

**”If you are a good leader I am a good follower“**

Working and leisure relations between  
Danes and Filipinos on board Danish vessels

Fabienne Knudsen

No. 9 • May 2004

Translated by Michael Stebbing, London 2004

# Foreword

This report concludes a study of relations between Danes and Filipinos on board Danish vessels. The author, Fabienne Knudsen, is solely responsible for the analysis and presentation of the results.

The study would have been impossible without the help and interest of a large number of people and organisations.

Grateful thanks go to all the interviewees without whom this report would never have happened. Thanks go, too, to the ship owners who arranged passage as supercargo and to the crews on board for providing me with such a professional and humanly fascinating experience.

Thanks to the Danish Maritime Authority, Danish Ship Owners' Association, Danish Engineers' Association, Danish Maritime Catering Association, Danish Metalworkers Union, Danish Seamen's Union and the General Transport Workers Union in Denmark for the interviews and their on-going assistance. Special thanks go to Søfartens Ledere/Danish Association of Navigators who provided financial support for the study and to the Danish Occupational Maritime Health Service who provided financial support to the translation of this report.

Thanks to the s. 16 instructors for assistance in collecting the questionnaires and to the Danish Seamen's Union, the Seamen's Church and Danish Seamen's Service in Rotterdam.

Thanks also go to the staff at the Maritime Health Education Center, MUV in Esbjerg and Rasmus Büchert of the Danish Engineers' Association for arranging interviews.

Thanks for excellent discussions along the way to (amongst others) the Seamen's Wives Associations of 1976 and 1996, Fredericia Seamen's Home, Henrik L. Hansen, Gunnar Lamvik, Helen Sampson and Rene Buch Nielsen. Thanks to Erik Green for support and fruitful discussions.

Thanks go to the following organizations in Manila: AMOSUP, IOHSAD, MARINO<sup>i</sup>; Scalabrini Foundation, SWAPI, AOS, Pandiman and all staff at ITF; to F. Landa Jocano and Jose C. Gatchalian from UP, and to Niko Geronimo from SILAW for exciting conversations. Thanks to all the manning agencies who took part.

A special thank you goes to the Filipino seaman's family who gave me a berth in the Philippines, and especially to Gigi, my guide to the Filipino community.

Thanks to my colleagues at the Research Unit for Maritime Medicine for their support and advice – and to Vibeke, our secretary, for always being helpful.

And thanks, too, to all of you I have omitted to thank!

---

<sup>i</sup> See Appendix 1 for a glossary of abbreviations

# Contents

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>6</b>
1.1 Background.....	6
1.2 Objectives .....	6
<b>2. Methodological considerations.....</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 The ethnographic method .....	7
2.2 Collection and use of data .....	9
2.3 Definitions/limitations .....	10
2.4 Ethics .....	12
<b>3. Theoretical considerations.....</b>	<b>13</b>
3.1 Enhanced focus.....	13
3.2 Cultural and other differences .....	13
<b>4. Presentation of results.....</b>	<b>16</b>
4.1 Results: an overview.....	16
4.2 About this report.....	18
<b>5. Structural considerations: the Danish dilemma .....</b>	<b>20</b>
5.1 Pay and terms of employment .....	20
5.2 Differences in qualifications.....	25
<b>6. Structural conditions: the Filipino dilemma.....</b>	<b>37</b>
6.1 Job security .....	37
6.2 Marginalisation.....	42
6.3 Discrimination on board .....	44
6.4 Knowing your rights, and daring to claim them.....	47
<b>7. Cultural differences that make a difference .....</b>	<b>50</b>
7.1 Historical traces: On not speaking up and on perceptiveness .....	50
7.2 Different perceptions of hierarchy and social relations.....	54
7.3 Overcoming cultural differences .....	58
7.4 Limits to cultural explanations .....	60
<b>8. Loneliness and communities.....</b>	<b>65</b>
8.1 Loneliness .....	65
8.2 Loneliness – difference between Danes and Filipinos .....	69
8.3 Communality .....	71

<b>9. Mess, accommodation and galley .....</b>	<b>82</b>
9.1 Social and cultural implications of meals .....	82
9.2 Qualifications.....	84
<b>10. Discussion of proposed improvements .....</b>	<b>89</b>
10.1 Qualifications and language .....	89
10.2 The same people .....	90
10.3 Leadership.....	92
10.4 Social focus.....	95
10.5 Strengthening communication .....	96
10.6 Stopping discrimination.....	99
10.7 Learning about a culture .....	100
10.8 Safety at work .....	101
<b>11. Conclusions .....</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>Appendix 1 .....</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>Appendix 2 .....</b>	<b>112</b>

## List of illustrations

Frame 1. Participant observation.....	8
Frame 2. Filipino AB's bill for mandatory training.....	22
Frame 3. Example of pay slip 2001 .....	22
Frame 4. Don't mix things up.....	26
Frame 5. Manning lists for a specific vessel .....	30
Frame 6. Hear no evil, See no evil, Speak no evil .....	33
Frame 7. Lunetta - Age limit .....	41
Frame 8. Accident report statistics .....	43
Frame 9. Extracts from interviews on accident reports.....	43
Frame 10. Marginalisation: We only get to hear the Danish version .....	45
Frame 11. About not speaking up to someone inattentive.....	51
Frame 12. Indirect communication: The meanings of Yes.....	55
Frame 13: Safety organisation and cooperation.....	63
Frame 14. Filipinos compared to other nationalities.....	64
Frame 15. Numbers of social relations and people.....	67
Frame 16. Filipino loyalty to their shipping company .....	74
Frame 17. See, Hear and Speak! .....	76
Frame 18. Loneliness and togetherness .....	78
Frame 19. Time for a yarn.....	80
Frame 20. The Mess .....	85
Frame 21. Respect for your employees.....	94

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Globalisation has a long tradition in the shipping industry, and about two thirds of all commercial ships today have mixed crews made up of two or more nationalities,<sup>1</sup> and the same trend is apparent in the Danish merchant fleet. The proportion of foreigners on board Danish ships has been steadily increasing since 1988 when a second register was introduced: DIS (Dansk International Skibsregister - Danish International Register) which has led to a reduction in crewing costs because people who do not live in Denmark are not included in Danish collective agreements (s.10 Danish International Shipping Register Act).

In 2002, foreigners constituted 42% of all approx. 7900 seamen listed in DIS. Filipinos, who comprise 28% of all seamen worldwide,<sup>1</sup> also constitute the largest group of the foreign labour force of more than 40% on Danish vessels<sup>ii</sup> listed in DIS.

What significance might this ethnic mix have for the crew? Hitherto, there have been no studies of the views of foreigners on working together on board Danish vessels. On the other hand, as earlier in connection with earlier studies<sup>2,3</sup> and the current debate in professional journals, etc., it has become clear that the subject is very important to Danish seamen, and that many of them lack the tools for establishing the best possible working relations

## 1.2 Objectives

The objective of this study has been partly descriptive: How do multicultural relations affect interaction and collaboration on board, what advantages, problems and challenges arise with respect to safety, the working environment and general wellbeing on board? It has also partly been informative: what frameworks and what skills promote/constrain successful interaction?

In addition to making specific recommendations, the intention of the report has been equally to replicate a reality with which players can identify and can discover new facets in. The guiding theme has been the following quotation: *'A research report may be relevant not because it points people in a particular practical direction, but simply because it allows people to see their practice from a novel point of view'*<sup>4</sup>.

The two first chapters are about methodological and theoretical considerations. The reader may skip them and go directly to the results in Chapter 4!

---

<sup>ii</sup> The figures are supplied by the Danish Maritime Authority. They deal with manning statistics i.e. the number of seamen on board at a given time. These are approximate figures partly because, according to the Danish Maritime Authority, manning data may be inaccurate as they depend on reports submitted by ship-owners; and partly because manual compilation of the latest figures might not have been completed when request was made.

## 2. Methodological considerations

### 2.1 The ethnographic method

The ethnographic method is qualitative and mainly based on interviews and participant observation. It seeks to make a balance between empathy and distance, description and interpretation in understanding human behaviour as it takes place in communities. In illustrating the method, I shall be referring directly to the present study.

One of the ethnographic method's strengths is to get answers to the questions that we do not know<sup>5</sup>. For instance, in this study one of the respondents said during an interview that safety meetings on board a ship in which nearly half the crew was Filipino, were conducted in Danish (cf. Frame 14). I would not have dreamt of asking in preceding interviews which language they used, as I took it for granted that it was in English. This kind of discovery presupposes that the interviews are very open and closely follow the comments that interviewees add to their responses rather than observing a tight schedule. In this study I made questions as specific as possible. For instance: Who eats with whom, what do you do in the evening? From there I tried to follow up on topics that the responses seemed to indicate. For example: An interviewee starts telling me that he has been sailing with foreigners for a long time; however, he has just been employed in a shipping company which exclusively employs Danish seamen. He adds: *"I changed shipping company by coincidence, it had nothing to do with foreigners, on the contrary"*. Subsequently it was obvious to ask the significance of "on the contrary". So every interview is unique in its construction even though the main theme was the same.

Another strength of the ethnographic method is participant observation, in which for a given time, one shares working and living conditions with the people involved. This provides access to information which would otherwise not be addressed in an interview. It can be because of the difference in what people say they do, and what they actually do, or because people do not often talk about things they take for granted. You also get another kind of insight and more understanding of such working and living conditions by trying it for yourself. You become, one might say, your own informant (cf. Frame 3). However, you need to play a part and work as crew. This kind of data cannot be collected from a neutral perspective. I participated as a kind of trainee in daily work routines as far as possible (mostly painting!), and in social activities. As the name "participant observation" indicates, active participation alternates with a more disassociated role. In the evening, I arranged the quick notes I had jotted down during the day.

The interaction between data is characteristic of the ethnographic method. It does not only apply to participant observation. Interviews were also collected over a longer period, and in the course of the study I have been able to test many possible interpretations on the respondents, meaning that interpretation has been an integrated part of data collection. Moreover, interpretation was in many cases directly inspired by some of the respondents who were remarkably perceptive.

## Frame 1. Participant observation

Extract from an article to an in-house shipping magazine:

If the aim were to collect objective data, the event described would have prevented me from doing my duties. At the time, it consolidated my place among the crew, whilst giving me a novel perspective from which I could observe life on board.

As an anthropologist, one of the important methodical tools in my work consists of "participant observation". That is, I try to share the life of the seamen in order to gain insights in their world and the way they live their lives. Even if most of my data is collected in interviews, those tours give "flesh and blood" to my research and can give access to some information that could remain hidden otherwise. Either because some facts are so evident to the people that they don't think of mentioning them, or because there is always a difference between what people say and what they do. Sometimes it is just because you have to experience things yourself to understand them fully. In anthropological jargon, we call it 'to become one's own informant'. This is what I want to try to illustrate with an example from my last tour.

After some days at sea I got a mail from home that my mother in law was so seriously ill that she probably would not recover. After another week I got the news that she was dead. It felt so frustrating to be "caught" in the middle of the Ocean and feel as if I was letting my family down. But I also understood that I experienced exactly what every seaman has gone through (or will do so) at least once in his life. And in that sense the shared experience brought me closer to the crew. Another seaman learnt that his aunt was dead the very same day that I got the bad news about my mother in law. So we felt in the proper sense of the word "in the same boat"!

I also learnt that the seamen have their own, good way to support and comfort, even if they use much fewer words to do so than I am used to. Like the same afternoon when an officer suggested a game of tennis table, as if he had guessed that physical activity was the best defence against too much worry - as indeed it proved to be!

So I learnt a lot from my situation. Of course I learnt by experience how hard it can be to be a seaman when something happens in one's family. But I also learnt that access to e-mail for everybody on board is crucial, and that social activities are the best defences against too much worry. I also learnt much about the subtle, non-verbal ways seamen use to support and comfort each other.



## 2.2 Collection and use of data

### *Interviews*

109 interviews with the corresponding number of persons were made as follows:

- 45 Danish (incl. Faeroese) seamen: 16 navigators, 16 engine officers, 5 trainees, 4 able-bodied seamen and 4 cooks/chief stewards
- 33 Filipino seamen: 4 officers, 2 trainees, 6 cooks/assistant cooks, 14 AB\*<sup>iii</sup> AB's (incl. boatswains), 5 OS\* and 2 fitters
- 7 Danish crew managers
- 3 Filipino manning agents\*
- 12 Danish key figures (organizations, authorities and others associated to shipping)
- 9 Filipino key figures (organizations and others associated with shipping)

Twelve Danish companies were represented, but if one were to include respondents' earlier experience, the list would be much longer. All the big, relevant companies were represented, with most respondents coming from big companies. The biggest crew was of 54 men, the smallest of seven. The smallest number of Danes on board was one, the largest nine. Danes were generally a minority on board.

In most cases, safety crew consisted of Danes and Filipinos only. In addition one or more nationality was frequently represented (electricians and the like).

It should be noted that only 12 of the Danes were less than 40 years old, meaning that the respondents' average age was higher than the average of *all* Danish seamen.<sup>6</sup>

With a few exceptions most of the Danish interviews were taped whereas most of the Filipino interviews were not taped (often noisy backgrounds). About half the interviews were individual, with the rest being made in groups of two or (infrequently) three. Eleven were telephone interviews, three by e-mail. Some of the interviews were prolonged (e.g. e-mail or telephone interview followed by e-mails).

Interviewees were recruited in different ways. Some were contacted while on continuity training; others contacted me after a comment in a trade paper. In several cases the interviewee put me in touch with others. Some of the Filipino interviewees were contacted during a safety course in Manila, and others through the ITF\* office in Manila. Some, I visited in their homes (with one crew member I had sailed with kindly putting me in touch with others), and some were contacted at the Lunetta\* in Manila. Some were interviewed during my time on board. As noted in the section on participant observation, I had conversations with all the seamen with whom I was at sea, but only 12 were considered proper interviews with thorough note taking. This was partly due to physical conditions on board one of the vessels that made it easier, but also that it was difficult for me to act as an interviewer on board when my daily duties were very different (colleague, trainee).

---

<sup>iii</sup> The glossary in Appendix 1 explains words followed by \*

In two cases (one Filipino, one Dane) it turned out that the experience of the interviewees did not come from a Danish flagged vessel. Even so, it was thought that these interviews were relevant after all and so they were included.

Most of the interviews took about an hour with the shortest taking no more than a quarter of an hour and the longest taking more than four hours.

The interviews were analysed using NVIVO (<http://www.qsrinternational.com>).

### ***Questionnaires***

For obvious reasons, it was more difficult to find Filipinos than Danes, so interview documentation was supplemented by a questionnaire for Filipino seamen [Appendix 2]. The questionnaires were collected by several s. 16 (safety course) instructors in Manila. After a pilot phase (44 questionnaires), the questionnaire was revised and 66 valid questionnaires were collected. Most took the opportunity to insert comments to the open questions. These comments are used in the report as citations from the interviews. As the open questions were the same in the pilot phase as in the final questionnaire, all questionnaires have been included here. All in all, there were 80 answers to the open questions.

### ***Participant observation***

I made two tours at sea, each of three weeks, one on board a container ship and the other on a bulk carrier. One ship carried a crew of three Danes, one Faeroese, eight Filipinos and a Pole; the other, three Danes, six Indians and 12 Filipinos. In one ship some of the Filipinos were officers, in the other they were all ratings. Notes from my tours are included in the text on equal terms with the citations from the interviews. To a lesser degree, I have also made use of the experience I acquired in two earlier tours (container ship with Danes and Filipinos and a tanker with Danes and Poles).<sup>2</sup>

I stayed in Rotterdam for a week where I divided my time between the International Metal Workers' Federation, the Danish Seamen's Service or the Danish seamen's church when paying visits to the ships. At the seamen's churches, I had the opportunity to talk to the seamen as well as to the local staff.

I stayed in Manila twice, for three weeks each time, where I made interviews and participated in a safety course (s. 16) together with a Filipino crew. I visited the family of a Filipino seafarer (one of those from one of my tours) with whom I am still in touch. I visited one of the Filipino maritime schools.

## **2.3 Definitions/limitations**

### ***Danes and Filipinos***

For reasons of space, I chose to focus on the biggest group of non-Danish nationalities on Danish ships. This does not imply, to the best of my knowledge, that this report is only relevant in relation to this nationality. There are, of course, some features in the Filipino background which do not transfer but the framework of the report and the background and attitude of Danes are the same.

Even though I have tried to understand the situation from both the Danish and Filipino point of view, the Danish approach dominates, due to several circumstances. A 12 week stay with Filipinos cannot compensate for the almost daily contact I have with the Danish shipping environment. One example is that every time I meet a seafarer at a party or on the train, the conversation ends up as an interview. I have used my shipping network several times so as to have a question defined. I follow the debate in the Danish magazines and on organizations' websites. Another factor is the difference in language. I can understand what the Danish seamen say, not only to me but also to each other – and that is at least as informative! I do not have that advantage with the Filipinos, where having to use English sometimes limits proceedings. Interviews were not always conducted under ideal conditions for the Filipinos; they were often “playing away” and time was limited. However, the difference in interest in the subject was most apparent, with Danes, whatever their attitude, being highly involved in the subject of foreign nationals on board Danish vessels; most of the Filipinos, however, considered the question about the nationality of the crew of minor importance as is apparent from the responses to the questionnaire (Appendix 2). It is not an overstatement to suggest that this might be one of the biggest differences between the attitude of Danes and Filipinos.

### ***Objectivity or perspectivism***

Is it possible to communicate a subject like this using this methodology objectively? In my opinion it would be just as impossible to try and imagine an eye not looking in some direction. One has to take a view on the subject. However, the more eyes you can “borrow” in order to watch the subject, the bigger the chances of a subtle description<sup>7</sup>.

