obstacle). Secondly, there is also something about the character of the seafaring profession,

¹ The idea of seeing a lack of maintenance as something deeply rooted in a Filipino sense of personhood, emerged in one of the many fruitful discussions with Roar Hansen.

which makes it difficult to communicate with the local residents. Most of the seafarers that I met, complained that people who are not familiar with what it means to be a seaman, do not actually understand what is going on at sea. In other words, the landlubbers do not possess sufficient information about the tasks on board to be familiar with the skills and know-how that the seafarers bring home; they do not know which questions the seamen actually are capable of answering. Thirdly, the problems related to the dispersal of the seafarer's competence are not only laid on the shoulders of the people back home. Since the knowledge obtained on board necessarily also will consist of a *tacit* element, the seaman faces an unsolvable or at least difficult problem when or if he wants to share this with others. The term tacit knowledge refers to the aspect which always will be present in complex know-how and which is not translatable into verbal communication. In brief, we might say that tacit knowledge denotes what we don't have any words for, and instead is in the hands of the individual or in the deep well called experience, intuition or practice.

It is therefore, in line with this, reason to believe that much of the technical know-how possessed by the seafarers is not dispersed into the local community, but remains in the mind of the individual seaman. The potential for a comprehensive distribution of new ideas into the seafarer's neighborhood is to a large extent restricted, due to fact that the "reservoir" of this alternate insight is away 10 months a year, and also due to the fact that the local residents are not fully aware of what the seafarers bring back home as far as skills and knowledge are concerned. Also the fact that the seamen often refrain from informing about their work to their family, friends and neighbors, is part of this picture. According to some of the people I met, they did not do this partly because the local residents could not (and would not) understand what it is like to be at sea, and partly because they were afraid this could be understood as mere bragging.

Nevertheless, let me once again emphasize that it is pertinent to view the seafarers as local, technical experts - cf. the outline earlier in this chapter - although the *potential* for new ideas into the local community is much greater than the *actual* dispersal.



A cadet (in the middle) during his on board training (the second year at college).



A cadet (in the middle) during his on board training.

6.2 The seafarer seen as a local cosmopolitan

After a contract period at sea, it might be difficult for the seafarer to adjust to the life back home again. Take for instance the man I referred to in section 5.2.2.3, the one who said “*but my life has not changed, because I have stayed in the same way for ten months*”. This statement was part of an outline which aim was to describe how the local community undergoes alteration while he (the seaman) is away at sea. He said: “*[When you are away] you don't know what happened in the Philippines. And when you are going home you heard something wrong, things seems different [compared to] when you left. So, [when you arrive at home] you can't adapt again [...] you must start living differently.*” Furthermore, this AB gave me a concrete example of how the lifestyle of the people back home had altered in his hometown. He described how someone had established a beach resort in the town while he was away, so he could not “*adjust to the [local] lifestyle again, since the people were so busy because of the new resort.*” I will argue, in line with these statements, that the most severe *recreation* process in the life of a seaman, actually takes place during the vacation time back home. Because of his absence he is forced to re-adjust, or mentally re-create himself, to a completely new world which, during the last year, has been established back home.

However, it is not only the local community back home that changes; so does the seafarer. Some years at sea seem to have a profound influence on how the seamen view their domicile. They return home marked by a first-hand experience of the outside world - that is both the exceptional universe on board and the stop-overs in different ports - a “luggage” which color their perception of what is going on back home. While the former section pivoted around the seafarers' technical know-how, this one will contain some examples of the seafarers seen as returned cosmopolitans. How their international experience is expressed back home on vacation, is again the main issue.

As mentioned earlier, many Filipinos live very local or provincial lives. I guess it goes without saying that the seafarers do not belong to this category of people. Besides the fact that the deck officers on board have as part of their job to maneuver the ship in “*the rest of the*” or “*abroad*”, to use some expressions from Jorun Rugkåsa (1997:142-44), the seafarers in general have actually seen places that the local residents are obliged to just read or hear about.

To take it even further: the seamen have been walking around in places that their fellow countrymen hardly know exist. To have this kind of first-hand experience and detailed knowledge of the outside world - such as having an idea of the climate in the North Sea or being able to locate Argentina on a map for that matter - is one way in which the seafarers differ intrinsically from many of the local residents.

In line with this I would like to mention that the seamen are familiar with or used to orient themselves - in a geographical sense of the word - with the assistance of the concepts of north, south, east and west. In my opinion, it is not quite common in the Philippines to apply such an abstract framework when approaching the geographical world. Even among highly educated people I met, this was not a typical thing to do. Apparently, it is a more widespread practice among the local residents to refer to places in terms of their proximity to other places. For instance if I wondered whether or not town B was north or south of the neighboring town A, many of the non-seafarers could not give me the “correct” answer. Instead they just said that B is *close to* or *not far from* A. Some of the seafarers I interviewed even referred to episodes where they themselves had forgotten about these matters, and where they had to translate or skip their use of the terms north, east, west and south in conversations with family members and/or neighbors, in order to be understood.

Besides these abstract geographical designations, the seafarers had also included in their vocabulary a wide range of other words or expressions originating from the daily life at sea, terms which the local population is not familiar with. “*For instance*”, a seafarer told me, “*when we are riding on a bus we usually call the back of the vehicle bopa [while the Ilonggo word is likod] and the front proha [while the Ilonggo word is una]*”. To let a peculiar tongue be a hallmark of the maritime profession is not an unusual remark to make. Rediker for instance, gives an outline of how “*the seaman had an unmistakable way of talking that included technical terms, unusual syntax, distinctive pronunciation, and a generous portion of swearing and cursing*” (1987:11). The seamen Rediker had in mind when he wrote this, were Anglo-American sailors in the 18th century. Despite of the fact that many things related to everyday life and work have changed since then, the fact that the secluded environment on board generates certain diverging practices, for example when it comes to language, remains.

Still, the cultural heritage from a long life at sea is not only reflected in a broad geographical knowledge and the use of strange words and expressions. The competence goes beyond such a rather technical or information based insight. In brief, we may say that the seafarers possess what Mary W. Helms refers to as *esoteric knowledge* (1988). That is, “*knowledge of the unusual, the exceptional, the extraordinary; knowledge of things that in some way or another lie beyond the familiar everyday life*” (1988: 13). To know about such things as customs and sacred texts of people living in geographically distant places, and to recognize the influence or contribution of foreign scholars, is by Helms given as examples of so-called esoteric knowledge. In brief, we may say that the aim of Helm’s work is to focus upon the aspects of esoteric knowledge which can be related to people’s orientations towards geographical distant places. The idea is simply that certain people, whether they travel themselves or are informed about exotic places, people and ideas through others, eventually will possess esoteric knowledge, which again will put them in a privileged position in the society, or strengthen an already established position.

In other words, people who possess esoteric knowledge - for instance those who Helms refers to as “*long-distance travelers or specialists*” (1988:80) - are not like all the rest. It goes without saying that (also) this type of knowledge is characterized by the fact that it cannot be shared by all or by most people in a population. The esotericism guarantees a certain element of exclusivity. How this secrecy is expressed, however, vary. Or to put it slightly differently: those who own a key to an esoteric domain may signal this in different ways. Helms gives an outline of a few characteristics which seem to be connected to the control of such know-how. As we will see, the overseas seafarer may fulfill some of the criteria put up by Helms. In other words, the seafaring profession can be used as an illustration of how secret and hidden knowledge is handled by people in general.

Helms focuses in her book on how rare knowledge may have political-ideological implications in traditional societies. Furthermore, Helms bases her perspective on the notion of esoteric knowledge as something which may or actually will give rise to certain protection maneuvers from the people who possess these secrets. In others words, these specialists - such as experienced travelers and members of the ritual and political elite - will put a lot of effort into controlling the access to their hidden knowledge. A keyword in this process of obscurity

is, according to Helms, mysticism. Selected people with exotic secrets drape their know-how in different manners, in order to avoid a large-scale dispersion of what they know.

One way the knowledge is kept away from the public - one way the mysticism appears - is through seclusion or concealment of the actual bearers themselves. Members of the elite may strengthen or preserve their strong position by living completely different lives than the rest of the society. The secluded life of hermits and mystical recluses are two examples given by Helms of these knowledge protectionist efforts (1988:15).

As we soon will see, this may have some similarities with the situation among overseas seafarers. But before that, let me as a general statement add to the outline above that it is obviously relevant to also look for elements of mystification in the field of language. It is for instance a strong element of exclusivity and hiddenness stored in a complicated or specialized vocabulary, or even in the practice of certain languages as such. What I have in mind is for example the role of highly technical and abstract terms and expressions among a particular group of people such as art critiques, and how this may keep many people from a deeper understanding of certain selected chapters in the history of art. Also the traditional use of Latin in the Roman-Catholic Church fits this picture. (For a more comprehensive discussion of the relationship between so-called *elaborated* and *restricted code* see for instance Douglas 1982).

From time to time it happens, though, that members of the elite give out small portions of their esoteric possessions. Helms refers for instance to transition rituals among Aboriginals in Australia, in which the novices are led through different levels of the ritual, where each level corresponds to a certain worldview, which is unknown to those who still are on the lower levels. The relatively few elders, who have passed through all the levels, are the only ones in the position to administer and influence this knowledge, and at the same time pass the cosmology on to the younger generations (see also, in relation to distribution of worldview through ritual, for example Barth 1987).

How do the Filipino overseas seamen fit into this discussion? In what manner do they possess so-called esoteric knowledge? Is it possible to detect a display of exclusiveness in the field of knowledge among the seamen? A highly routinized and mobile work place, surrounded by

water and manned by just a little more than 20 men, is not an environment for well-known everyday experiences (well-known is in this context used as a synonym for a family based life on shore). As argued elsewhere, life on board can be viewed as an extreme or extraordinary context. It is therefore pertinent to also treat the knowledge generated on board as unusual or esoteric.

My neighbor in Iloilo City, a chief mate with years of overseas experience, gave me once an explanation for why it is so; of what it is with the seafaring profession which may leave the actual seaman with a relatively exclusive know-how in the family and in the neighborhood. He said: *“The seamen give ideas to the local residents, you know. [Since] we reach the other side of the world, other countries and find some good ideas, more modern. We can apply it here, because the Philippines is delayed [it is not yet modern].”*

To see other places, to learn more about how things are done elsewhere, is obviously an important element in the new and extraordinary knowledge seafarers bring home.² Furthermore, it seems that one of the results of being exposed to this otherness, is the origin of a critical attitude among the seamen; they become critical towards their home country.

Let me explain what I mean by this. From time to time it can be difficult for some of the seamen to actually re-adjust, or re-create themselves mentally, to the society they left several months earlier. Instead, these seamen remain on the outside of the community, peeping in and pointing out what they see as major errors and defects in the Philippine society. For instance, a chief mate I met several times during my stay said to me that: *“[A seaman] can compare, you know, and this will influence you, help you develop your own life. [For instance] the traditions which is observed here [the Philippines] which is wrong, one can change it, you know.”* I asked which traditions he had in mind? He said: *“For example being a Filipino [includes] strong family ties, close, very close. But in some other nations, in America and in Europe, when you reach 18 years of age you are seen as independent [while you in the Philippines can live in your parents house until you are a grown up and even longer].”* It is appropriate to mention that I also refer to this seaman in section 7.2.1, when the theme is the strong tradition among the seafarers of presenting a broad range of gifts to the family back

² A parallel story is told by Rediker in his outline of the maritime world in 18th century (1987:294).

home, after an ended contract. The said seaman had been able to challenge and neglect the strong expectations he was facing from his family, friends and neighbors, concerning this so-called *pasalubong* tradition. It is possible that inspiration from how problems are solved elsewhere, *can* be one possible explanation for his change of behavior.

A critical attitude towards Philippine culture can also be expressed in a “*change of lifestyle*” as one phrased it. This seaman told me about some of his colleagues who “*are influenced by the world outside, where they used to work*” when they arrive at home. For instance in “[...] *their social life. The way they eat. The food they eat - western style. They don’t even want eat the native food [anymore]*”.

I remember also how some of the seafarers I visited condemned the littering and the crime rate in the Philippines and compared it to the situation in Singapore. One of them said: “*No danger being outside in Singapore. But here, I never go out when it is dark. Even in daytime you are not safe here.*” Another seaman I met made a similar comparison to Japan. If you forget your camera in a public place in Japan, you can be sure it will still be there when you go back to look for it, “*unless a Filipino has passed by in the meantime.*”

This last rather pungent statement remind us of something which has been discussed earlier in this thesis. In section 3.1.2 I made use of one of Niels Mulder’s (1996) considerations, namely to insist on an element of *self-flagellation* in the way the Filipinos look upon themselves. Also, the work of Jorun Rugkåsa can support such a notion. She claims that it is typical in the Philippines to downgrade products which are locally made, that is produced in the Philippines. In other words, “*objects coming from abroad are import and original [which] is sufficient to guarantee its quality, [...] while those which originate from the Philippines are local and fake and of lesser quality*” (1997:116-117).

If we see the seafarers’ critical attitude in the light of the Filipino self-flagellation in general, it might be so that their sting does not strictly stem from their foreign experience. When they return home and observe what they left with new and critical eyes, this can most certainly be linked to what they have seen by personal inspection abroad, but the glamorous notions of the outside world in general in the Philippines, is probably an element in this as well.

Besides the ambition of pointing at the critical attitude which may rise out of the seafarers overseas and unusual experience, I would also like to emphasize *absence* as an intrinsic presupposition for their esoteric knowledge, and therefore for their strong position in the local community. With Helms' idea of mystification through seclusion in mind, I suggest to see the seamen's absence in itself as a significant factor when the objective is to get an understanding of how their outstanding position in the neighborhood is linked to their unusual knowledge. The idea is simply that when the seafarer is overseas, the community back home will not be fully informed about what he is doing; which situations he will be a part of and what he will be exposed to.

Furthermore, this situation - one characterized by an information gap between the two parties involved - may again lead to a certain attention and curiosity from the people back home, a fascination which in the end can nourish or strengthen the position of the seaman within the on-shore community. What I am aiming at with this, is simply that since they (landlubbers) know that the seafarer has spent his time overseas or abroad - words which has glamour and prosperity as two of their connotations in the Philippine celebration of the outside world - they may ascribe his time of absence certain *attractive* qualities. They may start to treat the seamen differently, as persons who stand out in the neighborhood by virtue of their foreign or esoteric experience. As I have discussed at full length elsewhere in this thesis, the seafarer's position as brokers for inexperienced or potential seamen in the family or neighborhood, is one of the most striking practical manifestations of the seamen's esoteric knowledge (section 4.2). Like Hermes they know how to peregrinate between worlds and are hence able to assist others to follow their paths. When the seafarers perform their brokering, this will affect or more correctly preserve their position in the on-shore community. In relation to this, it should be sufficient to recollect the significant standing of *utang na loob* in Philippine society. Without having any numbers to refer to, I still insist that the widespread use of seafarers as *compadres* in relation to for instance baptism also illustrates the strong position of these people in the family or the community. An intrinsic part of the explanation for this pattern is of course the seamen's dollar count and perhaps certain personal qualities. Nevertheless, I will insist that the seafarer's international orientation is also of immense importance when they are intended for the duties of a *compadre*.

Let me sum up the argument so far. Through his absence, the seaman's overseas experience will be veiled in a certain mystical and glamorous manner. A mysticism which may tease the imagination and curiosity of the people back home in such a way that they make it possible for the seaman to captivate or be left in a powerful or key role in the local community. This rather paradoxical situation - one which underlines the possibility of being significant and present through non-appearance - fits very well with what Helms claimed in her work regarding the importance of absence. Both the hermits, which Helms uses as an example, and the overseas seamen accented in this thesis, are structurally strong though socially marginal. A central part of their significance in the local community stems from their possession of extraordinary or esoteric knowledge.

I find it also pertinent to add Turner's notion of "*the power of the weak*" to this discussion (1974:259). When he underlines the inferior position of the novices or "*passengers*" (*sic*) in a rite of passage, but at the same how they are able to obtain power from the sacred knowledge they receive in the same ritual, this have certain similarities with the seafarer's situation. The novices in an initiation rite receive an elevated position when they are molded in the picture of the society - expressed by the communication of the sacred knowledge of the society - while the seaman, on the other hand, obtain a superior and strong position in his family and neighborhood when he operates or appear as a "*man of the world*", to use an expression from Rediker (1987). In sum we could say that both these types of persons achieve a powerful status from temporary marginality in a certain social environment.

I still insist, though, that the landlubbers are not fully aware of what the seamen are bringing home from the sea after finishing a contract. In other words, as I have discussed above, it will be problematic for the seafarer to give an extensive description of the life at sea for the people back home, among other things because the seafaring experience is not of course included in their horizon.

Nevertheless, what family members, friends, acquaintances and neighbors *do* know for certain, is that *their* seaman has been out there; he has been abroad or overseas. Moreover, they see with their own eyes how he carries things from the outside world, and they will eventually learn to know whole stories or just bits and pieces of what he has experienced during his time at sea. All in all, I will maintain, that this is more than enough to make the

seaman appear in a rather esoteric manner; in an attractive and glamorous, and at the same time powerful, glimmer.

Let me take this a step further, and at the same time include some of the basic assumptions in the work of Fannell introduced in the section above. Sometimes I wonder if not the process between the family/friends back home and the overseas seamen is a good illustration of the continuously or on going negotiation between those who have and those who don't have, ideas introduced by Fannell, and outlined by Bloch (1998:67-84). What I'm aiming at is simply that the landlubbers, by taking part in an asymmetrical relationship with the seafarers, with this at least have a minimum of access to the resources floating in his surroundings. In other words, I will maintain that the people back home think or hope they will be able to share some of the secrets of the seamen, when accepting and encountering their esoteric possessions. It is as if they perceive some desirable remains of what he has obtained after almost a year of absence, when they socialize with him during his time back home; and they hope for some kind of magical dust to sift down on their heads and shoulders, so that they can be involved in the esoteric adventures of the seafarers, when mingling with the returned contract workers.

It must be emphasized however, that it is most probably through material things that the exotica included in the seafarers contract are best expressed back in the Philippines. Moreover, it is also reason to believe that it is these physical proofs of the seafarer's international experience, that are in the minds of the landlubbers when they pay him a visit short after his homecoming³. Since it is a strong tradition in the Philippines to always bring home something after a journey or a working period abroad, the people back home can expect or at least hope for a gift when they meet a seaman in between two contracts. Nevertheless, the aim of this section has been to emphasize that so-called esoteric knowledge - tales from the universe of extraordinary experiences - can also be part of what the seamen bring home from the sea, and something which makes them stand out in the family and neighborhood.

³ This takes place of course in addition to the satisfaction which is grounded in the invaluable fact of seeing the seaman again, hopefully sound and healthy.

Part VII

**Economic repercussions caused by
labor migration**

Oh, I'm sailin' away my own true love,
I'm sailin' away in the morning
Is there something I can send you from across the sea
From the place that I'll be landing?

That I might be gone a long time
And it's only that I'm askin',
Is there something I can send you to remember me by,
To make your time more easy passin'.

(Bob Dylan, *Boots of Spanish Leather*, 1963)

While the main theme of part III and IV was to illuminate inducement factors and preconditions for migration, and part V unfolded some aspects of the life at sea, the following chapters will focus on the economic effects of the migrants' labor journeys. Or to put it slightly differently: while part III and IV dealt with people leaving their homes and families, part VII will basically be about coming home. Not necessarily coming home in a literal sense

of the word. The focus will be more on the monetary *contribution* from the working hands abroad, than on the physical presence of the migrant. Nevertheless, as we shall also see, the way the remittance is used has often something to do with a wish from the single migrant to be able to stay at home – and at the same time to be symbolically present in the family and local community – if not permanently so, at least for a considerable period of time.

I will further in detail focus on some of these investments implemented in the local community by the migrants. Besides being small scale, these enterprises are for the most part tied up to the contract worker's family. Partly because they often are run by family members, but the fact that the investments are meant as an economic insurance for the family - the single seafarer included - also connect these enterprises to the family organization. In addition, the strong tradition of spending a considerable amount of the salary on gifts and some selected consumer goods will be discussed at full length in the following chapters. I will among others things maintain that physical objects are very well suited as connecting links between the different worlds which make up the seaman's life; at sea and/or overseas on the one hand, and a family life back home in the Philippines on the other.

The first chapter of part VII, however, will focus upon certain aspects of the migrants' contribution to the national economy. This means that once again the spotlight is on the OCW in general and not exclusively on the seafarer. The remaining chapters of part VII, on the other hand, will be reserved for a discussion of the remittance that mainly stems from the hands of the seafarers.

7.1 The migration industry

In a previous section (3.2.1) I chose to make use of the negative expression "*the sick man in Asia*" to illustrate the situation in the Philippine national economy. I further argued that the severe problems the country is facing, like poverty, corruption and under- and unemployment, constitute at the same time a fundament or preconditions for migration. People flee the country in favour of an overseas contract due to a lack of opportunities for a proper life back home.

It is obviously important to take into account the major problems in the Philippines if the aim is to get a more profound understanding of why millions of Filipinos choose to live and work outside their own country. Nevertheless, the mass exodus seen from this angle, seen as a result of a wide range of coercive forces which pull and push people in to a role of a migrant, does not tell the whole story. Individual inducements and family based factors are of course of overall importance (these are discussed at full length in part III). However, it is also imperative to look for nourishing factors for this mass movement on a structural and governmental level. What I am aiming at is the fact that labor migration is an industry in the Philippines; that perhaps as many as 7-9% of the population at any time is working abroad¹, and that this is a result of an expressed wish from the authorities in this country. I would like to maintain that from the year 1974, when overseas employment became a major governmental policy in this archipelago², nobody has actually been interested in reducing the stream of people across the borders. At least this is the case for the legal or registered migrants, those who have a file in the recruitment agencies and are registered by the federal authorities. *“The existence of transnational migration is thus officially sanctioned and highly regulated by the Philippine state”* (Schiller et.al. 1992:4).

