

## CHAPTER 4

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF A THICK RESEARCH NARRATIVE

#### 4.1 Introducing the main research characters

This research is guided by the metaphor of story writing. The whole research project is therefore seen as one story that consists of many different stories. This is not unique to this research because in any story a lot of story lines are woven together, but it is still seen as only one story. To apply the metaphor of research as writing I made use of the ABDCE formula. In the research, so far quite a bit of action and background have been discussed and development started to take place. Some important ingredient will be added now which, as I understand Müller (2001:70), is actually what gives momentum to the development of the story which can lead to the climax. This ingredient is characters. Research is in the first place not about action, but about characters who are involved with action (Müller 2003:13). I will now introduce the six main characters. They participated in this research anonymously, but in every story the characters need to have names, so I will choose a name for each seafarer and I will try to make it a name that will fit in with their background. Here I will also share a short introductory narrative about each one of them as I will refer to them while discussing the different themes without repeating the background information again.

##### a. John from Nigeria

This seafarer from Nigeria and I became very good friends. John is a committed Christian and someone who in his time in Durban earned my respect. He was on a ship with nine other Nigerians. Their reason for being in Durban was only to board the ship and to take it to Nigeria. In the end they did take the ship to Nigeria, but this only happened after a lot of stress for John and the other guys on board because they ended up staying in Durban harbour for more than a year.

On John's ship we had a weekly Bible study, largely because of John's committed attitude to Christ. Sometimes the other crew members would not participate, on other occasions even some of the Muslims would attend the meeting and two of the Muslims

even accepted a Bible from me. On this ship there was a lot of tension because of the situation they were in. In the end they did sail and made it safe to Nigeria. John and the others are now working on this ship in Nigeria as it is used as a supply tug for the oil rigs. In December 2009 the ship sailed back to Nigeria.

I had two interviews with John. I lost the first one almost completely because of the quality of my recorder. Fortunately I could get a new and better recorder and John was willing to have another interview with me. This interview was held in the Seafarersq Centre one evening. John was very comfortable about being interviewed and he even asked my wife to make a video recording of the interview so that he could show it to his people when he returned back home.

John was trained in the Nigerian navy, but he changed his career and started to work as an electrical officer on ships like the supply tug he was on at the time of the interview. When I asked John about dangers at sea he said: "That is commonplace. In fact, for any one that calls themselves a seafarer, [they] must have experience[d] a lot of ugly situations at sea." And when asked about his future he said: "To be fully committed, full time, into the pastoral ministry, at the age of fifty." John was also a pastor and he ministered to many of the local people in the time of their prolonged stay in Durban harbour. John is not what some would say your typical sailor, but then, neither were any of the other co-researchers.

#### b. Jonathan from Kenya

This seafarer is from Kenya. On the ship he was working on, at the time of the interview, he had been through a lot of stress and even abuse. Their ship was arrested in Durban but I got to know him, the other crew and especially the captain quite well before this happened. The captain, who was from India, and I became friends but in the interview Jonathan revealed a side to the captain of which I was not aware. Even though the captain was instrumental in giving Jonathan an opportunity to become a sailor he ended up mistreating Jonathan. Before this interview I asked the captain if he would be willing to participate in the research and he refused for some reason.

The ship was already very old and went to dry-dock where a lot of necessary repairs were done. The owner of the ship failed to pay the account to the company that did the repairs and the end result was that the ship had to be arrested and then auctioned. The ship was sold at a very low price and the crew ended up with only a portion of their salaries. They were sent home, to Kenya and India, without any guarantee that they would receive anything of their outstanding salaries.

I became intensely involved in the situation and even came into conflict over the matter with someone who was also involved with this case. According to him I overstepped a line and interfered where a chaplain had no business. In the interview Jonathan told me about his experiences and about what happened concerning the ship's arrest and the mistreatment he suffered on the ship under the captain. The word I would use to describe the situation he was in is: messy.

Previously Jonathan worked in a port in Kenya and when he saw seafarers on the ship he thought he would love to be one:

But my hope was, I was thinking maybe when I joined the ship things would be fine because before I was working [in] the port. I was working [in] the port like labour, lashing, I was doing lashings, sometimes I am doing tally. So when I was seeing these Filipino crew, I see their life, I talk to them, they say: Sea, to be a seaman is [a] good job. So I just like, when I saw this people, when they are coming and then they go ashore, just like that, so I was, I like to be a seaman because I was... But when I joined the ship I saw it was different.

(This is how Jonathan talked. It is difficult to follow what he is saying but, I am sure, possible.)

### c. Mohammed from the East Coast of Africa

For this seafarer it was very important to stay completely anonymous. In the interview he was upset when I referred to his home country and I had to assure him that even

though it was recorded I will not use this information in the research. For this reason I will not reveal from which country he is specifically, but for the purpose of background information I will simply say that he is from the East Coast of Africa and he is now residing in Durban. Previously he sailed a few times, but now he is working on a small boat which is being repaired and he is looking after it. In his heart he is a true sailor though, and he would like to sail one day again. He is one of the seamen who would actually recommend sailing to his children, although he does not have children yet. Mohammed said: %But if God, He give me a child also, I wish my son to join the, to follow my style, you see? Also I want him to be a seaman, because I love the seaman.+

Mohammed is a Moslem but he does not feel threatened by me being a Christian missionary and he accepts it if I talk about God and give him Christian literature. When he started out with sailing he could not do his work properly because of being seasick all the time. He did find an interesting solution to this problem, though, and he calls it the %secret of the sea+and he will reveal this %secret+later on in this research.

#### d. Ivan from Bulgaria

Ivan is a captain from Bulgaria. He is no longer living there, but he got married to a South African woman and therefore relocated. He was at the end of his career at the time of the interview. About twenty years ago he started working on a local dredger. Before that he worked on cargo vessels, mostly with people from his own country. In the interview with him he shared a lot about how things were in the past and how things changed. He also gave insight into the effects seafaring has on the family:

I don't find myself so lucky, you know, with family and all, issues. Okay in principal, I could say as much as I could say about my own folks, you know, from my country of origin, there would be very few seamen, you know, not specific level, of any level, from the crew list, very few would be found, you know, to not be divorced. And, married a second and third time, whatever. It's a difficult thing. It is a difficult thing for women and it's difficult for the man.

#### e. Noel from the Philippines:

I met Noel on a salvage tug which visited Durban harbour for a few days. He was the only one of the (seafarer) co-researchers whom I knew for just a short period of time. He was from the Philippines and he was the captain on the ship and the rest of the crew was from Indonesia. He talked about the financial advantages of being a seafarer and the disadvantages of being lonely sometimes: %6 you have to fight for it, because if youqe lonely youqe lost, you want to go home, you lose your job.+ A lot of what he said in the interview was typical of the situation many seafarers find themselves in. By typical I mean things that I also experience as being common themes in the stories that seafarers share with me on a daily basis.

One of the typical things that Noel talked about was the difficult situation of a seafarer who somehow belongs nowhere. He said:

%And, you know, and as a seaman I battle with the thoughts, even some times if at home for already two months, I feel restless already because, the routine just in the house [ ] children in school [ ] and itq not only me, most seamen only I talk [he means: %most seamen I talk with is saying this.-]

This is the reality of many seafarers who spend the largest part of their adult life at sea. When they are at sea many will count down the months that are left before they can go home. Then, when the happy day comes at last and they arrive at home they find that they are restless and that the routine of the household, children going to school and the wife going to work or managing the household is somehow not their life anymore. This precarious situation that seafarers find themselves in is something I will explore more thoroughly under the discussion of seafarers and their families.

#### f. Eric from the Philippines

Eric is a chief cook and he is good at it. His ship got damaged in a port in West Africa and they had to come to Durban for repairs. He is a cheerful person and he was willing to share many things with me in the interview. He talked about his family, about a broken relationship with his wife from whom he is separated and about the precious

moments he share with his four daughters when he goes home. He is a fun loving person, warm, generous and fond of laughing:

“As I told you, going here from [a port in West Africa], there’s a big swell, so we roll a lot, I can’t sleep. There was a time when I fell asleep and come a big roll, I mean a big swell, and we roll again. We roll hard, [ ], I almost fall down. Instead of being afraid, I just laugh and laugh because I can’t imagine myself falling down like that. I don’t know how I still managed to laugh [laughing loudly]. I don’t know, or maybe it’s because I become so, you know, I [am] kinda [a] smiling person. Even in the smallest thing I would laugh. So once somebody make me laugh, oh, I always laugh so loud. I always laugh my heart out, I don’t know. I cannot, I cannot stop laughing. Once I start, I started laughing and that thing that makes me laugh [is] still in my mind, I’m still laughing, laughing, until it fade in my mind, you know. So, I never really feel, sometimes, I was thinking: “Am I really 46?+ I don’t feel like it, yah, inside. I don’t really feel like it. I feel like 26, yea, actually [laughing]. I always feel like 26.+”

But he is not, he is someone with a lot of experience and he was so kind as to share with me both the good ones and the bad ones. Unfortunately one of the really bad ones happened in a seafarers’ centre in the USA.

#### **4.2 Understanding the climax**

The research story’s development has gained some momentum now that the characters are introduced and the hope is that this development will lead to a climax as it does when a story’s plot starts to develop. Before I go on, though, I would like to repeat shortly what the climax is all about. When I discuss the themes there will be a section on development, followed by the climax for that section, but without further explanation as to what the climax is.

As the themes will start to develop now a lot of background will be included and relatively long section of the interviews I had will be shared. Then when I move on to the alternative perspective a lot of background will fall away and certain phrases and stories will be used in order for the co-researchers to enter into conversations with each other. The co-researchers include the seafarers, the chaplains and the two

interdisciplinary partners. Here I would like to bring them all together. At the alternative perspective I would like to point out the highlights, the understandings and descriptions that in a sense ~~we~~ said it all+. Sometimes, by means of a few words one can have an experience of: ~~Aha!~~+(cf Bosman & Müller 2009).

The climax is where and when things are coming together (Müller 2001:68). Ann Lamott (in Müller 2001:67) said that the development of the story can be compared to the development of a Polaroid picture. At the climax the hope is that the picture will start to take shape. Müller (2001:67) says that he sometimes in a therapy situation left with a feeling that there are a lot of decorations for the Christmas tree, but that there is no tree, with other words there is no plot. Here the assumption is that the tree, whatever type of tree, whatever shape, should become visible and the decorations should get their proper place.

The section on the alternative perspective should be something that is the result of the action, background and development that went beforehand. This section is not so much about introducing something new, but an effort to bring things together and therefore I will look back over the descriptions, understandings and insights that was revealed and shared through the co-researchers. To put it more accurately: descriptions, understandings and insights that were constructed, because in a certain sense it was not really there before this research.

At the C the researchers work is ~~to~~ understand a little more about life and to pass this on+(Lamott in Müller, Van Deventer & Human 2001:87). This is what I hope will be accomplished in this section. The researcher/writer needs to try to be part of the solution (Müller 2001:69), and therefore in this section the aim is that some of the descriptions, understandings and insights should point in the direction of solutions.

The other aspect that is important at this stage is that here you hope to move to the ~~edges~~ edges of life+where you are ~~not~~ interested in the essence of life and relationships+(Müller 2001:69). This will include God and religion, but then this should not be introduced from

outside the stories of the co-researchers, but it should rather grow from it (Müller 2001:69). In the alternative perspective all three research movements will be brought together. The first movement had to do with the interaction with the seafarers, the second movement was about the two interdisciplinary discussions and in the third movement a number of chaplains shared something about their understanding on whatever the topic was.

In the rest of this chapter the themes will be discussed and each theme will lead up to an alternative perspective where I will, together with my co-researchers, try to bring the stories together.

### **4.3 The themes: Developed through local and “beyond the local” movements**

#### **A. Narratives about a shipmate called “Danger”**

“Wish you were here...!” Sadly that is the last thing today’s seafarers would write to their loved ones as they feel their way nervously around the Indian Ocean, despite its honeymoon islands and Kenya’s safari coast. It should be paradise, but it isn’t. Here be dragons. They are the two-legged sort who comes in skiffs wielding automatic weapons and ransom demands. They can board your ship in moments, take you hostage for months, beat you, starve you, torture you, sell you on, or murder you. These are the Indian Ocean pirates, and, despite the international naval operations to deter, prevent and repress their acts of violence, these predators are striking deeper and harder than ever before.

(Jane Spence 2011:24)

#### **- Introduction**

It is to be expected that life at sea is dangerous. The purpose of this section is not to convince anyone of this fact, but it is to give a window into hearts of people who are living with these dangers. Many times the dangers a seafarer has to face is related to weather, but there are also other dangers due to fatigue, the ports that are visited, the type of cargo the ship is carrying, the condition the ship is in, the mental state of the seafarers on board and of course the increasing problem with piracy. All six of the seafarers who became my co-researchers had something to contribute which can



enrich the understanding of the dangers at sea.

According to Kverndal (2008:253) seafaring is still one of the most dangerous careers one can pursue. One such danger is fatigue. In the *Nautilus International Telegraph* (May 2011:11) mention is made of a Chinese chief officer who was responsible for his ship to collide with the Great Barrier Reef. According to this report the most important reason for this to happen was that the chief officer slept only 2.5 hours in 38.5 hours. This caused him to make a judgement error and the ship was badly damaged. He is now facing the possibility of three years in prison. Fatigue is something very common on ships and it is for instance reported in *The Sea* (May/June 2011:8) that the ship Celine 1 was being held in Portland because it was discovered that the records of when the crew took rest were falsified. In addition the captain did not keep any records for himself. In many ways seafaring is safer today than before, but because turnaround times are shorter and crews are smaller, the result is that there is a tendency that the seafarers are fatigued. This, of course, leads to a higher risk that an accident can happen.

Once on a nice, relatively new, well maintained container ship with a crew that got their salaries on time every time, one of the officers and I started to talk about the positive changes in the conditions seafarers are living in today. He responded by saying that there is still one more thing that is a problem even on ships from good companies and that is the problem of fatigue. He said that he has never experienced that a ship will be delayed by the company due to the fact that someone like the captain or the chief officer is simply too tired to sail. This means that they are simply forced to do so even if they know that they are too tired.

Many other factors can cause dangerous situations to arise. It also depends on the type of cargo that is being transported. For instance the chemical tankers are in great danger of having some kind of explosion. Other cargo can be dangerous as well. In *The Sea* (May/June 2011:8) it is reported that ships carrying iron ore fines and nickel ore are in danger when the moisture content is above a certain level. It has happened

for instance in 2009 that a ship capsized due to this and 21 crew members died. Ships continue to be at risk due to pressure that is being put on captains and on the ship's owners to load the cargo anyway. There have even been cases where the surveyors and even their families have been threatened with violence so that they will allow the ship to load or sail with the moisture content above the levels that is specified in the Maritime Solid Bulk Cargoes Code (IMSBC).

It is not only at sea where there are plenty of dangers but also in the ports a seafarer is visiting there can be many dangers. They do not know the safe and unsafe places in a harbour city. It is easy for them to get lost or get conned by taxi drivers and other businessmen. Someone can point out that it is safer on board, why don't they just stay there? But to do it port after port is not good for your mental health and therefore not safe either. One of the chaplains wrote the following of a seafarer who actually lost his life in the unsafe environment of Durban harbour:

In August 2001, a Russian seafarer, [name] (59 years) from Kaliningrad, Russia was stabbed to death at Maydon Wharf. He was the chief mate on the fishing vessel Blue Fin. They had returned to Durban after being 6 months at sea and had celebrated his birthday the week before. This tragedy took place on a Sunday afternoon as he was taking a stroll. Two weeks after the incident, SAPS [South African Police Service] received a tip-off and one year later, a man was sentenced to 15 years in prison.

Recently there was also the unfortunate incident of a 19 year old Norwegian female seafarer who went out one evening and was raped. She went out to celebrate her birthday with a shipmate. On their return they got lost and in their confusion they were attacked. My wife I and went to meet her as soon as we learned about the incident and needless to say she was extremely traumatised. So much so that she did not speak to us. At first she thought that it was the police who did it, but later other suspects were caught. A few months later I met one of her friends in the chapel at the seafarers' centre who said that after being sent home she is now back on another ship and continuing her career.

Incidents like these cause ship agents, stevedores, chaplains or any other local person to warn seafarers about their safety in Durban as soon as they enter the port. Seafarers tell me though, that they quite enjoy Durban and that they view this as a relatively safe port, especially when their ship is mainly sailing to other African ports. Seafarers tend to be resilient people, who adapt and accept the dangers that are part of their jobs whether it is dangers in the port or at sea.

In the interviews I had with my six co-researchers I have found that the dangers they talked about were mainly related to weather, but recently piracy has become such a large issue that it has in many ways become a much bigger concern than the weather. None of my co-researchers had any direct experience with piracy but when I asked Eric about this he said: "Thank God I don't have... I'm kinda scared about them. I don't want to think about it. I don't even want to think about it."

The general secretary of ICMA, Hennie La Grange, gives a perspective on the size of this problem as well as how much effort is going into an attempt to find solutions:

Piracy is at last getting attention. Approximately 500 - 700 seafarers are held hostage at any time. The initial delay in effective response to the problem is regrettable, as is the ongoing lack of attention to the humanitarian effects of armed robbery and hostage taking. ICMA was the first of the international organisations in the welfare sector to encourage responses to the plight and needs of seafarers (see the ICMA resolution and public statement on piracy on the ICMA website at [www.icma.as](http://www.icma.as)). Humanitarian support is vital to the wellbeing of seafarers while piracy itself cannot be wholly eliminated. ICMA has offered its support to industry and governments to assist in providing first response and humanitarian support via its chaplaincies. ICMA has submitted papers to the IMO on piracy response. ICMA member, the Seamen's Church Institute of New York and New Jersey, has embarked upon a 5-year research project led by Dr. Michael Garfinkle [sic] into the psychological effects of piracy on seafarers and has suggested preliminary guidelines. The Mission to Seafarers and ICMA has begun to train ICMA's chaplains as first responders after potentially trauma-inducing events. The training includes RESPOND-accredited courses led mostly by Dr. Marion Gibson. Other ICMA members have made every attempt to access seafarers and their families after piracy, and have raised public awareness. Among others, ICMA

supported the e-petition of the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) which collected a million signatures that were handed to the IMO in London on World Maritime Day, September 2010. ICMA has since joined the Maritime Piracy Humanitarian Response Program (MPHRP), an industry-wide operation focussing specifically on the wellbeing of seafarers and their families affected by piracy.

In qualitative research the focus is not on numbers, but sometimes a few numbers can tell a whole story. In the year 2007 to 2008 there was an increase of pirate attacks of nearly 200% near the coast of Somalia (*The Sea* March/April 2009:1). Many ship owners do not want to report attacks, so it is highly likely that this figure might be even worse (*The Sea* March/April 2009:1). It was also reported in the *Nautilus International Telegraph* (February 2011:9) that in 2009 ships were held hostage for an average of 55 days but recently it increased to 150 days. In mid-January 2010, 12 ships with a total of 299 seafarers were under the control of Somali pirates and at the same time in 2011 there were 29 vessels under their control and they had 693 hostages (*Nautilus International Telegraph* February 2011:1). The cost to the world economy is estimated to be US\$12bn a year (*Nautilus International Telegraph* February 2011:9). In *The Sea* (March/April 2011:2) it is said that in 2010 more seafarers were taken hostage than in any other year on record. In 2006, 188 seafarers were taken hostage. In 2010 the number escalated to 1181.

Kverndal (2008:220) pointed out that the most dangerous places for piracy are in Indonesia and the Malacca Straits followed by India, the Caribbean and more and more the Northeast coast of Africa. Sometimes a ship will just disappear and especially the deep-sea fishing vessels are the most vulnerable (Kverndal 2008:220). Since the publication of Kverndal's book in 2008 the Northeast coast of Africa, in other words the waters where the Somali pirates are active, has become the most dangerous place of all. Being involved with the ministry to seafarers I have also encountered how this issue seems to be getting more and more out of hand. When I started out as a ship visitor a few years back, the whole issue of piracy was not very prominent. What I remember rather is that things were discussed like the FOC system or the effects of the ISPS code. Now, you can read almost any newspaper or magazine that has to do with

seafarers or shipping and the main issue under discussion will be piracy off the Northeast coast of Africa. In this section I have made extensive use of two newspapers, *The Sea* and the *Nautilus International Telegraph*, in order to give the reader a clear description of the reality of what seafarers have to face. It might be noted that many of the page numbers will be page 1. This is because it is normally the most important news.

I do not only read about this in the newspapers or magazines, though, I also encounter the influence this has almost on a daily basis on the ships. For instance it is seldom that a day will go by without visiting a ship where razor wire has been put up all around the ship. Talking to the seafarers about this you will find out that a lot of these ships have to go back into the high risk areas repeatedly as this is part of their ship's route. It has to go back time and again, sometimes even after the pirates tried to hijack the ship unsuccessfully. On one such ship a seafarer told me how the second officer on the ship was shot at by the pirates, but that the bullet just brushed the side of his head. After the attack the ship simply continued to trade on the same route. The seafarer, a Filipino rating, was philosophical about the matter, though, saying that he sees piracy as something similar to bad weather. It is something a seafarer simply has to accept.

One Indian seafarer on a MSC (Mediterranean Shipping Company) ship told me how they were sailing in the pirate area once and that he luckily spotted a pirate vessel approaching them in time. He was busy in the kitchen making food, when he went outside to take a smoke break. While looking into the distance he saw a small spot on the horizon. He alerted the officers and it turned out that it was indeed pirates approaching them. Being a container vessel they were fortunately fast enough to escape. However, this ship had to return to this area over and over again.

Another crew member on a containership told me that they were also attacked by the pirates, but that they only got away as their ship was too fast for the pirates. They were sailing at maximum speed and just as the engines were about to give in the pirates decided to give up the chase.

I have met three other Indian seafarers who have not seen the pirates in time and who were actually hijacked by them. They attended a prayer meeting on a Wednesday evening at the seafarers centre. They were especially open to the message that evening. Afterwards I started talking to them and they told me that they have been taken hostage by the Somalis. They were not very eager to talk about the details as it was obviously very traumatic for them. They just told me that they were hostages for about two months and that the only food they had was old rice with worms in. The pirates ate goat's meat which was slaughtered on the ship. It seemed that they were treated fairly well by the pirates and did not complain that they were physically abused. They were on a ship from a company in the USA who was able and willing to pay the ransom money. At the time I met them it was about a month after they were set free, but they still had to work on the same ship. Even though some crewmembers were sent home, these three still had to work on the very ship they had been held hostage on.

I also met sailors who told me that they are new on board their ship because some of the previous crew decided to go home out of fear for pirate attacks. The route the ship is trading on is always going back and forth past the most dangerous areas. The new crew signed on in spite of the danger because they needed the money. The old crew feared for their lives, but will soon have to go back to another ship to earn a salary and there will probably be no guarantee that their new ship will not have to sail in that region.

On another occasion a ship that had been hijacked by the pirates for sixteen days came to Durban harbour. After this attack they went to Mombasa and then came to our port. Here they were instructed by the company not to talk about their experience to anybody. Chaplains came on board with the intention of supporting them after this traumatic experience, but this was not possible because they were not allowed to tell their story. In addition there was so much work on this ship after the damage the pirates had done, that there was no opportunity to even talk to them about general matters. Fortunately later on, there was an opportunity to help them as two chaplains took them gift bags

with necessities such as razors, a tooth brush etc, because the pirates normally take everything. One of the chaplains who were involved with this case reported this:

On entering the ship, I asked for the Chief Mate (Russian) who was in the office and immediately explained why we had returned. When we showed the contents of the bags, there was a change of heart and we were allowed to go to the mess room and talk with some of the crew. They were grateful to be safe and we learned they had only been hostage for 16 days. The pirates had taken most items from their cabins . they had no money, mobile phones etc. What they also told us was that they had removed all their provisions from the vessel and brought them rice to eat (which smelt old and terrible). They caught their own fish from the ship to survive and said they were fortunate that their company had paid the ransom so quickly. [ ] there were other ships that had been detained for months, [ ].

How this chaplain is describing the situation seems to be very familiar. The crew are treated fairly well, they have to eat bad rice, the pirates take everything valuable and they are at least allowed to fish. While a pirate attack is happening, it is normally initially very dangerous, but the Somali pirates do not seem to be violent after they have control of the ship (although exceptions to this seems to be increasing). It was for instance reported by Hudson (2010:4) how the crew on one of the hijacked vessels had received food like old rice and that they had to catch their own fish. Owing to this relative good treatment many seafarers told me that on their ship they will not resist the pirates, should they be attacked. They will cooperate and just wait for the company to pay the money. I have to add that this was before reports started to come in that the pirates are increasingly more violent.

This chaplain also reported that no crew were repatriated after this ordeal. This narrative gives us a window into the trauma that seafarers are suffering due to the dangers of piracy near the Somali coast, but also what happens afterwards when the seafarers have to live with their experiences without much emotional assistance. Fortunately the chaplain also reports that there was spiritual support in Mombasa where the priest in Mombasa prayed for them and blessed them +



What was good about this situation was that in spite of the many obstacles of getting involved with the seafarers, in the end the chaplains were able to talk with them and at least some kind of support could be given. All in all about five chaplains visited the ship, as well as the one in Mombasa, and they were also assisted in a practical way by the toiletry bags and telephone cards with which they could call their families. The unfortunate thing about the situation was that no one was allowed to talk about their experience and that no one was sent home after this. In fact they continued their duties as usual and even more than usual because of the state the ship was in after the hijacking.

I just mentioned how some seafarers said that they would simply surrender to the pirates because of the fairly good treatment they expect to receive, but many times seafarers would do everything in their power to avoid an attack. *The Sea* (March/April 2009:1) reported about seafarers who decided they will fight fire with fire:

A Chinese crew managed to stop pirates taking their vessel even though the gang had got on board the St Vincent and Grenadines-flag Zhenhua 4. They locked themselves into the accommodation and used fire hoses and homemade firebombs to prevent the heavily armed pirates from entering while the master alerted warships in the area. The incident lasted some four hours before a naval helicopter arrived on the scene and fired at the pirates who left the ship and fled in small craft. None of the crew was injured and the ship, owned by Shanghai Zhenhua Shipping, continued on its voyage.

These seafarers had to endure four hours of what could be described as a small war. They had to fight with homemade firebombs and water hoses against the heavily armed pirates. After this nightmare they sailed further. What the company did at the next port I do not know, but on many occasions seafarers are required to simply keep on working till the end of their contracts.

As an example of this, the *Nautilus International Telegraph* (April 2011:3) describes how the crew of the Lady Remington III were required to simply continue their duties after they had been attacked by the pirates. The pirates were actually able to board this



cargo vessel, but the crew were able to lock themselves in the engine room. Here they had to stay for two days without food and water. After two days the pirates were gone and they had to resume their duties. It was only when these crew members arrived in Newport where ship visitors from the *Apostleship of the Sea* came on board that they received some kind of counselling.

While many come out of these ordeals alive there are sometimes fatalities. For instance it is reported in *The Sea* (March/April 2011:1) that one seafarer on the *Beluga* Nomination was murdered by pirates and at that stage the newspaper reported that two other seafarers from this ship were missing. (This ship came into Durban with new crew, but the ship inside was in a terrible condition, telling the story of the violence that took place there). The irony is that just after this incident, Rear Admiral Juan Rodriguez, the new European Union Naval Force commander said that he is content that they are helping to keep the piracy levels stable and that they are safely escorting World Food Programme ships which bring aid to Somalia (Spence 2011:25). Father Michael Sparrow (in Spence 2011:25), the chaplain in Mombasa, said: %Some seafarers think the EU naval forces are a bit of a joke. They don't go after the mother ships. They don't intervene. Somebody said to me: %The pirates are just laughing at them.++

Seafarers do not feel safe and for this reason David Cockroft (in *The Sea* March/April 2011:1), general secretary of the ITF, said that %many crew members were at breaking point because of the stress of passing through the area off the coast of Somalia.+ Some seafarers will not tell their families when they have to sail in this area (Spence 2011:24).

The emotional impact on seafarers is great. For instance Bailey (2011:4) writes: %Such is the fear among crews that some are signing off early from their contracts and leaving the sea altogether.+ A Danish superintendent I met on a ship confirmed this when he told me that on many occasions crewmembers will simply sign off prematurely if they hear that their ship will be sailing in pirate areas. Bailey (2011:4) talked to seafarers in Mombasa and one chief officer, told him: %We try not to think about it, but with this trip there's a chance we will be caught.+ And: %We have put razor wire around the vessel

and will carry out extra watches so that hopefully we can detect the pirates earlier.+

The seafarers are worried and stressed for good reason because being taken hostage is a terrible event. Even if they are physically unharmed there might be a lot of emotional trauma after being hijacked or attacked. On the South Korean owned vessel, the *Samho Jewelry*, the South Korean navy commandos were able to free the ship from the pirates, but in the process had to kill nine of them (*The Sea* March/April 2011:1). Fortunately none of the seafarers were killed and neither anyone from the navy, but for the seafarers this must have been a very traumatic event. Especially as the *Nautilus International Telegraph* (March 2011:1) mentions that the master was shot in the stomach and that the crew were beaten while they were hostages.

They did not sign up for things like this. These types of incidents add up to a situation where seafarers have to live with, as Tom Heffer, the secretary general of the Mission to Seafarers, said: %terrible fear and anxiety...on a daily basis.+ (*The Sea* March/April 2011:1). *The Sea* (March/April 2011:2) points out that sometimes seafarers are lowered with ropes around their ankles with their heads into the water. Bailey (2011:4) writes: %There is growing evidence that the violence towards captured seafarers is getting worse...+ An article in the *Nautilus International Telegraph* (March 2011:1) also confirmed this when saying that there are signs that it is getting more common that seafarers who are captured are being tortured. Major General Buster Howes (in *Nautilus International* March 2011:1), operation commander of the EU Naval Force, said that seafarers are being used as human shields and that they are sometimes locked into freezers.

In an article from the Durban based newspaper, *The Mercury*, Terry Hudson (2010:4) reported about the ship the *Maran Centaurus* that was hijacked and after its release came to Durban harbour. He describes something of what the seafarers went through as one of them lost all his hair during the time of this traumatic event. The crew reported that the pirates %make you subservient, they constantly belittle you, and turn you from responsible people into nobodies+.

Signs that the problem is getting more serious is also seen in the change of strategy used by the pirates (*Nautilus International Telegraph* February 2011:1). They are using the merchant ships that they have hijacked to make it possible for them to extend their reach much further away from the coast of Somalia. The pirates force the seafarers then to operate the ship on their behalf. The Danish security firm *Risk Intelligence* called this new tactic a *game changer*. The director, Dirk Steffen, said that this strategy might mean that the pirates would not be hindered by the monsoon season as is usually the case. Previously the monsoon season gave the ships a welcome window period of reasonable safe passage and now this will probably not be the case anymore. It was pointed out by this security firm that when the pirates are using a merchant ship, they no longer had the disadvantage of a small boat and that they might be able to pour fire into the target vessel from the bridge level, reducing survivability of the bridge team.

Pirates are not only using larger ships, though, they are also using smaller fishing vessels. An example of this was the case with the *Golden Wave 304* which was turned into a mother ship (*Flying Angel News* March/June 2011:1). Even though the ship was relatively small, this ship was better than many of the other ships the pirates were using and so the pirates decided to turn it into a mother ship. In the time the crew were hostages this ship was involved in successfully hijacking three other vessels. After the release of the 43 crew members, they were now ignored by the owner of the vessel as they needed to be paid both for the time they were held hostage and for work done before the ship was hijacked.

This new strategy, of using the hijacked ships as mother ships, can lead to the citadel situation to become ineffective as the pirates will be able to have the tools and the reinforcements they need to break into the citadel (*Nautilus International Telegraph* February 2011:1). The citadel situation is where there is a strong room on a ship to which the crew can retreat when pirates board a ship (*The Sea* 2011:2). Once in safety this strategy only works well when a navy ship can intervene within a reasonable time.

Otherwise it is possible for the pirates to eventually get access as was the case with both the Beluga Nomination and the Samho Jewelry (*The Sea* 2011:2). For the coalition naval force, which is deployed for the purpose of protecting the ships sailing in this area, it is not always possible to respond quickly as the area that they need to patrol is as big as the continent of Europe (*The Sea* 2011:5). The result of this is that locking yourself up in the citadel is not always an option, especially as the pirates might consider sabotaging the ship when they cannot reach the crew.

Another possible solution to this escalating problem is to consider using armed guards on the ships, although opinions are divided on this issue. For instance, initially it was illegal for Dutch ships to have armed guards on the ships, but recently it has been recommended as a solution (*Nautilus International Telegraph* February 2011:1). Bailey (2011:4), who investigated the situation by talking to the chaplain and seafarers in Mombasa, points out that there seems to be a sense of inevitability to use armed guards as a solution to the crisis. He believes that seafarers are in agreement with this and that they would even consider the option to train seafarers in using arms. He talked to a chief officer called Flores, who said: "I would like guns on board. I think that the problem is similar to someone who is trying to rob a bank. If the robbers know that the bank is heavily armed then they are less likely to attack. But, in our case, the pirates know that we only have a water cannon and some razor wire and they are not afraid to pursue us. Nor are they afraid of the dummies the seafarers are using. The seafarers put up dummies, reminding of scarecrows, to try and create the impression to the pirates that the seafarers are on the lookout and alert (cf Spence 2011:25). Dummies, water cannons and razor wire does not add up to much when the pirates are heavily armed and so the solution that is presenting itself is that the ship's ability to defend itself should be increased through using armed guards.

Not everyone feels that they would like to have guns on board, though. On one occasion I talked to a Filipino seafarer who was sailing on a ship with two armed British security guards and he was not comfortable with the situation. His problem is that the pirates are heavily armed and that as soon as the guards are shooting at them they will

fire back and the pirates are well equipped as far as weapons are concerned. On a different ship another Filipino seafarer expressed the same sentiment by saying that he would not want to have armed security guards on board because this makes the ship a target. Rather, he would prefer another ship with armed guards sailing with them as this will be safer for the crew and will not make the ship the target. This solution is partly implemented at the moment because the navy ships are escorting some of the ships, but the problem is that the navy ships are not enough. Flores said to Bailey (2011:5):

“On our journey to Mombasa we didn’t see any navy.” And: “I think the governments are trying, but the problem is that it is a very big area of sea to patrol. They cannot accommodate every vessel unless they put more forces into the area. They are doing their best but more is required.”

It seems that having armed guards on the ships are increasingly seen as this “more” that is required. In another article in *The Sea* (2011:2) the following is said:

The shipping industries main representative body has dropped its longstanding total opposition to the carrying of private armed guards on ships. The International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) has reluctantly accepted that “many shipping companies have concluded that arming ships is a necessary alternative to avoiding the Indian Ocean completely.”

This seems to be a solution that nobody is very enthusiastic about. For instance the commander of the EU Naval Force, Admiral Rodriguez indicated that they are both against arming the seafarers or having armed security guards on board. General Secretary of Nautilus International, Mark Dickinson (in *Nautilus International Telegraph* 2011:1) cautioned that there is a need to have regulations for the use of armed security guards when they are on board. Although he might not be eager to see this solution implemented he pointed out that: “Our members want effective action to deter the pirates, and they are fed up with the “softly-softly” approach.” The “softly-softly” approach means for instance that pirates who are caught will simply be released after their weapons are thrown into the sea (Spence 2011:25). Receiving millions of dollars for their efforts each year they will not have a problem to replace these weapons.

Even though there is great concern about this solution *The Sea* (May/June 2011:2) reports that this strategy seems to be effective. They looked at a short period, April 3 to 12, 2011, and observed that in this time eight ships were attacked, one was successful, two were able to escape through passive evasive action and the other five had armed guards on board. On these five the pirates retreated as soon as the security guards opened fire on them. It could be said that the success rate to the use of security guards on these five ships was hundred per cent. These are only five ships and more time needs to pass to tell if this approach will be successful in the longer run.

The situation is complex, however, someone like Leslie-Anne Duvic Paoli (in *Nautilus International Telegraph* May 2011:29), a researcher at Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security studies, pointed out that one of the problems is whether the captain will have authority over the guards or whether they will be responsible for their own actions. This is a very important issue, especially when it happens that a crew member or one of the pirates is killed.

A hopeful development is that the United Nations secretary general, Ban Ki-Moon, is trying to solve this issue together with the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), through aiming to create a coordinated plan (*Nautilus International Telegraph* February 2011:1). In *The Sea* (March/April 2011:1,2) it is reported that the IMO has put into place six goals for the year 2011 in trying to solve the piracy problem. The six objectives are to:

• increase political pressure for the release of all hostages being held by pirates; improve IMO guidelines on preventive measures for merchant ships; make more effective use of the naval presence; promote anti-piracy co-ordination and co-operation between states, regions, organisations and industry; assist states to boost their anti-piracy capabilities; and provide care for those attacked or hijacked by pirates and their families.

Concerning this last objective, those involved with seafarers' mission can be of

assistance. It is a very helpful that this is part of the priorities for the IMO for 2011 because it is always difficult to get involved with the seafarers after they are released as hostages. It normally takes all kinds of negotiations and efforts to simply get to see the traumatised seafarers and to take care of them in whatever way is needed. Hopefully the IMO will realise that the seafarers' mission can be an important resource in accomplishing this last objective. The seafarers need to tell their stories. I have not had an opportunity to interview a hijacked seafarer and in all the literature I have read their voices are mostly absent as well. People are speaking for them. I have no doubt that the campaigns speaking on the seafarers' behalf are accurate in the things that they say and in the way they are describing the problem, but it will be even more effective if the voices of the seafarers themselves are no longer silent.

With all the ships that came to Durban harbour immediately after being released the company acted as if they own the seafarers. The seafarers were always hesitant to talk and there was an atmosphere of great secrecy about their whereabouts. The reason given to us as chaplains was that they should not be exposed to the press. That is good and none of the chaplains in Durban, I am convinced, will ever break the trust put in them when they are allowed to have access to the released seafarers, but the problem is that the atmosphere surrounding the seafarers suppresses their voices and they are almost treated as if they did something wrong. They do not belong to the company whatever the company paid for their release. They are humans and they have freedom of speech. The problem is that as long as they cannot freely speak about their experiences an important aspect of processing their trauma is not allowed. For this reason I am very happy to hear that part of the IMO's plan is that care should be provided to the seafarers who are released.

Fortunately the IMO is not alone in its aim to prevent piracy. The *Nautilus International Telegraph* (April 2011:1) reports that seafarers' unions and ship owners are also campaigning against this and are trying to use people power to put pressure on governments to do more. They are asking people to go to their website, [www.SaveOurSeafarers.com](http://www.SaveOurSeafarers.com), where anyone can write a letter to their government to try



and make them aware of the impact that piracy is having at the moment. Can governments make a difference? Their campaign answers that it can because of all the pirates who are actually caught while engaging in piracy, eighty percent are released again and there is nothing stopping them from going back and resuming their criminal activities. This campaign is driven by the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) and groups of major shipping companies (*The Sea* May/June 2011:1). The slogan they use to make people aware of the problem is: %2000 Somali pirates are hijacking the world's economy.+

In addition to going to their website they also raise awareness through advertisements in influential newspapers (*The Sea* May/June 2011:1). They are trying to influence governments and point out that it should be kept in mind that 40 per cent of the world's oil supplies have to go through the Indian Ocean. Governments such as the UK are getting involved and decided that they will give £6 million to the cause. The *Mission to Seafarers* stated that this is good, but they were not sure whether this money is being allocated to the best place (*The Sea* May/June 2011:2). Some of it (£600 000) will go towards helping the Seychelles Coastguard to improve their surveillance and %evidence-gathering capacity+. The other £5.3 million will be used in an effort to improve the capacity and the conditions of the prisons for pirates in Somalia, Kenya and Seychelles. In the light of the fact that 576 seafarers were held by the pirates in terrible circumstances, the Mission to Seafarers felt that it is inappropriate to allocate so much money on improving the prison conditions in which the pirates were held. For them the money should rather be spent on directly preventing further incidents.

It might be 2000 Somali pirates doing the actual crime at sea, but the fact is that the problems originate in the social and political environment on land. The UN general secretary Ban Ki-Moon stated that they will aim to try and help Somalia to develop so that there will be an alternative for these people to becoming pirates (*Nautilus International Telegraph* March 2011:22). He went on to say: %Although piracy manifests itself at sea, the roots of the problem are to be found ashore. In essence, piracy is a criminal offence that is driven by economic hardship, and that flourishes in



the absence of effective law enforcement.+ Fr Michael Sparrow (in Spence 2011:25) pointed out that it should be kept in mind that this could take many years but that the need of the seafarers is to be protected immediately. Ban Ki-Moon's view is in agreement with this and said that the UN are committed to both trying to protect the seafarers at sea and to help the Somalis to develop their country (*Nautilus International Telegraph* March 2011:22).

To solve this problem would not be easy and as John Bainbridge (in *Nautilus International Telegraph* March 2011:23), an ITF official, pointed out at a day-long ITF seminar, that the past policies and methods of handling piracy is no longer working. He said that piracy has become a sophisticated operation run by organised criminals, and said: "The pirates are currently winning and too many states are not willing to share their responsibilities.+ Bainbridge summed up the tendencies of the last few months as: "an increase in violence, abuse and threats to the lives of hostages, longer hostage periods, now averaging 210 days, higher ransom demands, extended area of attacks, using captured merchant vessels as motherships+. Seafarers are truly in an unfortunate situation and are feeling powerless to do anything about the dangers they have to face. Chief officer Flores, whom I already mentioned said: "We can do nothing but pray that we don't get caught+(*Nautilus International* March 2011:24).

This then, are some perspectives on the situation concerning piracy and seafaring. By no means is this the only danger that seafarers have to cope with and my co-researchers had some narratives to share about their experiences with danger.

- **The research characters**

a. John from Nigeria:

I asked John about the dangers at sea. He responded by telling me about two incidents he experienced while he was still in the Nigerian navy.

Chris: [ ] what about, dangers at sea that you have experienced, dangerous situations, maybe storms and stuff?

John: Yah. That is commonplace. In fact for anybody that calls themselves a seafarer [they] must have experienced a lot of ugly situations at sea. For me, I will only tell you [about] two. There were, there were, there was this situation when I was in the navy when we had engine break down, we have generator broke down, and the ship was taking in water from the sea. So right from the keel of the ship, the water was coming up and the, everything was going down, going down. And, like you know, I work in the engineering department; I am an electrical officer there. So we had to go down, while the water was almost drowning us, we were searching for the hole to see whether we can block it. So, and at that stage we were very, very hopeless. But while we were doing that the captain and his other colleagues were up there communicating. So fortunately for us the Nigerian air force came in with some submersible pumps, bringing about two pumps. So they came up and lowered the pumps to us. So we collected these pumps, set one this side, set one this side, and began to pump, began to pump, began to pump. And as we were pumping the flooding was able to ebb down. We got to see where the ingress was coming from. Then we shut it, we used wood to shut it properly. And that was how we were able to get our engines fixed and cruised back safely to the [ ]. So it was a really, it was a really fable experience.

Now, there was another experience I had. I was also in the navy, Nigerian navy. That time in Nigeria you have oilrigs at sea when you see even bonfire. So, and, travelling very close to one of those bon fire, you know, flame, where they are flaring the gas. So our ship had lost our engine, we lost everything. And the ship, the wave was taking the ship to that fire. Alright, so, and, there was nothing else to use and stop that from happening, we were just going towards that fire. So [laughing], so when we were just about see, already we were feeling the heat of the fire as if the whole ship was going to blast. And as God would have it very close, about hundred, let me say okay, let me say five hundred meters to the fire, so our engine was able to recover, and quickly [ ] back, otherwise the fire would have roasted us on the ship. So these are true stories I can give you.

John told me about two ugly situations+. In the first incident they almost drowned and in the second one they were almost roasted+. Like John says it is commonplace and that whoever calls themselves seafarers must have experienced something like this. What was very tough in the first scenario was that those who worked in the engine department needed to go down into the water that was streaming in to the ship to see if they could block it. While they were doing this they were almost drowning. John is accepting the reality that seafaring is dangerous.

b. Jonathan from Kenya

As I have mentioned before this was Jonathan's first time to work on a ship. This unfortunately did not mean that he had a lack of experience of dangers on board. The ship he was working on was very old and not in a good condition at all.

Jonathan: % Then I had problem, when the ship, like our ship, I talk about our ship, because first ship is 30 year, the ship was very old. And then it has many risk, many risk on the ship. Like now it's around three time I've experience those kind of problem. When the ship was sailing from, from Mombasa, my first time to sail on ship, I was coming here. It was problem; I stay around one week I cannot eat. Vomit, always you vomit, you vomit and you must work, must work. So the time when you are coming to Mozambique the ship started problem, had another hole in the ship. So it was my first time, so in my mind I was thinking now maybe the ship is going to sink, something like that.

Chris: Yah.

Jonathan: Yah, and then we reached here safe. When we went in Seychelles, it was the cyclone. So we are getting there first from the satellite that we, the cyclone is coming maybe 150 km/h, yah. And the ship, our ship is small, you cannot go deep sea, we are going [close to] the coastline.

Chris: Okay, cyclone? Yah, yah, yah, yah, okay.

Jonathan: It was going around 150 speed. So captain told us: % Okay, now the ship must go deep, must go deep+. Because if we are, the coastline, the wave they make more strong than deep. So [we] are going deep. From here to Seychelles is 14 days but my first time we took 23 days, yah, to Seychelles, yah, 23 days. So there is a problem I see in the ship. Yah, most of the problem if the ship is old, many time you have emergency, any time you are sleeping, they wake you. There is an emergency, the engine failed. Maybe there's a hole, you must go down there, maybe sometimes, like our ship sometimes the generator [goes] off, no light and the ship is in the sea. Yah, that's the problem I experienced from this ship.

Jonathan, like John, had to go into the engine room where water was streaming in, in spite of the risk. Jonathan's ship was around thirty years old. Most of the dangers they had to face were related to the ship being so old. Of course this did not cause the cyclone and other bad weather conditions that they had to face, but it did make it worse and more dangerous than it would have been on a better ship.

Jonathan talks about his first trip that he ever had. This was from Mombasa to Durban. On this journey he thought they would sink as they discovered that there was a hole somewhere in the ship where water was coming in. When they went to the Seychelles they encountered a cyclone and they had to go deeper into the sea than was customary for a ship of their size. They did this to try to go where the waves weren't so strong, further away from the coast.

Jonathan says that there were many emergencies on the ship and that you would be woken up in the night regularly to attend to yet another crisis. This ship Jonathan was on was much more dangerous than usual, even though John said that all who call themselves seafarers must have faced ugly situations like this.

In an informal conversation Jonathan told me that in rough weather the waves will sometimes break the ship's windows. I asked him about this:

Chris: I was just interested in one more thing and that was that you told me about the danger of this ship specifically and that sometimes the, it's very, very low in the water. So, sometimes even the windows will break.

Jonathan: Break, yah. Like that, our ship is small, [ ]. But if the ship is, if it's empty, it is more dangerous than if the ship has cargo, because [if] it's empty, it's light. If it come strong waves it can turn the ship in anyway. So like our ship, when it's full, just like this table, this see [indicating the height of the table we were sitting at], even if you are just there, you can just hold the water, you see?

Chris: You can touch the water.

Jonathan: You can take the water, yah. So sometimes when there is strong waves, because in the sea, one day, two days the weather [is] changing. Every time, you can see now the sea is just quiet, yah, but when it reach evening, the sea is more, more rough. Sometimes the ship, is just like when you are driving the rough road, there is small... [making a gesture to show an uneven road]. So when the ship is running the ship is just hitting the water like this [illustrating how the ship hits the waves one after the other]. That is more dangerous, because this waves, there is waves coming like this, but there is some waves that just like water is boiling. So that one, when the ship is [ ] [showing how the ship is going over the waves] waves like this, it makes holes, yah.

Chris: So it damaged the ship.

Jonathan: Yah, the ship, and the ship is very old. It long time it was not in dry dock. So those hole you find when the ship has cargo. Now you cannot go down there, to, maybe to find where the hole [is] and then maybe you can do something there. So when the hatch is full you can do anything. So it is only to the ballast, the ballast. Maybe you see the water is like this you must reduce water on starboard side, you put water in portside. At least, so the ship will be just going like this, like this. So when we get to next port, when they discharge now, like when we are in Seychelles, the ship has this problem. We had around seven holes and big hole, big hole. So we reached there, we decide to come. And then we pump all water, but you can't finish the water, because you pump the water, [it still] seep in. So we're going down there we find with the, with the tank. We put there around six pumps, yah, strong pump. So they pump fast, because water is not coming, it's too much. Yah, it's just coming so and so. So we pump to the water, the pump they are strong, we pump, we find the hole. And that place you cannot [ ]. And our ship, we don't have this, we don't have this cement, marine cement. We don't have this marine cement, if you put this in the water it dries fast. We have this local cement, for the normal building [of] houses.

Chris: And it's not working so well.

Jonathan: Yah, if you put it in the water it just ...But this marine cement, if you just put it in the water, if the hole is there, if you just put there, is just dry, same, same time. So our cement we cannot put there. So we were making, we make some box. We [ ], just plate like this, work like a box like this. And then we'd put rubber on the corners of that place. So like this is the box, we put the rubber like this and then, now the box like this

then it works like this. [He continues to explain how they made a metal box with rubber on the edges to stop the water from seeping in].

Chris: Ah, okay, okay.

Jonathan: Yah, you put the rubber and then you put that, that plate there, so it would be like this.

Chris: Yah.

Jonathan: At least, the hole is the centre. Side we put the rubber, and then on top here, we put this [ ], it's a bottle screw, bottle screw, so that bottle screw, we tie, this one is going up, this one is going down. So you would press this box, so the rubber it would hold the plate, yah, so water not come too much. It would be, water just slowly, slowly. And then we pump all water and after we finish we press the [ ] so there is a day [ ] that we finished all, but we find the place, another place it was, the plate was very clean, it's already damaged full plate. So when we force it, it break. Now [ ] like a big hole, yah. So they called divers, because we can't do anything there. They called divers, the divers came they put, don't know [what] they call this, they just made another, something like that one, but they put [ ].

Chris: Ah, from the outside.

Jonathan: From the outside, and then inside also they tie to that screw. So we used that one from Seychelles to Durban. We reaching Durban, also the ship was full of water in the hatch. But the ship now was empty. Yah, it's dangerous, we are just going slowly, slowly. It was very dangerous. That the time now, the waves they are strong, they break round three windows, and then full of water in the cabins. So, can't sleep, all night we're just taking water outside. Even we cannot come outside, in the, the main entrance we cannot go there. [ ] So if you're going in the bridge, there is no rain but you must have, you must have the rain coat.

Chris: Yah, all the time.

Jonathan: The water is too much, sometimes when you're on bridge you finish your duty you must go down to call your, your reliever to come, but you can't go, because now sea is rough. The time you want to go there, and that water is strong. Even if the

drum is there full of oil, [ ] drum going there. So at that time the ship is moving up and down we must be out all of us. Everything that is on deck we must lash, everything. Like this portholes, we lash everything, [ ].

Jonathan is describing his situation in great detail and you can almost see and hear the chaos, danger and madness. Windows are breaking, holes are appearing every now and again, water is splashing and boiling, the 150 km/h winds from the cyclone is blowing, emergencies happen anytime of the night and in between all this, Jonathan is trying to start a new future for him and his family. The way in which the ship was managed made it a very dangerous situation and therefore this section is very closely related to justice issues. When they loaded this ship it was so low in the water that you could touch the water from the deck. Jonathan is saying that it was not much higher than the height of a table. I have seen once how it looked when their ship was leaving the port with a full freight and I haven't seen any other ship being that low in the water before or since. It is a small ship relatively to other ships, but even so, to be so extremely low in the water must be dangerous.

Jonathan also tells how they tried to manage with all the holes that seem to be part of everyday life on the ship. He explains how they try to fix it themselves with ordinary cement as opposed to marine cement. He also said that sometimes when the ship has cargo it is not possible to reach the leaks and the only way to manage it is to use the ballast mechanism of the ship to try and balance the ship. So if the ship is leaning towards the right side you empty the ballast water on that side and pump some water in on the left and so on.

The big problem was that this ship has not been in dry-dock for a long time. Once while trying to repair a hole they made a bigger hole due to the extremely bad condition the ship's steel plates were in. For this they had to get divers who could repair the damage.

He goes on and says that one time they had to sail from Seychelles to Durban without cargo which is the most dangerous of all. On this voyage around three windows were broken and even in the cabins the water came through. He explains that if you had to

go to the bridge everything was so wet that you had to wear a raincoat just to get there. In the light of all this danger I was interested to find out whether they are happy when they actually arrive in a port.

Chris: So, when you come inside the port you're very happy.

Jonathan: Most of the time, even if when we know, we maybe see the land maybe two hundred mile to port, mostly even if you see the islands far away you feel happy. But when the ship is all the time, when the ship want to sail everybody [ ] is not happy.

Chris: You are tense.

Jonathan: Yah, and this South African water when you are, if you are just outside the gateway, you're going out, it's very rough here, it's very, very rough. Most of the time our ship, even like last time on, on June when the ship was sailing, just outside, even we see uShaka Marine, we see uShaka Marine is there, and the engine was off, we stood there eight hours, even the light house they call: %What's wrong with [ship's name]?+ We tell them: %We have problem with the engine.+ %Can we call the tugs to bring you back to the port?+ Captain says: %No, we are still working.+ We work around twelve hours, the engine was okay, we sail again. But the nice thing the ship, when the waves coming, you see sometimes when the sea is rough, we close all doors, the window we close. So this kitchen, the kitchen the window most of the time it's that one, all the time it's always damaged that one, so water coming through there. And then the accommodation it's the deck, the accommodation is like this. So water, when waves coming the ship, water from accommodation, from the deck and accommodation just come in like this. So water, all accommodation down is damaged, all, so water in cabin all over come inside. Because now nice thing, in the engine room, water cannot go through engine room. That's the safe thing only. There's another time they got problem, I was not in the ship. That time Jovin was join, he was new on the ship. It was too much; the wind was strong and then too much waves. The water, very strong wave, around three waves in one time came to the ship, one time. And then they all [ ], they must close, but two they were open. So water was full in steering room, the steering room is full of water. So there's a motor there, the one controlling the, the rudder, the steering. But nice thing, it was just it look like this, the water was like here. But say the water will touch that one the ship will sink, because when the waves come like this, you must control the ship to go against the waves, so when the waves come



the ship going like this. But now if the steering is not working, the ship is like this, the waves come like this...