The subject is primarily considered from the seamen's point of view here. However, many “eyes” view different perspectives: Danes and Philippines, ratings and officers, bridge and deck crew and especially individual variations. The seamen's perspectives were further supplemented by the shipping companies and organisations. Quite different versions of reality were presented to me, even inconsistent versions of the same story. If all parties feel this report treads on their toes, I take it as a positive sign that my take of the perspectives was not too one-sided!

### ***Limits to representativity***

The ethnographic method has the advantage of uncovering a multifaceted reality, but the disadvantage is that results cannot be quantified. It is partly because of the open approach (for example, it was only after several interviews that I heard of some of the safety meetings not being held in English and I am uncertain whether this was the case in the first interviews). My ambition was not to present a 'miniature' of the whole group of seamen, and then deduce that a certain percentage had this or that problem, but rather to present the whole spectrum of issues and their relationships. The interviews were so subtle that trying to quantify them would mean ruining them.

As is apparent from the results, one of the recurring topics according to Danes was a postulated difference in qualifications between Danes and Filipinos. Determining whether this was so or not would demand very different preconditions and quite another kind of study. I must therefore emphasize that I make no attempt here to decide on this. As the Danish anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup puts it: “No reality can be represented independently of our

understanding of it" <sup>5</sup>. The starting point in the following is clearly the players' own take on the situation.

## **2.4 Ethics**

It was important to me that the study should be carried out in dialogue with those involved. I have had ongoing contact with several of the interviewees, thus being able to continue with the dialogue, and a draft of the report was sent to selected persons in different positions prior to publication.

Protection of anonymity of the interviewees is an indispensable principle that can be hard to comply with in such a comparatively small community as the shipping industry. More than once I had to face a dilemma between respecting anonymity and precision in my rendition of events. I evaluated every single case that could be considered sensitive and I either chose not to use an event, to blur some details or, if possible, contact the parties involved for further discussion.

It was not easy to make the necessary screening and generalizations without a feeling of having to use force against the extremely subtle picture displayed in the data (transcripts of interviews and field notes totalling approximately 1000 pages). My aim was to be loyal to data by not misusing citations from them, or by not representing certain types of statement. However, in endeavouring to catch every point of view, I chose to focus on citations that were most problematic and favourable to collaboration. Between these extremes, there were many mixed statements that are quantitatively under represented.

## 3. Theoretical considerations

### 3.1 Enhanced focus

Although a ship is a very restricted community, it is often necessary to involve external surroundings in order to understand life on board. Also when it comes to optimize seamen's competencies in multi-ethnic crews, the outer framework is crucial. The ability of the individual to work together has to be transformed into practice, and this transition depends on the framework made available by the company<sup>8</sup>. Specifically it means that in undertaking a study, such different factors as the players' attitudes and knowledge-base, and the conditions under which they were employed, should be regarded as an equally valid starting point.

The following is much about differences, particularly cultural and structural differences. It is especially about the *relationships* between those two kinds of difference, and about how they can affect and sometimes reinforce each other. By structure, I mean the framework, the conditions and the background outside the ship all of which influence life on board independently of individual competencies.

The cultural concept has been the subject of so many definitions and interpretations that when the word culture is mentioned, you cannot assume that you are talking about the same thing. Below I endeavour to sum up the conditions for my work in relation to cultural relations in this study. The main point is that 'culture' cannot be understood independently of 'structure'.

### 3.2 Cultural and other differences

#### *People meet, not cultures*

Sometimes you get the impression that culture is a "thing" engraved in the brain of man which dictates norms, values and behaviour. If that were the case, you could calculate how for instance a Dane and a Filipino would act in a certain situation. The trouble is that two situations are never the same and even though they were, two Danes/Filipinos would hardly act in exactly the same way. One individual would probably not even act as he did 10 years earlier, maybe because our culture is in constant motion. Our cultural background even offers several possibilities of action, and few would act in the same way if they, for instance, were seated in front of their boss – or their children. Cultural behaviour cannot be understood independently of the isolated situation and of the conditions in which an event takes place.

Further, culture, especially the national culture, may only explain part of our behaviour. A Dane is neither completely like all other Danes nor is he completely unlike other people. On the one hand, his unique experiences and life story make him a human being unlike anybody else; on the other hand, he has wishes and needs which he shares with everyone else, for instance the wish to be respected, to have a meaningful job and for his family to have a certain standard of living, etc. In-between he may relate to many overlapping communities. If he watches Denmark playing Norway at football, there is no doubt about whose side he will take or where he belongs. If it is a local game, any national identity loses its importance and

the part of the town or the province then determines his affiliation. There are other than geographic criteria which determine to whom you relate: Age, gender, profession, political affiliation, hobby... Let us assume that three people meet by coincidence in a bar in Brazil: A young Danish officer, a young Filipino officer and an old, Danish woman, professor of Old Norse. Now, is it obvious who has most in common with whom?

How you understand the cultural idea is not only a case for theorists, it has also practical consequences. If you believe that human beings from special areas are coded to react in a special way, the situation is at a deadlock, and you deprive those people of any chance of development. You even deny yourself the same option, since you believe that there is nothing new to learn about these people. You also happen to assume that every Filipino/Dane is alike, which brings with it the risk of misunderstanding the person you are facing. This is the same as dressing according to the average temperature of the month. In Denmark the average temperature in May is 11°C but temperatures of +33°C to -8°C have also been recorded so it is worth checking the situation before you set out – into the Danish weather or a strange culture! It does not mean that you should avoid any kind of categorisation or generalisation as they help bring order into an otherwise chaotic reality. But it does mean that one should remember that such generalisations are not a replication of the world, and that one should be aware of them.

### ***Making the unknown known and the known unknown***

Strangely enough it often seems as if cultures hold others in their power, whereas you feel able to act of your own free will. For historical and world economic reasons, this is especially true of Westerners when looking at other people. It is not unusual to come across the idea that Westerners are out front in human evolution, making them more rational and remote from an original state of nature. This is due to the fact that other people's cultures are always more conspicuous than your own, as culture is often taken for granted and considered natural. Only when others challenge our norms and standards do we realize that they are not generally valid. Even language is full of cultural norms which can cause misunderstandings if you assign different meanings to the same words. Most Danes, for instance, would be proud to raise their children to "freedom with responsibility". However, the sentence might seem funny to a group of young Chilean students who connect freedom with chaos and responsibility with use of force. It would sound to them as if you had been raised to chaos from the use of force in Denmark<sup>9</sup>. Body language is also subject to cultural norms; for instance, direct eye contact is considered a sign of honesty by some, as rudeness by others. The ability to communicate with people from other cultures is not only about learning about their backgrounds (making the unknown known) but also about looking at your own behaviour with fresh eyes (making the known unknown).

### ***Differences in living conditions, power relations and survival strategy***

*"Culture may be used to explain differences, but they may be also based on living conditions and pragmatic survival strategies"*<sup>10</sup>.

Not only must you keep an eye on cultural differences and differences in living conditions, but in my opinion you must also be able to view them in context, and the term "strategy" can be quite useful.

I take the liberty of illustrating this from my own experience. I was born in France but after many years in Denmark I usually feel Danish. However, in certain situations I can benefit from my French nationality. During my tours at sea, for instance, it was useful because it gave me a neutral stance where it probably was easier to circulate amongst and get accepted by the different ethnic groups on board. I have, however, also experienced being treated like a stranger against my will. For example, I might react with anger because of something unfair, which was interpreted as due to my “French temper” (and so not having to decide whether the situation was unfair after all).

Strategic action, as presented in this report, is not deliberately calculating. It is targeted but without one being aware of or having full control over all the terms and incentives for such action, and without being aware of all the consequences. You act on the basis of certain frames of reference that limit the possibilities. Within these frames you can derive special cultural features from yourself and others, as the example above shows. Your own cultural background, of course, sets limits on what can be derived but there will always be several possibilities. The result depends on the scenario and on power relations. The concept of ‘strategy’ also has the advantage of accentuating power struggles between human beings. If you look at relations between a Filipino and a Danish seafarer, the fact that one is a captain and the other OS\* or the other way round is not irrelevant, and outcomes depend on their position on board.

Anthropologist Anne Knudsen even suggests that describing another culture is in itself a kind of power play<sup>11</sup>. There can be a difference in how you describe yourself and how others describe you and then the allocation of power is not unimportant. For instance, some Danes regard the Filipino mode of addressing someone by saying “Sir” as submissive whereas Filipinos regard it as a mark of respect, and such differences in perception can give rise to conflict.

In my opinion you cannot decide in advance if relations between people from different cultures will be conflict-ridden or harmonious. That does not depend on specific cultural differences between those involved; it depends on a far more complex interaction between cultural differences, the context of the situation and the way those involved interact.

## 4. Presentation of results

Presentation of the results and the analysis is not separated in the following chapters, which is in line with the working method described in Sec. 2.1. I have elected to place the main emphasis in certain areas which are described in more detail in Sec. 4.2. These reflect prioritisation in the interviews and they are assumed to have special significance for relations on board. As noted above, I have elected to focus on the most negative and the most positive statements and attitudes, partly to demonstrate the whole spectrum of the interviews and partly because this procedure is presumed to be suitable for establishing a basis for optimising relations. First of all, however, I should like to present a short, broad-ranging overview of the results in their entirety.

### 4.1 Results: an overview

If one has to take a broad brush approach to describing Danish seamen's attitudes to their foreign workmates, the dominant attitude is pragmatism. *"Since they're here, you might just as well make the best of it"*, as the Danes often say. Further, many Danes emphasised the friendliness, sobriety and hard work of Filipinos. Filipinos' knowledge of English was also seen as an advantage compared to other nationalities (especially Eastern Europeans), even though communications could be made more difficult by having to use what was a foreign language for everyone since only a few (Danes as well as Filipinos) spoke it perfectly. Most were also careful not to generalise and said that there were both good Filipino and bad Danish seamen. This pragmatic approach was even more pronounced amongst the Filipinos, most of whom felt that they could fit in within the kind of crew. Filipinos are happy to work on board Danish vessels but the reasons for this are primarily the high level of safety, that is safety at work and the safety of the vessel, and the pay. Even though most of them had suffered some discrimination, they were very careful not to generalise. It was striking that the Filipinos were not nearly so concerned about the ethnic composition of the crew as the Danes. Whereas practically all Danes, including those who were most positive, at some time or other spontaneously remarked that they would naturally have preferred Danish workmates, most Filipinos said that the ethnic composition of the crew was immaterial and many even appreciated mixed crews. This tendency which was clear during the interviews was confirmed by the questionnaire which showed that crew nationality was regarded as absolutely the least important of the range of different factors borne in mind when considering a job. Most of the Filipinos had tried sailing with crews of many nationalities and their approach seemed to be that one had to fit in and accept things as they are. This is naturally not the same as saying that they do not appreciate human relations but they appeared to be more willing than Danes to accept different kinds of privation as part of their working conditions.

Despite the pragmatic approach, the interviews did reveal a series of problems in collaboration, especially among the Danes. The most widespread complaint was about the lack of qualifications of their foreign workmates. These complaints were often filtered into remarks about cultural matters. The most common complaint was about the Filipinos' exaggerated respect for authority, frequently illustrated by the statement that when addressed, they always finished by saying "Yes Sir!" regardless of whether they meant "No" or whether they had actually understood the message. This attitude was regarded as affecting safety, their professional development and social relations. Some Danes also complained that Filipinos



preferred to segregate themselves when off watch. For example, on practically all vessels messes are officially and traditionally divided by rank (officers and other ranks) and in practice, also by nationality - according to the Danes by the Filipinos' own choice.

The attitude of the Filipinos, reticence and acceptance of conditions, can be partly explained by their situation both on board Danish vessels and in their own country. Unemployment, in any event for ratings, is staggeringly high<sup>12</sup>, and the fear of being blacklisted is widespread. The social security network that we know in Denmark is not so widespread as in Denmark. Also, because of their precarious and subordinate positions on vessels and the few opportunities they have for influencing the Danish debate, they are in a marginalised position. Structural factors thus serve to reinforce cultural differences in their perception of a hierarchically-based distance.

Even though objectively speaking, Danes are employed on more advantageous terms than their colleagues (full contracts, better pay, senior positions and shorter tours of duty), there was a widespread feeling amongst Danes of being disadvantaged, or even discriminated against in several ways: Many felt that the shipping companies did not require their workmates to be so well qualified and that it was difficult to sack a foreigner even though they did not have the necessary qualifications. They thought that under-qualified workmates led to extra work and prevented professional development. At the same time, they thought that it was easier for them to be accused of racism (by the shipping company and by the foreigners themselves) if they were to complain. Some also felt that Danes, who are often in a minority, had to unilaterally give way to others' cultures. A Filipino cook who could not make western food was easily able to bring the Danes to the boil! Some Danes also stated that they suffered from social isolation, sometimes with serious psychological consequences which became clearly apparent when they were on home leave. This social isolation related to such factors as language, lack of community feeling, lack of leisure time and the fact that they were often in a minority on board.

It was striking for the author that relations with foreigners sounded much more problematic in interviews with Danes than had been noted on tour on board. The fact that many Danes complained about their foreign workmates' deficiencies did not necessarily mean in practice bad working relations, partly because of the pragmatic approach noted above and in part because many of them placed responsibility for these deficiencies (for example poorly qualified colleagues) with the shipping company and/or the manning agency rather than the person involved.

Despite all the cultural and structural differences, seamen are generally characterised by a strong sense of identity and a feeling of being something quite special because of their special working conditions and an environment rich in tradition. The yarns are characterised by a trans-national sense of community and the ability to identify with the position of another person. A single powerful person may in this sense have great significance for the atmosphere on board and none so much in this respect as the captain.

Participant reaction to what could be done to improve matters boiled down to a single piece of advice: Give foreigners proper, full contracts since knowing someone by way of long-term contact promotes mutual trust and confidence, a sense of community and reduces linguistic and culturally-engendered misunderstandings. Regardless of what the Danes feel

about Filipinos, there is nothing they fear so much as seeing them replaced by Chinese, for example.

It was also striking that most of the interviews were characterised by a great deal of ambivalence and they contained positive, negative, and often contradictory statements. Apart from a few exceptions, it would have been impossible to cover the situation by endeavouring to rate individual interviews on a scale from positive (no problems) to negative (many problems). Any attempt to categorise them with respect to “greatest advantages/disadvantages for foreign/Danes” also turned out to be far too simplistic.

Compared to the objective - the consequences for “safety, the working environment and general well-being on board”, well-being had a high profile place in the interviews, and this was reflected in the analysis. This was undoubtedly due to the special conditions for seamen with the separation between working and leisure relations being more analytical than real. Relations perceived as unsatisfactory in working hours often had an impact on off-duty relations as well, and vice versa.

## **4.2 About this report**

Chapters 5 and 6 deal with the structural differences (terms of employment, etc.) that are significant for relations on board. Chapter 5 reviews the perspectives of the Danes and it is also especially about their strategic reaction to the threat to employment represented by foreigners. Differences in pay and qualifications engendered a number of statements by Danes which are analysed in more depth. The aim is not so much to reveal the truthfulness of these statements as to establish an understanding for why they are widespread. Suffering discrimination and a feeling of being subject to ambivalent signals from the outside world are also reviewed in this chapter. Chapter 6 reviews the Filipinos' perspectives with an account of their background, employment and their position which has a negative impact of their job security and which can form a barrier to the requirements for commitment, independence and equality predicated by teamwork. Discrimination on board is also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 7 deals with cultural differences. The focus is on three areas which are assumed to be especially significant for relations on board: The ability to say no/obedience, different perceptions of hierarchies and social relations and direct/indirect communication. This is followed by examples of how some people overcome such cultural differences. Finally, there is a review of the limitations in cultural explanations.

Chapter 8 is about meeting places and hence mostly about off-duty relations. The feeling of loneliness was widespread amongst Danes and this is reviewed with respect to the ethnic makeup of the crew. Interviews also contained positive stories about good fellowship between the nationalities, with which the final part of the chapter deals. There is also a discussion of the role of management in "togetherness".

Chapter 9 is restricted to the mess, galley and food. Apparently, many of the interpersonal problems caused by socialising crystallise around the galley, which is regarded as the heart

of the vessel. The chapter may also be read as an example of the complex interrelationship between structural and cultural problems.

Chapter 10 reviews what can be done to improve conditions, partly on the basis of seamen's own proposals and partly on the basis of the analysis. The report ends with conclusions.

### ***Practical remarks***

Quotations have been slightly modified to fit with the body text. If a word that is important for comprehension is missing (either because it could be inferred from the context or because it was not recorded in the interview) it is inserted in [XX]. Any parts of quotations that are omitted are marked thus: (...). It is made apparent if a quotation represents a unique or rare point of view.

In deference to anonymity, certain parts of quotations or identities have been erased.

- The text does not identify seafarer's jobs unless the information is especially relevant. However, it is noted if the person speaking is a Danish AB or a Filipino officer (in most interviews it was the other way round). It is also noted if the quotation comes from a cadet. Possibly because of their intermediate position and age, they often differed considerably from the other interviewees.

- Faeroese are treated as Danes.

- Even though several of the interviewees were female, (although only one seafarer), everyone is referred in the masculine unless the context makes it necessary to disclose a person's gender.

FK stands for Fabienne Knudsen (interviewer).

Appendix 1 gives a glossary of words marked \* in deference to any non-nautical readers.

## 5. Structural considerations: the Danish dilemma

"Feelings of 'these people are coming and taking our jobs' confuse the whole issue. That's the way they see it. And right away the argument gets fraught" (Danish crew manager).