A very explicit illustration of the intrinsic role the government has in paving the way for the Philippine Diaspora, is given by Joaquin L. Gonzales III when he focus on how the state in 1991 initiated the Overseas Workers Investment (OWI) Fund Act (formaly catgorized as RA 7111). The idea with this fund was to *“Provide Incentives to Overseas Workers, Reduce the Foreign Debt Burden and for Other Purposes”* (RA 7111, in Gonzales III:123). Further, in the official Declaration of Policy, in connection to the RA 7111, it says: *“It is likewise the policy of the State to reduce the foreign debt in order to better achieve sustained economic growth by way of tapping the unofficial and informal remittance of said workers”* (RA 7111, in Gonzales III:123). Gonzales III concludes the discussion related to the OWI by stating that the Act represented a big let-down by the government towards the OCWs and their families, since it directly links the financial situation of the country with what the labor migrants are able to remit from their efforts abroad (Gonzales III, 1998:124).

¹ Alexandro M. Cruje, Officer-in-Charge at the Employment Branch of Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), suggested in discussions with me that as many as 6 millions Filipinos are having their daily work abroad or overseas.

² In 1974, the Philippine government enacted the Labor Code, which aim was to regulate the rapidly expanding market for overseas contract work (Goss and Lindquist, 1995:338).

In March 1995, the Filipina domestic helper Flor Contemplacion was executed in Singapore. She was accused and found guilty of murdering two persons, one fellow Filipina and her Singaporean ward. As discussed elsewhere, this so-called *Flor Contemplacion case* really led to harsh reactions in the Philippines. I personally remember for instance how huge demonstrations were organized in different places in the country, and how the Prime Minister of Singapore choose to postpone his planned visit to the Philippines after the hanging, this because of the tension in the population. The execution of Flor Contemplacion led also to some changes in the Philippine policy regarding the OCWs, at least officially. In the Republic Act 8042, named *The Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos*, from 1995 (after the execution), we find among other things the following phrasing: *“the State does not promote overseas employment as a means to sustain economic growth and achieve national development [on the contrary] the State shall [...] continuously create local employment opportunities and promote the equitable distribution of wealth and the benefits of development”* (Section 1. C, the Republic Act 8042, Appendix in Gonzales III 1998).

Gonzales III, however, sees it as a fact that the Philippine state treat the remittance from the OCWs as an integral part of the efforts in sustaining the country’s economic growth, and that many policy-makers in the Philippines strive to remove any obstacle for the labor migration to take place, as long as the country is not able to handle the labor surplus and as long as the national financial situation demands it (1998:78). It is important to be aware of the fact that this labor promoting policy is also criticized by many different groups, for instance NGOs, media, women’s groups and labor unions, which often conclude that the social costs involved in labor migration (such as physical abuse, emotional depression and family breakdown), is too high (Gonzales III, 1998:78)). I will later on in this chapter be more specific about in which manner the government can be said to nourish the actual labor exodus. Before that will take place, however, it is time to briefly look into what this so-called migration industry consists of and perhaps why it came in to being in the first place.

As already suggested, the principal explanation for the rise of this migration industry is the same as for any other industry: profit. Some figures could illustrate the intrinsic contribution overseas work represents for the national economy in the Philippines. But first, let me remind you of the fact that the remittance payments are not touched by the Philippine economy, such as interest rates and inflation. The financial assets will on the contrary be sturdily sent home,

regardless of any in-house, national problems (*Asiaweek*, 1995, Nov.10). We have lately witnessed for a fact how a situation of economic discrepancy is established in Southeast-Asia and how this can be said to strengthen the importance of overseas employment. The crisis in the recent years in the Asian economies has had, among other things, a tremendous effect on the Philippine Pesos. In the sense that the currency underwent an extensive decline of its value with the consequence that the migrants - who usually receive their salaries in dollars³ - had a raise in their gross income of perhaps as much as 100%.⁴

The value of the remittance in 1994, from the total number of OCWs, was according to information given in the magazine *Asiaweek* (1995, Nov.10) \$5.1 billion, while other, and perhaps more official sources, suggest \$4.7 billion for the year 1995 (POEA, in *the Philippine Star*, Feb. 3, 1996). In other words, if we propose that approximately five billion US Dollars were annually remitted during the mid-nineties, this should correspond approximately to the actual situation.

However, these numbers requires some explanation. In general, it can be underlined that it is not an easy task to inform on these matters. Nobody knows the exact size of the remittance that every year is ploughed into the Philippine economy. The figures vary from source to source - sometimes even the same source operates with different numbers - and it is also a fact that a considerable amount of money is never registered in the official statistics. Migrants transfer remittance outside the official state-controlled system - through, for instance, friends or colleges returning to the Philippines (the so-called *padala* system) - in order to avoid the taxation which is imposed on ordinary transmittances. Not only returning Filipinos may be used as remittance couriers for the migrants. On my first visit to the Philippines, I brought with me some letters from a nurse working in Norway, and although of course I did not open this mail, I am more and more convinced that they did not only contain sweet words from a caring mother and wife overseas, but also some unofficial fruits of her sacrifice in a strange and foreign country.

³ One indication of the strong position of overseas work among the Filipinos is the fact that almost every - if not all - major daily newspapers in the country are bringing the Pesos-Dollar rate on a central place in the paper. (in some journals even on the front page). Perhaps this piece of information can be seen as a kind of welfare barometer for the millions of Filipinos who directly or indirectly have their income from abroad.

The legal overseas migrants are not obliged to transfer 100% of the salary through the official channels. For land-based workers it varies from 50-70%, but for seafarers it is as much as 80% (Goss and Lindquist 1995:340). Gonzales III, emphasizes strongly the importance of this imperative when it comes to understand the after all substantial share of the OCWs earnings which is remitted through official channels (Gonzales III, 1998:75).

The lack of accuracy when it comes to determining the size of the total amount of remittance sent back to the Philippines is not only related to the migrants' exploitation of the *padala* system. As Gonzales III maintains, the monetary remittance make up solely 58% of what the OCWs brings home, the remaining 42% are canalized through the already mentioned *padala* system, mailing system or carried home as commodities and currency by the migrant themselves (Gonzales III, 1998:70).

Despite the problems connected to stipulating the actual value of the remittance which every year is sent home to the Philippines, it is beyond any doubt that the amount is enormous, and that it has a profound effect on the country's economy. So profound that the government, as we shall see below, will take measures which both promote and ease the pain of such a career. It is not only in the Gross National Product (GNP) - which is Gross Domestic Product (GDP) plus payments from abroad - that the effect of the remittance is visible. The overseas payments are also to a certain degree reflected in the GDP. As we shall see in section 7.2.2.3, the remittance is often invested by the migrants themselves in small businesses back home in the Philippines, investments which most probably will raise the GDP or the value of what is produced of both goods and services in one year in the country.

In which ways do the Philippine government encourage or pave the way for the mass exodus? In short, the governmental efforts can be said to follow two different paths. On the one side there are manoeuvres or arrangements which explicitly concern the migration process. For instance, as described in section 4.3, the government, represented by Philippine Overseas Employment Association (POEA), often accommodates the private recruiters in seeking overseas markets for their "products". The fact that the migrants also need to be clarified by

⁴ It is a fact that from my first trip to the Philippines (1994) and until the last (2001), the Pesos-Dollar rate went from circa 25 and up to about 50.

federal authorities before entering the foreign labor market can be seen in the light of these marketing operations. The government monitors the migration stream by doing this; they ensure that no troublemakers, hopefully, take part in the migration stream, people who in the worst cases can influence the position in the overseas labor market. A quotation from one of the POEA adds illustrates how they promote this labor force overseas or at least how they picture the ideal migrant: *“The Filipino workers...all equipped with necessary education, training and a natural ability to adapt to different work cultures...are ideally suited in any multiracial working environment given a facility with the English language. Their professional competence...making them much sought after in today’s competitive global workplace”* (published in the newspaper *Today* 1995).

Besides the promotion efforts of the POEA, the government is also engaged in protecting the interests and well-being of the overseas workers and their dependents. These efforts are first and foremost performed by the organization Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA)⁵, with the help from personell stationed overseas, such as a Labor Attaché and an Overseas Workers Welfare Officer (Gonzales III, 1998:20). In countries with a large number of OCWs, the OWWA employees will monitor the working conditions of their fellow countrymen, through handling a wide range of reported cases which in different ways are involving Filipino contract workers. By *cases* I mean everything from crime and cultural offences (in which the Filipino may be both a victim and a perpetrator), to matters which concerns the welfare of the migrant and the actual contract and payment situation in their overseas efforts (Gonzales III, 1998:89-90). In 1994, the OWWA handled as many as 14.314 cases in which crime and cultural offences (such as murder, rape, drug trafficking, theft and violationg Muslim law) made up the largest category (39%), followed by welfare cases (31%) and those pivoting around problems regarding the contracts and salaries (25%) (numbers from OWWA, in Gonzales III, 1998:90).

The Philippine government is also engaged in some sort of nourishing efforts, in relation to the said exodus. Official personnel do this, I will maintain, by drawing various types of pictures in the mass media, pictures which aim is to pay tribute to the OCW and to underline the significance of overseas work for the Philippines as a nation. To name the migrants *“the*

⁵ For the sake of order; both POEA and OWWA are part of Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE).

new heroes”, as for instance President Aquino first did back in the late eighties (Rafael 1997:4), is one such expression. Another is to insist on calling those who leave “*Overseas Filipino Workers*,” instead of OCWs.⁶ The significance of the latter term is, the way I see it, to emphasize that the migrants are not just any contract worker - a position they after all share with millions of others in the world - but they are *Filipinos*. They may find themselves overseas physically, but they are still a part of and contributing to the nation - the Philippines.

I will argue that the government, by using such expressions, tries to contextualize the efforts performed by the single migrant. They try to impose meaning, or more precisely add one dimension of meaning, to this choice of career. They make the migrants feel that they are persons of great importance not just to their own family, but also to their country. Critics, on the other hand, tend to maintain that they sugar the migration pill by performing these tributes. They try to lead potential migrants into contract work despite the high cost involved in these jobs.

I'm fully aware of the fact that by emphasizing factors situated on a rather aggregated level seen in relation to individual migratory careers, I touch a long and heated discussion in the social sciences, namely the relationship between the single individual and society; between externalization and objectivization; between free will and determinism; between the micro- and macro level. These have been, and most certainly will be, returning themes in a scientific treatment of human lives.

My intentions, however, has not been to enter this battlefield or to add one perspective to this established disagreement. Instead, with my eyes wide open, I choose to obey the Boyg's command in Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*: “*go roundabout, Peer!*”. I will insist that this *may* be seen as an unproblematic topic, as a “*phony war*”, to cite one of Giddens' comments to this scientific dispute (1985:292, in Goss and Lindquist 1995:318). I simply assert that there is not a question of either/or in relation to how the mass exodus from the Philippines can be understood. In this thesis, however, my main concern has been, and will be, the disposition of the single seafarers and their families (I have for instance in section 3.1 given an extensive

⁶ I have also seen on one occasion the expression “*internationally shared resources*” used instead of OCWs. The journalist who wrote these words, claimed it was President Ramos' new definition of OCWs (*Today*, May 1. 1995).

outline of the pool of individual motives for leaving). This section primarily serves as a *reminder* of the fact that the individual migrant performs his efforts in a particular setting, in a context that will have an intrinsic effect on the actual decision of leaving on an overseas labor journey. In other words, since the individual migrant will, during the process of leaving, in some way or another encounter and experience the reality in this surrounding structure, it should be of vast importance to also include this dimension of the Philippine mass exodus. Perhaps we could make use of some words from Turner to portray this issue. Even though Turner's concern is pilgrimage, his statement should be valid for migration as well: "*It is infused with voluntariness though by no means independent of structural obligatoriness*" (1974:182).

Nevertheless, let me once again emphasize that this section is not about a migratory determinism. The so-called second nature, in this case referred to as the migration industry, is not in detail putting restriction on and flavor to the migration drama. It is more a question of paving the way for certain individual decisions to take place. In other words, people are to a certain degree free to leave, and families are more or less able to voluntarily decide whether they should let one of the members leave for overseas employment for a certain period of time or not. But *where* they go, *how* they actually leave and *who* are not in demand as participants in this export, are examples of factors which often lay way beyond the decision of the single migrant. In this section the term '*migration industry*' is meant to denote such structural factors.

However, this doesn't mean that this industry should be treated as a tangible and consistent actor in this play. If or when I, in the text, describe the migration-related industry in the Philippines as if it act in accordance to an intention, it should not be treated too literally. My object is not to actually humanize the bureaucratic system, although it might be easier to see the importance and the strength in the different migration sectors of commerce when it is regarded as a consistent and intentional actor. When the intrinsic role of the said industry is described as intentional, one should definitely add the prefix *as if* ahead of the outline.

Nevertheless, it is an indisputable fact that overseas contract work is of vital importance for the Philippine economy, and that this is something which has given the government a leading position in what I will refer to as the migration industry. This does not mean, however, that

the official authorities in the country are the only operators on this particular arena. In addition to the private recruiters already discussed above, we also find some enterprises whose aim is to earn a living from the remittance sent home by the OCWs. Banks specializing in remittance processing are one example of such migration-related enterprises. Not only Philippine banks are involved in this transmittance business. Ads for banks located in, for instance, the Middle East - the area in the world where most of the OCWs are employed - were common in Philippine newspapers as well.

Duty-free Philippines (DFP) constitute another major actor in the migration industry, and once again the Philippine authorities are involved. The DFP was initiated by the Aquino government in 1986, and today it is one of the largest duty-free operators in the world. President Aquino's wish to open a duty-free business must be seen in relation to the large number of OCWs who every year come home to the Philippines, although ordinary tourists also constitute an important source of income for this enterprise. As mentioned earlier, and will be explored in detail in the section 7.2.1, the OCWs have a tradition of bringing home gifts to family members and friends after a completed contract, so-called *pasalubong*. By establishing a competitive duty-free operator in the Philippines, gifts might just as well be bought in the Philippines, rather than abroad. This option helped the migrants avoid overweight baggage and the government created at the same time a major source for foreign currency to the country.⁷ The home-comers are offered the opportunity to shop at one of the DFP outlets within 48 hour after the arrival, and they are often met with special offers and discounts since the DFP have special, designed *programs* for their customers among the OCW.

The DFP has been a tremendous success, growing from a net sale in 1987 of nearly 10 million US dollars to 350 millions in 1995. I would also like to mention that the average purchase per customer rose to \$334 in 1995 (numbers from the newspaper *Today* 1996). Let me finally briefly illustrate the close link between DFP and the contract workers. In 1996 DFP appeared

⁷ US Dollars is very often synonymous with "foreign currency" in the Philippines. And the fact that Dollars are what the migrants often use when they pay for their *pasalubongs*, is worth paying attention. As we will see in the next chapters, the use of greenbacks vouch for a certain appreciated quality in the Philippines; i.e. the items are bought, if not physically outside the country, at least they are paid for with foreign currency. This fact can turn the product into the category "imported" as opposite to "local" (see Rugkåsa 1997:116-117).

as a major sponsor of a so-called *OCW song festival* in the Philippines. The idea was to invite overseas workers to describe, through self-composed songs, matters such as their actual jobsite experience and their contribution to nation building. Reports from the management of the DFP said that their involvement in this song-writing competition took place since it fitted very well with their own interest in Filipinos abroad.

Nevertheless, the OCWs contribution to the national economy is not just a matter of remittance or money. As shown in section 3.2.2, it is common for the overseas workers to be employed in the Philippines before they decide or are able to join the stream across the borders. So when the migrants leave, they also often leave a vacant job behind. If we in addition to this also consider that it is not uncommon for the most successful OCWs to hire personnel for their small-scale businesses and a maid or two for their house, the conclusion should be clear: the mass exodus will have a positive effect on the unemployment rates in the country. As long as the migrants are employed before they go, and as long as they are able to create a monetary surplus from their work abroad, some extra people in the Philippines should be employed as a result of their overseas work.

7.2 Effects at a family and individual level

In the previous chapter, an outline was given of the contract workers financial contribution to the Philippine economy. The importance of the remittance was illustrated by figures from the national economy and at the same time seen in relation to what I chose to call the migration industry. The term refers simply to the wide range of companies and governmental institutions that surround the decision-making individuals and perhaps occasionally even dictates their judgments.

Some of the actors in this industry are mainly concerned with the technical accomplishment of the migration - such as the POEA and the private recruiters - while others are more directly involved in the business aspect of the labor exodus, for instance Duty-Free Philippines. I will, however, maintain that both parties share an interest in maintaining this exodus, due to the potential for revenue generated in this process. We can partly sense this interest in some of

their arrangements and operations in this arena. The private recruiters and POEA, for instance, actively sought to develop a market for contract work through their worldwide campaigns, and Duty-Free Philippines had their own programs directed towards the OCWs. These programs opened up for everything from discounts, loans from different banks to what they call livelihood skills training. To attend one of these courses, the OCW need to purchase for more than \$200 in one of the DFP outlets, at least if he or she wants the course for free or at a subsidized fee.

This does not mean, however, that the single migrant is reduced to just a cog in the wheel of this migrant industry. No company or institution can of course force an individual to join the stream of workers that leave the country. What they can do, and actually does, however, is to coordinate and materialize the migrants' desire for employment abroad. Further, by performing these articulated efforts the migration industry imposes constraints on the migrants' decisions. Initially, the single migrant is free to choose what kind of job he wants, but most probably his decision will take place within or among a given number of options offered him by the migration industry. This is likely to happen because the migrants themselves know that these jobs are monitored by the government, which in turn brings about a certain amount of clarification in questions regarding matters as salary and working conditions. But the migrants' decisions might have something to do with a lack of strategic knowledge as well. As discussed earlier, for example in the introduction to part IV, people often live very local or provincial lives, which again makes them fully dependent on a mediator to achieve overseas employment. The migrants might therefore choose in accordance with the strategies of the migration industry, due to insufficient information regarding the possibilities they *actually* have in a foreign labor market.

Nevertheless, there is something about the migration industry that makes it play second fiddle in the mass exodus. The industry might be interested in maintaining the stream of workers across the borders, due to the revenues generated for the players involved, but the individual migrants do not pay attention to this aspect of their careers. Labor migration, seen from single workers' point of view, is not motivated by the needs of this industry, but must be understood of course in relation to the well-being of their families. It is what they can do for their families which primarily counts for the individual migrant, and not that their choice of career happens to play a crucial role in, for instance, a nation's building program directed by the government.

So, in addition to some individual inducements discussed in section 3.1, it is first of all the welfare of the family that the migrants have in mind when they are facing the mediators and are ready to go. It is an indisputable fact that the financial contribution from overseas work is of great importance to the national economy, but the single migrant is more concerned with how the remittance from their work can make a difference for their family. The following sections will highlight how one particular group of workers, namely the seafarers, try to let their overseas efforts be a valuable improvement of their family's well-being.

7.2.1 Gifts from the “outside” - *pasalubongs*

In big international airports around the world, the seafarers can easily be recognized in the throng of other travelers, partly because they often travel in small groups and are pretty similarly dressed. Typical elements in the seafarers “uniform” are blue jeans, T-shirts, denim jackets, expensive watches (at least they look expensive), Ray Ban sunglasses and golden rings and necklaces. Also, at the check-in counters they differ slightly from the rest of the crowd due to their well-equipped luggage. In addition to some ordinary suitcases or bags, their luggage often also consists of a cardboard box or two. The content of and the reasons why the seafarers bring these so-called *balikbayan-boxes* (*balikbayan* in Tagalog means “one that is coming home to the country”), is what this section will be about. Still, let me put forward just one last episode which can shed some light on what it means to come home.

On my two first flights to the Philippines I had chosen a non-smoking seat in the front of the airplane. On the third, however, I decided to join the people in the back of the plane, the smokers. I did this transfer due to a sanctioned habit of smoking, but I soon realized that this shift also gave me an opportunity to start the fieldwork already before I arrived in the Philippines. In the smoking area I was surrounded by OCWs, and many of them were seafarers. Soon after I had mentioned the purpose of my trip to the man sitting next to me, I was introduced to four or five of his seafaring colleagues, one even from the province of Iloilo. During this flight I also learnt that ten months is a long time to be away from home. The moment the plane landed at the NAIA airport in Manila, an exalted atmosphere spread in the section where I was seated. The laughter and the small-talk increased. Some even left their seat long before the plane had stopped and got a scolding from some of the stewardesses.

“*They are so excited*”, the man next to me said, partly to explain and partly to excuse their behaviour.

As discussed earlier the duty-free trade is a business which yields a good return in the Philippines. Nevertheless, it seems that this business still has a potential for increased returns in the years to come. Far from all the seafarers I met use to buy their *pasalubongs* (gifts), in addition to different articles for their own house, after they arrived in Manila. They rather paid the excess baggage charge and brought home these things from different parts of the world (what they bought where will be discussed below). Some of the people I interviewed did mention, however, that they disliked the habit of bringing all these things home from abroad. On the one side there were those who in general meant that the seafarers spent too much of their salary on goods during their time at sea (I return to this point in a minute), while at least one seafarer stated that he really disliked seeing his colleagues carry home from abroad all these commodities after an ended contract, as if the excess baggage charge solely was a waste of money. The latter statement came from a successful captain who emphasized during the interview that many of the things he had in his house came from Manila, purchased there after returning from the sea.