Chris: From the side.

Jonathan: Yah, it's dangerous. So they were lucky, the water was just like here, and the motor is here. And they couldn't do anything, they cannot go inside there, because if you go, if you're going the ladder you're going down the water can reach you, so you can't go and see. So anyway they just pray. So everybody was in the bridge. [ ] so captain tell them: %Let us wait for five minutes, if [it continues] like this, okay, I'll call the nearest country to help with helicopter.+ But after five minutes everything was just normal. Yah, it became normal but the engine was off. So they work on, they work on when reach evening, same, same problem. And then captain called, so they bring salvage tug, they pull back the ship in the port and the ship came back to Durban.

Jonathan is saying at least three things here. First he answers my question and he corrects me. It is not just coming into the port that is good, but even just to see land is cause for celebration. Secondly he tells about one time when the ship was just leaving Durban and they had engine problems. The sea was rough and it was the beginning of the voyage but the engine was not working. The captain did not want any help and in the end they managed to get the engine running again after twelve hours work.

The third thing he is relating is something that a shipmate of his, Jovin, experienced. This time the water came into the wheelhouse and the danger was that if this happened something could be damaged to such an extent that they would no longer be able to steer the ship. The problem with this is that you %must control the ship to go against the waves+so that the waves do not hit the ship from the side and capsize it. Jonathan says: %So anyway they just pray+. At first the captain did not want to call for help, but in the end a salvage tug came to bring them back to Durban.

Chris: Yah, so it's a dangerous ship, [ ].

Jonathan: Sure it's a dangerous ship. Even most people they, if we would be lucky to go home just safely, and the ship would be running I don't think anybody would be

come back to the ship, because like we, we know all the ship. Those other crew they went home they didn't know those holes. Most of the time the ship was listed, but they don't know where's the hole. But when we stayed in Seychelles for one month in anchorage we look all those holes we find them, so if we know the ship was listed, even if captain say: "Okay, you go and see which place." We know, even can tell: "Okay the hole is there." Maybe it's five port, or three port. So all crew they know, the place of this problem, we know. But now when they make this ship [ ] they put new one, and then after they say the ship have crack, like now the ship have crack. So we don't know where's the crack. So most of the people they sail the ship, they want to take the ship maybe to India, we won't go, because we don't know where is the problem. Before we know if there's a problem [ ], the same, same place we make it easy to find. But now we don't know where's that problem. So [ship's name] is very dangerous. Even to me it's better it's scrapped. [ ] the ship run again, maybe big problem [ ]. Because every time the ship arrived in Durban the company sent divers. If the divers come they tell you: "This ship, today we make eight holes." And then the sailing time, the ship now is full of cargo we want to sail we see the ship, again list. They call divers, the divers they [come], around three times. With my eyes, with my ears I heard them telling company: "Please, this ship is in danger. Why can't you call the, [ ] take the ship to dry-dock?"+ They say: "Okay, one voyage, when we come back we'll take the ship to dry-dock." But problem, they were just after money, [ ] they don't make money. That's the problem [ ]. They want to make money but they don't want to spend.

Chris: And that endangers your lives. All...

Jonathan: All crew, and the problem also in the ship, all crew nobody has the life insurance. Even, even if you damage your hand, [we don't have] any insurance. If you damage your hand, okay, they help you the first thing. First aid, only that, but then nothing else. It's only captain and former chief engineer, they had, they had the insurance, but other people all, they don't have, that is the problem.

Jonathan felt a sense of control over the dangers on his ship because they started to know where each and every hole is. The problem was that now they heard about a crack in the ship somewhere and did not know where it was. Fortunately, after this interview, the ship did not sail again and Jonathan and all the rest of the crew made it home safely on an airplane. They were scared and anxious though, because the divers who repaired some of the holes would repair eight holes. Then they will be called back

again and again for around three times and Jonathan heard them plead once: "Please, this ship is in danger. Why can't you [ ] take the ship to dry dock?"+

Another concern for Jonathan was that none of them had any insurance and this on a ship where danger is around every corner and where something like damaging your hand is very likely. If your life was not threatened then at least your livelihood was, because a seafarer can no longer work without the full function of a hand.

These stories that Jonathan told was showing how life on a ship can be full of danger. Some of the dangers could have been avoided by the company, but like Jonathan said: "But problem, they were just after money..."+ This is the reality that most seafarers have to face, the reality that a company is in this industry because of money. This in itself is not a problem as the seafarer is also in this industry for the money, but in this case it caused some reckless behaviour that endangered everyone's lives on board. Jonathan's situation is further discussed thoroughly under justice issues.

c. Mohammed from the East Coast of Africa:

Mohammed's experience of dangerous situations was much less intense than Jonathan's and he did not face as many "ugly situations" as John has, even though he has been sailing for around 9 years. When I asked him about it he talked about his faith and said that when they start to sail he asks Allah to help him:

Chris: "Okay, and, how long have you been sailing now, how many years?"

Mohammed: "I've been sailing now more than nine years, yah."

Chris: "Yah, it's quite a bit. And, and, what have you, you have some experiences of the sea otherwise like maybe some danger, dangerous times that [you went through] on the ship..., or some good things that's on the ship?"

Mohammed: "Yah, one day I remember when we're sailing around the Somalian water, I meet with peoples, all the people are very strong except me. So when we're sailing, do the time for prayers, people they used to make a prayer just God protect us and help

from Allah, and present a victory, travel here that, make sure that by the time when we departure the port, the time when we want to return back which we were gonna return back safely so we can see our parents, we can see our family. So, but there was a time we had to get hard time, the sea is rough, yah. But since I've started to travel the sea I've never sink with the sea, and the ship never sink. There is nothing accident that happen at sea. I say thanks to God for our prayers.

Except for one specific storm in 9 years it seems that Mohammed did not encounter many dangerous situations. Danger seems to be ever present, though, in that every time they sailed they prayed for the journey ahead. So, seafaring might not be intensely dangerous all the time, but the possibility of danger seems to be ever present. To sink or to have an accident is not always imminent, but is always possible and therefore it is something that is normally in the thoughts of those who are sailing.

d. Ivan from Bulgaria:

Ivan looked back over many years of sailing and I asked him about his life on ships and about the dangers of sailing.

Chris: [ ] captain, I was thinking, you sailed from 72 to 91.

Ivan: To 91.

Chris: And in those years, all those years, is there some highlight maybe, that, something that maybe, sometimes that were good or bad highlights, or outstanding things.

Ivan: In what way?

Chris: Maybe you had the experience of a close encounter [with death] or maybe some rough weather, something, or maybe something good?

Ivan: Well yeah, I was on a ship in 74, you know, in Chinese seas, we were in three Chinese boats, you know, we started from Shanghai and we went to [ ] close to Canton. On the way to Canton, you know, there was a big typhoon. And we were told, but the forecast, you know, the, the report on its movement showed us it was supposed

to be like about, good enough distance, you know, to feel safe but then we ended up about, we were only about 300 miles of the centre. And I don't want to know what in the centre was because 300 miles away it was so bad, it was so bad it ripped off planks, you know, from sides of the, we would call it the monkey island, you know, on the sides, it was like planks to which a board with the ship's name was written on it and all this. It, it pulled it off, it ripped it off and rolling and pitching like anything so we had to turn back and by ..., there is a lot of islands so we parked ourselves in between the island, you know, and waited, till it became better, till we could continue our way to Canton.

Very, very, very bad and [a] similar thing we had in 76 on the way from Colombo, Ceylon, Sri Lanka now, to Karachi, to Pakistan, in the Arabic sea, you know. There is very bad weather. I remember there was a, there was a message on the radio to look for survivors, or remains of a ship, her name was *Maria Christina*, and, a Greek one. And it was very bad, our ship was fairly new. It was a small one, 7600 dead weight. And I remember the, who had this boxes, these wooden boxes, we had on deck for the ropes, they were made of a very thick solid, solid oak, they ended up in shreds. They ended up in shreds, and the ropes were all over, but we didn't lose the ropes at least and again we had to turn back, you know, and go back to Colombo and wait.

And, our captain, you know, had to, I was a second officer at that time, had to, had a reprimand because he forgot to, to acknowledge the agent on the other side that we are going to be late, because of this and this reasons. When we arrived late, and nobody knew, and all the consequence on his shoulders. But it was his stupidity, and he had to suffer it. But ag, look, we had bad weathers, we had lots.

Chris: That was part of, you know it's part of...

Ivan: It's part of the package, part of the package. In Black Sea, Black Sea we had such a thing; you would think that, you would never expect, to think of. I had, I had, I was in my home port of [ ], you know, one day. And a British guy came from a British ship to ask us to help them with the chart, because they didn't have that kind of chart for Black Sea, somewhere, I don't remember where it was. And he said, he's been all over the world, but he's never, ever seen anything as bad as they encountered in the Black Sea. It is mixed and a very short swell, and it makes you, it makes you really sick, it is like a real washing machine, we call it a washing machine, but it is not exactly [laughing]. That thing, when it comes it is bad, that's why it is called Black Sea.

Ivan is no longer working on a ship which is sailing all over the world. At the time of the interview he mostly worked in Durban harbour. He is looking back over many years of sailing and he remembers three things about the dangers of the sea. The first was something that happened in 1974 when his ship was in a typhoon where the wind was so strong %~~it~~ ripped off planks, you know, from sides of the, we would call it the monkey island, you know, on the sides, it was like planks to which a board with the ship's name was written on it and all this.+

The second incident he remembers was in 1976 when %~~the~~ these wooden boxes, we had on deck for the ropes, they were made of a very thick solid, solid oak, they ended up in shreds+. The third thing he remembers concerning dangers at sea was in connection with the Black Sea and a British guy who %~~he~~ said, he's been all over the world, but he's never, ever seen anything as bad as they encountered in the Black Sea.+ The reason for this, Ivan says, is because it %~~is~~ mixed and a very short swell, and it makes you, it makes you really sick, it is like a real washing machine, we call it a washing machine [ ]+. He goes on to explain that the Black Sea got its name because so %~~many~~ many lives were lost in that sea, and so many lives of survivors [ ] were blackened because of the loss+.

The things that Ivan can remember from many years of sailing does not seem so intense and bad as that which Jonathan experienced, but there were dangers and some of it he still remembers vividly. But as he says: %~~it's~~ part of the package, part of the package+. Seafarers tend to accept and expect bad weather and many times you do not hear them complain or even talk about it much.

e. Noel from the Philippines:

In the interview Noel did not talk so much about dangers at sea. The reason for this might be that the ships he sailed on were always in good condition and also his general attitude towards his career was very positive. What he did say was that shipping became safer than before:

Chris: So it improved quite a lot.

Noel: Yah, it is, only that, see more regulations safety if [ ] something happen to the ship, assistance, rescue and, men on board always check, not like before all change [ ] ships go for dry-dock, already rusty [ ] but it is time to change. That now even the ship is still looking good, it's expired, it's expired, must be changed.

He is saying that in general there has been a lot of improvement in the last few years. As an example he is saying that even when a ship will still look good it will already be expired. He means that it will have to be scrapped and replaced with a new ship. This is of course not always true, but it is at least Noel's experience. Further it is definitely true that it is much better than years gone by. Today there are more regulations and if something happened with a ship, assistance is more readily available than before.

f. Eric from the Philippines

Eric's ship was in Durban because of an accident they suffered. I am not sure what happened but the captain was sent home, so somehow he might have been responsible. One of the other crew members told me that the ship had collided with a mountain, and he showed me a mark near the deck on the ship and said that it was a mango tree that made that mark. So whatever happened they were probably not allowed to talk to others about it freely, but the point is that this ship was in an accident and that could have been very dangerous to the seafarers. Eric did not talk much about this accident, but did have some other experiences of dangerous situations at sea.

Eric: Seaman's life is not really that easy. It's kinda difficult, specially the bad weather, you cannot sleep, you cannot eat sometimes because you just keep throwing up, throwing up in bad weather. You cannot, you're rolling in your bed, especially a small one like this, yes, you'll roll in the bed. So you cannot just, maybe if you have some belt, [laughing], you tie yourself there so you won't fall down the floor [laughing].

Chris: And that can go on for days, not just one day.

Eric: Yah, it is. There is my difficult times because I keep, I have to, I cannot, do deep frying, and my baking, it becomes bad because, you cannot bake. The most I can do is make soup in a bigger saucepan, you know. Just make one third, because it will drip.

You cannot do any frying unless you are to hold the frying pad like that. It's kind of tiring cause you have to sit like this, you have to, you know, it's really difficult to do this job. That's why, so far, specially coming from [their previous port] after that, because we're empty. Big swell, like that. It's really. If you look outside you think it will not go back [laughing]. It's kinda scary if you look at the water.

Chris: Ah, you think you will not ever get back, you think it's gonna...

Eric: Yes, the first time watching outside, seeing some small ships subsiding like that, then being swallowed by the water like that. You wait till they come up again! [Laughing]. Yah.

Chris: The wave go over the whole ship.

Eric: Yah. I can't believe it's really, there's such as thing like that. I thought it will not come back again, because you cannot, it disappear already in the water. Yah! That's why I've been thinking before, if [I] will keep on sailing, seeing that thing, way back twenty years ago in Japan, oh [ ]. My very first ship is a car carrier. Car carrier is like a big box. You see, so once your in... And the accommodation is on the top. So there. Just imagine yourself there. And the water in Japan is really, oh. I never saw the water in Japan so calm, no never. It's much better in Korea and China. But in Japan, no. It's always big swells.

Chris: So, it's a constant thing, the whole time you're there, you have to cope.

Eric: So there. Before, my very first, first two weeks on board. First two weeks on board is really a mess [laughing]. All I have...all I do is throw up and throw up all the time. Going down to the engine room, the first thing I'm going to do was pick up a trash can and throw up in. [ ]. Even when my stomach is empty I always feel like throwing up. For almost two weeks. These Italians would sent me up: %o, go, go, go, go to bed. Go to bed. Go to bed.+ That's what they said. Until I got used to it.

Chris: And now you're fine, you're used to it.

Eric: Yah. The thing is I can, as I told you, going here from [the previous port], there's a big swell, so we roll a lot, I can't sleep. There was a time when I fell asleep and come a big roll, I mean a big swell, and we roll again. We roll hard, oh [ ], I almost fall down.



Instead of being afraid, I just laugh and laugh because I can't imagine myself falling down like that. I don't know how I still managed to laugh [laughing loudly].

Eric describes how difficult it can be when your ship is encountering bad weather. It is very difficult to sleep and for him, as the chief cook, it becomes very difficult to prepare food. To sleep he even said that he uses a belt to tie himself to his bed and as far as cooking is concerned it is limiting his options as he cannot bake and he cannot fry anything. He goes on to describe how difficult the trip was when they came to Durban and says that the ship rolled so far over to the one side that if you look out the window you think the ship will not roll back again but that it will capsize. He says: %If you look outside you think it will not go back [laughing]. It's kinda scary if you look at the water.+ He further says that long ago he saw waves immersing a smaller vessel and that he thought it will not come back up again. He says: %I can't believe it's really, there's such a thing like that. I thought it will not come back again, because you cannot, it disappear in the water. Yah!+ After he saw this he seriously thought about quitting.

Eric did not quit, though, and he seems to come to terms with the dangers posed by rough weather and big swells. He says that recently he almost fell out of his bed while they were sailing and he just laughed about it. He says: %Instead of being afraid, I just laugh...+

Eric also said something else about dangers at sea which I almost missed. He said:

Too much worries, in your mind affected your routine, you know. Especially here. It's the same thing here; it's what I'm saying. If they send you the problem, oh [ ], your work is being affected. There is one bad thing that I found out so I tell them, no, that if there is a problem that [they can solve] by them..., by themselves: %Just do it, tell me later.+ So, because I told them, I explained them why. Because if they going to tell me what the problem is then it will bother me, then it, my job, my work is being, will be affected. So, it causes a problem to me because I might get accident, I might get cut or whatever, you never know. Because I'm not so, I'm mentally upset, you know, working, yah, working without the presence of your mind. Then you realise you're stepping on a slippery... a slippery floor and you might fall [ ].

Seafarers are far away from their emotional support systems. When they become mentally upset by something it can create a dangerous situation, either for seafarers themselves or for the rest of the crew around them.

#### - **Alternative perspective**

In this section one was confronted with a view of how seafarers' lives are accompanied with dangers all the time, either with the possibility of danger or real threats like piracy, storms or an unseaworthy ship. When you arrive on a ship the idea that you are in a place where an accident can happen or where potentially something bad can happen is communicated to you immediately. Normally, on many ships, outside on the accommodation tower, it is written in large red letters: "Safety First". I do not have a sign like that painted on the outside of my home. In addition, when you go into the mess room and also elsewhere in the ship there are many posters communicating safe behaviour and correct procedures about a variety of activities. I do not have such things next to the table where I eat. All these things are very good, of course, but it does contribute to an ever present consciousness of danger in a place the seafarers have to call home.

Many dangers can be avoided and many good companies way to try and do that is through sensitising the crew to be alert and safe. Noel, Eric and Mohammed were working for companies who did very well to prevent unnecessary dangers. But of course there are also the companies like the one Jonathan worked for who did not hesitate to take risks with the lives of the crew.

The things that John, Ivan and Mohammed said did not have anything to do with the companies they worked for and they were just affirming that danger is always a possibility: "It's part of the package, part of the package". Even in relatively low risk situations like in Mohammed's case he said that they prayed each time before they sailed. A seafarer's life is continuously dangerous.

A chaplain who participated in this research said: %In spite of the ship being so big, the sea is bigger and the waves can be huge.+ He continues to say: %I have seen the superstructure of a tanker bend by a huge wave.+ It is as some seafarers have said: All ships are small on the ocean. It will not be a surprise for anyone to learn that the life of a seafarer is a dangerous one. My co-researchers shared some insights into this aspect of their lives and, although bad weather is a major factor which makes sailing at sea dangerous, there are also many other factors.

John said: %In fact for anybody that calls themselves a seafarer [they] must have experienced a lot of ugly situations at sea.+ This phrase from John summed it up very well. At one time or the other all seafarers are in some way exposed to danger. In one of the situations John was in there was a hole in the ship, the water came in and the crew from the engine department had to go and see if they can stop it: %So we had to go down, while the water was almost drowning us, we were searching for the hole to see whether we can block it. So, and at that stage we were very, very hopeless.+ On another occasion the ship lost its engine's power and they were drifting to a fire at an oilrig. Fortunately, just in time, they could get the engine working again: %otherwise the fire would have roasted us on the ship.+

Jonathan's ship was around thirty years old and %when it has many risk, many risk on the ship+. So although not facing the possibility of being roasted, like John, more than John he had to face the possibility of drowning, time and again. On his very first trip on the ship he thought that the ship will sink: %in my mind I was thinking now maybe the ship is going to sink, something like that.+ The ship's condition was not good and therefore there was always some kind of emergency: %many time you have emergency.+

As stated before, as you listen to Jonathan describing his experiences of danger you can almost see and hear what he had to go through: The chaos the danger and the madness going on in this thirty year old ship. Windows are breaking, holes are appearing, water is splashing and %boiling+, the 150 km/h winds from the cyclone is

blowing, emergencies are happening any time of the night and in between all this, Jonathan is trying to start a new future for him and his family.

Due to all these dangers on his ship it was always a happy event if they see land: %even if when we know, we maybe see the land maybe two hundred mile to port, mostly even if you see the islands far away you feel happy.+ With the condition this ship was in, it was truly something to be happy about. Jonathan even heard divers (who make repairs to the ship under water while the ship is in port), as they talked to someone from the company, plead that the ship should be properly repaired: %With my eyes, with my ears I heard them telling company: %Please, this ship is in danger. Why can't you [ ] take the ship to dry dock?+ The company did not want to because according to Jonathan their priority was not to protect the lives of the crew: %But problem, they were just after money, [ ]+

Fortunately this type of situation on board is not everyone's experience as was for instance the case with Mohammed and Noel. Mohammed said: %since I've started to travel the sea I've never sink with the sea, and the ship never sink. There is nothing accident that happen at sea.+ In 9 years Mohammed fortunately did not have any accident and when asked about the dangers at sea he only referred to one occasion where the sea was particularly rough. According to him they always prayed before they went out to sea which gives the impression that seafarers are constantly aware of the potential of danger.

Noel, though, seemed to be unconcerned about dangers at sea and, even though difficult to follow, one could understand that what he is saying is that ships today are much safer than in the past. He used words and phrases like: %more regulations+, %assistance+, %rescue+, %men on board always check+, %not like before, all change+, %ships go for dry-dock+and %now even the ship is still looking good, it's expired+. The words that Noel is uses are hopeful and it is showing that there is at least in some parts of the shipping industry much progress concerning the safety of seafarers. One of the chaplains also shared her experience on how the problem with an unseaworthy ship

was happily and quickly resolved due to the implementation of high standards:

Had one experience where a ship's captain reported to me a dangerous situation in the engine room of a sister vessel which was in port at the same time. The crew were afraid to sail and afraid of the Captain, so they visited the sister ship to ask their captain to come and look at the problem which he did. I passed on the report to SAMSA [and they responded immediately.

But no matter what a company does, seafarers have to face bad weather similar to Ivan and Eric's experience: "it was so bad; it was so bad it ripped off planks...+ This was in a typhoon in which Ivan once ended up in. "Very, very, very bad...+are the words Ivan used to describe this typhoon. Looking back over his life as a sailor and the situations he had to face Ivan said: "But ag, look, we had bad weathers, we had lots.+ He seems to accept philosophically that bad weather is part of the deal, or as Ivan puts it: "It's part of the package, part of the package.+

Seafarers seem to learn to deal with this type of difficulty as Eric for instance said when he almost fell off his bed when he was asleep: "Instead of being afraid I just laugh and laugh...+ Eric also shared how he was once terrified when he saw a smaller vessel that was swallowed by the water and he did not think that it will ever come up again. It did, and he says in amazement: "I can't believe it's really, there's such a thing like that. I thought it will not come back again, because you cannot, it disappear in the water.+ Coming to Durban he says the ship was rolling so far over that he thought it will not come back again but roll over: "It's kinda scary...+

Eric also pointed out that those sailing on board a ship can be negatively affected by something like receiving bad news from home. He even asked his daughters not to tell him any bad news if they can solve it without him. He said this because when you are mentally upset+, you are stepping [ ] on a slippery floor and you might fall.+ In the *Nautilus International Telegraph* (April 2011:24) there is an article which is articulating the same concern raised by Eric: "Whether you are the ship's master or its cook, you influence the safe operation of a large containership carrying cargo worth hundreds of

millions of dollars or a VLCC with a cargo worth as much as \$500m. If you are not a healthy individual these cargoes can be said to be at risk.+ And so are you, yourself and the other crew members sailing with you. This emphasises the importance of the efforts of the seafarers mission which is directed at helping seafarers cope with their circumstances. In addition to the spiritual dimension of our involvement there are also the other things that we are doing and that can be done which can help to support the seafarers in maintaining a healthy state of mind. These are things like simply being a friend to the seafarers, providing them with a healthy and safe environment at the seafarers centre so that they can relax and make contact with their families and to be of assistance when there is injustice on board.

The biggest factor in recent times that has made seafaring to have a much greater mental impact on seafarers is piracy. Piracy as practiced by the Somalis has changed seafaring dramatically. It is not an exaggeration to say that seafarers who started their careers a few years back joined up for something different than which they are getting today. It is growing in the sense that more ships are being attacked, more ships are successfully hijacked, the seafarers are prisoners on their own ships for longer periods and the violence against them seems to be on the increase as some are killed and some are tortured, physically and mentally. Our chaplaincy team in Durban had the opportunity to counsel crew members who were held hostage recently. They told us how on the first day of being hostages, one of the officers were taken outside, after which they heard gun shots. They believed that the officer has been executed. One of the crewmembers started crying and the rest of them were in a state of utter shock. Afterwards it came out that this was only to intimidate them and that they fired shots into the air. On another occasion the chief engineer was almost thrown into the sea because the pirates wanted him to switch on the second engine. The predicament of the chief engineer was that there is only one engine and the pirates did not believe it. I do not know how his life was spared in the end, but he was very traumatised by this and at a stage while our chaplaincy team was with them he just broke down in tears.

On this ship there were Greeks, a Georgian and Filipinos. The Filipinos were quite

talkative and they had a wonderful story to tell in spite of their terrible situation. One of them, for some reason, started to pray that they will be released on his birthday. The other Filipinos joined him and they also started to pray for this. Exactly on that day the pirates left their ship and the next day the naval forces came on board.

Some might argue that percentage wise it is a small number of ships that are being successfully hijacked compared to the number of ships still sailing on this route, but the fact is that the effect of this spreads out much further than the actual ships that are in the power of the pirates at a given moment. Piracy in this sense works like terrorism. Terrorism does not kill millions of people, but the effects of terrorism are felt all over the world for instance in the way port security has changed after 9/11. In the same way piracy does not kill thousands of sailors, but it has an effect on a very large percentage of them. This is seen in port by the many ships with razor wire, this is seen in maritime newspapers and even normal newspapers as this issue continues to be in the headlines and this is of course expressed through the seafarers themselves. The effects of this are far reaching and the slogan: "2000 Somali pirates are hijacking the world's economy", used by the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) and major shipping companies' campaign against piracy, seems to be an accurate description of the situation.

The point made with the slogan is clear: This is everyone's problem. It is not only the seafarers who are taken hostage, their families or their companies' problem. The effects of the problem reach much further. It cripples international economic activities. The effects of this problem are also far reaching in the sense that many seafarers have to live with constant fear. This is why the chief officer Flores said: "We can do nothing but pray that we don't get caught" (*Nautilus International Telegraph* March 2011:24).

When they have been in an attack or a hostage situation they and their families have to carry the trauma with them for a long time after the event. As was the experience in Durban, many times seafarers are instructed not to talk about their experiences in order to protect the company. This adds to the trauma and prevents the seafarer from



receiving the necessary support. With the most recent situation that the interdenominational team from Durban seafarers mission had to handle we were glad to learn that the company also appointed a professional counsellor to help the seafarers. It seems that at least some companies realise that these humans need to be taken care of.

Prevention is better than cure, though, and therefore everyone involved is desperately searching for solutions to this crisis. The most important solution is that the political situation in Somalia should be improved. As Ban Ki-Moon (in *Nautilus International Telegraph* 2011:22) said: "Although piracy manifests itself at sea, the roots of the problem are to be found ashore. In essence, piracy is a criminal offence that is driven by economic hardship, and that flourishes in the absence of effective law enforcement. This can take many years and so other measures should be put into place in the mean time. Possible solutions that are being proposed or implemented already are the citadel situation, the naval forces who are helping to prevent many of the hijackings, armed guards, razor wire, dummies and that the "softly-softly" approach should be abandoned.

It is unfortunate that my hermeneutical adventure did not lead to a deeper understanding of the issue of piracy through interviews with someone who had been in such a situation. On the other hand one could ask if there is really something more that should be understood. The fact is it needs to stop. Eric said: "I'm kinda scared about them. I don't want to think about it. I don't even want to think about it." The hope is that in some small way this research will add to the urgency to find more effective solutions to this outrageous situation.

## **B. Stories about God and faith in a multi-religious environment**

### **- Introduction**

It is an awkward situation. A seafarer from a non-Christian faith has been brought up with a specific tradition and belief system all his/her life. As a missionary my purpose is to confront this person with something new and different and my hope is that he/she will accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour. As anyone can imagine this is not happening all



the time and not so easily. I am convinced that if this happens it is part of a whole process and plan that God has been busy with for this person's entire life. It is truly a miracle.

In this section I do not want to discuss my theological position again, but rather I would like to develop an understanding of what the religious environment on ships is like. What can you expect to find on ships concerning the religious environment, at least on some particular ships for some particular seafarers?

Whenever I meet seafarers who are from a different religion and we start to talk about it there is normally a bit of tension as they are aware that I am a missionary and on board in the name of Christ. They usually alleviate the tension by saying that the differences in religion does not really matter. In my experience seafarers tend to avoid the issue of religion as much as possible in order to work together with different kinds of people in a small space, although there are some exceptions. On some rare occasions I came across situations where the issues of religions are openly debated.

On a local dredger I met almost nine of the crew in the mess room at once and we started to talk about religion. They were all South Africans, except one Somali who was a Moslem. It was a tricky situation because none of them were trying to be diplomatic and my purpose was not to create trouble on board. They asked me questions and started to debate intensely with each other. As a missionary I saw this as a great opportunity to witness about the gospel, but when I left I could sense that there was tension between them.

There cannot, not be tension in a multi-religious environment when you are thinking in an exclusivist way. Fortunately tension does not necessarily mean that seafarers from another religion do not want to have anything to do with someone from seafarers' mission. One example where I experienced a positive relationship with Moslem seafarers was on a ship with Turkish crewmembers. They were in Durban harbour for a few months in order for repairs to be done to their ship and therefore I got to know them

well. They were very friendly and whenever possible, when they were not too busy, gave me a warm welcome. I even had the opportunity to give a Bible to one of them. This happened in the crew mess and it seemed that the others were curious about what he received. They inspected it and for a moment or two I thought there might be trouble. Then they accepted it and shifted their focus onto something else.

Seafarers are not only from a variety of religions but as Christians they are also from a variety of churches. A lot of seafarers belong to the Roman Catholic Church and many others to the Eastern Orthodox Church. Then there are also those who identify themselves as %eborn+Christians. Mostly they are from the Philippines. Sometimes they have a very lonely life because they do not participate in activities like visiting night clubs and drinking which tends to make them outsiders. The result of this is that they are isolated.

One %eborn+from the Cape, a brown person, told me how lonely life on a ship is for him. According to him the other crew have a mindset that when they are in port they want to have fun. %fun+meaning to drink too much and to spend time with prostitutes. According to him he was the only one on all his contracts thus far who did not behave like this. Of course this is just one person's experience, but I think it is saying something of the experience of Christians who try to stay true to their faith.

Constantly meeting people from other religions and other church traditions is a thought provoking experience, especially if you are thinking in an exclusivist way. This is because the seafarers you meet from other religions become more than just a Moslem, Hindu or Buddhist. They become a person who is a husband, father, son and someone who is warm and caring. It is easy to think in an exclusivist way when the person from a different religion seems a bit strange. On a ship you meet normal people who could be your friends if only they stayed closer.

Only for a limited time am I confronted with other religions while I am on board. After a few minutes I leave again and go back to having contact with similar thinking people.

For seafarers it is different and they have to stay in the situation for months without any escape. In my experience most of the crew members handle the tension between different religions by ignoring faith issues all together. On a ship with crew from the USA a seafarer was quick to tell me that religion is a touchy subject on board and that Christian literature and Bibles are not welcome. Sometimes they would not even talk about one another's religious convictions and when I start talking about it they are surprised to find out that some are Christians like they are. Sometimes Mass will be conducted on a ship where there are Filipino's who are predominantly Roman Catholics. I have attended a few of these and it is normally a very special occasion. This is the exception and mostly the tension between different cultures and religions do not allow for this to happen on a regular basis.

These were a few introductory perspectives about religious issues on ships that I have experienced, but I also asked my co-researchers about their insider view on it.

- **The research characters**

a. John from Nigeria:

John is a committed Christian who serves God with all his heart. On his ship everyone was from Nigeria, but some were Moslems and some were Christians. He was from an evangelical church and the chief cook for instance was from the Roman Catholic Church. Thus on this ship there was religious diversity but this did not seem to be the cause of much tension. We had a regular Bible study in the mess room and this was tolerated by the Moslems. One of the Moslems was the captain and he even attended a meeting once or twice and at the end of their stay he requested a Bible as a gift.

On board John's ship there was much tension and drama but religious diversity was, as sensitive as it can be, not a problem or a point of concern. John talked to me about being a Christian and a sailor.

Chris: % being a Christian on board, is that always easy? Because, I think there is a lot of things that could be challenging, but at the same time it's a anchor to be a Christian. So, how, how is, how's your faith? And ehō

John: Yah, I can assure you now that on board ships is one of the most difficult places you can live as a Christian. Sailing, the history of sailing started somewhere from Britain. And these people, they, they did a lot of ritual thinking. Talking about worshipping gods of the sea, goddesses of the sea and things like that. So, these culture, in general talking to you now, these, their approach, these kind of worship of idols, has been made to be part of seafarers job. So that is the very first challenge you see when you are on board ships you discover that they will do some rituals and they will ask everybody to participate. And especially when they want to cross... there is an imaginary line that they call equator that tends to divide into the northern and the southern hemisphere into two halves. Now when you are crossing this imaginary line they perform rituals, they call the god that they are worshipping there Neptune. They call that god Neptune. And they do a lot of rituals and they are presenting pure idol worship. So that is, just get that one clear, apart from that there are other rituals they do that present idol worship inside ships and they believe that if you don't do this you will have problems at sea. And now I am talking about, because you are always away from your families, both male and female seafarers they are not very faithful to their spouses, you know. You need to struggle to be able to keep the, your faith as a Christian, while away from your family. So these two major things are very challenging. I, myself in particular, and most seafarers generally talking about how difficult, or how easy it is for a Christian to be on board, that's just the way it is.

Chris: And you have seen other people, Christian people that struggle with, being faithful with their, their husband or wife and, and that's happening a lot. It's, it's difficult for you to have Christian values and to live them on a ship because the people around you is, is not doing it, they are not living a Christian life, so there is this group pressure so, you also said about the rituals that they have, they expect you to participate. And also with your whole group is, is, is not faithful there is some expectations and there's some pressure on you to conform to the group. So, I think that makes it very difficult.

John: Yah, you're right. You're right, actually what you have asked, said now reminded me of when I failed from my Christian faith. One occasion I was away from my family, I was married with my first child. And because of the kind of peer pressure I faced on board with regards to going out with strange woman, I failed and I hurt and I failed. And, I, I, I, I, did that for a couple of times and when I realized myself I only wake up tears and it took me a very long time to get myself back. So, that is what it is, if you are inside the ship you will always be faced with the pressure, to follow the crowd, to you

follow, you know, the majority, because that is what majority see, and they cannot stay without doing without some kind of sinful things, especially going after, going into perverse outside their marriages.

John is not primarily talking about the challenges that a Christian faces when sailing with seafarers from another religion and the tension this can cause. What he is talking about here is rather how he, as a committed Christian, has a different value system than the general values of the people he has sailed with, in the past. In a way he is saying that there is, generally speaking, narratives that seafarers live with which are in conflict to the narrative of Jesus Christ in which he believes. He gives two examples of this.

Firstly he is saying that there is this ritual that seafarers conduct in honour of the god Neptune. This came as a surprise to me. In my first interview I had with John he described it in more detail and I must say it sounded very weird and even unrealistic that seafarers would do something this strange. In addition I had never heard of it from another seafarer at the time I had the interview. Not long after this I met a captain from another ship who did refer to this ritual, though. His English was not good and he was not very motivated to give me much information about this, but he did confirm that it is not just an isolated thing that happened to John only and that it is therefore some kind of a tradition at least on some ships.

John explains it as a heritage from the British sailors from long ago who were superstitious and that this and other rituals have been taken over by today's seafarers. For John this is a major challenge to his faith as it is opposed to all that he believes and stands for. He said that %they will ask everybody to participate.+ I anticipated that if everyone is doing this there will be a lot of pressure on you to participate and John confirmed my suspicion. This took us to the other issue which is faithfulness to your spouse while you are away from home.

I will also refer to this under family issues, but John says that being faithful is very difficult and that even he has behaved against his own convictions when he was not faithful once. This was partly due to the group expectation. He says: %a.because of the

kind of peer pressure I faced on board with regards to going out with strange woman, I failed + This had a very negative impact on him and he says that it took a long time for him to recover. For John the problem is with the majority as they cannot stay without doing without some kind of sinful things, especially going after, going into perverse outside their marriages. +

When I am listening to what John is saying I get the sense that there is a broad narrative that most seafarers live according to. One where unfaithfulness and superstition is the norm and this narrative wants you to conform to it.

In this sense being someone committed to the narrative of Jesus Christ is not easy. He says: I can assure you now that on board ships is one of the most difficult places you can live as a Christian. This did not mean that his Christianity was a burden to him and I asked him about the positive side of being a Christian.

Chris: So, and your Christianity brings you a bit in conflict with the group expectation but on the up side what, what does your faith mean for you as a seafarer, does it really, is it, on the positive side, what does it contribute to you being especially for, for you on a ship it's a very difficult situation being here one year now, and what, how did your faith play a role in this time, for you, being away, under this tough circumstances?

John: Yah, my faith as a Christian, in fact all the years that I have been working as a seafarer has been a wonderful experience. It give me opportunity of realizing that in the worst of situations that truly God is always there. I discovered that as a seafarer anytime I am away from my family I use it as an opportunity in order get closer to God, as it is an opportunity to challenge myself for patience to endure hardship. You know that is and in this particular situation where I've been away from my family for almost fifteen months now, it admittedly, I got into serious discouragement and pain but often times [I] heard of your organization here, seafarerssq[mission], Durban, South-Africa, I've always recovered, and when I recover I noticed that the peace of God is still full inside me and that God has not abandoned me and, that has kept me to keep moving. But ordinary, talking it on the surface it would not have been easy, so if not for Christianity I cannot survive this long away from my family, maybe I would have fallen on the wayside and gone drinking or do those sort of things. In fact if not for Christianity I would have

maybe abandoned the ship, going to the city, look for people who do drugs or doing some kind of thing or the other there. Any of these thoughts do not come up in me, because of Christianity. Christianity has been very helpful to me in the course of my job as a seafarer on the seas.

Even though to be against the dominant narrative is not easy, John says that being a Christian is a wonderful experience.+ He sees the time he is on board as a time to get closer to God. He says that the current situation at the time of the interview was such that he got discouraged but that: %b I've always recovered, and when I recover I noticed that the peace of God is still full inside me and that God has not abandoned me and, that has kept me to keep moving.+ He also witnessed that this is what kept him from going totally astray and to go into things like drugs or just mindlessly abandoning the ship to start a life in South Africa as an illegal immigrant.

John continued and did talk about the fact that he, as a committed Christian, is struggling with discouragement and that it is difficult not to have other enthusiastic Christians around him. Thus he is in need of a church and he is daydreaming a bit about a ship where everyone is a committed Christian.

John: õ So, you are right theõ thank God that one thing I would like to assure you is that any vessel that maybe by accident or whatever, or by own cause, divine arrangement, has in there only Christians in that ship, and practicing Christians, we look, we [would] be a specimen of heaven. Yah, because it would be like waking up and praising God and sleeping and praising God and sleeping and praising God, but I have not seen such a vessel. So in a vessel you see all religions, you see all people of different character so it's really, just been so challenging to me all these years because I've not sailed in any ship where even half of the crew are Christians. I always notice it, most of the ships I've sailed maybe we just have like two, three, four people who are committed Christians. We keep doing fellowship [ ] happy.

Chris: [ ] Yah. And but on this ship there is two, Islam, Muslim people and, it seem to me ironically the problem is not with the other religions but those who is the kind of Christian but not really practicing.

John: [Laughing] Yes, you are right because, you are right because Christians are suppose to be strengthening each other that, like what you saw, in my ship when we came, I can still remember that one of us, we came together, and he told me: %ook, Iqn not go[ing] out, I [will] not do anything+. Cause that time we came with the hope that we are going to leave in three months. So we stayed, stayed, stayed and before I knew it he started going out and he started drinking and womanizing and so, it is not, I want to say that for this our hope is, our long stay here really contributed to, to this behaviour of some of us especially those of the Christian faith. Talking about other faiths actually see, they have their own approach to life. For instance there are some faiths that believe that [if] they can hide and commit sin and nobody sees them, then it is not a sin. And that is unlike our own faith. So, and, I only want to say that the greatest challenge I faced in this my own ship now is the fact that Christians are falling away from the faith. So I lack people who, who we can always be together and built each other up. [ ].

Chris: Yah, so it's a bit lonely?

John: Yah, yah, talking about my faith now. I can pray but you know but it is only when you can come around that I have quality fellowship, prayer and sometimes that I used to preach, otherwise I do most of my praying in privacy and it is not as qualitative as fellowship prayer.

The lack of the support from other Christians was for John really a challenge as long as he has been a sailor. He says: %o it's really, just been so challenging to me all these years.+ Although the main focus of this research is not on the ministry as such, an important dimension of coming to an understanding of the lives of seafarers is to empower those in ministry to be more effective and more relevant in their practice. John reveals how important it is for the church and specifically those in seafarersq mission to be there for people like him. There is really a need for spiritual support to seafarers.

He agrees that the real challenge for him was not so much the Moslem people but more the other Christians. He says: %o I only want to say that the greatest challenge I faced in this my own ship now is the fact that Christians are falling away from the faith.+ As an example he is referring to a shipmate who I also knew well. This man was also a



born Christian and he was like John very enthusiastic about his faith. When I first met him it was at a Bible study meeting and he was leading it. The topic was: Hell. He ministered the Word with conviction and strength that day. Not long after this though, he fell into temptation, although he did continue attending the Bible study meetings on Wednesdays. John later confided to me that while this man was attending the Bible study meeting he was in fact illegally having a prostitute in his cabin. It was not just him, but also the Roman Catholic chief cook who also attended the meetings regularly.

This behaviour was most upsetting for John and he says how this man at the beginning just wanted to stay on the right track. He says: he told me: Look, I am not go[ing] out, I [will] not do anything, and: So we stayed, stayed, stayed and before I knew it he started going out and he started drinking and womanizing and so, it is not, I want to say that for this our hope is, our long stay here really contributed to, to this behaviour of some of us especially those of the Christian faith.

John has something to say about the other faiths and believes that they are concealing the things they do. John says that some religions believe that something is not a real sin if you are not discovered. Still, John's major heart ache is not to live with people from other religions but the absence of true Christian support from those who say they are Christians. He does acknowledge the support he did get but it does seem that it was not enough: otherwise I do most of my praying in privacy and it is not as qualitative as fellowship prayer.

#### b. Jonathan from Kenya:

Jonathan is a Christian and was always happy to receive literature about the Bible from me. When his ship was still sailing he would take these tracts I gave him to his people in Kenya who would eagerly receive it. This is one of the strong points of seafarers' mission because you might think you are only ministering to one person, but that person has a family and friends and they take the message and the literature back to their homes.

In the interview with Jonathan I did not discuss religious issues directly. On his ship the problem was the language and culture barrier and not so much the religious diversity. He and his colleague from Kenya, Peter, were both committed Christians. The rest of the crew was from India. I know that the captain was a Roman Catholic and that some of them were Hindu, but I am not sure if there were any other Christians or Moslems. The point is that religion was not a problem on board and tension was more due to the difficult and unfair situation they were in.

Jonathan did relate one story about prayer that I have already discussed in more detail under the narratives about danger, but I will repeat what he said here: % they couldn't do anything, they cannot go inside there, because if you go, if you're going the ladder you're going down the water can reach you, so you can't go and see. So anyway they just pray.+ Like most humans, seafarers know where to turn to when they face a crisis. Faith and danger actually bind them together. It was not a dividing issue on this ship.

c. Mohammed from the East Coast of Africa

Mohammed was the only co-researcher with an Islamic faith. It was therefore interesting to see the multi-religious issue out of his perspective and also to hear something about his religious convictions. I asked him whether it was sometimes difficult to sail with people from another faith.

Chris: ... And the thing is not just culture that's different but sometimes religions is also different. The, your religion, you might be sailing with some Christians, and was that ever a problem or it's not a problem?

Mohammed: There was no problem, because the, the aim, you came there to do the job. Make sure that you're doing the job; if you do the time for prayer you just hide in a place you just make a prayer. There is no need to show the people that you make a prayer, no. What is very important is you to concentrate to the job and you to maintain the boat and to follow the instruction. That is very important.

Chris: And the, the religious part is your private life and you, if you need to pray you go to your room and you can pray there.

Mohammed: Yah, there is no one disturbing you.

In this interview Mohammed and I did not have a very deep discussion about religious issues, but I think what he is saying here is very valuable to understand the narrative seafarers have about living in a multi-religious environment. I have heard this narrative of tolerance for each other on board many ships. There is many times a great respect for each others religion and normally religious matters do not interfere with everyday life on board a ship. Mohammed is saying that you are there to do your job, to obey orders and you can keep religious practices private. In private no one will disturb you.

The down side of this is that you might become isolated from support from others like John has experienced, but this narrative does contribute to an environment where everyone can work together in peace. Later, when I will share Ivan's experience we will see how it can lead to a very emotional situation if there is not a culture of accommodating each other.

Before we go there, there is another aspect about Mohammed and his story with Allah. When talking about seafaring with Mohammed he wanted to share something with me. I was not sure under which section to discuss this, but as it is related to his religious views I decided to share the story here. This was interesting and even though not what I was looking for or wanted to talk about it was where Mohammed wanted the interview to go. He talked about other things with me, but this was the actual issue he wanted to discuss. He was using what some would consider rude language (I am one of the ~~some~~), so I will use square brackets and leave the ~~rude language~~ out where necessary. This is Mohammed's story about the ~~secret~~ of the sea. This is important not because it is true or not, but it is, as I understand Mohammed, a narrative that is prevalent amongst seafarers.

Mohammed: Okay, now my aim is to be a seaman the time when I grow. [ ]. Now by the time when I arrived around 18, I decided to prepare my document, then I used to go the place where people they apply the job. So I meet with different seamen who they've travelled long time they used to give me the advice. Okay, so even me I was interested that job. Now by the time when [I] prepare my document I decided to travel to go different country to look for a job but it was very hard because people they used to say hard way is the only way. Because my aim is I want to be seaman so I didn't lose hope. I fight for my right till I get the job in the ship. Now, by the time when I travelled the ship I meet with people, they've already travelled long time. Now I see them, they're strong, they work hard job at sea, but me at that time I was feel lazy, I feel weak, people they just laughing the time when the sea is rough. I used to eat, but I'm vomiting I am not strong; even I'm not doing my job right. So now, you know, if you're working on the boat it's going by watch. Four hours, someone come to releasing you, four hours, someone come to releasing you. So now during my watch I am not, I am supposed to go to do my watch on the wheel, on the wheel house but I'm feel very weak. So even my captain he used to tell me that: "Okay, go and woke up boson, boson come here and he'll arrange the duty". We used to, to do watch, to come to watch for four hours but they decided to add one more hour for, for me because at that time I can't do the job, because I'm very weak. So now my friends they used to do five hours, instead of them to do 4 hours they do five hours because of me. Now I used to meet with people they used to told me: "Oh, you see the sea, the sea is rough and you don't know when it's gonna stop. Now you decided to be seaman, you've already spent the money, to go to school to learning, so if you decided to left this job people they will laugh at you." Even me too I love this job, but it was hard at that time for me to leave the job. And I love this job but I am very weak, I'm not strong at sea. So now I travelled for one year on that ship, then I decided to meet with different seamen. They used to tell me that: "You, you don't know nothing. It is better you to go to learning [ ]. There is another country called South-Africa. South-Africa, the document of South-Africa is recognized all over the world. Yah, so you are OS now." At that time when I was an OS I feel shame, people they used to tell me that: "You, OS, come here." Because I travelled the people they've been at sea for long time, now they're AB. You know OS is not a small boy. He's a big man also, because the job when you do it on the deck, AB and OS are same.

Chris: Yah, same job.

Mohammed: But the difference is rank. That man he got certificate of competence as a deck hand and you, you don't have a certificate of the deck hand as an AB, as an OS, because you start now at sea. So now, I decided to work on that boat for one year. In spite I'm weak, but I didn't lose hope, I didn't surrender. I work hard till I finished my contract one year, then I'm collecting my money. I decided to come here South-Africa. When I arrived here in South-Africa, I came straight forward to the seafarers college. I paid the money, I applied course for [ ]. I've done the course by the time I would have done that course there's one subject I've never finished. I didn't have enough money because I spent big money to travel to coming here, paid the hotel and the course is too expensive and there is no one supporting, you see. I'm working; when I get money I am going to school finish my course. Now, after that...

Chris: So you finished AB? You're now AB?

Mohammed: Yah, I finished the course for AB, now I am an AB, qualified. So now, before, I get an AB ticket I've done the course but there's some other course I've never finished. I look for the job, I get another job. I meet with one agent who got interest with me because [I have] a seaman's papers, he says: "Okay, I will give you job". By the time when the ship is coming from the sea, when the ship is arriving here, he give me the call to come and join the vessel. Now, I joined the vessel, when I joined the vessel I travelled the sea. Same story, I feel weak, I'm not strong, people they used to laugh at me, and there's some other people they're not happy, the captain he's not happy with me: "What kind of the seaman?" Now I was late to understand it, because the reason why me to get hurt is because God love me, giving me my brain. Because I'm learning the lessons because I know one day I am gonna be a captain. By the time when I, if I'm a captain and I see someone is vomiting, is weak, I already know what kind is this person. Because I just recite the name of God, I make a prayer, God is open me the door of wisdom. So now I meet with one man, his a English man, he used to tell me that: "There is something I want to tell you but I don't want to feel you sad: The sea doesn't need dirty. We know what kind of you. But you, you think maybe we don't know, you try to cover your face, but you, you can't hide it but we know what kind of you. The sea doesn't need dirty. You can be a good or you can be ... There's some other people they're good in their face but the inside is not good. And there's some other people they are ugly in their face but inside they're good. So, you look like beauty, you look like handsome, but inside it's dirty. That's why when you're vomiting, the dirt is coming out."

Chris: Comes out, Okay.

Mohammed: So you don't know, but we know. So, doesn't matter before, always they just thinking to do [ ], to do dirty, which is not right, because God is beauty, [God] like beautiful. So you can't say that you love beauty while you're dirty. Can't say that you love God and you pretend that you're beauty while you're dirty. It doesn't go like that. If you're a dirty, God He will not give you power. He can't make you to be strong to go and do hard job at sea if you are a dirty. But if you are clean, God love you and give you power. His gonna make you to be strong to go and do hard work at sea. So the sea doesn't need dirty. I'm gonna give you the secret of the sea now, that's why, the reason why me to calling you: the sea doesn't need dirty. You, there's some other people, every time they, they're just thinking to do dirty. Dirty like what? [He gives explicit examples and refers to homosexual activities] which is not right, because if you think to do something like that, all those will never see the Lord. If you think it to do something like that, and if God will never make you to be strong. Always you're gonna be weak.+ So now I realise by the time when I'm on bed I'm thinking [ ] from my friend, he give me nice advice. I decided by faith to fight with my heart. I don't want to fight with the peoples, because people if I look the people I look like all this people are my enemies by the time when I am vomiting, I am weak. People they just looked me, the captain give us the job, people they come to do my job. Why, I'm suppose to do my job, now people they come to do my job? So now by the time those people if they come to do my job [they] look like my enemy, but they are not my enemy. They just help me because you can't do the job alone. Because you're not strong, this job need you to be strong. Sea make you to be strong. So look [at] us, we're strong, because we're clean, we're not dirty. You, you're not strong because you're dirty. But we can't tell you anything, because if we tell you, you gonna start fighting and we don't want that. We didn't came here to fight, we came here to work.+

Chris: Yah.

Mohammed: So now, I decided myself to fight with my heart. Why? Because I don't want to do gay something. Gay, gay. So, original seaman [noise outside], original seaman doesn't vomit at sea, original seamen always when at sea every time they think to do hard job at sea. If you're a gay, you'd vomit at sea, you will [be] weak. But if you are a gangster, you can work at sea hard job, even if the sea is very rough. Because God He give the power to go and do hard job at sea. [ ]. Always they're very strong. And those people they're weak always they use to think to do dirty. So, the secret of

the sea I know myself. By the time I decided to stop to do all this nonsense, I travelled, the sea is rough, I don't think to [ ], every time I concentrate the word what God is saying, and I do the right things, I don't do [ ] things. I see myself, I am very strong. I say thanks God, God is help me now. He give me strong, He make me to be strong. So I can wish now to go more high seas later, Atlantic sea, because I hear the story the people they use to tell me that: %Here water is big, but the water is not boiling every time like the Atlantic sea. Atlantic sea is like a washing machine, if you're dirty, just now it make you to be clean. Yah, but now, I say thanks to God. I've been at sea every time when these people they used to give me advise, now I say thanks to God, He help me to stop to do all this [ ]. So, the secret of the sea: The sea doesn't need dirty.

When Mohammed finally got a job as a seafarer he found that he was weak, lazy and vomiting while the other men were strong. He did not quit, though, and even came to South Africa and did training for an AB for the sake of his career. After all the experience and the training he stayed weak and continued to vomit at sea. Then an English man revealed to him the %secret of the sea+. The English man was careful not to offend Mohammed but he said that he must know that %the sea doesn't need dirty.+ What he said was that if you are gay you are dirty and this will manifest in you being seasick: %If you're a gay, you'll vomit at sea, you will [be] weak.+

Mohammed bought into this, stopped and felt that he was no longer weak, lazy or seasick: %So, the secret of the sea I know myself+. Due to this narrative Mohammed shared with me he was very adamant that the interview should be anonymous and that I should not even include his country of origin. This is because he admitted that he lived a gay life previously and he did not want anyone to know about this.