The core of what I call the Danish dilemma may be illustrated by game theory, a theory that deals with various kinds of strategy amongst players depending on each other's actions. Game theory differentiates between a 'zero sum game' and a 'cooperative game'. In the zero sum game, one player always loses what the other wins and vice versa. In a cooperative game, on the other hand, both sides win by cooperating. Clearly, the two strategies are mutually exclusive<sup>13</sup>. On the subject of Danes, one can say that on the one hand they fight against foreign seamen as *competitors* for the same jobs, a typical zero sum game situation, whilst on the other hand they live and work with them as shipboard *workmates*, a cooperative game situation.

### 5.1 Pay and terms of employment

Section 10 (2) Danish International Shipping Register Act states: "Collective bargaining agreements (...), made by a Danish trade union organisation, shall only apply to persons regarded as being resident in Denmark, or who because of accession to international commitments shall be treated the same as Danish nationals."

The Act which means that Danes and foreigners are employed on different terms has given rise to much controversy since it was adopted<sup>iv</sup>. It is not to contribute to the controversy that it is mentioned here but because it is clear from the survey that the very fact that they are employed under different terms has considerable, often unfortunate, consequences, intended or not, for how Danes view their foreign workmates. The most surprising thing on the basis of the following is that more Danes than Filipinos stated that they had suffered from being treated differently.

The different terms of employment have led to various strategies among Danish seamen that occasionally come into conflict with each other and with the facts as well. We shall start therefore by looking at the facts (based on a study of the agreements and conversations with trade unions) so as to be able to analyse certain statements that were made several times and often in very similar terms by Danes.

Filipinos are typically employed on (vessel) contracts and most sail under an agreement between AMOSUP\* and the Danish Ship-owners' Association. Apart from pay rates, the agreement is the same for all categories of seafarer. Under the agreement, the standard contract is for 173 hours a month. Pay includes 103 hours a month guaranteed overtime, 12.5%

---

<sup>iv</sup> The section concerned has been contested by the Danish union since its adoption and it still gives rise to a great deal of discussion, with criticism being levelled at the fact that the act cannot be reconciled with Danish ratification of the fundamental ILO conventions, Nos. 87 and 98 on the right to unionisation and to be organised and make collective bargaining agreements. An ILO expert study from 2002<sup>14</sup> reviews its historical development and the current situation.

holiday pay and six days' additional leave for each month of service completed. Additionally the shipping company pension contributions are twice the seaman's own contribution. Under the agreement, duty tours last six months (decreased from nine months in 2001).

*Practically all Danes are currently on regular contracts (shipping company contracts). There are masses of differing contracts and they are far more detailed than the Filipino contracts but it is usual for navigators to sail either on a 1:1 scheme or on 1:0.85; for AB/OSs, it is a minimum of 2:1. Then there are holidays/days off. AB/OSs under the main agreement have a working month of 160 standard hours and 34 hours guaranteed overtime. Duty tours are 13 weeks maximum for officers and four months maximum for other crew.*

There are various other differences primarily associated with the status of being on a vessel or shipping company contract of employment. Filipinos have no guaranteed long service supplements, for example, even though some shipping companies do add a return bonus to pay, especially for officers. They often have to use their days off on training courses, many of which they have to pay for themselves (cf. Frame 3), they receive no special compensation among other things for delayed relief and they have to pay for their own travel expenses between their homes and Manila.

When it comes to pay, the ILO expert study<sup>14</sup> estimates that the pay under collective agreements is 37-40% lower for Filipinos than for Danes in comparable positions. If all expenses are included, the actual difference is probably even greater. A Danish crew manager says:

*"In fact it is nearly twice as expensive to have a Danish first officer on board. It has something to do with the fact that there are two men that actually share a single job."*<sup>v</sup>

Other factors that according to the same respondent make them even cheaper for the shipping company are the shipping company's contribution to the Danes' tax allowances, lower travel expenses and far smaller pension contributions (cf. Frame 2).

### ***Attitude to pay differentials***

Roughly speaking, there are four ways to react to the terms described and they should be regularly assessed on the basis of their consequences for life on board.

1. Acceptance of pay differential. Approximately half the shipping company representatives responded bluntly that the primary reason for employing foreigners was the savings they could achieve and many seamen accept this as an indisputable fact. It applies to practically all Filipinos: "As long as I do my job of the company, for myself and for God, no problem!" This also applied to many Danes that spoke of making the best of the situation

---

<sup>v</sup> It should be noted that these statements were made in the autumn of 2000, i.e. before the contractual duty tours for Filipinos were cut from nine to six months. This precondition was not used in the 2001.

**Frame 2. Filipino AB's bill for mandatory training**  
(interview in the Philippines in 2001)

GTF - General Tankers Familiarization = 3700 pesos+  
SBFF - Shore Based Fire Fighting = 3500 pesos  
PSCRB - Professional Survival Craft and Rescue Boat = 3500 pesos

This person had been working for ten years for the same Danish shipping company. The interview was held in his home and before I got to ask any questions, he showed me the above bill for the training courses he had had to take in his current home leave. He complained partly that the courses were expensive and partly that they did not leave him much time for holiday. Apart from the training course itself, he had to pay for transport to Manila himself, which took four-five hours a day.

He wondered why the USD 10 that the shipping company paid every month under his contract for upgrades and continuity training did not cover some of the expenses. A manning agency spokesman later stated that the shipping line only covered the expenses for upgrade courses.

USD + 67.44 (exchange rate 4/8/03)

**Frame 3. Example of pay slip 2001<sup>v</sup>** (kindly donated by the shipping company)

The difference in fixed rates is modest but Danes have shorter tours and pay while on leave. Holiday pay and payment for days off in lieu are included in the Filipinos' fixed rate.

**DK First Officer, 4 years service, 2001 rates**

	DKK	Months	Pers.	Number	Total
Basic pay	20,715	12	2		507,103
Pension	3,039	12	2		74,395
Compensation	1,100	12	2		26,928
Travel exp.	15,000			5	67,500
<b>TOTAL</b>					<b>675,926</b>

**PHI First Officer, 350 hrs/month, Rate 8.00, 2001 rates?**

	USD	Months	Pers.	Number	Rate	Total
Basic pay	20,715	12	1		8	232,368
Overtime	7	12		50	8	35,856
Holiday pay	0					32,187
Pension	74		1		8	592
Travel exp.	1,875			3	8	37,500
<b>TOTAL</b>						<b>338,503</b>

**DIFFERENCE**

**337,423**

*"Of course I would prefer Danish seamen to be in work since it's a bad thing for us to lose our jobs, as we can all agree, but if we have to have these people on board, then we might as well get the best out of them."*

This approach is decidedly the least problematic for life on board since any struggle for Danish jobs is kept away from relations on board. From the Danish point of view, however, there are several ways of balancing the books.

2 - Denial of pay differential. One example is to minimise or deny any pay differential, and there are examples of this from shipping companies and in the few instances, from Danish seamen: *"A Filipino first officer, he earns just as much as a Dane, there is no difference there"* (Danish crew manager).

In this case, the differences due to vessel or shipping company employment status (especially pay on home leave) have not been taken into consideration and several shipping companies also tend to refer to their foreigners as virtually being employed by the shipping company, seeing as how many of them have been associated with the shipping company for years, and some of them do receive a return bonus.

It is difficult to explain why individual Danish seamen deny a pay differential. It may be that it is based on lack of knowledge since there are very great differences in how much Danes know about their foreign workmates' working and living conditions. Lack of knowledge can make myths flourish (and myths do well at sea as we shall see later in this survey) and lack of knowledge can also be a sign of poor communications on board.

3 - The difference works against Danes. A third way of balancing the books is to include differences in the standards of living in their respective countries. Shipping organisations also attach great weight to differences in treatment of the basis of country of residence and not nationality (interviews and trade journals). It is a truth, however, that is susceptible to modification, according to a representative of an officer's trade union:

*"It is unthinkable for [the pay of] a Dane living abroad to be set, for example, at the level of a Filipino. We have countless examples of Danes living in Thailand, Japan, the Philippines, etc., all of whom have been or are employed under Danish collective agreements or individual agreements that are in line with Danes on collective contracts."*

Nevertheless, it is an argument that is often put forward by Danish seamen:

*"Just look at their earnings compared to what they earn at home, and don't forget that they are not underpaid. They do what they do for the sake of the money. They only accept us for the sake of the money; they are just as much prostitutes for Our Lord as we others. They just do it for the money...."*

The quotation draws parallels between the position of Danes and Filipinos (*they are just as much prostitutes for Our Lord as we others*), but several other seamen thought, with a clear sense of injustice, that the equation favoured the Filipinos who *'lorded it over their villages'*:

*"They think they should just get paid and that is not so little nowadays, because when you see what they get now and what their cost of living is in the Philippines, they are fantastically well paid. (...) Their pay is rising and their tours of duty are being cut, too (...) a Filipino cook on board today gets at least between DKK 10-12,000 a month and DKK 12,000 a month is really a lot of money for Filipinos, when they say a teacher out there gets around*

*DKK 4-5,000. And they themselves tell us they have this and that, they have servants and all at home."*

There are several examples of this kind of statement where the moral appears to be (as evidenced by another quotation made in another context). *"We don't get given anything for free, why should they have so much?"* as if improvements in foreigners' living conditions are seen as being retrograde for the Danes. This attitude is naturally hardly supportive of relations on board. There is a great danger of overall competition becoming part of routines on board, with a negative impact on human relations. The zero sum game can easily turn into a game in which everybody loses if it appears on board.

4 - Pay differentials reflect differences in quality. A fourth way of balancing the books is to equate differences in pay with differences in quality, implying that Filipinos are cheaper because they are not so good:

*"The shipping companies get what they pay for. You can hardly expect to drive around in a Rolls Royce if you have paid for a VW. That's how it is."*

From there, it is only a short step from reasoning the other way round: that they are not so good *because* they are cheaper. The next interview extract with two Danish masters, compares the pre-DIS situation (note the exaggeration in the differential):

*"If you can get a Filipino seaman for a third (...) of a Danish seaman, then you don't have to be some professor of mathematics or whatever to work out that he is not just as good. That's logical thinking. It's simple enough. Can you remember we were talking about those Filipinos who were working for [shipping company] at full Danish rates? They worked pretty well, the same as the Danes!*

*- When I was an AB 27 years ago, we were sometimes short of a Danish seaman. We were sailing out East then, so we got a Filipino or an Indian and they were just the same as us others. They could work because they were earning the money. That is the way it is: If you pay peanuts, you get a monkey (...) But one thing is certain, if I had a large bag of money I could just dish out, I would prefer not to have any problems and then every time they had done a really good job chipping rust, I could go down and give them a USD 100 each (...). It would be expensive, so we might just as well have a Danish crew at luxury rates. Because they can do things well if they get paid for it, but they don't do more than they get paid for."*

There were many other sailors who noted that they had sailed with foreigners, also before DIS, and relations were easier then, although without the difference being set directly in relation to pay as in this quotation.

Most of the people using this argument first and foremost accused the shipping company of putting profit before quality, often saying it was not the Filipinos' fault. So the tactic need not have a negative impact of life on board. The question is, though, whether there may be a negative effect if one's basic view is that the quality of all newly employed foreigners is poor. This can quickly become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The latter two expressions of the Danish viewpoint on handing pay differentials need more comment. They appear incompatible since one view is that the Filipinos' pay is (more than) sufficient compared to their standard of living whilst the second holds that Filipino pay is



too bad for them to do a proper job. But the contradiction disappears if the arguments are intended to demonstrate that in the final count, Danes are *cheaper* than Filipinos, both because there is a difference in the quality of work and because the shipping companies demand more of the Danes. There was a widespread feeling amongst many Danes of being disadvantaged despite the fact that objectively speaking, they were employed on more advantageous terms than the Filipino's. The next quotation is thus typical of the way such arguments are linked together: Danes feel slightly misused because the shipping company thinks more in economic than professional terms and because the Filipinos earn relatively more than Danes, although *at the same time*, the shipping company expects less of them:

*"The officers (...), they are employed under Filipino agreements and the shipping company does so because they are cheaper. So my view is that the shipping companies employ people mainly more from a financial point of view more than a professional one. And I believe that will cause great problems to the shipping companies in time precisely because many Danes now feel slightly misused because they go and work together with the Filipinos, who admittedly earn less than the Danes do themselves, but Filipino pay compared to Danish pay with the cost of living there is in fact higher. There is a significant difference. But the problem is that the shipping company expects considerably more of a Danish officer."*

Later we shall see other evidence that Danes (according to themselves) are both disadvantaged and, taking quality into consideration, cheaper in the final count. I repeat that this report does not consider any differences in quality. What is interesting here is how Danish convictions, which clearly relate to a situation in which they are competing for the same jobs on different terms, influence their relations with foreigners. Whether this is the case or not depends to a great extent of whether the Danes manage to keep things separate, as clearly stated in the two quotations in Frame 4. Fundamentally the two officers feel the same, regretting the lower pay, but while the first makes it a personal matter, the second is actually conscious of not letting it affect life on board.

There is a high level of unemployment amongst Danish seamen. The training schools currently have a problem in recruiting officers although that has not yet had an effect on supply. The policy of the trade organisations has primarily been to endeavour to raise the general level of pay for foreigners which would make the Danes more competitive. However, there is only one interview which unreservedly reflects the policy: *"I hope that their pay goes up so we can compete with them better (...). So many of us are unemployed.* (Danish AB).

## **5.2 Differences in qualifications**

*"Well, it's not their fault, they just don't have the education. (...) that is the officers as well as the ratings. That is the general feeling about it. They can't do anything. That is my sticking point when I compare them to a Danish officer, because I am on board a Danish ship. (...) You can find some who are down here and some who are up here. You can perfectly well find some who are good and some that are bad but compared to a Danish officer, I have never sailed with any that were good. I would characterise them as very bad."*

#### Frame 4. Don't mix things up

Both quotations are above the same subject: pay differentials and Danes' interest in keeping their jobs. But where the first, a steward, makes it into a personal matter with his foreign workmates (with a poor working atmosphere on board as a result as is clear from several interviews with Filipinos who have worked with him), the second is able to separate the two things and to relate his own experience to the Filipinos' situation.

"Nine months is also a long time to be on a ship and I can remember from when we had long tours that we were burnt out when we got home. But I don't pity them because that was the way they got the Danes kicked out, because they were willing to come and work for less, they got the long tours. So the shipping companies saved on travel expenses, they saved on pay and things, at the expense of losing Danish jobs at sea. We have had many discussions about that with some of those guys, like they don't earn much and they don't get this or do that, things along those lines and I come straight out and say: Well go home then! Go home! Because you yourselves came here and asked for it; it is not us that asked you to come. You came and said: We can do this or that. So I don't feel sorry for you. So the shipping companies can say, great, we can save lots of money, and that's that.... But it was them that came and now they are starting to.... (...). Well, let them just ask and let them get what they can because in the end, if they become as expensive as we are, they will be out of the picture and the shipping companies will be looking elsewhere. I can see that [shipping company] are already taking on the Chinese now, so they are about to get into the picture."

"Well, there are some of the Danes who are pretty rough. It happens. But you should not mix things up! From an overall socio-political viewpoint, of course I am interested in getting Danish jobs. It is social dumping and they are taking jobs from other people. But just think what would happen if companies in the country started employing foreigners as carpenters or such like at dumping prices? Just look at the case of the long distance truck drivers. OK, half the population would be happy because building costs would fall... but it is difficult; everything is linked together. A kilo of pork will have to cost the same in Manila as here before this problem is solved (...). No, things must not get mixed up. Danish labour policy and life on board. But it is also natural to look after your own first, so there is no difference between us. And the other can also be dangerous, it can develop into racism. But we others would do the same in their situation. In fact we do so today. Why do you think I worked for two years in Greenland? Because I was well paid but I probably took the job from someone else!"

*"They differ, too. Just as there are differences in cooks, so there are differences in the officers. But then you have good Danes and bad Danes and that is the same with the Filipinos. But generally their qualifications are perfectly good."*

As may be seen from the quotations from these two Danish captains, there are great differences in how Filipino qualifications are assessed by Danes. Even though many do point out that there are good Filipinos and bad Danes, most agree however in their judgment that their level of education is poorer than the Danes in general.<sup>vi</sup> The interviews did not lack for detailed accounts of an officer who sailed the wrong way, another who could not do stability calculations, a third who could not make an emergency call on the radio....not to mention the engine room crew, the lifeboat drills, the cooks (and to a lesser extent the ratings). There was no lack of assertions that you can still buy all kinds of papers and certificates on the Philippines, although they were generally based on second-hand accounts and were unconfirmed<sup>vii</sup>.

There are few people today who deny that there have been problems in the Philippines with the quality of certain maritime training schools, with forgeries and other fraudulent practices<sup>15,16</sup>. As one Filipino AB puts it: *"Now it is 'What do you know', but before it was only about 'whom do you know'."* However, controls have been considerably tightened with the implementation of STCW 95\* which should have been implemented in 2002 although preceded by preparations for some years (training of cooks does not come under STCW and is described separately). For example, the Filipino regulatory authorities have reduced the number of approved training schools from more than 100 to 50<sup>17</sup>.

According to the Danish Maritime Authority, the general procedure for officers is that the Authority issues certificates to everyone with foreign training after they have been through an "operational interview". There are bilateral agreements, *inter alia* with the Philippines in which following visits to the four most popular schools, the Maritime Authority has exempted three of them from individual interviews. A third option is to sail as supercargo of a Danish vessel for at least one month after which the master must submit a certificate of competency. Foreign seamen who have sailed on board Danish vessels for at least one year within the past three years and who have a certificate of competency, are exempt from taking tests. Ratings do not have to pass a test but are required to have had basic training. Denmark also only accepts those who are on the IMO white list\* (interview with the Danish Maritime Authority<sup>18,19</sup>, Statutory Instrument No. 71 on Recognition of foreign certificates for service on merchant vessels).