The seafarers’ spendings leave us with a lot of questions, such as: what kind of commodities are we talking about, whom are they meant for, and why are they given? We are, in general terms, given an idea of what this is all about in the following statement: “*Labor migrants are, in a sense, incomplete persons, who must re-establish a bond of substance with persons left behind*” (Werbner 1990:203). In short, and in line with the quoted remark, the seafarers’ distribution of gifts after the ended contract must be seen in relation to his position in the family web. His position as a husband, son, father, nephew, cousin, godfather, patron and godchild, will influence how he distributes the content of his *balikbayan*-boxes (as we will see later, friends and neighbors will of course often also be favored with a gift). When it comes to the actual dispersal, however, the main concern for the seafarer is to at least give *something* away, at least share a tiny portion of his sacrificial fruits with many of those he feels attached to. Apparently, in many cases the sharing itself makes the difference, to paraphrase a famous Philippine beer commercial (Lacar 1993:33). Still, not all people related to the seafarer are

given expensive gifts - some of course do not receive anything at all⁸ - certain people are more favored than others.

I will look at the distribution process in detail later on in this section, but it can be useful to know already at this stage that the kinship system in the Philippines is “*bilateral in form with an orientation towards ego. [This enabled the ego] to include in his kin group relatives not only from both parental sides but also those established through affinity or ritual kinship. The Filipino type of kinship group is, therefore, [...] expanded horizontally within each generation with ego as the central figure*” (Kikuchi 1991:55). If we in addition to this also take into consideration the great importance of groups of close friends - the so-called *barkada* (see below) - the single seafarer is facing an enormous number of *potential* receivers after ended contract. Still, let me give an example which can illustrate the *actual* dispersal of gifts.

A chiefmate I interviewed told me that he used to buy his wife expensive items such as a dress and a watch, while for instance his in-laws and his godfather were given things such as cigarettes, lighters, T-shirts or some expensive liqueur. This seafarer also mentioned that more peripheral people, such as neighbours, only received small gifts from him, for instance just a few cigarettes. Another high-rank officer I have met and discussed this issue with several times over the last years, gave me on one occasion this outline of what a seaman often brings home from the sea: shoes (for instance trainers of well-known American brands), T-shirts (for example with motives from cities visited by the seaman), food (such as coffee and chocolate), cigarettes (“*for neighbors and friends*” - sic) and whisky (my impression is that Black Label is the most common choice in this case).

These examples gives us an idea of how comprehensive this present tradition is. Nonetheless, to propose the exact number of receivers of the variety of commodities brought home from abroad and presented as gifts, is almost impossible. It all depends of course on factors such as the size of the seafarer’s social network and to what extent he wants to treat them with a gift. What we know for sure, however, is that it is common to donate gifts to the nearest kin and to some of the other relatives, such as wife, parents, children, siblings, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, cousins and in-laws. Also the seaman’s ritual kin - the godfathers and godmothers - are

⁸ For a discussion on so-called *social amnesia* in the Philippines, see for example Dumont 1992:143-155.

often favoured with a *pasalubong*⁹. Friends will in addition to this also receive some proofs of the life at the seven seas, for instance close friends that belong to the seafarer's own *barkada*. The term *barkada* refers to egalitarian social units based on friendship (I will come back to a more comprehensive discussion of this phenomenon, later on in this section).

We are also facing similar problems when the question is how much money the seafarers spend on *pasalubongs*. It is close to impossible to know this for sure - the spendings are of course influenced by factors such as the seaman's network, his salary and ultimately his personal preferences - but it is undoubtedly a considerable amount. As mentioned earlier, the average purchase at Duty-Free Philippines was in 1995 \$334, but if we add to this the fact that the seafarers belong to best paid group of all OCWs, the total amount spent on gifts should by far exceed this. One man told me - by the way the same chiefmate I mentioned above - that during the first five years as a seafarer he used to spend about \$2000 on gifts every year. It is also important to remember that this was in the late seventies, so the equivalent amount today would be considerably higher.

The fact that this officer - a man which in no ways is unique or stands out among the seafarers - was willing to spend what he claimed was nearly 25% of his salary on gifts, leaves us with the following questions: why do they perform this distribution, or what are the inducements for the *pasalubong* tradition?

First of all this tradition can be seen as one way to conduct a display or perform a show-off. I will maintain that deeply rooted in every migrant there is a wish to appear as successful. To come home as a failure, that is, broke and empty-handed, after nearly a year of absence, is in all probabilities something the seafarers will put a lot of effort into trying to avoid. So, to return as a Santa Claus or as the good Samaritan for that matter, with the baggage full of foreign and exotic gifts, is one way to make manifest that their sacrifice was not in vain. Quite on the contrary, the seafarers have succeeded in what they were aiming at when they left: to

⁹ A senior officer told me once that *all* godfathers *should* receive something from the seaman when he arrived home after the termination of a contract. He also added in relation to this that it is not uncommon that the number of ritual kin can be as high as 15 for a single person ("given" to him during baptism), but that this is a rather new phenomenon. Before, the number of ritual kin was lower, perhaps comprising only one single individual.

make a considerable amount of money and to appear as a benefactor or provider for their families.

To insist on a strong conspicuous element in this *pasalubong* tradition, should hardly represent a new angle in the discussion of the gift-giving economy in the Philippines or in any country for that matter. To express oneself through physical artifacts, which in the current situation first of all means to send messages through patterns of consumption ought to be the starting point or presupposition for every outline in this field. In other words, to overwhelm family, neighbors and friends with a token from his overseas employment, may be seen as closely linked to what Veblen back in 1899 named *conspicuous consumption* (1967). I will further on claim that the *display* in the case of the seafarers can be illuminated from at least three different angles. When the seaman is able to give something away, he first of all achieves to say that he possess the necessarily financial means to buy the goods or commodities. Secondly, he is generous enough to give it away. The third conspicuous element in these acts is related to the fact that the things are bought abroad or *outside*. As discussed elsewhere in this thesis, to be able to say that a gift is imported or obtained overseas will most certainly equip the commodity with a special aura or quality in the eyes of the receivers. So when the so-called leisure class in Veblen's work were pivoting around selected and luxurious goods and commodities, the essence of a *pasalubong* is to be found in its foreign origin. In other words, by dispersing items from foreign lands, the seaman also at the same time present himself as a figure in the local, social landscape with extraordinary or esoteric experience (cf. section 6.2 on the seafarers as a local cosmopolitan). In sum we may state that the aspect of *display* in the *pasalubong* tradition consists of the seafarer's ability to show his affluence, his generosity and his overseas experience.

Let me dwell a little bit upon the strong wish to parade certain aspects of a maritime career. There is something about it which suggests that not every excess is about addressing others, not everything is about impression management. I will maintain that also some strictly private moments can be read into these acts. In order to explain what I mean by this, I will first recollect and focus on the fundamental problem the seafarers are facing as employees: their profession is prestigious and well-paid, but it presupposes at the same time an absence from a family-based life back home. Or to put it slightly differently, the seafarers are great dollar-earners, but they themselves are most of the year unable to enjoy the benefits of their own

work. One of my best friends in Iloilo City - he was not a seaman - illustrated the seafarers' situation like this: they are "*powerless in their power*". What he meant was that their power stems from their salary, while their impairment refers to the fact that 10 months a year they are not in a position to exercise or make use of some of this influence or affluence.

It should not be difficult to imagine that when a seafarer sets aside most of his own needs and interests during the contract period - when he actually conducts his "*sacrifice for the family*" - this could or will lead to some sort of compensatory acts, or slightly excessive statements, when he finally gets home. I will maintain that one of the ways by which the seafarers try to compensate for the backlog caused by the remunerative, but monotonous life at sea, is to arrive home as a *nouveau riche*. Months of absence, and months of aggregated tension and expectation, are expressed through an exhibitionistic, though planned, dispersal of material things within the social surroundings. It is as if the seaman, with the help from messages stored in material vehicles, strives for a legitimation of his choice of career towards himself and family and friends. Gift-giving portrayed in such a manner, emphasizes not only the *obvious* communicative element in the activity, but also what I will call the strong element of announcement or proclamation in the effort. I will maintain that when a seafarer donates his *pasalubongs*, this *also* contains a message to himself, saying something like: at least I have all these things left after the long lasting hardship on board - the artifacts appear as private physical proofs of his own renouncement. In other words, gift-giving is obviously about social relationships and networking, but included in this outward process the donor will also be reminded of his own efforts and his own superior position in the family and neighborhood, which again add a personal or private element into the original communicative act.

Finally, it should be emphasized, however, that this said conspicuous wealth is not only expressed through the *pasalubong* tradition, but also, for instance, in the way the seafarers dress - their watches, golden rings and necklaces etc. - and how they decorate their homes (this will be described in further detail in the section 7.2.2.2), is this tendency obviously present. I also see the seafarers' involvement in such things as cockfighting during their vacation time - a gambling activity which may involve a lot of money - as an act which can contain a fairly tangible communicative dimension.

The distribution of gifts after an ended contract must also be seen in relation to *utang na loob* or debts of gratitude. The seafarer donates certain gifts to certain people as one way to express gratitude to these people. Very idealistically stated: the returned seaman is haunted by an inner (*loob*) feeling of debt (*utang*) toward certain people, and seizes the opportunity to exhibit his gratitude by presenting these people with a gift. As we shall see, not just any type of gift will do. One seafarer I spoke to emphasized that he “*gave them something they could appreciate, too. Things they could see were from you*”. In other words, what this man did was to bring *pasalubongs* that the receiver, in this case his godfather, could see was from him. I will argue that when the gift mirrors the donor in a non-arbitrary way - that is, when the gift makes the receiver remember the grateful giver every time he takes a look at it - the present is very well suited to function as a statement in a relationship characterized by *utang na loob*. I would think that to let the foreign origin of the artifact be very apparent - whether it is a carpet from the Middle East or a Geisha doll from Japan - can be one such quality that the seaman looks for when selecting a certain gift as a token of his gratitude.

Johnson (1995) sees this kind of gift-giving act as a so-called *remembrancing*. A type of behavior – or a quality of certain types of exchange - which involves establishing a shared memory between the parties, and which is a type of debt which cannot be waged or replaced by money (1995:117-118).

The seaman mentioned above can also shed some light on how strong the interpersonal forces involved in a *utang na loob* relationship can be, and how long the process can last. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, this debt of gratitude is initially triggered by favors; someone renders someone else a service and leaves a strong, inner feeling of gratitude behind. The seafarer illustrated his relationship to those who once helped him by saying: “*you could not reach this level unless that person helped you. In return,*” he continued, “*we could help him directly [or] we could help him indirectly through his son, daughter, nephew etc.*”. As long as the person is related to him or her, they can expect some help. Indirectly help is carried out when the person who helped you does not actually need your returning favors; maybe “*he is rich already*”, as the seafarer stated. The seaman summed up the *utang na loob* phenomenon by saying that it “*is a rotation in generations. [...] Utang na loob is very powerful. You cannot expect them [those who have been helped] to help you again [but] they might help your son.*”

I don't intend, with this emphasis on and presentation of the *utang na loob* phenomenon, to say that this is a plain and straightforward quality in social relations in the Philippines. I think these statements should be interpreted more as an expression of an ideal situation, rather than the actual situation in the everyday, lowland Philippines. Put differently, influenced by the work of Fenella Cannell (1999), to present this debt situation in such an idealistic manner - as if the feeling of debt follows strict rules and solely takes place among patrons and clients - excludes what very often is the case when people interact with each other, namely such things as tension, envy, disagreement and last but not least the possibility for modification or negotiation between the parties. Cannell phrases this lack of harmony and uncertainty one place in this manner: "*from the inside, the "rules of reciprocity" look much less clear cut*" (1999:231). This statement came after she had situated Mary Hollnsteiner, who is, after all, the pioneer in pointing at the vast importance of *utang na loob* in Philippine culture (for instance Hollnsteiner 1973), as a structural functionalist. Hollnsteiner neglect of the element of conflict and uncertainty in connection to the *utang na loob* phenomena, was by Cannell linked to her "home" in the functionalist school, and to the fact that the theories very often were elaborated on a system level rather than on a level which opened up for individual variation (see for example Cannell 1999 at p. 104 and 231).

To emphasize on variation and uncertainty in relation to this topic, correspond to what I mentioned earlier in this thesis (section 4.1), when I insisted to emphasize the *potential* in how this debt of gratitude connect ritual kinsmen. It is not given, once and for all, that if you receive a considerable favor you will be involved in an indebted life-long relationship. Flexibility and variations will always be a part of the picture. For instance may close relatives, who are favored with support, choose to see this as charity and *not* something that leads to debt and an obligation to eventually give something in return. Cannell, on the other hand, illustrate this flexibility by focusing on the negotiability in asymmetrical social relationships. If I should apply these ideas to this topic, the picture could be something like this: the inferior party in a *utang na loob* relationship - the one who actually receive the favor - will always strive to modify the terms and the plight involved in their relationship. He or she will do this in order to eventually be able to influence on and hopefully settle the asymmetrical character of the social constellation.

As the empirical example outlined above may suggest, the seafarer's main focus will not exclusively be directed towards those who once helped him, the other way around might also be the case. The returned seamen donate gifts to express gratitude, but may also seek to establish or initiate credit relations to certain people. In other words: the presents might therefore also be an *instrument* for the seafarer, a remedy to consolidate or even *expand* his position in the family web or in the social landscape as such; he endows gifts and can at least hope for loyalty in return.

To treat the *pasalubong* tradition in such a rather instrumental manner, touches old and fundamental problems when dealing with the position of gifts and gift-giving practices among people. I will not fully go into this matter in this thesis; I will just point briefly at some links and illustrating examples in selected literature.

It is of course impossible not to mention Marcel Mauss and his famous book *the Gift* (1990 [1921]) when the aim is to understand more of the reason why societies are criss-crossed with patterns of chains, which are initiated and preserved by the three imperatives involved in the activity, namely the obligation to give, to receive and to return a present. This highly complex activity - Mauss referred to gift-giving as a "*total social phenomena*" (1990:3) - can of course be approached in a number of ways. *Who* one chooses to highlight in this back-and-forth process - that is, either the donator or on the receiver - is for example of great importance when it comes to how one should understand this activity. Take for instance Mauss' rather unfamiliar type of argument, when the aim was to understand the process of why the actual gift which was given, contained an obligation to reciprocate the gift. Mauss' own explanation to this mystery was a notion of something supernatural embodied in the actual gift - "*the spirit of the thing given*" (1990:10). I will not go deep into his outline of the Polynesian phenomenon or concept of *hau*, I will just remind the reader that this spirit of things (*hau*) was presented by a named Maorien storyteller as a spirit "*that wishes to return to its birthplace, to the sanctuary of the forest and the clan, and to the owner*" (1990:12). So, when you give a thing away, the *hau* in it will insure that the thing eventually is returned to its original owner - the *hau* is coming home, so to speak.

To insist on an immanent spirit as the explanation of why a gift ideally should be met by an identical counter gift, has reasonably enough met a lot of criticism. Maurice Godelier, for example, has in the recent book *The enigma of the gift* (1999) both rendered Levi-Strauss' critique in this field, in addition to his own examination. Godelier on his part insists that a "thing does not move about without reason, neither does it move of its own accord [...] what causes it to leave and then return to its point of departure is the will of individuals and/or groups to produce (or to reproduce) among themselves social relationships which combine solidarity and dependence" (Godelier 1999:101). Godelier also meets Mauss' idea of a spirit in the gift when recalling how Levi-Strauss, in his *Introduction to the work of Marcel Mauss* (1987), rhetorically asks the question whether the force which makes gifts circulate exists objectively as a power of a different nature, which again turn the actual act of exchange into a secondary phenomenon? (Godelier 1999:17, [Levi-Strauss 1987:46]). Levi-Strauss' answer to this question is of course no. He continues instead to say that Mauss' "mistake was to take the discrete operations for the basic phenomenon" (Godelier 1999:17, [Levi-Strauss 1987:46]). In Levi-Strauss' structuralistic perspective, exchange was seen as the basic phenomenon in human societies, and the origin of these processes was to be found in the unconscious part of the human mind (Godelier 1999:18). Whether this exchange consisted in a circulation of words, wealth and women between individuals and groups (Godelier 1999:18), the "primary fundamental phenomenon [of social life] is exchange itself" (Godelier 1999:19, [Levi-Strauss 1987:47]).

The idea behind this excursion into parts of these so-called enigmatic qualities of the gift, was just to give some brief examples of how these activities are treated as essential/fundamental issues in the social sciences. Whether the gift exchange is seen as a reflection of the intentionality of groups or individuals, or mirrors unconscious layers of human thought, *exchange* may be situated at the heart of people's lives. Keeping these ideas in mind, I will gradually return to the discussion pivoting around the Filipino seafarer's donation of gifts after ended contracts.

Something about the notion of exchange as *the* pillar in social life, reminds me of the work of Cannell and her use of Rafael's position in this respect. In brief, Rafael claims that it is only through participation in debt relations, that the *loob* (lit. *inside*) or the self is created (Cannell

1993:431). In other words, it is only as a regular partaker in various relationships characterized by debt, that the “inside” of a person is made and remade (Cannell 1999:105).

To present debt - an interpersonal quality which after all goes hand in hand with exchange - as what actually creates or expresses the self or personhood in the Philippine society, should lead to a notion of gift-giving - especially the one which is motivated out of debt of gratitude - as something extremely important and fundamental. By offering a gift to those who once helped you, you show that you appreciate what that person did for you, and through this the relationship between the two of you are upheld or strengthened. In other words, with the help from the gift-exchange, the parties involved are created or reborn as selected persons for each other.

I will in general claim that this innovative element in the gift-giving activity can be referred to or closely linked to the act of *remembering*. When the seaman comes home and donates items within the family and among friends and neighbors, this can well be seen as his way of joining the community again after months of absence. The maritime migrant shows that he remembers certain members of his social surroundings, by presenting them a gift. One by one, family members, friends and neighbors are recalled and chosen as members of the seaman’s social network, when receiving a physical proof of his overseas efforts. One are *re-membered* as *members* of the close circle of the seaman’s social surroundings.¹⁰ What characterizes the relationship between the donator and the different recipients is therefore a certain degree of intimacy, an awareness that have *memory* as a strong element. It is as if the seaman thinks, when facing members of the community back home, “*take this item as a proof of me remembering you during my year-long absence, and as an expression of our social alliance*”.

It is also conceivable that if or when the seafarer as part of this process actively seeks to “re-open” certain relationships with the help of *pasalubongs*, or even establish for novel contacts with some members of the local community, this is closely tied to his ability to play with what is perhaps his career’s best asset - besides of course a considerably amount of dollars in a bank account - namely, foreign goods, hand-carried from the outside. While more permanent

¹⁰ I find that the words *remember* and *member* obviously stems, etymological speaking, from the same root, as a fascinating piece of information in this connection. To remember somebody you incorporate these people as members of your social horizon.

citizens are able to give a helping hand any time during a year, or on a daily basis manage the arrangement and size of their social network, the seaman's reconnection with the local universe will be more abrupt in its character. And at the core of this *annual re-introduction*, lies the gifts.

Let me sum up the argument so far. Until now, we have seen that, firstly, the *pasalubong* tradition might have something to do with a wish from the single seafarer to appear as a successful migrant and provider. By putting on display and at the same time giving away a considerable amount of goods to the people back home, he achieves both to show his affluence and generosity, and at the same time to communicate that he possesses overseas, esoteric experience. Secondly, the outline above has also contained a discussion about how and to which extent the actual gift-giving practice takes place as a result of favors or support given in the past. Although I strongly emphasized that flexibility and negotiation always are modifying elements in relationships characterized by debt of gratitude, it appears to be common among the seafarers to express gratitude and render gifts to those who once helped him, for instance those who helped him into this favored position in the maritime industry. I continued then by introducing *remembering* as a fundamental inducement factor in gift-giving. To be favored by a gift can be seen as a physical sign of being remembered as a member of the donator's social network. Thirdly, I also briefly suggested to see the gift-giving as one way for the seaman to not only uphold or preserve his personalized links to the outside world, but also sometimes even to extend his network, by including new members. Such a notion presupposes of course an idea of the embodied - that is, social ascribed qualities - imperative in the gift as such; if something is given, something should come in return.

A fourth approach to this annual reintroduction of the seaman to his family and local community is concerned with a type of behavior which commonly and throughout the Philippines is referred to as *pakikisama*.

Pakikisama can be translated with "*togetherness*," and it stems from the Tagalog word *sama* which means "*to go with*," "*to accompany*" or "*to go along*" (Dumont 1993:411).

Pakikisama can also, according to Frank Lynch (1973:10), be used in a slightly more narrow sense, as "*giving in*," "following the lead or suggestion of another" or "*concession*". Jean-Paul Dumont, on the other hand, argues that this valued pattern of behaviour emphasizes

“social compliance and conformity as well as consideration for others” (1993:411). What is it that makes it pertinent to connect this togetherness, concession or conformity to the seafarer’s habit of bringing gifts home from their time at sea?

In short, we can say that the seamen face a problem when they return home after finishing their contracts; they challenge the highly appreciated behaviour named *pakikisama*, due to the fact that they have earned a considerable amount of money since they left, most probably more than any other in the family or in the neighborhood. In other words, their occupation as seafarers entails an eruption of social differences. Their salaries - we can also add exotic, foreign experience - make the seamen stand out among previous peers. One way to cope with these differences, however, is to let the others have a share of or take part in the wealth. By distributing gifts, the seafarer achieves to ease or play down the fact that he is rich and the rest is not.