So what should one do with this story and what does it mean? Firstly it is simply a story that I stumbled across. It is strange and unique in the same way that the story of the Neptune ritual that John related was. Secondly is this what practical theology in a postfoundationalist approach is all about: the research gets its life from its particularity (Müller 2005:79).

d. Ivan from Bulgaria:

Ivan had strong feelings about the way in which two Moslem persons behaved and he told me about this when I asked him about religious differences.

Chris: And Captain, now that you say, 20 years you've been now in South African ports, for 20 years? And, maybe something about your experiences, the standard, and working with other, working here with other religions, you're working with other nationality; you're working with people from other culture as you, yourself.

Ivan: Yah, it's very, it's difficult.

Chris: Yah, yah, I can think.

Ivan: That is what the truth is. It is difficult, I in person don't have a problem with different cultures, different religions, and all this thing, as long as they don't interfere with my own beliefs and my own culture. And talking about interference, if, if they don't force themselves in that way on to me. Yes, specially religious, the religious way, we have had a couple of incidence[s] you know. I had to, I had to tell a guy who was shouting his Islamic prayers, you know, to go and close the door in his cabin and pray there behind closed doors, without disturbing anybody else. I don't or anyone else doesn't disturb anyone else. And eh...

Chris: And you also told me about the cell phone that somebody put some [ ].

Ivan: Yes, yes and very recently. I believe it is a person of very senior position who was borrowing our cell phone from time to time and a few days ago by accident I've found actually he must be the one because nobody else would have had it in his hands being from the Islamic faith. He has put all these Islamic prayers and Islamic calendar, everything, even alarms for the times for every prayer to be activated, whenever, obviously he needs which is not right, which is not right. It is a total abuse of ethics and position of seniority and everything [ ].

Ivan is very frustrated and angry about the way in which some crewmembers express and propagate their faith. He tells of two times when a member from the Islamic faith had upset him. The first was when an Islamic person shouted his prayers so that he had to listen to it and the second time it was a person of senior position who had put some Islamic things like alarms for the times for every prayer+on a shared company



cell phone. Ivan saw it as a total abuse of ethics and position of seniority+

This type of frustration between different religions is in a sense just waiting to happen. This is not happening much though and I did not encounter a lot of it yet in my every day work with seafarers or in my research. I guess the reason for this is that a lot of seafarers tend to be very sensitive about this.

e. Noel from the Philippines:

With most of the interviews it took some effort to listen to the heavy accents of the seafarers and with Noel it was maybe the most challenging. This section is a bit difficult to follow, not only because of Noel's accent but also because he spoke in a staccato fashion that made it very difficult to understand. I asked him about his faith and he was at first not very sure what I was asking. At the second attempt he did understand better.

Chris: Captain, one last thing is maybe something about being a Christian on board, because you're Roman Catholic and for you as a Christian how, how is it, how do you live your faith? Because there is some challenges in the sense that you [are] not always with your family and not always with the church, but how do you experience your faith as a, as a, as a seaman, as somebody on a ship living away from home and eh... how do you experience your faith?

Noel: My faith?

Chris: Your faith, your, your religion. And how do you live that out because you are not part of your, you are far away from your family, you are far away from your church? In what way is God part of your life?

Noel: Oh yeah, okay, so when I started I still was single [ ] we have our family, also we are Catholic.

Chris: Oh, your whole family?

Noel: Yah and [ ] married to my wife, she is very devoted. [ ] she once even [wanted] to become a nun. And then so also Catholic organisation like she become a member of CFM, Christian Family Manila conference and that because I am not always there so

she cannot [ ] because mostly it is a couple, you know, but she continue [ ]. But if I am home we always [ ] with the family, with the church. And I always carry my rosary [ ]. And every Wednesday I pray the novena.

Chris: What's the novena?

Noel: Protectorer novena.

Chris: So even on the ship you keep that routine up.

Noel: I pray every night before I go to bed, I pray because here now [ ] crew [ ] Moslem, you have Christians [ ] the majority is mostly [ ]. But you must respect all faith. I respect their faith and they respect mine. Don't argue or talk about religion [ ]. So that's okay.

Chris: And you respect each other.

Noel: Yes. So, as long as [ ] you still have to pray, the weather is not good, you know [ ] so I respect [ ] my wife: %every time I always pray for you+[ ].

A lot of this conversation was difficult to follow but the narrative of being tolerant and being respectful to other's faith was clear. Noel believes that %you must respect all faith. I respect their faith and they respect mine. Don't argue or talk about religion [ ].+ They manage to get along through avoiding the topic of religion and they respect each other's faith.

Noel continued in privacy to pray, to use his rosary and to pray the novena. He was also able to participate in his church when he went home especially as his wife is a committed Christian. As I have mentioned Noel seems to be a person who has adapted well to the challenges of seafaring and I got the impression this was also true concerning his religious practices and his relationship with people from other religions.

One thing that I think is a pity is that they do not speak about religion at all. This can be very bad as a Christian needs to witness about Christ and a Christian needs to express

his/her faith. This is where the seafarers' mission is very important as the visit from someone from the seafarers' mission, or to the seafarers' centre can be an opportunity for a seafarer to witness and express something of his/her faith.

- **Alternative perspective**

In spite of the explosive issue that religion sometimes can be, even among people from the same faith, religious diversity surprisingly does not seem to be a reason for much conflict and tension between crew members. This does not mean that it is easy or never an issue. My co-researchers talked about religious diversity and also their personal struggles with faith and being a seafarer.

In this section I tried to engage in a hermeneutical process to come to an understanding of the religious environment on ships or at least on some particular ships for some particular seafarers. I did this through sharing and thinking about some of my own experiences and also through contemplating the insights that my co-researchers shared with me.

John said: "I can assure you now that on board ships [it] is one of the most difficult places you can live as a Christian." With this he was not just referring to multi-religious issues, but to all the different things that are making it difficult to live life as a Christian on board a ship. He gave a few examples. John said that he was at times under pressure to do idol worship. He said that: "The worship of idols, has been made to be part of seafarers' job. So that is the very first challenge you see when you are on board ships. You discover that they will do some rituals and they will ask everybody to participate."

The other challenge for a Christian, according to John, is the problem with staying faithful to your spouse. He says: "Because you are always away from your families, both male and female seafarers they are not very faithful to their spouses, you know. You need to struggle to be able to keep the, your faith as a Christian, while away from your family." He goes on to give a painful example of when he failed to be faithful to his

wife: %a I failed and I hurt and I failed. And, I, I, I did that for a couple of times and when I realized myself I only wake up [in] tears and it took me a very long time to get myself back.+

This overlaps with the insights concerning seafarers and their families, but what is being said here is mainly understood out of the perspective of John struggling with his faith. John says that as a committed Christian he had a different value system than the rest of the crew on all the ships he had sailed on before. John found that there is group pressure on ships and that being away from the support of your church community, your family and likeminded friends it can be very difficult not to give in to easy sins. Still, John does not see his faith as a burden, something that limits him and which hinders him in enjoying the freedom of his profession. To the contrary, it is something that gives him strength.

He says: %a my faith as a Christian, in fact all the years that I have been working as a seafarer has been a wonderful experience. It gives me opportunity of realizing that in the worst of situations that truly God is always there.+ John has experienced that his faith gives him strength and that God is there even in the most difficult situations. He said this while he was in the midst of one of the worst situations of his life.

He explained further how much his faith has helped him: %b if not for Christianity I cannot survive this long away from my family, maybe I would have fallen on the wayside and gone drinking or do those sort of things.+ It was clear that John missed his church community: %b I only want to say that the greatest challenge I faced in this, my own ship now, is the fact that Christians are falling away from the faith. So I lack people who, who we can always be together and built each other up.+ Even with support from people from the seafarersqmission he still lacked support from his faith community.

For John the hardest part was not to live together with people from a Muslim background, but rather to live with Christians who did not display Christ-like behaviour: %b Christians are suppose to be strengthening each otherõ + The spiritual loneliness

made life very difficult for John. For John there were a lot of challenges to being a committed Christian and a seafarer. He said: %can assure you now that on board ships is one of the most difficult places you can live as a Christian.+ The reason is that: % if you are inside the ship you will always be faced with the pressure, to follow the crowd +

This window into the world of seafarers is inviting those involved with the ministry to and with seafarers, to realize that many times there is a spiritual vacuum when going on board a ship. Those who are involved with the ministry cannot take full responsibility as if this can be eradicated completely, but it does show a real need that seafarers experience. Those involved with the seafarersqmission have to consider the role we are playing and we should consider the challenges Christians face when becoming seafarers. As seafarers wave their families goodbye there is a need to help them so that it does not mean that they are waving their faith goodbye as well. John shared precious insights into how even he strayed off the road once, especially because of the social situation he was in.

Narrative research is especially concerned about the out-constructed. The early Christians were known as people who reached out to the poor, widows, the sick, mine-workers, prisoners, slaves, and travellers (Harnack in Bosch 1991:49). This was not done to help the church grow, but it was only done as an automatic expression of Christiansqfaith in Christ (Bosch 1991:49). I am convinced that seafarers are part of the group to whom we are called. There is a special need that we should not leave our brothers and sisters on the oceans alone in their spiritual vacuums.

As an example of how there is a spiritual vacuum on board ships I met a Sri Lankan chief cook who came to a Bible study in the chapel at the seafarersqmission one evening. He was very appreciative of the effort, but he said that this was the first time in seven months that he had any opportunity of being together with other believers. I am convinced that most Christiansqfaith would be seriously challenged when they are not able to have any kind of fellowship with other believers for seven months. One of the

chaplains reported:

... so many times we find only one re-born Christian on the ship or one Christian between all the other religions and it is difficult to make a difference because everybody focus on this one person to see what he is doing. He stand out between all the other crew and sometimes they don't want to mix with them. So many time these men will burst into tears when we spend time with them and fellowship with them. They are very lonely.

If practical theology is happening when there is a reflection on practice out of the perspective of the experience of the presence of God (Müller 2005:73), John is showing us to reflect on practice out of the perspective of the experience of the absence of God. Not that God is not on ships, not that John experienced God to be totally absent, but it is sure that on his ship he experienced a spiritual vacuum. In the light of John's experience and for instance the Sri Lankan chief cook's experience we would do well to reflect on the practice of the ministry. To me Kverndal (2008: XXV) showed the way when saying that it is important that it is not just mission ~~to~~ seafarers but also ~~with~~. Mooney (in Kverndal 2008:174) states that it is important not to see a seafarer as a passive object, but rather as an active co-subject who participates in the mission work. He also points toward another type of strategy than the seafarers' centre approach as the only strategy to reach seafarers (Mooney 2005:19). So, John's experience is giving us a window into the reality in which seafarers are experiencing the absence of church and support from other believers.

Otto (2007:40) also emphasises the need for church on the oceans, when using the words of a Filipino seafarer who wrote a letter to his colleague Volker Lamaack. The seafarer wrote, amongst other things:

It seems that we are living in a different world, a world far away from God, a world abnormal in nature. We cannot attend Bible seminaries when we need it. We cannot go to church when we need to go there. We cannot hear the Word of God preached by somebody like priests or pastors or ministers. We cannot participate in Holy Masses during Sundays and holidays. Sometimes we even forget it is Sunday. There are times

of loneliness, being far away from home and families for so long. Sometimes we don't have the emotional support from our families when we need it most.

This seafarer goes on to say:

All these things are very hard to cope with when we don't have the strength and guidance coming from God. It is through God's grace that we are able to survive our job. Yet many of us are on the wrong way, a way which leads farther and farther away from God. We always sin against God. And that's why we need help. Please help us to pray and ask for the forgiveness of sins. Thanks to God, that you continuously look for those lost souls and bring them back to God.

It seems that seafarers feel disconnected and not only far away from their church, but also far away from God. If there is someone who can help with this and who can make a contribution in this respect, then it is those involved in the seafarers' ministry. There is a great need for spiritual support to the seafarers.

It should be added that it is also true that not everyone seems to feel that they need more spiritual support than they are getting. For instance Noel seemed to be content. He prayed, he said the novena and he used his rosary. He said: 'I pray every night before I go to bed...+His wife supported him by praying for him and it seemed that, that was enough for him. Trotter (2008:110) also pointed out that it is just a few seafarers who are interested at the seafarers' centre in anything spiritual. I can certainly agree with this, as percentage wise very few seafarers will attend a church service or a Bible study.

So, there is a tension between the spiritual vacuum in which someone like John lives and where he hungers for more involvement on the one hand, but on the other hand there is the reality that the ministry offered to the seafarers is not always successful or even necessary.

In response to this I would like to point out two things concerning the practice of the

church. The first is that the ministry should simply continue because that is what we are called to do and because mission work is part of the essence of being church as it is part of the essence of who God is (cf Bosch in Niemandt 2007:147). The second thing is that we should rethink the strategies of our ministry as Kverndal (2008: XXV) and Mooney (2005:19) suggested.

Firstly, to continue doing the ministry in spite of the reaction of those you minister to is based on God's love. Pieterse (1991:44) states that God is always taking the initiative to turn to humans and to reach out to us. Seafarers' mission is our participation in God's initiative regardless of the reaction of those who you minister to. Pieterse (1991:44,45) asserts that God uses humans as instruments in God's service, especially in communicating to others. The communication of God's Word and the love that God has for seafarers are what we from seafarers' mission need to communicate to others. The point is that this is a specific need seafarers have and if we are not concerned about it, no one else will be. This is our unique contribution.

Someone else can sell phone cards, give away old magazines, sell beer, provide internet, etc, but who but the church can communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ and minister to the church on the ocean? Only the church can minister to the church. Therefore spiritual matters are not something that those in seafarers' mission can simply neglect. The spiritual need that seafarers have is the one aspect that I would like to emphasise here at the alternative perspective.

The second thing is the emphasis both Kverndal (2008) and Mooney (2005) put on the ministry together ~~with~~+seafarers and not simply ~~to~~+seafarers. Rasser (2006:22) has written a review on Mooney's (2005) book and to him the whole idea of having ministry ~~with~~+seafarers seems to be farfetched. He says about Mooney: *Zijn idee is dat zeevarende geschoold en aangemoedigd moeten worden een soort mini-pastores te worden.* And: *bij dit ideaal heb ik twijfels.* For him it is better if seafarers simply do their jobs and do not try to be a pastor as well. He seems to be saying that the idea of ministry ~~with~~+seafarers is a bit idealistic and not really plausible especially if you take



the practical situation into consideration.

Theologically, Kverndal and Mooney are correct as the Holy Spirit was poured out not on only a selective few, but on all Christians (cf Küng 1995:163). This means that it must be possible, in some way or another, for seafarers to minister to each other as the Spirit is with and in seafarers as well. I can witness to the reality that ministry can be ~~with~~and not only ~~to~~because I have experienced this for instance at a Bible study meeting where one Filipino ministered to two others from a different ship concerning handling someone who was causing them difficulties on board. This Filipino who knew the Word well could minister to his fellow countrymen much more effectively than I could. While he was ministering to them they were listening to him attentively. I was needed to facilitate the meeting, we had to have the infrastructure of the seafarersq centre, but this shows that we can become partners with the seafarers.

I have also met a Filipino seafarer who was having Bible study meetings on board his ship. He gave me the book of Martin Otto (2007) which is full of stories of seafarers who actually did minister to each other. This seafarer was working in the engine room on board and although he did say that it was not easy to establish a Bible study group he did manage to do it. For example he once sent a text message to me saying: ~~Well~~[o] Chris gud afternoon! We~~d~~re still on anchor waiting order maybe tonig[h]t or tomorrow. Our BS [Bible study], only 2 attended the C/O [chief officer] and the 3/E [third engineer]. Praise God!+ As one of the chaplains also wrote: ~~They don~~ share very easily their faith but some are very bold. We were on a ship which was half Chinese and half Filipino. The Chinese did not want to listen to the gospel. The Filipino crew member realized they like music and play gospel music to them on the key board. Not long and they sang along.+ So ~~with~~is possible.

I could have discussed this reflection on practice later on in the section about the seafarersqmission, but I include it here because of John~~s~~ experience of the absence of the presence of fellowship with other believers and in a sense therefore the experience of the absence of the presence of God.

Another aspect that I would like to point out concerning the religious reality on board is the harmony on the ships in spite of the potential conflict that there can be with so many diverse religious opinions together in a small space. Noel said: %But you must respect all faith. I respect their faith and they respect mine. Don't argue or talk about religion...+ It is not only Noel who has this attitude of respect towards other faiths but almost all seafarers tend to be like that. One chaplain said: %When there are many different faiths on one vessel, which is quite common . the rule is not to engage in talk about religion / or politics.+ And another one observed: %There are so many faiths & denominations that seafarers have to keep their beliefs personal.+ So it seems that this can almost be called %The Rule+, you do not talk about religion.

Another reason, that explains the harmony between different religious groups, is that dangerous situations in a sense seem to unite the seafarers in prayer, although maybe to a different God/gods. Seafarers are every now and again in a situation where they are in fear and in crisis and in this situations, whatever religion they subscribe to, they pray. Jonathan did not say much about religion and his relationship with God but he did mention one time, before he was on board, when all the others were in a life and death crisis. He said: %So anyway, they just pray.+ They were at the edges of life and their reaction was to huddle together in the bridge and pray.

For Mohammed multi-religious relationships is not a problem and he kept on practicing his faith in a discreet and non-confrontational way: %Make sure that you're doing the job, if you do the time for prayer you just hide in a place, you just make a prayer.+ For him Allah is the one that gives him strength at sea, but you should be sure you are clean. You can also ask Allah to protect you when you are sailing: %So when we're sailing, do the time for prayers, people they used to make a prayer just, God protect us and help from Allah, and present a victory, [ ], make sure that by the time when we departure the port, the time when we want to return back which we're gonna return back safely so we can see our parents, we can see our family.+

One chaplain said: %It is very common for all humans to call on God when in distress . whichever God they serve.+ Humans tend to call out to God whenever they are in a crisis and at sea there are quite a lot of things that can cause a crisis. In some of the things Mohammed and Jonathan said it seems that this reality tends to shape the spirituality of seafarers. One of the chaplains said (concerning his experience with the spirituality of the seafarers) that: %Seafarers [sic] religions I have often found have strong ties with the cosmic. The cosmic are their world, it is the fact that they are constantly faced with the elements of nature, the sea, the wind, storms ... And often I see that their understanding of whatever God they serve correlates strongly with their experiences of the cosmic.+

This is his theory why seafarers get along so well in spite of many religions living together in such a small space. Mohammed has also put into words how seafarers manage to get along in spite of religious diversity and the problems that can potentially come out of this. He said: %There was no problem, because the, the aim, you came there to do the job.+ For Mohammed it is not so much the same God that is worshipped that brings him into a harmonious relationship with the other seafarers, but rather the fact that they shared one goal: everyone is there to do their job.

Mohammed did not only believe in the Koran though, he also had a strange superstition. He believed that if you participate in homosexual activities, then you will be incurably seasick. This is because, according to him, the sea will only accept you if you are pure and if you are not clean due to your homosexuality, the impurity will come out. Mohammed is convinced about this as he experienced it: He stopped being seasick when he stopped his homosexual activities.

Although this is a strange story and I have never heard it from someone else before, I did share it because I am convinced that this is a narrative that is accepted by other seafarers as well, at least in a limited way. Mohammed heard it from a British seafarer who is from a totally different cultural background than he is. So, this is not a myth that originated in Mohammed's home country and is therefore probably more widespread.

Mohammed linked this to his relationship with Allah. He said: %Because I just recite the name of God, I make a prayer, God is open me the door of wisdom.+ The door of wisdom opened through a %Englishman+who told him the %secret of the sea+as he took Mohammed aside one day and said to him: %So, you look like beauty, you look like handsome, but inside it's dirty. That's why when you're vomiting, the dirt is coming out.+ The %Englishman+went further and said: %If you're a dirty, God He will not give you power.+ And so he told Mohammed the secret of the sea: %I'm gonna give you the secret of the sea now, that's why, the reason why me to calling you: the sea doesn't need dirty.+ It would be easy to dismiss Mohammed's narrative but I do not think anyone will convince Mohammed of anything different: %So, the secret of the sea I know myself.+ In his experience this is the truth.

Another thing that was broadly related to this was John's experience of the ritual in honour of Neptune when the ship crosses the equator. In Mohammed's case I could not find anyone that has ever heard of this belief, but with this ritual I did hear it from another captain and a chaplain also said that she has heard of it: %This is very commonplace with all seafarers and many don't consider it as being wrong or worshipping idols.+ This might be commonplace, but seafarers tend to be very quiet about it. In around five years of involvement with seafarers I only heard of it twice and no other chaplain than this one reported of having any knowledge of it. I am not saying this is not commonplace, but that if it is there seems to be some secrecy around it.

The point is, though, that this is an understanding that seafarers have and these are social constructions that seafarers have to deal with. The construct about homosexual behaviour causing constant seasickness could result in victimizing (this is not the same as seeing homosexuality as sin) someone who is known to be homosexual. In the *Nautilus International Telegraph* (2011:24,25) mention is made that bullying is a common occurrence on ships as was found by both a survey done in 1999 and in 2010 by the *Nautilus International Union*. The survey done in 2010 revealed that 4% of the respondents reported that they have suffered bullying due to their homosexual

orientation. The problem with this narrative is that it is a thin one and therefore in many ways unfair.

Typically this thin story can lead to thin conclusions which pathologize people. At the same time there is the lived experience of Mohammed which I do not simply want to dismiss. In reality I do not know if in his case what he experienced was true or not, but it is necessary to be cautious of the effect of this kind of narrative concerning the potential it has to provoke bullying.

Concerning the story of the rituals in honour of Neptune, when crossing the equator, it is also a social construct which can lead to bullying. In the same survey just mentioned (*Nautilus International Telegraph* 2011:24-25) it is said that 5% of the respondents indicated that they have suffered bullying which was somehow related to their religious beliefs. John was clear that it was expected that everyone should participate in this ritual and for him this was clearly a sin and equal to idol worship. So it is evident that even though there is generally speaking an attitude of tolerance between the seafarers for each other's beliefs, sometimes faiths and beliefs do clash with each other.

This was especially clear in Ivan's narratives. He said concerning the issue of living together with other faiths: "That is what the truth is. It is difficult..." + Twice Ivan experienced some conflict with someone from the Islamic faith. Once an Islamic seafarer offended him by reciting his prayers in public: "I had to tell a guy who was shouting his Islamic prayers, you know, to go and close the door in his cabin and pray there behind closed doors..." +

On another occasion he was intensely affronted by someone who had put Islamic prayers on the company's cell phone: "He has put all these Islamic prayers and Islamic calendar, everything, even alarms for the times for every prayer to be activated, whenever, obviously he needs which is not right, which is not right. It is a total abuse of ethics and position of seniority..." +

In both cases it is not clear what the intentions of these two Moslem seafarers were, but it was highly upsetting for Ivan. This kind of behaviour is not common amongst seafarers and it is in contrast with what Mohammed, also a Moslem said: "if you do the time for prayer you just hide in a place, you just make a prayer." Ivan is fortunately a captain and could surely quite easily handle the situation. His case does show, though, that religion is still, potentially, a very sensitive issue which can make life on board intolerable. Ship owners, for instance, should keep this in mind when they simply employ a lot of different people together on a ship. Those in the seafarers ministry should also be careful to offend seafarers who are not Christians when handing out religious literature and Bibles as well as talking about Christ. I have visited a ship with predominantly Hindu crew where a chaplain in a previous port handed out Christian literature without asking them or considering what the crew's religion is. When I came on board the chief cook, who was a Christian, was offended by this and gave me the literature back. Even though it is our work as missionaries to confront people with the gospel it should be done with wisdom and it should be kept in mind that you can be so offensive that you are driving people away from Christ and not attracting them towards Him.

### **C. Injustices on board: Floating prisons**

#### **- Introduction**

If an owner takes no steps to rectify deficiencies discovered by an inspection, is it the case from the authorities' point of view that the crew simply have to continue to suffer unless a charity helps them out? This was an important question asked by a Nautilus/ITF inspector, Tommy Molloy (in *Nautilus International Telegraph* February 2011:7) when there seemed to be no action taken to help the crew on the Panama registered ship *Most Sky*. In this case the ship's owner did not take responsibility for the welfare of the seafarers and they had to deal with things such as not getting paid and below standard food. The feeling of being powerless to help is one which I also experienced especially in the cases of John and Jonathan.

Kverndal (2008:240) points out that when a seafarer is being treated unfairly it is

normally up to that person to stop the abuse but with possible consequences like physical violence to blacklisting, even arrest and incarceration.+ Sometimes one seafarer is willing to stand up but for legal reasons the union requires joint action. Some have too much at stake like money for their families, so nothing will happen to end the injustice. There are many injustices and many times the victims cannot speak out because of the dynamics of abuse. For instance, I knew Jonathan for a long time and the first time I learned about the captain's abusive relationship with him was when I had the interview with him.

One example of injustice which I encountered in Durban harbour was with crew on a salvage tug that was here for a few months. The crew was from India and they had to sail to India so that the ship could be sold for scrap metal there. The ship was so old that it did not make economic sense to repair it. The crew realized what condition the ship was in and therefore many were too afraid to sail. The big problem was that a tow tug should have two engines but this one had only one that was in a working condition. The owner did not want to spend a lot of money on a ship that will sail only once more.

The result was that the tension on the ship was just getting worse and worse. Some of the crew who were close to the end of their contracts were able to go home but they were replaced by other seamen who also did not want to sail with a ship that was not seaworthy. Before they sailed some of the crew were convinced that the surveyor would be bribed so that the ship would be allowed to sail in an unacceptable condition. A surveyor has to inspect a ship before sailing, especially after it was in for repairs. Whether he/she was dishonest I do not know but in the end they did sail with a crew that were very unsure whether they would reach the next port.

One of the problems was that the crew were not of one mind. Mostly they agreed on the condition of the ship as unacceptable but some did not want to take action and so in the end none did. A union was involved and did what was possible but the crew had to join forces and they did not. Before they sailed I talked about the situation to them and one of the engineers told me that he once sailed on a ship that sank. He was rescued

but some of his shipmates died. He felt that it is reasonable if he would die on the journey because he already had a second chance. Not everyone had the same level of acceptance.

I am happy to say that they made it to the next port in spite of the condition the ship was in. The chief cook took my cell phone number and sent me a text message that they did arrive safely. I do not know whether this ship was really unseaworthy and whether the seafarers were really treated unfairly but I did have a lot of sympathy for them and believe that at least they should have had more of a choice in this matter. It is their lives and if the engineers on board were not feeling safe there must have been some problem.

For me as a chaplain and missionary it was good to get to know these guys personally and to get involved with them. It was an opportunity to live out the evangelism and prophetic dimensions of mission. The evangelism dimension because in the course of the months they stayed in the port I could talk to both Hindus and Christians about God and I could give Bibles to them. The prophetic dimension because I also had the opportunity to support them in the situation of injustice and to encourage them, although in the end it could not be stopped that they had to sail to India.

Sometimes there is success. A Ukraine seafarer's wife was in labour and wanted to go home badly as he was finished with his six month contract. Normally the contract that the company has with a seafarer is the duration of the contract plus or minus a month. The reason is that the ship might be in a port that is not convenient for a replacement to join or for the seafarer to go home from. For instance if the seafarer is from the USA and his ship is sailing to the USA anyway he might as well wait till his ship is there before disembarking, even though his contract is finished. That is why most companies have this reasonable arrangement with the seafarers. It can also be that a replacement is not immediately available.

In this instance the Ukrainian did not have a strong case. The company did promise to



send him home, but his contract was just finished. The company could argue that they can keep him for another month. Why the matter was so urgent for this man was because his wife did not have support from family and they had a seven year old son who could not look after himself if his mother was in hospital. The company however was not at all concerned about the domestic problems of their employee.

As a chaplain I have to be. So I contacted the representative from the ITF for advice and he fortunately got involved. He spoke to the owner about the situation and when the owner heard he is from the ITF he agreed to send the man home without any further arguments. This worked out well, because although it was fair to send the Ukrainian home, it was not strictly speaking legally necessary for the company to do so.

A very positive thing as far as justice issues are concerned is that there are many organisations that are involved in changing the shipping industry to become a more just and safe environment. The ITF is one such organisation. Unions are very important role players to protect seafarers against abuse as they are constantly vulnerable to it. According to Kverndal (2008:211) in the early 1980s Christian missions were still involved in about 90% of welfare work among seafarers. When the maritime unions just started to form, those involved with the mission work did not trust them as they felt it had too much of a secular focus (Kverndal 2008:211). Later on, mission organizations came to realize that unions have a very important role and that they have important expertise and, on the other hand, the unions also realised mission organizations can be valuable partners (Kverndal 2008:212). Kverndal (2008:212) states that the relation between Christian missions and the other welfare organisations have slowly developed into mature relationships where there is a focus on mutual goals, but a respect for diversity.

The International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) is one of the organisations that campaigned the hardest against the Flags of Convenience (FOC) (Kverndal 2008:212). In 1981 the ITF started the ITF Seafarers Trust, which is a fund meant to help with the spiritual, moral and physical welfare of all seafarers (Kverndal 2008:212). Missions

have been the most important recipients of the funds due to the big role they are playing (Kverndal 2008:212).

Another important role player is the International Labour Organisation (ILO) which was founded in 1919 (Kverndal 2008:213). They are an inter-governmental agency of the UN and they bring people together from the government, employers and unions in negotiations (Kverndal 2008:213). Their aim is to improve and to monitor the situation of workers everywhere, although they have spent more time and energy on seafarers than on any other group (Kverndal 2008:213). The International Maritime Organisation (IMO) is also an organisation of the UN, but their focus is mainly on technical issues like safety and pollution (Kverndal 2008:213).

Although there are many organizations which are involved with protecting seafarers and their rights, many times seafarers end up in situations in which they seem to be beyond help, as is many times the case on fishing vessels. In general the working conditions on fishing vessels are the worst of all the ships that visit the port. The worst because of the small salaries and the way the crew are treated. Sometimes they will have five hours to sleep and the rest of the nineteen hours of the day they have to work. The work is physically very strenuous. Their contracts are extremely long compared to merchant ships, for up to three years. Once I went on a ship where the crew were not even allowed to have shore leave because the captain was afraid that they would desert the ship.

Douglas Stevenson (in Kverndal 2008:204) from the Seamen's Church Institute's (SCI) Centre for Seafarers' Rights said: 'If seafarers are the forgotten people of the world, then fishers are the forgotten of the forgotten.' Two types of fishers can be distinguished: 'artisanal', who are fishers who work on small scale ships or next to the coast, and 'industrial' who are normally working on bigger ships and who will fish in the deep seas (Kverndal 2008:205). The seafarers in this industry are particularly vulnerable because of a lack of regulations and the fact that few of these seafarers belong to unions (Kverndal 2008:206).

On these ships the crew are mixed with the purpose to weaken their collective power (cf Kverndal 2008:141). The one ship I got involved with was a mixture of Vietnamese, Filipino, Chinese and Indonesian crew. The officers were from China and the owner was from Taiwan. The situation on the ship got too much for the Indonesians. When the journey started for them they were six, when they arrived in Durban they were only five. Close to the coast of Mauritius one of the Indonesians decided to jump overboard and to try and swim to shore. The five did not know if he ever made it. For them the situation also got too much and they decided to desert the ship in Durban. One of the Chinese, the bosun, abused them while they were at sea. The bosun is in a position above the normal crew and he has to see that the captain's orders are executed.

The Indonesians were desperate and I, out of a research point of view became an active participant to try to assist them (cf Van Huyssteen 1997:267). Rubin and Rubin (2005:31) points out that you have to be aware to what extent you identify with the people you do research with and in this situation I identified with them to a very large degree. Not that they handled their situation professionally, but I identified with them because they were the victims and had to endure inhuman treatment. I felt that I had to try and help them in whatever way was possible.

The first thing to happen was to try and get the union involved with them, but in the end the union decided to withdraw from the case. With a union involved there was a slim chance to get them repatriated in a legal way but with the union out of the picture their only option was to go back to the ship or to desert. As a chaplain I tried to help them. I explained to them that it was their decision to desert but that they had to know that potentially there could be very severe consequences. They would have to be detained, maybe even in prison, and there they would be locked up with real criminals who could abuse them severely. This did not impress them as they were too desperate.

Part of their desperation was the fact that they tried to get their neighbouring ship, which also had Indonesian fishers on board, to attack the Chinese bosun. As was told to me

later, all the Indonesians teamed up against this bosun. Somehow the bosun survived this but one of the security guards told me that he had to try and separate them, so the port security maybe saved the bosun's life. Consequently they knew they had big trouble if ever they were back at sea without the back up of the other Indonesians.

On the day that the ship had to sail they phoned me and told me that I must help them and that they were waiting for me at the gate just outside the port. They wanted me to take them to the seafarers' centre but I could not just do that. A person from a union informed me that if I do that I could be assisting them in something illegal. For this reason the only option I could see was to try and set the process in motion for them to be deported and to accompany them through the process with the aim to make it as smooth as possible.

I went to the police, but the police tried to take them back to their ship and tried to convince them to stay there. They even tried to put pressure on the group of five to split up, but the five just stayed together. Together with the police we talked with the owner but the owner had no sympathy and said that on the next trip he would repatriate them but not immediately. After a while the police informed me that they have other things to do and went their way without any agreement being reached.

The fishers stretched out their hands to the police asking them to arrest them but the police refused and said that they did not break any law. The Indonesians went off the ship again and sat next to it on the quayside. While sitting there the security of the port also came to see what is happening but fortunately their sympathy was with the Indonesians. I could not be a hundred percent sure but the security said something about the owner asking them to force the seamen on board. They would not do it though, even for a lot of money as they really felt sorry for the fishers and long after this incident still talked to me about it.

The owner called some of the Chinese crew to come and search the bags and suitcases of the men while they were sitting there. It was a very degrading and

humiliating thing to do, I felt, but the Indonesians allowed them to do it without protest, probably because they were used to this type of treatment. Then, when they had taken out everything that was belonging to the ship, like chopsticks and two new sweaters, they left them alone. After this I urged them to rather sit outside the port area so that the owner could not harass them any further. I left them there and went to try and find someone from immigrations to help with the situation. In the end the people from the immigrations office did get involved and the Indonesians were then taken away by the police to their offices.

The whole process from then on was handled by the immigration officers but the men had to be detained at a police station. There they were kept in their own cell and they were treated very well by the police. The afternoon of the following day, escorted by security, the jobless fishers were going home. It was ironic that they were treated like criminals, while in my opinion the bosun, the captain and the owner were the guilty ones.

Afterwards I could not help but feel that so much of this was wrong. They were not criminals, but had to be treated as if they were. The real crime was the abuse from the bosun. Even when the police, aware of this, came with me to the ship, they did not question the bosun and did not even talk to the owner about this. All they did was to try and force the Indonesians back to the ship. It seemed to be a case of blaming the victim.

Fortunately the agent of the ship allowed the ship to sail before the situation was resolved. Even though I am not sure about the rules and regulations in a case like this, as I understand it from what the immigration officers told me, the result of this was that the owner had to pay for the fishers to be sent home and therefore they were not deported but only repatriated with the owner paying for it. Neither the agent nor the owner wanted me on one of his ships again.

At the immigrations office a few Filipinos from a merchant ship sat next to the five

Indonesians from the fishing vessel. The Filipinos were going home and were in a cheerful mood. The Indonesians were going home but they were downtrodden, to say the least. Some of the cheer of the Filipinos was partly because of work done by people involved with the seafarers' mission and the unions. Some part of the Indonesians being downtrodden was because of work not done by people involved with seafarers' mission and the unions. For me this is one of the most important things to focus on in the future for anyone involved with seafarers and who are concerned about their welfare. There have been a lot of success concerning justice on board merchant ships but the fishing vessels are the forgotten of the forgotten as Douglas Stevenson had said (in Kverndal 2008:204).

Another fact about fishers is the reality that mortality rates in this line of work is twelve times higher than in other high risk jobs (Kverndal 2008:205). The owners are making full use of the FOC system and combined with the absence of regulation and involvement of unions this makes the fishers extremely vulnerable (Kverndal 2008:206). So, for me, justice for fishers is one of the most important goals to accomplish in the future for people involved in the seafarers' mission.

The stories of injustice are something that lies close to my heart. With Eric, Ivan, Noel and Mohammed there were not really much in the interviews that we talked about concerning justice issues. Eric, Noel and Ivan have been on ships for many years and even though I did not ask them directly, it did not seem that justice issues were very important to them. The idea I got from my conversations with them was that they had long and good careers and that they were treated quite fairly.

With John and Jonathan it was much different. Their stories were riddled with unjust and unfair treatment. Firstly we will take a look at what John had to say about their uncomfortable situation on their supply tug.

- **The research characters**

a. John from Nigeria

John and his fellow crew members were a good example of how badly things can go wrong for seafarers and how, once they are in this situation, they are powerless to do anything about it. John came to Durban in order to take a newly bought supply tug to Nigeria. It was an old ship and the ship did not cost so much, but the owner misjudged the amount of repairs that would be necessary before the ship would be able to sail. This had far reaching implications for John and the others on board as we will see from his story. I asked him to elaborate about his experiences.

John: Yes, fact is speaking Reverend, when we were leaving our country we were informed... When, you know, we came in two batches. In my own batch I was informed that I should make provision for my families upkeep for not more than three months, that we would not stay beyond three months. So, when the second batch were coming they were informed, that they should stay; they are going to stay not more than three weeks. So, and when all of us got here, in fact when we were leaving there, we asked for, is what they call basic travellers allowance or something [ ]. So we were asking for the company to give us such money so that on our arrival you can use it to meet your basic needs and things like that. So they said no we can go that one, we can [ ] they are going to take care of us. So when we got there: One they didn't talk about our going home as promised again. Two, they didn't talk about any allowance again. So they changed their language now they began to say: No problem, when we are ready to go they [are] going to give us a kind of bonus, they are going to give us the kind of shopping money that we'll use to get some things we need for our families. And so, this particular thing when this begin to [ ] a number of us, we all felt deceived and we have been very angry about it. We sought the assistance of the ITF, the ITF asked us for a contract, whether we signed any contract back home, there. And we said: No+. And he said okay, we missed the point, that what they know from international law for seafarers is that before you leave your own country you're going to sign a contract with the ship owner stating that we are going to stay for this period of time and that need to be stated in that contract and then the amount of money he is going to pay you for that period of time also needed to be stated in that contract. Both of this we don't have and it has really impacted very negatively on our moral on board. So that is our particular situation. [ ] You know the ship was bought from here [ ] to be taken back to Nigeria, so and we hope we are learning our lesson in a very hard way. We are now in a situation where it is difficult for us to go home now and abandon the ship because: One, we are thinking that if you abandon the ship the so called bonus that the owner is promising he would not have it again. And maybe abandoning the ship as well would make you feel that you didn't fulfil the mission for which you came, because each seafarer will always feel very



fulfilled when he succeed in a particular mission. Maybe you are travelling with a ship from here to America [ ] you arrive in America you feel very happy, especially if you arrive in the ship. So these are some of the things that [are] facing us in our own present situation.

Chris: And, many times he has changed, he's told you, you are gonna leave at [a] certain stage and then again it's not happening. So he's making a lot of promises and nothing in writing.

John: Yah that is it. Each time he comes, what he does is that each time he comes he, he would give out some money like maybe R500 per sailor, per seafarer or sometimes R1000 per seafarer [and] says: Use it and pay for cost of your family: I am coming back in two weeks time, I am coming back in one week's time. So, immediately I am coming you guys are gonna be going.+ He makes these kind of promises. Several times and these are made us to become liars to our families, and made us to become liars to our friends and lead us to be, has ridiculed us so much. Like me, I made a lot of friends here in South-Africa and that in the course of this, making these promises I told these guys that I am going. And only for them to phone me after two weeks and I am still here. So it made me sometimes look very fake about myself. Alright, so that is how our situation is.

Whether the owner knew how long they would be staying in Durban is not clear and to make a mistake is human, but to not let his employees sign anything and to not make any promise in writing afterwards, is showing how he was clever enough to keep his options open while he limited the options of those he employed. He promised John's batch+that they will be back in about three months; he also promised that they would receive %basic travellers allowance+. This did not happen, but of course the owner always has the option of making another promise. This time the promise was that they would receive %a kind of bonus+.

With this last promise not materialising a couple of them felt %angry+and %deceived+. They decided to contact ITF but as they did not have a contract, ITF was not able to help them. At this point John realized how powerless they were and all he could say was: % and we hope we are learning our lesson in a very hard way.+ The promises continued as the owner would pay them now and again, and said that they must get something for their families as they are going home soon. This happened several times



and the impact of these false promises was that they in turn made incorrect promises to the people they knew here and their families at home. John said that due to this he felt very fake about himself as he seemed to be a liar to others.

John came to South Africa only expecting to stay here for a maximum of three months. It turned out that he stayed for more than a year. In an informal conversation he used the metaphor of a prison to describe something of the frustration he is going through and the intensity of it. I asked him about this metaphor and how he is sometimes reluctant to go back to his ship.

Chris: And you, something you said now was they are [holding] you here. And you have described it before, not now, but in another conversation that it's like a prison. And when you are at the club you don't immediately want to go back, it is like you want to postpone going back.

John: [Laughing] Yes, you see the truth is that the true picture of the ship is, it is even a more confined place than prison, because in a nice prison arrangement you have places for recreation, for sports, for basic things that you need to be doing to improve your life. But in our situation there, especially when you are involved with a small vessel, you discover that either you are sleeping in your cabin or you are just going around in just the same small circle. Seeing the same type of people, you know, and doing the same thing every now and then. So the routine becomes so monotonous and so tiring and so, you know, so frustrating and it's not uncommon for you to come in the ship, most times and you see us very angry with each other. Fighting with each other that has been very common with us except for one or two. In fact like me I kept very patient and there was a particular occasion where I got angry. And I wanted to beat James up. James is one of the colleagues in the ship. Cause he was always pestering my life, he was always troubling me, he called me all sort of names. There was a time when I got angry; I wanted to beat him up. But God took control and eventually I repented of what I did. So it's not really easy, just like in prison, and if I find my way out, just like most of my colleagues... if we find our way out either at Seafarers Centre or arriving in the city we don't feel like going back again, because as you are going back you are going back into the same [ ] situation, so to speak. So, that is the way it is.

John says that a prison is in some ways even better than what he is experiencing. The impact of going around in just the same small circle is that life becomes monotonous and that the social environment becomes a breeding ground for conflict. As I said before, John is a committed Christian and he has a strong character. But even he had conflict to such a degree that he almost physically attacked a shipmate, but God helped him and he came to his senses in time. This prison situation made everyone of them reluctant to return to the ship after they've been out.

Chris: Yah, it is because your social environment is not nice, the people around you, you are in conflict with them, but also then your ship is small and, the accommodation is not very, very nice and you need to shut the lights out, there is no electricity for some time, so it's uncomfortable situation.

John: Yah, you see that shutting off, of electricity is what you observed in my ship and you are right. In other ships that is not always the practice. But the way it happened was in our, little contribution to help the ship owner to get things fixed up, pay for his finances and all of his bills, and we start going. So we just on our own suggested that: "Okay let's see how we can rationed the fuel, so that we can save money for him for our going". And that made us to be using our power generators [ ] only for maybe half of the day. And the other half we have blackout. So this also added to our challenge, so to speak.

The ship was not just small, like a prison and full of conflict, they also had their own imposed blackout. Out of desperation to go home they decided to assist the owner and to endure for half of the day without electricity. They did this because in their state of powerlessness this was at least one thing, one little contribution they could make to hasten their release from ship-prison.

In John's case we see how easily seafarers can get caught up in a situation where they cannot get out no matter what they do. In Jonathan's case we will see how everyone, from the lowest rank to the captain, is vulnerable to being treated unjustly and unfairly. There are rules and procedures, but who will hold you accountable if you don't stick to it while working with seafarers?

b. Jonathan from Kenya

At the time of the interview they had not been paid for eight months and I asked Jonathan about this and how they were being assisted by those involved with them.

Chris: [ ] So but, at the moment, the, your ship you didn't get paid for eight months.

Jonathan: Eight month now. Eight month no pay. My first time I joined the ship, my first salary I got there from the ship, it was also four month. After four month I get the salary. The second time they pay me after three month, by that time now after eight months. I've never get the salary in time, never in time [ ].

From the beginning of his contract Jonathan was not paid on a monthly basis. After he joined the ship he had to wait for four months before he got his first salary. After this he had to wait three months and at the time of the interview it had been eight months since he received a salary.

Chris: So and total how long have you been on the ship, in total?

Jonathan: In total now is one, one year and 4 month, 16 month.

Chris: And how long was your contract, you had a specific contract?

Jonathan: No, just captain, because when the ship was coming Mombasa, was working there as a tally, tallyman. Yah, so I had document, always I would ask the captain: %want work in ship [ ].+ So good luck, one Indian going to go, [he] made problem. [ ]. So captain called me then I joined the ship.

So Jonathan was more or less in a situation of: %Beggars can't be choosers.+ He did not have any previous sailing experience and for a Kenyan to get a contract on a ship is not easy. He came to know the captain through his work in the port, and for the company Jonathan was cheap labour and someone who had to be thankful for the opportunity they were giving him. He was a convenient option for the company because he was an employee with no power to enforce any rights. They knew he was not about to insist on a contract or going to complain for not being paid every month.

Jonathan: So it was just, if my work was good he will keep me there, if the work was bad [ ] but I was lucky, I finished one year, now four months now I started.

Chris: Yah, and the..., at the ship on..., at the moment..., at the moment on the ship I understand that it was difficult because the ship needs to be auctioned. It was already auctioned and now it's sold and it seems that you won't get your eight months salary. So how, how is, how did that happen?

Jonathan: So, like to me, it is difficult because all, we are, we had hope that if they sell the ship, according to what they told us, ITF and the lawyer, they, they told us, they say that if they sell the ship, we'd be the first to get our salary and ticket, yah.

Chris: That was before the auction, they told you that?

Jonathan: Before the auction, before the auction. And then after auction, the first they told us it was around 40 000, yah, so he said to me, big problem there. Then after they told us, 300, now they came 9000, now it is 1.2. So when it was 9000 they told us maybe you get 80% salary, yah. So for us it was okay, no problem, it's better than nothing. Then when they sell 1.2, now they say maybe you get half of the salary. So our problem is we don't know what is going on. 90 000, no, 900 000 they say they'd give us 80%, but now it is 1.2, they can give us full salary but now they say maybe you get half, you get now 50%.

Chris: So the story changed after the auction? Before the auction...

Jonathan: [ ] now it is the final auction now they said now it's more difficult.

It is not so easy to follow what Jonathan is saying here as he himself got confused with the numbers, but as I knew what was happening I could understand what he was saying. The first amount he talks about is in US dollar: \$40 000. The second amount he mentions is 300 and he is actually referring to R 300 000. I know this because this was the amount the ship was auctioned at the first time and I attended the auction. This is not a big ship, but an amount of R300 000 is far below the value it would fetch as scrap metal.

What happened with this ship was that repairs were made to the ship and the company owning this ship could not pay for it afterwards. The only way to cover part of the costs for the repairs and the salaries of the crew, then about four months behind, was to try and sell the ship. The ship was around 30 years old and relatively small and therefore it only got R300 000 at the first auction.

The second amount Jonathan is talking about is R900 000, although he is saying 9000. After the very low price of R300 000, everyone involved was hoping that someone else will make another offer. And someone did for the amount of R900 000. So everyone was grateful but here the trouble started and emotions began to run high. Jonathan says: %So when it was 9000 they told us maybe you get 80% salary, yah. So for us it was okay, no problem, it's better than nothing+. The information they got was that they will receive 80% of their eight month salary and for Jonathan this was in a way acceptable because when it was only R300 000 the problem was that they might only get tickets to go home and nothing else.

The last offer that was received for the ship and the final amount it was sold at was R1.2 million. Jonathan and the rest of the crew were happy about this as they thought that if they get 80% with an offer of R900 000 they will surely get more than that with an offer of R1.2 million. Unfortunately now they were told that they will only get 50% of their salaries.

No one had control over the amount that the ship would ultimately get and there was nothing unfair or unjust about this. The problem was the way in which the company mismanaged the crew and set them up for something like this by not paying them on a monthly basis and in Jonathan's case not having a written contract with him. This made him vulnerable to become part of a drama like this. None of the people from the South African authorities who had to handle this case could determine the price the ship would be sold at. What these people did right was not to just accept the first offer of R300 000 but they kept the process going for about a week longer. The end result of this was that eventually the ship was sold at a much better price.

The problem was how the information was communicated to them. It made them feel isolated and it bred resentment and distrust.

Chris: And, are, are there some people that's helping you with this situation?

Jonathan: Our situation, okay, like me I thank like Mission to Seamen [SeafarersqMission], they have been helping us a lot for bringing the reports about the auction, last time they brought for us some shaving things, like that. It was good, but, we have never get any help from anybody. No help. [ ]

Chris: Okay, and, and other help like legal help. You get some legal people that's helping you like a attorney or somebody?

Jonathan: No, like you know me and Peter, we're getting some help from our other friends, Kenyan friends, yah, they know the situation so some they will come in here they can help you [with] the airtime, you can call home, but any other help no.

Chris: Okay, Okay. But I mean from ITF you get some help?

Jonathan: No, ITF no help. We never get any help from ITF, it's only Mission to Seamen.

Chris: But ITF is involved?

Jonathan: First we call them; even I'm the one who call ITF, yah, the one who called ITF. When they came, he told us, first he want to know if we are the members, in the union. We tell him: %No, we are not members.+ Then he told us, %Okay, even if you are not members, but you are seafarers I'd help you, yah, I'd help you, I'd bring lawyer, but the lawyer you are going to pay, 10% of your wages, pay 10% to your lawyer.+ So after, now we got problem that he say: %Okay now you are not members+, yah. So to him he says hard to help us because we are not members of ITF.

Chris: So, and that lawyer that you are paying 10% of what you get out is he helping?

Jonathan: Lawyer, to that I can say he's not, he's not help, yah. Because it would help me about the, our money it will be straight forward, yah. Okay, now the ship have to be sold already, the money is this, but now you're going to get... It would be better if he tell us we'd

get 10%, or tell us we'd get 50%, better you know that you're going, but now we don't know. He just told us: 'You'd get, you're not going to get 100%.' So he will tell us even if it is 80%, better, it's okay, I'd get this kind of money. Can be prepared, okay, you know what to do. But now we are just in darkness, we don't know what is going on. Maybe the last time, they tell us, okay, we are getting maybe 20%, maybe you are getting 50%, that's the problem. Now even if you can, even if you have your people, [ ] [you can] not tell them what you're going to get. It is better if you know, I'm going to get 80% you can be prepared. Okay, yah, this money I pay this, I'd keep this one for my, for my family, but now we don't know. Maybe now the last time they tell: 'Okay, it is hard, we will give you only ticket.' Because last time ITF was on board, it was on last Sunday he came he told us, now problem is the ticket. Yah, he didn't tell us about our salary. He tell us: 'You see now we sold this ship already, but you have problem with the ticket.' Yah, so we didn't know what the, situation [is], because when he told us problem is ticket, now we don't know maybe our salary we are going to pay our self, our ticket, we don't know. That's the problem.

Chris: So, a lot of time I've experienced that through this whole process, from 22 of December [2009] up to now, 29<sup>th</sup> of April [2010], you didn't know what was going on. Many times you didn't know.

Jonathan: Yah, like from 22, even we didn't know the ship is under arrest.

Chris: You didn't even know it?

Jonathan: Yah, we knew on February, 12, 12.

Chris: Only on February you learned about it.

Jonathan: Yah, and who told us, this security, this [ ] security. Yah, they don't told us, it was me and Peter who went there, so they told us: 'Your ship is under arrest.' All this time we didn't know anything. But captain knows everything, but he didn't tell us. He's just forcing us: 'You must work, you must work, you must work.' So, when we call ITF, ITF told us that they're, they're arrest this ship, but we're not sure. Until the day we saw the, this sheriff, [ ] when he came there, now he, when he want to see captain, he talk to captain, and when he came out even he didn't tell us anything. So that day we saw the lawyer, so he was the one who told us the ship was under arrest. But we heard some rumours just from outside people, but in ship, it's only one person who knew what is going on, captain, but he didn't tell us.

Chris: He didn't tell you. So, the first time you knew for sure was 12<sup>th</sup> February.

Jonathan: February 12, yah.

Chris: That was the lawyer that told you.

Jonathan: The lawyer was the one who told us that the ship was under arrest. But when he was telling us, even then we were not sure. Because you know maybe like this lawyer, it's just business. But after, when he called us together, he spoke, captain was there, then he told us: "Now this ship is under arrest." Now we knew the ship was under arrest.

Chris: So, from 22 December till 12 February you weren't sure, it was just you hear from security, rumours.

Jonathan: Yah, just rumours from outside people that: "Our ship is under arrest."

I would describe the situation as messy and confusing. The ITF officer did get involved and it is true that none of the seafarers was a member of ITF. So, any involvement from the ITF was based on goodwill which should be appreciated. The lawyer's payment was 10% of the crew's salaries. In the light of this Jonathan and the rest of the guys experienced that the lawyer was not communicating to them in a way that was satisfying to them. Whether it is objectively true or not, Jonathan and the rest of the guys felt that they were treated unfairly. He said: "We never get any help from anybody."

He said that he did get help from seafarers' mission as they brought them some packets with toiletries. What they appreciated more was the news and the information that they got as the communication with them by those handling the case was not sufficient. Jonathan's story is one of isolation and injustice. I tried to help them with information on some occasions and generally I simply tried to be a friend to them. The whole process was not handled in a transparent way and therefore they felt they could not trust anyone so I think that friendship was something they appreciated.

The real issue though was money of course as they and their families were in big



financial trouble. Jonathan said: %But now we are just in darkness, we don't know what is going on+. It has to be realised though that neither the lawyer nor the ITF officer could have known either and the process needed to run its own course before anyone could know for sure.