---

<sup>vi</sup> It should be stated that according to Frame 15, criticism of qualifications is seldom directed specially at Filipinos as such but affects foreigners in general, although accusations of false papers are specially aimed at Filipinos.

<sup>vii</sup> By way of example, I would mention an account I have heard twice in slightly different versions when 3-4 years ago, some Filipinos had apparently showed Helmet/Fire fighting certificates from Survival Training Center Esbjerg even though they had never been there. It was not in fact the interviewees who had seen this but some colleagues. Calls to the Danish Maritime Authority, Survival Training Center Esbjerg and the interviewees' union did not produce confirmation of whether the story was true or not.

Some Danes also feel that in recent years there has been an improvement in the general level of education among Filipinos. But almost as many feel that things have got worse. The first invoke STCW standards and the fact that many schools have been closed in the Philippines; the second claim that there is a lack of officers worldwide which is forcing the Government of the Philippines to focus sharply on their overseas workers as a source of income so as to “mass produce” seamen at a higher rate than can be supported. Few people argue on the basis of their own experience.

According to many Danes, the fact that many Filipino qualifications are regarded as inferior to Danish standards has the following consequences on board:

- It makes for more work and stress:

*”I could see that he was useless; he could not do the stability calculations and neither could he navigate and that meant I was very nervous about sailing with him, especially at night. (...) It led to me asking the chief engineer to go up every hour of the six hours of the night in case anything should happen. And we were simply dead scared it would. (...) It always leaves you constantly tired because every time you are about to fall asleep, there is a strange sound. (...) Then up you jump and ask what is more wrong, desperately hoping that nothing has happened...”*... (captain about a Filipino officer).

- It affects professional development:

*”... from a purely professional point of view, I get no well qualified feedback from Filipinos. It is very, very rare for a Filipino to be able to tell me something I did not already know. That is where I probably feel better about having a really well trained Danish First Engineer; that gives me good technical feedback, I can kind of ask him about something and I learn something even though I would not have thought of it myself. I practically never feel that with the Filipinos.*

- It affects social relations:

*“It makes for sharp words and miserable faces right down the line, so a minor thing leads to everyone getting stressed out and upset with each other, and shouting at each other.”* (An engineer who had just described the problems it gave when an engineer, and then an electrician, could not get the boiler started).

The problem is often one of lacking professional response and initiative, and here it should be noted that there is a fluid border between what relates to lack of qualifications and what relates to culturally-dependent attitudes (cf. chapter 7).

### ***Proof that Danes are cheaper***

Even though the perception of differences in qualifications does clearly affect work routines and personal relations on board, most Danes do not agree about blaming individual Filipinos (or other foreigners) but keep their bitterness for the shipping companies and the authorities who are often seen as being two-faced. Even though the emphasis placed by Danes on differences in qualifications may be used to demonstrate problems on board, it is even more used to provide evidence that Danes are asked to do more and that in the final count, they are cheaper than their foreign workmates, without the shipping companies (and the Danish Maritime Authority) openly acknowledging it. Danes find proof in a range of factors, such as:

- Manning lists: A Danish crew manager says that manning lists *"are generally increased automatically if there are foreigners"*. The kind of changes noted in Frame 5 are regarded by many Danish seamen as proof of the higher level in the Danes:

*"After all, you can see that the Danish Maritime Authority are aware that the quality level and qualifications of the Filipinos is not as it should be because [shipping company] built some new vessels which according to the manning list would require three watch keeping officers. Then they were allowed to sail with only two watch keeping officers and then the skipper (...). Then when they wanted Filipinos on board, the Maritime Authority said: "No. You have to have two watch keeping officers when you have all Danish crew. If you have Filipinos, there will have to be three." Why is that? Their certificates are STCW certificates like ours (...) It sounds a bit strange if their qualifications are in order (...), why should there be two Danes or three Filipinos?"*

- Alternating use of Danes and foreigners:

*"It has been tried out several times, having a Filipino or Polish first and second officer for a period, then having Danish officers for the next, (...) but that just shows that the shipping companies admit that Danes are better trained because it sounds like they have to have a Dane along every second voyage to get it all together again, and raise the standard (...) We have seen many times at [shipping company] that they have got rid of all the foreigners and put in Danes simply to get the standards up again."*

- Use of Danes on more technically demanding vessels:

*"But then [shipping company] says that they won't have a Filipino mate on tankers for safety reasons etc.. There are much greater environmental demands for tankers than there are for bulkers."*

- Freight and charterers: There are several detailed accounts in the interviews of a charterer who demands Danish crews, about a cargo that was ruined or of a charterer who ended a business relationship of many years standing with a shipping company after the Danish officers were replaced by foreigners.

- Condition of older vessels and expenses for repairs:

*"I don't believe you will find a Danish shipping company that has started on two new buildings and then put a Filipino crew in one and Danes in the other and let them run for a ten year period and then sold the two vessels. Because that would show the real cost of your ship. And when there have been Filipinos, there have always been masses of repair costs all the way through, where over here, we would have sorted out all the problems ourselves."*

- Expenses for spares and equipment: Here, too, there are several examples of foreigners who use things wrongly, use too much of a product, order the wrong things, etc.

One can naturally ask why all these complaints do not end in official action and many under-qualified seamen getting dismissed, but here is the answer from many Danes:

**Frame 5. Manning lists for a specific vessel**  
(borrowed from a shipping company)

DANMARK

**Søfartsstyrelsen**  
Danish Maritime Authority



**BESÆTNINGSFASTSÆTTELSE**  
**MINIMUM SAFE MANNING DOCUMENT**

Udfærdiget i medfør af lov nr. 239 af 6. juni 1985 med senere ændringer om skibes besætning og i overensstemmelse med de principper og retningslinier, som er fastlagt i resolution A. 481 (XII) vedtaget af Den Internationale Søfartsorganisation (IMO).

Issued in pursuance of Act No. 239 of 6th June 1985 on Ships' Manning as amended and in accordance with the principles and guidelines set out in resolution A. 481 (XII) by the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

.....  
Skibstype (Type of vessel)

.....  
Skibets navn (vessel's name)

Kontrol nr. National number	Kendingsbogstaver Distinctive letters	Hjemsted Port of Registry	Registertons brutto Gross tonnage	kW (hk/hp)

anses for at være forsvarligt bemanded, hvis det, når det forlader havn, har en bemanning, der mindst svarer til det nedenfor anførte, herunder eventuelle særlige anførte vilkår.

is considered to be safely manned if, whenever it proceeds to sea, subject to any conditions stated herein it carries not less than the numbers and grades of personnel shown below (translation overleaf).

Antal	Stilling	Sønæringsbevis/STCW reglement
1	Fører	Reglement II/2 (ubegrænset)
1	Overstyrmand	Reglement II/2 (ubegrænset)
1	1. styrmand	Reglement II/4
1	2. styrmand	Reglement II/4
1	Maskinchef	Reglement III/3
1	1. maskinmester	Reglement III/3
3	Bef. skibsassistent	Reglement II/6
<p>2. styrmand er ikke krævet, hvis overstyrmand og 1. styrmand har bestået dansk skibsførereksamen.                      Skibsassistenterne kan erstattes af 2 befarnede matroser og 2 ubefarnede matroser/1 ubefaren matros og 1 juniormester med bestået maskinmestereksamen, hvoraf mindst 3 opfylder II/6.                      Mindst 2 af navigatørerne skal være i besiddelse af GOC i GMDSS.</p>		
* See below for English translation		
9		

Fartsområde/Plying limits Alle have/Unlimited.

\* Mate is not required if the Chief Mate and the 1. Mate have passed the Danish Master's examination.

The ship's Assistants can be replaced by 2 Able Seamen and 2 Ordinary Seamen/1 Ordinary Seaman and 1 Junior Engineer, of whom 3 shall fulfil regulation II/6.

At least 2 of the deckofficers shall be holder of a GOC (GMDSS).

***"It is practically impossible to fire a Filipino"***

In accordance with Act 15 on manning of vessels (s. 25), it is the shipping company and the vessel's master that have to ensure that the seamen they engage comply with the training, qualifications and certification. If certificates are not to standard, the case can be referred to the police and a fine could be imposed on the shipping company or the master.

The Danish Maritime Authority states that it is especially the foreign PSCs\* that check papers on Danish vessels. After 1<sup>st</sup> February 2002 when the amendments to STCW came into force, Danish shipping companies can only muster ships officers with foreign maritime trading certificates when a Danish endorsement has been issued. The Danish Maritime Authority states that in the period between 1st January to 1st November 2003, they received about 450 applications for endorsements from ships officers and issued 420. No applications were rejected. The remaining applications were not completed for various reasons.

If papers are in order but the employee turns out in practice not to be able to carry out his duties, the authorities have no opportunity to check on this unless their attention is drawn to the fact that the person concerned represents a special danger. The Danish Maritime Authority's estimate is that the employee concerned (regardless of nationality) is then usually dismissed without them being informed.

According to the AMOSUP agreement, the first two months of a contract are regarded as a trial period. Within this period, the ship's master can terminate the contract by giving 14 days notice. Otherwise, the most general procedure is for the master in conjunction with the relevant senior officers to fill in an evaluation form on expiry of the contract. This is then sent to the manning agency and the shipping company. If the evaluation is not positive, the procedure varies from one shipping company/manning agency to another but the most general procedure is (on the basis of the documentation available) either that the seaman is not re-employed or that he gets another chance on board another vessel.

So it is possible to get rid of under-qualified seamen and in the case of gross negligence or doubtful/lacking certificates, these are serious offences in which the ship's master is required to act. On this basis, it is amazing that so many Danish officers make such statements as this:

*"The problem is actually that it is almost impossible to sack a Filipino. The shipping company feels that it is always the Danes that there is something wrong with and never the Filipinos. It is impossible to get rid of them if they are poor, so you are stuck with them."*

The question is not so much whether this actually *is* the case, for there are also interviews with Danes as well as Filipinos that state the opposite. The question is rather why this kind of statement is so frequent. The fact that it depends on the shipping company by which you

are employed can hardly be the whole answer because there are cases of Danish officers from the same shipping company who have a very different take on such matters. The reasons may be at three levels:



## Frame 6. Hear no evil, See no evil, Speak no evil

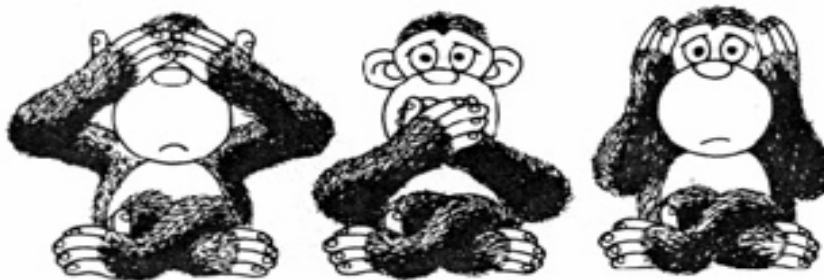


Illustration by Carsten Madsen and Jørgen Koefoed. (Write, speak and be heard: a mediation manual).

- "What we don't understand out there is why when we call home and say "We will absolutely not have that guy back again", the company does not respond. They should go to the agency and say, (...) people must have their qualifications and they don't. Their papers are in order but when they come out, they can't do anything. Often they don't have a word of English."

FK: "But can't the captain fire a man like that?"

"Well yes, but then again he has to be careful. He has to tread softly because he has the shipping company back home and the shipping company is interested in getting cheap folk who can work. They are not at all interested in sending out people who cannot work. But if everything is going well on one vessel because the captain does this (sign of blinkers) and the first officer does a bit of this (sign of covering one eye), well then... it's probably okay. It is also okay nine times out of ten... but if on the other ship, there is a skipper who says: "I won't put up with it!" Well it's as if he just can't get on with the Filipinos. That is how it looks to the shipping company back home: That ship is going really well" as they see it. "And that one, no good at all. What kind of idiot is the skipper, who can't make things run smoothly". So the skipper will be to be very careful otherwise he will be out, they will find another."

(Cadet DK)

"... And the shipping company often says to the captain: "Why won't your crew work with him? We have never heard about problems for anybody else". This makes many captains say: 'Well, can't we try and cope?' We know just how much administrative work is involved so we often agree and say: 'We'll try...'. And then nothing happens, which means the next crew that person sails with, the same thing will happen because the office back home just does not want to know if there are communication problems (...). It is a completely special phenomenon at [shipping company name] and it is a mad system, I think. It also means that neither the captain nor the chief engineer can say that the people they are dealing with are not trained well enough. The company has a philosophy: All our people are clever. So you can't actually give a person a bad evaluation without an explanation (...). I know that there is a company standing order that people should not get bad evaluations because they are employed by the shipping company so must be regarded as being good enough. But it is us who have the problem out on the ship.

(Chief engineer DK)

- Manning Agency: Some report that it does not help to warn against re-employment since the shipping company/managing agency does not always follow the advice. Most people see the sense in a person having two chances but feel that it is very unfortunate for the same man to return to the same vessel. On the other hand, they often complain that neither do they see a man again who has had good references.

- Shipping company: Many come under pressure from the shipping company not to sack an employee whom they regard as unqualified. It causes "a lot of trouble" to sack a man and some captains are afraid of the consequences; in the worst case they can lose their own jobs, (cf. Frame 6). One of the ways pressure is exerted which was mentioned several times, is by accusations of racism, as in this quotation from a Danish captain:

*"Once at [shipping company] I tried taking a tough approach to sorting them out at the beginning and after a very short time I was told: "These people have come to stay so there is no point you using your racist methods". [I replied]: "It has nothing to do with racism. You told me when you took them on that we should have properly qualified people and if they were not good enough, out they should go. That is what I started but then everything is turned round and I am a racist."*

- Masters (especially according to engineering officers) may tend to pass people on to someone else, perhaps to avoid being confronted with problems from their owners or because they are afraid of being dismissed, cf. Frame 6.

- A fourth explanation may be that some Danes may find it hard to acknowledge that the same judicial processes should apply to foreign employees as to the Danes. This is naturally not something which directly derives for the interviews but which can be inferred from certain statements. For example, *"It is actually difficult to sack Filipinos because there have to be a reasonably good reason."* One might well ask what the interviewee had otherwise expected, that a Filipino can be dismissed without "a reasonably good reason"?

There is generally nothing in the interviews to indicate that it is the Danes who were generally negative about Filipinos that were most liable to sack them. You can perfectly well have good relations with your subordinates, and the shipping company, while also taking a consistent, professional approach to sorting out bad seamen, as evidenced by the next quotation from a chief engineer.

*"If I have a second or first officer who I simply feel I should not have on board in that position, then I call home and say that this guy is no good so send a new. They have never ever questioned my judgment. (...) If you get a new man on a vessel, it is clear that on the first day he must naturally have help finding his way around but I can sense if all is not well by what they say (...) then home he goes (...). I have nothing against telling them something about the ship and what kind of engine we have and compressors, etc., but I don't want to have to train up someone who is a first engineer. He is a senior officer and I demand that he has reached a certain level. He is a trusted employee. As a first officer, he has a pretty big responsibility and should be able to do his duties. It is no good if we happen to burn out an ancillary engine and the company comes and asks what has been happening and I say it is because my first officer is useless. Then they will say: "Look old chap, why didn't you just send him home ages ago!" But the times I have done it, I have called the man in for a talk*

*with me and the captain and told him that it was no good and they have generally agreed with me and said they could see it too. (...) I should think that at [shipping company], I am the person to have sent most people home. And I definitely feel I have treated them properly, those that I have sacked and those who stayed with me. (...) but I have also had colleagues who I feel were unreasonable about the Filipinos, no doubt about it. There are some real bad guys around, right?*

### ***Extent of the problem***

There are three factors which are especially thought provoking in the matter of differences in qualifications. The first is just how many of the Danes' comments run in parallel with the question of pay differentials in setting out to demonstrate that, in the final count, they are cheaper than their foreign employees. The need to emphasise the deficiencies of the Filipinos is probably present and it is clear, namely from interviews with several people, that some almost "collect" horror stories of officers sailing in the wrong direction, etc. It should also be noted that we are only hearing one side of these stories (more of this in the next chapter). Accordingly, the following remarks from a Danish crew manager do not sound unreasonable:

*"I make it a habit every time I talk to a chief engineer or skipper to ask: "So how were the people?" And on the basis of the questions and evaluations they provide when they pay off, I would say about 80% of the Filipino seamen we have in any event are satisfactory. When people have just returned home, everything is fresh in their minds so they can indeed say that they were pretty good. (...) But if you ask at a seminar when they are all sitting together and thinking back to the good old days when they only had Danes, then they are all bad or in any event, far more than the 20% that I mentioned."*

The second is that the powerlessness and frustrations of the Danes, as expressed in this connection, are mainly directly at the shipping companies and the Danish Maritime Authority which apparently refuses to acknowledge their problems while also imposing greater standards on Danes. It appears as if the lack of acknowledgement by the outside world of the difference in qualifications is just as great a burden for the Danish seamen as the actual difference in qualifications. On this point, too, the above quotation is interesting: Is the figure of 20% "bad" workmates acceptable? Would it be more acceptable if some Danes were exaggerating the figure? The conviction of the Danes that they are better qualified is nourished by signals from the outside world which are sometimes extremely ambiguous. Even if, according to information from the Maritime Authority, it is not true that Manning Lists are changed more or less automatically depending on whether the certificates are Danish or not, but in fact does only occur in specific instances, it is not surprising that these instances further reinforce the Danes' convictions. Further, Danish seamen get the same powerful signals from organisations, authorities, shipping companies and training schools that "Our training is our competitive parameter" (conversation with Maritime Authority representative), that it is their quality that is their best weapon against international competition. So is it strange that they also feel that the cheaper labour is poor quality? And even if they did not wish to accuse the Filipinos of this, it is difficult to avoid the fact that it does affect life on board, as a Danish captain comments:

*"There is broad agreement that Filipinos are pleasant, friendly people who cannot help it if they have not had the opportunity to get an education/training as good as ours, but it is clear that in daily routines, the frustrations felt by many are most often directed at the crew*

*and not at the shipping companies and authorities which is where they really belong. So it is much easier to have a go at the crew than it is to sit down and write a complaint to the right place - we are only human."*

The third thought-provoking factor is that compared with all the examples that peppered the interviews, so few cases end up with the Danish Maritime Authority. Maybe they make do with not re-employing a poorly qualified seaman but it would be in the interest of all seamen (irrespective of nationality) to involve the Maritime Authority so that rumours either get neutralised or end up in specific action. As it is now, the shipping companies and Maritime Authority can deny the existence of the problem on the basis of the lack of cases, and this does give rise to frustrations amongst Danish seamen.