Sometimes I wonder if this emphasis on equality also can lead to the opposite reaction, namely to a lack of distribution of gifts from the hands of the well off. What I mean is simply that the moment you give, you demonstrate or go public with what you actually possess of valuables. Thus, to be in a position to actually give something away, is at the same time to be in an outstanding position. It is a fundamental asymmetry between the two parties, since one part always has something that the other doesn’t have. The reason why I in this discussion emphasize the given inequality between the donor and the donator, is of course that this particular constellation may bring about certain reactions which threatens the bottom line in these informal, social units, namely *equality*. The gifts are in this case seen as something that jeopardizes the equality, rather than harmonizes the relation. Take for instance the *barkada* I was an associated part of during my time in Iloilo City. One of the members of this group was a young and wealthy businessman. Nevertheless, this *barkada* had for years practised a rule that one should always pay for oneself in, for instance, a restaurant. Everyone knew of course that the single member I mentioned above, could afford to pay for all of us, if not always, then at least from time to time. But this would interfere with the strong ideas of friendship and equality as a basis for this unit, and therefore it never took place.

Let me now shift the attention back to a situation in which a dispersing of gifts actually takes place, and in that connection emphasize or recollect the fact that people who surround the seafarers *expect* or even *insist on* this distribution to happen. I remember perfectly well how some officers I met illustrated this by exemplifying what a seaman could be met by when meeting some of the people back home: “*Hey, long time no see...*”, an opening line said in a false and exaggerated tone, and in which the hidden agenda absolutely was discernible. Some other seafarers I spoke to emphasized that if they did not give anything, some sort of tension would characterize or erupt in the relation. One phrased it this way: “*Sometimes they who did not receive a gift from you have a hard feeling for you*”, while another seaman in a jocular manner said “*if you do not give them, they have a hard feeling, they do not love you anymore.*”

The *pasalubong* tradition reflects therefore not just an individual’s attempt to tone down social differences, but also the strong expectations the seafarer is facing as a prominent figure in the local community or inside the family. He is actually just as much giving in or following the suggestions of others, by distributing these gifts, as he is acting in accordance with any strictly personal motives. In other words, he is practicing *pakikisama* when donating *pasalubongs*.

Some of the seafarers I interviewed in fact saw this gift-giving tradition as a huge economic burden, and therefore something they wanted to put an end to, at least the large scale of it. As already mentioned, however, this can cause problems for the seamen. Despite the risk for reactions from the surroundings, some of those I met had actually managed to reduce the number of *balikbayan*-boxes, and were willing to pay the social costs rather than spending a considerable amount of the salary on gifts. Instead of irrigating the social surroundings with exotic tokens, they said they wanted to spend part of their wages on a more long-term basis (in the next sections I will highlight some typical, family based investments performed by the seafarers). Others I talked to said that they didn’t bring that many gifts the first time they came home, and thus avoided to create any precedence for this practice to take place among friends, neighbors and relatives. I have also met seafarers who organize one big homecoming party, to which they invite all members of their network. This party is meant to substitute a large-scale donation of gifts.

A fifth and final approach to the *pasalubong* tradition is perhaps, compared to the former, more hypothetical in its character. In short, the idea is to see this custom in relation to a widespread notion in the Philippines of being fortunate as opposed to unfortunate in life. According to Benedict J. Kerkvliet (1990) and Carmelita E. Veloro (1993) *suwerte* (luck) is commonly used as one of the explanations for social inequality; prosperous people experience success due to *suwerte*, while others are trapped in poverty because of *malas* (bad luck).

I will below explain the relevance of these notions in relation to how to understand the actual gift-giving convention, but let me underline that I am well aware of the fact that this is a very simple and one-dimensional way of expressing people's notions of social differences. For instance, it is just as common to see inequality in relation to individual efforts and categories as skills, talent and so-called *diskarte*, than solely as something that lies way beyond the control of the single individual. According to Veloro, elaborated in her work on notions of fishing in two Philippine villages, *diskarte* refers to qualities such as "*skill, talent, cunning and savvy. It involves a strategy, a scheme, a plan by which one confront a problem, a puzzle or a difficulty in a pragmatic way [and] experience is one of its main ingredients*" (Veloro 1993:152-53).

Also Kerkvliet, in his well-known book named *Everyday politics in the Philippines* (1990), underlines how people seem to have rather rational or tangible explanations for their own (and others) localization in the social landscape, although social class seems to play an interesting role in that respect (1990:138, 164-173). Rich people seem to put a lot of effort into how they can applaud themselves for their own success, and the poorer parts of the population are inferior since they either drink and gamble too much, are lazy and not industrious enough, have too many children and don't think about the future at all. The poor themselves, however, are more concerned about how they for instance can be seen as exploited by the wealthy - through for instance very low salaries - that their many children are both desirable and necessary in their situation, and that their drinking patterns - some of the poor informants in Kerkvliet's material admit that they drink too much - rather stems *from* poverty than represents their way *into* this structural marginality.

Nevertheless, even if these rational elements are taken into consideration, there will always be episodes where people apply explanations which involve factors beyond human control, such as fate, God and *suwete*, to reconcile themselves with social inequality. This is a type of explanation which might turn up among people from all social strata, but poor people will most certainly outnumber the more affluent members of the society, when it comes to accentuating luck as a major explaining factor in relation to social status (Kerkvliet 1990:170). One example from my own fieldwork may shed some light on this issue.

A very successful seafarer I spoke to¹¹, emphasized the weaknesses of the educational system in the Philippines during the interview. He claimed that many students actually threw their money out the window by attending nautical courses at college, due to the fact that most of them did not have any "*backer*"¹² who could help them get through the manning agencies and on board a ship. However, he also underlined that it is nearly impossible to know for sure who will succeed and make it all the way to the sea, and who will not. He referred for instance - admittedly in a jocular manner - to God or fate to explain his own success.

I suggest to see the after all very high number of students at the maritime colleges, in the light of this fundamental uncertainty. We must be aware of the fact that perhaps as many as 95% of the students will never make it to the sea after finishing their education. If we in addition to this also take into consideration that to allow or to send a student to a college, may represent a major expense for many families, the chase for a maritime education can appear as a mystery. On the other hand, if we instead pay attention to the fact that a seafaring profession is very well paid and that it is not given *who* will actually be the selected few to enter a ship in the future, the situation should be slightly more comprehensible. I will maintain that the students (and their families/relatives), when entering college, know about their marginal chances to actually start working as a seaman in the future, but they are willing to give it a try, because if they are *lucky*, their lottery ticket (their career as maritime students) will give a very good yield. Of course, this education can also lead to some kind of land-based employment, which

¹¹ I refer to this man as very successful since he, despite his rather young age, held a position of a chief engineer on board (a Norwegian Company), lived in a nice and well-equipped house and had plenty of his own fighting cocks outside in the courtyard. Also the fact that he stood as the owner of pieces of land/lots here and there, mirrored his prosperity.

¹² The need of someone to *back* or assist the application for overseas, contract employment through a certain manning agency, is outlined and explored in for instance section 4.2.

means that it doesn't have to be a waste of time and money to go through a maritime education, even though you don't get to join a ship in the merchant marines. Nevertheless, it is at the seven seas the big (dollar) salary is to be found.

A more rational explanation for the success of the chief officer mentioned above, however - an explanation which he of course also would admit is correct - is that he, in addition to personal skills and know-how, was helped by his uncle who at that time was chief engineer on board a ship. The uncle provided him a job on board "his" vessel. Nevertheless, the example above should illustrate an awareness of these matters; one cannot know for sure who will prosper and who will not. Or in other words, it might be so that when one succeeds, it is *just* the destiny or *suwerte* that is on your side. Exactly these notions may shed some light on the *pasalubong* tradition.

Successful seafarers might think they do not deserve all the wealth themselves, since they may see themselves as *just* lucky or having experienced *just suwerte*. Others could have been in their shoes, but they have been unfortunate or experienced *malas*. In other words, despite the fact that it is the individual seafarer who performs the work on board, and therefore strictly speaking is the one that deserves the wealth, he may feel that the proper thing to do is to share or distribute some of the affluence, because the prosperity he is experiencing is accidental.¹³ Cannell, in her work from Bicol, have some reflections which can shed some light on this issue. One place she states: "*Power-holders and the powerless are not different "kinds" of human being in Bicol [...] Fate, luck, human and supernatural patronage, hard work, the mysterious will of God, and the pragmatic mechanisms by which the rich always become richer and the poor become poorer are what tip the scales so unevenly*" (1999:229).

It is time to come up with some general and concluding remarks in relation to this *pasalubong* tradition. A running theme in this section has been to point at a wide range of reasons or inducement factors for *why* a physical item is presented by the seaman after he has ended a contract period at sea. I have above given an outline of how the gift-giving can be seen in relation to the seafarer's wish to express conspicuous generosity, and that a foreign gift can be

¹³ I can briefly mention that this way of approaching the *pasalubong* phenomenon was conceived in a discussion with Professor Ricardo G. Abad at Ateneo de Manila University in March 1996.

one way of paying respect towards people that the seaman feel indebted to. Moreover, we saw that a distribution of gifts could be an instrument for the maritime employee in extending the feeling of obligation in his social surroundings, and that giving away *pasalubongs* can be understood as an attempt, from the seafarer himself, to play down or meet a painful asymmetrical social constellation. Finally we saw how to be lucky vs. unlucky also may be stated as an inducement factor for presenting family, friends and neighbors a gift.

In common for all of these motives, has been their core of sociality. A gift is a genuine social phenomenon. A gift is something that bridges the gap between people; a vehicle that upholds or strengthens the invisible bonds among people. But does not necessarily do so in a straightforward and tangible way. A gift should definitely be seen as both a container of many *potentially* different messages and located in a rather subtle sector of human communication, in which hints and intimations may play an intrinsic part. What the actual donator has in mind or are referring to when giving certain people a certain gift, will of course differ from situation to situation. In some context it may be relevant to exploit or play with the many facets of a gift's denoting qualities - take for instance a flirting present to your girlfriend - while in others it is perhaps more common to select an item which corresponds to a more narrow understanding of what to say with the help of a gift.

Let me give a brief and simple illustration of the so-called multivocal qualities of the presents the seamen bring home from the sea. When the seafarer carries home for instance a bottle of whisky to his *compadre*, it is easy to see how the object points to ideas of exclusivity and masculinity in the Philippines. Liquor drinking is definitely a male activity in the Philippines (very often seen in relation to what men do together with their male friends, in their own *barkada*), and the price of American or Scottish whisky in the country guarantee for the exclusivity. Expensive drinks also fit very well with the glamorous, or perhaps I should say mythical, canopy with its origin in or influence from overseas mass media. Perhaps the seaman also has this in mind when selecting this particular gift for his *compadre*.

There is however, despite of the gifts, many tales and voices, one running theme through the typical collection of *pasalubongs*. The variety of presents have one thing in common, a quality which I would emphasize as *the* most important and what really turns the different items into a appreciated gift in a Philippine setting. What I'm aiming at is the object's foreign origin. A

perfect *pasalubong* should be “imported”; it should be bought “outside” and paid for in foreign currency (which often means US dollars). A seafarer’s ideal gift for family and friends, should be brought home from abroad. One officer I interviewed described this issue in this manner: “*When you have been outside, you bring something from the outside*”.

I find it relevant here to include Godelier’s classification of what a valuable consists of (1999:161-163), or more precisely, in which manner power and wealth is symbolized and materialized in certain items. Even though his work take place in a New Guinean setting, and pivots around themes such as power and wealth and not explicitly gift-exchange, the list of criteria given by Godelier can shed some light on what a gift consists of. As will become apparent, to let foreign origin - both that the thing is manufactured and purchased overseas - be the main criteria for what transforms an artifact or a commodity into a gift, fits very well with parts of Godelier’s outline.

The first hallmark Godelier puts forward of what characterizes a valuable, focuses on the lack of practical usefulness of the artifact, and that the thing is not usable in daily life, that is, in the subsistence sphere. Godelier explains this by claiming that the competition for power and wealth - and I would add gift-exchange - is something which takes place beyond the subsistence sphere. I will maintain that when the seafarer returns home with a variety of gifts in the luggage, he is not addressing everyday life with these things. Instead he is introducing elements of an extraordinary universe.¹⁴ He contributes to a world made up of dreams and longing, one in which there is no place for the local peso. One aspect of this picture is that the seaman’s gifts are bought overseas - a “place” for the esoteric rather than the homely and ordinary (see section 6.2 for a further outline of this issue), another factor is that the *pasalubongs* are equipped with what is commonly referred to as a different “*flavor*” or “*taste*” (I will elaborate a little bit on the use of such metaphors later in this section). The imported goods or commodities that are presented as gifts will therefore not be compatible with the stable and the well-known of the subsistence sector of people’s lives. The artifacts are genuinely different, since they are obtained and produced abroad. They appear for the recipients back home as enchanted by different layers of significance, a wide range of

¹⁴ I’m of course fully aware of the fact that a lot of what the seaman is carrying home can be rather trivial in its character. Things which primarily are meant as a supplement to the equipment household’s collection of tools or appliances, and not necessarily as presents.

messages which locally made products not are capable of to tell. The *pasalubongs* are therefore - both in a metaphorically and literal sense - not of this (that is, their) world.

The second quality of the objects involved in communicating affluence and power, is to be found, according to Godelier in their ability for *abstraction*. Once again the outline of Godelier can be a fruitful starting point for a discussion about certain aspects of the gift. Both the objects for wealth and influence in the work of Godelier, and the typical gifts donated by the seamen, are elements in a highly abstract and symbolic language. As already discussed above, a gift is multivocal and open-ended as far as meaning is concerned. There is no direct, explicit or non-arbitrary link between what the donator want to say with a present, and what is actually said or how the gift actually is understood or interpreted by the receiver. This type of openness - accompanied by the fact that they are not an integrated part of everyday reality - is by Godelier underlined as the explanation why some objects are so suited to express or mirror certain social relations, and at the same time to *re-present* these relations in a material, abstract and symbolic manner (Godelier 1999:162). Let me include these notions in what explicitly concerns the seafarers gifts and the importance of the label "*imported*" in that connection. As we will see, there is something about the *pasalubong* which challenges the notion of openness or abstraction as an absolute quality of items applied in gift-exchange.

To give away imported goods involves at least one classification problem, namely the apparent and actual similarity between products produced in the Philippines and commodities from abroad. In the broad and overwhelming spectrum of merchandise offered in the Philippines, we find a variety of products that are meant as good substitutes for and/or copies of what is manufactured in other countries (in addition to this it is also common, at least in the large shopping malls, to offer a wide range of actual imported goods as well). I will maintain that this situation, in which it is difficult to know what is imported and what is not, may influence on how the seamen select their collection of gifts.

There is one waterproof answer to this uncertainty, however, namely the tag on the product where it says in which country the thing is produced. One officer I interviewed emphasized the importance of this tag for the people back home (the receivers of the gift). He said something like: "*The gift can be as small as it wants, as long as the item carries a tag where it says 'Made in Germany' or some other country, it is accepted by the people back home*".

The fact that an artifact is transformed into a suitable *pasalubong* when it is equipped with such a concrete and non-arbitrary link to the overseas world - remember, it is sometimes just a matter of a few words on tag - is what I have in mind when I see these gifts as challenging the criteria of abstraction which was introduced above. There is hardly any subtlety in presenting someone a gift, under the cover of the nationality of its manufactory sign. It should be underlined, however, that this is the *pasalubong* portrayed at a rather general level. The question of foreign origin is after all just one constituting element in the making of suitable homecoming gifts. When the gifts take part in the seaman's socializing after ended contract, it is after all the multivocal, arbitrary and abstract qualities which are highlighted or put in the foreground.

I have one last comment regarding the similarity between items coming from the Philippines versus abroad. I mentioned briefly above that metaphors and expressions as "*different taste*" and "*different flavor*" are common when people want to state the reason why they prefer imported goods instead of locally made, or what the difference between these products consist of. A typical statement among the seafarer could for instance be: "*It is important to bring something from the outside [to the people back home] so they can taste how it is like out there*". Also that foreign goods have a "*better quality*" than local goods, is by many people I have met given as an explanation for why they appreciate imported commodities. Common for these illustrations of difference is their *invisibility*. It is impossible to see with the eyes, what people have in mind when using these metaphors. I will thus maintain that since it is difficult to point at particular substantial differences, they need to turn to some vague notions as *taste*, *flavor* and *quality* as explanations for why they insist on the excellence of foreign products.

On the other hand, it can also be maintained that we sense how *tuned* this classification process is by taking into account people's use of certain metaphors. Put differently, the vagueness I mentioned above could just as well be described as a highly competent and controlled selection process; an effort based on and propelled by a strong and cultivated willingness to prefer foreign things. That is, although the items from the Philippines contra foreign countries are often very similar, there is, according to the people involved, a profound gap between them.

The starting point for these differences in the field of taste, is of course the strong and widespread notion in the Philippines of the local contra the outside world, where the former is connected to its surroundings in an inferior, asymmetrical relationship. In other words, this “*colonial mentality*” or “*inferior complex*” which it is commonly denominated by Filipinos, involves a disparagement of what the local or domestic world can offer vs. the imported and foreign made. I have commented on this central aspect of the Philippine society elsewhere in this thesis – for example in section 6.2 - and I will continue to pay attention to this issue in the final, concluding section of this part.

The third and last quality put forward by Godelier in his outline is related to *beauty*. The function of beauty, according to Godelier, can be approach from two different angles. On the one hand the aesthetic dimension may glorify the owner of the item; the object may display “*the quality and the status of the person wearing or giving it*” (Godelier 1999:163). Such a description corresponds to what I earlier in this section underlined in relation to the strong element of show-off or display in the process of a gift-exchange. When a seaman brings home a suitable gift from abroad (where *beauty* comes in as a weighty element), *and* gives this away, a considerable share of the focus in this seemingly generous act is after all directed towards the donator. He achieves to be in the limelight of the gift, long after he has separated himself from the thing by donating it to others. This brings me to the other way beauty can be approached, again according to Godelier, namely as a source for emotions and creation of intimacy. The type of affection he has in mind, is the one that can arise between the owner and the object, which again can “*contribute to a feeling of identification between the individual and the thing he exposes to the gaze of all*” (Godelier 1999:163). We sense, in line with this, one of the fundamentals in the treatment of gifts and gift-giving in the social sciences, namely the indivisibility of human beings and their artifacts. When a gift is given, a part of the donator is included, not only in the act but also actually in the object. The donator gives a part of himself away - and likewise - the receiver are offered not solely a physical object, but in addition an actual piece of the giver. I will elaborate a little bit more on these notions below.

I’m now approaching the end of this section, but before I continue and discuss other ways that the seamen contribute financially to their families’ welfare, I will give some final remarks regarding the gift. With Godelier’s work in mind, I will claim that the seaman and the *pasalubongs*, at a fundamental level, ought to be considered as *one*. In the sense that the gifts

suit the seaman and the seaman mirrors the gifts. In brief, I will insist that both can be denoted as partakers in the non-subsistence sphere in the lives of the people back home, since both the men and the things are colored by their overseas exposure or origin. Put differently: propelled by its beauty, abstraction and status as an imported gift, the items obtain a position beyond everyday reality, while the character of the seaman's profession - the peripheral position in the daily life back home, in favor of a glorious overseas experience - makes him stand out in contrast to the daily, routinized and taken-for-granted life. Perhaps we can say that the item and the seaman strengthen and presuppose each other's appearance in the local community back home. At least I will maintain that a home-coming in which either the exotic items are left alone - presented without the stories told by the seaman; without his presence which vouches for authenticity - or the seaman returns empty-handed, far from fulfilling the expectations of the community back home of what ought to take place on such an occasion.

I will, in the concluding part of this thesis, elaborate more on this seemingly inseparability between the seafarer and the items he brings home and eventually leaves behind when he goes back to the ship. The focus will among other things be pivoted around how the things he carries home - in addition to other local, physical expressions of his effort at sea - can act as a substitute or double for him while he is away on the ship. I will also in connection to this discussion take into consideration the intimacy and significance between the gifts the seafarer purchase while he is on board, and whom they are meant for back in the Philippines. I will among other things suggest to see the act of buying the selected gifts for the family and friends, for then to keep it in the cabin during the contract period, as one of the strategies that the seaman has in bridging the gap between himself and his beloved ones back home. In the process of buying and keeping, the seaman achieves, during his time on board, to be surrounded by material representatives and reminders of important members of his own social network.

In more general terms I would say that part of the discussion in the conclusive part will be about how physical items are capable of speaking of, or passing on a strong sense of recollection. In short, the idea is to approach the objects as so-called *mnemonic devices*, as things which generate a sense of first hand experience in their presence, despite the remoteness of the actual event or person it stands as a reminder of (in relation to this discussion, see for example Bloch 1998:120-121). So for instance, when a certain item is paid

attention to by the seaman's family during the provider's absence, this may pave the way for a strong and explicit re-experience of the husband/father at the sea. People back home can, through some of the artifacts which surround them, experience an intense feeling of being next to the absent family member - the objects, and the emotions these produce, facilitates his presence. Johnson comes up with some good illustrations of the physical object's ability to pass on a certain memory (for instance 1995:121-122). He claims for example that the typical framed pictures in any Philippine home – these so-called *laminates* consist often of a collage of several pictures in one frame – should not just be treated as examples of home decoration, but also as “*vehicles for and witnesses of the ongoing remembrancing relations through which persons [...] are constituted as a social presence or memory*” (1995:122).