The problem was that the situation was changing the whole time and they even had to hear that they might be responsible for their own ticket as the ITF officer told them, according to Jonathan: %You see now we sold this ship already, but you have problem with the ticket.+ Yah, so we didn't know what the, situation [is], because when he told us problem is ticket, now we don't know maybe our salary we are going to pay ourself, our ticket, we don't know. That's the problem.+

There was a lot of confusion and all kinds of upsetting news were reaching their ears. This made the whole situation on the ship very tense and it made them also unreasonable in some ways as the captain for example once angrily took me to task as to why we, from the seafarers' mission, do not take out a loan to buy the ship so that they can go home.

What added to the stressfulness of the situation was the way in which the captain acted towards the crew. Even though I became good friends with the captain, Jonathan revealed another side to the captain which I did not know of before. One of the things that the captain did was to hide the news about the ship being arrested from the crew. Probably he did this out of fear that if they knew the ship was arrested they would stop working. Jonathan said: %All this time we didn't know anything. But captain knows everything, but he didn't tell us. He's just forcing us: %You must work, you must work, you must work.+ First they heard from the security (at the gate) that they were arrested, then only later when the lawyer told them in the presence of the captain were they sure that it was so.

The unfairness that Jonathan had to face was not only connected to the ship's arrest but it started even before this. Jonathan came on board the ship, as he already

mentioned, due to the help of the captain who he met as he was working in the port. The captain and the company took him in and Jonathan was thankful for the opportunity. It turned out, though, that there would be a lot of problems in store for Jonathan concerning his relationship with the captain.

Jonathan: Yah, crew and captain that's a big problem. Yah, that's a big problem that we have on the ship is only we are not together. See like master, just like a father at home, you must put your family together, yah. [ ] In case of anything, you'll see captain maybe, if there is big problem now you'll see captain and talk to him. But if something happen like, like even from company, company they can, they can, like there is a time, it was Christmas, not Christmas, it was Easter, last year. The ship was, we were coming from Seychelles to Durban. It was around 4 days to arrive in Durban. So when the ship arrive here, they bring some present from company for Easter. He didn't tell us anything. He didn't tell us anything. So we just heard those rumours from the one guy working the ship, yah. He [ ] tell us: 'Okay, there is some present, you get from captain?' We say: 'No.' And [ ] also all crew they fear him. Nobody can follow him and tell him: 'Okay, sir we heard this and this.' See, we just keep quiet, maybe one day he will give us. We sailed until the ship was in Mombasa now, June. Now he give us the present, you see? Even that last thing when you brought that stuffs, you see, most of them they told you: 'Don't give captain!' because if you give, he cannot give us. He can't give us. That's the problem we have in the ship, even when the ship was in dry-dock, in dock, those company, those who came to paint, they bring some t-shirts, some caps, he didn't give us. And he told us: 'We already give captain something to give you.'

Chris: To give for you and...

Jonathan: Yah, until the time he heard that the ship was under arrest and crew are going home now he give us those t-shirt. He give us the t-shirt, even some people they refuse, they tell him: 'Okay, we don't like it, you better keep them.'

Whenever the captain would receive something to give to the crew he would keep it back and only later give it to them. This bred a lot of resentment against him as the crew found out from other sources that he had received it and that he did not give it to them. When finally they received it some said: 'Okay, we don't like it, you better keep

them.+ This was the reason why, when I brought them some packets with toiletries, they did not want me to take it to the captain out of fear that he will keep it back. This type of behaviour would not be considered as a real justice issue but the captain's behaviour, especially towards Jonathan, was not limited to this only.

Jonathan: And also last, like last year when I joined the ship on February. If you join the ship they must give you towel, boiler suit, those kind of stuff, it must be... Since I joined the ship I've never have that. I just get boiler suite when the ship was in Seychelles on August. Yah, but I came with my own overall, my own, till now my safety boots that are finished, but I still have, and he have. So it was on March he s..., last month, now he start giving people these towels, some t-shirts. He call me. Me and him, I said, me and him, I'm not in a good mood with captain, yah. Because most of the time, I don't like maybe, if I know, this thing is wrong, and you want to force me this thing to be correct, me I always refuse. Yah, so there's a time last year, when the ship was here. When I joined the ship, I didn't have boiler suit. They brought from the company, new boiler suits, towels, bed covers, and a blanket, for crew. Captain was there, he took all stuffs and put in his cabin, even he don't put in the store, he just put in his cabin. And then he went home, he went there for vacation. So, when he came back my overall was finished, so I decided now to use the, my normal clothes. And our second officer he didn't like, he just say you must use boiler suit, the company boiler suit. So I didn't have. I told him, I don't have. And then the, our, our, this guy Deon, he visit the ship, he find me, my overall is damaged, full damaged. So he asks: %Who is this guy?+ They tell him: %His our, his our crew.+ He call me he ask: %What is your name.+ I told him: %My name is Jonathan.+ %Why you look like this?+ [I] tell him: %Sir, I don't have boiler suit.+ %Who give you this one?+ I said: %This is the one I joined with, when I joined I joined with this boiler suit.+ And then he called the chief officer. %Why this guy is different from other guys?+ He say: %It's captain who is suppose to give him boiler suit, I can't give him.+ And then I didn't talk anything, I just continued my duty. When captain came, also I didn't tell him anything. And then after two days I talked to chief officer: %Please, you can talk to captain, I don't have boiler suit.+ Now it was just damaged, even, it was just damaged.

Chris: Yah, holes and dirty, yah.

Jonathan: Yah, my, I'm just like, like naked. Yah it was just [ ], so I decided because the people they are coming on the ship they see me like that...

Chris: Yah.

Jonathan: Yah. I decided I use my clothes. So I was just using short and t-shirt. They find me on duty: %Why you dress like this?+ I didn't talk anything. I just said: %Excuse me, I'm sorry.+ I just went inside I take the same, same boiler suit, I put on and then I came on gangway. And then he came, saw me like that. He tell me: %You must have boiler suit like this.+ I told him: %Sir, what can I, how can I dress like this?+ I didn't talk anything, I went inside. So, the boss, because the ship is just near the office, the boss is on top there, he was watching me. And then he sent me the messenger from the office, there's one guy working there, he call me in the office, I went there: %Why you dress, we saw you, in civilian, now you put on boiler suit, and the boiler suit is not good, why can't you get the new one?+ I tell him: %I don't have new one.+ %Why don't you ask captain?+ I say: %I asked chief officer but he didn't give me any reply.+ So they call chief officer in the office. %Ah, why this guy is working like this?+ He say: %I talked to captain, but he didn't give him.+ And then they just leave like that. Imagine captain give all people boiler suit, didn't give me boiler suit.

Chris: But not for you.

Jonathan: Yah! So I was [ ] just same, same size. He give me the one he was using and then he use the new one. He didn't give me anything for sure. Till when the ship, the one he gave me, I use for six month. It was in the same, same situation again. I was using also my clothes. So there was another chief engineer on the ship from Sri Lank..., from Pakistan, he is South African. So he's the one who tell me: %Why you are wearing this?+ I say: %Sir, what can I do now? My overall is not good. Also Peter he was like that, me and Peter were like that. So he give Peter boiler suit, because Peter, another one was big to him. But because his size and Peter are same, he give Peter. So captain he tell: %Give all crew boiler suit.+ To me he didn't give me. So I was angry. I didn't feel good. Yah, I didn't feel good. And then I went to chief engineer, chief engineer: %Why, this now is second time, yah. He's giving new overall, but why don't give me overall?+ Chief engineer telling me: %I cannot help you because I'm not, you're not working in the engine room, you're working on deck.+ Yah, I understand him, I went to chief officer. I ask chief officer, the new one now, but this guy also he cannot talk to chief, to captain. So I decided: Better to me to go and talk to him. I know. I ask: %Sir, I don't have boiler suit again. You give all people boiler suit, towels, but me you didn't give anything.+ He tell me: %You have you, I saw you working there your clothes, so

you use your clothes, when the ship will leave in Durban I will give you new boiler suit, just like that. Okay, I decided [to] use my clothes. So I, I, one day I was working I saw him talking to chief engineer. So the ship went to [ ], there came those port authority, those, the custom officer, officers, they're coming on board. So I was the one to receive them, [ ]. So when I went to them they asked me: %Who are, you?+first. I tell them I work in the ship. %Why you work like this?+ So this people, the one who talk to captain: %These guy is your crew member?+ He says: %He's my crew member.+ %Why his like this?+ And then in that time I just tell them, yah, tell them: %Listen, when I joined the ship I've never have the boiler suit in this company. This is second time they give all crew but they didn't give me like anything. So it's better you ask him.+ And then they tell captain: %This [is] not good, it's against the law, you can, you can, we can take you in the, you can call this cap..., this port captain for this issue.+ So captain he was very angry with me. And then he give me in front of them, he give me boiler suit, but it was not in my size, my size was there. So when he give me I put on, it was short, even I cannot pull the zip. It was for Jovin's size. So I decided to give one crew, one there, those guys who work in port. I saw he had another big, I said: %Excuse me you take this one, I take this one.+ So it was new, he liked it. I give him and I put on. So of course he was angry: %Why you changed?+ I tell him: %Sir, it is not my size, how can I put on this one?+ So from then, me and captain big problem.

Jonathan tells the story of how the captain treated him unfairly and how he had to stand up for his right to receive something as basic as a boiler suit. It is of course not just on ships that people with authority in the work place use it against those working under them, but what makes it really difficult for seafarers is that they have to live with those misusing their authority 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. Jonathan's story has a lot of detail and the impression I got in the interview is that this treatment of the captain is even a more serious matter to Jonathan than not getting paid for eight months.

The captain refused to give him a boiler suit even though there was no apparent reason for it. This happened more than once. During this time Deon, a local Indian man with a high position in the company, found out about it but even he did nothing to help. Some other officers on the ship knew about it but they also could do nothing. Jonathan decided to talk to the captain himself but the captain just said he will give it to Jonathan later and that he should use his own clothes.

For a second time the rest of the crew received boiler suits but again Jonathan was left out. He got an opportunity to tell the custom officers when they came on board and he said to them: %listen, when I joined the ship I've never have the boiler suit in this company. This is second time they give all crew but they didn't give me like anything.+

They told the captain that it was against the law and the captain gave Jonathan at last a new boiler suit. But again the captain was up to something: the boiler suite was far too small for Jonathan. Jonathan changed it with someone else's who was working in the port but this also made the captain angry. This was unfair treatment and even though I visited the ship many times and knew the captain well I was not aware of this continuous drama going on between Jonathan and the captain. The captain let Jonathan work in his own boiler suit till he was %just like, like naked.+ This is why Jonathan said earlier: %Me and him, I said, me and him, I'm not in a good mood with captain, yah.+

So far Jonathan told us that the captain kept complimentary gifts back that were meant for the crew, he kept information about the ship's arrest from them and he did not give Jonathan a boiler suit to work with, but this was not all.

Jonathan: Yah, I tell him in front of them. So, me and him, we had problem till now. Till now, me, me and captain, he can come in front of people, he can talk to them, but if I'm there he cannot, even if I ask him, he cannot answer me. Yah, so the former chief engineer is the one who tell me: %You just work like that, don't force him to tell you anything. If you have any problem, you better [ ]. So, if I have my own problem, I cannot talk to captain. I cannot talk to him. Other problem: If captain is not good on board, most problem, we crew we get. If captain is good then everything is fine. Yah, but now if captain is not good, because like our captain, he's the one to control everything, everything. He's captain, same, same time he's chief officer, same, same time is he also controlling up to the galley. Yah, so if, like chief officer is there, he's, maybe he can give the document, he must sign by captain and chief officer, but he find he have to sign everything. Okay, chief officer is junior, he don't know anything, but he have time to train him, because the ship is small, he can train him to be a nice chief

officer. But his problem he cannot train anything, but always just blaming: %ou people don't know anything what, what, what, what.+ [ ]. Even like in food. Company they can bring everything in the ship like drinks, water, everything. But you find those stuff like water, you don't drink mineral water on the ship. And water is there. Yah, like last time we had problem in Seychelles, the ship was in Seychelles, we stay in anchorage one month, in anchorage. So we didn't have water, all tanks they are dry. Even we open the manhole, we went inside the tank, the water is very small, and it's dirty. Water is like tea. Imagine you're forcing now to take that water, you give cook to make food [with] that water. And he have water. We have water around, around the twenty cartons of mineral water, but he cannot give.

Chris: He refuse to...

Jonathan: Yah. So if you want to take shower, it was problem. If you want to go in bathroom you are using seawater. And the port is not far, you're in anchorage, you can bring the ship there, bunker and then he go back. But imagine he refuse. So all people they are using the same, same water. So when it's rain he tell us: %Okay, you take the [ ] outside when it rain, you get some water.+ So once it's rain, the ship has dust, all water is dirty. So he force that water, he use that water to clean there, even plenty are cleaning the seawater. So it's the same, same water we are using to cook. But his food, he tell the cook to use mineral water, to make his food. So there's a problem, till now. Even company they'd bring, if they bring like yogurt. Yogurt, till now, you'd find the yogurt had give us maybe two to three days to expire. Seriously, even if you ask anybody in the ship. You get Peter [ ]. And the date they're near to expire: %Now Peter, okay, you give them.+ Like me I cannot take. Because it's not good, yah, it's not good. Sometimes there's a day they give us, it was expired maybe one day, he give us: %Okay give them.+ People they refuse. Yah, and the problem even if you report him to company they can't do anything, they can't do anything. So the problem we have on this ship. But I see, this small companies, maybe if you get company maybe with one ship, maybe two ship, most of them have problem. Yah, they have problem you find that captain the man his getting small money, yah. So he must do his own kind of business there maybe [ ] shorten things, drop money there. Because I see other companies captain is only six months if it's too much maybe nine months [ ]. The captain now is four years.

Chris: Four years.



Jonathan: Four years on the ship, yah, he's still there four years on the ship.

After the unpleasantness between Jonathan and the captain the captain ignored him. He says: %6 even if I ask him, he cannot answer me+, meaning that the captain won't answer him. According to Jonathan the captain's influence was everywhere and that even the company would not easily interfere with him. The captain would use his disproportionate amount of power to control even things like the food that is supplied to the ship. He would keep yogurts back till it is almost expired.

Once when their ship was in outer anchorage outside Seychelles, their water supplies were so low that they had to use rainwater. The rainwater and the little bit of water left in the tank was not pure but the captain forced them to use this and to cook food with it. This while %the port is not far, you're in anchorage, you can bring the ship there, bunker and then he go back.+ All the time the captain was using mineral water for himself.

Jonathan explains the reason for this behaviour as the consequence of the fact that the company is small and that the captain therefore needed to try and obtain money in an underhand kind of way: %So he must do his own kind of business there maybe [ ] shorten things, drop money there.+ This is also the reason why Jonathan believes that the captain has stayed on board the ship for four years. The captain told me that it was three years. Jonathan continued to tell me even more about this behaviour of the captain.

Jonathan: It's not nice. Even sometimes, like our ship, we didn't have proper working time, we didn't have proper working time. If, if, if captain said, he tell you, you're only sleeping night time, day time you must work. In the ship you must work eight hours. More than eight hours is over time but like in my watch, because me and Peter we are not [ ] so I was wake up four o'clock morning. I can work from four o'clock morning up to two o'clock morning. You work there, all morning, day, evening, won't reach six o'clock even he'd give us another job, [ ]. We work, all people work. But now problem is other crew, some they work maybe they come on duty maybe ten o'clock morning, some they came three o'clock morning, some they come night time. But all they work together till two o'clock morning. And then at two o'clock morning, imagine himself, he



know: %Okay, this guys tired. He cannot wake up four o'clock, you see. You find captain himself he come to wake me. Fifteen minutes to four o'clock morning he come to knock [making knocking sound on desk]: %You must come on duty+. So my problem was [ ]: He tell us go and sleep. Okay, I know my watch is four o'clock morning, I must wake at four o'clock. But we work, I work more, more hours. Maybe I worked around eighteen hours or twenty hours. He must understand that [I am] a human being: %This guys tired, let him rest maybe nine, ten o'clock, is okay.+ But you find he come to wake me. So sometimes I was angry, I ask him: %Sir, you woke up two o'clock, that two o'clock someone is suppose to be on watch. Yah, but he tell all: %You can go and sleep.+ But before he woke me four o'clock morning. How can I sleep two hours? We finish two o'clock, you must take shower. Even [ ] problem is [ ] okay dinner time must be at maybe six. He go to eat and leave us on duty, [while] we [are] still working. And he tell us: %Don't stop working, you must finish and then you go to eat.+ So when we finished, and also cook, cook cannot sleep. How can he sleep and crew they [ ] not [ ] eat, he must wait [for] us. So sometimes, cook will even he come on deck and just sit there until we finish, all together we finish that time and then we go to eat, after we eat, we go to sleep. Okay, after you finished to eat you want to take a shower, maybe it's one hour, to shower and eat is one hour.

Chris: And then one left.

Jonathan: Yah, so then one you go to sleep, he wake you up for five minutes, he come and open the door. So there was a day, here, the ship was here in Durban. In this August, not August, it was in October [ ] after dry dock, when the ship was just in the jetty here. We worked up to round eleven. And then he told us: %Okay, the crane is coming we want to [ ].+ That job is not easy job. So we ask the chief officer: %Please talk to captain.+ This job, better call the crane morning and then we work this job, even if we work until evening it should be better.

Chris: Yah, one whole day.

Jonathan: But the problem now, he wants us to do our normal duty first. And then after that he call the crane eight o'clock night time. As we are still working crane is there. One crane [ ] guy he tell us: %Okay, prepare those things to be ready.+ When we prepare, already crane is ready. Now we start working. That time cook is ready. We cannot go to eat. We work, maybe until midnight. When we finish midnight he tell us: %Okay, maybe cranes now they're finished now going. Now, you must clean that place

again, what about morning? You see, you must clean.+ So there was a day I was angry, I tell them: %Guys, let us talk to him. Yah, this job is too much, this ship is not sailing morning. If the ship is berthed, maybe the ship is sailing morning, Okay, we know, it matters.+

Chris: But there is no emergency.

Jonathan: The ship is in dry-dock, yah, it's in dry-jetty. So we ask him: %Sir, wedd clean tomorrow.+ He was very, very angry. %Why do it tomorrow? You must finish this job! Tomorrow you must do other job.+ Okay, we clean, we finish around one o'clock. After finish the same, same time he want me to wake up morning. That time I said: %I not wake up.+ I just sleep.

Chris: He want you to wake up four o'clock.

Jonathan: Yah! I sleep. But even I cannot sleep, yah, I wond sleep, yah, because I know hedd come to wake me. Okay, he came to wake me: %You wake up!+ Okay I wake up, [ ] I came back inside. And then Peter told me: %You dond go outside, you just stay inside.+ Yah, I just sit inside. When he came again to knock, I didn talk, Peter was the one who talk to him. Peter talk to him, I saw captain was angry: %Okay now you make plan. You people do not work, now you must go home.+ I was angry at him: %Yes, I am ready, send me home, yah, you send me home.+ And then I went outside, sitting outside, I came outside. When he came in the mess room I was not there. He asked: %Where's Jonathan?+ They tell: %Jonathan is outside.+ %Go and call him to come inside.+ %Already take your breakfast?+ I said: %No.+ %Take your breakfast, go in the hatch. Go and take out water in there, in the tank. The people they're not working there.+ So, I just take breakfast, I went there I sit taking water. So these guys, Elgin [the name of a repairing company in Durban: Elgin Brown] people, they asked me: %What are you doing inside here?+ I tell them I must clean this tank. %For what, we're not working here? You will clean but also today we are going to fit, we are going to put water because we want to see if it's leaking there.+ %So ] it's the order, I must obey the order, yah. Because I am here to obey and follow this orders.+ He told me [ ]. There is one guy, it's Indian guy, tall guy, working Elgin, he went to captain, he ask: %Why you tell your crew to clean the tank and now you want to put water?+ So he was ashamed, and then he tell me: %Okay, leave the job.+ I leave the job.

Chris: So it was a job for no purpose.

Jonathan: Punishment.

The problem with the captain went further in that he did not let the crew work within their normal and proper working times. Once Jonathan had to work till two o'clock in the morning and the captain himself came to wake Jonathan up for his duty at four o'clock: We finish two o'clock...+

Dinner is supposed to be around 18:00 but sometimes for some reason it will have to be postponed and then the cook's working hours will also be affected. In the meantime the captain will take his dinner at the normal times.

He tells about one incident which happened in Durban, very similar to the one when he only went to sleep at two and had to be up at four. They started working only at eight one evening with a job involving a crane. The job was finished at twelve that evening but then the captain expected them to clean up as well. This job they completed at one in the morning and then the captain expected Jonathan to start his duty again at four. Jonathan did not want to and the captain threatened to send him and his friend Peter, who tried to speak on his behalf, home. Jonathan said that he said to the captain: Yes, I'm ready, send me home, yah, you send me home.+ Purely as a form of punishment the captain gave him and unnecessary job to do.

Jonathan: Yah, it was punishment, it was punishment. So that's the problem, if captain is not together [with] the other crews it's big problem. It's big problem, it's very big problem. Like now we had problem on the ship who's under arrest. We don't have salaries. In the ship we have too much scraps. Okay we tell captain: Sir, if possible, why don't you sell these scraps, at least you can get money for credit, we can call our people, we can buy airtime.+ He say: No, these scraps, let us keep them until the last day we sell them together.+ And then we have this ship's under arrest you can't take anything outside. And then the problem they were too much. Now we want to call our families. [ ]. He says the ship is under arrest, you cannot sell scrap. And then we ask him: Why can't you ask the sheriff police, that sheriff court, that: My crew they have problem. And this scraps, if you can allow us to sell these scraps, so that we can have

airtime to call their family.+ Yah, because they're human being[s] they'd understand. Yah, he said: %No.+ And then the guy came on the ship, and we asked him: %Sir, can we sell it, can you give us permission to sell these scraps, so that we can have money to call our families?+ He says: %I'm going to ask the court. If they'd agree I'd allow you to sell this scrap.+ He went, after two days he came he tell us: %Okay, you can sell this scrap, but first talk to captain.+ Captain didn't tell us anything. This guy came out we didn't ask him anything. After three days he asked us: %Why this scrap is still here?+ We tell him: %We asked permission but he didn't answer, sir.+ %I talked to captain we must, you can sell this scraps, yah. You can sell the scraps and give you the money.+ So it was hard [ ] to go to captain and ask him if we can sell. And then after [he] is the one who say: %Now, we want to sell the scraps, yah, so that you can have money if you want to hold your thumbs, then hold your thumbs.+ We tell him it's good: %Let us sell the scrap.+ And then he went out, yah, he went out on Sunday, and bad luck, he meet the thugs there, they steal his phone, yah. And when he came on ship he was very angry. He say: %Now you people, when I was going in the church...+ Because when he was going, by that the time we talked to him: %Sir if possible, you call [ ] to come and take the scrap.+ He say: %Okay, we call them but, but tomorrow Monday, not today Sunday.+ So when we talked to him, imagine when he came back he say we're the one, when we talked to him morning it was like, it was like bad luck to him he went out people steal his phone, yah. And then he stopped to sell the scrap.

Chris: So up until now it's not sold.

Jonathan: Yah, didn't sell them, they're just there. So now the ship is sold, small money but we lose everything, scrap,...those scrap we take from the hatch, even the hatch, there [are] too much inside there, they're too much. Even in front of there too much, we put them together. But now we see we spent our energy putting together for nothing. Now we lose, we lose.

The captain did not want to help the crew. The captain had enough money for calling his family but the rest of the crew were having a tough time as they have not received money for eight months. They had a plan that could have worked was it not for the captain. Their plan was almost successful as the sheriff from the court granted them permission to sell some scrap metal which was lying around on the ship. Unluckily for them a day before the scrap metal would have been sold the captain went out and got robbed. When he came back to the ship he blamed the crew and said that it was bad

luck for him that they talked to him before he went out. He blamed them for the loss of his cell phone and therefore he refused to help them any further.

When talking about justice issues and unfairness on ships the story of Jonathan is a good, if extreme, example of how things can go wrong for a seafarer. From the start he was vulnerable as he did not have a contract. He did not get any money for the first four months, then for the next three months and lastly he got a percentage of the eight months salary that was owed to him. In addition to this the captain treated Jonathan and the crew unfairly. Jonathan and the rest of the crew were in such a bad situation and there was not much help from anywhere. I did not even realise what the captain was doing before this interview. It seems that one of the first things the victims of abuse lose are their voices.

c. Douglas Stevenson: A transversal interdisciplinary conversation with maritime law

I asked Douglas Stevenson, a maritime lawyer and Director of the Center for Seafarers Rights of the Seamen's Church Institute (SCI) of New York/New Jersey, to respond to the three questions proposed by Müller (2009:227). I asked him to respond to the stories of John and Jonathan as I suspected that we shared important concerns around which there could be a transversal interdisciplinary connection. I had sent him a summary of the stories, which is attached as Addendum B. His response, I am convinced, is valuable and shows that different disciplines can connect in a productive way with each other around shared problems. I would like to include his response, as he gave it, and then afterwards digest what was said. His response was relatively brief but insightful and opened important new perspectives.

1. When reading the stories of John and Jonathan, what do you think would their concerns be?

I don't like to speculate on what their concerns would be. You should ask them to tell you their concerns and then attempt to provide answers or

solutions to their concerns. It is not always possible to resolve all of their concerns, even when they are in the right from a legal perspective. But, what can be very empowering for them is for them to receive an honest appraisal of their situation and some advice on how they might proceed. In many cases, seafarers are adequately protected by the law, but there might not be a practical remedy for them. For example, seafarers wage liens have a very high priority and should be paid before other liens. But if the case drags on, expenses of maintaining the vessel while under arrest keeps growing, and if the vessel isn't worth much, an auction might not produce enough to pay the wage lien. In other situations, a seafarer may wish to forego his or her legal rights for some reason that is more important to him or her. For example, seafarers have a right to decent food, living and working conditions. A seafarer might endure substandard conditions in order to keep his or her job. For them it might be better to have a bad job than no job at all.

2. How would you formulate your discipline's unique perspective on these concerns and why is it important that this perspective be heard at the interdisciplinary table?

It is important not to confuse moral obligations with legal obligations. It is also important to understand that it is not enough to have a legal right, there must also be a practical remedy. In some cases it will be necessary to go to court to enforce a legal right, but the costs of litigation could well exceed the amount in dispute, thereby leaving no practical remedy for a legal right. The discussions at an interdisciplinary table should not forget the views of the affected person (the seafarer). We shouldn't get too wrapped up in how we are going to solve a problem if the seafarer would rather we not solve it for him or her. As mentioned above, it might be more important for a seafarer to keep his or her job than to enforce a right that might jeopardize future employment. The

legal rights and possible remedies should be explained, but the decision on how to respond should rest with the seafarer. Why would a seafarer continue to work on a vessel without being paid for 8 months? Often the reason is that they believe all of the fairy tales coming from the shipowner that they will be paid soon. In some cases it might be better to cut ones losses and go home rather than endure more and more misery without hope of ever getting paid. Seafarers rights should be explained to them, but they should also understand the practicalities of enforcing the rights.

3. Why do you think your perspective will be understood and appreciated by researchers from other disciplines?

I am not sure that they will be understood and appreciated by the researchers from other disciplines. But it is important to understand that maritime law was created by commercial interests for commercial purposes. Seafarers enjoy more legal rights than any other class of worker (but they aren't always able to find access to justice to enforce their rights). Many of these rights were developed long before Christ and even longer before the concepts of human rights emerged in law. Seafarers rights were created by the maritime industry to encourage skilled and responsible people to embark on seagoing careers. Shipping depended, as it still does, on competent people operating vessels, and if you want to recruit and retain good people in seagoing careers, you have to take care of them.

On two levels this response is of significance. Firstly Stevenson's response serves to enrich and thicken the understanding of seafarers and their lives. Secondly it also leads to insight into the interdisciplinary process. It thickens the research story and it enlightens the process of connecting transversally with another discipline.

Concerning the interdisciplinary process I found that on a practical level it is difficult to ask of anyone more than the response given by Stevenson. His time is limited and therefore a more detailed response was not possible. He said: %regret that I don't have sufficient time to devote to providing you with comprehensive answers to the manifold issues raised in your two case studies. I am afraid that [I] must be brief, but I would like to share a few thoughts with you.+ These %ew thoughts+were very valuable, but the point is that this practical issue is a real obstacle in the interdisciplinary process.

Another observation is that question 1 can be misleading. Stevenson said: %don't like to speculate on what their concerns would be.+ It might be good to rather explain that this question is more to stimulate a conversation than it is about making an unfair assumption about what is going on in a seafarer's mind. I do not think that the question necessarily needs to change, but rather that I could have explained it better when I asked Stevenson to participate.

Concerning enriching the research narrative and deepening the understanding of seafarers and their world, Stevenson's response seems to be basically that there are laws but then there is reality and that many times these two do not come down to the same thing. He says: %is not always possible to resolve all of their concerns, even when they are in the right from a legal perspective.+ Referring to the story of Jonathan whose ship was arrested and whose salary was not paid in full, he confirms that even though the salaries of the crew should get priority before other claims are paid, the reality is that seafarers sometimes will not be compensated in full because there is simply not enough money. The point that Stevenson makes here, and later on again, is that generally speaking the laws which protect seafarers are very good and are in theory, at least, favouring the seafarer and not the owner.

He points out that there are situations in which a seafarer has to make a decision where the only thing he/she can do is to choose between the lesser of a number of evils. In a sense this is what John did when he decided to stay on the ship and to keep on working even though the owner kept them in South Africa for much longer than was the verbal



agreement with each other. Stevenson says: %A seafarer might endure substandard conditions in order to keep his or her job. For them it might be better to have a bad job than no job at all.+ Certainly this is true for many seafarers and they do make this decision often. My concern is that after they have decided that they do want to quit they are stuck and even if they fear for their lives, as was the case with fishers from Indonesia, there is no help for them.

On a practical level Stevenson suggests: %B, what can be very empowering for them is for them to receive an honest appraisal of their situation and some advice on how they might proceed.+ This suggests to me that those who are involved with seafarersq ministry should be informed and knowledgeable about the legal options that seafarers have in order to have a helpful response to a seafarer stuck with a legal issue. Those from seafarersqmission should be empowered in order to empower the seafarers. An honest appraisal might not be what a seafarer would like to hear, but it is better than to create false expectations that would later disappoint the seafarer.

Concerning question two about the unique perspective of maritime law on the concerns identified, Stevenson points out: %I is important not to confuse moral obligations with legal obligations.+ This reminds of what Stevenson once said in an email to me about another matter: %W hat is legal is not always right.+ At the interdisciplinary table Stevenson seems to say that this would be an important point to remember for people in another discipline. For instance for someone involved with seafarersqmission it might on some occasions be necessary to remember that what is right might not be legal and that what is morally correct is not always legally possible to enforce. As he points out that a seafarer might stay on a ship with substandard living conditions, which is morally wrong of the owner, but if the seafarer judges this to be better than to have no work he/she might be willing to endure it.

Stevenson asserts: %I is also important to understand that it is not enough to have a legal right, there must also be a practical remedy.+ Moral and legal, is not always the same as practical. Stevenson says: %I n some cases it might be better to cut ones

losses and go home rather than endure more and more misery without hope of ever getting paid.+ The reality, and I again refer to the case with the Indonesian fishers, is that sometimes not even this option is available to them. Who will pay their ticket to go home? In such a case, from the perspective of practical theology, you can only keep on supporting the seafarer and communicate the love of Christ to them in whatever way we can (cf Pieterse 1991:44-45).

Stevenson further points out: %The discussions at an interdisciplinary table should not forget the views of the affected person (the seafarer).+ This seems to be a very important point from the perspective of maritime law as Stevenson stresses this more than once: The responsibility of making a decision on how to proceed in a legal crisis should rest on the seafarer. Stevenson seems to imply that there should be healthy boundaries between us and the seafarer and that we should respect the fact that a seafarer is the one to make his/her own decisions.

In question one his first response was: %don't like to speculate on what their concerns would be. You should ask them to tell you their concerns...+ Later he continues to emphasise this: %We shouldn't get too wrapped up in how we are going to solve a problem if the seafarer would rather we not solve it for him or her.+ In other words Stevenson would like to emphasise this at the interdisciplinary table for people in other disciplines. I think that this is important to hear when involved in the ministry as this mistake can cause a lot of ill feeling and actually it is communicating to seafarers that you have better judgement than they have. Stevenson rather emphasises that the role we should play is to empower the seafarer and leave the decision up to them.

Stevenson's response to question 3 is very insightful and again shows the value of the interdisciplinary discussion. Here he repeats a perspective which I am convinced I would not have arrived at on my own, from the narratives of seafarers or from the comments of others in the ministry and that is that seafarers are very well protected by the law. Stevenson says: %Seafarers enjoy more legal rights than any other class of worker...+

According to Stevenson the reason for this is that owners are in need of workers who are good enough to do this necessary job. He says: "Shipping depended, as it still does, on competent people operating vessels, and if you want to recruit and retain good people in seagoing careers, you have to take care of them." For this reason, Stevenson points out, laws that protected seafarers were in place even before Christ and long before the whole concept of human rights became important. So, the reason why the laws which protected seafarers are so good is because ship owners need to attract people to this relatively unattractive work.

There is another reason for these many laws though. When Stevenson says that seafarers have more rights than other kinds of workers, he adds in brackets: "but they aren't always able to find access to justice to enforce their rights." This is an important point because if you cannot find access to justice then there might as well be no law to protect them. This shows that a chaplain's duty should be to help seafarers that these many laws protecting them will actually be implemented in their concrete situations. Sometimes you are the only one who meets a seafarer in distress and then you need to give that person access to the information he/she might need so that all these wonderful laws will not be meaningless. The problem for seafarers is that they are normally more vulnerable than other workers because they are taken away from their homes to countries where they do not know anyone and where they do not have any connection with friends or family who might assist them. Trotter (2008:27,28) pointed out how seafarers are low-status foreigners who do not have much resources or networks to rely on when they are visiting a port. This situation causes the seafarers to be in a disadvantaged position because something as simple as making a telephone call might be impossible if you have not been paid for months.

Looking back at the conversation with Stevenson I am convinced that it was a productive interdisciplinary discussion and it confirmed how such a discussion can thicken and enrich a research narrative even when the conversation is relatively brief. This conversation illustrated something of what Van Huyssteen (2000:437) meant when

he said that between different disciplines there can be a creative enhancement rather than impoverishment of our intellectual culture+. In my opinion this discussion between maritime law and practical theology has led to a creative enhancement+of the research narrative.

#### - **Alternative perspective**

Unjust and unfair treatment can happen to anyone in any profession, but when you are a seafarer you are cut off from your family, friends or any other kind of support that you could have depended on at home. This is why Cockroft (2008:288) from the ITF said that seafarers are one of the most exploited groups of workers in the world.+

Sometimes justice issues can be sorted out easily. For instance with the case of the Ukrainian seafarer who was eager to go home after his contract was finished, but the company would not let him even though his wife was about to give birth to their second child. The ITF officer got involved and it was solved; quickly and without fuss. Similarly one of the chaplains had this experience to share:

Had one experience where a ship's captain reported to me a dangerous situation in the engine room+ of a sister vessel which was in port at the same time. The crew were afraid to sail and afraid of the Captain, so they visited the sister ship to ask their captain to come and look at the problem which he did. I passed on the report to SAMSA and they responded immediately.

That is how it can be. Without much effort the problem is sorted out and everyone but the guilty party is happy. Another chaplain said: Generally seafarers seem to be paid. ITF is very helpful where there is a problem.+ Many times it runs smooth and even unfair treatment by the captain, which is almost never happening it seems, is sorted out promptly: In 15 years experience, I only met one Captain who the crew were terrified of. When their vessel returned, he had been replaced.+ And yet another chaplain said: we had a ship where there was a tear [ ] underneath the ship and the captain wanted to sail because that is what the owner wanted to do. The crew were so scared

and refused to sail and phoned ITF. They were forced to repair the ship before they sailed because the ship could tear in two if they got in rough waters.+

There are many encouraging signs as far as justice issues and unfair treatment are concerned. Organisations like SAMSA and ITF are called on and the problem gets solved. It is like Stevenson remarked: %Seafarers enjoy more legal rights than any other class of worker...+And: %Shipping depended, as it still does, on competent people operating vessels, and if you want to recruit and retain good people in seagoing careers, you have to take care of them.+

Unfortunately it does still happen that some seafarers get caught up in an unfair situation and then you realise that the battle for justice for seafarers is far from over. This is why Stevenson had to add: %a but they aren't always able to find access to justice to enforce their rights.+ The place in the seafaring world where it is happening most of all is with fishers. A chaplain had this to say about his experiences: %On board the fishing vessels there is often a feeling that a captain is in the company's pocket. There is often distrust between the crew and captain.+ This distrust normally starts with the approach the owner has with his employees. Recently a group of seafarers from Indonesia told me that their manning agent with whom they signed a contract made a certain deal with them, but now that they are on the ship and in a foreign country, the owner is saying that he is not bound by this contract because they did not sign it with him personally.

This type of treatment of fishers often happens and for this reason Stevenson called them the forgotten of the forgotten (in Kverndal 2008:204). It is not a surprise that the mortality rates in this line of work is twelve times higher than in other high risk jobs (Kverndal 2008:205). One such mortality recently occurred on a fishing vessel where an Indonesian fisher died due to the negligence of the captain. After this incident the fishing vessel came into Durban and a local Indonesian, who got involved with the case, told me the story. Somehow this fisher got serious head injuries while they were at sea and the captain refused to get any outside help, even though it was in his power to do

so. The Indonesian embassy got involved, but as far as I am aware neither the owner nor the captain had to face any charges due to this incident.

In Durban I have seen this vulnerability over and over again and many times the fishers themselves are blamed when things go wrong. With one incident we had in Durban harbour the fishers deserted the ship because of some serious issues on board. On discussing this issue with someone the comment was made that the fishers are %naughty+as they do not follow the advice given to them. Somehow, when it comes to fishers, the victims tend to be blamed. In my experience they are not %naughty+. They have too much at stake. Going home means going home to being jobless and even losing money which the owner still needs to pay them. I call them desperate.

There are so many things today on merchant vessels that is right because of the efforts done by unions, people involved with the seafarersqmission as well as the ILO, the IMO, flag state countries, labour-supplying countries and responsible ship owners (cf Stevenson 2008:379). Comparing the traumatised five Indonesian fishers, sitting next to happy, cheerful Filipino\$ from a merchant vessel, it is a wakeup call and an encouragement. A wakeup call because the situation of fishers is many times unacceptable and those who are able to bring about change such as people from the seafarersqmission should start getting more active about it. On the other hand it is an encouragement because, although it is not easy and the situation is complicated, if so much improvement could take place on merchant vessels it can happen on fishing ships as well.

As an example of how well it is going on many vessels concerning justice issues, neither Mohammed, Eric, Ivan or Noel had any stories to tell about this problem. Between them they had many, many years of experience with sailing. Something can be done, but I have to admit that this will not always be easy. For example even someone from ITF, who are normally quite powerful, are at times simply powerless to do anything. As I have pointed out, Tommy Molloy (in *Nautilus International Telegraph* February, 2011:7) a Nautilus/ITF inspector said: %f an owner takes no steps to rectify

deficiencies discovered by an inspection, is it the case from the authorities point of view that the crew simply have to continue to suffer unless a charity helps them out?+ To bring about change is possible, but not easy and many times there is a powerlessness to do anything about it as was the case with both John and Jonathan.

Companies are into shipping because they want to make money. Normally, when it is going well with the company it goes well with the seafarer. Sometimes companies or owners come under pressure, though, and then one of the first places to save money is with the crew. This is what has happened in John's situation. The ship the owner bought needed too much repairs and the owner simply broke the commitments he had made with the crew previously, with no other consequence to him than the anger of a powerless crew.

In the beginning of John's nightmare the company said: "they are going to take care of us." Then unfortunately they changed their language. John and some of the others sought the assistance of a union, but according to John the union said there is no way to help them as they do not have a contract that states the length of time or the salaries they will receive. John said that this: "impacted negatively on our moral on board..." He further said: "we hope we are learning our lesson in a very hard way." You can almost feel sympathy for the owner, but then you remember that this owner was clever from the beginning because he did not give any of the seafarers a contract to sign. They only had a verbal agreement with each other. This worked perfectly for the owner as he could simply chop and change the agreement to suit his situation. He knew that some of them could make trouble for him by for instance paying for their own ticket and fly back home which was what John had in mind, but he made a plan concerning this as well: he promised to pay them a bonus before they start sailing. Unfortunately I did not follow this up, whether this bonus was ever paid, but I do know that the owner got a lot of use out of the hope the promise of the bonus created. Someone like John simply stayed and endured the situation because the bonus would be paid out at the end.

This owner made a lot of promises about when they would be sailing, which he did not

keep and concerning this John said it: %a.has ridiculed us so much+. And it made him %a.sometimes look very fake+. On the ship it was not easy for John as he describes the ship as even worse than a prison: %a.the true picture of the ship is, it is even a more confined place than prison...+. In this prison situation the pressure sometimes went up to such an extent that they started fighting:

%a.either you are sleeping in your cabin or you are just going around in just the same small circle. Seeing the same type of people, you know, and doing the same thing every now and then. So the routine becomes so monotonous and so tiring and so, you know, so frustrating and it's not uncommon for you to come in the ship, most times and you see us very angry with each other.+

For John the anger got almost out of hand so that he: %a.wanted to beat James up.+. James was one of his shipmates and although John is a patient type of person he almost resorted to physical violence.

Adding to their difficulty was that they, on their own initiative, tried to help the owner by shutting off the electricity on the ship for about half of the day: %a.to help the ship owner to get things fixed up, pay for his finances and all of his bills, and we start going.+

The owner had this group of sailors where he wanted them. According to John ITF said they could not help because there was no written contract. No one from the seafarersq mission could help them either. We were powerless and could only support them on a spiritual and emotional level. The only one to do something about the situation was the owner, but it was to his advantage to keep the crew in South Africa because then he did not have to fly them back to Nigeria and replace them with someone who might insist on a written contract. In the end he did what he wanted to and he never had to answer to anyone for it.

In Jonathan's case their problem was: %a.eight month no pay.+. I do not know about the other crew but Jonathan's employer also did not have a written contract with him. It was not only the last eight months that Jonathan was not paid, but his whole contract was



characterised by late payments: %we never get the salary in time, never in time...+ Things went wrong for the company as they could not pay for major repairs done to the ship and consequently the company was declared bankrupt. Initially, those who were appointed to look after the concerns of the seafarers reassured Jonathan and the others: %they say that if they sell the ship, wed be the first to get our salary and ticket...+ Jonathan and the others hopes were dashed as the things communicated to them changed every now and again. When the price that the ship was auctioned for became higher the amount the seafarers would get was lessened and so Jonathan said: %So our problem is we dont know what is going on.+

It might not have been objectively true but he felt that no one was helping them in their time of crisis: %we have never get any help from anybody.+ At first they did not even know when the ship was arrested: %even we didnt know the ship is under arrest.+ The captain kept it from them because he wanted them to keep on working: %But captain knows everything, but he didnt tell us. Hes just forcing us: %You must work, you must work, you must work.+

Many times seafarers are caught up in a situation of injustice. In such a situation they tend to be cut off from information. Jonathan did not know that his ship was arrested at first. He did not know what was happening as far as the process of the auction was concerned. In a case like this it is very helpful if there is someone who can be a source of information because this empowers them. This is why Stevenson said: %But, what can be very empowering for them is for them to receive an honest appraisal of their situation and some advice on how they might proceed.+

Jonathan then went on to elaborate on how the captain added to his and the other crews difficulties: %ah, crew and captain thats a big problem.+ According to Jonathan: %all crew they fear him.+ Between the captain and Jonathan a whole unfortunate situation developed around a boiler suit, but it seems that it was never really about a boiler suit, but rather about power.

The captain gave everyone a boiler suit, but for no apparent reason Jonathan did not receive one. Consequently they had an extremely tense relationship: %Me and him, I said, me and him, I'm not in a good mood with captain, yah.+ He had to wear his boiler suit till it was totally dilapidated: %a.I'm just like, like naked.+ On the ship the influence of the captain was everywhere: %our captain, he's the one to control everything, everything.+ The captain's attitude toward the crew was very negative: %always just blaming: %ou people don't know anything what, what, what, what.++

This attitude once caused them to use dirty water that looked like %ea+for cooking while %his food, he tell the cook to use mineral water, to make his food.+ Jonathan even suspected the captain of corruption: %ah, they have problem you find that captain the man his getting small money, yah. So he must do his own kind of business there maybe [ ] shorten things, drop money there.+

The captain also let Jonathan and the others work extremely long hours: %even sometimes, like our ship, we didn't have proper working time, we didn't have proper working time.+ Sometimes Jonathan had to work extra hours, up to eighteen or twenty hours, rest two hours and then start his duty again: %Maybe I worked around eighteen hours or twenty hours. He must understand that [I am] a human being: %This guys tired, let him rest maybe nine, ten o'clock, [it] is okay.+ But you'd find he come to wake me. So sometimes I was angry...+ This kind of situation did not happen only once.

The tension had even built up once to such an extent that the captain wanted to send Jonathan home: %Okay now you make plan. You people do not work, now you must go home.+ I was angry at him: %Yes, I'm ready, send me home, yah, you send me home.++

In summary Jonathan says about the captain: %So that's the problem, if captain is not together [with] the other crews, it's big problem. It's big problem, it's very big problem.+ The problem with the captain's attitude was that he behaved irrational towards the crew and acted in a very unfair manner.

Once it happened that they were able to convince the captain to sell some of the scrap metal on the ship in order to use the money for airtime to call their families.

Unfortunately just before this could happen the captain went out, was mugged and blamed the crew for this: % imagine when he came back he say were the one, when we talked to him morning it was like, it was like bad luck to him he went out people steal his phone, yah.+ The scrap metal was never sold.

In spite of all the improvements in recent times there are still many injustices on board ships. In this research I shared narratives about my own encounters with this and two of my co-researchers shared their stories, while they were in the middle of intense situations created due to unjust behaviour towards them. Seafarers sometimes get caught up in messy situations. The biggest problem remaining is the situation with fishers, although Jonathan and John showed us through their stories that it is definitely not limited to them.

John said that after they arrived in Durban the company just %changed their language+, and they were stuck for a very long time in a situation which was for John %even a more confined place than prison.+ For Jonathan his problem felt so all consuming that he felt that no one was helping them: %we have never get any help from anybody.+ On Jonathan's ship there were basically two problems concerning justice issues: the problem with the ship being arrested because of bankruptcy and the problem with the captain's abusive behaviour. Concerning the arrest Jonathan said: %But now we are just in darkness...+ About the captain Jonathan said: %It's big problem, it's very big problem.+

Justice issues are messy, intense and on many occasions something that no one can do anything about. It's a challenge and anyone involved with seafarers' mission should be willing to become part of the solution, whatever it takes. Stevenson (2008:376) notes that when he started to work at the Center of Seafarers' Rights in 1990 it was still a question whether the Church should be involved with justice issues. Fortunately since

that time those in seafarers' mission seem to have reached the conclusion that the answer to this question is: *Yes!* Now the remaining question centres on the way in which we can accomplish this (cf Crafton 2008:291). So, Stevenson (2008:376) states we have moved from *whether* to *how*.

Crafton (2008:294,295) describes this change in the following way:

What was true for the American victims of the African Slave Trade is no less true for the victims of modern-day bondage. The assumed split, or bifurcation, between spirituality and advocacy in the early 1980s was a heresy. Today it is recognized as such by virtually everyone in maritime ministry. Advocacy does not *oppose* spirituality; it *arises* from it. So now we are free to move naturally between the sacred and the secular, to see all human experience as resting in the hand of the God who is never absent from any aspect of it. We are not split human beings, doomed to cordon off our souls from the rest of ourselves. We are on our way to a spiritual adulthood that joins them both together.

This *heresy* is still with us and there are still some who hold a position that as people from the seafarers' mission it is better to only focus on spiritual matters, but fortunately the large majority are no longer wasting time and are focussing their attention on *how*.

In the interdisciplinary conversation Stevenson highlighted some important issues related to the *how*. For him it is important to remember that you cannot assume what their needs or concerns are: *The discussions at an interdisciplinary table should not forget the views of the affected person (the seafarer). We shouldn't get too wrapped up in how we are going to solve a problem if the seafarer would rather we not solve it for him or her.* As an outsider you might judge that a certain situation is unacceptable, but it might be that the seafarer accepts it because he/she desperately needs the money. Therefore: *the decision on how to respond should rest with the seafarer.* On the mission field the mistake has many times been made that those you ministered to was not respected and not to allow the seafarer to take responsibility for his/her own decisions is to repeat a mistake made many times on the mission field before (cf Bosch 1991:223,224,227).

Stevenson states that seafarers should be empowered through information so that they decide how to proceed. He admits that there are sometimes situations where the seafarers might be on the right side of the law but that it is still not possible to help them: %an many cases, seafarers are adequately protected by the law, but there might not be a practical remedy for them.+ This is exactly what the situation was with Jonathan and John and although the law seemed to be on their side there was no %practical remedy+. In order to arrive at a remedy it might take a lot of money. Money which someone like Jonathan did not have and it might even be more expensive than the amount the seafarer would get if he wins the case: %the costs of litigation could well exceed the amount in dispute, thereby leaving no practical remedy for a legal right.+

So what will happen on many occasions is that someone like me from the seafarersq mission will get involved as well as the ITF. Then the seafarer will be empowered through %an honest appraisal of their situation and some advice on how they might proceed.+ This is basically what happened in John and Jonathan's cases. But then they had to realise that they could do nothing about their situation: %Seafarers[d] rights should be explained to them, but they should also understand the practicalities of enforcing the rights.+ The practicality about the situation in which John and Jonathan were in was that they had to endure a situation of injustice and they could do nothing about it.

Even though giving an %honest appraisal+ might lead to no action, at least it is something a chaplain can do in order to help a seafarer. Seafarers in a situation of abuse normally gets emotional about it and tends to lose perspective. All they see is the terrible situation in which they are in. A chaplain can bring calm and a bit of objectivity to a situation.

Someone reading these stories of John and Jonathan might think that the whole shipping industry is a lawless enterprise, but the fact is that it is the industry with the most laws. Stevenson says: %Seafarers enjoy more legal rights than any other class of worker...+ Stevenson explains why: %Seafarers rights were created by the maritime

industry to encourage skilled and responsible people to embark on seagoing careers. Shipping depended, as it still does, on competent people operating vessels, and if you want to recruit and retain good people in seagoing careers, you have to take care of them.+

This echoes Dickinson (*Nautilus International Telegraph* March 2011:25) who pointed out that owners must remember that it is to their own benefit to prevent discrimination on their ships. In the *Nautilus International Telegraph* (March 2011:24) it is also observed that it must be kept in mind how it is a risk to the owner when seafarers who operates a ship with cargo worth millions of dollars are not in a good mental state. It is to the owners benefit when the seafarers are treated properly but still, this does not always happen.

When Stevenson says that seafarers have more rights than other kinds of workers he adds in brackets: %a„but they aren't always able to find access to justice to enforce their rights.+ This is an important point because if you cannot find access to justice then there might as well be no law to protect seafarers. This shows that part of a chaplain's duty should be to help seafarers that these many laws protecting them will actually be implemented in their concrete situations. Sometimes you are the only one who meets a seafarer in distress and then you need to give that person access to the information he/she might need so that all these rights will not be meaningless. The problem for seafarers is that they are normally more vulnerable than other workers because they are taken away from their homes to countries where they do not know anyone and where they do not have any connection with friends or family who might assist them. Trotter (2008:27,28) pointed out how seafarers are low-status foreigners who do not have much resources or networks to rely on when they are visiting a port. This situation causes the seafarers to be in a disadvantaged position and they get easily caught up in a prison of injustice.

There is none more likely to get caught up in an unfortunate situation than the fishers who are the least protected of all seafarers (Tronche 2008:381). Tronche (2008:381)

notes that endangered fish and the pollution of the seas are prominent issues today, but that the welfare of the fishers is ironically still being neglected. In addition to being overlooked, when they are seen, Tronche (2008:381) has experienced that they tend to be looked down upon and that they are seen as drunkards, cannabis smokers, foulmouthed, promiscuous guys whom you simply cannot trust for anything...+ But the fact is that these fishers are normally desperate men hoping for a better future, although their dreams seldom come true as they end up in a floating prison+(Tronche 2008:383). In order to do something about this Tronche (2008:383) points out that what is needed is advocacy for systemic change+. Tronche (2008:284) ends off by gently reminding us that the One who sits on the judgment throne cares a lot about fishers and therefore, so should we:

In Matthew 25:31, we learn that when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne and before him will gather all the nations of the world. This is where the Christian perspective on life will one day bring us all, whoever we are. He who sits on that judgement throne is the risen Christ. This means that he who will have the last word is the very one who once prepared breakfast for his fisher friends, Peter, Andrew and the Zebedee brothers, John and James, tired after a long night's work.

Terrible injustices are still to be found in the seafaring world and it seems that, when this happens, suddenly everyone is powerless except the perpetrator. This can lead you to feel very hopeless, especially while you are in the middle of a situation similar to what John and Jonathan had experienced, but Crafton (2008:296) shared the following encouraging story to remind us that there is a greater power at work:

It was Easter Sunday. Chaplain *Francis Cho* was already on board, and he heard that an ailing seafarer was being sent home without maintenance and care before his contract was up. The crew knew that this was illegal and wanted the chaplain's help. He prayed with them and with the sick man. However, the captain had already summoned the agent to take the man directly to the airport, and the agent was on his way. On shore, Father Cho saw the agent in a phone booth, making the airline reservation. As soon as he hung up, the chaplain introduced himself and began to make his case: Today was Easter Sunday. It was unthinkable to endanger a man's life

on the feast of Christ's victory over death. This was the day that Jesus arose, the day on which our great human tragedy became, instead, the story of our salvation. The agent stared at the priest in bewilderment. But Father Cho was just warming up. He went on to remind his surprised listener about the longing of Israel for deliverance from oppression, about hope of heaven, about Christ's work in overcoming sin and error. No, Easter Sunday simply could not be the day to deliberately hurt another human being.