The question of differences in qualifications is incredibly difficult to separate from differences in competency, understood as the ability and the possibility of putting your skills into practice. It is also to do with a range of other factors (cultural and hierarchical differences, (cf Chapter 7) motivation, experience and ownership and the culture on board the vessel). But this should not conceal the fact that doubt about formal qualifications is regarded as being at the root of all problems, according to some Danish seamen. The question deserves to be discussed far more openly by the parties involved than they are now.

## 6. Structural conditions: the Filipino dilemma

There is a widespread feeling that “modern shipping is all about teamwork”, not least because nobody is dispensable at a time when crews have been extensively cut. The question is, however, whether the Filipinos are offered the best possible framework for operating in accordance with the requirements for commitment, independence and equality that teamwork demands and which the Danes value. The survey revealed a range of factors relating to foreign seamen's job security, marginalisation and discrimination, which there are three good reasons for discussing: they are partly assumed to have a direct impact on collaboration between equal parties, and they also partly affect Filipino endeavours to remain in the same job. Finally there is an ethical obligation to investigate the legal status and social protection for all employees in Danish workplaces.

### 6.1 Job security

#### *Vessel contract*

Compared to employment by a shipping company, a vessel contract has some disadvantages that Filipinos often mention, such as having to pay to attend mandatory training courses, and use their home leave to do so, or not having regular home leave with full pay. Surprisingly enough, very few connect a vessel contract with a poor degree of job security, even though the questionnaire showed that they give a very high rating to job security (Appendix 2). This may be due to employment by a shipping company being unusual at the global level, and at a time when more and more Danes are being employed by shipping companies, it has been going the other way for the Filipinos (interview with Filipino organisations and manning agencies). The desire for full employment may be regarded as simply too unrealistic to be put into practice. Most Filipinos however, prefer working for the big shipping companies for the single reason that *'when there are so many vessels, there will be more employment and more security.'* Danes especially really want to work with the same workmates tour after tour although this is not a matter of job security as such, since it is primarily for comradeship and for the sake of social life on board. Meanwhile, many interviews with Filipinos show that insecurity of employment and anxiety about losing their jobs very much affect their attitude to work and their relations with their superiors.

For every tour a Filipinos makes, irrespective of how long he has been employed on board a Danish vessel, he theoretically runs the risk of being dismissed or not re-employed, partly during the trial period and partly by getting a bad evaluation when paying off. Finally, irrespective of the shipping company, the manning agency can just not re-employee someone. In this survey, there were three examples of seamen who had lost their jobs, often after many years on Danish vessels. In one instance, it was the manning agency that did not wish to re-employ an officer who had been working for the same Danish shipping company for 15 years:

*"I was on vacation, planning to take 2-3 months off. But the office in Manila told me to wait and wait. After 6 months I lost my patience. I 'm sure I cannot work with them anymore. I don't know why. I know lots of captains have said they want me back. I know there are 3 or 4 certifications that they want me to come back. But they must have problems with me at the*

agency!” (The interviewee added that the manning agency had new staff which he assumes was why he did not get a new contract).

In another case, interviewee X had worked on board some three or four Danish vessels over a twenty year period, as an AB, boatswain and safety representative, first for one shipping company until it closed, then another until that also closed. He was then employed on a vessel from a third Danish ship-owner and was then dismissed after eighteen days. He stated that the Filipino deck crew relieved a Danish deck crew and that the master had been uncooperative right from the start, for example when he joined ship, the master refused to familiarize him with the ship's procedures, he was foul mouthed and behaved in a way that X characterized as discriminatory. X did not have the necessary time to settle in to what was for him a new type of vessel. He added that it was the first time he had experienced discrimination in his long Danish career. When X asked for a ‘second chance’, the master replied that many Danes were unemployed because of the Filipinos. He also warned X against contacting his union after dismissal: *‘Don’t say anything to AMOSUP when you go home!’*

X was proud to give me copies of papers showing that he had worked on board the same vessel year after year and to provide the names of the Danish captains whom he had visited privately. Discussing his chances of being reemployed, X said: *“It will be very hard to get another job because it is written in the seaman book: 18 days tour. So the new agency would say: ‘How can it be, only 18 days?’ ”*

The third case had many parallels with the second. I will not go into a discussion of whether there were correct grounds for these dismissals. Getting a comment from the manning agency concerned (who was the same in all three cases) was complicated, partly because of the anonymity of the seamen and partly because the manning agency took the position that dismissals by and large never occurred since they only employed clever people. The fact that the seamen had had lengthy and apparently satisfactory employment with Danish ship owners made the dismissal open to discussion. The fact that in certain instances dismissals happen randomly is strengthened by an interview with another manning agency:

*”After the first hire there is an evaluation within the first months. If the man satisfies the captain and chief engineer, then he is recommended. If not, the captain has to prepare a report according to the CBA and he can be sent home. But sometimes the same seaman has been working very good for 3 years... so you cannot help thinking that it is subjective. When it is not clear, it is the principal\* who decides. Here we don’t know the Danish officers and we cannot question them. So we have to ask the principal. (...) Sometimes the seaman gets bad evaluation, but the seaman himself says: ‘The captain is always drunk’. But we cannot do much about it.”*

Another problem revealed by the above cases is that the seamen did not have a single evaluation from previous tours which puts them in poor position when applying for a new job. Here again the statements of the seamen disagree with the manning agency who said that *”normally the evaluation is given to them on board”*. On the other hand, on the subject of evaluations, a Danish crew manager stated:

*”When we suspect that he will be using it to get further on in the system, we don’t gain anything from giving him one, do we? (...) Of course, all our Danish employees get one. I can see (...) that if you want to get on, you need to have feedback on the evaluation you have got. I have told our Danish masters and chief engineers: ‘It is up to you whether you want to*

*show it. If you have the feeling that as soon as he has it in his hand he will use it to apply elsewhere...then don't show it'. It does not help us if we give them a tool to get away from the shipping company, that's not the idea."*

In my view, what makes it extra valuable to describe these three cases is that they involved three seamen who clearly had "bridge building" qualities, that is they had long experience of working with Danes and they had the qualities (as far as I can judge from an interview) that Danes want: direct, social and articulate and a remarkable sense of humour. They were clearly used to talking to Danes. Such bridge builders are, as this survey has shown, in several respects an invaluable resource for good relations and a good working environment on board. If their dismissal was random, it was not only for the three people involved that it was regrettable.

### ***The Filipino background***

Job security not only relates to a vessel contract but also to certain factors in their home country such as unemployment, black listing and age limit. One might take the position that the problems Filipinos might face before and after a hire is nothing to do with the employer or their Danish workmates but one cannot ignore the fact that these factors can affect their attitudes during their employment.

*Unemployment* is very high in the Philippines, also for registered seamen. Out of an estimated total of about 500,000 registered seamen, 60% are unemployed<sup>12</sup>. Since internationally there is a great oversupply of ratings and a small undersupply of officers, the problem must be assumed to be worst for the ratings.<sup>20</sup>

It is difficult to demonstrate the extent of the practice of *blacklisting* but with so many statements about it in this survey (from seamen, organisations, NGOs and manning agencies) and elsewhere it is hard to deny that it exists<sup>12,21,16</sup>. Blacklisting is an illegal practice by which some manning agencies exchange lists "under the table" to prevent seamen seeking assistance, typically from ITF\*, in getting a new contract. Black listing should not be confused with the legal watch list which is an open list controlled by POEA\* which seaman can appeal against and have their name cleared from (even though the practice is also criticized by some NGOs\*, especially as it can take such a long time to get it removed that one can then no longer be regarded as an active seaman). Neither should it be confused with the sample, unsystematic exchanges of experience between two manning agencies (or two shipping companies which also occurs in Denmark according to a Danish crew manager) when a seaman applies for a job somewhere new, even though the latter practice can in a high unemployment situation have serious consequences. As a manning agent put it: "When an agency calls you and asks how this seaman is: If you say he is bad, that's already blacklisting!"

A seaman/priest in Manila talking about blacklisting says:

*"Black list and watch list... It's all business and even if the government tries to regulate, there are many agencies who can escape the regulations. One of the ways to do it is blacklisting: If you complain once, I won't employ you anymore. It is discrimination, it is illegal and against the human rights, but we know for sure there is a list going through many companies. That's why some seamen keep having this answer (when seeking a job): not now..."*

*not now. Everyone knows that there are those lists, no one would deny it. But some agencies would say: Yes it exists, but there is nothing to worry about. MARINO\* speaks about 15,000 seamen being blacklisted. I think it is exaggerated, but the practice is going on for sure. Oversupply is the problem (...) I have to be cautious when I advise a seaman, and say: 'Ok it is your full right to demand the 100 dollars or so that you should get, but you must know: there can be some consequences. The price for demanding your right may be much higher than what you demand'."*

It should be emphasized that there is no indication that black listing is practiced by the manning agencies used by Danish shipping companies. It is not so much how *widespread* blacklisting is that is relevant here but the *fear* that it brings with it. It is also important here to emphasize that the majority of Filipino seamen who contributed to the survey had an impressively long list of how many flag states, including some convenience flags, they had worked for. So one cannot expect that they relate exactly to the conditions ruling in Danish shipping companies. When I was having a discussion on board with a Filipino about admitting faults (Danes often mention, and irritated by, the fact that Filipinos are reluctant to admit their faults), he replied: *'If we make a mistake we are aware that we may be sent home. We can get blacklisted.'* The following quotation from another interview came after a seaman had been telling me about an industrial accident, at which I enquired whether he had received the compensation he should have had. He replied that he did not know, even though he thought he had been well treated (by AMOSUP). The quotation is included even though the seamen concerned had not been working on board Danish vessels (but on board 'practically all the other European flags') to show the mix of fear and lack of awareness of one's rights (and the fact that he confused blacklist and watch list). This also occurred in several other interviews.

*"We have privileges and rights, but nobody tells us about them. That's the problem. The company does not tell us anything. And AMOSUP does not.*

FK - What about ITF?

- ITF, Yes, I know them. But you see, the problem is, it is difficult... Sometimes if you tell everything to ITF, that will worry them in the company - you are going to be blacklisted. That's why if you have bad experience, you cannot tell it all. Then you'll be blacklisted and you cannot get a job anymore. So you have nothing to do than shut up your mouth. I have worked for more than 15 years and I have known bad experiences. But we just let it pass. I just want to finish my period and go home to my family. You cannot complain! I think you don't know how to find the person you can deal with (...) The system here is, if you work in 2nd register: low salary, poor treatment, and if you tell it to ITF the local agency will put you on the blacklist. The manning agency will give your name to the government, and then when you are blacklisted in one company, you cannot work in another because your papers have gone to the government. That's why people keep their mouth and shut up, to avoid these things. Most of them are afraid to complain. I have no other income and I have to sustain my family. No matter how hard the conditions on board, they always want to finish their contract".



**Frame 7. Lunetta - Age limit**

Seamen looking for a contract on the pavement at Rizal Park. Representative from a manning agency with a sign for a Japanese shipping company seeking captains (not older than 52) and other jobs (not over 38). Below: 'Position: 2nd engineers. Not more than 45 years old.'(German line). Active seamen in Marino, with T-shirt saying: 'No to blacklisting'.



*Age limit* is another problem like blacklisting that does not affect Danish shipping companies but is widespread elsewhere. Here again, interviewees did not differentiate between what was and was not practice on board Danish vessels. For example, one of the above failed to get his contract renewed after years of service on Danish vessels (he is now working under another flag): *"I would like to come back to [Danish company] because my brother is also working there, but I don't know if they want to take me back because of my age. Though my brother is 48 and still working"*.

The person concerned was an officer and aged 36! As can be seen from Frame 7, it is striking how low the age limits are set and how openly it is practised.

## 6.2 Marginalisation

*"...contrary to migrant workers, serving foreign seafarers have no residence in the State in which they "legally" work, and therefore no line of communication or political influence within that State. In short, seafarers employed in the international labour market often have difficulty in pursuing their legal claims in the flag State for various reasons, including against an absent shipping company or in the absence of local assets. Although in a legal sense they work in a specific country and should therefore come under the jurisdiction of that State, they are unable to have their rights enforced. In other words, seafarers working on board open register vessels have limited access to state institutions or processes in the flag State that might provide them with protection in cases of abuse or potential abuse. Seafarers are also unable to participate in conventional political processes"*.<sup>22</sup>

The situation described above applies to a certain extent to foreigners employed on board Danish vessels even though, compared to many open register vessels, the problem is limited by the fact that practically all shipping companies in DIS are Danish-owned. There are channels by which foreign seamen can be heard, for example at meetings of officers in the presence of a Danish crew manager. The crew managers who were interviewed also said that they get many letters from foreign seaman. Nevertheless, this does involve marginalization of foreign seaman in more than one sense. It applies, for example, at several levels in the event of accidents in which foreigners may well come under Danish legislation but such equality is in fact open to question. The statistics (cf. Frame 8) show that Filipinos file less than half the number of industrial accident reports compared to a similar group of Danes<sup>23</sup>. The difference is even more apparent when it comes to occupation health problems: *"In a review of a large number of cases, there was not a single example of a foreigner having been paid compensation for an occupational complaint"*<sup>24</sup>. More investigation is required to be able to explain these differences. It may well be that it is due to a more cautious approach by Filipinos but several interviews indicate under-reporting as one of the reasons (cf. Frame 9). No so much is known about the cases in which an accident had occurred but the seaman concerned is back in his home country. I have myself met injured seamen in Manila where it is questionable whether they have received proper legal process and compensation. A separate investigation of such matters would be useful.

In many situations, foreign seamen appear to have been 'forgotten', probably not consciously but either because it is easier to ignore their specific situation or possibly because they are not really considered part of the Danish shipping industry. I mention three examples:

## Frame 8. Accident report statistics

Nationality	Injuries reported to Maritime Authority <sup>+</sup>	Injuries leading to permanent disability - min 5% <sup>+</sup>
Danes	2.09	0.25
Poles	1.70	0.33
Filipinos	1.00	0.07
Other countries	1.33	0.18

+ per 10,000 hire days<sup>23</sup>

## Frame 9. Extracts from interviews on accident reports

**Engineer:** 'All that about them having fewer accidents, it is all about registration...(…). When there is a mixed crew and someone gets something in the eye, he gets a patch on it and then he can go and clear up somewhere or other and it is not registered as an accident. A Danish seaman will say "No, I won't put up with it!" He demands protection for his health and his body and can get a half day off which is not too bad and so a purely Danish manned ship would probably report much more. I was in [shipping company] and we went from being the worst ship for accidents in the Danish division to being number one over a period of two years. It's just a matter of reporting. The long and the short of it is (...) if a sailor breaks his arm then it is an industrial accident and he will be off sick for six weeks. (...) But if he is posted as lookout for eight hours a day, he can just sit in a chair and there is no real lost working time, right? (...) So when an accident happens, it is just a shame when no working time has been lost, then he is not in the statistics. A Filipino can perfectly well work with a sprained ankle, a Dane can't.'

**Representative from Officer's Union:** In part it may be that the Filipinos don't know enough about it and partly it can be down to the captain's approach: 'Now wasn't it just a minor thing? I would have to file a report...then my accident rate would go up ...'

**Cadet:** They don't come to us unless there is some obviously serious accident or other. (...) Things which we otherwise would have to include in the statistics because they have been reported by Danes (...). We would have to take extracts of case notes and they have to be sent in to the Industrial Injuries Board and if something were to happen later it could lead to an insurance case. (...) And another thing, should we start explaining how Danish legislation works to the Filipinos? We can't. Then we would have to start all over again every tenth month. We just can't be bothered, to put it mildly. We don't have time for it.'

While this survey has been going on, I have seen several examples of occupational health projects but none involving foreigners. The thrust of these projects was otherwise for free e-mail, satisfaction surveys, appraisal meetings, wellbeing, collaboration, co-determination. Are these activities less relevant for foreigners? A Danish captain said during a conversation that there was only one solution to the problem of social isolation, etc.: Shorter tours. I replied in that case we should start cutting them for foreigners. 'Oh yes,' he replied, 'but it's our working environment you should be taking care of.' On a shipboard visit, I asked a Danish seaman how many nationalities there were on board. 'Only Danes,' he replied. At which I asked whether there wasn't a Thai gang. 'Oh yes', he replied, "down there," pointing down towards the lower deck.

### ***We only hear the horror stories***

*"There have been situations when officers of another nationality have reacted differently than a Dane would have done because of the difference in cultural background and where it could have ended up badly. And there are certainly many times where it has turned out perfectly well but you don't hear so much about that....."* (Officer DK).

*"A lot of the talk about the Filipinos, it is a bit negative but there are also some positive things about them. But if the debate is generally negative, then you need to be negatively minded when you don't know much about it."* (Cadet DK).