The anthropologist in the middle of an interview with an officer. Behind my back we see a typical carpet with biblical motif, often bought in Middle East. Behind his back we see a self-made sitting box, meant as a birthplace for his future fighting cooks. In between the two of us we see a bookshelf, a so-called *display*, containing a wide range of things bought around the world.

I will also add or maintain - as already suggested above - that to recall a memory of people with the help of material devices, is an intrinsic element in the act of *shopping*. When in this case the seaman buys his beloved ones a gift during his time at sea, he is able - I will presume - to put some of his longing into the physical artifacts, together with a clear memory of the persons the things are meant for. In the conclusion, I will argue that the *pasalubong* tradition appears to be an important coping strategy for the seaman during his time on board.

I have in this section tried to come up with some thoughts and different perspectives on why the seaman finds it so important to carry with him back home a wide range of foreign commodities, which then are presented as gifts for selected members of his social network. The outline culminated in a brief description of what the concluding section will contain, regarding the function of gifts and artifacts as vehicles for personalized expressions. We saw, in brief, how the items are sent between people as tangible reminders of each other's existence.

The next sections will also partly and in some senses direct the searchlight into the same blurred area, the one between living humans and the material culture. But this time the discussion will not explicitly be about the gifts that the seaman brings home, but about other tangible results of his overseas work. What I have in mind is the many long-term investments in family welfare, which it is common to perform among the seafarers. As we will see, once again it is relevant to claim that the family unit is what accentuates his dispositions, although some what we might call biographical elements also take part in this picture. The latter point refers to certain physical artifacts' ability to mirror or condense a wide range of a person's life or biography, which makes the significance of the things exceed what strictly concerns the family welfare or orientations. As we will see, some of Alfred Gell's thoughts can be useful in shedding some light on this particular issue (1986).

7.2.2 Long-term investments in family welfare

Practically all experienced seafarers I interviewed during my fieldwork in Visayas had invested a considerable amount of their earnings in different arrangements which affected the daily life of their families. These expenditures are called investments due to the fact that they

are based on long-term planning. The seafarer does not always look for immediate results of their financial outlays, since they are in some way or another meant for the future.

The investments can therefore also be treated as some sort of insurance for the seafarer and his family. Many of the seafarers I spoke to emphasized the uncertainty attached to their profession and gave me this distrust as one of the reasons for their spendings. In other words: the seafarers accomplish some investments while they are employed, just to be sure they have something to fall back on in case of disability and unemployment. Although the insurance aspect of these investments definitely are real enough, it is far from the only inducement factor for these substantial expenditures. As we will see, for instance when focusing on the seafarer's extensive housing projects, a wish to be present in the neighborhood despite one's employment on board, may also be a motive for the seaman to carry out these investments.

When it comes to *who* the investments are meant for, the ideal picture is as follows: If the seafarer is married, the lion's share of his expenditures is directed towards his own wife and children. Unmarried seamen, on the other hand, often contributes to the welfare of his parents and siblings. It must once again be emphasized, however, that the word flexibility is what really covers this allocation process (cf. what was outlined above regarding the negotiability which always is attached to relationships characterized by asymmetrical reciprocity –(Cannell 1999)). Which family members - and of course other members of his social network as well - that will enjoy benefits from the seafarers' remittances, depends on a wide range of factors. For example, it may be so that the seafarer is so indebted to some of his relatives that he fully has to concentrate on managing these relationships; that he step by step, contract by contract, first of all is involved in handling the demand of the outstanding, interpersonal accounts.

It also seems like the seafarer is open to suggestions whether or not he should donate some money to a relative. For example, if a nephew of the seaman has decided to pursue college studies, he has to ask his uncle for financial support, but it is up to the uncle to decide whether or not he will consent to the request. Many of the seafarers I met said that they only sponsored the education of those who had already shown an interest in and an ability to study. I remember perfectly well how the woman, who was the domestic helper for my wife and me during our stay in Iloilo, used the phone in the house and called her uncle in Canada to appeal for educational support. The answer was for her discouraging, he said he could not afford

another sponsorship that year since he had already agreed to pay for her cousin's college education.

What kind of investments are we talking about? In the next sections I will give an outline of three different categories of investments; education, housing and small-scale business.

7.2.2.1 Education

Higher education in the Philippines is expensive. School fees are often as high as 10-15 000 pesos per year per student. A lot of people with their income from landbased or domestic employment will therefore never be able to send their children to college by themselves. What they can do, however, is to make a request for financial support from where this is found, for instance among highly paid seafaring relatives or family members.

Obviously many Filipinos do so. Most of the seafarers I met were sponsoring the education of certain relatives, such as nephews and nieces, in addition, of course, to their own children. For instance, a first engineer I interviewed had paid for seven college educations; for two of his own sons and five of his brother's children. This was also common among the ratings I met. For instance, an AB I visited had covered the expenses of four of his brothers' college education. It is important to notice, however, that this took place while he was unmarried. From now on, he underlined, he concentrated on the well-being of his wife and his one year old son.

The seafarers' spendings on other people's education, fits very well the ideal picture I drew earlier: The single seafarers pay for their brothers and sisters, while the married ones take first of all care of their own children's schooling, but also often - at least after some years of steady income - some other young members of the kin. But once again it must be emphasized that people do not always live their lives in accordance with such ideal pictures. The case is rather that real life, just as often as it reflects perfect representations, challenges and modifies such ideal notions. For instance the AB I mentioned above told me that it was his decision to sponsor the education of his siblings, but he was fully aware of the fact that this should be the responsibility of his father. The problem was that his father was unemployed and could not act

in accordance with these ideal notions. Therefore, according to the AB, his father never explicitly commented on his son's appearance as the provider of the family.

My impression is further that the expenditure on the education of family members or other relatives, is one of the major outlays for a seafarer. Take for instance the 1st engineer I mentioned above. His salary per contract would, in 1995, be about 500.000,- pesos. If we then say that the average cost per student per year is about 14.000,- pesos, and multiply this by seven, the total outlay would be about 98.000,- pesos. In other words, this seafarer spent about 20% of his salary on school fees. The considerable amount of money spent on educational costs, can also be illustrated by a statement from my seafaring neighbour in Iloilo, a chiefmate with years of experience from Norwegian vessels; "*the money I earn is in the children, it is in the school*". Confer also the work of Johnson, in which it is stated that "*the most important thing one could invest in and bequeath to one's children as pusaka' [heirlooms or house valuable] was education*" (1995:121).

Why is such a widespread practice common among the seafarers? Why are they every year willing to spend thousands of pesos on educating certain members of their kin? In answering these questions I will once again draw upon the concept or the type of behaviour named *pakikisama*, but also the aspect of insurance in these educational investments will be a theme for the following sections.

As underlined earlier, by practicing *pakikisama* people seek to establish a situation of equality, at least to a certain degree, between themselves and their relatives. In other words, the seafarers are, by distributing some of their wealth, signaling and emphasizing togetherness and conformity towards their surroundings. In the same manner as *pakikisama* is an element in the *pasalubong* tradition - as discussed in section 7.2.1 - it will be one way to approach the educational investments as well. When the seafarers pay the school fees for their relatives, they act in accordance with the ideal of concession. A statement from one of the seafarers I spoke to, may shed some light on the relationship between *pakikisama* and educational investments. He expressed the reason for his own involvement in this sponsorship like this: "*I do not want people to just sit and watch while I am eating well.*"

What the seafarer actually achieves by this act, is to offer certain people of their own flesh and blood the same opportunity for prosperity and success that he had some years earlier.¹⁵ Or to put it slightly differently: these particular investments made by the seafarers pave the way for a dilated affluence, not just anywhere, but within their own families or among certain members of their own kin. We should in relation to this discussion remember that the seamen are not just capable of supporting some relatives or family members in terms of solely sponsoring their education. A seafarer's career will just as well - as discussed in section 4.2 - include the necessary know-how for how to get an application successfully through the recruitment process, a quality which is decisive when it comes to actually be able to find employment for the relatives and family members in question, and eventually help them into a - at least in monetary sense of the word - better life.

But as the skilled mass exodus from the Philippines perfectly well should illustrate, people with a higher education are not just better off *in* the Philippines, they might as well want to exploit or make use of their possibilities in the international labor market and leave the country. So, what might be a latent and even unintended effect of these investments, is an increase in the total number of Filipino migrants. In other words, the seafarers' spendings within the field of higher education, might nourish the so-called "*brain-drain*" effect; that is, skilled and highly educated personnel leave their native country and apply their know-how or expertise abroad. The existence of so-called maritime families – in which several members have employment in the maritime industry – may illustrate these mechanisms. Also the work of Massey – which underlines that migration may lead to more migration - could be mentioned in this discussion (1990).

Let me dwell upon the already mentioned maritime families. Many of the seafarers I interviewed had relatives or close family members who also were seamen, and this pattern might partly be explained by the fact that it is common among the seafarers to emphasize the importance of higher education within their own families and among their relatives. The experienced seafarers position as informal and family oriented brokers, when new potential members of the Philippine exodus encounter the manning agencies, will in all probabilities

¹⁵ After the necessary number of exams they (the sponsored ones) are at least offered an opportunity which can - if they are experiencing *suwerte* (luck) - bring some substantial

also be an important factor in this picture. The seamen know they are able to help their sons and/or nephews also after they have finished the maritime education, which again may assure them that the education and the spendings involved are not in vain.



An example of the family enterprise: A cadet with his brother (also a cadet) and mother. The father, a high rank officer were at work, at sea.

These educational investments can also be seen from an alternative angle. Besides an approach which underlines the relationship between these investments and *pakikisama*, it can also be pertinent to introduce or focus on the *insurance* aspect of these spendings.

As stated before, many of the seafarers I met saw their occupation as risky and uncertain - disability and unemployment were always seen as a threat to their careers. It might be so that the investment in education is one way to spread this risk. That the seafarers are willing to bear the educational expenses for certain members of their kin, might be an attempt to

improvements into their lives (cf. section 7.2.1 and the discussion of *suwerte* vs. *malas* bad luck)).

preserve or make sure that their family's standard of living will remain unaltered, even if the main providers suddenly should be unemployed or disabled. Investments in higher education appear to be one way for the seafarer to prepare his family for what easily can be the case; unexpected interruption in the primary source of income.

Not everybody succeed in accomplishing this preparation. The career of one of my informants illustrates perfectly well how vulnerable the seafaring profession is, and how dramatic the consequences of disability can be for the seafarer's family. One of the most touching interviews I conducted during my fieldwork was with a man who had experienced the nightmare of every provider. He graduated from Iloilo Maritime Academy (now John B. Lacson) in 1975, but completed his last contract as a seaman just a few years later, in 1983. He told me that he did pay the tuition fee, food, transportation and rent for five brothers and sisters during these years, until illness forced him to leave the sea for good. The immediate effect this disability had upon his family - he never told me what he actually suffered from - was that some of his siblings, if not all, had to leave college long before their final exams. When I met this former seafarer, 12 years after his last contract, he was still completely dependent on his wife's income.

One concrete way to cope with this uncertainty, however, is to pay in advance for your children's education. One of the seafarers I met several times during my stays in Iloilo, a captain in a Norwegian company, did not have any children of his own ready for college, simply because they were too young (his kids were at the moment pupils in one of the best and most expensive private schools in Iloilo City). What he did, however, was to pay some sort of insurance for their future college education. Within a period of five years, the plan was to pay about \$3000,- per child, into this educational fund. I might also mention that this officer had of course already sponsored the education of some of his own brothers and sisters, but they had graduated years ago and were now settled in the USA, at least this was the case for four of his nursing sisters (cf. the *brain drain* discussion above).

To fully understand the element of insurance in these educational spendings, you need to remember what earlier has been discussed under the label *utang na loob* or debt of gratitude. The students who receive financial support, will endeavour to repay, with interest, what they have been given. This is not necessarily a question of money, just as often the supported

perform the reimbursement by doing favors and services for the donator (cf. for example what is outlined in section 7.2.1 in relation to gift-giving as one way to meet debt of gratitude). Furthermore, according to Mary R. Hollnsteiner (1973), this debt of gratitude is explicitly stated vis-à-vis members outside the nuclear family, and is more non-verbal in its character between, for instance, siblings.

The fact that *utang na loob* reciprocity among close family members seldom is articulated, can be the explanation of a puzzle in my own material: I hardly ever experienced - not even in a dependent clause or in a mumbling, spontaneous moment - that a seafarer explicitly claimed to have some outstanding accounts among those who had received any financial support from him. Instead they often insisted on the opposite; emphasized that they did not expect anything at all in return from the supported ones. One did, though, suggest that since he had paid for the education of his siblings, he should expect something in return, for instance if he was exposed to an accident on board and had to leave this profession. Nevertheless, the common picture is definitely that the relationship between the supporter and the supported did not involve any (public) debt at all. One of the seafarers even went as far as suggesting that the sponsor and the student do not have to relate at all. He phrased it this way: *“Sometimes they visit their donator, and that is nice. But do they forget us, that is OK as well.”*

How should we deal with these seemingly unexpected results? How is it possible to understand the apparent lack of claims between the sponsor and the sponsored? Let me first of all assert that I find it difficult to rest satisfied with the seafarer statements. *Utang na loob* is deeply rooted in what it means to be Filipino - although the practical aspect of this attitude is not necessarily so tangible and clear cut - so it is very hard to imagine that for example an unemployed seafarer, who in his employed years acted as an educational sponsor, should not, one way or the other, expect a favour in return and actually benefit from his earlier donations. Nevertheless, a possible answer to these questions is to insist that these matters are not something the seafarers usually and explicitly talk about. Perhaps thus the explanation is to be found in the fact that the educational investments of the seamen generally affect close kin, so prospective claims are not articulated, but remain non-verbal in their character (this if we agree with Hollnsteiner's assumption regarding the tacit position of *utang na loob* within the nuclear family versus other parts of one's kinship system).

Some statements from one of my informants can perhaps support such a notion: A captain I met several times during my stay in Iloilo, told me in a rather strict manner that *utang na loob* is irrelevant when it comes to the relationship between brothers and sisters; to help your own brother or sister is not dependent on some kind of unwritten, cultural command. I am inclined to agree with the annoying tone of this senior officer. It can appear very technical and rather subtle to look for imperative cultural commands - in the field of financial support - inside the intimate sphere of the nuclear family. As for instance Brøgger have underlined, it seems that there is something with the family unit or nuclear entity which, at least on an ideological level, denies ideas of transactions and debt relations to take place or gain a foothold (see for example Brøgger 1982). On the other hand, it may be so that this protectionism is a luxury which first and foremost is a quality with the family entity in the Western, bureaucratic countries. It goes without saying that the origin of the modern welfare state - which includes for instance bureaucratic solutions to educational funding - paves the way for an emptying of the tasks that should be dealt with inside the family web, which again does something to how strong and what kind of interdependencies can occur between the family members.

Nevertheless, a slightly different approach to this silence is to say that the seafarers do not have to express some kind of claim towards the sponsored ones, due to the fact that they know for sure that they sooner or later - it might even be the next generation who will benefit from the spendings - will receive something in return. The seafarers know that the feeling of debt within the sponsored individual is so strong and unalterable, that they can allow themselves to appear as strictly generous - at least when dealing with a foreign anthropologist - rather than a strategic actor who expects some kind of yield in return.

The purpose of this section has been to illuminate some aspects of the seafarers' educational investments. The discussion has on the one hand established that this is a widespread and costly practice among the seamen, and on the other, it has underlined that these expenditures can or must be understood in relation to *pakikisama* and *utang na loob*. We have also seen how these investments may nourish the so-called brain-drain type of labor migration. Finally, we may state that it is not an easy task to indicate the long term effects of these investments. Education is about human beings, and people may apply or make use of their education in many different ways. What we can maintain, however, is that these investments, over the

years, most probably will raise the standard of living within whole families, regardless of whether their income stem from overseas work or from white-collar jobs in the Philippines.

The next section will highlight the more concrete investments, namely houses. These investments are not only concrete in the sense that the buildings often are made out of bricks, but the fact that a house in its nature is attached to its locality - compared to the mobility which often characterizes educated people - makes these investments appear as relatively solid.

7.2.2.2 Housing

If one leaves the city and travel out into the Philippine countryside, it is in general easy to spot a seafarer's house. Outside the urban centers, it is still common to include materials as *nipa* - a palm type, especially used on the roof - and bamboo in the construction. The seafarers, in contrast, built their houses out of concrete and applied multicolored shiny steel plates as roof. Also, the fact that the seafarers often paint their houses in different colors - paint is very expensive in the Philippines - underlines the contrasts between their homes and those living in the simple brown/gray *nipa*-huts. Of course, not only seafarers live in houses made out of cement. This expensive style of architecture also reflects the preferences of other highly paid professions such as OCWs with landbased employment. A residence of a seaman does often have some public genuine hallmarks though. When you enter the property of a seafarer, you very often go through a gate decorated with either a wheel (if the owner works in the deck department) or an anchor (if he works in the engine).

Due to the considerable amount of money involved in the construction of a house - much more than the average seafarer earns per year - the task must be based on long-term planning. Step by step, contract by contract, the house is built. First, a lot need to be purchased, then the house gradually is erected. One seafarer I met suggested that it more often than not would take 5-7 years to construct your own house. Sometimes this process is also linked, by the seaman himself, to the company which gave him the opportunity to build his own house. For instance, one seafarer I met, told me that his house was a result of employment in two specific

companies, and that this was information he from time to time gave to visiting friends and neighbors.

While I stayed in Iloilo City, I interviewed seafarers at different stages in this process. The most experienced ones had often completed their houses years ago, while others were in the middle of the construction process. During the last years' involvement in the still ongoing *Project Alpha*, I have gained some new experiences in the field of housing. Part of my effort in this project has been to visit as many as possible of the cadets' own homes. The result was that more than 30 visits were conducted during the cadet's first year at school (University of Cebu); during the fall of 1998 and the spring of 1999. *Project Alpha* is based on full coverage of the students' expenses - food, lodging, tuition fee, uniform etc. This arrangement has as one of its effects that a (completely new) door is opened for the poor and those with limited means in the Cebu area, which again directed my visits into unfamiliar territory in the Philippine social landscape. Although a broad part of the cadets come from a middle class background¹⁶, a few still remain who have been raised in very poor conditions. A handful even came from typical squatter areas, in which the houses consisted of materials such as cardboard, wood of bad quality and plastic. It will be very interesting to see in what way the career of the son in the house, implements changes in the residence of the family, when he (hopefully) starts sailing as an officer in a few years time.



An example of the family enterprise: A cadet with his mother, younger sister and his father (the welder).

¹⁶ Have in mind what I elsewhere have described as maritime families. I.e. many of the Alpha-cadets comes from a background which involves members who are sailing or at least did so in the past. This means that we can take for granted that the standard of living of these families over the last year have been, and still is, relatively good.

Nevertheless, some of the officers I met during my time in Iloilo, belong to the experienced and therefore successful category. I remember in particular the house of a captain, a master who had been employed in the same Norwegian company for almost 16 years. He had perhaps the most beautiful house I ever entered during my fieldwork. Besides the fact that it was relatively large and located in one of the most expensive sub-divisions in Iloilo, it was comfortable and well-appointed. He had, for instance, turned one of the rooms into a so-called music-room, where he could practice his sing-a-long hobby, karaoke. Also the room where the maid was staying was remarkably cosy. I would also like to briefly describe the house of another captain I interviewed. He did not live in the same sub-division as the former, but success was undoubtedly written on these walls as well. The living room in this house was dominated by a massive, decorated mirror - the Manhattan Skyline was the motive - expensive furniture and ornaments, karaoke equipment and a personal computer. The PC was meant for his sons, the master told me, they were both studying at the most prestigious universities in Manila. Also outside the house, wealth was on display. Here the captain could among other things take pleasure from his orchids, a typical hobby for wealthy Filipinos. His interest in orchids had even made him drill a well in his garden. He was not satisfied with the quality of the public water supply.

Most of the interviews, however, was not conducted in such exclusive surroundings. A majority of those I met were living in what I will call simple middle-class houses. The typical exterior coincide with how I described a seafarer's home in the beginning of this section and inside they had some expensive things, such as electric appliances of different kind, still, there were not so much extravaganza.¹⁷

¹⁷ Among a lot of people involved in the shipping industry in Norway, a notion that the Filipino seafarers live back home in some kind of overwhelming luxury has developed. This situation is often illustrated by stating that the seamen have their own maids in the house - for a social democratic Norwegian this may appear as the ultimate sign of success and excess - and that they, relatively speaking, make more money than their Norwegian counterparts. I don't find these postulates particular correct nor interesting. First of all, to have a so-called helper in the house is neither expensive nor uncommon in the Philippines. Second, of course a Filipino captain will have more left every month of employment since he - besides having longer sailing periods than the Norwegians (6 vs. 2/3) - have the *privilege* to live in a third world country, in which the price level is much lower than the one in Norway.

In part this can be explained by the fact that a lot of the people I visited were at a relatively early stage in their careers and therefore at another level in the house-building process. After some more years of seafaring experience they might reach the level of a high rank officer, which in turn will allow them to spend more of their dollars on housing. The story of a 4th engineer I once interviewed, may shed some light on the relation between rank and how the houses gradually are erected. This unmarried seafarer was living in an unfinished house together with his family in a sub-division in Iloilo City (his mother, who was present under the entire interview, told me in a laughing manner that “*only seafarers could afford a lot in one of the sub-divisions*”). Just to get hold of this lot took him at least one contract. Then, in the following years the house was under construction. When I visited the place the house looked completed. At least I thought so, until they, in the middle of the conversation, told me to take a look at the ceiling; only corrugated iron separated us from the open air. In other words, there were still some contracts left to go before the house would be completed.