None more surprised than he, the agent saw the logic of this argument and assented to it. The chaplain returned to the crew with the good news. The agent called the company and negotiated maintenance and care for the sick man. The captain heard the news and just knew: that day something stronger than any of them had touched them all.

I told the story of the fishers from Indonesia who was abused by the bosun and who decided to desert the ship. I also mentioned how the security guards from the port were greatly touched by their plight and had a lot of sympathy for these men. One of the security guards, a black man, said: "It's like apartheid". There are still terrible injustices on ships, but with the confidence that Someone stronger than us all is at work, those involved in the seafarers' mission can proceed in living out the prophetic dimension of mission as good as we can.

#### **D. The social dynamics of women on board**

##### **- Introduction and the research characters**

Before World War II women working on ships were very scarce and the only exceptions were normally on passenger ships and then they were at the very bottom of the hierarchy (Kverndal 2008:202). In the mid-1990s, according to the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), 9% of the seafarers working on cruise-ships and ferries were woman (Kverndal 2008:203). According to a study done by ITF under, Sarah Fincke, there is still a lot of discrimination against women on ships (Kverndal 2008:203). This makes it difficult for women to be recruited, to get trained, to get promotion; there is sexual harassment and also pregnancy-related discrimination (Kverndal 2008:203).

Women seafarers are not very common on the ships I visit. When I am on a ship I am



always a bit surprised if I encounter a female seafarer. This applies mostly to the international ships with foreign seafarers. I asked Mohammed about this and it was clear that he did not have much experience with female seafarers.

Since I've travelled the sea I've never meet with [a] female [seafarer], but I used to meet with different ship, different port at sea. But, yah, [ ] yah as chief mate and chief cook for the mess, yah, something like that. But I've never [been] working with, I've never travelled with a woman. But I used to meet in the Mission to Seamen something like that, we have conversation, yah.

In the interview I had with Ivan, I also asked him about female seafarers. On his particular ship there were a number of them.

Chris: And on this ship there is quite a lot of women. Are they, you know, able to be, are they functioning well as seafarers and umō

Ivan: Um, what can I say? Okay, it is, it is to me, it is a process. It is a project. It is a misunderstood, it is a misinterpreted emancipation. We had it in my country, we had a few women you know in our fleet and as much as I know they have been only trouble, each of them in their own way. Here, not much difference. With this small difference you know, the women that we had in my ex-shipping company were highly educated and very intelligent women and they would understand, you know, when you talk to them. Here we don't have their understanding, you know. If you try to give a remark you are either a racist or you're fighting with them or maybe, maybe somebody can turn around, point finger and talk about sexual harassment, you know. And God forbid, you know, if you don't have witnesses to prove it otherwise. But, the education level is very low.

Chris: And that would at least have helped to come into a traditional man's world.

Ivan: Yes, yes, yes, yes, cultural traditional laziness. Lazy minds either, you know. I mean they don't try to understand when you talk to them. And yes, some of them, at the lowest level, usually, some of them we've had a few stewards who have been, we've had a couple of cooks that have been together. We've had probably one or two deck ratings, women, that you can see they try, they try to do something and they keep themselves busy and as much as a woman, you know, can do a physical job of that

kind, they're trying their best. But we have come there not without fights. The first thing they try is to cheat. And once they get the proof that there is no way out, then they agree and they, they, they perform in [a] satisfactory way. But there are those that are persistent. I have been with a woman, I had to suspend her from the bridge, she is [an] officer third, class three deck officer, and she couldn't even steer. I was on the dredger [name of the ship], and I had to suspend her because she, she is trying to sink herself, you know, with the ship, which is not the right thing, that is not the way we do our job. And also now they have been given middle management packages and they don't even, not only women, but we have a man of the same cultural backgrounds, everything, they get the middle management package, they don't want to make themselves any better, and they declare it. They make a statement. And nobody seems to be worried about it. But, I am dealing right now with that kind of case, you know, the cook that we have on board, [ ] hygiene, getting the pantry of ours in a poor state, [ ] and we asked her to take responsibility of it because [it is] her area of responsibility, and she is keeping telling us that it is not her job. It is not in her job description for which she had to be charged to receive a written warning for six months. And now when you talk to her she turns the other way, she turns the other way, she doesn't want to look at you which means she is telling you she is not listening to you. And yet the office knows about that, and we don't have the right support. So most probably in a day or two I will have to write another charge and carry on and on and on until they...that word, they use that word at our offices, but they don't act to the meaning of that, until they have the ultimate proof that this dead wood, piece of dead wood, has to be removed and anyone of those kind. And, it's, it's cultural, ethnical whatever, rainbow, we are fighting a bit of a losing battle. We hope, we hope things might get better but it is very much a losing battle you know. It is like whatever you say turns against you.

Chris: So, yah, the issue of women is a bit thorny, it is a bit difficult.

Ivan: Yes, not to even say, you know, that they can understand if you tell them, you know, when the time comes, do not dispose of in the toilet, even that simple straight thing they do not want to understand. And we keep having blocked toilets and all this thing. Every now and then. It is a shame, I wouldn't, I wouldn't like to mention anything like this but

Chris: But it is the reality.

Ivan: But it is, it is. That is the fact of our life.

This is some of the perspectives that Ivan has concerning woman as seafarers. Some of what he said can be seen as cultural issues and some of his comments will give offence, not just to woman but also the cultural group to which these women belong. Even so, I include this as this illustrates how it can be difficult for a woman to be a seafarer, but also that it is for some men difficult to adapt to women joining them as colleagues. When you add cultural issues together with this, then it is clear that it can cause serious trouble on board.

Ivan starts by saying that the women seafarers he had experience with ~~have~~ have been only trouble, each of them in their own way, and he adds that it is not much different on his current ship. Then he talks about all the difficulties he is experiencing with the women on the ship he was working on at the time of the interview. He says that he is afraid of being called a racist, that he is afraid of being accused of sexual harassment, that the women he is working with have a very low level of education, that they are incompetent as one third officer almost sank herself and the ship, that there are one or two women who have been trying, but they cannot do physical work like a man, that mostly they have a bad attitude as for example the cook did not look after the state of the pantry and on top of this they block the ablution facilities on a regular basis. If a ship owner would listen to what Ivan is saying they would never, ever employ a female seafarer.

But there is a context. Maybe more than anything cultural issues are behind this. There is a clash of cultural values and there should be an understanding that as Bulgarian culture, with all its social constructs, is meeting Zulu culture with its social constructs, there is bound to be tension. Then adding to this is the fact that Ivan had a certain view of women seafarers even before he started sailing with these Zulu women.

Ivan is one person but he gives us an understanding into the world that women need to enter into if they would like to become a seafarer. It is not just Zulu women but according to Ivan it is all women who have caused trouble. I am convinced that this is a

social construct floating out there on the oceans and women who would like to have a career as a seafarer will have to overcome this.

At the same time I do not disregard Ivan's experience. It is also important to really listen to what he is saying, even though he might not be saying it in a polite way. For instance it might be true that some women would not be physically up to some of the work that might be required of an ordinary seaman (OS) or an able bodied seaman (AB). It might be part of the reason why many of them, as Mohammed said, are officers or working in the galley. The fact is that there are some obstacles for women seafarers to overcome when entering this male dominated territory. It is also a challenge for certain male seafarers to welcome women into their midst.

Women's careers at sea fortunately are not always troubled as the story of Wendy O'Donnell illustrates (*Nautilus International Telegraph* February 2011:25). Wendy underwent her training with Maersk and reports that the training was very good and that they looked after her. What was difficult for her on the cargo ships was the multicultural situation and also that some sailors were more used to women having a traditional role. The multicultural situation led to her being socially isolated. Fortunately she could join a cruise ship which suited her better and she is now aiming at taking her Master's examination.

Even though Wendy's story shows that seafaring can be a good career option for many women the fact is that at times it will be more difficult for them than their male counterparts. In the *Nautilus International Telegraph* (March 2011:11) mention is made of a survey that was done in 2010 to which 40% of female seafarers reported that they have in some way been discriminated against. This rate compares with a study done with women working in the UK where only 20% of women indicated that this was happening to them. This discrimination is primarily referring to bullying, but also includes racism, ageism, sexism, homophobia and sexual harassment. A serious complaint that these women raised was that when something like this happened the shipping companies did not have procedures in place to handle the situation. The end

result was that these women were stuck and that the problem only got bigger. It is not realistic to expect discrimination to disappear, but it is realistic to expect that systems should be in place to protect the victims of it. Many who experience discrimination will not report it because they are convinced that this will only make matters worse (*Nautilus International Telegraph* March 2011:25).

#### - **Alternative perspective**

There are not many female seafarers. Although it seems that for some female seafarers the shipping industry is really a good place to be, on many occasions there are much more challenges for women than there are for men. One of the chaplains had this to say: %think a woman seafarer, especially a pretty one, changes the %atmosphere+on a ship. She becomes the catalyst that affects relationships and feelings amongst the crew. It could lead to a kind of rivalry.+ A male seafarer told me once that for him it is nice to have a female seafarer on board because it is a welcome alternative to exclusively male conversation on the ship you are working on for months. In this way a female seafarer are sometimes much appreciated by her colleagues.

On the other hand, recently another chaplain and I visited a container vessel where a male and female cadet were both sent home because of a %kind of rivalry+of which she was the %catalyst+. They were both cadets from the Philippines and the other seafarers told us that a knife was found with the male cadet and that the issue started because of jealousy. I do not know the rest of the details, but the fact is that they were both sent home with a bad record and this could actually mean the end of their careers.

Sometimes women seafarers do not only have to be careful of causing a %kind of rivalry+, but sometimes they even come up against aggressive abuse as another chaplain explains:

I do not often see woman seafarers. I have however experienced and shared lovely stories with woman on board. I have come across a lady who has been raped by her crew on an earlier ship. My experience is that whenever there are woman on board, they tend to come and speak to me as if they are hungry for some conversation. They

definitely have a hard time on board ships. Whenever I have raised the issue with seamen they had very strong feelings that a ship was no place for a woman.

Another chaplain said: %A captain told us once that they are dangerous cargo and that they must keep their eyes on them. It is difficult when the men are away from home for such a long period and there are women with them on the ship.+ So it seems that at least some male seafarers see female seafarers as potentially causing trouble. There are even extreme cases where discrimination against women ends up in their deaths. One such an incident was with the tragic story of the 19 year old South African female cadet, Akhona Geveza, on the ship Safmarine Kariba (*Nautilus International Telegraph* February 2011:2,7). Before her death there were reports about %bullying and harassment by other cadets on the same training program+and she had even laid rape charges. According to the *Nautilus International Telegraph* (March 2011:25) these charges were against the chief officer of the ship.

This happened on a Safmarine ship and it was interesting that one of the chaplains, unrelated to this incident, said, in response to a negative remark which Ivan had made about women seafarers: %From what I have seen and heard, this [the negative remark] is not the general opinion, especially on %Safmarine+who employ and train numbers of female crew.+ The company might be creating opportunities for women, but this does not mean that the ship mates will feel the same.

Personally, except for Ivan I have not heard about male seafarers who voiced a negative opinion about female seafarers. Mohammed for instance seemed to be very neutral about it and only confirmed that female seafarers will aim for certain positions such as: %a chief mate and chief cook for the mess...+ This suggests that the doors are open for females to enter the shipping industry, but that it is only certain selective doors. It seems that male seafarers still have more options than their female colleagues. Sometimes women do obtain other positions on the ships such as cruise ships and many times when the ship has an all USA crew. Still, in general job opportunities for female seafarers are less than they are for men.

In the interview with Ivan he revealed part of the reason why it is so. He said that the whole process of making women part of the seafaring industry is a misinterpreted emancipation.+ Ivan said that the women he had worked with: %a they have been only trouble, each of them in their own way.+ Ivan also foresees some other possible complications by having women on board: %a maybe somebody can turn around, point finger and talk about sexual harassment, you know. And God forbid, you know, if you don't have witnesses to prove it otherwise.+ He admitted that there was some exceptions where the women did try their best, but at the same time he doubt whether they can do the physical work that a man can do: %a We've had probably one or two deck ratings, women, that you can see they try, they try to do something and they keep themselves busy and as much as a woman, you know, can do a physical job of that kind, they're trying their best.+

He also had an experience with a woman seafarer that almost caused the ship to make a serious accident due to her incompetence: %a she is trying to sink herself, you know, with the ship, which is not the right thing, that is not the way we do our job.+ Another woman, working in the kitchen did not do her job either: %a getting the pantry of ours in a poor state...+ He also made mention that the women blocked the ablution facilities every now and again.

This research is narrative research and therefore I was interested to find out about the smaller stories and about those who might be out constructed. I think Ivan opened some valuable insights into the social constructions that women come up against in the seafaring world. Discourses that make it exceptionally difficult for women to have the same opportunities as men.

That it is difficult for women is partly the reason why they generally work in the kitchen or as officers, as Mohammed had said. With some men there might also be a preconceived idea that women would make trouble as Ivan gave the impression: %a they have been only trouble, each of them in their own way+. This type of view is

maybe why in a recent survey it was found that 40% of women reported some kind of discrimination against them (*Nautilus International Telegraph* March 2011:11).

However, although it is difficult and tragic, and things happen like in the case of Akhona Geveza, there are many women today at sea and they are making a success of it as for instance someone like Wendy who had a wonderful experience, trained by Maersk and who will probably soon become a captain (*Nautilus International Telegraph* February 2011:25). The doors are open for women seafarers and maybe those who are able to enter can open the ones that are still closed.

### **E. Coping with and appreciating diversity: Stories of many cultures living under the same roof**

#### **- Introduction**

Seafarers in general are people who are able to cope with a lot of challenges and living with other seafarers from a variety of countries and cultures is one of them. Most seafarers I have met have adapted to this, but sometimes it can be very tough as it can lead to social isolation, as was also illustrated by the story of Wendy (*Nautilus International Telegraph* February 2011:25). When Kverndal (2008:253) refers to the social isolation of the seafarer he links it with the suicides on board which shows how serious this matter can be. According to the estimation of the SIRC three seafarers per day commit suicide (Kverndal 2008:253). Therefore it is a very important point of concern for anyone involved with seafarers.

On one occasion I met a Romanian seaman in great distress. He was part of a crew consisting of Filipinos and they excluded him in such a way, from their social interaction, that he just wanted to go home. He was at the beginning of his contract and the only way that he could escape this unbearable situation was to pay for his own ticket. The officers on board were from the Ukraine and also with them he could not get along. To disembark before the end of his contract was not in his best interest but the social isolation was just more than he could take. He also stood the chance of being blacklisted as the captain has to write a report concerning his conduct while on board as



a reference for his next contract. This could mean the end of seafaring for him. In spite of all the negative consequences he still decided to leave the ship and the reason was social isolation caused by cultural diversity.

According to Adeney (in Kverndal 2008:273) there are sometimes conflict on board ships due to ethnic differences and sometimes between the officers and crew if they are from different backgrounds (which are the case on many occasions). As stated before sometimes the nationalities of the crew on a ship will be mixed because the owners do not want joint actions against him/her and knows if the crew is divided they do not have much power. Another reason that a Romanian chief officer shared with me is because seafarers are not so easy to come by. It is especially true for officers and so the owner would sometimes make use of seafarers from different nationalities just because they are available. On this specific ship the crew consisted of seafarers from the Philippines, Romania, Russia, Poland and India. There seemed to be good relationships on board, although the Indian sailor wanted to stop me from entering when one of the Filipinos saw me and, overruling the Indian, invited me to their mess room.

Something like this can cause tension between crewmembers. I think that many missionaries and chaplains will agree that the Filipinos are the nationality that are the most open for visitors. Other nationalities would be more cautious to allow someone to visit them. Having a different social construct about a visitor and how to behave toward a visitor is only the beginning of the challenges of twenty odd strangers trying to make themselves at home in a relatively small space.

Surprisingly in most of the cases where there was a ship with multicultural crew there did not seem to be a problem. One Filipino even said that he prefer a mixed crew to a one nationality crew. As I understood him this is due to the phenomena that when the crew is mixed the Filipino crew will function as one group. In contrast to this, if there are only Filipinos on board different groups will form between them. I have heard this more than once and therefore I am convinced that mixed cultures on ships should not be seen as necessarily a negative thing.

It is a very serious issue though, because as one owner-operator recently found when doing extensive research on the accidents which happened on its ships, the cause of these accidents were many times related to cultural issues (Logie 2011:23). Logie (2011:23) is involved with maritime training and is someone who pays specific attention to cultural issues. She sees cultural issues as an iceberg. The issues on the surface are things like Indians who shake their heads in agreement, to view the thumbs up gesture as rude and not to call a Filipino with a crooking finger. Those under the surface are more serious and have to do with values and assumptions. Logie (2011:23) gives examples like a junior officer from the Philippines who did not challenge the senior European officer who made a navigational error. This led to an accident.

Geert Hofstede (in Logie 2011:23), a Dutch sociologist, identified six different dimensions to cultures. The first is individualism vs collectivism. An example Logie (2011:23) refers to is where crew members rushed to help their fellow crewmember who was trapped in an enclosed space with toxic fumes. They did not follow their training which stated that they had to first think of using breathing apparatus for their own safety because they were from a culture that thought more in a collective way than in an individualistic way. The second is the way in which power is viewed in a culture. The Filipino who came from a hierarchical culture did not want to confront his superior officer when the officer made a mistake. The third dimension is the amount to which uncertainty is avoided and therefore to what extent a certain culture dictates how you avoid risks or follow rules. People from Germany, UK and Switzerland will be more prone to follow rules and avoid risks, whereas people from South America, South East Asia and the Balkans will be more prone to taking risks.

The fourth dimension has to do with masculine vs. feminine tendencies. People from Russia, China, Japan and Brazil are prone to have more masculine tendencies which mean that they value competition and strength. People from the Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam have more of a feminine tendency as they value things like group harmony and teamwork. The fifth dimension is whether a specific culture has a long-term or

short-term orientation. People from China for instance will plan ahead carefully, set goals, save for the future, whereas people from other cultures will be looking for short cuts, quick fixes and be more spontaneous. The sixth and last dimension is whether it is acceptable for someone to talk directly or if you should listen carefully to what is not said. Broadly speaking in Western cultures it is considered to be a good thing to speak directly about some issue where as in Eastern cultures this would be considered as rude. In Hofstede's findings there are a lot of generalisations, but I think it is interesting to take note of some broad tendencies in certain cultures.

Logie (2011:23) points out that culture can be considered as a national or regional thing but that it should also be seen to be related to industry. In other words each industry seems to have its own culture. Logie (2011:23) would describe the culture in the shipping industry as to be collective, hierarchical, rule orientated, favouring masculine values, as both long term and short term orientated and communication is direct. She further points out that culture even differs from company to company and from ship to ship. When the cultures on different levels clash, there is bound to be some problems.

Logie (2011:23) believes that part of the solution to this problem is training of cadets, seafarers and shore-based staff. Seafarers should not abandon their own culture but they should not criticize others' values either. It can even be helpful to keep your sense of humour in situations like this. This is how this should be but the following is how it is as my co-researchers share their understanding on the multicultural reality they are living in.

- **The research characters**

a. Jonathan from Kenya:

Jonathan experienced a tough time due to cultural differences. He was from Kenya and the other crew were from India. I got to know Jonathan and the crew from India quite well and all of them seemed to be very nice persons. This did not mean that it was not very difficult for Jonathan. I asked him at the start of the interview to explain his situation on the ship to me and he started with telling me how he was socially isolated. I

expected that he would tell me about the justice issues on the ship as this was almost all everyone on the ship talked about, but he responded by telling me about something else, I guess because this issue was really important to him.

Chris: So, all I am looking for is some of your stories, the things that you are experiencing now and also in the past, you know, things that you, you know about and things that you heard about seafarers. Yah, so that's what I am interested in, so maybe to start off with just explain something of the situation you and the, your fellow crew members are in at the moment. Just explain something of that.

Jonathan: [ ] Okay, for like experience that I've seen and still have, now like problems you get in sea, yah. Like now when we joined the ship, also depend the company, and also depend the captain working, your master on the ship and also your colleagues [with whom] you're working together. Sometimes even if you're working to different countries, maybe like me I'm from Kenya now I'm working with Indians. So most of different there, like in my ship, when I joined the ship the difference was about, it was hard even to communicate with them. Because like now, some they know English, some they don't know English, the problem is there. So even if you have problem, maybe [you] want to share with your friend, you find it's difficult. And also you cannot face captain to talk to him, because captain [is] always special, maybe if the problem is difficult you can face him. But if you just want to share with your colleagues in the ship, like me it was difficult. But when my other friend came, Peter, now it was easy time [to] share, [if you] have problems.

Chris: You mean with share like, um, like personal problems.

Jonathan: Yah, personal problems.

Chris: You don't have anyone to share that with.

Jonathan: Yah, yah, to me it was like that when I joined the ship. You can explain to him but sometime maybe he don't understand. So you are in the ship even in mess room, sometimes I will just sit in my cabin, not in mess room. Because when they talk I don't understand and nobody talk to me on the ship, yah. So when Peter came, to me it was easy now to talk to Peter.

Jonathan is describing the obvious problem with multicultural crews which is the language barrier: %a some they know English, some they don't know English, the problem is there.+ The effect is also easy to anticipate: isolation. When he started his contract he was the only one from Kenya. The guys from India excluded him from their conversations in such a way that he would just go to his cabin and he would not sit with them in the mess room, the space in the ship in which social interaction within the group can take place. They would speak in an Indian language with each other and so Jonathan explains: %b when they talk I don't understand and nobody talk to me on the ship.+

He says he also would consider talking to the captain, but the captain is %c special+, in other words unapproachable as a friend. The result was that he did not have anyone to talk to if he had a problem or simply to have any kind of companionship. Fortunately Peter joined the ship after a while. He was the fitter and he was also from Kenya. This made life much easier for Jonathan as he could talk and %d share+ with Peter. Jonathan's story illustrates how it can become tough on a ship because of cultural differences. I am convinced without any bad intention from their side the Indians totally excluded Jonathan by talking in an Indian language and so he just stayed in his cabin by himself. If not for Peter, who fortunately joined later, it would have been a terrible time for Jonathan being on the ship for longer than a year.

b. Mohammed from the East Coast of Africa

Mohammed did not have anything bad to say about multicultural crews. He was only seeing it as something positive. He is from the East Coast of Africa and it is seldom if ever that a whole ship would be full of crew only from his country of origin. So, it is all he knew and for him it was not a problem.

It's good to meet, to meet with different seamen because you are seaman and the seamen travel with the different ship, different country. So it's good, there's no problem since I travelled with the ship I meet with different crew from Russia, from Polish, from different country you see it. But I've never see any bad things to them. I've meet with people from South America, from Peru; I've never see any bad thing to them. [ ] You

know seamen you need to be a good man, yah, so because, seamen doesn't need dirty. That's why there's no bad things to working with different ship, to be working mixed crew. I've never see any bad things if I'm with ship, if I meet with different seamen. If I meet with different seamen we used to share in the advice, the ideas, something like that, because I meet with people they've got enough experience, they used to give me experience. I've meet with people they've seen many things, they just to give me advise, something like that.

Mohammed is very positive about working with different cultures and for him it is more of an opportunity than it is a challenge. For him it is good because: % I meet with different seamen we used to share in the advice, the ideas, something like that, because I meet with people they've got enough experience, they used to give me experience.+ When I asked him about it I actually expected him to say that it is a negative thing, but he only had a positive perspective on it.

c. Ivan from Bulgaria:

Ivan's experience of multicultural crews is much different than that of Mohammed. Ivan started sailing in the days when you usually sailed with crew only from your own nationality. This is much different than today as is clear from for instance the experiences Mohammed had. This was up to 1991. After this his experience changed and he started to work in South African ports with South African crew. Here he encountered working with multicultural crews and it was not as positive as Mohammed's was. Ivan and I first talked about his experiences before 1991.

Chris: But those days it was like the whole ship was Bulgarian. And the other ship was, everybody was Soviet Union, so it was not mixed crew like today.

Ivan: No, no, no, no, no, we only had Bulgarian crew.

Chris: Okay, so just one nationality.

Ivan: No, no, just one nationality. There was, it was not allowed. It was like German and American ships, you know, only nationals. Only nationals, same Russians were the same. I don't know, maybe, now maybe it was already possible, I don't know. I see on

the net there is in my home city big offices you know, for MSC, MSC stroke BG, Bulgaria: MSC/Bulgaria. So if there is MSC/Bulgaria, I don't know if we have a merchant fleet anymore. But probably it must be possible, mixed crews.

Chris: Yah, for sure, yah.

Ivan: But, they long time already, even before the communism fall apart they were sailing under foreign flag. There was I know a couple of radio officers were on German ships, many, many of our guys on Greek ships or even Turkish ships. I was here in South Africa already in 92 or 93. There was a Turkish ship with Bulgarian captain whom I knew and he even visited me with another Bulgarian colleague to spent Easter Day, you know, in my place. He even said, I cook everything you know, he was, he must call his Turkish, you know, cook to understudy with me, you know, a couple of things [laughing]. So eventually, but, um...

Chris: Yah, but I think those days were, were, actually nicer time to sail, because the crews were big, like you were and it was only your own country[es] people sailing with you, so it was more like fun, and now, nowadays you don't have like ships playing against each other soccer [Ivan told me about this earlier in the interview] or, you know, you don't have that nice atmosphere of friends and friendship, and, you know it's very, I think it's more serious today.

Ivan: It's, it's difficult to say because I don't have my own experience with mixed crew, my experience with mixed crew is right where I am now, here, but I have been on a few ships where the crew was mixed and recently I was on one ship where captain, and, captain and chief officer were Romanian and the Romanian chief officer must have been demoted and he was always pleading he's a master too, he's a captain too. And they were always fighting you know. And the chief officer was apparently drinking, you know, too much, too regularly, or fighting with the captain, and the Bulgarian was a second mate. He eventually I found was the son of a colonel who in my time was in charge of the catering department. And that guy is, was like in between fists, you know, trying, just trying to survive. And the third officer was Ukrainian who would not too often if ever be sober. And you know Russians, Romanian, Polish, they were known for that. And, ag, it, it's a difficult thing. Okay, first of all, Romanians, okay, very, very bad English, but much, much better than Russian English. Ukrainian, very difficult, I mean when I met them I had, I had to help them, in a, in a restaurant to order themselves something. That Ukrainian was there, you know, he does [not] know what to say to

order himself something. So, imagine, and the whole world will never start talking Russian. Look this, looks like not much an understanding you know. And the crew, the, the lower level crew, you know, some of them Romanians, some of them Bulgarians, some of them Russian or Ukrainian, and everyone is pulling up towards their side. So, [ ] it's not as it was.

Ivan has limited experience of mixed crew other than what he experienced in South Africa. He did experience a little bit of it but part of the problems on board was also because the chief officer and the captain were not getting along so well and they were both Romanian. I am not sure what Ivan's position was then, but the second officer was Bulgarian and the third officer a Ukrainian who was, like the chief officer, always drinking.

Part of the frustration I hear in Ivan's story is that the Ukrainians could not even order something for themselves in a restaurant due to the lack of knowledge of English. The main problem I think that Ivan is identifying is not so much drinking or language but maybe rather that everyone is pulling up towards their side. This developing of separate groups based on cultural backgrounds on one ship can lead to a lot of difficulties.

This Ivan had experienced in the latter part of his career working with different cultures from South Africa and he shared some of his frustrations. He first talked about some issues concerning religious diversity and then he voiced his anger and frustration about the other cultural groups on his ship:

And these cultural things we also have, I had too many times, not once and not twice, but many times to give remarks to people of our African majority, the majority on board as well. Because they after hours they would get to have a smoke room, which people will sit and have a coffee or something, have a cigarette and after hours they would watch TV or DVD or something. And they put their own, their own African DVDs, music and all these things and they make it blast. And they scream and they scream and they shout and one cannot even rest. And then when you tell them they, they turn around and they say: But it's all our culture. And sometimes one needs to tell them to take



their culture, whatever they call culture, back wherever it came from. And keep it there, because here it is multicultural society, community, and they have to consider every other culture present on board and they have to respect it if they want people to respect them in the same way. So basically like it says: Don't do unto others what you don't want done unto yourself. Come back to the Bible. But, yes, and that thing, in that way and they have about so many things, the cultural experience. This is their culture and that is their culture which is mostly unacceptable, you know, but well, we have to, we have to manoeuvre somehow in between and try to survive in this rainbow society.

The South African, mostly Zulu culture, and the culture from Bulgaria did not seem to work together well. What is frustrating to Ivan is especially the loud noise they sometimes made while relaxing: %a they scream and they scream and they shout and one cannot even rest+. He feels that they do not take into consideration that the ship is a multicultural community and that they should respect other cultures. Without making a value judgement over what Ivan is saying here, it is important just to listen to what he is describing as it brings a better understanding to how easily cultures can collide and resentment between cultural groups can build up.

d. Noel from the Philippines

As said before Noel was the only one on his ship from the Philippines and the rest of the crew were from Indonesia. I visited their ship a few times and I got the impression that the interaction between the crew and Noel was very good. Still, he was from the Philippines and the rest were from Indonesia and culture, language and religion separated them from each other. We were talking about being lonely as he is far away from his family and I asked him about the situation with being the only Filipino on the ship.

Chris: And I think adding to loneliness, is sometimes, like on this ship, you are the only one from your country.

Noel: That's the worst thing, yeah. The first time I thought I could not make it. But I remember before when I was sailing when in Smit, we had a captain, who was also an American [ ], we all Filipino and the captain was American, just the one,

Chris: From America.

Noel: Yah, he's doing fine. I think we've been together for about three years and a half, [ ] they work 2 months on, two months on, two months on two months off. They worked back to back. But it's okay. And when I worked on Smit, also one Dutch captain and all Filipino. Now it comes to me that I am only Filipino and all the crew is Indonesian so, yah.

Chris: But it's okay, it's okay for you.

Noel: I get adjusted.

Chris: Yah, yah.

Noel: Yah, I adjusted, as long as all the crew smooth, no head ache no problem [ ]. Of course if you're awake, you always miss them.

It was no small matter for Noel to work on a ship as the only Filipino. He says that at first he thought he could not make it and in answering my question about it he says it is the worst thing+. He adjusted but he admitted that he always miss them+. Out of the context I understand this to mean his family.

This social isolation is not something a company is very concerned about and it is not something a well adjusted sailor like Noel cannot cope with. Noel is fortunate that he only has a contract for two months or so and he is the captain. For a rating it might be more difficult to adjust to the group and it might be more difficult if the contract is for an extended period.

e. Eric from the Philippines:

Eric was a friendly chief cook from the Philippines who could get along with almost anyone. Still, even he had his ups and downs as far as multicultural experiences are concerned.

Eric: My very first experience on board sailing with Italians which is kind of difficult for me that time because it is my first time so a lot of adjustment, you know, working with people [from a] different nationality and [a] different language. So difficulties in communication. Yah, so that's it, that's the first experience that I can share. [ ]

Chris: So your first experience was: %an with Italians; lqn a Filipino [and] we cannot communicate.+ Little bit, but not much.

Eric: Yah, my Spanish is so little, and as I realise Italian and Spanish is kind of resembles, you know. And on my second ship, with the Norwegians, which is not so difficult, because they speak English well. And I had another job that time because my first job on board is at the engine room, but my second ship start working in the galley which is my line of work. So there. By little I learn, I learn everything in the galley. And the housekeeping, that resembles with the hotel work, you know. So there. I, I would say that I have adjusted myself there because there are more Filipinos there. We are three nationalities on board, Norwegian, Indian and Filipinos. But it is mostly Filipinos. It is only officers that, Norwegian, Norwegian officers. And radio operators and electricians are the only Indians on board, but they [are] also nice. See, there is something else I also found out. With these people are not so many, once they are not so many or a big group, should I say, they are so nice. You know, get what I mean?

Chris: Yah, yah, I do.

Eric: They were so nice, and, and, you know, very kind. But once they are in a big group, oh my [ ], you can see the difference. You can see the real them [laughing without humour]. Anyway, that [is] another [story], and Norwegians doesn't really, they were not so, you know, will not sit and make friends with you, like that. They just work, work and work, like that. But they were not so serious, some of them, a few of them, were so, some kind of friendly, yah. And kinda interested to know about Filipinos, like that. The youngsters, but the old ones they don't really care about who you are they just care of what you have to do, if you are doing your job or what, that's it. And then, but working with this Norwegian, I mean, my superior, the chief steward I just, the time I was in the mess, the mess man, these Norwegian stewards is very, what do you call it? They tried to teach me everything [they] knows, so sharing a lot to me. This is the right way to do this, this is the right way to do that. That's it. And one, I should say best thing I learned from them is being so honest all the time. Don't say yes, never, never say yes if you don't think you understand. [ ] Because you know some, some guys

when they are given a task or job order or what so ever, they would just say yes and yes, even though sometimes they are not really sure about what they were told, you know. So what happen is, they did it wrong and, and, you know, they got some problem with this. They got themselves into trouble because they did it incorrectly. So there.

The first issue Eric raises about working in a multi-cultural environment is that language is a real barrier between shipmates as he experienced with the Italian seafarers. What made it worse was that here he seemed to have been the only Filipino and it was his first contract. On his second contract it went better because he sailed with Norwegians who could speak English and there were also other Filipinos on board: %owould say that I have adjusted myself there because there are more Filipinos there.+

On this second contact Eric experienced how the Norwegians on his ship would be friendly with him as long as they are not part of the group. As soon as there is a group their attitude would change: %But once they are in a big group, oh my [ ], you can see the difference.+

For Eric Norwegians also seemed to be too focused on work and %hey will not sit and make friends with you.+ The younger Norwegians will be friendlier, but the older ones will only relate to you in as far as your function on the ship is concerned: %the old ones they don't really care about who you are they just care of what you have to do...+

Eric did not only have negative experiences with the Norwegians, though. He also tells with appreciation about the steward from whom he had learned a lot: %They tried to teach me everything [they] knows...+ They taught him about how to do his work, but also about life: %best thing, I learned from them is being so honest all the time.+

Eric did not get training before he started sailing, but he learned to do his job well as a result of people like these Norwegian stewards. Eric is very appreciative of all that he had learned from others and this seems to be very important to him because later on in the interview he returns to this subject again: %actually seeing me meeting with

different cultures is quite something, but learning something from them is quite good, you know. And with my superior who's been so very supportive and nice, I am so thankful of them for my situation now at present. [ ] I am so grateful they taught me a lot which is very useful to me now.+

Another aspect of being in a multi-cultural situation is that there can be some kind of competition between different cultural groups, comparing yourself and your group with another group. Eric says: %But, whatever my English is, I'm proud of this because working with these Italians and Koreans who cannot really speak [English]... Well, I'm so proud, I feel taller than them, you now [laughing]. Being able to speak English better than them makes me feel like, taller.+ Eric is quite short.

#### - **Alternative perspective**

A person's culture can be said to consist of narratives he or she lives by. These narratives originate, broadly speaking, in the countries people grow up in. These narratives consist of social constructs which defines someone's identity and therefore the behaviour a person sees as appropriate, good, and possible. The degree of difficulty of living on a ship with people, whose lives were formed and shaped by different cultural narratives than your own, should not be underestimated.

One of the most serious consequences of the multicultural situation on ships is that it can lead to social isolation. With Wendy (of whom we heard already under the issues discussed of female seafarers) one of the difficulties about sailing was not so much about her being female, but with being socially isolated because of the multicultural situation on the ships she sailed on (*Nautilus International Telegraph* February 2011:25). When Kverndal (2008:253) refers to the social isolation of the seafarer he links it with the suicides on board which shows how serious this matter can be. People who transgress each other's cultural values do not easily become friends and so you can end up living with a group of unfriendly people for months.

There are so many different cultural values on board, but as Logie (2011:23) has

pointed out the shipping industry as such has a culture of its own. Logie (2011:23) made use of some of the ideas of Geert Hofstede and pointed out that the culture on ships can broadly be described as collective, hierarchical, rule orientated, favouring masculine values, as both long term and short term orientated and the communication can be described as direct. On the one hand this says that someone entering a career as a seafarer from a cultural background with different values will have a hard time to adapt, but on the other hand seafarers do adapt and if they do this shared culture can serve as a way to bind the seafarers from different backgrounds together.

On a certain level most seafarers realise that they have to live together somehow, whether they have appreciation for someone else's culture or not. This is because a ship is not just a work place; it is a home. It is the personal, private space of a seafarer for the duration of his/her contract. In this relatively small space different individuals from different backgrounds need to try and make themselves at home. I guess if you are not emotionally resilient enough to adapt to the challenges of a multicultural home you will not last long. It was interesting to listen to the perspectives that the co-researchers had on this issue.

Jonathan was from Kenya and the rest of the crew were from India. He got along well with them, but especially at the beginning of his contract the language barrier was a very serious issue. Not everyone was able to speak English: "it was hard even to communicate with them. Because like now, some they know English, some they don't know English, the problem is there." There was no possibility of friendships forming between Jonathan and the others: "So even if you have problem, maybe want to share with your friend, you find it's difficult." Jonathan was very isolated because of this cultural barrier: "So you are in the ship even in mess room, sometimes I will just sit in my cabin, not in mess room. Because when they talk I don't understand and nobody talk to me on the ship, yah." About a situation like this one, one of the chaplains wrote: "It is never easy when there is only one of a nation between others because they are most of the time very lonely and don't feel part of the other crew. They don't make an effort to make their food or do something that will make him feel at ease with them."

It is hard to be the single representative of your culture on board. Noel said: "That's the worst thing, yeah. The first time I thought I could not make it." It does not always happen, but sometimes a seafarer does end up being the only person from his/her country and according to Noel it is "the worst thing". Seafarers are resourceful and they can cope with it as Noel said: "I get adjusted." Still, it is not easy and it is a situation where a seafarer can be extremely isolated.

This isolation is not only due to the language barrier because culture is more than language. On Jonathan's ship some of the Indians could understand English, but the problem was that Jonathan did not just need to communicate about the work, but he needed friendship. Cultures can work together relatively easy, but as Jonathan experienced cross-cultural friendships can be hard to come by. Fortunately later on a sailor called Peter, also from Kenya, joined them and between them a friendship could develop.

Eric also talked about the difficulty with cross-cultural friendships. With the Norwegians he found that for them it is quite acceptable to sit and talk with you while they are not in a big group, but as soon as they are part of a group they start to change: "They were so nice, and, and, you know, very kind. But once they are in a big group, oh my [ ], you can see the difference. You can see the real them [laugh without humour]." With some of the older Norwegians Eric experienced that they would not even be vaguely interested in friendship because they tend to see you in terms of your function: "the old ones they don't really care about who you are they just care of what you have to do, if you are doing your job or what, that's it."

By saying that this is Eric's experience I am not saying that this is how Norwegians are. This is Eric's experience and what his experience is saying is that to be at home in a multicultural environment is not that easy. Eric himself is not an anti-Norwegian, though. He admits that some of them, especially the younger ones are "kinda interested to know about Filipinos". He continues to attribute a lot of what he knows to

the Norwegians stewards with whom he worked on his second contract: %a these Norwegian stewards is very, what do you call it? They tried to teach me everything [they] knows, so sharing a lot to me: ¶ This is the right way to do this.q ¶ This is the right way to do that.q That's it. And one, I should say best thing, I learned from them is being so honest all the time.+ It is interesting to compare what Hofstede (Logie 2011:23) said that broadly speaking in Western cultures it is considered to be a good thing to speak directly about some issue whereas in Eastern cultures this would be considered as rude. Maybe what Eric did here was to make a bit of Western culture his own.

He learned about his work and life and later on he articulates his thankfulness again: %a learning something from them is quite good, you know. And with my superior who's been so very supportive and nice, I am so thankful of them for my situation now at present. [ ] I am so grateful they taught me a lot which is very useful to me now.+ Learning from other cultures is also a theme I have found in the interview with Mohammed.

He said: %t's good to meet, to meet with different seamen...+ This summed up Mohammed's perspective on multicultural crews and issues. He asserted: %a there's no bad things to working with different ship, to be working [with] mixed crew.+ In fact Mohammed was so positive that he saw it as an opportunity to be enriched by others: %t I meet with different seamen we used to share in the advice, the ideas, something like that, because I meet with people they've got enough experience, they used to give me experience.+

Unfortunately for Ivan the multi-cultural crews on the ships he worked with did not result in good experiences. He has been sailing for many years and according to him multinational crews were not something you would get in the old days: %a it was not mixed crew like today.+ And he continued: %No, no, no, no, no, we only had Bulgarian crew.+ He did have some experience with ships with mixed crew and it was not a positive one: %And the crew, the, the lower level crew, you know, some of them Romanians, some of them Bulgarians, some of them Russian or Ukrainian, and,



everyone is pulling up towards their side.+

This was not as bad as his encounter with Zulu culture later on in his life and it really frustrated him: %And they put their own, their own African DVD\$, music and all these thing and they make it blast. And they scream and they scream and they shout and one cannot even rest. And then when you tell them they, they turn around and they say: %But it\$ all our culture.\$ He felt that the way the others made noise on board was unacceptable and inconsiderate and what frustrated him was that they simply excused themselves by saying that it is their culture.

Then he said in his frustration: %And sometimes one needs to tell them to take their culture, whatever they call culture, back wherever it came from. And keep it there...+ This is how bad the relationship between people from different cultures can become.

Ivan is saying that seafarers on a ship should be sensitive to the fact that there are other cultures on board and they should therefore not give free reign to their cultural practices: %because here it is multicultural society, community, and they have to consider every other culture present on board and they have to respect it if they want people to respect them in the same way.+

In Ivan\$ case the multicultural tension on board was so extreme that in a sense it became a struggle for survival: %we have to manoeuvre somehow in between and try to survive in this rainbow society.+ I am sure that there are many that would feel offended by what Ivan is saying, but he is sharing an understanding of the social reality in which seafarers have to live and therefore it is important to listen to what he is saying here.

Multicultural issues on board are serious and it is something to be sensitive to, but it is also true that seafarers tend to be resilient and that somehow, as it was the case with religious diversity, mostly they are able to cope with it. I would like to use the words of one of the chaplains who also shared his ideas about religious diversity. He talks about

his experience as a ship visitor:

Every day is a multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-denominational event. I seldom come upon a ship where this differs. I am often quite amazed with the harmony between different groups on board a ship. Even though there are fundamental differences crews tend to respect where people come from and what they believe. Obviously you visit ships where this is not the case, but more often than not there are room for other beliefs.... For me, the ability of seafarers to live in peace in such a confined space, regardless of their differences, is quite admirable.

## **F. Seafarers and the stories of their families: An ironic relationship**

### **- Introduction**

Being a seafarer is a unique kind of life. There are many disadvantages to the families of the seafarers, but of course the truth is that the seafarers would not be sailing if there was no advantage or benefit for them and their families. There has to be some kind of payoff. Ivan said:

Young people they need to be and they want to be next to each other, they want to be together, and it is the right thing but, somebody must do the job, and if one commits themselves, you know, to doing their job they must accept the disadvantages of the advantage they all enjoy. Our guys used to say overseas: every advantage has its own disadvantages, and it is that way.

Especially the financial advantage for seafarers and their families keeps them coming back and back again to the challenging environment on ships. In this section, though, a lot of the things the seamen had to say about their families and the impact of sailing on their families were very negative. They might receive a good salary, but the price they and their families are paying is very high.

Lennart Johnsson, a Swedish journalist, together with photographer Leif Hansson, has written a book about seamen's wives in the Philippines (*Nautilus International Telegraph* February 2011:29). Generally speaking family is very important to the people in the Philippines and therefore it is creating a lot of tension for the seafarers and their families

when they are always away for extended periods of time (Johnsson in *Nautilus International Telegraph* February 2011:29). Johnsson (in *Nautilus International Telegraph* February 2011:29) notes that in Sweden many marriages failed because of the impact of seafaring on the family. Spouses from the Philippines on the other hand stay together more often than not, due to the Roman Catholic influence. This does not mean that there are not real and intense marriage issues because of seafaring, as Johnsson implies (*Nautilus International Telegraph* 2011:29).

Johnsson's book aims at making people aware of the size of the sacrifices that seafarers and their families are making on a constant basis. In Sweden there is even a stigma to being a seafarer which of course has a great impact on the seafarers' family, but it is different in the Philippines. Seafarers here normally have a high status because of the relatively high salaries. Some women told Johnsson that when they got married to a seafarer they were told that they had won the lottery. But one woman told Johnsson: 'I would much prefer it if my husband stayed with me and the children instead of being away for 10 or 11 months a year.'

Some of the pictures in Johnsson's (*Nautilus International Telegraph* February 2011:29) book opened the understanding on how family dynamics of some seafarers are. One picture is of a motorman, Loreto, who is supporting 23 family members. His story reminds me of Eric's relationship with his family which will be explored later on in this section. Another picture is from a seafarer's wife, Sheryl, standing with her small boy in her arms, who says that she shows a picture of the boy's father to him every day.

To show how extreme the impact on the seafarers' family can be, research has found that less than 34% of seafarers are able to contact their families on a monthly basis (Adams 2010:2). This lack of communication and being away from each other leads to a situation where many married seafarers are not being faithful to their spouses and of course this has an impact on their marriages. I already referred to Trotter's (2008) book and here I would like to make use of some of the stories and insight that was made accessible through his research about the night club scene found in Durban and Cape

Town.

In a lot of the studies about seafarers this aspect about their lives and circumstances is absent. So the fact that dockside prostitution is part of seafarers' lives is just overlooked. In my research I do not want to focus on this aspect, but I do think it should be taken seriously because for many seafarers it is very serious. In the next few paragraphs I will use Trotter's (2008) understanding and description concerning dockside prostitution and seamen as I believe this will give a lot of background which will thicken the narrative concerning seafarers in an important way. His research can also be seen as in line with the postfoundationalist approach as his understanding grew out of a local context (cf Müller 2005:74).

Trotter's (2008:15) method of research was to visit the local night clubs, which focus exclusively on seamen, and talk and listen to the stories of the prostitutes who work there. They prefer the work in the seamen's clubs because, according to Trotter (2008:27), the seamen are low-status foreigners and are not able to expose their secret lives (because a lot of them try to maintain a double life). Another advantage for these local women being dockside prostitutes is that the seamen seldom offer any threat to their safety as they have better resources and networks than the seamen (Trotter 2008:28).

Trotter (2008:31) also describes the effect that the ISPS (International Ship and Port Facility Security) code had on the circumstances of these women. This code got rid of all the unnecessary persons, including prostitutes, on the docks under the initiative of the USA after 9/11 (Trotter 2008:31). According to Trotter (2008:31) this code isolated the harbour areas from the rest of the cities. This changed the lives of seafarers in a dramatic way as well as the dynamics of dockside prostitution.

Important, for this research story, is Trotter's (2008:36-46) description of the understanding that the seamen have of their lives as he experienced it while busy with his research. They are away from home for extended periods and long for female

company (Trotter 2008:37,38). For this reason it is also difficult to start a family and get married: they are never in their own countries.

There are some positive aspects to their work, but for them the biggest part of their life is hard and dangerous work, being away from families and experiencing %sexual loneliness+(Trotter 2008:38). According to Trotter (2008:38) self-pity is part of a lot of seafarers' stories and they will agree that they face challenges that most people would not like to face. Trotter (2008:218) describes his conversations with seamen as centred on how difficult their lives are, how boring it can be and how bad it is that they are always away from home. The seamen would describe how their work situation leads them to look for prostitutes (Trotter 2008:218).

The time of their contracts is normally between eight to eleven months for the crew and three to six months for the officers (Trotter 2008:38). The crew on the fishing trawlers will be away for eighteen to twenty four months (Trotter 2008:38); although I have found that it can be up to three years. The result is that most seafarers are more away from their homes than being there and therefore their children and wives are strangers to them and they become only the person that makes sure that the family has money (Trotter 2008:39).

Being away from home poses extreme challenges to a marriage and it takes its toll. In addition to the fact that a lot of sailors are not faithful to their wives, their wives are also not faithful to them (Trotter 2008:39). The seamen also say that they are only human and between them they do not judge each other so that it is socially acceptable to be unfaithful to their spouses (Trotter 2008:39).

On the ships there are normally only men, therefore the sailors are always longing for female conversation (Trotter 2008:54). Trotter (2008:59) calls the seamen %companion-starved+. Therefore some will visit the night clubs only for socializing with women (Trotter 2008:61) and also with each other.

Sometimes the seafarers will have children with the prostitutes. Trotter (2008:158-160) tells about an unlikely meeting between a sailor and his daughter at her twenty first birthday. The mother was a prostitute in Durban and the sailor was a Filipino who had not been in Durban for over twenty years. The daughter was now a prostitute at the club as well and the mother was also still working there. The mother recognized the father and that evening he met his daughter for the first time.

On other occasions the mother would not know who the father is and she would tell a lot of guys that it is their child (Trotter 2008:161). So a seafarer might accept responsibility for the wrong child. On the other hand the father will many times just abandon the child or take care of her/him in a very limited way (Trotter 2008:161).

Sometimes the women will get married and go overseas with the sailors. Though there have been some marriages that worked in the past when there were more Europeans, mostly the marriages with the Asians fail for a variety of reasons (Trotter 2008:172). Sometimes if it is a Filipino, Chinese or Indonesian seafarer they will be from more humble backgrounds than the new wife expected and other times it is the in-laws that will not accept the wife (Trotter 2008:172). Still, there are actually a few that work out well (Trotter 2008:190).

I have also had some firsthand experience with this. One evening at the seafarersq mission an Indonesian chief officer asked me if I would be willing to conduct a marriage ceremony in order for him and a local girl to get married. He had been in the port for an extended period of time as his ship had to be repaired. While we were speaking he dialled her on his cell phone and gave me the phone so that I could talk to her. She sounded quite young and was Afrikaans. I got the impression that she was eager to get married to the chief officer. For me this was surprising as the Indonesian was in his mid fifties and surely she could not have known him well enough to get married yet.

A few days later I visited the chief officer's ship and when I asked him about his intentions to get married he said that the wedding was off. The girl left him for a

younger Indonesian sailor. After reading Trotter's book the whole situation made more sense. I did not understand why a young girl would like to get married to a much older sailor who is a foreigner and who will take her away to a strange country. The way I understood Trotter was that the women see the seafarer as someone who will save her from her circumstances. He is the one who can end her life as a prostitute and give her a new and decent life.

Dockside prostitution is not an easy way of making a living and therefore Trotter (2008:212) says that the scene at the night clubs is actually a very sad and painful one, not only for the women, but also for the sailors. He does point out, though, that for the women it is sometimes an empowering situation compared to other alternatives where she will be abused. With other words it is sometimes the lesser of two evils in the minds of these women.

Trotter (2008:222-224) remarks that, although many seafarers are still part of this scenario it is also true that a lot has changed compared to the old stereotype of a sailor who has a wife in every port. He tells of his experience of sailing on a container vessel as part of his research. On one occasion they were in port and when the seamen went out they only bought things for the family and one guy wanted to call his wife. He explains this surprising decent behaviour (compared with the stereotype) as due to things like technological development, urban modernization and other changes in shipping such as the short turnaround times of ships (Trotter 2008:224).

Trotter's contribution was important because he opened up a perspective on something that has a great influence on the family life of the seafarers. His book provides a rich and colourful description of seafarers and the world they are living in. The seafarers I have contact with are normally aware that I am a chaplain and therefore this aspect of their lives would normally not be part of the conversation and, if it is, would not contain so much detail. An exception to this was the interview with Eric which I will discuss later on. The general impression one gets from this perspective is that it is really difficult for seafarers to have a good relationship with their families.

Otto (2002:7,8) also describes something of the life and circumstances of seafarers and mentions the awkward situation that seafarers find themselves in as they neither feel home at sea or in their countries. This uncomfortable reality will also be explored together with my co-researchers. Otto (2002:8,9) mentions a study which was done in 1996 by the Seafarers' Union together with 6000 seafarers. They revealed how at first it is wonderful when they go home, but after a while they realise how out of place they are. Their children are shying away from them and sometimes call their father 'Uncle'. Seafarers also find that their opinions do not carry that much weight and that they do not have authority in their own homes. Normally this leads to conflict between the spouses (Otto 2002:10). So seafarers tend to be caught up in a unhealthy cycle where they long for home when they are at sea and long for the sea while they are at home (Otto 2002:10). Nowhere are they at home anymore.

The irony is that what is happening is that seafarers lose the very people for whom they are making the sacrifices (cf Otto 2002:9). Especially seafarers of countries from Asia, Africa and South America sail because they want to provide better opportunities for their children than they had (Otto 2002:35). Another reason why some seafarers decide to make their living on the ocean is because they try to avoid 'domestic and social problems' (Otto 2002:35). This will also be discussed later on in this section in my interdisciplinary conversation with Stipp who is from a systemic family therapy background.

My co-researchers gave much insight into the hardships and disadvantages created by the reality of seafaring as far as family life is concerned. But, on the other hand also how many good things seafaring has brought to them.

- **The research characters**

a. John from Nigeria:

John was very open hearted about his family and his marriage.



John: And talking about family. I have started going to sea when I married. I married some 19 years ago and the very first thing I experienced was when I got married. Immediately [after] I finished my marriage, I was taken away from my country to Liberia where I stayed for six months before I saw my wife again. And it was the very first time I knew: ~~Okay~~, working at sea is not always a bed of roses. ~~Cause~~, it was, when I got back home another man was almost taking over my wife ~~cause~~ [laughing], because in fact there was even a rumour or two [which] had [it] that I was not to coming back. That I have married another woman, but God helped me: when I came back I met her and it has been a wonderful marriage with her for this long. So that is what I can tell you.