When seamen get together, they tell yarns and in my experience it can be amazing how quickly a tale spreads in this environment. It is apparently the same for the Filipinos but their version does not have the same effect as the Danish debate. So it makes for a much more one-sided version that few hear of in Denmark. I can illustrate this with a single story.

In 2001, I made most of the interviews with Danish engineers. Several of them referred to an article that had been in their trade journal.<sup>25</sup> They used the article as proof of the Filipinos' lack of qualifications. 'There you are,' said some of them, 'it can be actually dangerous to sail with them.' The article reported the case of a Danish chief engineer who was badly injured, ostensibly because of an incompetent Filipino first engineer. A little later, by chance I interviewed a colleague of the chief engineer in the article. He also referred to the article but only to correct the story. According to him, the chief engineer in the article had accused a Filipino who had not even been on board at the time. The fact that there was no Filipino engineer on board when the accident occurred was subsequently confirmed by the shipping company. Hopefully this was the only story based totally on falsehood. But it does give food for thought when Danish seamen are uncritical in passing on stories about which they have no first hand knowledge (cf. Frame 10).

## **6.3 Discrimination on board**

Judging by the interview documentation, there is no reason to believe that there are frequent examples of gross discrimination. On the other hand, most Danes as well as Filipinos know of one or two of their workmates whose conduct they clearly disapprove of. However, it can be hard to decide whether this is down to race discrimination as such, colour-blind abuse of power or simply bad management style.

## Frame 10. Marginalisation: We only get to hear the Danish version

Extract from an article in Maskinmester (Engineer)

"In 1993, the engineering crew (...) had to make repairs to the refrigerated hold where there was a leak in one section. The chief engineer told the Filipino engineers to do the job. It turned out, however, that none of them knew how to do the brazing required, so he ordered them to drain the refrigeration unit and wash off the ice. They should then call him again, get the tools ready and he would then do the brazing himself.

- 'When I got down to the hold, the ice and snow had not been washed off as agreed. So I cleaned round the leak myself, after which I did the brazing,' reported the chief engineer. 'I smelt an unpleasant smell while I was welding. Suddenly smoke developed. I thought for a moment that the smell and the smoke were due to the oil in the snow and ice I had cleaned off. At some point the first engineer disappeared towards the exit hatch because he could not stand it. I finished brazing and went aloft. The first officer and the two apprentices cleared up and started the refrigeration going again. Finally they ensured that the joint was tight.

The following morning when [the chief engineer] got up, he felt unwell. He had difficulty breathing, his heart was labouring and his pulse racing.

I could feel my carotid artery pulsing. After breakfast, I called the engineering crew for a meeting in the office and asked the Filipino engineer whether he had drained the system as he had been ordered to. It turned out that he had not. I also told him that neither had he cleaned up as requested. He explained that he had not had time. I pointed out to him and the other crew that it was unforgivable to make such mistakes and not do a job he had been ordered to do. And I expected that an engineer should either do the job he had been ordered to or have such a sense of responsibility that he would report back to say that he had not done the job.' (...)

But what had [the chief engineer] learned from this case?

'I learned that foreign seaman do not have the training they should have had. In general they do not have the same sense of responsibility and so you have to rely more on your own efforts, especially in critical situations. That is not how it should be on a ship. Especially not today when there are so few of us on board. We should, especially in the engine room, be able to trust in each other's professionalism and comradeship. But unfortunately we cannot,' said [the chief engineer].

X's crew manager's response to an e-mail:

"I can confirm that in 1993 the [chief engineer] had two tours, both on board the same vessel. The vessel had a fully Danish engineering crew, i.e. chief engineer [X], first and second officer. At no time in 1993 was there a Filipino engineer on board. All the other engine room crew were Filipino.

When talking about human relations on board (and thus not about more structural discrimination like having to pay for training, or being quartered in a cheaper hotel than the Danes, etc), 11 wrote in the questionnaire that they had experienced discrimination, such as: *'High ranking officers like masters and chief engineer don't give a chance to other nationalities'*; while 12 wrote positively, e.g.: *'It is very easy to adapt the Danish culture and tradition. Most of them are kind and understanding in terms of work on board'*.

This reflects the impression received from the interviews in which most Filipinos said that though they had experienced individual discriminatory incidents, the overall picture was positive. On the other hand, the survey does not support the widely expressed claim of the Danes that Filipinos are far better treated by the Danes than by all other nationalities. It is correct that most are pleased to sail on board Danish vessels but the main reason appears to be that they value the high level of safety and the safe condition of the vessel. This is confirmed by the questionnaire (Appendix 2), where top priority was given to safety (higher than pay and only exceeded by job security) when considering a good workplace. But also in the interviews and conversations on board, I found that when answering my questions about the advantages and disadvantages of various nationalities, they were often thinking about the safety and condition of the vessel. A review of the experiences of Filipinos with different nationalities would be extremely convoluted. Filipinos are greatly opposed to generalisations. It was also a widespread perception that the nationality of one's workmates was not important; you just had to 'adapt and adjust', two words that came up again and again in the interviews.

### ***'There are some real bad guys around'***

Even though there was no lack of examples of discrimination from the Filipinos, most (and the worst) examples actually came from Danes' accounts of other Danes from whom they clearly disassociated themselves. This might be everything from discriminatory language such as calling Filipinos monkeys, and setting them to do some quite unreasonable work. A cadet told of a skipper who set them to painting after dark with a paintbrush in one hand and a torch in the other. There are instances where the discriminatory behaviour appeared to be consistent, at other times it arose as individual episodes, for example connected with ingestion of alcohol. There were also several Danes who indirectly experienced the bad atmosphere at work when the foreigners were 'unhappy' when a feared relief appeared. In some instances, it clearly involved conduct directed at foreigners; in others it appeared to be more general approach to subordinates. As a Danish officer said of a Danish first officer:

*"You never get used to being told off and hearing that you are stupid two or three times a day. But you can survive it when it is only for a couple of months. It is odd but often it only takes a single person to ruin the good atmosphere for the rest. (...) Not even half of what I was told off for was justified so that was not such fun. And the skipper knew perfectly well that he was a real swine but he said nothing. It was not just me he attacked; it was also the cadets and seamen. In brief, everyone with a rank lower than his."*

Even though the bad conduct was directed at the Filipinos or at everybody, the problem was apparently not so much that they occasionally met a real swine (where does one not?). The problem was rather that a single senior officer could be allowed to make dramatic changes to the atmosphere. A cadet said: *"However reasonable you are, if you have senior ship's officers who do not think the same then you are bashing your head against a brick wall. Then*

*they lose confidence in you and then everything falls to pieces. In the final count, we all want to keep our jobs. It may well be that on some tours you have to treat the Filipinos worse than you might actually want to. Because that is the custom on board and just the one of you cannot change that."*

This does not mean that there are more 'real swine' amongst senior officers than among others or more among Danes than among Filipinos (a Dane mentioned for example a very unfriendly Filipino first officer who was just as unpopular among the Danes as the Filipinos) - their power was just more unlimited. When I was interviewing Filipinos I heard of an obvious example of discrimination from a steward. My reaction was to ask why they did not complain. They replied: "*Complain? It's a Danish ship with a Danish captain! We would only have trouble! The captain and the steward were like that!*" (sign that they were close).

The Danes, too, often close their eyes and put up with things, even though they are clearly offended by the behaviour of some of their colleagues.

*"We cannot do very much because complaining to the captain is not popular. We have discussed this in the association several times, what we should do if we come up against someone who cannot control this or that. The association suggests that we should pull ourselves together and complain and that they would then back us up if there was any trouble, but it is difficult".* (Chief engineer DK).

Apart from everything that is morally and legally abhorrent about discriminatory behaviour, it apparently often makes Filipinos react by way of passive resistance. This is not to say that there are some of them who openly declare that they consciously use this as a survival strategy but many statements from them and from Danes, and some of my own observations, clearly point in this direction. For example, a steward said that he set the cook to painting the cabin ..."and he made a real mess". The mess was probably the cook's silent protest against an order which he was within his rights to find unreasonable. Unfortunately discrimination and passive resistance can end in a vicious circle. For example, what the steward noted above could then affect what he could expect of his cook (and possibly all Filipino cooks), especially if no one stood up to him and told him that it was humiliating for a cook, irrespective of the nationality, to be set to paint. On the other hand, the cook might then interpret future dressings down by the steward (and possibly all Danish stewards) as a sign of discrimination regardless of whether they were justified or not.

## **6.4 Knowing your rights, and daring to claim them**

### ***'You never have trouble with Filipinos'***

There are some Danes who prefer to sail with Filipino crew, because there is never trouble with them, rather than Danes who almost always want to discuss things. One might ask whether in some circumstances this could be another form of discrimination if the main motive is for them to obey an order without discussion irrespective of whether the order is reasonable or not. In any event, there are other Danes who are critical about this approach and who think that it touches on exploitation. The following excerpts from four different Danish interviews show both attitudes:

*"I have sailed with the Filipino stewards and they are generally easier to handle because you can as it were go and say that is how I want it done, end of discussion!"*

*”If many of them like sailing with the Filipinos, it is because if you give them a order, they damned well do it!”*

*“Danish laziness gets to flourish because they are so willing.”*

*“They will practically say yes to everything, just to get a hire or get the money they will actually put up with everything several times over.”*

While it may actually be convenient for management to have some employees who say ‘yes’ to everything, it may come at a price: it is hardly compatible with the desire for sparring which many Danes like and also with the objective of getting the whole crew to function as a team. The positive thing about saying ‘yes’ to everything is suspiciously close to the negative in replying ‘Yes Sir’ to everything, an attitude which Danes in other respects do not like. It is not the same as saying that sparring/feedback will come all by itself provided that senior management respects Filipinos’ rights and ensure that they are told about them. But it is a step in the right direction.

### ***Knowing your rights – and making use of them***

*” A Filipino seaman uncritically signs his contract and the only thing that interests him is how many USD he can earn every month. AMOSUP elegantly fails to state what his rights and obligations are but I have always made sure that there is a copy of their agreement and an English translation of the Seaman’s Act in their mess. Then it is up to the individual to go into details. But it is precisely this lack of knowledge that often leads to slavish conditions in which shipping companies act as predators on a crew unless the captain intervenes which, strangely enough, is not so popular with the manning department, despite the fact that there are absolutely clear working hour and contractual regulations.”*

This quotation from a Danish captain raises several problems. Not all Filipinos know their rights; not all shipmasters/shipping companies keep them informed; some of the barriers are down to the Filipino seamen who often do not take the initiative. Finally it points to problems in the role of AMOSUP.

According to the law, an English version of the Seaman’s Act and the agreements must be available on board, but as Dane said, there are differences between what is available in the mess or in a drawer in the captain’s desk. There are some Filipinos who expressly request more information about their rights: *’Filipinos are subject to Danish law. Copies should be available to the crew, and translated to English so we know or understand it’*. But there are few of them and my impression is that they generally do not take the initiative. For example, among the Filipinos who stated they had never had an evaluation, there was not one who had actually asked for one. *’I don’t want to make trouble’* is a sentence that often arises in interviews. This attitude may be affected by structural as well as cultural factors.

A Filipino who had worked as relief cook on board a Danish vessel said at the start of the interview that conditions were good: *We are treated equally, there is no discrimination. Of course we know there are good and less good people everywhere. I experienced two captains in the Danish ship, and the last one was not so good.*” Much later in the interview he said that his pay had not been adjusted for the new contract:

*”I don’t ask for privileges, just what I should have. (...) The contract should be [followed] but maybe because I was just a reliever, I did not get it. (...) The new adjustment on the CBA*



*was from January and I started the contract in March. I only talked to the captain about it, but did not do more about it - I don't want any trouble... But maybe it is therefore that they did not take me again after the end of my contract."*

This cook was only a reliever and it is highly possible that there was no use for him anymore after the end of his contract. He appears to have learned from this episode that you only get 'troubles' by not keeping quiet. Another seaman tells the story of an industrial accident in 1997 when he was pouring chemicals into a ballast tank. He fainted, was hospitalized and sent home where he got two months' salary in sick pay but felt dizzy and could not to work for a lengthy period. He tried to get compensation via the Danish Embassy but in vain and gave up sailing for a long while. Today he has lost his sense of smell and is worried about the long term effects. When I asked him whether he had tried to get help from AMOSUP or ITF he replied: *"I don't go to ITF, maybe I get trouble with [company] and lose my job, also not in AMOSUP, they are not helpful in situations like that, they are after only our contribution, and always protecting the company, not the seaman."*

This attitude that AMOSUP does not protect seamen's interests is replicated in practically all interviews with Filipinos. It should be noted that this is not a union as we understand it in the West since it is not subject to democratic control. As many people have remarked, it is only while at sea and the following six months that one can be an active member, which perhaps explains the feeling that many have that no help is available when the need is greatest. It should be emphasized that I am only repeating the seamen's attitudes to AMOSUP without entering into a discussion on the justification for such attitudes.

While this survey has been ongoing, the possibilities of Filipinos to seek help have been restricted on three fronts: the ITF office in Manila has been closed, the Danish embassy in Manila has been closed and the possibility of getting advice from the Danish Maritime Authority's social security office has been restricted (information from the Danish Maritime Authority). On the other hand, the Maritime Authority say that they published a free review in March, 2002: "The Seaman's Rights and Duties", which has been issued to all shipping companies for use on board their vessels. The publication contains among other things a brief review of health and unemployment coverage after the end of cover by shipping companies together with relevant addresses such as the Industrial Accident Agency. Shipping companies have been asked to make this publication available to seamen. It is also free and can be ordered from the Danish Maritime Authority" (via e-mail ). AMOSUP has also been informed about the existence of the brochure. It is available at the Maritime Authority website:

[http://soefart.inforce.dk/graphics/Synkron-library/DMA/UK\\_PDF/Publications/PDF/pligt\\_og\\_ret\\_pjecel.pdf](http://soefart.inforce.dk/graphics/Synkron-library/DMA/UK_PDF/Publications/PDF/pligt_og_ret_pjecel.pdf)

It is still too early to say whether this endeavour will raise the level of information. As I write, I have just been told about this publication by two sailing seamen: a Filipino AB who says that he discovered a copy after several days' searching and a Danish master who replied that the brochure is on board but there is only one copy, his own. Following my inquiry, he would, however, copy it for the crew and order more copies.

## 7. Cultural differences that make a difference

One reason for not being able to talk about cultural differences in absolute and objective terms (cf. Chapter 3) is that any differences that are found to be significant vary according to the circumstances. Not all differences make a difference! I have chosen to focus on a few cultural areas that have shown themselves to be as particularly significant for life on board. Yet again it should be noted that there is an interrelationship between the structural framework described in previous chapters and the differences causing problems. These are areas in which culture and structure reinforce each other's impact so that in the final count it may be difficult to decide whether the reason for the problem is cultural or structural.

### 7.1 Historical traces: On not speaking up and on perceptiveness

Regardless of how positively Danes view their relations with Filipinos, in most interviews there was a complaint about the lack of initiative by Filipinos and their exaggerated respect for authority. This is often associated by Danes and Filipinos with experience gained over a lengthy period in which Filipinos were subject to various colonial powers:

*"...this mentality they have, it dates back to their colonial past when the white man was always superior however stupid he was. It's that simple. And as a superior, it can drive you crazy, having a right hand man who says 'Yes Sir' even though he does not understand what he's saying."* (Crew manager DK).

This attitude, of not speaking up about your own or other people's mistakes and only doing what you have been asked to do is regarded as a hindrance to trust and as having unfortunate consequences for working together and for safety. Here are two examples of many from Danes:

*'We have a Filipino engineer who has to take readings every morning. This is part of his daily duties and the readings form the basis among other things of how much freshwater we have and how much waste oil there is in the various tanks. Very often I have to go and say: 'Those readings, they don't match those that were taken yesterday.' So I say to him: 'Take a new reading'. He says: 'Yes Sir!' And then I ask him whether he cannot see that there is a very big difference between yesterday and today. 'Yes!' 'But doesn't anything tell you that when there is such a big difference you should take a new reading or come and tell me?' 'Yes sir,' he just says and that is our standard form of communication. They do not understand that if something or other is wrong then they have to come and report it. This means that in fact everything can collapse around their ears without them reacting in extreme cases.'*

*"One example I usually give about where they should think for themselves is this: There is a door they all pass through onto the deck every day. It gets more and more stiff. Finally it takes almost two men just to open it. They do not think of giving it a little oil. That is what we would do. So I ask: 'But why is the door so stiff it is practically impossible to open it? Yes, but they had not had orders to oil it.'"*

Many Filipinos admit that they suffer for inferiority complexes when it comes to westerners, partly because of their colonial past and partly because of economic development:

### **Frame 11. About not speaking up to someone inattentive.**

The vicious circle

In an article on 'simulated collaboration', the instructor tells of an episode in a simulator in which the captain lays off a course that will put the ship aground. The Asian crew look on silently whilst 'exchanging nervous glances'. The Danish instructor comments: "The Asiatic culture and thought processes can be a problem. (...) Asiatic officers have a good grounding in theory. In general, Asiatics have great respect for authority. This is not bad in itself because the captain is the natural leader of the vessel. But that is why it is important even so for the crew to be aware of what the captain is doing. In the example above, the crew were actually aware that the course was dangerous. But they did not dare say so to the captain (...) [the captain had been told to make the mistake on purpose]. If the first officer had drawn attention to it, in his eyes the captain would have lost face."