The seafarers’ middle-class houses may also reflect the obligations and expectation they are facing from their social surroundings. As described in the section above, it is common among the seafarers to sponsor certain people’s college education. This responsibility can, for some of the seamen, be so extensive and therefore expensive, that there is hardly anything left to spend on the house.

I will also, finally, suggest that we see their houses in relation to different preferences among the seafarers. Maybe they simply do not want to spend a considerable part of their salary on housing. One seafarer told me for instance that he saw housing basically as a “*dead investment,*” (*sic*) and therefore it was not something he gave preference to. This man was living in a relatively simple house, despite his position as a 1st engineer. It must be emphasized, however, that he used to live in one of the most exclusive sub-divisions in the city, but decided just a few years ago to relocate and to build a new house in his and his wife’s hometown. The house I entered was therefore relatively new. Still, housing was not, according to himself, his main investment. Besides the fact that he saw houses as far from a profitable way of spending money, he gave me security reasons as an explanation to his calculations. He was afraid that a nice house could attract certain “unhealthy” people; strangers could suddenly show up and point at him with a gun, as he said. I will also finally propose that this seafarer’s approach to house investments, might as well reflect his substantial spendings in other fields.

He spent for instance a considerable amount of money on relatives' education - this is the same man I have mentioned above, the one who sponsored seven college educations. I have also this feeling that the 30 fighting cocks in the back yard, "stole" an ample share of his salary.

Despite some major differences in both exterior, interior and location of the seafarers' houses, they all shared at least one characteristic. Whether it was the home of an officer or a rating, they all contained signs which told a visitor like me, that this was a seafarer's house. What I refer to is a wide range of objects the provider has brought home from the seven seas. Typical elements in the decoration is: exotic pictures and drawings (for instance depicting Japanese geishas), photographs (picturing some of the vessels where they were employed), a great deal of typical souvenirs (often wrapped in transparent plastic), decorated carpets on the wall (for instance with biblical motives and often bought in the Middle-East) and electric appliances (such as a TV, a VCR and a stereo, often brought home from Japan). It was also common to have different certificates and diplomas on the wall, proofs of their maritime education.

Why is it apparently so important for the seafarers to have a relatively large and well-appointed home? Why does it seem to be urgent for the seafarers to express or bring into view some of the financial results of their work at sea? Besides comfort, what other reasons or motives does the seafarer have? In answering these questions, let me start by emphasizing that a house is not just a shelter from nature and your fellow beings. A house will also communicate or say something about those who erected the building and those living there. I will maintain that houses - maybe besides artifacts like clothes and cars - are the most pregnant and applicable instrument for the seafarers to signalize for example success towards their social surroundings.

In general, we can say that the typical house of a seafarer is *translocal* in its plan and character. In the sense that the building or the whole property as such expresses "*in various ways their owners' and occupiers' association with other worlds and ways of doing things*" (Thomas 1998:434). One thing is that the house do contain elements which not necessarily traditionally have a place in the local architectural style - such as some of the building materials - another factor is that the houses very often are equipped with hallmarks of the owners external, maritime career. Cf. for example what I mentioned above related to the

decoration of the gates with either a wheel or an anchor. Remember also what I emphasized in section 6.2, when the issue was to see the seamen as so-called local cosmopolitans and as possessors of, what Helms (1988) referred to as, *esoteric knowledge*. All in all, to build the house in such a way that it expresses overseas experience, will be something the seaman will put some effort into to achieve.

Secondly, a nice and well-equipped house is also a suitable way for the seafarer to tell the neighbors that his sacrifice has not been in vain, and that he cares about what really matters; his family. It can, in line with this, be appropriate to underline or bear in mind who the house is meant for, namely the seafarer himself and his family. A house is therefore in a very explicit manner a family related investment. A nice house is a *celebration of the family*, and at the same time a condensation and an objectivization of why the seafarer became a migrant. For instance, one seafarer I met pointed at his house and said: “*this is the fruit of my sacrifice*”¹⁸; a particularly significant announcement when it is seen in relation to the typical answer from the seafarers when they were asked *why* they chose this profession or *who* the suffering was meant for: “*for my family.*”

The third house building reason is closely linked to the second, and is connected to the seaman’s wish to appear as a respected adult in the local community back home. This perspective is inspired by the work of Thomas (1998), in particular the description on how migrants from Madagascar erect modern and solid houses back in their own villages and from this effort achieve to communicate relative independence and adulthood towards the people living there, and at the same time receive respect from the same people. Thomas phrases one place the significance of this construction work this way: “[...] *part of a man’s journey to respected adulthood involved building of a house. [...] they [the houses] were, in short, landmarks along the path of men’s life trajectory, the material deposits of the actions that constituted a process of self-realization*” (1998:438).

¹⁸ “*The fruit of my sacrifice*” is a rather common saying in the Philippines. In Tagalog the same expression is: *bunga ng pagsisikap* which literally means “*the fruit of my effort/hardship*”. Note the significant discrepancy between the Tagalog version of this statement and the English - hardship vs. sacrifice. See section 3.1.2 for a further elaboration on this issue.

To view the seafarers' houses like a construction loaded with significance for them as respected, independent adults, might explain the indignation and contempt some of the seamen showed towards those who had not been able or willing to build their own house. Several seafarers told me about colleagues who did not have a house of their own, but were still living with their in-laws or just renting a house. One seaman claimed that this was common even among captains and other high ranking officers. This seafarer continued by saying, however, that not so many of these poor providers lived in Iloilo, they were instead located in Manila in considerable numbers.¹⁹

I met at least one married seafarer who was living together with his wife and kid in the house of his in-laws. This must, however, be seen in relation to the fact that he became a seaman just a few years back, and had not yet been able to accumulate enough money to erect a house of his own. He did, however, tell me that this task would for the following contracts be given top priority.

In line with this last statement, it may be appropriate to underline that not all seafarers I met agreed on such priorities. I have already mentioned the one who saw housing basically as a dead investment, but also another outspoken seafarer I interviewed complained about his fellow seafarers and their preferences. They simply emphasized and spent too much of their salary on housing, according to this man. He himself gave instead preference to business projects; he chose the Chinese way as he called it. *"The Chinese do not have big houses, but they have a big business. The Filipino way: big house, no business. The Filipinos do not have any money to spend in their vacation [because of their priorities]."*²⁰

The forth and final set of comments attached to the seamen's investments in the field of housing, is also related to the visibility of the buildings, although in a slightly different way compared to the description above. As already suggested in the section on the *pasalubong*

¹⁹ Isn't it very often like that: the individuals with a lack of decency are not members of our own community. Instead they are located outside, in this case even in the incalculable metropolis Manila.

²⁰ Talking of a situation of *"big house, no business"*: Is there any chance that a Filipino seaman spend so much on his house, since he knows this is an investment he cannot easily share with others? Even though it's not uncommon that relatives from other parts of the country live for some time in the house of a relative, it will still be a fact that a house cannot be separated and dispersed on a more permanent basis.

phenomenon, some of the physical items owned and donated by the seaman, may function as a double for him while he is away and on board. I find it pertinent to view the house in the same manner.

A house is such an extensive construction and manifestation in the local community, that it demands or insists on attention from the citizens. A house is therefore a very suitable as a means for communication with the world, a quality which puts the seaman into a rather unique situation. If the seafarer is able to put his personal mark on the house, he will achieve that the social surroundings constantly is experiencing his presence or reminded of his existence, even though he is absent and on board. The house - together with a wide range of other things of course - will see to that he still has a place in the *everyday reality* of the people back home, despite his nonappearance. The idea with this outline is simply that it might be so that the *wish* from the seaman to be remembered by his own neighborhood, may influence on his dispositions in the field of housing.

The work of Thomas (1998) from Madagascar, can support such an assumption. He describes how the migrants put up relatively unusual and expensive houses in the country side, and that this not solely is motivated by their relative wealth and desire for prestige, but also how a nice and modern house in the village they once left, is one way "*to forge a continuing relationship with the "ancestral homeland" [...] from which they were absent.*" (1998:438). Later on he continues by stating that these houses "*not only are tangible evidence of the success of their [migratory] sojourns [but] also material embodiments of their owners' on-going connection to the place [the homeland] despite their continuing absence.*" (p. 439). Although there are some profound differences between the migrants described by Thomas and those accentuated in this thesis - long-term absence vs. annual cycles - I will insist on some significant similarities. For example, both parties live a considerable part of their lives away from the people they feel and actually are related to, a constellation which generates a strong wish among the migrants to be remembered by or present among them. One profound way this *mnemonic* process takes place is through housing.

In sum, we can say that the seaman's house is put together by the following elements: a desire to communicate a prestigious, respectful adulthood, which is based on a support and caring for one's family and financial success overseas. Moreover, a longing to occupy a place in the

daily life of those living permanently back home, may also be an important factor in this endeavour. As we shall see in the next section - when the spotlight is directed towards the family-run small-scale businesses - to bridge the gap between the sea and land, with the help from certain qualities of material objects, will also be a relevant approach to that sector of the seafarer's life.

7.2.2.3 Small-scale business

Practically every seafarer I interviewed had either already founded some sort of business enterprise back home in the Philippines, or was planning to do so in the future. Common for all these projects was that they were small-scale in character; just a few people were employed in these enterprises and the actual amount of money involved in these investments was relatively small. During my time in the Philippines I hardly ever met or heard about seafarers who were running or participating in large-scale projects. The limited scale of the different enterprises should not only be understood from the fact that the businesses are meant to be run by or in association with the seaman's family, also the government policies towards migrants in general is part of that picture. According to Martin (1993), the Philippine government "*encourage only large-scale and capital-intensive enterprises*" (p. 644), information which also helps us to see the typical small-scale projects appear as highly rational and well-considered.

What kind of enterprises are we talking about? It is almost impossible to present a complete list of all the different projects I heard about or actually saw myself during the fieldwork. Still, some of the most typical ones were: piggery and poultry farming (raising of pigs and chickens respectively), rice trading (buy rice from the farmers in the season when prices are low, then store it and wait for the prices to go up), boarding-house business (lodge for instance students) and *sari-sari* stores. The latter term refers to tiny stores which are scattered around in every Philippine town. For instance, in the neighbourhood I was living there were located about six or seven such stores or stands within a radius of 150 meter. *Sari-sari* means in Tagalog "*variety*" or "*miscellaneous*", and refers to the remarkably rich assortment of commodities offered in these tiny stores. Despite this multitude, my impression is still that the main income

of these *sari-sari* stores, stems from the sales of different types of snacks (snacks is definitely a Philippine specialty), cigarettes (often sold one by one) and beer or soft drinks.

All these investments were represented among the seafarers I met. Still, the theme for the following pages will not explicitly be about one of these enterprises. I will rather concentrate the discussion on what I see as *the* most significant business project. What I am alluding to is the so-called jeepney-business. Almost every experienced seafarer I interviewed was involved in such an enterprise or had at least been so in the past. It should be mentioned, however, that part of my fieldwork was conducted in a rural area - outside the city proper - which most probably influenced on what kind of business the seafarers involved themselves in. It is for example difficult to imagine rice trading and poultry farming as common among seamen living in Manila area, while this was popular ventures among the Illongos I met.

A *jeepney* is, in short, a licensed vehicle used in passenger traffic. It is common that a jeepney runs between two towns or parts of a city, and picks up passenger all along this route. One single jeepney can easily take about 14-18 passengers, it all depends on the size of the car and how many the driver allows on board. Outside the cities, however, where it is common to sit on the roof or stand/hang outside the jeepney as well, the number of passengers will be much higher. The term jeepney refers to the origin of these type of vehicles, namely the American Jeep. When World War II was over, the American troops left behind some of their military Jeeps. These cars were modified, or more precisely lengthened, so that they were able to carry passengers. Today, however, not many of these original jeepneys are left - most of those I saw in Iloilo, for instance, looked or actually were Japanese. Despite of this change, the term jeepney remains.

Why is the jeepney business so popular among the seafarers? And what am I driving at when I speak of this investment as being *the* most significant or meaningful one? First of all, to be an owner of a jeepney represents for the seafarer an extra source of income. When he, after some years, has been able to save enough of his salary to buy a jeepney - he must be prepared to pay as much as 200-300.000,- pesos (about \$8-12.000,-) for a new vehicle - he or his family will receive some pesos every day the car is used in passenger traffic. Ten months a year these pesos are added to the seafarer's income from the sea, but in vacation time - those weeks or months in-between the contracts - they represent for some the only source of income. A lot of

the seafarers I spoke to underlined that the jeepney business was, for them, basically one way to have at least a minimum of income during their stay at home. Still, a few of those I interviewed had a dream of letting the jeepney represent their only income in the future. In other words, they were hoping to, one day, be able to permanently stay at home, and fully rely upon the jeepney business, perhaps in combination with some other business projects as well. I can briefly add to this picture that to establish an extra channel for income is of course an extremely important motive for every business-project initiated by the seaman.

Since the seafarer is away most of the year, he can obviously not be the one who does the actual driving. Instead the jeepney is rented out to a driver who either pays a fixed price per day (250-300 pesos) or keeps a share of the turnover. It is very difficult to suggest exactly how much the seafarer may earn from this investment. Much depends for instance on route, the look of the jeepney and how good the driver is to spot and convince potential passengers along the road to choose "his" vehicle.

There were different opinions among the seafarers I interviewed, when my questions handled these matters. All agreed that the jeepney business had a *potential* for profit, but all agreed as well that the driver is the main problem or the joker. The potential for profit can be illustrated as follows: let us say that a jeepney is on average hired out five days a week. The owner receives then about 1500,- pesos per week, 6000,- per month and about 72.000,- per year. This amount is of course the gross income for one single jeepney. After the owner has paid for necessary maintenance, and perhaps some accidents as well, the amount will in all probabilities be considerably below 72.000,-.

If we, in addition to this, also imagine that a reckless driver is hired - a driver who for instance does not feel any responsibility when it comes to the maintenance of the car - this business could at the worst turn out to be just an item of expenditure for the seafarer. I have been told about drivers who just leaves the car in the middle of the road after facing engine trouble. If we are lucky, one seafarer told me, they call and tell us about these matters, but sometimes they do not do that either.

The problem of careless drivers - perhaps I should add dishonest as well - had actually made a lot of the seafarers leave the jeepney business. They said that the only way to generate a profit out of this investment is to do the driving themselves, something which obviously is impossible since they are away most of the year. It must also be underlined, however, that some of the seafarers I met insisted that it is impossible to turn a jeepney investment into a profitable business. Their argument was not only based on problems with the driver, but also on the fact that there was not enough money involved in this business - the price every passenger had to pay was too low compared to the size of the investment (in Iloilo City the charge per ride was 1.50,- pesos or the same as \$0.06). To illustrate the situation, this slogan like expression was used by many of seafarers I met: *“to invest in a passenger jeepney is basically to disperse your money on the road and then pick up the coins.”*

This outline of some of the problems or pitfalls involved in the jeepney business, leaves us with the following puzzle: why is it, despite the risk and despite all the coins, still common among the seafarers to carry out these investments?

On the windscreen of every privately owned jeepney I saw during my stay, there was a plate mounted. On one side of the jeepney the route number was indicated. On the other side of this plate, however, the following words were written: *“Family use.”* These two words are of great importance when the aim is to understand more of why the seafarers spend so much of their income on passenger jeepneys. A jeepney is not just a potential source of income for the seafarers, it is just as much a way for the seafarers to contribute to the well-being of their families, in this case their transportation needs. A jeepney - or *“service”* as it often just is called - is therefore, compared to an ordinary private car, a general purpose vehicle. It can meet the seafarer and his family’s own need for transportation, and at the same time be a potential source of income for him and his family (a peculiar coincidence with reference to these matters can be that the name Jeep stems from the words General Purpose or GP). I can briefly mention that the jeepney’s ability to be a multi-purpose vehicle, was very often used by the seafarers themselves as an explanation for carrying out these investments.

I will, in line with this, argue that a jeepney in the same manner as a house is a celebration and a physical, mobile representation of the family. If the seafarer is lucky, this investment will financially contribute to the well-being of his own people, and simultaneously the jeepney will

make the family able to travel *together* wherever they want. Also, the actual decoration of the vehicle will help us see the jeepney as deeply rooted within the family web. In Iloilo the names of the seafarer's children are typical elements in the adornment of a jeepney, while in Manila it is common to see the name of the family who owns the vehicle painted on the rear of the car. It seems, in general, that *family exclusivity* is one of the messages in the decoration of passenger jeeps. As if the owner wants to say that behind this point - whether it is at the main entrance, at the rear or through the sign "*family use*" on the windscreen - it is the excluding and concurred space of for instance the Escobar family. *Privacy*, in other words, is in this case synonymous with *family*. That is, the family is the smallest social unit or the bearing principal for separation and organization.

The jeepney business is not only about a strong family orientation. An intrinsic aspect in this is also how the seafarer makes use of the vehicle in addressing his own neighborhood with somewhat general expressions related to his professional life, and thus an orientation which exceeds strictly family concerns. The actual decoration of the jeepneys can again be used as an illustration. Among the total number of jeepneys in the streets it is often easy to discern a vehicle owned by a seafarer. It is common among the seafarers to make use of certain symbols to tell the surroundings that they belong to this particular profession. If a wheel is painted on the car the owner is from the deck department, while a propeller is the corresponding symbol for personnel employed in the engine department (cf. the decoration of the gate in front of the house). In addition to these two symbols, it is also common to see a wide range of words, expressions and names which link - directly or metaphorically - the jeepney to the owner's profession. For instance, in Iloilo City I saw jeepneys carrying names such as "*Rough Sea*", "*Ocean Voice*", "*Sea Horizon*", "*Atlantic Cruiser*", "*D'best Master*", "*Pacific Glory*", "*Ocean Cruiser*", "*Lorentzen Tankers*", "*Vistafjord*", "*Stena*", "*Skaugen Petro Trans*", "*Skaugran*", "*Skaulake*", "*Singa Ship*", "*Sagafjord*" and "*Stavanger*". Sometimes a painting of a ship also accompanied these names.

Why do seafarers choose to decorate their vehicles in this manner? One way to approach this adornment tradition is to see it as a relatively *private project*, as something which strictly speaking only concerns the individual seafarer. When I asked the seamen about this phenomenon, they often referred to the "*sentimental value*" (*sic*) this beautification represents for themselves and their colleagues. From the seafarer's point of view, the decoration is meant

as some sort of “remembrance” or “souvenir”, or as one put it: “*the ship comes to life every time I see [the name of the ship written on] the car*”. The last statement has to do with the practice of giving the jeepney the name of a certain ship, which often alludes to the vessel on which the owner made enough money to buy the actual jeepney.



A jeepney owned by a seafarer with an employment on board a Norwegian vessel.

I will fully elaborate on this topic in the next and concluding part, but let me already at this stage point at what I regard as particularly interesting aspects with the statements above. The decoration have obviously something to do with *remembering*. When the seaman come up with terms as remembrance and souvenir, this has to do with a wish, in an active way, to recall a certain period of time, certain people and certain episodes of the professional life at sea. Seen from this angle, the decoration is about looking backwards, both in time and career. It's about “*authenticate a past or otherwise remote experience*” (Steward 1993:139) or connected

with creating “*a continuous and personal narrative of the past*” (p. 140). In this fundamental nostalgic project, the aim is to achieve an “*intimate distance*” (p. 140) between what is and what has been. It’s about, at a certain level, bridging the gap between the native soil and life on board. As we have already seen, how specific this link is expressed through the actual decoration varies. Sometimes it refers back to some particular vessels or to specific companies - “*Sagafjord*”, “*Singha Ship*” etc. - and sometimes the life of a seaman in more general terms, such as “*Rough Sea*” and “*Ocean Voice*”. Nevertheless, the biographical concern backwards in time and place, is a running theme the jeepney decoration.

The privacy, or should I say intimacy, is obviously present in what I have outlined so far. But also the fact that the average man or woman in the Philippines does not know the meaning of this decoration - this was underlined by many of the seafarers - turns this practice into a private act. One claimed for instance that most people do not know that M/V is the abbreviation for Motor Vessel.

Nevertheless, I find it hard to believe that all the landlubbers miss the message embodied in the decoration of the jeepneys. Everybody may not understand the more technical and specialized aspects of the symbolic language used in the adornment - for instance that a wheel means deck department and M/V Motor Vessel - but names as “*Rough Sea*” and “*Pacific Glory*”, along with a picture of for instance a huge oil tanker, should make the link between the jeepney and the owner’s profession clear and comprehensible. I will therefore, in line with this, maintain that the maritime decoration of the jeepneys is not strictly a private matter, it must also be treated as a statement towards the surroundings, towards family members, friends, neighbours etc. In other words, once again a display of success, but also of esoteric knowledge, are the key words.

It is important to remember in this connection that to be an overseas seafarer is a prestigious profession in the Philippines.²¹ Since the occupation is often associated with dollars and

²¹ It might be so that this has not always been the case. I have noticed some popular notions in the Philippines, which accentuates a rather inferior position of the maritime career in the educational landscape. A maritime education used to involve only two years in college. Many of the seamen I have met, gave me the short duration of the education, compared to the potential income, as the most important reason that they became seamen in the first place - the family could not afford to pay for a longer education. Today, however, the impression is that

success, one method for the seafarer can be to play along with such notions and decorate his own jeepney in a certain way (I have maintained above that a car - together with houses and clothes - is perhaps the most pregnant and applicable tool for the seafarers to signalize success towards their surroundings). A jeepney is of course in itself a very physical sign of success - jeepney owners "*see their money leave in the morning, and see them come back in the evening*" as one stated it - but by decorating this marker, the seafarers manage to even strengthen this symbol of prosperity.