Chris: Okay and with the children now you have 4 children I think.

John: Yes.

Chris: Okay, and the, the impact on them because I think they [are] now teenager[s]?

John: Yah, my first child is 18, my second child is 16 and then my last children who are twins are 13. The impact of my profession on, on my children just like it is with most other seafarers, is that they don't experience the true fatherhood, you know. It's like most, you discover that it is common among seafarers that their children will take almost 75% of their upbringing from their mother and then that affects, it affects their outlook. So as I am now I put in a lot of energy to be truly, [a] friend to my children. What I do, when I go home I put in so much energy otherwise the job estranges me from my children, makes me a stranger to them. And no matter how I try, that is just the way the job is. So, but thank God, my children, because of our Christian orientation, they tend to understand. And I keep telling them: ~~Well~~, don't rush to take this profession because I am not so happy that I [am] always missing you guys. That is the profession that is making me to miss you guys. ~~So~~ it is, that is how it is with children.

Chris: Yah, now so you won't recommend the seafaring to any of your children?

John: Yah, sure if I choose profession for my children what I would do I would tell them: ~~If~~ you are such a person that would like to keep close to your wife and to your children don't choose the job of a seafarer. You will not get it there. ~~+~~

There are a few important issues that John is talking about here relevant to understanding what some seafarers are going through concerning their relationship with

their families. First he talks about the time when he and his wife just got married and he had to go away for a six months contract. On his very first assignment, just after their marriage ceremony, they almost broke up. He says: %And it was the very first time I knew: %Okay, working at sea is not always a bed of roses+. Sailing is definitely not always a bed of roses and he found that another man was %almost taking over+his wife and she thought that he had married another woman. This first trip almost cost them their marriage.

There is an alternative perspective here, though. He is saying: %God helped me, when I came back I met her and it has been a wonderful marriage with her for this long.+ So, with the help of God it was possible for John to have a wonderful marriage. It might not be so easy, but it seems that to have a good marriage relationship is not impossible for seafarers.

John also said how it is difficult with his relationship with his children. Many seafarers will tell you how their profession opened up doors for their children and many times their children will go to college and have more opportunities than their parents had. What John is saying, though, is actually sad and true for many families. He is saying that his children %don't experience the true fatherhood+. He even adds a percentage to the amount of upbringing the children take from their mother: 75%. He believes that this affects the way they see life.

Even so, he believes that as a seafarer you can do something about it. He puts in extra effort into his relationship with his children and he says that their Christian orientation also helps them to be more understanding. John's perspective on the relationship with his children and his wife is that seafaring is always creating an obstacle in the relationship with them, but that the challenges can be overcome. Still, he would definitely not recommend seafaring to his children.

This is not all there is to say about John and his wife and children, though. He said that since the time of their marriage it has been wonderful ever since. That this is not the

whole story became clear as he elaborated further about his relationship with his wife.

John: And now I am talking about, because you are always away from your families, both male and female seafarers they are not very faithful to their spouses, you know. You need to struggle to be able to keep the, your faith as a Christian, while away from your family. So these two mayor things are very challenging. I, myself in particular, and most seafarers generally talking about how difficult, or how easy it is for a Christian to be on board, that's just the way it is.

Chris: And you have seen other people, Christian people that struggle with being faithful with their, their husband or wife and, and that's happening a lot. It's, it's difficult for you to have Christian values and to live them [out] on a ship because the people around you is, is not doing it, they are not living a Christian life. So there is this group pressure so, you also said about the rituals that they have, they expect you to participate. And also with, with your whole group is, is, is not faithful there is some expectation and there's some pressure on you to conform to the group so, I think that makes it very difficult.

John: Yah, you're right. You're right, actually what you have asked, said, now reminded me of when I failed from my Christian faith. One occasion I was away from my family, I was married with my first child. And because of the kind of peer pressure I faced on board with regards to going out with strange woman, I failed and I hurt and I failed. And I, I, I, did that for a couple of times and when I realized myself I only wake up [in] tears. I, it took me a very long time to get myself back to... So, that is what it is, if you are inside the ship you will always be faced with the pressure, to follow the crowd, to you follow, you know, the majority, because that is what majority see, and they cannot stay without doing some kind of sinful things, especially going after, going into perverse outside their marriages.

As I said before John is a very committed Christian and he is someone who is totally committed to living according to Biblical values, but even for him it was difficult to stay faithful. To understand seafarers and their families this is an important aspect many marriages are living with, this is why Trotter's (2008) book on dockside prostitution was so insightful. Seafarers have many opportunities to be unfaithful, they are in a social environment on the ships where this is not considered a big moral failure and normally they have enough money.

Even if someone like John never failed again it did happen once and it can have a negative impact on the marriage for many years after the incident. The influence of this was probably visible in the manner his wife reacted to the situation John found himself in here in Durban. He said:

ō you see like my wife phoned me one time and said if I know that I have married here I should let her know [laughing]. So I was just, there was a time I had to plead with your wife Reverend Anneke to talk with my wife, and, so that she could be encouraged. In fact there was a time she went to the office, our office in Nigeria to enquire: %s it true that you are the ones holding my husband or he has married there and he is living with another person there?+ So, she was [ ] in the office, they say: %ah woman, that is what is happening.+ Yah, my children are more understanding, maybe because they are children. It has not been very easy with my wife.

Similar to the very first sea voyage John says that it happened again: his wife thought he got married to another person. The whole situation is difficult for a wife at home, much more so if the husband, like John, was unfaithful before.

The relationship with his children seems to be a bit better. He said that it might be because of his children's Christian orientation and also just because they are children. With children he emphasises again that he has to put in deliberate effort to re-establish the bond with them. I asked him about coming home:

Chris: Something else, if you go back to your family, I am just interested, between contracts and, and so on. How do you adapt at home? Is it easy to just adjust, because your family now they have a routine they are use to you, you know, they get on with life, without you, and suddenly if you are back, you are part of their life again. How is that?

John: Yes, yes, I want to tell you that I was just, in a deep thought one time, one time and I began to see: %Oh, so if I had died, so my wife, my family will still get along.+ So that thought was just coming to mind. I said: %Okay, that's a good one too, that if I had died for this length of time they would be living.+ So, what I want to say is that normally

when I get back home, I can, I can tell you that it would take some time before I will be part of them again. I'm going to be a total stranger. Cause what has been happening, talking about; I talk with my wife every day. [ ] because of the cost of airtime, we don't talk, we don't talk with the level of affection that we should talk. So we just try to talk: %s there anything wrong, what is happening?+ Like that. So when I come back home now, I am going to begin to see how I can refit myself into, to their routine of life, you know, the way they see life and the way things are with them. So, yah, it is not easy, but I am going to try. It is part of what I am doing [ ], will make our reconciliation very quicker, faster when I get home. That's, there's no doubt that I'm going to enter my house as a stranger. It will only take time for me to begin to work together again.

John is explaining how it is to come home after a long absence and he explains that it is not easy. He realized one day that his family can get along without him, which he evaluates in a positive way. He said: %Oh, so if I had died, so my wife, my family will still get along.+ They are able to get along without him and so when he comes back from being away so long he says: %I can, I can tell you that it would take some time before I will be part of them again. I'm going to be a total stranger.+ John is motivated and is making a conscious effort to adjust but it will be a challenge.

Based on conversations I had with other seafarers I was interested to find out to what extent it is true that when you are with your family you just want to go back to sea.

Chris: And have you experienced that, sometimes you feel: %I've been at home long enough now; I want to go back to sea.+

John: Okay, when I am at home?

Chris: Yah, when you are at home.

John: Yes, yes, especially when that happens I was younger. You see I am forty six now. When I was younger the sea life used to excite me. And I want to get away from, you know, the hustle and bustle of the city. I want to go to the water environment, so [it] used to be like that for me. But now, I am always thinking of home now.+

John said this after he was away from his family for more than a year and he does say that the sea life used to excite him. This is what I have found with many seamen: that if they are at home they are restless.

John describes the situation of being a seafarer and the effect this profession has on one's family with the following words: 'Working at sea is not always a bed of roses. More than once his marriage almost ended up in divorce because his wife thought he took another wife and once he was really unfaithful. He also added that even if there is not something dramatic like this in the marriage, the problem is still that emotionally there is not such a connection like there should be: 'because of the cost of airtime, we don't talk, we don't talk with the level of affection that we should talk.' John anticipated that he will be a stranger in his own home: 'there's no doubt that I'm going to enter my house as a stranger.' This did not mean that John was not motivated to go home or that he felt helpless and hopeless about the situation.

John said: 'So as I am now I put in a lot of energy to be truly a friend to my children. What I do, when I go home I put in so much energy otherwise the job estranges me from my children, makes me a stranger to them.' John did not have a perfect family, but was able to have a good relationship with his children and a wonderful marriage with his wife as 'God helped him. So, on a positive note John shows that although seafaring poses real and extreme challenges to seafarers' relationships with their families, it is not impossible to overcome it and to be successful concerning this aspect of your life like John was.

He admits that the sea life used to excite him, but he adds: 'I am always thinking of home now.' There is something about the life of a seafarer that is exciting and that draws people towards it other than the relatively big salary. But at the relatively young age of 46 John is thinking strongly of stopping his career as a seafarer.

b. Jonathan from Kenya:

Jonathan described the impact the extreme situation in which he was in had on him and his family. Not getting paid for eight months had far reaching consequences for him and his family as one can well imagine. It became a struggle just to make any kind of contact with the family because he did not have any money to buy airtime. It was difficult to help his child when he got sick and he could not determine how serious the illness was. Further, because of the lack of money they were on the brink of losing their new home which they hired because they thought that, with Jonathan sailing now, things will get better for them financially. His wife who was studying also had to plead with the lecturers for some leniency because of their lack of funds. So, the unfair treatment which Jonathan suffered had far reaching consequences for him and his family. This is what Jonathan said:

Jonathan: Yah, now it's difficult. Okay like, he now, this, him, this other Indians there is one who was problem like me and Peter, this tall guy. This guy he joined the ship, we joined, me and him we joined together and [ ] his problem, because when we joined the ship the company now starting problems, they are not paying in time. And others they were there around six months, like Jovin, was there already one year. And when they get money they don't send money home. Most of them they keep their money, when they sign off they take their money. So we are using, maybe we ask them money, they give us money. And then when we get salary we pay them. So when the ship was under, under arrest it was hard to ask now because you don't know how you'd pay them. So like this guy, this Indian guy, me and Peter, we had that problem to call. Okay, the rest they have airtime they can call. But now, like me, Peter and this Indian guy, we cannot call. You cannot maybe ask some more money to them, and then after it would be problem to pay the money. Yah, that's the problem. So, like me, my family they can call. I cannot call them they can call; they are supposed to call me. [ ] told them: 'I don't have money to call.' And if you, even if I call them through mobile phone [it] is very expensive, and if I use this telephone card, this one is cheaper. And when they call me through my country SIM card, it's cheap. So they call, but this Indian guy, he don't have any...

Chris: Nothing.

Jonathan: Nothing, yah. [ ]

So the situation Jonathan was in was such that he could keep contact with his family in spite of the difficulty with his salary, but to have quality communication with his wife and children was impossible. So in the end it was really difficult for him as this was continuing for months by the time he was sharing this with me. Not having communication was all the more frustrating as his family had to handle all kinds of frustrations such as that his wife was not able to pay for her studying any more.

Chris: And, and, on your family, it's difficult for your family, your family is struggling also?

Jonathan: Yah, like my own family they have that problem. I talk about my wife. My wife, when I joined the ship she was not working. Before she was working, when I, also when I was just jobless at home, my wife was working. And then after election in my country, in Kenya it was problem in Kenya, people they were fighting, yah, so she lose her job. [ ] And then I joined the ship last year on, on, on April. No, last year in May she got company in the port. Now she was working like a tally, making tally also, but the small money. Because she don't have any paper for the job, but she can do the job, yah. So she was working there when she get money, because by then I was already paying house six month, nine months. So when she was getting money she was going, she was, she joined the private study, private study, yah. She was studying for this, I don't know what they call it, catering or caterers? Working the hotel...

Chris: Ah, like catering business, yah.

Jonathan: Yah, yah, she was doing that, because before she was doing that job, but she was doing that with fake papers. Yah, so she liked the job. She was going for studies. But now she is supposed to do this paper on June this year, in June, yah. So problem, she is working, just small money, she must pay that money. And I'm supposed to give her money for food. Don't expect her money to buy food again. So the problem was starting, so I tell her: "Okay, your money you pay for study, and then about food, you, you take for credit, I'll pay for credit." So when the problem came I stopped her to take food on credit, yah. So the problem started.

Chris: So her studies stopped?



Jonathan: Like now, she cannot pay her study, but [ ] She's just paying small, small. When they reached the time of examination it is already finished the money there. So the, the principal she, he know her, [ ] %am not working, I don't have money to pay but I'd try.+ So you understand, I said, I told her: %So you do your paper but you can't take your certificate.+ [ ]. So she is still going.

In spite of the difficulty with studying, Jonathan's wife was able to make a plan about the situation, but now another problem that Jonathan needed to handle together with his wife, without proper communication or a salary was that they were on the brink of being thrown out of their home.

Chris: Yah, yah. Okay, and also they are, your family is having trouble with housing and they might be put out.

Jonathan: Yah, yah like now, I have problem now. I have one day now, that is only today and tomorrow they must be out. That is, really they must be out. Like yesterday when I was here, I find message, she was, she called and she talked to Peter, that the agent he was there. Morning he tell her that on 30<sup>th</sup> she must go out, yah. Because on first, either they pay money or they're close the door. [ ] The problem I have, I don't like my son to know what's going on. At least, yah, just want to, because you know he's still young, [ ]. My son cannot [ ] himself still young, the problem I have is that.

Chris: And this is all, the big problem is, everything is caused because you're not paid, you didn't get your money in time. If you get your money like the contract was, no problem.

Jonathan: No problem, because if I get in time, at least if I have the money, I can plan. [ ] So when I get a job, before we'd just stay in one room, in one room. So we have our baby there and my son is sleeping down. So I decided, because my son now is older now, better I have maybe house with two rooms. Maybe he can sleep in bedroom; he can sleep in sitting room, like that. So he, I get the room of sixty dollar, including water and electricity, sixty dollar. So if I could get salary in time, it would be better, [ ]. Because if you have problem with your salary some other problem that are coming, small, small problem, but this problem [ ] when you get the money, the money is small there's problem see, that is problem. But if you have money, you can control yourself. [ ]

Chris: Yah, you can plan and know how much you have and...

Jonathan: [ ] Yah, but now problem, [ ] Yah, the young kid, last time he was sick, many time sick, sick, sick, yah, that [is] the problem.

And later we continued:

Chris: So and you are here and your child is sick and you don't have money and you are not there to help. So that's very, I think it's very difficult.

Jonathan: It's difficult, especially if you are out, if you are there, maybe, your son is there you see him, you can do, maybe you can do something. You can do anything; maybe ask your friend like that. But now that my wife she cannot go to my friends, you see. Okay, they can help, they can help me but I have problem, maybe today I went there tomorrow again. Now she say it is no good. And also if you are there, you can know, maybe if it's serious. Because you tell okay, your son is sick. If you are here, you don't know how serious it is. Maybe you think it is only fever, but maybe it's serious. Sometimes you can assume also, and when they call you, you don't have money. Now you have too much pressure. Temper, you don't know what is going on there. You cannot help them, even to call them to know what is going there, you can't. Like me, that's the problem I've experienced this year. Called my son, he was sick around three times. Yah, three times.

Jonathan is giving us a glimpse into the dramas of the world he is living in. His circumstances are unique in that there are few ships where seafarers are not being paid for eight months. The things he and his family had to endure are extreme and fortunately not an everyday thing for seafarers.

Being away from home and having trouble at home, though, is an everyday thing for most seafarers. Leaving trouble behind for the family and the spouse to handle is also an everyday thing. One Ukrainian chief officer told me that his experience is that the moment he goes back on a ship after a vacation the problems at home start. When he was there and able to handle it nothing went wrong, but now that he is on the other side of the world the troubles start. Jonathan, while referring to his son being ill, said: %t's

difficult, especially if you're out, if you're there, maybe, your son is there you see him, you can do, maybe you can do something. You can do anything; maybe ask your friend like that.+ He goes on to say that his wife can also ask his friends help, but that she does not want to do it repeatedly like he is able to. Being far away makes you powerless in many ways.

Jonathan describes the problems his family is having and the way in which he is describing it you sense that this is a man who is facing a lot of very serious troubles. He is overwhelmed. His wife is working in a port in Kenya but is not earning much and she is also studying and needs to have funds for this. In the light of the fact that he got the job on the ship they decided to move to a bigger home and that he will pay for the food and housing and she can pay for her studies. Now, because of not getting paid for eight months Jonathan and his wife were financially in big trouble. His son also got sick three times and he is not there to help and also does not have money.

Many times seafarers go into this job with great expectations. They got a bigger home and maybe his wife also started to study as the family's situation started to improve. Before there were times when he did not even have work and his wife was the only provider. For Jonathan and his family working at sea turned into a nightmare, although fortunately there is always the possibility of another contract. Jonathan talked about why he started, how it turned out and how he saw the future: %But my hope was, I was thinking maybe when I joined the ship things would be fine + As we have seen it was anything but fine. In the seafarers' centre he talked to another seafarer who was experiencing better circumstances who said: %But when you get the, the nice company with too much ships maybe things will be fine. But when you are starting that's hard, [ ]. So you must keep on working and then one day you get nice company.+ This is the hope that keeps seafarers at sea. The hope that: %things would be fine+. I kept contact with Jonathan and it took longer than a year for him to receive a new contract again.

c. Mohammed from the East Coast of Africa:

Mohammed did not have children yet. At the time of the interview he and his South African wife were still together, but later on they separated. Family and seafaring for him had other implications than for instance the things Jonathan and John had to face. He moved from his country to South Africa and found a wife here. This was all as a consequence of becoming a sailor. He came to South Africa after he started sailing as a way of having better opportunities. He said: %So now I travelled for one year on that ship, then I decided to meet with different seamen. They used to tell me that: %You, you don't know nothing. It is better you to go to learning [ ]. There is another country called South-Africa. South-Africa, the document of South-Africa is recognized all over the world.+

So for the sake of seafaring and opportunities in seafaring he came to South Africa and had to leave the rest of his family behind. Another way in which family and seafaring are connected in Mohammed's story is that part of the reason why he became a seafarer was because one of his family members was also a seafarer.

Okay, now my aim is to be a seaman the time when I grow. The reason why is because my uncle he was the seaman. The time when I grow when my uncle coming from sea people they very happy the place where he's staying. And I see there's a different, can give us a story. He was in Germany, he was in Holland, so he travelled different place. So, me too I wish to follow his style.

He became a seafarer because he wanted to follow in his uncle's style+. I was also interested later on in the interview whether he would recommend to his children to follow in his footsteps of being a seaman.

Chris: %If one day you have, you have children would you tell them it's a good work to do, to be a seaman? Would you, would you recommend that for your children?

Mohammed: Yah, because you know I can't say anything at the moment now because I never get a child. But if God, He give me a child also, I wish my son to join the, to follow my style, you see, also I want him to be a seaman, because I love the seaman.

Chris: So it's been a good, it's a good work for you and you love it.

Mohammed: Yah, yah, because it came in the family, in the seamen families.

So, for Mohammed seafaring took him away from his family in his country of origin on a semi-permanent basis. On the other hand it brought him to South Africa where he met his wife. Seafaring and family also went together for Mohammed in the sense that he wanted to sail because of the example his uncle had set by being a seafarer who had all kinds of interesting stories to tell. He wanted to follow in his uncle's footsteps and he wanted his children one day to follow in his. This is quite unique as there are not many seafarers whose children will become seafarers, although on some occasions a seafarer will tell me that his father/son is also a seafarer (I have not experienced this with a female seafarer).

d. Ivan from Bulgaria

Ivan had been sailing for many years and what he had to say about family and seafaring were from a perspective based on many years of experience. He is married to a South African lady and was divorced from the wife he had in Bulgaria. It seems that he is saying that the reason why his marriage failed was because of his career as a seafarer. He had children with her, but he did not say much about them. I asked him about seafaring and family.

No, it is not easy. I don't find myself so lucky, you know, with family and all, issues. Okay, in principal, I could say as much as I could say about my own folks, you know, from my country of origin, there would be very few seamen, you know, not specific level, of any level, from the crew list, very few would be found, you know, to not be divorced. And, married a second and third time, whatever. It's a difficult thing, it is a difficult thing for women and it's a difficult [thing] for the man. For a woman it is difficult because she has to deal with every kind of problem and every kind of emergency when the man is not around to help. For the man it is difficult because he finds himself when he comes back home a bit purposeless because this woman has already gotten the routine of dealing with everything and if he tries to do something that she automatically, you know, takes a stand you know of defence and would even told him to him not to interfere, she can deal with it on her own. She would talk as if he does [not] know what it is about.

According to Ivan, at least in Bulgaria, a lot of seafarers are divorced. Ivan explains this by describing how the situations is with a seafarer and his wife when he returns. Normally seafarers will be keen to go home when I meet them on a ship. Being far away they remember their countries and families with fondness. The reality is that it is not always so easy to reconnect with your family as John also explained.

Ivan says that it is both difficult for men, who come back, and women who stay at home when the husband comes back. The problem is that when he comes home the wife is used to handling everything and the husband, also used to handle everything on the ship finds himself ~~purposeless~~ and he is not suppose to ~~interfere~~. This on its own does not have to lead to a divorce, of course, but it is something that I believe a lot of seafarers have to overcome.

Ivan also told me a little bit about his children and shared an incident that happened after he got home from a contract of 18 months.

It, happens, it happens, and that is, and also with children, I mean with children especially, especially deep sea, talking seamen, children don't know you. I heard with my third child, you know, coming after 18 months, and it is so nice the mother leaves her in the morning with me to go to work and she starts screaming blue murder, you know: ~~Mommy~~, mommy who are you leaving me with?+ And yes, slowly, gradually you know, it comes, to the right level of relationship you know, but, but it is a problem.

So Ivan tells of this incident with his daughter who was afraid of her own father. Many times seafarersqchildren will be born when they are at sea. Some will joke about the fact that their children will be confused about who this new stranger in their home is after the seafarer returns to his family. It does not seem to be funny to Ivan though. Ivan describes further how a seafarer finds that he does not always have much authority with his own family in contrast to the ship if he is an officer:

Ivan: It's a problem when a father finds, you know that no one listens to him, they listen to their mother because she is the boss, most of the time, and yes, and...

Chris: And if you are a senior officer you [are] used to be in command and now you are at home and not your wife or your children are listening to you, you have no say.

Ivan: Definitely, definitely. Well, like a colleague of mine, I've been working with him here on this dredger and on the other dredger, he's a chief engineer, he's [saying the] same [thing]: 'Here I'm the boss, at home I am nobody'. And I am sorry to say very close to the truth, you know. Not because it is literally true, but because the women makes it that way. They like, they obviously they, they feel naturally under privileged as women and well, they take most probably something, which I would call affirmative action, and they reverse the situation on their own initiative.

Especially someone who has a senior position on a ship, I think, can relate to what Ivan says and he tells about the one chief engineer who said: 'Here I'm the boss, at home I am nobody'. Ivan even compares it to affirmative action.

Otto (2002:13,14) quotes a letter that the wife of a Filipino seafarer wrote in a news paper called *Tinig ng Marino* in September 1997, which illustrates how difficult it is from the perspective of those who stay at home:

His homecoming is like a honeymoon. How intoxicating and joyful! Everybody is on cloud nine. The wife is on top of the world. The husband is overflowing with love and attention. The children are overwhelmed by Dad's generosity. You are ready to forgive the hurts, which were inflicted upon you.

When the honeymoon period is over how difficult everything becomes! Everybody comes back down to earth. The wife takes the back seat. The husband is beset with disillusionments and becomes demanding. The children are wary and confused by dad's moods, which can switch . sunny one minute and critical the next. Once more you are harbouring the hurts that you thought were already buried. After twenty-one years of married life and six children, I would say that I have encountered some dilemmas as a seafarer's wife. I bet he has too, although in a different way.

My husband who was the oldest in the family and the first to earn a living abroad (being a seafarer) is a good son and brother. I thought that he would make a good husband and father. And he did. The trouble was, I was not prepared to take the great responsibility of having to take care of his brothers and sisters, who lived with us under one roof during the crucial early stages of our married life. I could not bear the task that was suddenly heaped upon my lap, not to mention having to cope with different characters, habits and upbringing. It was like heavy baggage that threw me to the ground.

I could not write about the pain I had been going through, because I did not want him to worry, and his job might be affected. I could not discuss it either when he was on vacation because I did not want to ruin his precious moments with us.

The change came when I came into a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Slowly I learned to trust in Christ despite the many problems. I learned to tell Jesus all my sorrows and problems, and healing started to take place. Soon after Jesus changed me, my husband also came to know Jesus. When my husband comes home now, we take time in prayer and spend our time together with God's help.

While Ivan describes the situation of the family from the seafarers' point of view, this wife gives some insights into what those who have to stay at home are experiencing. Fortunately she found a solution in a personal relationship with Jesus. Exactly the place those in seafarers' mission are pointing towards.

But even those with a close relationship with Jesus do face challenges as John for instance also described and gave us insight to. When the seafarer comes home everyone is happy but this honeymoon stage is soon over. This might be why someone like Noel, who I will discuss in the next section, was quite comfortable with going home for only 12 and 14 days after two consecutive contracts: he can leave before the honeymoon stage is over.

This might be good for the short term, but this wife is talking about hurts that are there even though she thought it was forgotten at first. These hurts did not have the proper time for the husband and wife to work through, she says: "I did not want to ruin his precious moments with us." All the responsibilities came down on her shoulders and



she did not only take care of her own family, but also the husband's brothers and sisters. The responsibilities are not always as extreme as in this case but it is true that a great responsibility rests on the wife's shoulders while the husband is away (and of course the other way round when the wife is the seafarer).

Otto (2002:11,12) refers to research Erol Kahveci did and a few things that Filipino seafarers' children said are insightful to take note of here: 'Most of the time I feel like we are one of his men on the ship. There are times he keeps on saying 'You have to finish this at this time+and 'You have to do this before that.+There are lots of commands.+ Another child said: 'We have to wake early because my dad wants us to wake up when he is up. He doesn't want us to sit down and relax, he wants us to do things. He wants all the family working and working and working. Maybe he's used to the ship. When he's on the ship everybody's working.+'

The seafarer is saying: 'Here I'm the boss, at home I am nobody+'. A seafarer's child says: 'There are lots of commands+'. This is not the only frustration for seafarers and their families and all this takes its toll. The result is not unpredictable: many seafaring families end up separating from each other like in Ivan's case. He speculates that if a person is to sail at a different stage of his/her life it would be easier on the family. The fact is unfortunately that most seafarers start to work at sea and continue to work at sea when their wife and children need them the most.

Chris: Yah, so, so family and seafaring is, it is difficult, it, it's not so easy.

Ivan: Yah, it is, but look, when I was, when I was much younger, 77, 78, we were like next door neighbours, you know, with big American old liberty ships. And we were watching them, the crew, the crew looked like [ ] of them must be beyond pension age, they all of them are old people, all of them. So, basically it comes to say, it makes sense in life it doesn't so much affect people's life when they [are] of that ripe age, you know, where not really much counts. Whether you will be away for a while, a woman is more like settled down, and so are the man, and, looks like more bearable on either side, to say.

Chris: But with a different age it can be very, very difficult.

Ivan: Yes. Yes. Young people they need to be and they want to be next to each other, they want to be together, and it is the right thing but, somebody must do the job, and if one commits themselves, you know, to doing their job they must accept the disadvantages of the advantage they all enjoy. Our guys used to say overseas, every advantage has its own disadvantages, and it is that way.

Chris: Yah, and you have to accept, if you are sailing there is some plusses and some minus, yah.

Ivan: Unfortunately, unfortunately sometime it comes to more like, if not extreme, close to extreme situations where it's not good to carry on. It's not good. Although we know what the Bible says what the Lord told us, that you must not part from each other, but it comes to a point where you don't want your children as they grow further, you know, to witness, [ ] that are not good, positive, not educational at least, for them. So, then rather take a clear cut, you know. At least they won't have that, that, very, very bad environment.

Chris: Yah, it becomes a choice between two bad options [ ].

Ivan: Yes, it happens like that. It happened to me and it happened to other people too.

Ivan says that at a young age a wife and a husband need to be together. This is of course the age you have to start your seafaring career and you will just have to accept the disadvantage of the advantage+. The disadvantage in Ivan's case was that he got divorced for the sake of the children so that they did not have to grow up in a bad environment.+

So, seafaring turned out for Ivan to be a great strain on his relationship with his family. When he was still young and part of his family he felt purposeless+. His third child was so afraid of him once that when left alone with him she started crying for her mother and in the end he decided to get divorced from his wife.

Seafaring was not just bad for his family life though. He has another wife now and the option to live in South Africa was made possible because he was able to find a job on a local dredger. So, for him seafaring was a curse and a blessing, a disadvantage and an advantage.

e. Noel from the Philippines

While Noel described the situation with him and his family I got the impression that he adapted well to the challenges posed by this unique career. It seemed to me that the way to describe Noel is to call him a ~~well~~ well adapted seafarer+. Well adapted to his family and well adapted to the situation on board the ship. He told me about his family and the financial motivation for staying at sea. He also explained how he does not want to stay home for too long, mainly because of financial reasons, but there are also some other reasons. He was with a company where he could work for two months and then go home for one month, although it did not always work out like that. We talked about vacations, finances and family.

Noel: I've been sailing since I was 19 years old, finish my college then up to present, and...

Chris: How long did you...

Noel: ...the longest vacations I spent at home is about, one year and a, one year and a half, that's the longest vacation I spent at home, that was [when I] still, still, I still have one son. After that I've been sailing most of the time and spent home vacation one month, two months, and sometimes three months.

Chris: Okay, so that's the average, two months, three months, that's, that's...

Noel: But mostly working in [the name of a previous company] for several years...because we have regular rotation so I get always two months. Two months on, two months off.

Chris: Okay that's, that's now in the current company you are working for. That is the...

Noel: Yes, the ship also here but because with now with the shortage of officers so sometimes cannot spend much for vacation. So, like this time, first was this year, first was 12 days and next one is 14 days at home.

Chris: Only 14 days at home?

Noel: Yes, because it was urgent that I must replace the captain here, because he's been six months on board.

Noel is describing how much time he has with his family. He managed to have as long a vacation as one and a half year once. Now he ended up in a company that offers him a favourable contract where he is two months on, two months off (in theory). What actually happened was that he only had 12 days vacation, two months on the ship, and then 14 days at home again. This was due to a common occurrence in shipping that there are not enough officers available. This is good, in a sense, because even if there was a recession, which hit the shipping industry very hard, at least officers had not much worry about getting new contracts. In Noel's case the problem was that he did not get so much time to spend with his family. He accepted this and also highlighted the financial advantages of being on the ship for longer:

Noel: So, anyway, that's okay as long as I be home for a short time, and I see my family, that's okay. And also one thing is that financial, it's growing up, so you must have to cough up with expense[s] because my family is growing big. And the children become big, so in college, so more expense, not like when they were still young and you just give small pocket money. But now they have advance already and they have also to, find their own dress, you cannot just say like when they [were] still young, you buy, you buy for them, they only happy, you know, but now they're not. They ask money; they need more, always, always more.

Chris: Yah, so it's okay for you not staying at home so long because you can go home, you can come back and you can earn some good money.

Noel: Yah, there's advantage and disadvantage. Disadvantage that I still want to spend more [time at] home, time for my family. The advantage is going back, earning again, because at home we get nothing, so all money just come out.

Chris: Yah, so, so it's okay, a short stay at home is okay.

Noel: Yah, and you see it's always the drawback on the seaman, all seamen is like that, that when we are off so we get no salary. So of course always going out, money going out no coming in. So if you stay long, so you bankrupt [laughing].

Noel is talking about a very typical situation in which almost all seafarers find themselves in. Most seafarers are contract workers. Even when they are working for the same company they do not get paid while they are taking vacation and so all the money is going out and nothing is coming in. This is part of the reason why Noel was not upset about going back for another contract after a short stay at home. He did stay once for longer than a year and I was interested to find out how this was possible considering the fact that he does not earn any money for that period.

Chris: So, but how did you do it for one and a half year, once? How did you cope because you said your longest vacation was one and a half years?

Noel: That was a long time ago.

Chris: Oh, you did not have so much expenses then?

Noel: Yah, at that time still was only had one son.

Chris: Oh, okay only one.

Noel: I have business. So my business was able to cope up with my expenses, and that's okay, even though at that time, I even I don't go back I can already survive in our business, but a family growing big so expenses also grow big. And, you know, and as a seaman I battle with the thoughts... even if some times when I am home two months, I feel restless, only because, the routine just in the house [ ] children in school [ ] my wife [ ] and it's not only me, most seamen only I talk.

Chris: I heard that, yes...

Noel: Your body also looking for it.

Chris: So, so it's two, two months feel like it's enough now. You would like to go back to sea.

Noel: Yah, because you already, feel bored already. Because sometimes see my wife said I saw only so much things now so: %ou better go!+[laughing]

Chris: Even for your wife it is better. Two months is too long.

Noel: Yah, %o ] you see so much things around already+[laughing].

Chris: Yah, interesting.

Noel: Yah and especially the budget is getting smaller already: %ou need to go+[laughing]. That is also, if you have a project, so by the time you go home, mostly I have to do some improvement of the house or something, you know, so yes my wife do the planning, but for me I had the money, okay, because you don't have the money you cannot buy anymore. [ ] So the life of [a] seaman is quite very hard, compared to... If I can earn in the land, I can just say 50% what I earn now, I can do it.

Chris: Yah, you will be able to manage, with only 50, yah.

Noel: That's what the saying, from my father, when your blanket is small, you have to learn to bow, you know.

Chris: Yah, you make yourself smaller.

Noel: [ ] if you blanket is big, okay, you can spread, yah, so you have to adjust, if your blanket is small you have to, [ ]

Chris: And you would be able to adjust with only 50% of what your current...

Noel: [ ] So you have to planning, expenses, good time [ ] Cause I see it, some of my friends they also survive, they also send their children to school, how much more for me that I can earn maybe 5 times what they earn?

Chris: Wow, so it's actually a good salary for you that you [are] earning at the moment.

Noel: Oh, yes, yeah.

Chris: Compared to a land based.

Noel: Yes.

Chris: Yah, much better.

Noel: That's why so many Filipinos want to sail to sea, but it's a hard life, [ ], you must be, one thing, you must be tough, [ ] you know you are a seaman, so there's loneliness.

Chris: Loneliness.

Noel: Yeah, you have to fight for it, because if you're lonely you're lost, you want to go home, you lose your job.

Chris: So how do you fight loneliness?

Noel: So, you have so many things you have to do, [ ], there is reading, the computer, [ ] to exercise, to make yourself busy.

Noel is describing the tension between wanting to be at home and wanting to go back at sea. He is talking a lot about the advantage of the salary he gets, especially as he is a captain. But wanting to go back to sea is not just about the money because after two months at home he starts to feel restless, he battles with his thoughts and he heard this from other seafarers as well. It seems that the daily routine of the household is driving him away to go back to the sea. In addition to this he says his ~~no~~body is looking for it.+ He says that he gets bored and even his wife will tell him: ~~no~~you better go!+

This is actually not the full story because when he is back on the ship again he finds many times that he is lonely. He says that ~~no~~you have to fight for it, because if you're lonely you're lost, you want to go home, you lose your job.+ It seems like the loneliness

is something that can just take you over and get you in its grip if you are not careful. He has ways to fight it, though, for instance through keeping himself busy.

What was interesting in Noel's relationship with his family was the tension of wanting to go and wanting to stay. In my experience it is not only Noel who has to face this difficult situation. With Ivan he called it the disadvantages of the advantage of sailing. Noel even used the same words when he said: %6 there's advantage and disadvantage. Disadvantage that I still want to spend more home, time for my family, that advantage is going back, earning againõ +

Later in the interview I asked Noel about his history and why he is still sailing after all these years in spite of all the drawbacks. We were talking about the difficulty of working with a multinational crew as he was the only Filipino amongst Indonesian crew.

Chris: Yah, so, but Captain, how long have you been now on sailing, you say you started at 19, and now how many years have you been?

Noel: So, 2009, so 39 years.

Chris: 39 years!

Noel: I started in 1970.

Chris: 1970, wow.

Noel: So now 39.

Chris: Wow, and the reason why you kept going was, um? Why did you keep going, for 39 years?

Noel: Yah, one thing this is where I get to support my family. This is my profession. I love it.

Chris: But you said also, that there is sometimes loneliness that is making it difficult. What else it making it difficult on, on [the] ship?



Noel: You have a family problem. That's not only to me, most of the seamen they have, they have family problem that's the worst, especially you cannot make action. So [ ].

Chris: If there is a problem you cannot make any action.

Noel: Yah, yes [ ] like before when there was not yet cell phone, I was still at that time sailing in the tanker. So it's a long, long way to sail from Singapore through the Persian Gulf, and the Persian Gulf you cannot go down the ocean so you have to wait till you go back to India or Singapore. So the company always had that when the agent arrived, first thing on board is the mail. Yes, everybody happy, so now, also when we arrive also in Singapore. Singapore, it's in the post office where we can make telephone call. So now because we have cell phone we have a satellite phone we are always in touch with our family.

Chris: Ah, so that has changed over the years. It is more easy to just at least keep in touch.

Noel: For so many years now I have not written [to] my wife.

Chris: It's no more necessary anymore, yah.

Noel: No.

Chris: So that has actually improved over the years?

Noel: Yes, this [was] bad days now you see, course sometimes [it's] months before you can receive your mail. Especially the mail was for [ ], you already departed, so it will have to catch up with you in the next port. And also we have times that you don't receive any mail. And so, we know because somebody [ ] would feel very sad that no news at home.

Chris: Then that makes you lonely. You don't have any contact, no news, nothing.

Noel: Yeah, yes, but now we have a cell phone you can contact any time [ ] your family.

Noel says: %dove it+. This type of attitude you do not find so much among other seafarers. I did hear other seafarers talk like this before, but it is mostly captains. He says this as part of the reason why he, after 39 years, still comes back to the sea. The other reason that he referred to was that it is because he needs to make a living.

Like Jonathan he says that one of the problems of being a seafarer that you experience in relation to family is that you cannot do much when there is a problem at home. Noel says: %a.you cannot make action+.

Noel has been sailing for 39 years and he had experienced a lot of changes along the way. One of the changes he discussed with me was cell phones and how it made their life so much better. Before they could only make a call in some places, but now they have access to cell phones and satellite phones. Before it was difficult if you go to ports in the Persian Gulf where you are not allowed, or just not able, to go ashore and to make a call. Now it was easier and with satellite phones you can have contact with the family even in the middle of the ocean. This is expensive but for a captain it is relatively affordable and even though you might not be able to talk with the %level of affection that you should talk+as John has articulated it, it is enough to just say hello. Before you sometimes had only contact through letters and you might even miss the letter if you leave the port before the letter arrives. In this respect Noel says that it is really better than before and he even calls it the %bad days+.

f. Eric from the Philippines

Seafaring seems to run in the family not only in Mohammed's case, but for Eric as well. In Mohammed's case it was his uncle who got him interested in seafaring, whereas in Eric's case it was his father-in-law.

Eric: I got a job through my father-in-law, he requested me to one of his superior, the superintendent that he met, because [he had] been regular on one particular ship, so these superintendent knows him. There. I got the job, although I don't have my education, luckily. But now he is retired, he's too old, he got sick. That's it.

Chris: What work did he do?

Eric: He's the bosun.

Chris: Ah, I see, ok, ok.

Eric: So there. Ah, I finally got a job, then able to send my children to good schools. Luckily have my first born graduated already and my youngest is also graduating now come summer. So, most likely I'll be having, I will be able to spend a long vacation now [ ] my youngest graduated. Of course I'll have to keep on sailing, you know, to be able to send her to school, you know. Because sending someone to school nowadays is really costly, especially college. That's it.

Chris: So, that is one of the things that keeps you going back to sea and...

Eric: Yah, I do the sacrifice, you know, yah, and that's it. But it is very compensating. Seeing my daughter having a good job now is really quite [ ]. All the hardships is worth it.

For Eric his work is a sacrifice, but it is worth it as he is able to provide for his daughters and able to see to it that they get a good education. For him this is ~~very~~ compensating. His father-in-law helped him and now, in his turn, he is helping his daughters to make progress in life. Eric is very positive about his work but he does not deny the fact that there is sometimes loneliness to cope with and he gives advice to the younger seafarers:

Eric: But one thing I'm really proud of is seeing the world, really. I just, what I do is I keep myself busy, so I can avoid thinking about my family and be homesick, that's all. Maybe that's all I can share. My, my advice to the new ones, if you are going to be homesick, [if you are going to] get homesick; keep yourself busy, that is all you have to do. Just keep yourself busy, and everything will be fine. Just think, always think that you are here to work so you can send food, everything that your family needs you can provide them that, all the necessities that they need, that's all. It is the service sacrifice. And most of all keeping in touch with them [ ] a phone call will do. These days it's a lot easier, there's a lot of ways, so many ways of communicating with families. It's easier

now, unlike before, if you sail with these tankers, these big tankers, it will cost you \$8 per minute to make a call via satellite. So...

Chris: So you can say Hello and that about it.

Eric: Yah, you can say that. But no, no, it's alright. But what is the use of earning and earning if you're going to lose them by having miscommunication. So communication is really important. Oh, by the way, before there is no email, only telex, so I used to receive letters, up to twenty, up to twenty every port [laughing].

Chris: From your wife?

Eric: Just from my wife, and my friends and also my cousins. I'm from a big family. And I would say I support most members of my family. That's why, everybody loves Kuya. Kuya is big brother.

Chris: Ok, K...

Eric: Kuya. Everybody loves Kuya. Kuya, I need this, Kuya. Kuya, thank you for that, thank you for this. Kuya, where is you? Kuya, happy birthday! Every vacation, just sharing some stories, yah, that's the way, that's how we live before the sea. So, just imagine if you don't get any letter, just imagine that.

Chris: Yah.

Eric: Those were the days.

Chris: Were there people who didn't receive any letters?

Eric: No, the thing is, if you don't get any letters, it only mean something. It only means you don't have family, you don't have a friend, like that. For me, I'm a family guy, I have a lot of friends, I'm a big brother to everybody. That's why I never miss a letter. So, that's it. Those were the days. See, how big is the difference? Before we always pray that we get letters. Now you can have mails through internet, you know, text messages, unlike before. Once you got letter the next letter will come next port, unless your wife or any other member of your family write you every day. [ ].

Eric has to admit that seafaring is not always that easy. His advice to another seafarer would be to keep busy, to keep perspective as to why you are doing it and to keep in contact. His argument is that it is no use if you earn good money to provide for the family, but in the process you lose them. It seems that seafaring did not cause Eric to lose his family, quite the opposite.

For Eric his life at sea has made him to be a bit in the centre of everything. He is the big brother, affectionately called %kuya+, and loved by all. In the old days he would receive up to twenty letters in a port. Now, it is easier to stay in contact, but his role in the family did not change. Maybe he would have been an important part of his family without seafaring, but one thing that seafaring gave him was money with which he could not only support his children, but also other members of his family. So, therefore there are many requests and many family members to say: %thank you.+ As an example of this I had to take %kuya+ to the bank one day so that he could send money to the Philippines to his brother in-law who was ill. I warned him that it would be very expensive, but his brother in-law insisted that he cannot wait, that he must get the money. To send \$200 to the Philippines it had cost %kuya+ about \$50. Eric afterwards said that this is why he could not have a good time in Durban, but immediately says that, that is okay, because he could help a family member. Like Eric says: %am a family guy.+

So, on the one hand it seems that seafaring is making it possible for Eric to do so many things for his family because of the money, but at the same time it takes him away from them. Most seafarers have to live with this irony, but nowadays it is better and technology has made it possible to stay in contact much easier than before. None the less, eventually he did separate from his wife, but in the manner he talked about it I got the impression that they would have even if he had a different profession.

Previously when I referred to the research done by Trotter (2008) I pointed out that he gave perspective to an aspect of the lives of seafarers which is normally not accessible to me. Amongst other things because seafarers tend to be aware that I am a chaplain

and therefore would not like to speak freely about things such as their night lives and all the things that are part of it. Eric, though, did not mind talking about this and shared his view on this intimate issue. Eric says: %mean, sex is a part of our life, our lives.+ He goes on to say:

So, every time we have a chance, you see, some of these guys forget their families and all they see is just beautiful girls. They used to pay every time in order to have a good time, you really have to pay. But, before it was a little cheaper. But now, it's expensive and dangerous. You know, because this time there is AIDS, there are AIDS [ ] so you have to be careful these days. Unlike before, you can easily go, one, two girls [ ] as long as you have the money to pay them. But now it's kinda difficult because it is dangerous. You never know, you cannot take your chance. Because once, once you get it, I don't know, maybe it's the end of your, not just your career, but your life. So you have to be very, very careful. That's it.

Eric describes some of the tension with which seafarers are living within their hearts. There are the seafarers who %forget about their families and all they see is just beautiful girls+but they come up against the reality of AIDS and that this would mean the end of your life, not only your career. Eric says: %But now, it's expensive and dangerous.+

Eric goes on to talk more about this aspect of seafarers' life and explains how his daughters' view of him has been influenced by the stereotypical idea of what a sailor is like:

Eric: %Maybe you see a girl again. Maybe you have a good time again.+ [ ]. Yah, because they also have this, they heard these stories of seaman's life before. You know, seaman's life before it's kind of famous for being womanizers, you know. Because they said: %In every port, report.+ You know that saying?

Chris: I've heard [of] it, yes.

Eric: %In every port, report.+ I don't know if you know what I mean...

Chris: Yah, you mean like a wife in every port.

Eric: Yes, exactly, that's it [laughing]. They have that, they heard that saying, that's why they have this, I don't know, they keep on thinking that it [is] still the same. No, I try to make them understand that, no, you cannot do that now, it's kinda dangerous.

Chris: But that's your children now, they feel you shouldn't live like that, you shouldn't...

Eric: Yah, yah, yah, yah, they know now, but still they're teasing me: %knowing you, knowing you dad.+ %Come on.+ %And when you come home you show me another picture of a girl.+ %Ah, no, no more, no more.+ You see, because, as I told you, I kinda have some, this collection of pictures, even with girls, you know. I was, I mean, I can have a picture with any woman that I've been with because I'm separated from my wife. Yah, we've been separated since my first born was four, and she's now what, turning twenty.

Chris: Ok, so a long time.

Eric: Yah, it's been a long time.

Chris: But that's your second wife.

Eric: My first wife.

Chris: Ah, you only have one.

Eric: [pause]. Yah. No, see, that's my marriage. When my first born was four I went to see my former girlfriend and I have another child with her. Then, another one with my teacher friend. So, I have three firstborns. That's why I have this reputation of [ ], that's why my children doesn't trust me. They cannot just believe that I'm straight now. I'm kinda good now [laughing]. They know I have one girlfriend in Singapore. They met her, because she came with me to have a vacation in the Philippines, yah. Just working in Singapore.

Chris: But she's a Filipina?

Eric: Yah. And she's been working there for almost twelve years. [ ]

Chris: So and you guys don't see each other much. I mean she's in Singapore, and you're on a ship, so [you] almost never see each other.

Eric: You see our, our relation is kinda, what do you call it? Just a, just good when we see each other.

Chris: Ok, you have this understanding.

Eric: Yah, she can do whatever she want, whatever [ ], but whenever I was there, she's with me. Like that. You know. As I told you I'm a practical person. You, you as a human you have your needs. That [is] why I understand when my wife cannot stand the... me being away for a long time, so she would [start] seeing another guy. So I let her go. It a different thing if it is your wife or when it is your girlfriend only. If it's just a girlfriend, then let her... but if you are married to somebody you cannot, you cannot just do that. You know. So you have to suffer it, if you can't stand living without seeing somebody else. So there. [ ]. Every time the ships go to Singapore I like to see her, that's all. I know she's also seeing somebody else sometimes. But she doesn't like, just like me she doesn't like, what do you call it, steady, steady relationship. Because it's kinda difficult to keep one these days, for someone like us who's also been working for the family, you know. If maybe, if maybe, if we don't have children, but if you see, if you go with somebody for keeps you might neglect your family. And the children you have to send to school, and you have to send the children to school, right, until they're finished. [ ].

Chris: What you are saying is that you are practical, that you have a practical view on relationships. That's at the moment for you what is working. It is practical.

Eric: Before I used to be a conservative person. Yah, I hate being, I'm kinda, I'm not a jealous guy but I'm kind of conservative inside, you know. [ ]. I became liberated, that's the thing, see, meeting a lot of people, talking a lot of things, so I became more liberated. So...

Chris: But I also think it has to do with your reality, for you as a seafarer.

Eric: Yah, it is.



Chris: It's your situation; [it] makes you to become, [to] adapt to this kind of view. Yah.

Eric: Yah, it is. That's exactly that makes me become liberated. Just [ ] how conservative was I before? You know. But now, thinking, see, having the grown up girls. I can't expecting them to be virgin these days, you know. But before for me my, it's not acceptable for me. Things like that, no, getting them go dating and dating, like that, that's alright with me: %Go, date, go. Have, do what you want. It's your life, you only live once. Enjoy, live life to the fullest. Go, go.+ You know, that's it. I used to be that kind of person before. A little strict, you know, and snobbish, but now [ ]. I can easily adjust, or, what do you say, adapt myself to the place I was. [ ]. I don't want to be a outsider all the time. Because I grow up in, what do you call it? I grew up without a family beside me. Feeling like being all by myself all the time, you know. [ ]. I learned how to put myself wherever I am.

In this part of the interview Eric talked about so many things and describes his world and his view on it. He starts off by talking about his relationship with his daughters. For Eric they are very important and he always likes to talk about them. At first he says they think that he is a bit of a %womanizer+ because they have heard stories about sailors who have to %report in every port+, but then he also says that he has an album with photos taken with him and these %girls+. The reason why it does not matter that he has pictures like these is because he is a separated from his wife.

This happened long ago, when his daughter he had with his wife, was four years old. He says: %I went to see my former girlfriend and I have another child with her.+ Later on he also says about his wife: %As I told you I'm a practical person. You, you as a human you have your needs. That [is] why I understand when my wife cannot stand the, me being away for a long time. So she would [start] seeing another guy. So I let her go.+ It seems that seafaring and marriage simply did not go together for Eric and his wife.

According to Eric, what does work if you are a seafarer is to be a %practical person+. He says: %Before I used to be a conservative person.+ But now: %I became liberated, that's the thing, see, meeting a lot of people, talking a lot of things, so I became more

liberated.+ Now, instead of marriage he has a girlfriend in Singapore. They do not see each other much, but that is fine because he says they are: %a just good when we see each other+. And: %a she can do whatever she want...+

Eric is a practical person and the life as a seafarer also changed his view concerning the values with which he is raising his daughters: %G Go, date, go. Have, do what you want. It's your life, you only live once. Enjoy, live life to the fullest. Go, go.+Eric is practical and liberated about his own conduct in life and also about his daughters. But, his view of himself is that he is not the stereotypical sailor with a wife in every port: %an kinda good now [laughing].+ There are probably many reasons why Eric became so liberated and practical about things, but one of the reasons for this will be apparent when he tells us a story of what happened to him once in a seafarersqcentre in a port in USA. I will share this in the section about seafarers and the seafarersqmission.

Although Eric did not have a good experience with marriage, for him family is very important. He says: %donq want to be an outsider all the time. Because I grow up in, what do you call it? I grew up without a family beside me. Feeling like being all by myself all the time, you know.+ Being liberated meant for Eric that he can be part of the group as he is no longer conservative and %anobbish+. He says: %dlearned how to put myself wherever I am.+

It is not only to be part of the group you are sailing with that is important to Eric, but most of all to be part of his family. Maybe it is because he grew up without family that this is so important to him. He tells how recent changes have made life better for seafarers and their families, compared to how it was before. Today communication with the family is much easier and contracts have also become shorter.

So, it is either eight or ten, it's what I'm trying to say. Then you will request for extension, two months, that's it. But not allowed to stay for a year. See, that's the normal contract before. But now, since a lot of things, [ ] there are a lot of incidents on board before, like bad incidents, you know. You know, there are some guys who got, I mean, who receive bad news from home then they got affected with that and their job,

their work, you know. Some of them get real bad news, cannot take it, they take their live. Yes, something happened like that and luckily, I don't know [ ]. They lost their sanity, because of too much thinking. That was before, with this, that is the problem before if you don't have constant communication with your family. So there. I mean now, contracts is only a short time, before it was nine months, now it is six [ ].

For Eric, family is so important that he links suicide with too little communication with the family and too long contracts: %a that is the problem before if you don't have constant communication with your family.+ On the other hand it seems that constant communication has its drawback as his children become more demanding:

%a they're just content if they'd have this constant communication. But now they're become more demanding. The more we have the communication the more they become demanding: %Why you not respond to my messages?+ %Oh, I didn't see anything. Sorry.+

Later on in the interview Eric goes back again to money and family as these two seem to be inseparable as far as seafaring is concerned. Money takes you away from your family, but the money you earn is the result of the sacrifice that you're making for the family. Eric compares his life with someone who is doing a land based job:

So, if you are really practical, you know, because working there, yah, ok, you're with the family, but you cannot earn much, you cannot earn more, enough to send, to, to pay for all your bills, and send the children to school, imagine that. But if you have about three kids, sending children to school, it's costly, it's really costly. Not just costly, but really costly. So, I have to sacrifice, [ ]. I make it a point with the children [to] really understand that, I cannot stay with them for a long time because I have to work. So they, they know that. That's why they're just content if they'd have this constant communication.