The same instructor notes that seamen from the Nordic countries are used to speaking up. On the other hand they are not so perspective as their Asiatic work mates. 'Strangely enough, [the Danish instructor] often finds it easier to suggest changes to work routines to Asiatic delegates than the Nordic. (...) Scandinavians are much more aware of their own worth, rightly so, but even so there is always room for improvement. If an exercise turns out less well, Scandinavians are often ready to find a technical reason for events rather than anything human.'<sup>26</sup>

This description fits closely with results from this survey and communication can develop in a very unfortunate direction if on the one hand you have a Filipino who does not dare to speak up and on the other side you have a Dane who will not listen when the Filipino does actually speak up. There are many examples in the survey when this can be so:

From Danish interviews:

- 'They obey blindly, they have such respect for authority, so they just blindly obey what comes down to them from above.'
- 'They are so submissive, it's terrible.'
- 'If they discover something along the way, you will never get to hear about it.'
- 'They simply don't dare report anything.'
- 'They just say yes and maybe they go off thinking it is not right and do something else but they don't tell us still it's too late.'

From Filipino interviews/questionnaires:

- '[I don't like] the way they treat us as seafarers, they look down on us, they don't listen to our comment.'
- 'Danish are sometimes sceptics.'
- 'Some will show, I'm better than you!!'
- '[What] I don't like [with] Danish company [is that] some of the captains are bad. Because if you have an idea and tell to him he says never or forget it.'
- 'The Danish always think that they are best educated.'

*"By nature we are very obedient. The Filipinos have a mixed culture, with Asian, Spanish and American [influence]. And we have undergone 400 years of Spanish colony. On the other hand you Europeans are very frank. But we claim or approach our problem in some other ways. Everybody knows that too much politeness will harm us, but we have a complex, believing that Europeans are superior to us."*

Probably this complex also contributes to the fact that some Filipinos assume that they will suffer discrimination. As one of them said in the middle of complaining about the negative expectations he might meet from Danes: *'... Of course we will accept that there is a little bit discrimination with the Asians and the Europeans, it's true, we admit...'* Several Danes also mention their great irritation about situations where they have been accused of racism even though they would have treated a Dane in this same way.

There is no doubt that many Danes are driven by a real desire to establish more even-handed relations with their Filipino workmates and to be able to discuss things with them on an equal footing on and off duty. As one of them says, having them bow to him makes him embarrassed. But there are several indications that the barriers can also come from the Danish side. Westerners, including Danes, have an historically and economically based tendency to believe that their way of acting is more rational than others and so they may tend not to be open to alternative ways of acting<sup>27</sup>, which is confirmed by several statements from Filipinos:

*'Sometimes (...) if you have some idea during the situation of the job, about the work, you will suggest to the officer or captain, you will suggest some idea, good idea, that it is more easy to finish this work compared with his idea, I think he does not listen to you. (...) Sometimes they think that they are more superior, I don't know... more superior with us... with me. (...) And what I have noticed is that the Danish captain or chief officer, if they finds that you make a mistake for example about the work, one time or two times, maybe they already admit that... you are not good. (...) They expect you already know the job, but sometimes they have not been giving us a chance.'*

The Danish lack of perceptiveness was also acknowledged by individual Danes. One referred specifically to the fact identified by the instructor in Frame 11, that of Danish unwillingness to learn something from foreigners:

*"You might say one of the good things about foreigners is that they are very often willing to learn right from the bottom up. Whereas our own people ... we don't want to start learning from the beginning because we think we already have got further just because we are Danes - and that is rubbish."*

On the other hand, it is quite usual for Filipinos to value multicultural crews precisely because they can gain mutual enrichment and learn other ways of doing things:

*"Working for a Danish company flag gave me an insight in how is it to work with a completely different people, but the good thing was there were efforts from both sides to cross that difference."*

There were not many Danes who, as in the following quotation, questioned whether Danish working practices were always the most logical.

*"I also think that many Danish employers would look askance, they do things in a totally different way than we are used to. For example, one day I came down and they had stripped*

*down a pump. Normally we would have got it up to the workshop onto a workbench. But there they both sat cross-legged stripping down the pump on the decking 1½ m from where they had removed it. It is enough to make you think they are a bit primitive when they do things like that, but thinking about it afterwards, I can quite see that it's actually more practical to sit and work on it there rather than using time and energy manhandling it up to the workshop. So if they can fix things, in principle I am indifferent how they do their work, as long as it gets done. (...) Often there are many ways of doing things. The right way doesn't have to be the way we do it, does it?"*

Luckily several Danes were aware that taking a superior attitude could lead to a vicious circle and get the Filipinos to react with passive resistance.

*"The Danish officers should not make the Filipinos out to be worse than they are. If they are treated well and given some responsibility by way of interactive collaboration, many of them can be perfectly good employees. (...) Unfortunately far too many of my colleagues have the basic attitude that their Southeast Asian employees are stupid. They rarely are but when they have been told by their superior that they should not think for themselves but to what they have been told to, then you get the results you deserve."*

*"If it was me that was treated badly by my boss and I was told I was stupid, well it is clear that I would live up to it and try to make myself stupid, that is what I would do quite automatically, so it's perfectly natural for them."*

Such acknowledgement is often based on experience (for example a captain noted that having given his Filipino crew a public dressing down, they became visibly less willing to cooperate) and most Danes have discovered that the vicious circle can be avoided by treating them with respect and positive expectations.

*"What happens is, if you don't treat them reasonably well, it comes right back at you, meaning that they go and do what they have been told. But if they discover there is something that is not running as it should, they don't come and tell you. Oh No. Let the idiot find out for himself because it's impossible to talk to him."*

The vicious circle between lack of perceptiveness and lack of initiative may be exacerbated by other factors such as Filipino anxiety (here it is difficult to differentiate between the specific fear of losing your job and a less specific anxiety 'to offend and to be hurt') and Danish experience of foreigners' lack of qualifications. It is difficult to demonstrate trust so long as you are uncertain about their basic qualifications. A third factor is the language. Both sides say that some misunderstandings that arise when working may be down to simple misunderstandings, or that people will not admit that they misunderstood the other person. A fourth factor is the shipboard hierarchal system with Danes ranking above the Filipinos.

### ***Direct and indirect communication***

Something that does require extra perceptiveness on the part of the Danes is that in many situations they are used to a far more direct form of communication than Filipinos can manage. They are used to 'yes' meaning yes but this can have many different meanings for a Filipino (cf. Frame 12). Understandably enough, Danes find this most irritating. There is no doubt that too much ambiguity can put safety at risk. But again, we should turn this around and question whether Danes always communicate as rationally and directly as is supposed. Danes do not live in a cultural vacuum and some of the misunderstandings Filipinos mention

arise in situations where expressions used by Danes cannot be understood directly and literally. Using irony, which is regarded as particularly Danish, is a form of indirect and extremely ambiguous communication. For a Filipino this can be just as difficult to interpret correctly as a Filipino 'yes' is for a Dane. Many Danes know the little poem from Piet Hein:

*"Taking fun as simply fun  
and earnestness in earnest  
shows how thoroughly thou none  
of the two discernest."*<sup>28</sup>

Just replace 'fun' with 'Yes' and 'earnestness' with 'No' and you have a Filipino version of what is otherwise a typically Danish maxim!

A Filipino manning agent told of an episode that had made a great impression on her. She was visiting on board a Danish ship and got talking to the Filipino crew in their lunch break. They were talking so well that they forgot the time and the captain came in and said to her: "*Just because you are the crew manager, you should not prevent the men from working!*" The Filipino agent went on, clearly emotionally affected: "*He said it in front of the whole crew! To a woman! In front of my inferiors!*" She felt insulted both as a woman and especially by getting a public reprimand, even though the Danish captain had undoubtedly meant it as a friendly reminder that it was time to go back to work. In other words she had understood the message far more directly than had been meant.

## **7.2 Different perceptions of hierarchy and social relations**

Being addressed as 'Yes Sir' provokes twin reactions in Danes, partly because of the ambiguity in Yes and partly because being addressed as Sir denotes an exaggerated hierarchal distance. Danes view it as a sign of authoritarian, hierarchical relations whereas they themselves would prefer to have relations on an equal footing. Filipinos find Danish aversion to something they see as a positive mark of respect as totally incomprehensible. I myself had negotiations with the bosun on passage when he got me to accept being addressed as Ma'am.

*"Yes for us Ma'am is a sign of respect. (...) It does not depend of the status. If you were a stewardess I would call you Ma'am, too."*

Several of them asked me directly during the survey why a Dane (for example an officer on board or an instructor in Manila) cannot be called 'Sir'.

A short, very generalised answer is that it all relates to various fundamental perceptions of human relations. Filipinos' understanding of social relations can be viewed as a system of asymmetrical mutuality based on obligations<sup>29,30,31</sup>. Jocano notes this as a Filipino concept (kapwa: 'relationalism') that relates to togetherness, equality in status, without any denial of hierarchical differences<sup>30</sup>. In Denmark where the emphasis is on the individual and less on relations, it is hard to understand that one can have both hierarchies and equal status.

## Frame 12. Indirect communication: The meanings of Yes

From Jocano's 'Working with Filipinos'<sup>32</sup>

Filipinos are likely to say Yes when they:

- 'do not know
- want to impress
- are annoyed
- want to end the conversation
- have half-understood the instructions or what is being said
- are sure of themselves
- think they know better than the one speaking.'

'Saying Yes may also mean any of the following:

- 1 - Yes, in hear you, but I do not understand what you are saying. If In ask questions, you may think I'm stupid;
- 2- Yes, you are wrong but in will not contradict you. I will not let you lose face before your friends, peers, superiors or subordinates;
- 3 – Yes, if that is what you want. It all depends on your decision;
- 4 – Yes, in already know what you are saying. Why should I embarrass you in public? We can talk privately about it later if you want.'

'[To say No] is to be confrontational. It causes hurts, and it brings about conflicts. (...) To say No is in effect an outright unwillingness to accommodate or cooperate. It is to deny other people the chance to express themselves. It makes people 'lose face' – a serious social mistake.'

From the interviews:

Filipino people are not very confrontational. They try to please everyone, and a weak 'Yes' is for some a 'No' (NGO).

Maybe some Filipinos don't understand what the officer says. Maybe they get afraid so they say Yes! (seaman).

Answering YES SIR is to say: We don't know, because we are afraid that they may become angry. This is a part of the cultural [way] to show respect. I don't do it anymore. I would say no if it is no to a Dane; and if someone does it, I would explain it to him; I would say it is wrong. But at my first promotion I was a bit shy and afraid, so I could answer Yes Sir. But then I tried and studied: How to manage that? (seaman)

The Filipinos are keen to work because of oversupply, so they try not to complain. [But there are also cultural reasons]. Now they see their non-Filipino employers as "superiors" to them – they feel inferior. Therefore they restrain from complaining. A foreigner, a superior, it's the same to them. They don't want to offend – so they say "Yes". (NGO).

To put it simply, a Filipino community may be described as a puzzle in which each piece (individual) is mixed up with the others in a complex system of obligational relations. Each

has something on the other, everyone owes something to other people, such as a service, protection, gratitude, loyalty. As a Filipino NGO said:

*'A relationship is always based on hierarchy. Never talk back to a superior in the same way. Then rather give the message to another one!'*

In contrast, the more individualistic Danish society could be described as a collection of uniform, disjointed pieces. So while the same mode of address which signals respect may be relation-building for a Filipino, it creates distance for Danes. These different perceptions of social relations have several consequences. They can explain why many Danes take a positive view of the way Filipinos stick together and their ability to adapt whilst the down side of this is the strict 'pecking order' amongst the Filipino part of the crew. One also has to be careful not to favouritise individual Filipinos on board. The Filipino system with mutual obligations appears to be vulnerable and fragile and often threatened by splits because of 'favouritism' or 'regionalism', two words that are often mentioned in Filipinos' accounts and which appear as counterweights to the harmony that can often be interpreted as a designation for balanced social relations. The danger of favouritism is also well known to the Filipinos: *"I can say from my experience, some Filipinos don't want to talk with officers because they are afraid of what the other Filipinos would say. You know, starting rumours..."*

The vulnerability is possibly even clearer in the dense, enclosed shipboard environment and this may be some of the explanation for why many Filipinos admit to preferring multiethnic, rather than purely Filipino, crews. One AB explained to me that difficult relations with an individual in a purely Filipino crew risked upsetting all other relations, whereas it was easier to encapsulate the problem in a mixed crew. So it is not so much a matter of too great a distance as in the Danish view but more a matter of the ethnic or hierarchical distance that serves as a kind of fireproof door for relations in the event of any conflict.<sup>viii</sup> Two other ratings (who also complained about Danish unwillingness to listen in another quotation) discussed the matter as follows:

*- "It is easier to go to Danish or white captains. It is easy to go and ask about problems, to tell him that there is a problem than to go to the Filipino captain. It is a very big gap. For me if you have a Filipino captain, you cannot go directly with your suggestions or so. But if you have a Danish captain or chief officer, you can go and suggest, or explain what is your problem."*

I interpret the quotation as meaning that it is not because of a small distance (in a Danish sense) that it is possible to speak directly to the Danish captain but in contrast because ethnic differences mean that the hierarchy is not threatened by direct contact.

Several of those interviewed (Danes and Filipinos) also indicated the positive aspects of direct communication by saying that Filipinos bear grudges for a long while: *"What I noticed with the Danish, they give bad words to you, or they shout to you, he gets angry to you, but after that: normal!"*

---

<sup>viii</sup> The fireproof door metaphor comes from a quote from a seaman in a French only crew<sup>33</sup>: "The hierarchy, it's the fireproof door for conflict" (p. 90, my translation). This illustrates to perfection the explanations given by Filipinos for preferring multi-ethnic crews.



The fact that some Filipinos ensure they mix as little as possible on board may be a consequence of their fragile social order. As one young AB put it: *'My father says: If you don't want to have trouble, then stay in your cabin after job!' But then I do too much thinking and it's boring! I need someone to talk to!'*

It is also true of all nationalities that 'monkey politics' (cf. Frame 6 or for example the failure to intervene against a discriminatory colleague, s.6.3) characterizes life at sea at a more general level. My experience is that people often endeavour to avoid conflict and difficult subjects on board. This is confirmed by a book about French seamen<sup>33</sup>, in which the author talks about a formal consensus being a necessity in the closed environment of a ship, because relations are so close and there are so few of them, that mixing too much can lead to vulnerability.

### ***Hierarchy on board***

The way officers and other ranks are separated on board Danish vessels replicates a worldwide hierarchal order in which seamen from OECD countries always rank higher than seamen from other parts of the world. East European seaman come below those from OECD but above those from other parts of the world<sup>34</sup>. The global distribution thus reflects the economic world order. On Danish vessels, too, Filipinos practically always rank lower than Danes, and so there is an overlap between the ethnic and professional hierarchies. This is why at the end of the survey I interviewed some Danish ratings so as to enquire especially about their relations with Danish officers. The picture given by these interviews is far more characterized by distance, contrasts and visible ranking than the picture given by Danish officers of their time with all Danish crews. In accounts given by ratings, hierarchical differences are still highly visible. The most radical of them stated: *'They call it modern management but it is only one-way communication, top down. Long live the hierarchy!'* It should be added that the crew themselves contribute to retention of this separation; for example they all agreed that practically all ratings would rather have their own mess; *'You can't really chat together when it is a common mess.'*

In these interviews, relations between Danish officers and Danish ratings had far more in common with relations between Danes and Filipinos than in interviews with the Danish officers. Some Danish ratings for example had also seen their suggestions for work being ignored by their superiors. So it can be difficult to differentiate between the structural and culturally conditioned sides of the hierarchy.

Whereas the Filipinos tended to overplay the shipboard hierarchy, Danes showed a similar tendency to underplay it, even to a certain extent denying hierarchical - professional or ethnic - differences. Several anthropologists have demonstrated that in Scandinavia, including Denmark, many people endeavour in the name of equality to conceal and keep silent about differences and especially inequalities, even though these may be real enough<sup>35,36</sup>. It is easy to explain the distaste for Danish officers in juxtaposing the hierarchical order with the ideology of equality. Remarkably ambiguous responses given by some Danish officers showed that they themselves contributed towards retention of the distance which they often accuse the Filipinos of creating.

A Danish officer mentioned an occasion when he had shared a whisky with a crew member (on board a vessel with only two Danes): *'Well it was OK, we had a really nice time together, no problem at all. But it was like a special occasion, you can't do that very often on*

*board a ship and especially not if you don't want to lose the small amount of respect that they actually have for you. You need to be a little careful. One of their great things is not to lose face and we naturally should not do so to them because we then drop a level. So there is a quite natural distance and they are (...) very social together but prefer us to keep away.'*

A Danish cadet gave details about who sat with whom in the evenings. He and the other cadets sometimes went 'down' to the Filipinos (some of whom were officers) but it was more rare for the Danish first officer to go with them:

*"I think it was just as much a matter of maintaining, I would not call it discipline, but in any event not making it too much of a social get together because they cannot cope with that. They can't because there is a distance. Whereas we Danes, we can easily say this is work and this is leisure. No problem about it at all."*

Note that in both quotations it is the Filipinos who in the final count get the responsibility for creating the distance even though it was just as much the Danes who were keeping away. Perhaps it is the Danes with their higher ranking that have the greatest responsibility for possibly minimizing the distance. A young Filipino AB with whom I discussed Danish complaints about Filipinos keeping themselves to themselves, replied:

*"Sometimes they [Filipinos] are afraid to speak with the higher ranked cause they fear of being rejected. (...) But when the high ranked comes along with us we are open. We give back if the attitude to us is good, we don't want to isolate them. I think it's not the low ranked to go to the captain's cabin and knock and say: 'Captain! Come with us'! It must be the other way around."*

Here we must come back in parenthesis to the structural differences noted above. In Chapter 5 we saw many examples of Danish attempts to negate or in some other way equalize pay differentials. One might wonder why since it was so apparent that the easiest way would be just to accept them outright. It is obvious that the Danish ideology of equality interacts with other causality. An obvious difference fits badly with Danish self-awareness and this has preferably to be explained (away).