A third and last possible explanation of the jeepney adornment tradition is also about how this creativeness is part of a communication process towards the surroundings, but in a slightly different way. Once again I want to highlight the *mnemonic qualities* with the seafarers investments. I will maintain that by decorating the jeepneys - by personifying the vehicle with the family name and a wide range of maritime words, names and symbols - the seafarers try to be present or remembered in their own neighbourhood while they are away at sea. The decoration practice seen from this angle turns the phenomenon into a method of bridging the geographical and cultural gap between the seven seas and the native soil.

I will further argue that this effort, when proved successful, might ease the pain or the feeling of loss and homesickness among the seafarers. In other words, the decorated jeepney seen as a physical representation of the seafarer, might impose meaning upon the seafarers' efforts at sea and give them strength to carry on. Their sacrifices have not been in vain, they have on the contrary left some appreciated traces or remembrances behind. I can finally, and for the sake of order, add that when I introduced this way of thinking, some of the seafarers supported my notions while others rejected them and did not see this as an important aspect of the jeepney investments at all.

The aim of this section has basically been to approach the jeepney business from different angles. I have among other things claimed that to establish an extra source of income is just one aspect of this business project. If we wish to understand more of the reason why this is such a common investment among the seafarers, we must take some non-monetary aspects

the reputation of a maritime career has improved. The reason for that is perhaps to be found in the fact that the actual education is extended (four years), made more challenging and

into consideration as well. I emphasized for instance that, besides the vehicle's mnemonic qualities, it can be important and pertinent to also see these vehicles as tributes to the family and as symbols of prosperity in the local community.

The last three sections have highlighted some of the investments performed by the seafarers I met. As we have seen, the running themes have on the one hand been how the family organization accentuates the provider's dispositions, and on the other hand how the investments bridges the gap between land and sea; between the absent husband and his family back home.

In the next part - the conclusion - I will once again emphasize the significance of the gift in this picture. The focus will among other things pivot around the so-called *pasalubong's* ability to remind the concerning families and their breadwinners of each other, despite the annual separations these two parties face. The yearly dispersal of gifts, and the more long-term investments, will thus both be important also in the final chapter. The conclusion will moreover, of course, contain an attempt to recapitulate some of the other main themes in this thesis. An effort which, among other things, will take us back to where it all started, both this thesis and the seafaring career, namely to the recruitment process.

complicated, and that the seafarers belong to the best paid segment among all the Philippine overseas workers.

Part VIII

The Filipino seafarer - a life between sacrifice and shopping

In the spring 2000, in a newsmagazine from one of the major shipping companies in Norway, a Filipino captain defined in his own words the word and profession *seafarer*. This is what he wrote:

"I guess the seafaring profession is quite a unique one compared to other sources of income. The seafarer has to make the sacrifice to be away from home, family and friends. There are large burdens to be dealt with and the most critical one is called loneliness.

He has to live and work daily in an isolated and limited space, seeing the same faces every time he wakes up in the morning all during his contract.

Other people say that seafarers live an abnormal life, which is maybe true to them, but not to a seafarer who is supporting a family.

Although recreational facilities on board are a big help to ease the feeling of isolation, constant communication with their loved ones is still the most important.

Thanks to the high technology, like the invention of the cellular phone, many seafarers who live in remote area where telephone line are inaccessible, can now contact their families whether in port or at sea. On board communication is becoming cheaper, but phone cards when the vessel is in port remain very popular among seafarers.

More than half my life has been spent at sea and all I can say now is that the seafaring job in the new millennium is a lot less isolated and what contributed most positively is a good company like [NN], which takes good care of its sea based employees.”

Why do I dwell on this rather personal tale? Though it may seem odd to start the recapitulation of this dissertation/thesis with this high-rank officer's utterances about how it is to be a seaman, there are good reasons for doing so. In brief, I see in these lines an unfolding of *the* most significant elements in a Filipino overseas seafaring career. The bottom line of this statement, *and* in this thesis, is to portray the Filipino seafarer as a family based enterprise. Nearly every section in the captain's outline contains a direct or metaphorical reference to the seaman's family. Here we see statements about “*the sacrifice to be away from home*”, how the seafarer “*is supporting a family*”, the importance of “*constant communication with [the] loved ones*”, how new technology bless their situation and help them “*contact their families*” and hence make this profession a less “*isolated one*”. Also the way this captain accentuates “*loneliness*” as *the* major problem involved in this profession, and at the same time as a contrast to a family based everyday life, is highly significant and will be dealt with later on.

I will in more general terms state that at every stage of a seaman's career, the family organization plays an intrinsic part: as motive and facilitator for the actual labor migration, and as a weighty reason for repeating this journey on an annual basis. I have in this thesis highlighted how the family appears to be an important inducement factor for choosing an

overseas career - commonly phrased with the words: "*sacrifice for my family*" - and how family members often act as sponsors in the case of the potential seafarers' entrance into the maritime educational system. I did also mention the existence of what I named maritime families. The term basically refers to the situation in which several members of a family or a kin group have their income from the merchant marines. The on-going recruitment program *Project Alpha* at the University of Cebu can serve as an illustration of this. In the first batch - which started back in 1998 and which is the group I first and foremost monitor in my research - 41 out of a total of 49 members had either a father, grandfather, uncle or cousin (or a more remote relative) who were sailing overseas, or at least used to do so that in the past. That the careers of certain family members inspire and influence on the preferences of other and younger members of the same family, is perhaps the most obvious link between the seaman and his family.

The same tendency is also apparent when it comes to the actual process of leaving - the concrete facilitation of the labor migration. It is a fact that a personal contact inside the manning office, such as a relative, is often needed in order to be employed. Also that an experienced seafarer - for instance a member of his own family - recommends the inexperienced seaman's application to the private recruiters, is an important and common element in this picture.

In the same manner as the seaman through his profession travel back and forth between the deep blue sea and the solid, Philippine soil, he must also, as a bread winner, be seen as a result of a dialectic process. The seaman must not solely be understood in terms of the input from his kin-based surroundings. The way in which he serves or accommodates his family is equally important. In other words, and to paraphrase Clifford Geertz famous distinction (1973:93-95), the seaman is not only a result *of* his family; he can also be viewed as a result *for* his family. What I am alluding at is of course the seafarer seen as a provider.

To insist on the importance of salary in relation to a person's professional life, should hardly represent a new angle to such a matter. Nevertheless, in what manner the favorable financially situation is expressed and managed by the Filipino seaman, is worth paying attention, and it has thus been a major theme in this thesis. Before I go on and give a recapitulation of how the overseas dollars are integrated into the family based economy, let me briefly illustrate and

perhaps clarify this issue. It was not uncommon to hear among seamen that the relatively high salary was a major reason for why they made international waters their working place. However, and this is highly significant, these types of statements were close to always succeeded by the words “*so I can help my family*”. In other words, the weight of salary in a Philippine setting is always linked to the family organization. I will maintain that it in this case it hardly makes any sense to talk about individual wealth; the meaning of the salary lies instead in to what degree it may contribute to the well-being of the family. In other words, the income is equipped with an intention, namely to make a major difference or to be a main contribution to a social unit which exceeds the single seaman (and the nuclear family as well). Once again we sense the family based enterprise.

A considerable portion of this thesis has been an outline of how the seamen contribute financially to the well-being of their families. We have for instance seen how the provider presents certain people *pasalubongs* or gifts after ended contract, and how he invests a considerable portion of his salary in the fields of education, housing and small-scale business projects.

This family related seamless web - this back and forth movement; this *of* and *for* the family - is what spins the Filipino seafarer. The creation of this family based enterprise refers therefore not only to the actual initiation or recruitment of the seafarer, but also to the different ways he sees himself as member of, delegate from and actual contributor to the ground organization.

Let me illustrate this with an example: One of my neighbors in Iloilo, a chief mate with years of experience from Norwegian companies, came up with one of the most significant statements during my fieldwork in the Philippines. He said that “*to be a seaman, is basically about hit and run*”. What he meant was that a seafarer is employed on board for some years - *he hits* - but after some contracts he has hopefully been able to save enough money to start, and to live from, a business back home. In other words, he stops sailing - *he runs*. But the chief mate said more - and this is essential - “*but I cannot run, because I have a family*”. Let me paraphrase this in more general terms: as long as the seaman is a provider, it seems that he cannot quit, he cannot run. Instead, he is, because of his family, obliged to stay at sea.

However, and this is important, I don't say by quoting this seaman that the family solely represents a force which compels the seafarer to stay out at sea year after year - although I do not doubt that the seaman might see himself as a hostage in the family web from time to time. In a dialectic process, it is per definition impossible to sort what causes what in the constellation. So when the officer above says that "*I cannot run, because I have a family*", it is highly likely that he instead could have said something like "*the family is what makes it worth while and meaningful to continue this career*", or "*the family is what made me capable of attending the yearly labor journey*". In other words, the seaman's actual phrase "*I cannot run*" is therefore not solely referring to a situation in which the seaman is incapable of establishing a financially sound fund for local investments, due to the expectations from family members of receiving monetary support. An equally significant understanding of the statement is to regard it as an explanation of why he sees the overall meaning in and the most profound reason for going back to the sea on an annual basis.

Phrased slightly differently, we might state that the provider is out at sea, year after year and contract after contract, in the name of someone else - his family. Just as often as I heard the seafarers say "*this is the fruit of my sacrifice*" while they were pointing for instance at their house or their car, they explicitly stated for whom they suffered: "*For my family*".

With this outline of the profound position of the family organization in mind, let's take the argument a little bit further and pay attention to in what way the beloved ones back home also may play an intrinsic part in the *concrete* life on board. What I'm alluding to is the Filipino seaman's ability to cope with the actual hardship on board, by thinking of and referring to the absent family. Phrased in a slightly different manner, there is something about the character of the seafaring profession which makes the deep concern for the family unit appear as the key to what makes people go on a day to day basis.

An experienced seafarer, that is, one which per definition is at ease with the situation of the annual 10 month stays on board, will most probably refer to the family as the most important reason for him to continue as a maritime migrant. I will maintain, however, that the confidence the seafarer experiences not solely stems from the fact that he partakes in and represents a profound contributor to a larger unit which exceeds him as an individual, but also that this fact and focus may help him to shift his focus away from the narrow, routinized and

The next coping strategy the seamen use- that is, an alternative way to communicate with folks back home, although not in such an obvious and tangible manner as the telephone - is the *gift*. In section 7.2.1 I gave a comprehensive outline of the complexity and importance of the gift-giving tradition among the seamen, and suggested already at that stage in the thesis that this so-called *pasalubong* tradition, do have as an important purpose or quality to actively remember or create an image of the family members back home. I will below go further down that road, and among other things portray the gift as fundamental in the seaman's strive for upholding a clear picture of whom they are doing this for and why they find themselves out at sea in the first place. Phrased in a slightly different way, I will maintain that, besides regular phone calls, the gifts represents the most important remedy in keeping up a profound meaning in this overseas life.

"Shopping can ease the boredom" came up as one explanation, by a seaman I met on one of my many visits on board, when he wanted to explain to me why the seafarers are so involved in purchasing gifts during their contract periods. What he had in mind was not solely the act itself - although I'm sure that to roam around in a foreign shopping mall after weeks at sea, is a refreshing time for the men. While boredom denotes the deprived and dull universe on board, the easement through shopping refers to the *mnemonic* qualities of the gifts that are bought. That is, the gifts that are hand-carried on board are capable of and remedies for generating a clear memory of those back home, people whom in the near future will receive the things as presents. Shopping is therefore a type of active remembering of the receivers by the seaman at work, and equally important; for the seaman to be remembered by the family while he is away. Let me elaborate on and clarify what I mean by this.

The seaman has during the years bought and distributed most certainly a wide range of gifts to members of his nearest family, as well as to other relatives and neighbors and friends. As outlined in section 7.2.1, the seafarer's gifts share at least one certain quality; namely its foreign origin. Moreover, in addition to its status as so-called *imported*, there will also be other meanings stored in or ascribed to the item which may link the gift to its donator. In other words, the gifts will be equipped with a significance that may tell a personal as well as exotic tale long after the object has left the seaman's hands. In sum this will create a situation in which the gifts can be seen as reminders of the after all marginal seafarer (marginal in the social sense and not of course structurally or economically). This again will see to it that he

will be represented in the family and the local community during the time he is away. He will be present through the presents, so to speak.

I will maintain that this situation - one in which the gifts reminds those back home of he who is overseas - may ease the sense of emptiness, absence and loneliness, which the seamen often are experiencing during their time on board. His everyday life at the ship may be draped in a meaningful veil, since he has been able to traverse the geographically gap and isolation by leaving and systematically distributing physical proofs of his bare existence and successful effort at sea, among significant members of his land-based network. The family back home will through these foreign artifacts, receive not only a reminder of the seaman as a person, but also of which project he is involved in; to every year toil and struggle on board, a hardship and sacrifice which after all takes place in their name.

It should be emphasized, however, that it is not solely the gifts that are capable of reminding family and friends of the absent benefactor. Every expression which can be related to the peripheral seaman - physical as well as abstract - will have the potential to appear as helpers of Hermes in such a respect. In part VII the searchlight was also pivoted around some alternative ways the seaman was represented in the local community. Such as through their small business projects and modern houses, both constructions that were equipped with tangible links to the person who founded the investments.

Nevertheless, I will still state that the gift-giving tradition is unique as far as imposing meaning to the social universe on board in concerned. Since this is a type of action that takes place while the seaman is away from the family and isolated on board a few square meter big working place, the significance of such an active remembrance is immense. This takes me once again back to the statement "*shopping can ease the boredom*".

We must remember that when the seaman arrive on board after his vacation in the Philippines, he is met by and assign to a relatively large and well-equipped room, though through out naked and impersonal. Besides what he brings with him - such as civil clothes and family pictures - gifts represents an important share of what he keeps in his cabin. If we then remember whom these gifts are meant for, are we getting closer to the key in this argument. I will maintain that a significant element in this arrangement or perhaps I just should say the

storing of the presents, is to be constantly reminded of whom they are doing this for; that is, the people who give meaning to the routinized days on board.

In a more dramatic fashion we might say that the gift's mnemonic qualities make the seamen actually experience - on one level - the presence of his people back home. It is as if they are on board together with him, and he never has left them behind. In more general terms we could state that the gift appears in an overseas, deprived setting to be unsurpassed good to think with, since it represents one of the few things present on board to nourish and convey the memory of those who live in the Philippines on a permanent basis.

Moreover, before the items are brought on board and arranged in the seaman's cabin, an even more explicit way of re-experiencing and remembering the family and friends back home takes place, namely the actual act of selecting and purchasing the items. In the moment when the seafarer is standing in front of a great variety of goods in a store somewhere in the foreign world, he will in all probabilities pick the object which says something about or mirrors the one who will receive the thing when he gets home; or at least it says something about the relationship he holds to that person. Shopping, from a seaman's point of view, can therefore be seen as a process that is basically to look for items that can function as one's family double, for then to keep the objects - or is it the people? - as messengers in the private cabin the rest of the sailing period.

What we further on are witnessing here, is an example of how highly relevant it is to also take into consideration that *a gift is important as a gift even before it is actually given away*. People select with care what to bring home, and they involve themselves at the same time in the powers of secretiveness and expectations. In the sense that the receiver is not supposed to know what the wrapping is hiding and the donor will after all be spending some time wondering about the receiver's reaction when they get the present. In other words, a considerable portion of the gift's significance in the life of a seaman, is hence that it is meant for the future; it contains a tale or a mystery which will be revealed at a certain time - during the actual handing over - and is not only concentrated on a retrospective outlook. However, as we have seen, the gift's mnemonic aspect is an extremely important and apparent quality with the so-called *pasalubong*. On the backdrop of this, I will in brief state that the gift is *the* remedy for reminding the men on board of why they are out there in the first place - to help

the family - *and* in mirroring the expectations which gradually builds up during the contract period at sea - to greet the beloved ones again. A gift thus works both ways; it copes with or encloses both the future and the past.

I have above given an alternative outline of *how* and *why* the gift-giving institution has such an intrinsic place in a seafaring career. While I in section 7.2.1 emphasized on what takes place when the gift is actual handed over back home - for instance as one way to put on display wealth and success, and at the same time to play down the same excess - the focus on the last pages has been on the importance of the gift long before it reaches its receiver, and during the seaman's stay on board. I suggested above that the gift should be understood in terms of its ability to in a mnemonic manner link the man on board with his family back home; both in the sense that the object appears as a double for the absent seaman for the family in the Philippines, and as a representation of the same family for the bread winner on board the ship.

One major question is still not sufficiently answered: why is it apparently so important to give a present after a period at sea? Or, to anticipate the answer a little bit: what is actually given away?

In section 7.2.1 I underlined how important it is, when certain items are turned into suitable gifts, that they are of foreign origin. It seems that when an artifact is so-called *imported*, a certain aura is added to the thing, a quality which often is expressed with words as "*different quality*", "*different taste*" and "*better quality*", and these expressions are used when people want to legitimate their preferences for imported goods rather than local products.

However, there is more to the gifts than their status as imported from the outside. The fact that the gifts are hand-carried home and dispersed by a central member of the family - or a close friend or neighbor for that matter - is of course also crucial when the aim is to understand what the gifts are ascribed, or how significant the presents can be portrayed as in a Philippine maritime community. I will maintain that an extremely momentous element in the seaman's gift to his family and friends, is to tell *a* or *the* story of his own professional life. The gifts are as exotic as the seven seas, and they are also the uppermost concrete things that they have left after a long contract period at sea. I will in sum state that in the gift, the seaman see himself,

which again means that what he gives away, and the others thus receive or are offered, is (parts of) himself.

It should be apparent that we are here witnessing a tangible example of a well-known theme in the human sciences, namely indivisibility between man and the gift. However, let me take a closer look at some other relevant works and illustrations before I continue and explore my argument further. In her book *On longing* (1993), Susan Stewart has an outline of the character of the *souvenir*. She emphasizes among other things that such tokens of remembrance “*is by definition always incomplete*” (p. 136). Firstly, in the sense that the item is brought out of its metonymic position when it is bought and carried home, a process which turns the souvenir into “*a sample of a now-distance experience, an experience which the object can only evoke and resonate to, and can never entirely recoup*” (p. 136). Secondly, the souvenir is and must be rather allusive in its character. That is, it gains its significant position among people from its potential rather than actual ability for mirroring a certain experience in the past.

In short, the incompleteness Stewart is focusing upon generates the need of a *narrative*. A souvenir will not be meaningful unless a “*supplementary narrative discourse*” is introduced (p. 136). Not just any story will do. It is the narrative of the owner or possessor, which are the primary content or the ascribed qualities of the souvenir. In other words, the souvenir are able to tell to it’s surroundings the story of how the owner, gained experience from a distant though authentic past; it is able to establish an “*intimate distance*” (p. 140) with “*a past or otherwise remote experience*” (p. 139), to once again quote the work of Stewart (1993).

Alfred Gell describes in the book *The social life of things* (1986) how a television set, owned by a Sri Lankan fisherman living in a village without electricity, can be portrayed as a synthesis of his “*biography, his labor, his social milieu*” (p. 114). The TV is capable of condensing what the local fisherman is facing in his everyday life on board an “*old boat, pursuing an all-too-familiar routine, and facing the all-too-familiar messiness and uncertainties of weather, movements [...] of fish, and price fluctuations at the market*” (p. 114). With the help from a television set he is able to “*turn all this labor, all this familiar messiness and uncertainty, into a smooth, dark cabinet of unidentifiable grainless wood, geometrically pure lines, an inscrutable gray glass face, and within, just visible through the*

rows of little holes and slots at the back, an intricate jungle of wire, plastic, and shining metal.” (p. 114).

Gell continues, in line with this outline, by stating that the TV is per definition a piece of art. This exotic object holds a position as a work of art, because of its ability, not only to objectify the biography of the fisherman, but in more general terms, to negate and transcend the real world (p. 115). In other words, the paramount reality is challenged, supplemented and commented on with the help from these artistic expressions, which again is an approach that makes the actual purchasing of the gifts an act that definitely addresses creativity and the extraordinary, rather than just routinized consumption.

To illustrate how items can generate the need for personal narratives to be told, and at the same time mirror whole biographies, was my intention with the excursion into the work of Stewart and Gell. I will maintain that the gifts carried home by the maritime migrants have important similarities with Stewart’s souvenir and the television set in the work of Gell from Sri Lanka. As we will see, my reading of Gell and Stewart also contains a further exploration of the idea that what the seaman in the most profound sense gives away, is himself.

The seaman’s gift can be looked upon as some of the most concrete and palpable he has left after 10 months at sea. In the vacuum he experiences on board, the *pasalubongs* represent far the most tangible proofs of his effort on board this transnational working place. Phrased in a slightly different manner, since the seaman has 10 months a year that he can’t explain, that he can’t account for, the gift will represent important cornerstones in or reminders for the memory. So, just as the souvenir sheds some light on the actual traveler and generates a need for his or her narrative to be told, the gift may point at certain episodes from his contract period and see to it that this is mentioned or included in the process of giving it away.