Although Eric cannot stay for such a long time, when he is at home it seems to be a very good time. Sometimes too good, so that Eric feels it is better that it is not so long:

Eric: %aI don't want to stay longer on the vacation, because if I stay longer on vacation the only thing I do is drink, drink, drink. [ ]. That's it, that's the only thing, that is what is always happening on vacation. [ ]. Catching up with my friends and some relatives, is always... it always ends up like that.

Chris: So you have two months that is just crazy.

Eric: Yah, that's why my children makes appointment, every Sunday we go to church in the morning then we go somewhere else.

When Eric goes home it seems that his daughters are the ones he want to spend time with, but some friends and relatives normally get in the way and so Eric says: %a the only thing I do is drink, drink, drink.+ That is why he does not want to stay for too long, but he really misses his daughters:

Eric: Actually I do not want to think about all that kind of things, because it makes me feel sad all the time. The things that you miss, you know, things you... I mean, I spend most of my time here sailing, missing a lot of special occasions, like Christmas. Did you know that we miss eight Christmas already?

Chris: Eight, eight in twenty years.

Eric: No, no, not that much. We miss eight years straight.

Chris: Ah, in a row.

Eric: Yah, that's why we're always kinda in a hurry catching up. That's why two months is not really enough, but they understand that I really must go. That's why I never allow them to see me at the airport. Once I go outside the door I don't look back anymore. You know, and whenever I come home I never ask them to pick me up at the airport. I always make surprise: %Surprise!+ Like that.

Eric continues:

Eric: You can see them: %Oh, dad!+ Like that. How happy they are. Unexpected. %Dad!+ And all the neighbourhood will found out that you are there, because they're

yelling [ ]. I told them, even I told them, not so loud, because sometimes you arrive in the middle of the night, you know. Oh, once they found out that you were there, even my nephew [ ]. They all wake up, even this dogs and cats, all does.

Chris: So the whole neighbourhood...

Eric: They were the first one to come to the gate, the dog. Oh, I miss them, you see I have one special dog, whenever I sit he is always there at my back, like that. His tail is wagging here, so I am just scratching him like that [he is illustrating this to me]. Oh, that is life, missing a lot of things, but it is kinda rewarding also because, see, as I told you I was able to send them to good school and provide them all their needs and helping most members of my own family from my mother's side. My cousins, my nephews, my niece, yah, they all depend on me because I am the only one in the family who has been able to, you know, to help them. I am the only one who earned a little better than them. Some of them, just like me, were just able to finish high school, and that is it. So, I used to support my mother before, because she lost her husband. I sent my half brothers and sisters to school also. That is why for twenty years I still have no house of my own. Still living with my in-laws.

Chris: Your, your first, your wife's parents.

Eric: Yah, yah, I am still living with them.

Chris: Ah, ok.

Eric: My wife is still living up stairs and I am living with my in-laws down stairs.

Chris: Ok, when you go home, that is where you stay for two months.

Eric: Yah, actually for days only. I never stay at home like that. I just make sure I am home on Saturday night, because my children expects me every Sunday morning going to the church. They feel bad whenever they miss me that time. It doesn't matter if I come home drunk or whatever, as long as I come home. What bothers them is that I am home every Saturday night. So, if we cannot make it in the morning going to the church, we [ ] in the afternoon. There is Mass in the morning and there is Mass in the afternoon.

Chris: But so it's your children that keeps you going to church. They make sure you go to church.

Eric: Because that's what I told them.

Chris: Ok, now they're teaching you.

Eric: Yah, no, no I mean we used, we always used to do that. It's kinda routine in our home. Only my mother in law does not go to church. They don't. But I make it a point my, that all my children should go even without their mother. The mother is not so keen at going to church. She just wanted to go to church whenever I am home. She's still come with us, especially when her lover was abroad also. She have a lover, from Cebu. That's alright; they're staying upstairs, [I am] only down stairs with my children. I stay downstairs with my mother and father in-law, because I'm the one taking care of them.

Chris: Ah, I see.

Eric: She doesn't want to take care of her own parents. Yah, she's a bad girl, yah. She, they don't really get along, even before. My in-laws loves me more than her. They're always so happy to [ ]. Even before we finally build that second floor in that house they can stay, she, they used to live separately somewhere else. [ ].

Eric thinks of how much he misses because the biggest part of his time is spent on ships: %I spend most of my time here sailing, missing a lot of special occasions, like Christmas.+ In fact, for eight years in a row he has missed out on being with his daughters at Christmas time. When he is with them two months is simply not enough time: %Ah, that's why we're always kinda in a hurry catching up. That's why two months is not really enough, but they understand that I really must go.+ So, when two months of catching up is over Eric has to say goodbye. This is terrible for Eric and his approach is to simply say goodbye and to go to the airport on his own, otherwise it is unbearable.

When he comes back from a contract he also arrives alone at the airport and no one is waiting for him. He does not tell them when he is coming because he always wants to

surprise them and when finally arriving at home it seems to be pandemonium. His daughters are yelling and even the cats and dogs are part of the joy and trying to calm things down is hopeless: %d told them, even I told them, not so loud, because sometimes you arrive in the middle of the night, you know. Oh, once they found out that you're there, even my nephew [ ]. They all wake up, even this dogs and cats, all does.+

It is to be expected that all should welcome him like this (with the exception of his previous wife, of course). He is %kuya+after all and the one who is earning enough to help not only his own daughters, but also many of the other family members: %a helping most members of my own family from my mother's side. My cousins, my nephews, my niece, yah, they all depend on me because I'm the only one in the family who's been able to, you know, to help them. I'm the only one who earned a little better than them.+ He also helped his mother (who when he was a child abandoned him) and his half brothers and sisters. But to help everyone has consequences: %That's why for twenty years I still have no house of my own.+ But, this is alright for Eric, because helping everyone is what makes the sacrifice of going to sea worthwhile: %Oh, that's life, missing a lot of things, but it's kinda rewarding also because, see, as I told you I was able to sent them to good school and provide them all their needs and helping most members of my own family...+

Eric is loved by his own family and even his in-laws are still fond of him. Talking about his wife he says: %My in-laws loves me more than her.+ He stays at their house and even though he goes out and many times sleeps somewhere else, the deal he has with his daughters is that they will go to church together on a Sunday to attend the Mass.

When reading the interview I had with Eric and thinking about the things he said about seafaring and family, the impression I got was that this is the one thing in his life that makes sense. His daughters most of all are precious to him, but he also enjoys to be %kuya+to all the others. Seafaring is a hard life: %Actually I do not want to think about all that kind of things, because it makes me feel sad all the time. The things that you miss,

you know, things you... I mean, I spend most of my time here sailing, missing a lot of special occasions, ...+ And: %a two months is not really enough,...+ Saying goodbye is really tough: %Once I go outside the door I don't look back anymore.+ It is also tough because it is not only the family that you are leaving behind but also the pets: %Oh, I miss them; you see I have one special dog...+ But all this sacrifice makes sense because of his family: %Oh, that's life, missing a lot of things, but it's kinda rewarding also...+ Eric's family is what is making sense to him.

g. Surita Stipp: A transversal interdisciplinary conversation with systemic family therapy:

I suspected that there would be a productive transversal connection between practical theology and systemic family therapy. In order to have a transversal discussion I invited Surita Stipp, a social worker who was studying her Masters degree in systemic family therapy in Australia, to respond to the stories of the seafarers and their relationships with their families. The stories which she responded to can be read in addendum C and the sources she used I will include as addendum D. I will include her response here and then I will reflect on what she said and how her response can enrich this research narrative. (I did not include the narratives which Eric shared with me because I did the interview with him after this interdisciplinary conversation.)

I used the three questions developed by Müller (2009) and this was her response to it:

1. When reading the stories of John, Jonathan, Mohammed, Ivan, Noel and a seafarer's wife, what do you think would their concerns be?

The following themes and concerns run through all six stories:

The seafarers are often away from their families for long periods. This has an impact on both their marriage relationship and the relationship with their children. They describe periods of unfaithfulness, their wives without support and problems with role adjustment when they eventually return home. According to one seafarer these relationships often end in



divorce. They expressed regret about their relationship and attachment with their children and not being there when their children are sick. Financial difficulties are also a prominent theme that most of them are worried about. From an interpersonal lens they also express a fear of feeling lonely and there are questions about their mental state when the seafarer's wife describes the mood swings at home. There is also the fear of being bored and the enticement of the sea life that draws them into this lifestyle.

2. How would you formulate your discipline's unique perspective on these concerns and why is it important that this perspective be heard at the interdisciplinary table?

There is a strong theme of loss characterising each story. It is the loss of the relationship with their families. It is the constant loss of saying goodbye to their loved ones when they have to return to their life at sea. It is also the loss of years without their families that they can never get back.

The family's life stage can play a significant role in attachment, migration, gender and power as well as differentiation. According to Dallos and Vetre (2009), there are a number of significant periods in a family's life where they go through transitions that could be predictable or unpredictable. During these periods they need to readjust and organise the family structure to fit with new demands on the family system. John describes a time when he just got married and he then started his career as a seafarer. There was no time to adjust to this important life stage and the couple was left to continue their marriage separate from the start. Each stage of their children's lives needed adjustment, often when their father was at sea. They continued to grow and develop, often in the absence of their father. The implications of this are very apparent. A

breakdown in attachment is one factor but also a loss of understanding about the stage of development the child is in as well as the emotional needs of each individual in this process.

There is a hypothesis that a lot of seafarers choose this lifestyle in the first instance because they can't cope with the intimacy and demands of a life in an intact family where they are with their families constantly. They triangulate with their work as a seafarer to reduce the anxiety they feel in intimate relationships. According to Carter and McGoldrick (1976:198) by putting off a relationship by physical or emotional distance does not end the emotional process: in fact it intensifies it. This is in the end not a solution but in fact just brings more confusion and complexity to their relationships.

A dyad is a pattern in relationships where two people have a close bond. When this bond gets too close or unstable a third person or entity is needed to stabilise the relationship. Because of the very nature of a triangle this is problematic as one person might then in turn feel excluded. Often a dyadic pattern is entrenched in a triadic pattern (James, 1989). From a systemic family therapy perspective the life at sea and being away from home could be seen as the third entity in the couple's relationship that breaks the anxiety in a tense marriage dyad. It could also be the couple that triangulates with their children and the seafarer's feelings of exclusion when the family's life returns to normal routine after the initial period of reunion.

Haley (1989) describes a sequence as a pattern that repeats in a chain of three or more events, and this is embedded in a system. This pattern is circular in nature and according to Breunlin and Schwart (1986) symptoms in a family are often related to these interactional patterns. These sequences are often recursive and will fuel itself to continue.

There is a pattern of circular interaction during the seafarers contact with their families. There is usually a period where they are delighted to be home after a long period and they would describe it as the honeymoon phase. Their families are glad that they are home and everything is seen through a rainbow lens. Slowly life would turn to normal again for the family around school, work and other commitments. The seafarer would see himself as the outsider with not much authority as his wife and children has learned to cope without him. When he tries to redefine his role as husband and father it is met with resistance from his wife and children. Some of the seafarers would describe this period as one where they got bored, frustrated or even depressed. Slowly the longing to return to the life at sea would start to grow. The pattern would start again where he returns to sea and have a longing to be home till he eventually returns.

These circular patterns sometimes change when the family realises that they are stuck and are able to do something different. The seafarer's wife broke this pattern when she became a Christian. She involved her husband in praying when he was home. A change in their relationship and family interactions were facilitated and they found a new way to relate to each other that was more positive overall. In other relationships this stuck pattern was broken by the end of their marriage relationship through a divorce.

The term gender is a cultural attribution to the meaning of being male or female. It affects different aspects of our lives like expectations, roles, behaviour and status (Knudson-Martin, 2008). Especially in a couple's relationship the issues of gender in an intimate and mutually rewarding environment needs to be one of equal power. Each family mentioned in this paper represent another culture, loaded with their own attribution to the gender roles. To fully understand each story and perspective and

roles in a society as well as family functioning you need to be culturally sensitive as to not imprint your own bias ideas about roles onto a family.

3. Why do you think your perspective will be understood and appreciated by researchers from other disciplines?

The systemic family therapy perspective looks at the family and wider socio- political factors as a whole to interpret unique contributors to family functioning. No one function in isolation but have different moulding agents that make someone the person they are. By using the systemic lens to look at a particular phenomenon like the life of a seafarer, a more multi layered interpretation could be discovered that is multi dimensional.

As was the case with Stevenson, the value of the interdisciplinary conversation is evident and many aspects pointed out by Stipp enriched the research narrative. One of the concerns mentioned by Stipp was that the seafarers have fears. Fear of being lonely and bored. Out of the perspective of family therapy a concern was also about the mental state in which some of the seafarers are, as the wife of a seafarer described how they experience mood swings when the husband comes home. The mental state of these seafarers, and also of their family members, is an important concern out of the perspective of family therapy.

Responding to the question of what the unique perspective is of her discipline, Stipp says: ~~There~~ there is a strong theme of loss characterising each story.+ She goes on to explain what she means by this by saying that these seafarers experience a loss concerning their relationship with their families, but not only the immediate loss after a seafarer goes to sea for the duration of a contract. There is also the loss because they realise that the time they miss with their families is time they will never get back again.

Stipp also points out that one of the important issues out of the perspective of systemic family therapy would be to consider the influence of the life stage in which seafarers and

their families find themselves. She asserts that the life stage plays an important role in attachment, migration, gender and power as well as differentiation. She points out that, when John had to go away just after getting married that this was actually at a crucial stage of their relationship. This meant that crucial relational tasks, that needed to be done, were not done. With seafarers this happens continuously, one life stage after the other. This obviously puts great stress on the relationship between seafarers and their spouses as well as on the children. This is why John said: %a when I go home I put in so much energy otherwise the job estranges me from my children, makes me a stranger to them.+ John is a seafarer who is trying to make up for the time he has lost but this is no simple matter to try and reach back and sort out uncompleted relational tasks as the family had adjusted without you and had negotiated a %normal+which in many ways excludes you.

Stipp says that because of this there is a %breakdown in attachment+between the family members. This means that there is an unhealthy disconnectedness between the family members because of the work the seafarer is doing. Many seafarers are constantly away for nine months, then back at home for a maximum of three months and then away again for nine months.

Stipp thickens the plot further, though, by pointing out that it is not simply bad for seafarers but that there is probably a positive pay off for them to have a distance between them and their families. It might even be that they choose the career especially for the distance that it creates with their family. So in a sense, the detachment between the seafarer and the family is not only a negative thing for the seafarer. Stipp states that there is a theory that it could be that a seafarer uses this as a way to avoid the demands of being fully part of the family. They escape the difficulties associated with being part of a family.

Out of the perspective of systemic family therapy they look at the structure of a family or a marriage relationship. The seafarer and his/her spouse forms a dyad, but as the seafarer goes away the work becomes part of the relationship and the dyad changes to

a triangle. Stipp explains that a dyad is a pattern in relationships where two people have a close bond. When there is emotional discomfort a third person or entity is used to alleviate this and when this happens it is called triangulation. Stipp points out that this can be done in two ways concerning the seafarer and the spouse. The seafarer can do this with the work he/she is doing. On the other hand it can also be done by a spouse who triangulates with the children. The problem with a triangle is that one of the parties in this triangle is always excluded and in this sense someone is always losing.

Making use of literature from systemic family therapy, Stipp identifies a circular pattern in the narratives presented to her. She states that this circular pattern is a reoccurring pattern and therefore defined as a sequence. The pattern is that the seafarer's homecoming is wonderful, but soon the family continues their normal lives. At this stage the seafarer tries to fill his/her role in the family but this creates difficulty. Then, after the vacation is finished the seafarer goes back to the sea and he/she starts longing to be back with the family again. Sometimes this sequence gets broken through a divorce as Ivan mentioned, or as the seafarer's wife told through changing her behaviour as she came to know Jesus Christ. The point is that this unhealthy sequence can be broken and a more positive relationship is possible. This is hopeful and maybe an important point to look into when reflecting on the practice of mission as the seafarer's wife testified that her faith brought about the change so that the sequence could be broken.

Another aspect in the narratives which is important out of the perspective of systemic family therapy is the concept of gender. Gender is a cultural construct and how it is understood is especially important in a family setup as this determines expectations, roles, behaviour and status. Culture is therefore also a very important issue and Stipp asserts that a true understanding of the seafarers cannot be obtained if the individual cultures of the seafarers are not taken into consideration. Further it is important to understand cultures from the inside and not to judge them from outside as if you are an objective observer without a culture or someone with a superior culture.

Concerning the contribution that systemic family therapy can make to other disciplines, why it would be understood and appreciated, Stipp says that the value of her discipline is that it looks at people in their wider context and at the social and political factors that shape a person's life. There is sensitivity to the fact that there are many moulding agents that interact with each other and, because the discipline of systemic family therapy is aware of this, it is able to come to a multi layered interpretation. Maybe, to put it in language from the narrative approach, it can be said that this discipline strives towards obtaining a thick description.

Looking back on this interdisciplinary conversation, it can again be asserted that this approach is very enriching and that many perspectives are opened up through embarking on an interdisciplinary adventure. Concerning the issues of family and their relationships it was evident that systemic family therapy and the narrative approach has important points of intersection. New perspectives were opened up as issues such as triangulation, the repetition of a pattern, the functioning of the concept of gender, the struggle with role adjustment, the strong sense of loss in the narratives and the issue of life stages were pointed out.

- **Alternative perspective**

Seafarers are more away from their homes than being there. The result is that their children and wives sometimes become strangers to them and that their role in the family is reduced to be the one who makes sure they have money (Trotter 2008:39). So on many occasions a very high emotional and relational price is paid as far as a seafarer's family is concerned, but of course they get a lot back as well. Seafarers can provide opportunities for their children that would never have been possible without this career, and many times it is not only their own children who benefit but also many other family members (Otto 2002:35).

There are advantages and disadvantages for seafarers and their families. My understanding of seafarers and the relationship with their families based on my co-researchers, and also other stories I have encountered, is that there are constantly

forces working in on them. Forces that pull them back to sea and forces that push them away from their families as well as forces that bring them back home and forces that push them away from the life at sea. Their lives seem to be doomed to be lived in between these forces and many of them only hope that their children will have a better life because of their sacrifice.

For Ivan, who has been sailing for many years, it is clear that families must accept the disadvantages of the advantage they all enjoy.+ Noel echoed Ivan's wisdom, saying: %ah, there's advantage and disadvantage.+ The co-researchers revealed that these disadvantages sometimes meant that their families had to suffer great pain. As one seafarer's wife in Otto (2002:13,14) described how difficult it is when her husband comes home for vacation: %When the honeymoon period is over how difficult everything becomes! Everybody comes back down to earth.+ Much of what the co-researchers said tend to agree with this statement.

John said: %immediately I finished my marriage I was taken away...+ With this he means that just after his wedding ceremony he had to go on a ship with a contract. This is where John's story with seafaring and family started off and unfortunately much heartache was still to follow. About this first incident John said: %And it was the very first time I knew: %Okay, working at sea is not always a bed of roses.+ When he came home it was even less rosy and there was almost another man in his bed: %when I got back home another man was almost taking over my wife...+ This happened while his wife heard rumours that he had another wife. Fortunately their marriage survived this first challenge: %God helped me, when I came back I met her and it has been a wonderful marriage with her for this long.+

From a systemic family therapy point of view Stipp pointed out how important certain stages in the family's life are and that when the seafarer misses the transitions from one stage to the other it can have a very negative impact on the family. She says: %During these periods they need to readjust and organise the family structure to fit with new demands on the family system.+ Probably this incident with John and his wife was



partly caused because the time after just getting married is an important transition phase. Stipp points out: "There was no time to adjust to this important life stage and the couple was left to continue their marriage separate from the start." One of the chaplains said: "I think a sailor should not go to sea for at least a year after getting married! I believe this used to be the case in Bible times for soldiers! He needs time to get to know his wife." The fact is they cannot do this and that seafarers will miss important transitions from one phase to the next and that they and their families will have to pay the price, not only as far as the spouses are concerned but it is also relevant for the relationship with the children. Stipp says: "A breakdown in attachment is one factor but also a loss of understanding about the stage of development the child is in as well as the emotional needs of each individual in this process."

In Eric's case, although it seems he had a wonderful relationship with his children, he did separate from his wife. It might have happened anyway as he calls her a "bad girl", but he also implies that the seafaring had something to do with the fact that his marriage did not work out: "I understand when my wife cannot stand the, me being away for a long time. So she would [start] seeing another guy. So I let her go." (cf Trotter 2008:39). It seems that it is really difficult to be a seafarer and to have a successful marriage at the same time.

It might be that what took place in Eric's marriage was a case of triangulation. Stipp says: "There is a hypothesis that a lot of seafarers choose this lifestyle in the first instance because they cannot cope with the intimacy and demands of a life in an intact family where they are with their families constantly. They triangulate with their work as a seafarer to reduce the anxiety they feel in intimate relationships." (cf Otto 2002:35).

It is hard to say whether this is the motive why Eric, or any of the other seafarers started to sail, but I think whatever the motive was, when looking at it out of the perspective of systemic family therapy it is definitely how the reality of seafaring can start to function, almost as a third person in a marriage. I would say that it is for many seafarers just too much of a temptation and even if they did not triangulate with their work to start with, it

will be highly likely that it will happen in one way or the other. Looking at it in this way it might be that Eric's wife mirrored what she felt was happening between Eric and his work: He triangulated with seafaring and she in her turn triangulated with another man. So in this case the wife was unfaithful, but more often it is the male seafarer who ends up being unfaithful.

Trotter (2008) did research on dockside prostitution and thickly described this phenomenon. On the one hand seafaring is still a career where there are many opportunities to be unfaithful to your spouse, but it has changed and out of a Christian perspective it is much better today than before. As Trotter (2008:31) states the ISPS code has changed the situation very much as this got rid of unnecessary people, like the prostitutes, in the harbour area. Trotter (2008:222-224) states that the old stereotype of a sailor who has a wife in every port, or as Eric had said: *"in every port, report"*, is no longer true. So for a seafarer to be unfaithful is more difficult but it is still a temptation. One of the chaplains who participated in this study said:

Being on a ship is a very unhealthy environment. The ISPS code may make it more difficult for sailors to be unfaithful. And I am sure that a sailor's friends will try to help him [ ] to do stupid things. But in the end his sexual urges will be something that haunts him. He will also feel that his wife has every opportunity to be unfaithful to him. Very difficult.

There are definitely less temptations than before, but on a ship the social environment is still so that it will be easy to not be faithful. Trotter (2008:37,59) states that seafarers tend to long for female company and calls them *"companion-starved"*. This makes them more vulnerable and in addition to this they tend not to judge each other (Trotter 2008:39).

John also confirms that the seafaring world is full of temptations and therefore poses a great challenge to seafarers in their relationships with their spouses: *"both male and female seafarers they are not very faithful to their spouses, you know."* Even John failed: *"I, I, I, did that for a couple of times and when I realized myself I only wake up*

[in] tears. I, it took me a very long time to get myself back.+ Between John and his wife it was also not so easy with his prolonged stay in South Africa, possibly because of this incident years ago: %t has not been very easy with my wife.+

Concerning the issue of unfaithfulness one chaplain deconstructed the idea that this is necessarily how seafarers act, although agree that it is difficult:

We had seafarer who put their families [sic] photo on their laptops and whenever the temptation is there they will look at the photos and it pass again. One seafarer and his family had each their own Psalm they liked and every morning they will read through these Psalms and feel connected to each other and through that he could stand firm. Lots of them make an effort not to be unfaithful and the perception people have that it is the case with all of them to be unfaithful is not true.

Eric's perspective on the night life was interesting because he came from a different perspective than John's evangelical Christian perspective. He did not have any moral objections against prostitution and he talked about it openheartedly, but said that nowadays it was much more complicated than before. According to him before it was much safer and much less expensive: %But now, it's expensive and dangerous.+ In Eric's opinion it is no more a good thing to be a womanizer, although only for practical reasons: %no, you cannot do that now, it's kinda dangerous.+ While laughing loudly he says: %am kinda good now.+

Even so, because of seafaring his views have changed from being a conservative person to someone with a liberated outlook on life. With this Eric means that he now has a girlfriend, but that this does not mean that they are exclusively committed to each other: %You see our, our relation is kinda, what do you call it? Just a, just good when we see each other.+ This change from being a conservative person to a liberated person was because of his experiences as a seafarer: %I became liberated, that's the thing, see, meeting a lot of people, talking a lot of things, so I became more liberated.+ He also believes in conveying this liberated view to his daughters: %Go, date, go. Have, do what

you want. It's your life, you only live once. Enjoy, live life to the fullest. Go, go.+ Seafaring changed Eric and changed his values in a radical way.

Although John's values were not affected by seafaring it did have a great impact on his relationship with his family. At one stage John realised that his family can go on without him: %Oh, so if I had died, so my wife, my family will still get along.+ He interpreted this in a positive way, but it does suggest that a seafarer can feel that his/her family does not need him/her. Maybe it is because the family needs to adjust and get on with their lives without the seafarer and so, when the seafarers return it is as John said: %normally when I get back home, I can, I can tell you that it would take some time before I will be part of them again. I'm going to be a total stranger.+ So: %It will only take time for me to begin to work together again.+

John's narrative seems to be very positive and empowering because for him it is tough, but with effort it can be overcome and handled. It might be difficult to adjust, but John preferred being at home far more than being at sea: %But now, I am always thinking of home now.+ Adding to the difficulties of having a long distance relationship is that calling is not always so easy: %because of the cost of airtime, we don't talk, we don't talk with the level of affection that we should talk.+

Noel and Ivan also shared stories about their families. Ivan said: %No, it is not easy.+ This was how Ivan responded when he talked about family and seafaring. One of the chaplains also commented how family and seafaring is not always smooth sailing: %This is maybe the main theme of all the seafarers I speak to. The loss of not being at home, not seeing how your children grow up, not having a good relationship with their partner because they are away from home. Stories of being at home, and then still fighting constantly are regular.+

Ivan said: %there would be very few seamen, you know, not specific level, of any level, from the crew list, very few would be found, you know, to not be divorced.+ He elaborates on how a marriage can be difficult for both the husband, who is usually the

seafarer, and the wife who is normally staying at home: %It's a difficult thing, it is a difficult thing for women and it's a difficult [thing] for the man. For a woman it is difficult because she has to deal with every kind of problem and every kind of emergency when the man is not around to help. For the man it is difficult because he finds himself, when he comes back home a bit purposeless...+

This is echoing some of the same thoughts that John shared. Ivan describes the dilemma between a husband and his wife, especially as they are younger: %Young people they need to be and they want to be next to each other, they want to be together and it is the right thing, but somebody must do the job...+ And then he concludes with the hard and true reality that seafarers and their spouses %must accept the disadvantages of the advantage they all enjoy.+ In the end the disadvantages became so much that he and his wife decided to get a divorce: %but it comes to a point where you don't want your children as they grow further, you know, to witness, since that are not good, positive, not educational at least, for them. So, then rather take a clear cut, you know.+

Noel and his wife seemed to get along well in spite of the obstacles posed by his career. Part of the reason might be because he does not stay at home so long. Comparing what the seafarers' wife in Otto (2002:13,14) said it seems to be that what Noel is doing sometimes is to stay only for the honeymoon stage and that he leaves before it is over.

Noel says: %because with now with the shortage of officers, so sometimes cannot spend much for vacation.+ Noel, as a captain, had contracts for only two months, but the problem was that he spent consecutively only 12 days and then 14 days at home. This did not bother Noel much, though: %So, anyway, that's okay as long as I be home for a short time, and I see my family that's okay.+

However, he is not always able to do it like this and after the honeymoon period is over it becomes difficult for him as well: %when I am home two months, I feel restless, only because, the routine just in the house [ ] children in school [ ] my wife [ ] and it's not

only me, most seamen...+ Seafarers are not always at home, at home: %Ah, because you already, feel bored already.+ And even Noel's wife feels it becomes too much: %Because sometimes see my wife said I saw only so much things now so: %You better go!++

So Noel concludes: %So the life of seaman is quite very hard...+ At home his wife says: %You better go!+But to be at sea is also not always a %bed of roses+: %a, you have to fight for it, because if you're lonely you're lost, you want to go home, you lose your job.+

As was mentioned before, Otto (2002:10) states how the seafarers get caught up in longing for home when they are at sea and longing to be back at sea when they are at home. One of the chaplains put it like this: %I believe that a sailor experiences ambivalence. When he is at home he wants to be at sea and when he is at sea he wants to be at home. He never really feels %at home+. He loses his place there. He becomes an %outsider+in his own home.+ Another chaplain remembers a seafarer saying: %Sometimes I feel like a spare part and long to return to the vessel.+

Stipp also picked up on this theme and stated how this becomes a reoccurring pattern in which a family can get stuck:

There is a pattern of circular interaction during the seafarers contact with their families. There is usually a period where they are delighted to be home after a long period and they would describe it as the honeymoon phase. Their families are glad that they are home and everything is seen through a rainbow lens. Slowly life would turn to normal again for the family around school, work and other commitments. The seafarer would see himself as the outsider with not much authority as his wife and children has learned to cope without him. When he tries to redefine his role as husband and father it is met with resistance from his wife and children. Some of the seafarers would describe this period as one where they got bored, frustrated or even depressed. Slowly the longing to return to the life at sea would start to grow. The pattern would start again where he returns to sea and have a longing to be home till he eventually returns.

This seems to be a hopeless situation, but although it is a constant challenge it can be managed. Stipp says: "These circular patterns sometimes change when the family realises that they are stuck and are able to do something different." An example of this is the wife of the Filipino seafarer in Otto (2002:14) who was able to interact differently with her husband. Concerning this Stipp says: "The seafarer's wife broke this pattern when she became a Christian. She involved her husband in praying when he was home. A change in their relationship and family interactions was facilitated and they found a new way to relate to each other that was more positive overall." So, a positive change is possible and even considering all the challenges that seafaring poses to a marriage there are ways to handle it. This is maybe an important field of ministry to which those in the seafarers' mission can give attention: To help seafarers in the struggles of their marriage relationships which seem to be set up for failure due to their careers.

In seafarers' marriage relationships it is important that it is kept in mind that what is adding to the complexity is the culture which determines largely what the gender roles of the husband and wife would be. When thinking about ministering to seafarers concerning this aspect of their lives it would be necessary to take this into consideration. Stipp says: "To fully understand each story and perspective and roles in a society as well as family functioning you need to be culturally sensitive as to not imprint your own bias ideas about roles onto a family."

Each seafarer is unique and therefore it is interesting to note how Eric longs to return to his vessel for a totally different reason than the other seafarers: "I don't want to stay longer on the vacation, because if I stay longer on vacation the only thing I do is drink, drink, drink. [ ]. That's it, that's the only thing, that is what is always happening on vacation. [ ]. Catching up with my friends and some relatives, is always... it always ends up like that." At the same time as far as Eric's relationship with his children are concerned, two months are not enough. It seems that he and his daughters normally have quite a bit of time to spend together and that it is especially on Sundays that they are together: "Just make sure I'm home on Saturday night, because my children

expects me every Sunday morning going to the church.+ This is the routine for two months and then he has to go back: %That's why two months is not really enough, but they understand that I really must go.+

Out of the description and the stories that Eric told about his relationship with his daughters, it seems that he really has a good relationship with them. John also mentioned that for him, his relationship with his children is easier than his relationship with his wife: %Ah, my children are more understanding, maybe because they are children. It has not been very easy with my wife.+

Even though it is sometimes easier with children, it does not mean that there are not serious struggles. The relationship with children is very challenging at times: %Children don't know you.+ Ivan gave an example of how bad it can be: %It is so nice, the mother leaves her in the morning with me to go to work and she starts screaming blue murder, you know: %Mommy, mommy who are you leaving me with?+ And yes, slowly, gradually you know, it comes, to the right level of relationship, you know, but, but it is a problem.+(cf Otto 2002:8-9)

He said that the relationship with the children is such that they will accept the mother's authority, but as far as the father is concerned: %It's a problem when a father finds, you know, that no one listens to him...+ That is why one of Ivan's colleagues said: %Here I'm the boss, at home I am nobody+. When I shared this with one of the chaplains she replied: %I heard that one a few times!!+ Another chaplain wrote this: %The seafarers shared so many times how strange it feels when they go home after a long period on sea. Their children don't know them and so it feels between the spouses as well. It takes time to know each other again and when things go better they have to leave again.+

It was insightful to read the letter in Otto (2002:13,14) that a Filipino seafarer's wife wrote concerning the complexities of her relationship with her seafaring husband. Her perspective was important because as a chaplain said: %We seldom have the



opportunity to speak to wives.+ As chaplains we tend to hear only the one side of the story. Out of this seafarers' perspective she experienced how it is at first wonderful when the husband comes home: %How intoxicating and joyful!+ After a while, unfortunately: %The wife takes the back seat. The husband is beset with disillusionments and becomes demanding. The children are wary and confused by dad's moods, which can switch . sunny one minute and critical the next.+ Talking about her pain the woman says: %I could not discuss it either when he was on vacation because I did not want to ruin his precious moments with us.+ Otto (2002:11,12) refers to research done by Erol Kahveci who asked seafarers' children to share their perspectives: %Most of the time I feel like we are one of his men on the ship.+ And: %There are lots of commands.+ Another child said: %He wants all the family working and working and working. Maybe he's used to the ship.+

About rearing his children John said: %I don't experience the true fatherhood...+ But he did try: %I when I go home I put in so much energy otherwise the job estranges me from my children, makes me a stranger to them.+ This did not mean that it is an easy situation and he went on to give more detail into the challenges of his profession, a profession he would not recommend to his children: %Don't rush to take this profession...+

For Jonathan it was not only the relationship with his children on an emotional level that was difficult, but for him it was also very difficult on a practical level because he could not help his child who became sick. He says: %Ah, the young kid, last time he was sick, many time sick, sick, sick, yah, that's the problem.+ He is sick and Jonathan is far away, stuck in South Africa without money. If Jonathan was at home he could at least try to do something for his sick child: %If you're there, maybe, your son is there you see him, you can do, maybe you can do something.+ The whole situation just created a lot of tension: %Now you have too much pressure. Temper, you don't know what is going on there. You cannot help them, even to call them to know what is going there, you can't.+ This is also what Noel referred to when he said about the problem of being so far away from his family: %I you cannot make action+. This reminds of Eric who

asked his daughters that if they are able to handle any problem on their own it is better if they do not tell him about it while he is still on board: %Because if they [are] going to tell me what the problem is then it will bother me, then it, my job, my work is being, will be affected+.

Eric does not like to know too much about his daughters' troubles, but he is eager to have continuous communication with them. Fortunately today communication is easier than before, but it does have its drawbacks. Even though, or, maybe because, Eric seems to have a very good relationship with his daughters, it seems that they are more and more demanding as far as his attention is concerned: %The more we have the communication the more they become demanding: %Why you not respond to my messages?+ %Oh, I didn't see anything. Sorry.+

But for Eric, alias %Kuya+, it was not only his daughters who craved his attention. He became the big brother of his family, taking care of everyone and being there to help not only his own daughters, but also other family members: %Everybody loves %Kuya+ %Kuya, I need this, Kuya.+ %Kuya, thank you for that, thank you for this.+ %Kuya, where is you?+ %Kuya, happy birthday!+ This is because: %I'm from a big family. And I would say I support most members of my family.+ In the Philippines family is normally very important (Johnsson in *Nautilus International Telegraph* 2011:29) and in a sense seafaring caused Eric to be very important to his family. Johnsson (in *Nautilus International Telegraph* 2011:29) pointed out that although in a country like Sweden a seafarer sometimes has a low status, in the Philippines it is a bit different. Probably because of the high income seafarers have a high status and it is partly the reason why Eric could become a real older brother to most of his family members. As mentioned before Johnsson (*Nautilus International Telegraph* February 2011:29), in his book, shows a picture of a motorman, Loreto, who is supporting 23 family members. It seems that this tends to be part of the culture in Philippines and as can be imagined, Loreto and Eric must have a position of importance in their families.

Therefore, when %Kuya+ at last comes home everyone in the family is happy, even the

cats and dogs: % told them, even I told them, not so loud, because sometimes you arrive in the middle of the night, you know. Oh, once they found out that you're there, even my nephew [ ]. They all wake up, even this dogs and cats, all does.+

Eric did not seem to experience that he become frustrated at home, but after two months it is normally time to go back to sea and then his relationship with his family starts to depend again on long distance communication. It is not always so easy to make telephone calls. Jonathan, who was on an arrested ship said: % don't have money to call.+ This was unfortunately what Jonathan had to tell his family. They could call him, but the problem was that they also did not have much money and Jonathan was stuck on a bankrupt ship. Jonathan's problems with his family were mainly due to the unjust treatment he had to endure as a result of his company's money problems.

Jonathan's situation was unique and extreme, but Adams (2010:2) notes that less than 34% of seafarers are able to contact their families on a monthly basis. Eric, on the other hand says that it is really much easier than before to keep in contact with the family. This is a very big improvement in the lives of seafarers. Eric says: % these days it's a lot easier, there's a lot of ways, so many ways of communicating with families.+ One of the chaplains said: % Praise God they have communication. Only 15 years ago, letters were posted which often arrived home after the seaman went back. Maybe it's time for them to go back to pouring out their heart in detail in a letter (which his wife will probably keep under her pillow until his return).+ This chaplain is saying two things: On the one hand that seafarers can be glad that today there are much better ways to keep in contact than writing a letter, but also that a letter has its advantages. The wife can treasure it as a symbol of her husband's presence when he is gone. In addition to this it is also an opportunity to verbalise your feelings more thoroughly and in much more detail. This chaplain is saying this in response to John who said: % because of the cost of airtime, we don't talk, we don't talk with the level of affection that we should talk.+ Ultimately one can say that things are a lot better than before, but that there is no replacement for being there with the family.

Eric also gives his perspective on having communication with the family and on how important that is. For him it is so important that he links it with suicide and believes that some seafarers in the past committed suicide because they did not have constant communication with their families: They lost their sanity, because of too much thinking. That was before, with this, that is the problem before if you don't have constant communication with your family. This also shed some light on how severe it must have been for Jonathan not to be able to have much communication with his family.

Mohammed's narrative about his family was quite unique, compared to that of the other co-researchers. At the same time there were also similarities. It is also a story of separation as this led him to leave his family behind in his country of origin in pursuit of his career on the ocean. He met his wife in South Africa, but they were soon separated after my conversation with him, although I am sure that the reasons for this were not related to seafaring. For Mohammed family played a role to spark his interest in seafaring as his uncle was also a seafarer: Okay, now my aim is to be a seaman the time when I grow. The reason why is because my uncle he was the seaman. In Eric's case it was his father in-law who did not only spark his interest in seafaring, but who made it possible for him to become a seafarer: he requested me to one of his superior, the superintendent...+

Eric is still grateful for the opportunity which his father in-law made possible because of all the things it brought him, especially money. This is a theme seafarers go back to time and again: It is about the money... for the family. Noel for instance says about his children: They ask money; they need more, always, always more. Noel, a captain, could fortunately provide to his children's needs and so could Eric for whom it really was what made all the sacrifices worthwhile: I finally got a job, then able to send my children to good schools. And: But it is very compensating. And: All the hardships is worth it. And in those days when you are longing to be with your family so much, just keep busy, try to make contact with them and: Just think, always think that you are here to work so you can send food, everything that your family needs you can provide

them that, all the necessities that they need, that's all. It is the service sacrifice.+

It is important to be able to earn a good salary because as Eric says: %But if you have about three kids, sending children to school, it's costly, it's really costly. Not just costly, but really costly. So, I have to sacrifice...+

The family life of seafarers is definitely not always a %bed of roses.+ For seafarers it comes down to accepting %the disadvantages of the advantage they all enjoy.+ One disadvantage is that the children: %a don't experience the true fatherhood...+ And the: %a children don't know you.+ Sometimes the spouses do not experience true marriage either: %a both male and female seafarers they are not very faithful to their spouses...+ The result of the disadvantages of seafaring was in Ivan's experience that: %a few would be found, you know, to not be divorced.+ This is understandable as it is a struggle to just keep in contact as Jonathan had to tell his family: %don't have money to call.+ John also experienced difficulty to try and maintain a long distance relationship: %because of the cost of airtime, we don't talk, we don't talk with the level of affection that we should talk.+

After being away from each other for a long time, coming back after a contract can be very hard for the seafarer and the family: %Here I'm the boss, at home I am nobody.+ Noel's wife says, after he is home for two months: %You better go!+ He does not seem to feel offended, though: %Ah, because you already, feel bored already.+ Noel concludes: %So the life of seaman is quite very hard...+

Eric said: %Actually I do not want to think about all that kind of things, because it makes me feel sad all the time. The things that you miss, you know, things you... I mean, I spend most of my time here sailing, missing a lot of special occasions...+ Eric does not only miss many special occasions like Christmas, but he also misses other members of the household: %Oh, I miss them; you see I have one special dog...+ This is why Stipp pointed out, even though she did not read the stories from Eric, that in the stories she read there is a feeling of loss as far as family is concerned: %There is a strong theme of

loss characterising each story. It is the loss of the relationship with their families. It is the constant loss of saying goodbye to their loved ones when they have to return to their life at sea. It is also the loss of years without their families that they can never get back.+

But Eric keeps his perspective as to why he is doing it: %Oh, that's life, missing a lot of things, but it's kinda rewarding also because, see, as I told you I was able to send them to good school and provide them all their needs and helping most members of my own family...+

In addition to keeping the right perspective many seafarers and their families found their strength for coping with these disadvantages, in their relationships with God. John said: %God helped me, when I came back I met her and it has been a wonderful marriage with her for this long.+ And the seafarer's wife said in her letter (Otto 2002:14):

The change came when I came into a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Slowly I learned to trust in Christ despite the many problems. I learned to tell Jesus all my sorrows and problems, and healing started to take place. Soon after Jesus changed me, my husband also came to know Jesus. When my husband comes home now, we take time in prayer and spend our time together with God's help.

### **G. Seafarers and the seafarers' mission: Shaving things, a little drinking and even a spiritual dimension**

#### **- Introduction**

In an article on a ship visitor called Sister Marian Davey from the *Apostleship of the Sea*, Debbie Smith (2011:26) describes a day in the life of someone who ministers to seafarers. To me this was interesting as it shows how much the experience of ship visiting is the same whether it is in Felixstowe or in Durban. Smith describes how they visited a ship where the seafarers did not know Sister Marian. At first they were reserved towards the two strangers visiting the ship but the seafarers' attitude changed as soon as Sister Marian offered SIM cards and cell phone top-up in order for them to phone home. After the visit Sister Marian explains that, although this is not directly a spiritual thing to do, it is spiritual in the sense that this helps families to keep in touch

and also because it builds a relationship between the seafarers and her (Smith 2011:26,27). When this relationship is established it becomes possible to hand out Bible scriptures and to talk about God. When the ship comes back to her port again the relationship is already there and it becomes possible to talk about deeper matters. This article about Sister Mariansqwork is very familiar and it shows how similar ships and ship visits are all over the world. If ever I visit a ship one day where Sister Marian has been before me, I know that they will be open to me and even though I am a stranger the seafarers will welcome me on their ship.

Seafarersqmission is, as stated before, the collective name of all the different organisations and churches reaching out to seafarers all over the world. Those who are part of this ministry should continually assess the practice of their ministry and should keep on asking the question whether the things being done in the name of mission and ministry are effective and are in line with the narrative of Jesus Christ. I have talked to the seafarers about seafarersqmission. The impression Iøve got is that they had a positive attitude towards the ministry, but that it did not play such an important role in their lives and that it does not make that much of an impact on them. The exception to this is when they have a crisis and someone from seafarersqmission can assist them.

- **The research characters**

a. John from Nigeria

John was someone who had visited the seafarersqcentre on many occasions. He was specifically interested in the Bible study and he attended it many times even though I also conducted the same Bible study on board his ship. John was appreciative of the efforts to reach out to them on the ship, even though he indicated in his interview that he needed even more spiritual support than what was given. I have used John's words in the discussion about family already, but as he is mentioning the seafarersqmission I repeat it here: %got into serious discouragement and pain but often times with the help of your organization here, seafarersq[mission], Durban, South-Africa, Iøve always recovered, and when I recover I noticed that the peace of God is still full inside me and that God has not abandoned me and, that has kept me to keep moving.+

So, for John the seafarers mission has been a source of spiritual encouragement, in the midst of his unfortunate situation.

b. Jonathan from Kenya

For Jonathan the encouragement from the seafarers mission in his trying times was not so much about spiritual matters as it was in John's case. He says that the seafarers mission was helpful in two ways as they were supplied with some shaving things (this is a plastic bag filled with toiletries by people from the church to support the Christian Seaman's Organisation with our mission work) and secondly as they were assisted in getting information about their situation.

Chris: And, are, are there some people that's helping you with this situation?

Jonathan: Our situation, okay, like me I thank like mission to seamen [he means: seafarers mission], they have been helping us a lot for bringing the reports about the auction. Last time they brought for us some shaving things, like that. It was good, but, we have never get any help from anybody. No help

Many seafarers understandably get confused with Mission to Seamen and seafarers mission. Mission to Seafarers (or Seamen) is referring to the organisation from the Anglican Church which is involved with seafarers mission. Normally seafarers are not so much concerned about which denomination you are from; they just see you as someone from seafarers mission as one chaplain also observed: They have absolutely no understanding of different organisations. For them everyone is part of the mission. For Jonathan help from the seafarers mission came in the form of reports and shaving things.

c. Mohammed:

Mohammed did have some experience of the seafarers mission, although it was very limited. This is what he had to say:



Yah, I've been in Djibouti, you know there is some other country they doesn't allow mission to seamen like Djibouti, Somalia, Soudani, I've never seen mission to seamen, like Mozambique, I've never see mission to seamen. Mission to seamen [I] see in South-Africa, Tanzania, and the Kenya, and the [ ], Namibia I see, but, but the other country I've never seen mission to seamen because there is no development there. Yah, something like that.

He did have one other comment about seafarers' mission and that was in connection with female seafarers: 'I've never travelled with a woman [he refers to a female seafarer]. But I used to meet in the mission to seamen something like that, we have conversation, yah.' The seafarers' mission through the seafarers' centre creates a space where different seafarers can meet and have interaction with each other.

d. Ivan

Even though Ivan had been a seafarer for a long time he did not have much to say in the interview about the seafarers' mission. I did not directly ask him about it and he did not mention much about it from his side. It seems that in around forty years of sailing he did not have much experience with the seafarers' mission.

e. Noel

I asked Noel about his experience with the seafarers' mission as he had been on the sea for many years. It turned out that he had a very good idea of what seafarers' mission is all about. Noel is a Filipino and due to the hospitable culture and their relatively good English, Filipinos are normally accessible and approachable to people from seafarers' mission. This might be the reason why Noel had more experience and a better understanding about the seafarers' mission than Ivan. He knew what we are all about but I got the impression that he did not really know why we are doing it namely because of the narrative of Jesus Christ. This is also a challenge to people in seafarers' mission to not only be more visible in the ports but to let the reason be known why we exist in the first place.

Chris: Captain, another thing I was just thinking of is the seafarersqmission what, what role, how do you think of seafarersqmission and what role is seafarersqmission playing, in your life as a seafarer and how do you see seafarer[sq] mission? Is it a helpful movement, helpful for you as seafarers? Or are there something else that people from seafarersqmission can do for you as seafarers.

Noel: So far I can remember [ ] because this is the first, it's been a long time since I have visited the seafarersqmission.

Chris: Okay.

Noel: I was only in the early 80's in India and in the Persian Gulf, so in India we always go there in seamen's club. Best place we can call. Also we can have our telephone call, we can buy our things. Also we got our postcards. So that's... and you know a little drinking there. India they have centre [ ] and also in Hong Kong I saw [ ]. And then I remember some also before some stranded seamen, they took care of them, yah, and books, books to read we also exchange new books. News, also you can get news.

Chris: And yesterday evening you wanted to go out but why didn't you?

Noel: I had nobody else to go.

Chris: Ah, okay, so you were, everybody on board just wanted to stay on board. They were tired.

Noel: Yesterday was cold, because raining yesterday [ ] it's okay, so nobody wants to go, I just stay.

Noel remembers correctly what the seafarersqmission is all about, but when I asked him about this his memory goes back to the eighties. He has been sailing for so many years but he does not remember much in between 2009 and the eighties. What he does remember is that seafarersqmission took care of some stranded seafarers. Seafarers from all over the world seem to understand that seafarersqmission is about helping seafarers in need.

He also listed things that the seafarers' mission, and especially the centres, are offering seafarers. For instance books, telephone calls, a little drinking, some shopping, receiving postcards (in the eighties) and also in receiving some news from their home countries.

It is not always easy to visit the seafarers' centre and to go ashore. The captain describes how it was more comfortable for him to stay on the ship than to go out the previous evening. He did not have anyone to join him, it was cold and so he rather stayed on board. The ship was here for about a week, but Noel never took the time to visit the centre. Many seafarers stay on board nowadays as it is almost too much effort to go out. It is safer as many people (including me) in Durban warns them that it is dangerous to go out because of the situation with crime. Some seafarers also explained to me that they do not want to go out because if they go out there are too many temptations.

The problem is that when this happens seafarers, in a sense, imprison themselves as the next port might not have a mission to go to or any other kind of safe place. Many seafarers will not go ashore in a number of countries in Africa, the Middle East and even in the USA. This all adds to seafarers, due to both themselves and external factors, locking themselves in on ships and isolating themselves up to a point where it is not healthy. A study done in the USA found that only 20-25% of seafarers will take shore leave when in port (*Nautilus International Telegraph* March 2011:24,25).

I would not say that it is a serious problem for Noel, but he is fortunate enough to be on board for only two months. If it is for longer periods it can become really hard for seafarers and even unhealthy.

f. Eric:

In my interview with Eric he talked about something that happened to him years ago in a seafarers' centre in the USA. He did mention the port's name, but it is not important where it happened, but just to note that something unthinkable as this can happen to a

young seafarer far away from home. It reminds me that people involved with the seafarers' mission can do much good in the lives of seafarers, but also much harm.

In the interview, Eric at first explained some of his early experiences with the seafarers' mission which is very similar to what the others had to say about it:

Chris: Yah, one thing I was wondering about was the thing with seamen's missions. What would you say is, you know, you had some experiences or...

Eric: Yes, the seamen's mission, the very first seamen's mission that I can recall is, yah, in Australia, yah, in Australia is my first. It's way back, 1995, something. Yah, just pick you up. Then there's no internet yet, so they all they have in there is the karaoke and the drinks and some games, phone booths, that [is] it, that [is] the most they got, they can offer. Telephone, some games, [ ] and books, magazines and everything, like that, but that's all. Then they bring you back to the ship. That's the most. Then in Canada. There, same thing. It's almost, most seamen's club are all the same actually. The only difference now they have these internet thing and yah. But speaking of services, the seamen's club in UK, they kinda strict. Yah, especially on time, if they say you have to be back at ship [ ]. You cannot say [ ] because they have a limited, I don't know, driver, especially when there are plenty seafarers in the club.

Eric observes that many seafarers' centres seem to be the same in many ways:

Most seamen's club are all the same actually. Some might be a bit strict about the bus times, but basically they are the same offering karaoke, drinks, games, books, magazines, the bus service and nowadays they have internet. Eric explains that in the ports in USA there are also transport services to shops and then continues to share his experience with a priest at a seafarers' centre:

Eric: But in America it's another story, it's different. I don't know if you're going to believe what I've experienced there [laughing without humour]. Well, first, they pick you up in America. They pick you up and bring you somewhere where you wanted to go like shopping that's, that's what they do, you know. But the thing is sometimes in the big ports they, like in [ ], they cannot accommodate everybody, because the port [is] so big but they have only two drivers. So what they do is pick you up, they go ship to ship like that, they pick up until the bus is full. Then ask everybody, where you want to go?

Best-Buy or Wal-Mart to do some shopping?+ Then those who wanted to go to the club to do some internet thing, to make some phone calls they go along with the bus to the seaman's club. Then they will tell you: %What time, okay, what time you want to be picked up? There. They will come back for you and then send you back to ship. That's it. Um, should I tell you about that priest?

Chris: Yah.

Eric: That I encounter? In [name of the port] there is one priest that I met. And since everybody is busy on board no one is able to go with him except me. But I didn't know that no one is there at the seaman's centre. And, there are actually, there are different seaman's centres. There are *Flying Angels*, *Stella Maris*, and there is something else. As far as I remember there are three and he's with the *Stella Maris*. This guy that I'm talking about is with the *Stella Maris*. They said that he's the one that is managing the *Stella Maris*. The place, it's a little, it's not so big, it's just like an old house, you know, it looks like an old house to me that is converted into *Stella Maris*, seafarers' [centre], you know. There. And he let me in, then he showed me around then he offered a drink. And, so accommodating then: %Have a drink+. After a few, few drinks, um, he come to me, um, eh, there. Ah, he's, were a little drunk, so, I don't know, it very [ ], and the last thing I remember is him drinking and then says that he likes me. I don't know if it [is] because of what we've had...we've been drinking, so I don't know what happened to him so there. He just, ah, just took advantage of me, that [is] all. And I'm, I don't know, maybe it's because it's been a long time I just, I just let him do it. So there. But the thing is...he insisted that he likes me so much. There. So, something happened, I mean, yes, I had sex with him, so I just let him do it and that's it. I thought it was just one time so I just let him do it. That [is] how it happened. Then after that, [he] sent me back to the ship. That's it. But, on the way home, he told me that, he proposed that I can stay in the place, as his assistant, like that, or some kind of caretaker of the place. There. And he would sponsor me like, something like that. He would sponsor me to the US embassy, you know. It requires a sponsor, if you [are] trying to leave for America, that's the way, you must have a sponsor or something else. And another thing is you have to show money. So, he just told me to show money, he just told me that I show money so I can easily get his sponsorship. So, what he's saying about, what he means about this sponsorship for US embassy to [ ] my stay in America that he is willing to get me there. And that's it.

Eric told me this story before in the first conversation we had when I visited his ship,

probably because even though it happened long ago it is still an event which is weighing on his mind. Here, while at the seafarers centre in Durban he is telling me the story again reminding me of the vulnerability of seafarers and the way in which people can take advantage of them. The priest was from *Stella Maris*, from the Roman Catholic Church in other words, but of course he could have been from any church group. This priest seems to be acting with a plan, making Eric drunk and therefore more vulnerable. Afterwards he proposed that they could continue their relationship but in the end Eric declined it and said: 'Ah, but I can not into, I can not a [ ]. It's just a one thing for me. I can not really into that.'

#### - **Alternative perspective**

The first reaction when I identify myself as a missionary is often that I sell telephone cards, and can organise them a lift. This is how one of the chaplains described how seafarers react when he identifies himself as someone from the seafarers mission. The immediate reaction of seafarers seem to be good on the one hand because they know that someone from the mission is there to help them, but it is also a bit disappointing that they do not often seem to recognise the spiritual agenda that we have. It seems that the word mission for them does not really have something to do with the fact that it is God's mission that we are busy with and therefore that seafarers mission is in the first place a spiritual endeavour.

Allen (in Niemandt 2007:155) says: 'Missionary zeal does not grow out of intellectual beliefs, nor out of theological arguments, but out of love. If I do not love a person I am not moved to help him by proofs that he is in need; if I do love him, I wait for no proof of a special need to urge me to help him.' Missionary zeal grows out of love and therefore a missionary activity devoid of the diaconal would be unbalanced. But mission without the dimension of evangelism will be lifeless because as Bosch (in Kverndal 2008:232) pointed out: 'If you cut the heart out of a body, that body becomes a corpse. With evangelism cut out mission dies; it ceases to be mission.' Out of some of the things that the co-researchers said it seemed that the heart in the seafarers mission is not always pumping as it should. Otto (2002:91,92) tells of an email he received from a

seafarer called Deepak Dayal, an Indian who at that stage was a chief officer. He wrote the following:

To be honest, I have to say that it is unfortunate that only a few missionaries visit ships today. The number of ships has certainly increased, but there are hardly any missionaries who visit us. Perhaps someone will come and sell us telephone cards. Then, if you call a missionary, he will drive you to the city or to the missionary headquarters. But in many so-called seamen's missions I haven't met a single missionary. What happens is that seamen go to the seamen's headquarters to have a drink and make a telephone call. I remember in the 1970s, when a seamen's missionary would come and visit you on the ships and he would pray with you. He would even give you evangelistic material if you requested it. And on a Sunday he would pick us up and take us to church. Nowadays everything is so fast and hectic. We hardly ever stay at a port more than 24 hours. And most of the time we don't even go on land. We look at our e-mails, make phone calls and relax. At such times it would be great if [sic] someone came on board and talked to us. Seafarers need hope, support and fellowship while at port. They are all lonely. Every seafarer has problems and struggles in some way or another, and it would do them good if they could talk about their problems with a missionary who understands.

So there are telephone cards, there is transport, there are the centres selling alcoholic drinks, but there are not prayers, church or evangelistic material. At least in this case the seafarer experienced that the seafarers' mission on many occasions fail to make a connection between the diaconal and the evangelistic dimensions of mission.

In the story of Sister Marian Davey (Smith 2011:26,27) it was interesting to see how she made use of things like selling telephone cards in order to establish a relationship in which she could add a spiritual dimension. It seems that she succeeded in making the connection between the diaconal and the evangelical dimensions of mission. Unfortunately not everyone from seafarers' mission achieves this.

So, for instance in the case of Sister Marian Davey it does seem that the heart of the mission work among seafarers is beating. Someone like John also witnessed about this

saying: %got into serious discouragement and pain but often times with the help of your organization here, seafarersq[mission], Durban, South-Africa, I always recovered, and when I recover I noticed that the peace of God is still full inside me and that God has not abandoned me and, that has kept me to keep moving.+

In Jonathan's case his biggest need at that stage was the crisis with the situation of injustice and unfairness that he was facing. The help from the seafarersqmission in Jonathan's case was less spiritual and more practical as they received: %reports about the auction.+ Also they got some help with toiletries as they did not have much money: %last time they brought for us some shaving things...+ Neglecting this more diaconal emphasis of our work would have been heartless.

For Mohammed the seafarersqmission provided a space where he could socialize with other seafarers. He says that he has never sailed with female seafarers, but that he did meet some at the seafarersqcentres he visited: %But I used to meet in the Mission to Seamen, something like that, we have conversation, yah.+ This indicated that the seafarersqmission brings seafarers together that would otherwise not meet each other. This is an important function, as it was already mentioned how seafarers can experience social isolation and the seafarersqcentre can provide a welcome relief from being isolated and lonely.

For all the good things that the seafarersqmission and the centres mean in seafarersq lives it does seem that it is not always that relevant in every seafarersqlife and that in some cases our impact is very limited. It was disappointing to notice, for instance, that even though Ivan had been a seafarer for many years he did not have much experience with the seafarersqmission. Noel did mention a few things about the seafarersqmission, but also in his case it seemed to be that his experiences with the mission were few and far between. He said: %it's been a long time since I have visited the seafarersq mission.+ In the 80's he noted that it was a good place to make a telephone call: %Best place we can call.+ Other things Noel remembers about the seafarersqmission is: %We can buy our things [ ] a little drinking there.+ He also remembers seafarersqmission as



people who are there in times of need: %a some stranded seamen, they took care of them...+ Seafarersqcentres also supply books and give some news: %a and books, books to read we also exchange new books. News, also you can get news.+ He does not make any mention of anything spiritual.

Then there was also Eric. He did not make mention of any spiritual aspect to the activities of the seafarersqmission either. He said: %a they have in there is the karaoke and the drinks and some games, phone booths, that [is] it, that [is] the most they got, they can offer. Telephone, some games, [ ] and books, magazines and everything, like that, but that's all. Then they bring you back to the ship.+ Then unfortunately there was also the incident which happened in a port in the USA.

He starts by saying: %a don't know if you're going to believe what I've experienced there [laughing without humour].+ Then, before he continues he makes sure that I do want to hear about it: %a m, should I tell you about that priest?+ He then tells how it was only he and the priest in the seafarersqmission and how the priest gave him something to drink: %a don't know if it [was] because of what we've had...we've been drinking, so I don't know what happened to him, so there. He just, ah, just took advantage of me, that [is] all.+At this stage Eric was a young inexperienced seafarer and someone he would not have suspected %a to take advantage+of him. It is to be expected that people will try to misuse and abuse seafarers, but that this happened by someone from the seafarersq mission is appalling.

As bad as this incident is it has to be said that by and large seafarersqmissions are well known and appreciated by seafarers and it does make a positive contribution in the life of seafarers. My co-researchers revealed a long list of things that the seafarersq mission did to make a positive contribution in their or in other seafarersqlives which can be listed as the following:

1. Reports about the auction
2. Shaving things

3. Providing a place to meeting other seafarers
4. Telephone calls
5. It is a place to buy things
6. A little drinking
7. Assisting stranded seafarers
8. Books
9. News
10. Games
11. Karaoke
12. A place to receive your postcards

These are mostly all important things and my hope is that those in seafarersqmission will keep up the good work, but most of all that the spiritual dimension of our work will grow stronger:

13. Spiritual support: %got into serious discouragement and pain, but often times with the help of your organization here, seafarersq[mission], Durban, South-Africa, I've always recovered, and when I recover I noticed that the peace of God is still full inside me and that God has not abandoned me and, that has kept me to keep moving.+

The spiritual aspect to our work is not totally absent and many times the seafarersq mission does well in making a balanced connection between the diaconal and the evangelism dimensions. What I am suggesting, though, is that our identity is not always that clearly communicated to seafarers. Maybe this is because we are not so sure about our identity ourselves.

Our identity should be rooted in the narrative of Jesus Christ who was sent by his Father. David Bosch (in Niemandt 2007:147) has emphasised that God is not only busy with and involved in mission, but that mission is part of the essence of who God is. Keifert (in Niemandt 2007:148) said: %the very life of God as Father, Son, and Holy

Spirit is a process of mission: a Father sends a Son, a Son who sends a Spirit. In this very likeness of God, we are called, gathered, centered, and sent within the life of the triune God and God's mission, an infinite journey of being called and sent.+ Somehow we from the seafarers' mission manage to hide the fact that we are busy with the *Missio Dei*, God's mission, and we become just 'mission'+. Not the mission of God, not the mission who shows God's love, not the mission who are sent to the nations to make disciples, but simply the 'mission'+ who helps with telephone top-up etc.

What do I propose then? I propose that our identity should be communicated more clearly so that seafarers know what 'mission'+ means when one of us say we are from the 'mission'+, that seafarers must know that 'mission'+ means that we are participants in the *Missio Dei* and that we are not simply there to show that we care, but that God cares. Further that the visible, tangible things that we do for them points towards the intangible and the invisible and that the seafarers' mission exists because God is not only busy with mission, but because mission is part of God's essence (cf Bosch in Niemandt 2007:147).

Should we abandon any of the things that we are doing that is not explicitly spiritual? I am sure that it is not necessary and that many of the activities and the services we do have is important and that it will be unthinkable not to provide them. What is important is for us to have clarity in our own minds who we are and why we are doing mission work. We should make sure that the diaconal and the evangelism dimensions are not separated from each other.

William Douglas (2008:303), himself a Master Mariner, had this to say concerning his view of the role of a chaplain and thus the purpose of the seafarers' mission:

Given this overall context, and viewing it from the standpoint of a lay Christian, what is therefore the essential calling of a chaplain to seafarers? I personally believe that a devoted chaplain will take to heart the core of the Apostle Paul's charge to Titus . never shrink from delivering the message of God's Word, but uphold its doctrine fearlessly, showing incorruptness, gravity, sincerity, and sound speech (Titus 2:7-8).

My agreement with Douglas has of course much to do with my theological position of being an exclusivist, as I have already indicated. Da Silva (2008:279) emphasises that being an exclusivist does not mean that one does not care or does not have respect for someone from another religion, but that this position oppose pluralism which denies Jesus as Saviour and inclusivism which is a position which is implying that explicit faith in Christ is unnecessary. Exclusivism is not rooted in hatred for others whose religious point of view is different than yours. It is rather a position that grows out of faithfulness to the Bible. The Bible emphasises this position in verses such as John 14:6 where Jesus states that no one comes to the Father except through Him (Da Silva 2008:279). The purpose is to honour Jesus and not to dishonour anyone.

Da Silva (2008:279) does admit that this type of position begs the question as to what happens with those who do not believe in Jesus through no fault of their own and then answers by stating that the Bible itself does not really dwell on this question. Therefore he takes the view that it is not for us to decide, but says that we must rather trust in God's justice and mercy as far as this mystery is concerned (Da Silva 2008:279).

On a practical level, what does the exclusivist position propose then? Da Silva (2008:280) concludes by stating that his position is articulated well by a Dutch-Canadian port chaplain called J E F Dresselhuis who has drawn up the following threefold approach:

**Without coercion!** True, mission is a matter of urgency. Yet our witness must not take on the character of force or railroading. It is the love of Jesus Christ that must motivate us. We are called to go only as his ambassadors.

**Without arrogance!** We ourselves have received salvation only by pure grace . as a free and unmerited gift. Each of us has to admit we are not one whit better than our Hindu, Muslim or Buddhist neighbor. The gospel is not the product of any human brain or moral superiority, but the good news of Jesus Christ.

**Without fear!** It is the Son of God who has given us the Great Commission . to go make disciples of all nations. We are only called to obey. It is he who has the power to persuade and change the lives of individual people or nations, whether on ship or on

shore. So we can go without fear, knowing that Christ has, according to Matthew 28:18-20, personally promised every one of us: %will be with you . to the end of the age!+

Peter Ibrahim (2008:323) explains how this type of ministry can look. He starts off by saying that the chaplain who gets involved with the seafarers might be the only Bible a seafarer will ever read. He continues to tell a story of an experience he had to explain what he means by this:

A Buddhist radio officer from Malaysia was in despair. He had just received news that his mother was seriously ill, and he wanted so badly to see her before she died. The captain would not let him go; and he knew that if he left the ship against orders he would be black-listed for ever. So, I prayed with him in his cabin. Next morning the captain himself met us with the good news . a replacement officer had become available. There were tears of gratitude as we drove to the airport. A mother got to see her eldest son three days before she died. Some years later, I heard someone call my name: %brahim, don't you remember me?+ After his mother's death he had wanted to find out more about the faith of a friend he met in his need. He had then decided to follow Christ himself.

It is not the seafarers' mission's work to try and coerce people to Christianity, it is however our work to participate in the *Missio Dei*. Our identity is that we are participants in the *Missio Dei*. We should remember that we are not simply there to show that we care, but that God cares. The visible things that we do are pointing towards the invincible.

The seafarers' mission is an amazing ministry to be part of. Especially in the beginning I was surprised at the size of it and the room that is allowed for us by secular authorities. We are welcome in so many ports all over the world. This is a unique ecumenical enterprise where churches come together as participants of the *Mission Dei* like nowhere else that I know of. The hope is that our efforts will always consciously be based on the fact that it is God's mission which has originated in God's heart because God is love. John Green, the director of development from the AOS said: %Our chaplains and ship visitors are the human face of shipping+(*Nautilus International*

*Telegraph* April 2011:3). This is our aim, but also more than this. May we also show seafarers the face of God who loves and cares for them.

## **H. Positive narratives about being a seafarer: A profession of hope**

### **- Introduction**

Without any positive aspects to being a seafarer it would have been impossible to recruit anyone to work in this industry. A good story needs a good problem and therefore it is easy, while doing narrative research, to only focus on problems and challenges. To do this would be to tell a thin story, though, as there are definitely a lot of positive aspects in this line of work, although admittedly it is sometimes more a matter of positive promises which in some cases never get fulfilled. Still, there are the alternative stories of many seafarers who really benefit from this career and whose families are better off in many ways as a consequence of their career.

For instance Kurtis Rogers (2011:22), a young seafarer, wrote an article in the *Nautilus International Telegraph* describing his experience in his chosen profession. He has just started his career and although he does admit that there are some negative aspects to his work he is glad that he had made the decision to enter this career. For him it started with the realisation when he was younger that he did not want to be in an office or call centre when he grows up. He was attracted to seafaring as he saw it as a career which promises security, career progression, free travelling around the world and where every day at work brings something different. He is also happy to note that while he is training and studying he gets paid at the same time. For Kurtis it is also positive that there are multicultural crews on board and he notes that this gives you insight into other people's values. He does admit that there are many negatives to this line of work, that there are many regulations, that ships have very quick turnaround times and that you are separated from your loved ones, but overall for him the positives outweigh the negatives.

The sailors I had interviewed also had some positive perspectives on seafaring of which the most obvious one is the financial advantage.

- **The research characters**

**a. John from Nigeria**

At the time of our interview John was not very positive about being a seafarer because of the unfortunate situation he was in. He did say that there are some positives about seafaring though his overall view on it was very pessimistic. He said: %When I was younger the sea life used to excite me. And I would like to get away from the hustle and bustle of the city. I want to go to the water environment. So I used to be like that. But now, I am always thinking of home now.+ It changed as he got older, but for some younger seafarers it might still be true that there is some excitement and that it is a way of getting away from the normal %hustle and bustle+of life, especially in a city.

**b. Jonathan from Kenya**

Jonathan has been through a lot, but for him seafaring was still a career of hope and promise. In Kenya there are not many job opportunities and the work that is available is not high paying jobs. In seafaring there is a promise of a bright future.

So when I was seeing these Filipino crew, I see their life, I talk to them, they say: %Sea, to be a seaman is [a] good job.+ So I just like, when I saw this people, when they are coming and then they go ashore, just like that, so I was, I like to be a seaman because I was... But when I joined the ship I saw it was different. It's different, even some I meet, one guy this place [the seafarers mission] I meet him here one time, yah. I told him: %Now I am a seaman now, but I received a big different, the way I've seen you before.+ He say: %ah, is this your first ship? But when you get the, the nice company with too much ships maybe things will be fine. But when you are starting that's hard, [ ]. So you must keep on working and then one day you get nice company.+

The Filipino encouraged Jonathan by assuring him that it is just a matter of finding the right company. That when you do find the right company, preferably one with %too much ships+, (the term %too much+is universal language for most seafarers to say: a lot) you would be able to have the kind of life Jonathan saw that the Filipinos had when he was still working in the port in Kenya. So even though in Jonathan's story there are a lot of problems and challenges, the Filipino in his story is pointing towards an alternative

reality where he might have a bright new future.

#### c. Mohammed from the East Coast of Africa

Mohammed was very pleased with this job and he loved it. I got the impression that it was for him a bit like a dream come true to become a seafarer because his uncle was also a seafarer and he listened to the stories his uncle told and the reaction of the people to his uncle.

Okay, now my aim is to be a seaman the time when I grow. The reason why is because my uncle he was the seaman. The time when I grow when my uncle coming from sea people they [are] very happy [at] the place where he's staying. And I see there's a different, [he] can give us a story. He was in Germany, he was in Holland, so he travelled different place. So, me too I wish to follow his style.

Mohammed also said: %Even me too I love this job but it was hard at that time for me to leave the job. And I love this job but I am very weak, I'm not strong at sea.+ He was talking about being seasick and the effect of this on him, but that he did not want to stop being a seafarer because he loved it. Some seafarers actually %love this job+.

#### d. Ivan from Bulgaria

In the interview with Ivan he did not point out clearly what positive aspects there are to being a seafarer, but he did say that sailing is a profession where you have to accept the disadvantages of the advantage. He did not elaborate about what the advantages are but as I understood him one of the advantages he referred to was the salary. Referring to how it was in the old days he said: %But you see it was okay, there was no starving, before. There was no poor people.+ Even then the salaries were relatively good. I got the impression that Ivan did quite enjoy being a seafarer, but he did not talk about many other advantages except the salary.

#### e. Noel from the Philippines

Noel was positive about his career and he said: %This [is] my profession. I love it.+ He did say that there is sometimes loneliness and other drawbacks to his life on the ships



but in general he was positive about his chosen career. He also talked about salary and said that it is difficult due to the fact that you do not earn during the time you are at home. Seafarers are largely only contract workers and therefore it is sometimes very difficult for them to go home as they do not earn anything during their vacations. This means that you need to budget carefully as most seafarers do not know in advance exactly when they will be able to start a new contract again. Referring to the situation of salaries he says: ~~%That\$~~ why so many Filipino\$ want to sail to sea...+

As referred to before Noel is saying that he is earning up to five times more than some of his friends back in the Philippines and that he saw how even they could send their children to school. So even though it is difficult not to earn a constant monthly income and not to earn for a month or two while you are on vacation, financially it is still a good and positive situation for the seafarer.

#### f. Eric from the Philippines

Eric got an opportunity through his father in-law who was a bosun. He had asked the superintendent on one of the ships he worked on if he can help Eric. Looking back Eric is thankful for the opportunities that seafaring has opened up for him:

Chris: So it seems to me if you think of your career as a seafarer, it\$ been tough, it\$ been [a] sacrifice, but you are thankful.

Eric: Yes, yes I am very much. And to all those people who has been the bridge for me to get there I thank them all. May God bless them all. I\$ really glad that I got my job. Because you see nowadays, before you can find a job here you go [for] a lot of training, schooling. It will require you a lot of trainings. Not just two or three, but a lot. So, kinda strict these days. Unlike before, twenty years ago, before I start its kinda easy, I mean, it is not that difficult, as long as you have the requirements. Now they have a lot of requirements. So, very strict right now. I think that 9/11 have something to do with this, you know.

Chris: Yah, for sure.

Eric: But one thing I\$ really proud of is seeing the world, really.

Today it is not so easy to get a job and therefore Eric is grateful that he had the opportunity when he started: %And to all those people who has been the bridge for me to get there I thank them all. May God bless them all. Iqn really glad that I got my job.+ He also implies that a positive aspect of his work is that he could see the world: %But one thing Iqn really proud of is seeing the world, really.+ Later on Eric continues this theme of seeing the world and explains that he has souvenirs and photos reminding him of the places he had been: %I have this collection of this pictures about hundred and twenty albums of pictures taken from different places that Iqve been.+And: %It is not so easy for us to go ashore all the time so I just make sure I got some coins, something, or any notes that I can have for souvenir, in exchange for that. So there. [I] have also the collection of the money. Yea, thatq nice.+ So it is good to see the world and it is good to have hundred and twenty albums full of photoq of you being all over the world, but it comes back again to the money and the opportunities that this industry creates for someone who would not have had the opportunity. Eric tells the story of being young without parents, but that along the way there were always some people who could fill in for them:

Eric: Yah, [I] live with my aunts, my motherq sisters, but they cannot afford to send me to school because they have their own children, you know. Of course they have to send their own children first, before me. So I look for somebody else who can send me to school. I worked in that restaurant in exchange for schooling. And [it] was very, very kind [of them] to welcome [me] in the family, in their big family. To think that they, that [their] family [is] so big, big enough to have me. This family have ten children, yah, but the father just accept me in the family because he have only two boys, thatq why. So he said, [you are] one of my son. So I called him father also. Yah, so nice. Then heq the one who send me to school. He made sure that Iqn going to finish my high school. But, you know, itq kinda difficult living in a big family. Jealousy, the jealousy is there all the time. Yah, so I cannot stand being, you know, being the problem, so I have to go.

Chris: Yah, because I think you are still a bit of a outsider in their family.

Eric: Yah, it is, it is, it is. Not because they said Iqn [not] welcome to the family. Not all of them, yah. Two out of them, maybe, doesnq like me. Yah, but nowadays when we see

each other, they still welcome me as a member of the family. I always be a family to them. Especially the mother, she loves me so much. She gets mad whenever she heard that I on vacation and I did not drop by to say 'Hey, how are you mother?', and so and so. She's like that, she's getting old. [ ] As people get old they become more sensitive, you know, [ ].

This is the background of Eric's story before he started sailing. He was treated like an orphan, although both his parents were alive. Fortunately he could finish his high school education and later on it was possible for him to embark on a career as a seafarer.

Eric: Going back to seamen's life, here's what I can say: Mmm, some people they use to think they are looser once they come on board in the vessel they are in they cannot get good overtime. They said they are looser and so and so, something like that. But for me I look at, I look at it, I look at it the other way around. I always think I'm a winner, every time I get a contract, because here we're just contract worker, you see. Every time you get a job, you have a contract, sign, and it is only nine months, something like that. That is the longest contract they can get today. You cannot get these ten months or so, something like that. Not more than nine months. It's getting shorter and shorter, contracts nowadays are getting shorter and shorter, up to two months, you know, so there. Now, I always feel, lucky and a winner, because I always get a contract. You see, they don't realise how hard it is to get a job. It's more difficult to find a good job, besides, what you earn here is more than these professionals will get, you know.

Chris: Yah, you mean like a doctor even.

Eric: Yah, can you imagine [ ]. I am working here as a cook, and I'm earning more or less \$1500. And there is not less than, more or less 70 000 pesos. 70 000 pesos a month, see, compare to what a teacher, a teacher, a school teacher, earn in a month, they only earn 16 to 20 thousand, pesos. While I'm earning 70, not less than 70. I'm just a simple cook, see. And I didn't get, I did not acquire a higher education whatsoever, they required to become a school teacher. To think they are more professional than I am. You see what I mean? So there. And a bank teller, as I heard, a bank teller, they earn a lot less, almost 30 thousand pesos a month. You see, there, there, they work and earn that kind of money, that much money only. And yet they have to go to work, I mean, going to work requires them fare, you know, going there they have to ride the bus or taxi, or [ ], whatsoever. So, that will cost you something.

And then you will have a meal there, right. Here on board everything is free. You know what I mean, you get what I mean?

Chris: Yah, you sleep for free, you don't have [a] transport problem...

Eric: Yah, the meals are not a problem, and earning that money, while they are earning...okay, suppose they get half of what I get, still they have to pay for the transport, for the meals and everything. Here everything is free. See, just like this, I'm having coffee every time I want, you know. And, I can eat as much as I want, although, the only advantage they have for me is being with their family, right. That's the only sacrifice that I have. That's the difference. So, if you are really practical, you know, because working there, yah, okay, you're with the family, but you cannot earn much, you cannot earn more, enough to send, to, to pay for all your bills, and send the children to school, imagine that. But if you have about three kids, sending children to school, it's costly, it's really costly. Not just costly, but really costly. So, I have to sacrifice...

Eric's background is that he did not have that many opportunities in life as he grew up as an orphan. But along the way things changed for the better and people helped him so that in the end he could become a seafarer. This is why he is so positive and expresses his gratitude for the work he has: %And to all those people who has been the bridge for me to get there I thank them all. May God bless them all. I'm really glad that I got my job.+

The big theme for seafarers is weighing up family against money; the disadvantage of being away from the family versus the advantage of providing for the family. Eric explains that he receives a significantly larger salary than people who are more educated than he is, but who are doing a land based job. In addition to being paid better he does not have expenses such as transport and food. Receiving such a big salary he is able to create opportunities for his children. That's why, if he gets a contract on a ship he sees himself as a winner: %always think I'm a winner, every time I get a contract...+

#### - **Alternative perspective**

Mohammed said: %Even me too I love this job...+ Noel agrees with this: %This [is] my

profession. I love it.+ It would be a thin story and unlike the narrative approach if the focus of this research would be only on the problems and challenges of seafaring. For this reason I was interested to hear about the positive narratives my co-researchers had to share about their lives at sea. Many seafarers are positive about seafaring. The big reason for this positive attitude is that for many it is an empowering career. As Kverndal (2008: XXV) stated, surveys have shown that seafarers main motive for their careers is to provide for their families.

Referring to days gone by Ivan asserted: %There was no poor people.+ Even then you could make a good living as a seafarer. Making a good living, Noel says, is why so many people from the Philippines are sailing: %That's why so many Filipinos want to sail to sea...+ One of the chaplains affirms that money wise it is a good career option: %Met a chief cook recently (Filipino) who had six houses!+Eric continued this theme and explained that he earns more than double the amount someone like a teacher or a bank teller is able to earn. Added to this is the advantage of not having to pay for things like food and transport. He said: %Now, I always feel, lucky and a winner, because I always get a contract.+ And: %a.70 000 pesos a month, see, compare to what a teacher, a teacher, a school teacher, earn in a month, they only earn 16 to 20 thousand, pesos. While I can earning 70, not less than 70. I can just a simple cook, see.+ They earn a good salary and they have less to spend on necessities: %Here on board everything is free.+

Having a big salary is empowering and this is why someone like Eric will come back and back again to the ocean. It is empowering because it creates opportunities for you and your children. Eric says: %can just a simple cook, see.+ He could not get education, but because of seafaring he can provide this for his children and he will continue to sacrifice for them: %But if you have about three kids, sending children to school, it's costly, it's really costly. Not just costly, but really costly. So, I have to sacrifice...+ He has four children and he can provide for all of them. Jonathan from Kenya, who was either jobless or doing work which provided a very small salary also saw seafaring as something which can create a better future for him and his family. In spite of the intensely negative situation he had to endure, even in this situation he wanted to keep

on pursuing this career. What kept him interested in sailing were the positive narratives that other seafarers shared with him. Filipino crew told Jonathan: %a to be a seaman is [a] good job.+ Another Filipino seafarer encouraged him: %So you must keep on working and then one day you get nice company.+

Having enough money to get your children educated was not the only positive aspect to sailing, though. The positive aspect that John pointed out was that seafaring is in some ways exciting: %When I was younger the sea life used to excite me.+ In a letter he wrote for the purpose of this research he said: %a life at sea is full of adventures.+ He also wrote that it gave him %the opportunity to travel round the world and meet people of other cultures which otherwise would be unaffordable.+ This is the same aspect that Eric pointed out when talking about his collection of photographs and other souvenirs. He said: %But one thing I'm really proud of is seeing the world, really.+ Rogers (2011:22) also said that for him one of the advantages of choosing sailing as a career is to see the world for free and to not have an office job. After seeing the world you can come back to your family and community and have stories to tell and photographs to show.

Mohammed says that when his uncle came home every one was glad to see him: %The time when I grow when my uncle coming from sea people they [are] very happy [at] the place where he's staying. And I see there's a different, [he] can give us a story. He was in Germany, he was in Holland, so he travelled different place. So, me too I wish to follow his style.+ With Mohammed's uncle it seems that being a seafarer gave him status in his community as everyone was happy when he came back from a contract. This also reminds of Eric who became %kuya+, the big brother, of the family. Being a seafarer empowered him to play this role in the family: %Everybody love %kuya+ %kuya, I need this+ %kuya, I need that.+ %kuya, thank you for that.+ %Thank you for this.+ %kuya, where is you?+ %kuya, happy birthday.+ Every vacation sharing some stories...+ In some countries being a seafarer has a stigma to it, but mostly in developing countries they have a high social standing. Johnsson (in *Nautilus International Telegraph* 2011:29) for instance referred to this by pointing out the difference if you compare

Sweden with the Philippines. In the Philippines a wife will be told that she has won the lottery when she gets married to a sailor (Johnsson in *Nautilus International Telegraph* 2011:29).

Different cultures see things differently and although this can cause a lot of difficulty there is also a possible positive side to it as Kurtis Rogers (2011:22) said and also some of my co-researchers such as Eric and Mohammed whom I already referred to. Eric said this about the Norwegian stewards: "They tried to teach me everything [they] knows, so sharing a lot to me. This is the right way to do this; this is the right way to do that, that's it. And one, I should say best thing, I learned from them is being so honest all the time." And Mohammed had this to say: "I meet with different seamen we used to share in the advice, the ideas, something like that, because I meet with people they've got enough experience, they used to give me experience."

Rogers (2011:22), a young seafarer also mentioned a few other things that are positive about being a seafarer such as career progress and job security. These two are also closely related to the advantage of the salary that they can earn. Except for the salaries the positive aspect to seafaring can be summarised as follows:

1. They love it (Noel and Mohammed).
2. There is some excitement and adventure to it. It beats an office job.
3. It's an opportunity to travel around the world.
4. In some countries it gives you a position of high social standing in your community and family.
5. For some seafarers there is job security.
6. There is career progress.
7. The multicultural situation can be an enriching experience.

In the end the greatest positive aspect to seafaring is the salary which empowers seafarers and which creates opportunities, especially in developing countries. William Douglas (2008:303) himself a master mariner, admits that seafaring has many

challenges, but says that sometimes there are moments on a ship in which you are certain that you would have been sailing even if you weren't paid for it:

Life for the mariner can be hectic and dangerous. It can also be fulfilling and challenging. Nothing beats the peace of a midnight watch at sea under a clear, dark tropical sky; or steaming quietly through the Mediterranean on a sunny day, the water unbelievably blue, while playful porpoises frolic in the bow waves. One can almost be amazed that one should be paid for that kind of pleasure!

## I. Relationships between seafarers: Friendships and fistfights

### - Introduction

In a certain sense seafarers become family while they have to live together, albeit only for a few months. A young seafarer, Kurtis Rogers (2011:22) said: "I feel that due to the lifestyle and environment you live in when at sea, the people you meet become good friends. For the months you're together, these people become your family and working on board becomes a lot easier if you embrace that concept." They may not be from the same faith, the same culture or level of education, but for the period of their contracts they are all living together like family. Family that is sometimes supporting each other, sometimes fighting with each other and a family in which there is specific ranks and procedures.

The relationships on board are not only determined by the different cultures which are represented, but the physical environment on ships also has an important influence on this. Professor Helen Sampson from the Seafarers International Research Centre pointed out at the second Institute of Marine Engineering, Science & Technology (IMarEST) Marine Failure Conference that noise and vibration on the ship has a very negative impact on seafarers (*Nautilus International Telegraph* May 2011:11). She pointed out that the ship is not only a work place but also a home and that if the environment is not healthy it will impact the relationships of the seafarers on board. She said that some studies have shown that where there is a lot of noise people tend to be less helpful and that it can lead to being irritated and aggressive. Sampson also pointed out that the view a seafarer normally has is looking into the lifeboat. She believes that it



would be much healthier for seafarers if they could have a view on the ocean. The point is that relationships are seriously affected by the environment.

In the rest of this section I will look at some of the things that the co-researchers had to tell me concerning their experiences as far as their relationships with the people they had to share their ship with are concerned.

- **The research characters**

a. John from Nigeria

The crew on John's ship were all from Nigerian and they were together in a very small space, at a very tense time for an extended period of time. To me most of the crew seemed to be emotional type of people and I assumed that it was perhaps partly due to their Nigerian culture. John, who is an exception to this and normally a very calm person, once almost assaulted his fellow crewmember, James, as I already mentioned. Relationships between each other when all is well is one thing, but when things go wrong and everyone starts to get frustrated the social environment on the ship can get very tense. John said:

Fighting with each other, that has been very common with us except for one or two. In fact like me I kept very patient and there was a particular occasion where I got angry, and I wanted to beat James up. James is one of my colleagues in the ship. Because he was always pestering my life, always troubling me, he called me all sort of names. And there was a day when I got angry; I wanted to beat him up. But God took control and eventually I repented of what I did.

b. Jonathan from Kenya

In Jonathan's situations the crew seemed to get along much better in spite of the unpleasant situation that they were in. They even helped each other with the difficulties created by their circumstances. Some crew members borrowed money from others in order to have airtime. Under cultural differences Jonathan explained how he was excluded from the others and that he could not fit in when he was still the only Kenyan amongst the Indians. Later on it went much better when Peter, also from Kenya joined

the ship. The other difficulty was between Jonathan and the captain, but this was already discussed.

His friend Peter stood up for him against the captain when Jonathan did not want to do his normal duty after working till one o'clock in the morning. He says: "And then Peter told me: "You don't go outside, you just stay inside." Yah, I just sit inside. When he came again to knock, I didn't talk; Peter was the one who talk to him. Peter talk to him...+ Sometimes real friendships develop where seafarers will stand up for each other. It must have taken a lot of courage for Peter to stand up to this abusive captain, but he did it for his friend.

c. Mohammed from the East Coast of Africa

Mohammed's story describes how seafarers function like a team and when you are not able to do your work it creates trouble. He was seasick and others had to do his duty. I repeat different sections of some of the things he said about this in the interview. He starts off by saying: "So now my friends they used to do five hours, instead of them to do 4 hours they do five hours because of me...+ He goes on to explain: "Now, I joined the vessel, when I joined the vessel I travelled the sea. Same story, I feel weak, I'm not strong, people they used to laugh at me, and there's some other people they're not happy, the captain he's not happy with me: "What kind of the seaman?+ He continues:

I don't want to fight with the peoples, because people, if I look the people [they] look like, all this people are my enemies by the time when I am vomiting, I am weak. People they just looked [at] me, the captain give us the job, people they come to do my job. Why, I'm suppose to do my job now people they come to do my job. So now by the time those people if they come to do my job [they] look like my enemy, but they are not my enemy. They just help me because you can't do the job alone. Because you're not strong, this job need you to be strong. Sea make you to be strong. "So look [at] us, we're strong, because we're clean, we're not dirty. You, you're not strong because you're dirty. But we can't tell you anything, because if we tell you, you gonna start fighting and we don't want that. We didn't came here to fight we came here to work.+

Seafaring can be extremely difficult when you have a weakness as was the case with Mohammed who struggled with being seasick all the time. You are stuck in the situation and so are the other crew members who have to work harder because of you. It has been pointed out before that the tendency in today's shipping is to have as little crew on board as possible. On a ship with the minimum crew the burden on everyone escalates. This means that even if just one crew member is not functioning as he should, (and if it is like in Mohammed's case something that has a stigma to it as well) then that crew member will have problems.

Another aspect about seafarers' relationships with each other is that the difference in rank can be a source of discord. Mohammed tells of the time he was an OS (Ordinary Seaman): "At that time when I was an OS I feel shame, people they used to tell me that: "You, OS, come here." It is easy for the higher ranking officers to abuse the lower ranking ratings. It is not always the case, but sometimes it can be emotionally painful as was the case with Mohammed. It can also become really intense as was the case with Jonathan and the captain.

All in all Mohammed gave me the impression of someone who is embracing the seafaring life and who has a positive attitude towards other crew members. He said: "So I meet with different seamen who they've travelled long time they used to give me the advice." And also:

I've never see any bad things if I'm with [the] ship, if I meet with different seamen. If I meet with different seamen we used to share in the advice, the ideas, something like that, because I meet with people they've got enough experience, they used to give me experience. I've meet with people they've seen many things, they just to give me advise, something like that.

So, in Mohammed's story it is seen that there are, like in all human relationships, a lot of things that can cause problems. On a ship it is just sometimes amplified due to the confined situation you find yourself in every day. If you have a weakness you cannot just quit or run away, you and the crew around you have to cope with that. Mohammed

gives us also a view into another side which is that seafarers also learn from each other and that it is therefore also an enriching experience for them to become temporary family.

d. Ivan from Bulgaria

Mohammed's story was told out of the perspective of someone who was ashamed of being only an OS. In Ivan's case it was the other way round. He was a young officer and an OS did not want to acknowledge his rank. He said:

But, yes there was problems, I mean, you go there as a seaman, ordinary seaman, nothing special, come and try to be funny and, when we were mooring, one mooring, you know, what am I doing that I am not helping them? I had to sometimes say that: This is what I applied for. To be an officer, in charge and supervision of you, and you have applied to listen to my command. Whatever I say, you can only say: Yes, sir, and run fast. And, they were not very happy, that's what I had on my first ship, and I had to approach the master, you know with that. And the guy was very, very, strictly, you know, reprimanded ...

It is obvious that the different ranks will determine the way in which different seafarers act toward each other. It is to be expected that authority will sometimes be challenged and that this can lead to unpleasantness. But, most seafarers seem to understand that ranks and authority are part of the package and that they need to accept this.

e. Noel from the Philippines

The relationships on this ship seemed to be good and relaxed. As stated before he was the only Filipino and the rest of the crew were from Indonesia and they got along well, although Noel did talk about being lonely.

f. Eric from the Philippines

One of the things Eric had to share, as far as shipmates were concerned, was about his first contract when he got seasick. In Mohammed's story the other seafarers began to lose their patience when he kept on being seasick, but with Eric it seems that the other

crew members allowed him time to recover: %Even when my stomach is empty I always feel like throwing up. For almost two weeks. These Italians would send me up: %Go, go, go, go, go to bed. Go to bed. Go to bed.+ That's what they said. Until I got used to it.+ Eric had this experience early in his career and it showed that shipmates are not callous towards each other. Talking more about his experiences it is clear that relationships on board are many times complicated and that it is often the younger seafarers that seem to make trouble:

Eric: Work, work here on board is not really so difficult, but what difficult is, the difficulty is getting along to people you are working with. It is the most difficult thing, here, on board, where I work. Whether it is your fellow Filipinos or any nationalities it is what is difficult, not the work. [ ]. It is always getting along with these people. You know sometimes you can encounter a moody person, who doesn't want to be told, [ ]. The funny thing is it is sometimes the one who is having the lower rank who's acting like that, pretending to be somebody, you know, instead of the senior officers, I don't know. You really cannot choose the one you are going to work with. And sometimes the company is trying to hire new crew and they even accept this crew who is very inexperienced, just because they are qualified, just because they were able to comply with this requirements that they ask. So there. They never realised that they, these people that they hire without any experience can be a problem. You know, it happens all the time, especially when these young recruits was intoxicated, you see. Wherever you go people can be nice all the time, but once they are intoxicated they become a different person. Just like what happens in [port's name], you see, so I cannot help it, so there. It's not just, a lot of things happen when somebody gets intoxicated. Lot of them come into fight, yah, a small misunderstanding become into a big deal, but when something like that happen, I stay away. I never ever want to get involved into a fight. You know, these days, once you get into fight, any fight, you lose your job; that is dismissal, they will send you home. [ ] And once you will go to another company they will [not] accept you because there is this character check that those in every agency: %Why did you, why did you, why are you transferring here in our company, what is wrong with your previous company?+ Yeah, then after that they will call your previous company, they will call for your character, for a character check so they will tell that you've been into a fight [ ]. So it will be very difficult for you to get another job.

Chris: So you have to be very careful for what you do on a ship.

Eric: Yah.

Chris: The way you act towards everybody.

Eric: Try to be very patient with everybody, especially the young ones.

Chris: Which is not so easy.

Eric: Yah, that's alright, you get use to that. Anyway, [ ] I can easily adjust in that kind of situation. But most people now try to get a shorter contract, especially when they don't get along with the people they work with. That is the advantage of the shorter contract. For me, it's not my problem if you're a troublemaker, as long as you do not interfere with my job. That's the good thing of my job, because, I'm working alone, see, that's why I kinda avoid this misunderstanding and so and so, like that.

Maybe it is because of the confined space, but relationships on ships tend to be difficult: Work, work here on board is not really so difficult, but what difficult is, the difficulty is getting along to people you are working with. It is the most difficult thing, here, on board, where I work. Whether it is your fellow Filipinos or any nationalities it is what is difficult, not the work.+ If someone is not able to get along with people that tendency will make it difficult for all on board: You know sometimes you can encounter a moody person who doesn't want to be told...+ And what is interesting is that this person tends to be the seafarers who are less senior, especially when they get drunk because then a small misunderstanding become into a big deal+. According to Eric: The funny thing is it is sometimes the one who is having the lower rank who's acting like that, pretending to be somebody, you know, instead of the senior officers, I don't know.+ Eric puts his finger on the problem: You really cannot choose the one you are going to work with.+ But who decides?

Eric says that it is the companies who decide and they have criteria that do not take into account whether someone will be a good shipmate or not. None the less he states that there are consequences if you start fighting on board as this will count against you if you apply for your next contract. This is good in the sense that seafarers who are really

troublemakers can be avoided, but Eric seems to be concerned that he can innocently get caught up in serious conflict with another crewmate and then lose his job. Therefore his approach is to keep his distance from fights and people who are difficult: %That's the good thing of my job, because, I'm working alone, see, that's why I kinda avoid this misunderstanding...+ Fortunately Eric is the chief cook and can keep his distance from troublemakers.

But shipmates are not only someone to keep your distance from. Eric tells how he once had to encourage his seafarer friend to use %protection+and that the reason for this is because he cares a lot about his friend. His friend once saved his life in Costa Rica:

Eric: One of my pal, [ ], I've been sailing with him twice now, so, I learned that he like to use no protection. I told him that he is still young, he should think of his family. %Ah, never mind, you die, you die.+ That [is] what he said. %It's alright, it's your life, it's just that you're a friend and you've been so good to me.+ Because, last year, [ ] in our last vessel we had the chance to go ashore and went to the beach when I got drawn in. I was, what do you call it, I was, by these waves, I got, wasn't even swimming, I just... I went into the water, he was there laying in the sand watch, watching these girls, you know. And I went to the water to wash [ ]. And I'm still watching him while washing, then here comes the waves, these waves. I can swim but it's big, big waves, you know, the, the waves that the surfer is really after, oh goodness; I thought it is my end, there. I didn't know what happened next. I just, the last thing I remember is, I keep on swimming and swimming and swimming, I can feel this water is, as if someone is pulling me down, you know, so there. So these friend of mine, once this waves turn me up again, I managed to shout, and call his name. There. When he look he saw me like that, that's the last time I saw him. I again, trying to swim and swim and swim. I lose all the strength I have, but I got tired. That's it. The last thing I could remember is, I mean, the last thing I could think of is my children [ ]. I didn't know what happened next. The next thing I know I woke up in the hospital. He sent met there [laughing]. It happens in Costa Rica [ ].

Chris: And he saved you.

Eric: Yah. That's why, even, even, even before that thing happened we were so close. [ ]. We always go out together, that's why.

Eric tells about the drama that took place in Costa Rica. He almost drowned, but his shipmate-friend saved his life. I share this story to show how seafarers can become good friends and that a strong bond sometimes forms between them. He told his friend who was endangering his own life: %It's alright, it's your life, it's just that you're a friend and you've been so good to me.+ With other crewmembers Eric also seems to have a good relationship. He says that he can use food to make friends, seeing that he is the chief cook and that overall his approach is to be friendly and generous:

Eric: Yah, see that's another thing, being a cook, [ ], everybody loves you because you cook.

Chris: If you're a good cook.

Eric: Yah, yah, yah. Actually you're correct about that, that's the point there; if you're a good cook you're nice. Sometimes [ ] I remember, his a good cook but he's not a nice fellow. He's a good cook but he's strict: %No, have one only.+ %Can I have one more?+ %No, that's it.+ [ ]. There are people like that. [ ] Maybe I'm kinda different, I'm more friendly, that's why they love me. Everybody who celebrates their birthday, I make cake for them, they always have birthday cakes.

Eric tries to use his position wisely in order to have good relationships with his fellow crewmembers. He bakes cake for the other shipmates' birthdays and he tries not to be strict as a previous chief cook who would not let anyone have a second helping: %a he's a good cook but he's not a nice fellow.+ In contrast Eric says about himself: %a I'm more friendly, that's why they love me.+ There are many advantages to being a chief cook, but you still need to be careful about the way you approach others: %That's another thing that I learned on board, seaman's life. Proper communication, a proper approach, like, you want these guys to do these things in your way, tell them nicely. Don't talk like: %hey, don't do this like that!+ No, not to be strict, diplomatic way. So everybody will do it if you could say it nicely, they will do it.+ Later on Eric continues this theme of being diplomatic:



See, that's another thing you should remember in seamen's life, patience, you must have a bunch of patience. If you don't you will get into [a] fight every day, starting with your superior, who sometimes, you know, who is sometimes, getting crazy, you know, because of too much work. They are so loaded, so they cannot; they cannot think which of which to be come first. The captain [ ]. And now the demand from the company, so to do first this then and this. Then even before you finish one, there are three more waiting for you. That is how things are now; because of these high technology they can easily send you job orders.

What is straining the relationships between crewmembers is that the company often puts a lot of pressure on the captain. These many commands that the captain receives cause a situation where %even before you finish one, there are three more waiting for you.+ So, many times the way the company treats the captain can determine the rest of the relationships on board.

So, Eric's advice to survive the social intricacies on ships would be to be patient, diplomatic and to keep your distance from any kind of trouble: %stay away. I never ever want to get involved into a fight.+

#### - **Alternative perspective**

As I said before, a ship is not only a work place, but a home. In the same way the people on board are in a sense not only colleagues, but temporary family members. In a sense, because as Trotter (2008:38) pointed out there is the hierarchical structure on board and seafarers are actually living together with strangers. Due to the fact that seafarers have to live together with strangers as if they are family, Trotter (2008:40) pointed out that they sometimes use a night club as a place where they can bond with each other, especially before they sail again into dangerous waters. This strategy can also backfire, as Eric pointed out, because when they get drunk %a small misunderstanding become into a big deal+and instead of helping them to bond it causes ill feelings towards each other.

There are many things that can cause tension and conflict. Sampson (in *Nautilus International Telegraph* May 2011:11) has for instance indicated how the environment

on a ship can cause strain on relationships. She refers to things like the view seafarers have when they are looking out of their cabin window, which she says is normally the lifeboat. Other things that can have an impact on the relations are things like the constant noise and vibration on board. When I listened to one of the interviews I had with Eric I was surprised to hear how much background noise there was from the ship's engine, and we were in the mess room. When something goes wrong in an environment which is already unpleasant, as was the case with John's ship, it can only be the cause of more stress.

Going through a time of great pressure, John and the other crew on the ship experienced a lot of conflict between them: 'Fighting with each other, that has been very common with us...+ The difficulty on their ship had put a lot of strain on their relationships and John almost assaulted James, his colleague: 'I wanted to beat him up.+ Eric seemed to be very wary of this as a fight with someone can cause you to lose your work: 'You know, these days, once you get into [a] fight, any fight, you lose your job, that is dismissal, they will send you home.+ What is more you will have a record of being a troublemaker.

Relationships between seafarers can be very tricky: 'the difficulty is getting along to people you are working with. It is the most difficult thing, here, on board, where I work. Whether it is your fellow Filipinos or any nationalities it is what is difficult, not the work.+ Why it is so difficult is because sometimes you are sailing with a 'moody+ person, some of them get drunk and causes trouble, ironically, especially those of lower rank tend to be 'pretending to be somebody+. Eric realises, though, that he cannot do much about the bad choices the company makes: 'You really cannot choose the one you are going to work with.+

This is why Eric's approach was to avoid conflict and to try and be friendly. He learned from others' mistakes, for instance from one of the chief cooks he worked with: 'he's a good cook but he's not a nice fellow.+ So Eric does it differently and he reaps the good consequences: 'I'm more friendly, that's why they love me.+ Eric learned that the best

way is to have proper communication, to be diplomatic, patient and whenever there is trouble to keep his distance from it: stay away. I never ever want to get involved into a fight. Fights are possible, especially with the younger ones, but there is also the possibility of conflict with your superiors. He seems to simply keep his perspective on the fact that superiors often make it difficult for the crew because of the pressure that is being put on them by the company. The stories of conflict and strife on board, as told by Eric and John, suggest to me that the relationships on ships are often influenced by the company or the owner. If the owner puts pressure on the captain it will trickle through to the rest of the crew.

This is due to the hierarchical structure of relationships which determines to a large degree the manner in which social interaction on a ship will take place. The officers and the rest of the crew, for instance, normally eat in two different mess rooms. Ranks can be misused as was seen in the relationship between Jonathan and the captain, but it also came out in the interview I had with Mohammed. He said: when I was an OS I feel shame... This was because higher ranking seafarers would disrespectfully say to him: You, OS, come here. So the hierarchical structure on a ship can be the cause of abusive behaviour against lower ranking crew. As one chaplain said: There may be a lot of bullying of the strong against the weak and often against ratings. This seems to be what happened with Mohammed.

Due to the hierarchical structure on a ship it can be called a total institution (Rodriguez-Martos 2008:364). Goffman (in Rodriguez-Martos 2008:364) defines a total institution: A total institution can be defined as a place of residence and work where a large number of individual in the same situation, isolated from the rest of society for an appreciable period of time, share in their confinement a daily routine that is formally administered. Rodriguez-Martos (2008:365) asserts that this is exactly what the situation on merchant ships are and says that although this is necessary for the functioning of the ship, the problem arises when someone starts to use this hierarchy to their advantage: We can see that the structure is unavoidable and necessary,... The problem arises when the person or group exercising authority takes undue advantage of

the structure required by life aboard ship for his or her own benefit. This abuse can come from outside . the shipowners, or from inside . from the captain or officers...+

This unethical use of power was exceptionally evident in the relationship between Jonathan and the captain, but for all the bad things that were already said about Jonathan's ship, at least it can be said that on their ship the crew got along quite well. Maybe it was because they had a common enemy in the form of the captain as well as the whole situation they were in. They helped each other with airtime and Peter, the other Kenyan on board, stepped in and tried to protect Jonathan from a furious captain: %And then Peter told me: %You don't go outside, you just stay inside.+ Yah, I just sit inside. When he came again to knock, I didn't talk; Peter was the one who talk to him. Peter talk to him...+ Sometimes good friendships develop between shipmates. This was also evident in the dramatic story that Eric had to tell of his near death experience where a shipmate saved his life.

He and this guy had been sailing together twice and a good friendship developed between them. At a stage Eric told his friend who refused to behave in a responsible manner: %It's alright, it's your life, it's just that you're a friend and you've been so good to me.+ Positive relationships are possible between crewmembers and Eric says the people on the ship do not only like him, but they love him because of his attitude: %I am more friendly, that's why they love me.+

So it seems that as far as relationships between crewmembers are concerned you often get what you give. When you are friendly you will get friendliness in return. Unfortunately it does sometimes happen that you do not have anything to give and then a lot of negativity can develop against you. Not everyone loved Mohammed on his ship because he was continuously seasick and this had put a burden on everyone: %instead of them to do four hours they do five hours because of me...+And: %people they used to laugh at me, and there's some other people they're not happy, the captain he's not happy with me: %What kind of the seaman [are you]?+

This type of attitude is fortunately not always the norm when someone gets seasick for a long time. Eric tells of the Italians who were concerned about his welfare when he was seasick for two weeks: %Even when my stomach is empty I always feel like throwing up. For almost two weeks. These Italians would send me up: %Go, go, go, go, go to bed. Go to bed. Go to bed.+ That's what they said. Until I got used to it.+ It seems that on some ships at least there is some sympathy for each other. Fortunately this incident with Mohammed did not mean that he became bitter and negative of other crewmembers as he still appreciated what he could learn from them: %I meet with different seamen we used to share in the advice, the ideas...+

Ivan experienced the other side of the coin than Mohammed. In Mohammed's case he was disrespected because he was only an OS, but when Ivan was a junior officer (but an officer still) an OS disrespected him: %an ordinary seaman, nothing special, come and try to be funny...+ This echoes the words of Eric who said: %The funny thing is it is sometimes the one who is having the lower rank who's acting like that, pretending to be somebody, you know, instead of the senior officers...+

There are sometimes a lot of ill feelings toward each other, but on some occasions real friendships do develop. Whether they become friends or not, in a certain sense they become family. It is as Kurtis Rogers (2011:22), a young seafarer said: %I feel that due to the lifestyle and environment you live in when at sea, the people you meet become good friends. For the months you're together, these people become your family and working on board becomes a lot easier if you embrace that concept.+ You do not choose your family and you cannot choose your shipmates: %You really cannot choose the one you are going to work with.+ That is why Eric gives the advice: %See, that's another thing you should remember in seamen's life, patience, you must have a bunch of patience.+