In other words, what the seaman gives away is glimpses of his recent, though monotonous, past. Just as the souvenir gain its strength from “*events whose materiality has escaped us, events that thereby exist only through the invention of narrative*” (Stewart 1993:135), the gift should be treated as physical results of an endeavor in a highly routinized, deprived and therefore blurred universe.

Also Gell's notion of the exotic items as per definition pieces of art is relevant in the discussion around the gift. Although I do not want to view the *pasalubongs* as if they are actual pieces of art. Instead I will insist on that the presents brought home from the sea do share certain elements with a typical work of art. The gift is for instance similar to art when it comes to negation and transcending of the so-called real world (in this context, Philippine everyday reality). It is bought and brought home from the glamorous outside, and instead of the local peso, it is paid for in US dollars. Moreover, according to many Filipinos, the imported goods are characterized by a different flavor, a different taste and a better quality and are therefore preferred to local products. A perfect gift is seen in contrast to what their own world is capable of offering. A gift from a seaman is a taste of what it can be like out there, compared to the well-known, take-for-granted Philippines.

As we have seen demonstrated over the last pages, it is almost impossible *not* to draw a tangible line between the things that are given, and the person who actually is giving it away. The profound significance of the wide range of gifts presented after ended contracts is thus both connected to the origin of the item and to the position and the experience of the single seaman. In general I would illustrate this relationship by stating that the gift comes from the outside, and speak of an outside world - just as the seaman himself (cf. section 6.2 where the discussion is pivoted around the seaman as a local cosmopolitan). He distributes objects from the outer world as gifts, things that at the same time are an objectification of and commentary on his life as an overseas seaman. Phrased differently, he donates artifacts which he knows people back in the Philippines appreciates, but to emphasize imported items is also one way to comment on his own past and experience on board, and outstanding position in the family and local community.

As I now approach the end of this thesis, it may be appropriate to ask: what have this thesis been about? If we leave the day to day activity and view the seafarers everyday life from a distant and more general angle, what do we see?

One way to situate and to sum up my outline of the Filipino seafarer is to describe them as *modernists with a lag*. That is, they have their origin in and act in accordance with a society containing strong elements of bureaucracy and technological production – what elsewhere have been named “*primary carriers of modernization*” (Berger et.al. 1974:9) - but they lack

certain typical features concerning the level of consciousness. What I first and foremost have in mind here is the weak position of the *individual* in a Philippine everyday universe, this in favor of the family.

To insist that individual autonomy is a typical and important theme in a modernization process is hardly an original approach to this field. (See for example Berger et.al. 1974:196). Generally we might state that the individual, due to a lack of a paramount and unquestioned superstructure in a pluralistic, modernistic universe, is left on the one hand with a freedom to choose, but on the other with a burden to, through his own effort, impose meaning on his own, private world. In other words, in a pluralistic, modern society, where the individual migrate between a wide range of different social worlds, the individual may be left with a sense of being without a home (Berger et.al. 1974:184). One way to meet this state of homelessness, that is, a situation where “*certainties of any kind, are hard to come by*” (Berger 1974:184), is to emphasize and protect a private sphere. This sector of society, which to a large degree is manageable and under control by the individual - and thus an arena for his private projects - may help the individual to cope with “*the cold winds of “homelessness” [...] brought about by the large structures of modern society*” (Berger 1974:188 and 186).

This private or personal solution has been a success. Despite the death of “Grand” and taken-for-granted insights and explanations, people around the modern world have shown remarkable abilities to live – at least apparently – meaningful lives. However, to let life pivot around the private sphere, and then achieve to establish a fence towards the multitude and meaninglessness of the outer world, has some built-in weaknesses.

Compared to what we can name a pre-modern situation, where large, strong and accepted institutions came up with clear answers to what people were facing in their everyday life, a so-called private solution is hopelessly weak and in demand for continuous maintenance. The weakness stems from the fact that in this privatized universe, the single individual has to rely on his own abilities and accomplishment in establishing a meaningful life; no taken-for-granted sectors in the society are present to ensure a meaningful life.¹ It is for example

¹ Berger draws upon the work of Arnold Gehlen in this discussion. Especially his ideas elaborated in the book *Man in the Age of Technology* (1980) of how the modern world appear

The fact that the seaman cannot be seen isolated from his family – that he first and foremost sees himself as a family member, rather than an independent individual – is what places him on the opposite side of the continuum of modernity, than say an ideal typical picture of a Northern European. While the latter emphasizes a private or individual identity – he will rely upon his personal skills and his own efforts - a Filipino will in general terms achieve respect and obtain a position from his participation in and effort for his family. Let me illustrate this significant difference – in short; a strong family orientation vs. individualism – with some examples from the situation on board, or at least how this is expressed at a *discursive level*. Besides information from my own fieldwork, the outline is based on the work of Serck-Hanssen, which in a very illustrative manner illuminated this issue (Serck-Hanssen 1997).

It is not uncommon to hear from for example experienced Norwegian personnel that the Filipinos are not actually “*real*” seafarers, in the sense that they don’t possess the necessary professional skills – they don’t have what’s often referred to as “*seamanship*” – and that their focus is located outside the vessel and with the family, and not on the working tasks on board. A typical accusation could for instance be that sole reason why the Filipinos are on board is to make money for their families and that they don’t show a genuine, professional interest. To fully understand such harsh and critical remarks, we must be aware of the significance of work in the ship society (at least the Norwegian version of it).

We can, in short, claim that work is the most important frame of reference on board a vessel manned by Norwegians (Sørhaug & Aamot 1980:30). To receive respect and dignity as a seaman – according to this perspective – it is of tremendous importance in order to be involved in regular work, and to solve the tasks in a satisfactory manner. To be a seaman, according to this Norwegian discourse, is therefore first and foremost about professionalism; about a strong concern regarding work.

Simply put, we might state that the Norwegians, portrayed in this manner, are true modernists. They swear that their destiny and acceptance as professional seamen lies in their own hands and is stored in their own specialized know-how. They impose meaning and adjust to the profession as an overseas seaman, through a strong concern with the work performed on

board. They literally see themselves seamen; their focus is solely on what takes place on board.

Nevertheless, the Norwegian seafarers - to once again to make use of them as an illustration of a fairly “pure” modernistic attitude - will most certainly also have a family; they will also be linked to people back home through fatherhood and marriage etc. The difference is, however, that this is not something that they bring with them on board the ship; it is not explicitly and actively used during their time on board to give sense or direction to the professional, everyday life. To appear and perform as a skilled and diligent seaman - and not as a family member and a provider - is what make them feel at ease with the situation on board.

I see such a strong discursive focus on work as a *coping strategy*. In accordance with my discussion above, it is pertinent to see relatively autonomous individuals trust their own skills and efforts in establishing a meaning in their everyday life. We sense at the same time the vulnerability in the situation of this category of seafarers; a vulnerability which stems from the fact that they lack the opportunity to link their daily life on board to a broader social context. In brief we could say that the daily life of the Norwegians is less institutionalized than that of their Filipino colleagues at sea, and this in its turn may create some additional problems for the Norwegians in upholding a meaningful horizon in the deprived universe on board.

I will also maintain that the Norwegian approach to the seafaring profession, is less favorable when it comes to handling the switch between the working place on board and the totally different world back home. This in the sense that the Filipino seaman can and will see the family as also an important factor in his life on board, whereas the Norwegian finds his haven in his work, and thus indirectly strengthens the gap or the profound difference between the family life back home and the situation on board². In other words, the Filipino pays, in a relatively high degree, attention to the family *while* he is doing his job on board. Through the gift-giving tradition and frequent use of the cellular phone, the Filipino can be said to not be fully separated from his family during the time at sea. So, when he comes home to rest in-

² Later in this section, I will point at some consequences in what concerns the health situation of the seafarers. As we will see, figures from for instance Denmark show that many seamen have major problems in leaving the profession or handling the switch between a life at sea vs. a life on land.

between the contracts, it may be relatively easy for him to blend in the local, family-based way of life.

I will in sum state that the difference between a typical Norwegian and Filipino seafaring career, is one layer of meaning. The Filipinos have added one significant frame of reference to their migratory life – the family – which makes them cope with the professional ordeals in a less problematic way than their Norwegian counterparts. In short we could say that the Filipinos are equipped with a strong and vivid idea of giving in the name of the family – expressed in English by the seamen as *sacrifice*, and in Tagalog with the term *pagsisikap* (literally: effort, hardship) - which gives them an advantage when it comes to impose meaning into or out of their work situation.

Take for instance the actual *separation* from the family involved in this career. For our ideal typical Norwegian this division doesn't give any sense in itself. Just through a skilled and hard-working performance on board, he acts in correspondence with the principles of "his" profession. The Filipino, on the other hand, is different. He – once again expressed in a rather ideal typical language – acts in accordance with highly appreciated values in his cultural universe by being away. For the Filipinos, the separation make sense, since it is a presupposition and a condition for their "sacrifice"; a sacrifice which overall purpose is to become a so-called great dollar-earner, *so* they can help their families. In brief we could therefore state that to be away link them to their families. Their absence makes them present. Through their investments and expenditures on gifts, phone calls, housing, education, business projects etc., they achieve a sort of *conspicuous absence*.

That the Filipinos are able to handle the separation as highly meaningful, reminds me of how Fredrik Barth comprehended the significance of the seasonal movements of Basseri tribe of South Persia (today Iran), and in that respect underlined the strong ritual element in the migration itself (Barth 1964:135-153). Barth focused on the remarkable poor ritual life among the Basseri people, and saw this scarcity in relation to the dramatic form – for instance the fatiguing passings through rough mountainous area - and the "*supreme ritual value*" of their nomadic movements (p. 153). Barth ended up by claiming that it is an expression of naïveté if one rejects to see that activities which "*are of fundamental practical economic importance*" *also* can hold a highly significant ritual position (p. 153).

The parallel between the Persian nomads to the Filipino seafarers should be clear. Just as Barth portrayed the Basseri people's "*migrations [as an] engrossing and satisfying experience*" (p. 153), I would state that the annual labor migration in itself may or will be of profound significance for the seamen.

Also the *pilgrim* can be brought into this discussion, in the sense that this is a figure which also presupposes a strong focus on or concern with the actual process or movement. Even though the pilgrim has a fixed destination for his journey or pilgrimage, it is a mistake not to see the travel in itself as part of what molds him into this figure. I mean, if the idea was solely to get to a place as Santiago de Compostela, a flight would have been much more convenient means of transport than to travel the same distance by foot. The whole purpose of a pilgrimage is hence to let the time and energy spent on the physical travel be a redeemer for a journey on an abstract or mental level. Furthermore, it is common to claim that the willingness to set forth on this inner voyage is rooted in a *vow* or an obligation the pilgrim experiences towards a spiritual being or some fellow human being³. For instance, they decided to become pilgrims because they *promised* a divine force to do so if their child recovered from severe illness or in relation to some other miraculous outcome of critical situations.

Both the seaman and the pilgrim are able to see the actual travelling as something which concerns matters beyond the concrete geographical transportation. That is, they are both able to elevate the significance of the actual movement. I tend to see the pilgrimage as a remedy used to achieve a deeper understanding of both spiritual and interpersonal matters, and the Filipino migrant's separation from his family as a demonstration of a willingness to set one's own needs aside and emphasis on his position as a provider, and therefore act in accordance with the celebrated behavior of committing sacrifice or undergo individual hardship in the name of someone else.

³ It is a misinterpretation to see a pilgrimage as solely an "upward" or spiritual concern. Many writers have underlined how a pilgrim's journey explicitly can be linked to also strictly interpersonal matters. See for instance Helms (1988:76-77) and Turner (1974:166-230) outline of this issue.

The pilgrim could also shed some light on the seafarer in other respects. Both the fact that they both share a liminal or peripheral position in society - though in profoundly different ways when it comes to matters such as the financial returns of their efforts - and that they both are driven by a strong will and obligation to carry out their actions, are examples of this. Nevertheless, I will leave this comparison for others to go into, or perhaps myself on a different occasion.

Over the last pages the main objective has been to illuminate the Filipino seafarer's ability or capacity to handle some of the major challenges involved in an overseas career. We have seen how they are able to link their everyday life on board to a wider and significant context, which in their case means the family, and in what manner the Filipino seafaring discourse therefore differ from the typical Norwegian discourse. In the end we saw this difference exemplified by highlighting the advantages that the Filipinos have when it comes to handling the obvious element of separation and absence in overseas employment.

Before I close this thesis, I will dwell upon one effect of this ability to impose meaning into one's everyday life, Or perhaps even more important, what implications do a *lack* of meaning have on human lives in general and on the seafaring personnel in particular. The keyword for my focus is *health*.

The seafaring profession is in general unhealthy and dangerous. Even though this may differ among the different types of vessels and rely upon the position held on board, studies performed in Denmark and Sweden show that seamen in the broad picture hold a higher mortality rate than the general population (see for instance Hemmingsson et.al. 1997, Hansen and Pedersen 1996, Hansen and Jensen 1998, Brandt et.al. 1994, Hansen et.al. 2000). These findings are seen in relation to both job related accidents – which are relatively frequent in connection with work on deck, such as cargo operations, maintenance and mooring and anchoring activities⁴ – and to certain lifestyle factors which appears in the life on board. It is this latter category which is of special interest in my argument.

⁴ Hansen et.al. (2000:10).

In the work of Hansen and Pedersen (1996), which pivots around a cohort of more than 24 000 Danish seafarers employed on board the merchant marines between 1986-93, we see how lifestyle - and not solely accidents related to work tasks on board - represents a major cause for a high mortality rate.⁵ On the one hand we have the diseases related to a widespread use of alcohol and tobacco – such as alcoholic liver cirrhosis and lung cancer – and on the other an involvement in high-risk activities. The emphasis on risk as a factor in this picture, refers among other things to an interesting tendency in the Danish material, namely that the mortality rate among *former* seafarers increase, due to an involvement in activities which may lead to fatale accidents. Traffic accidents are one example of such behavior.

I also see an obvious element of lifestyle included in the relatively high suicide rate among the seamen – for active Danish crew members the standard mortality rate was 1.56, while it rose to 3.31 when the personnel left an active career on board – in the sense that this fatal solution is partly taken on the basis of how the life and work is organized on board. In other words, those who commit suicide may lack suitable coping strategies; they may not have the ability to uphold a meaningful horizon behind their careers, but are overwhelmed by the elements of anomaly in the seafaring experience, such as the emptiness, boredom, deprivation homesickness and the absence or nonappearance of the family. This argument is inspired by Durkheimian insights, originally introduced in his famous work *The Suicide* from 1897 (1952). I will later on explain a little bit further what this influence consists in.

Hansen and Pedersen (1996) concludes by stating that the seafaring profession “*is a high risk occupation with a high mortality*” and that it is characterized by “*hazardous working conditions causing occupational accidents and [a] high risk lifestyle in general*” (p. 1242). In other words, there is something about this profession, *in itself*, which will lead to a higher mortality rate compared to the rest of the population⁶. But, as I have already suggested above, it is not only the accidents on board and an unhealthy lifestyle that kill. There is also something in the character of this occupation, which obviously turns it into one that is difficult to *leave*. As the figures above should show, many seafarers encounter problems in switching back to a land based life; both the suicide rate and the number of deaths related to alcoholism

⁵ The standardized mortality ratio was 1.43 from all causes and 3.05 from accidents (Hansen & Pedersen 1996).

⁶ Also Hemmingsson et.al. come up with the same conclusion in their work (1997).

increase among the former seafarers. Perhaps it is not too difficult to comprehend that when you leave behind this *totally* different world, it is hard to adjust again to a land-based everyday life. When you realize that the international waters and the comfortable routines are gone; that the structured and rank-based daily life has vanished; that the context for your wanted expertise is left behind - together with the *communitas* on board and the many dreams of how it would be like when you finally came home to settle - it is pertinent to view an involvement in high risk activities and drinking as something which may ease the transition and put flavor to the domestic universe.

I tend to see the Filipino version of a maritime career as a slightly healthier one compared to my brief outline of a Scandinavian occupational performance above. One remarkable aspect in this respect is that foreigners in general - including Filipinos - are less exposed to accidents, than their Danish colleagues in the same position (Hansen et.al. 2000 a)⁷. Still, there are certain differences in lifestyle that I find particularly interesting.

The Filipinos drink less than their European colleagues. Even though alcohol definitely also has its place in constituting manhood in the Philippines, it is a returning theme among non-Filipinos I have discussed this issue with that drunkenness is a minor problem in the present situation, compared to how it was when the Europeans dominated the scene. I see the overall meaning the Filipinos gain from their position as family delegates, as one plausible explanation for this abstention, in the sense that they don't *need* to the same *extent* as others to handle meaninglessness as part of their professional life, and therefore they are not in the same need for the relieving qualities of alcohol. I will also assert that the colossal responsibility the seamen have for the well-being of their surroundings, will prevent them from risking their careers by an unsatisfactory job performance, rooted in an excessive use of alcohol.

I will also anticipate that the suicide rate among Filipinos is much lower than for example the figures above should tell about the Danish situation. Although I don't have figures to support such a notion for maritime personnel in particular – I doubt that there exists such a material or

⁷ The way I see it, this may have to do with different approaches towards masculinity and work, and it is perhaps also due to an under-reporting practice from the vessels.

at least I haven't been able to trace such numbers⁸ – I expect that the relatively strong integration the Filipinos are experiencing towards their family and relatives, will decrease the rate. This view is supported by WHO's official statistics for the population at large - the Philippines operates with a suicide rate of 2.5 (per 100,000 in the year 1993), in contrast to for example Norway's 19.1 (in 1995) and Denmark 24.3 (in 1996). However, we do not have a clear and statistical picture of how the overseas Filipino seaman places himself compared to the population at large. Will the fact that the seaman is a very successful provider and that he in a fundamental manner sees the meaning in the hardship on board, make him less frequently represented in the suicide statistics than his fellow country men? Or will the anomalous forces on board be so strong and overwhelming that he loses the sight of who he chose this career for in the first place, and perhaps place him at the very top of the death rate statistics?

We sense here an obvious influence from Durkheim and his outline of suicide as a type of behavior which is rooted in sociological processes, rather than being solely an individual concern. The suicide rate is seen in relation to the degree of integration of the individual in his surroundings, and the broad picture is that the freewheeling (Protestant) individuals, tend to be more involved in such destructive behavior, than (Catholic) people who are situated in the social landscape in a larger scale and in a more complex manner.

Figures from a large Norwegian shipping company's own health statistics are also interesting in this respect. Out of a pool of about 1500 Filipino seafarers, only five were repatriated over a period of nine months, due to illnesses such as psychosis, anxiety, depression and insomnia. I am of course fully aware of the fact that this information should undergo a sober treatment. The total number of people is relatively small, they are all employed by the same employer and I don't know how accurate the classification practice is among the health personnel who perform the actual examination. Still, even with all these weaknesses taken into consideration, it is a remarkable and interesting fact that only 0,3% of the Filipino seamen suffered from severe mental illness, a fact that also was supported by Henrik L. Hansen (2000 b).

⁸ Once again we are witnessing a potential field or issue for future investigation.

It is time to close this thesis. I find it pertinent to do so in the same way as I started this concluding outline, namely to once again recollect the significance of the family in the Filipino maritime migration. In other words there is a line between how this chapter started - with a Filipino captain's own definition of the term *seafarer* - and how it ended, in a description of the positive health situation among the seafarers from this archipelago. The seaman's place or position in a family based network, is what makes him *able* and *willing* to leave, and at the same time it is what enables him to (but not without struggle) *cope* with the deprived and secluded universe on board.

Besides an element of adventure and avoidance of certain relationships back home, it is a strong focus on *sacrifice* – or to undergo hardship in someone's name – that motivates the departure for this overseas labor market. In addition, the obvious and strong financial element among the inducement factors, should be comprehended as being deeply rooted in the Filipino family orientation, since it is a widespread notion that the income is for the benefits of or meant for the whole family. Insights and efforts from relatives are also crucial when it comes to the practical accomplishment of the labor migration. In order to get to know how to approach the manning agents, those who locally handle the foreign labor market, the seaman – at least in the beginning of his career – often needs to rely upon the resources of his relatives.

To regard the family organization as a coping strategy during the contract period on board, is related to the seaman's ability to drape his daily life on board – despite its monotonous and anomalous character – in a meaningful veil. With a focus on the family - expressed especially through the so-called *pasalubong* tradition - he is able to bridge the gap between himself and those back home, and at the same time achieve to see his effort and isolation on board in a wider and more meaningful context. Besides frequent phone calls back home, he will through an involvement in gift related *shopping* be reminded of those who rely on his effort, the very people who also represents the overall motive for why he chose this profession in the first place.

The gift should also be understood as a “*metasocial commentary*” (Geertz 1973:448) to the experience obtained by the seafarer in his maritime career. He brings home exotic artifacts from all over the world – words as *overseas* or *abroad* have often a glamorous aura among people in the Philippines - and emphasizes simultaneously, since he himself has been to the

same places, his own extraordinary knowledge. In short, the gift is in this thesis treated as a medium for and an exemplification of the contact between the seafarer on board and the family members at home. He conjures in the memory of those back home with the help of the *mnemonic* qualities of the gifts, and they see his imprint in the exotic gifts while he is away. He purchases physical bearers which are capable of carrying the memory of the family at home, and ends up by presenting them as gifts, as pieces of himself to family members after terminating his contract.

To sum up this thesis in one sentence, it has been about how strong ideals and motives are kept alive in a deprived and monotonous universe with the support of certain mnemonic devices. It has been about how *sacrifice* is nourished through *shopping*.

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