### **7.3 Overcoming cultural differences**

If Danes won't listen to the Filipinos who already have difficulty in opposing them; if Danes made an effort to negate differences and inequalities whereas Filipinos prefer emphasizing differences; if both parties use indirect language in various connections; if communication is also in a language which neither of the parties speak perfectly, it can actually make communications difficult. On this basis, one can only be impressed by the many statements that these handicaps were being overcome in day-to-day duties. I illustrate this with a lengthy extract from three interviews selected from other similar instances.

1. In the first extract, an officer is talking and in contrast to the quotation from the cadet above, he felt that it was easy to differentiate between work and leisure situations with Filipino seamen.

*"I was standing talking to the skipper the other day. He has been sailing with Seaman M many, many times, now. They really like each other and respect each other for the work they*

*each do. That morning they were both on the bridge, M to clean and the skipper to get a cup of coffee and they had a little chat.*

*M likes joking and chatting with the skipper, but if anything needs doing, he would still do it without question because it was his job. If that had been a Dane, he would have found it more difficult to differentiate between standing chatting as an equal and then a moment later having to accept orders. I can also remember an officer saying to me when I was a cadet that I should avoid becoming good friends with the seamen because then I would have nothing but trouble with them."*

He does not conceal the fact that relations between officers and crew (all officers were Danes on that vessel) were unequal and characterized by distance, which did not prevent them from respecting each other's work and being able to establish off duty relations:

*"The whole thing works much better if the seamen do the jobs they are asked to without asking too many questions and wasting everybody's time. For all that, one can still chat as an ordinary person even though at work I have a higher ranking."*

Despite differences in rank and nationality, his basic starting point is normal human relations - this is only one of many interviews where cultural differences are transcended by the simple device of putting yourself into somebody else's shoes and treating others as you would like them to treat you, as others have put it:

*"I try to be open and friendly to everybody. I have seen people laughing about someone or making snide remarks when you suddenly came up against something you don't know or have not learned and which they think it is obvious you should know. I just hate that. So I know that it is not how to react. (...) I also think it makes the seamen especially relax when they're working with me (...).if any of them are in doubt, they can just ask...."*

2. The second extract concerns a chief engineer who had been sailing in a vessel with only two Danes. All in all, the interview was definitely not one of the most positive. He felt that in many cases his foreign staff did not have the necessary qualifications and he had suffered social isolation to such an extent that he had now stopped sailing. Here we can really talk about overcoming things. Even so, he was still able to listen to individuals, not to generalize on the basis of his bad experience and believe that he could learn something from some of his Filipino juniors:

*"I would say that if you are going to have a foreign crew with Scandinavian officers, then Filipinos are probably some of the best you can get despite everything. (...) It is as if we get along very well with each other, we can as it were see each other's differences but even so we can work well together, even if there are these differences (...).*

FK: Do you believe generally that you Danes are also ready to listen if for example they make suggestions about doing things differently?

*"No, not from the one day to the other because now we are, like, not so prepared to listen so much to them. (...) On the last ship I had for three years, there I had a Filipino first officer and I had sailed with him for three months and then I came back and met him once again. There I have to say I listened more to him than I had the first time. He could turn into a good man one day, quite certain. But it is certainly something you have to get used to. And if I have to do that, then I start out with the person I am talking to, definitely. And the same thing, I had a second officer who had been on board the ship for a couple of years and was a*

*very skilled man. I listened to him, too, once in a while when he made suggestions about how we should repair something or other, temporarily until the next port when we could get some spares. You have to know Filipinos very well before you dare go so far as to give them the time to tell you what they want to say instead of letting them tell you what they want and then cutting them off, right, as one tends to do. That's right enough."*

Note that in the two accounts the seamen and the first and second officers were people who had had lengthy service with Danes. One of the conditions for being in the best case able to turn cultural differences to advantage is that you have known your staff long enough to build up trust.

3. The third extract was with a Filipino boatswain. I sailed with him for three weeks and he was always good humoured. During the interview, it turned out that his good sense of humour was not just a natural characteristic but was also a conscious survival strategy. He had seen that his proposals were not always listened to and he also emphasized the importance of starting with the individual:

*- There is a big difference between nationalities and sometimes you have to adjust your-self to the attitude of the captain or some others. Some people are not so much...open-minded. That's why you have to adjust. (...) If my chief officer – just to mention an example – is not open-minded, as we are in the same department, we must be together and we are the ones who arrange the job at the department. And if he is not open for anything I suggest (...) it will depend on him if he will agree to my suggestion. (...) Teamwork! Teamwork is best. If he listens to my suggestions, and I do the same with him, we combine the best of both. (...) Working with full crew? For me it's almost the same, because I can adjust. And even if you are Danish, you have not the same attitude as another Danish person. The attitude of the person is more important than the nationality. Even if you are Danish we are closed together (...) Some Danish are very good, some are good, and some are just at the level. If there had been some bad, then maybe I'd been already out! (...) Discrimination? Some people put it on their mind but I put it on one side! Otherwise you would always think of that, it would be torture. If you have discrimination to me, I won't have to you and then it's ok. I experienced discrimination with German people, very long time ago. That is their style, I have mine.*

*FK – Can't you get angry?*

*- No, I never get angry. If you get angry in your mind, your life is getting bad, cause then you are always angry. It's better to be always happy! If you are angry to everybody in the ship it will affect your family too. You will also be angry there. That's why we have to be open-minded. Sometimes you get angry but you have to be so just for some minutes only!"*

## **7.4 Limits to cultural explanations**

In this chapter, I have endeavoured to demonstrate that aspects from both cultures need to be considered so as to explain those areas in which a meeting of cultures can cause problems. Regardless of how important and useful the cultural explanation may be, it can rarely stand by itself and its utility cannot always be transferred from one situation to another. I shall illustrate this with two examples from this survey. The first, Frame 13, comes from a presentation on safety [held for the Scandinavian Maritime Medicine Symposium October 26, 2002) in which I compared problems ashore with those on board. The second, Frame 14, is a presentation of some quotations from Danish seamen comparing Filipino seamen and those

of other nationalities. It should be noted that the Filipinos' comparison of the various nationalities they have worked with is equally constructed.

### ***Safety relations: cultural and structural barriers***

If we just investigate the status of safety organisations in nationally mixed crews, the main impression from the Danish interviews is that linguistic and cultural barriers (Filipino respect for authority/lack of response) get in the way of good collaboration. From there, it is only a step to making the Filipinos (or their culture) the main reason for unsatisfactory safety meetings. In Frame 14, I have gone the other way round and started with an article by Hasle in which he sums up safety collaboration ashore<sup>37</sup>. Pictures 1 and 6 show Hasle's status and possible solutions. The other pictures are my way of matching Hasle's findings to conditions in the shipping industry, generally on the basis of conditions at sea and specifically on the basis of this survey.

In Picture 1, Hasle identifies a series of problems which obviously have nothing to do with nationality or conditions at sea: the safety organisations have generally not been playing their intended parts in the regulatory system comprising in addition to the working environment service and BST (corresponding to the Danish Maritime Authority and the Danish Maritime Occupational Health Service), but has become a kind of 'appendage'. According to Hasle this is due *inter alia* to the fact that the process is not systematic (ad hoc solutions), preventative measures are limited (e.g. the tendency to focus on personal protection and not technological modifications that would eliminate the risk), the lack of integration at the corporate level (e.g. inclusion in planning and procurement) and at the control system level, and that safety organizations depend too much on enthusiasts to function properly, and this hinders continuity.

If we compare these problems to the special conditions affecting shipping, (Picture 2), the risk of exacerbating the problems is obvious for several reasons, of which the most important are as follows: the physical separation of the vessel makes the above-identified integration more difficult. The hierarchical structure is more obvious and crews are replaced more often than ashore which exacerbates the problem of enthusiasts and continuity.

Picture 3 shows more specifically how enthusiasts can promote relations and how in contrast, a negative leader can obstruct it.

If we compare these problems with the special conditions pertaining in mixed nationality crews (Picture 4), it can be argued that the problems do get exacerbated but hardly caused by the presence of foreigners.

The example in Picture 5 in which the captain revealed, after having complained of the lack of feedback from Filipinos during the interview, that the meetings were conducted in Danish, is extreme but not unique. This makes it difficult to maintain that barriers are only to be found in the Filipino culture (for the sake of good order: in the incident described, the safety representative was Danish, but about half the crew were Filipinos).

The lack of feedback may also derive from some structural factors. First, Filipinos have to know the rules for safety at sea. But while I was gathering data for this survey, some ship-

ping companies had still not sent any foreigners on safety courses on the pretext that they were not on full contracts.

Picture 6, Hasle's recommendations, are also applicable to the maritime situation. It can even be argued that a fully functional safety organization is even more important at sea where one's entire existence depends on good collaboration and where there is a great risk of marginalizing foreigners (cf. s. 6.3 and 6.4). Perhaps safety meetings could be extended into being a forum in which one could openly and legally talk about the problems arising from cultural differences?

## Frame 13: Safety organisation and cooperation

<p><b>1. Status ashore</b> (Peter Hasle, Arbejstliv No 2/2001)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ad hoc efforts</li> <li>• Limited preventative work</li> <li>• Lack of integration</li> <li>• Dependent on enthusiasts</li> </ul>	<p><b>2. Specific maritime problems</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legally behind</li> <li>• Ship as an entire institution <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical separation between ship: ship-owner</li> <li>• Hierarchical structure</li> <li>• Powerful traditions</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Frequent crew changes</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Enthusiasts and conservatives</b> Chief engineer on informal meetings: <i>'...in some way or other they get more involved instead of it just being a meeting that has to be got through because the guys back home at the shipping company say we have to have them. That is how it is most places and it is a bit of a shame because some things can be used constructively, they certainly can.'</i></p> <p>Captain on safety meetings: <i>'A farce. Something we have to do, something we write up and something we do because we have to.'</i></p>	<p><b>4. Specific problems for multiethnic crews</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linguistic barriers</li> <li>• Cultural barriers</li> <li>• Structural barriers</li> <li>• Combination of factors</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Combination of factors</b></p> <p>S1: 'If we have an all Filipino crew, we get to lack some feedback and input from the crew about what safety equipment we need to order. They don't come and say to us: Now listen. If we have to do this or that, we must have <i>some</i> fall arrest system or other. (...)'</p> <p>S2 (now sailing with an all Danish crew): '<i>When we have what we call a safety meeting, they all turn up (...) it is not just the safety committee. It is the whole bunch of them!</i>'</p> <p>S1: '<i>Yes, us too, the whole bunch ...except the Filipinos because we speak Danish!</i>'</p>	<p><b>6. Better collaboration: How?</b> (Peter Hasle)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More involvement by management</li> <li>• Localisation</li> <li>• Greater integration</li> <li>• Greater co-determination</li> <li>• Regulatory involvement</li> </ul>

**Frame 14. Filipinos compared to other nationalities**

If you tend to believe that it is the national culture alone that determines our behaviour, you can be thoroughly confused by this juxtaposition of quotes, all made by Danish seamen (all quotes from interviews with Danes).

+ Poles	- Filipinos	+Filipinos	- Poles
I should say the Poles are better than the Filipinos because they are N. Europeans, they are as hardworking as we are; in quite a different way than the Filipinos. Filipinos may have all sorts of certificates but they can't live up to them. Not all.		It was our shipping company's naivety back when they started taking on Poles. (...) They made excuses like, 'well, they are closer to us culturally'. Actually in many ways they are further away culturally than the Filipinos are. Filipinos are actually somewhat better at talking English than the Poles. And when it comes to racism, the Poles have quite another tough culture. So in that way they are actually further away than the Filipino are.	
The difference between a Pole and the Filipinos is that the Poles are more like us, they are more independent and they dare come to you and say if something is wrong..		Their way of working is still affected by the communist system they had for years, so if they worked they earned so much and if they didn't work they earned the same, and for some years afterwards we had something of the same philosophy after they started sailing.	
Compared to their level of training and general professional competence, the Poles are cheaper than the Filipinos. But in terms of DKK, they are a little expensive. (..) They can do more on average. Professionally there are cleverer and their culture is closer to ours and the way they do things in general. They cost a bit more but they do more.		Now I have not tried sailing with Russians and Poles but I think that the Filipinos are considerably better seamen than the two categories, I have absolutely no doubt about it. They know how things have to be done. <i>Notes from tour.</i> X. had worked with some Poles and clearly preferred Filipinos. While the Danes were having a jolly time, the Poles could sit for hours without saying a word. They also had no sense of responsibility. When 16:00 hrs came, they just dropped what they had in their hands.	
+Other nationalities	- Filipinos	+Filipinos	- Other nationalities
- I have heard that Indian officers are quite clever... - They are meant to be good, yes. I haven't sailed with any yet but that is what I hear.		<i>Note from shipboard visit:</i> The Captain is well satisfied with his Filipinos, they are much more 'western' than the Indians he had had before. Indians would not come and say they had made mistakes or that things had gone wrong.	
I prefer sailing with Danes, no doubt about it.		The Danish seamen were nothing but trouble. The Filipino seamen just kept right on working.	



## 8. Loneliness and communities

As is apparent from the previous chapter, ethnic subdivision is only one of several divisions on shipboard. There is also (usually overlapping) a hierarchical division between officers and men and a physical division between deck, engine room and accommodation<sup>29</sup>.

Even though the ship constitutes a physical unit, it also consists of several possible communities and even though you may maintain an ethnic origin, there are always ways of dividing up the crew. In my interview documentation, I have more than a page of quotes about differences between Faroese and Danes, stated half seriously and half ironically in the best Piet Hein spirit! But mutual differences usually tone down if the crew also consists of Filipinos and the same may well be said of Filipino regionalism. French anthropologist Duval describes life accord with an all French crew and it is amazing how many common themes I recognize in his book from my survey. Even with a crew all from the same province, Brittany, they all had stereotypic pictures of those coming from another valley ('monkey valley')<sup>33</sup>. In identifying with a single community, it is also necessary to have something to identify *against* and that is seldom the case out at sea. My point is that an internal division in an isolated society such as on board a ship is perhaps inevitable. On the other hand, it is clear that seamen, regardless of hierarchies and their ethnic origin, share and are affected by a strong sense of identity as seamen, based on a shared experience in living and working under conditions that are different from all other professional groups.

This chapter deals with the lack of community and the various forms of community on board and hence how living conditions for seamen are affected for good or evil by working and living in mixed ethnicity crews.

### 8.1 Loneliness

Shipboard life is characterized by monotony, exclusion from the outside world, a limited physical environment, restricted social contacts, few opportunities for recreation and lengthy absences from the family. Loneliness is one of the fundamentals that is often reported in the maritime literature, even though interest in the extent and consequences of the problem are more recent<sup>33, 29, 38, 39, 40</sup>. In this survey, many, especially Danish seaman, mentioned being burned out, loneliness and social isolation as their biggest problems, and the metaphor of imprisonment comes up in several quotes:

*"When I go up in the evening, I don't know how many times you sit and watch the clock, you can't allow yourself to go to bed yet, you just sit and wait until it gets late enough for you to go to bed. I mean, I have television and video and a music centre in my cabin but I can't be bothered to sit and watch films all the time; you often just wait till it's late enough to go to bed. And what is there to look forward to? It is very sad, isn't it. (...) [In prison] they sit in a cell but they can go outside and walk about, they get Danish food every day, they get bread rolls, Danish newspapers, Danish TV every evening ... OK, the door is locked and they don't get much money but they are better off than we are."*

As is apparent in the following quote, though, this is not just a problem for life on board but also possibly even more so when on home leave and in relations with family and friends.

*"I should also like to play four handed whist once in a while, even when I am away working. Because I am at work just as long as I am at home. Let's not forget that. I spend so long out there and I feel that sailors can get mentally confused in their heads if we don't switch the brain off once in a while. Then we get a bit strange when we get home and spend time with our family and friends, then we become a little ...we just cannot switch over to having a nice time together."*

Some of those who were more satisfied also mentioned that the transitional periods at the beginning and end of a home leave can be long and difficult and that they are '*not the most enthusiastic about joining in social get-togethers*'.

Since the subject of the survey was precisely relations with other nationalities, it is not surprising that amongst Danes, the problem relates to the fact that Danes often are in a minority on board. But most of them are not blind to the fact that developments in the shipping industry mean that smaller and smaller crews, greater pressure of work and less and less time in port<sup>2</sup> are also contributory factors

*"Since we are talking about the atmosphere, it is not enough to say that it is the way it is because crews are mixed. The fact that they have cut the size of crews means that even if it was an all Danish crew, we would not have the same atmosphere on board that we used to."*

For a Filipino officer, the greatest obstacle to establishing transnational relations was the pressure of time:

*"Sometimes you have not much time to interact and discuss, like when we sail in North Europe. For ships trading in North Europe, time constraint is the more limiting factor for recognizing and minimizing cultural misunderstandings"*.

It is hard to decide why some people get affected whilst others do not know the feeling of social isolation, irrespective of the shipping company and type of vessel. Both the need for and ability to generate and maintain social relations is very much down to the individual. This survey has demonstrated no detectable interrelationship between social isolation and the general feeling of individual Danes about their foreign colleagues, or the size of the crew. On the other hand, it was clear that the problem was greatest in 'Two-Dane' vessels and amongst senior officers (captains and chief engineers). It should also be noted, however, that amongst the Danes who were most unconditionally satisfied with their working and social relations on board, there were two who had sailed as the only Dane on board, one as the captain with eight Filipinos, the other as chief engineer under a foreign flag.

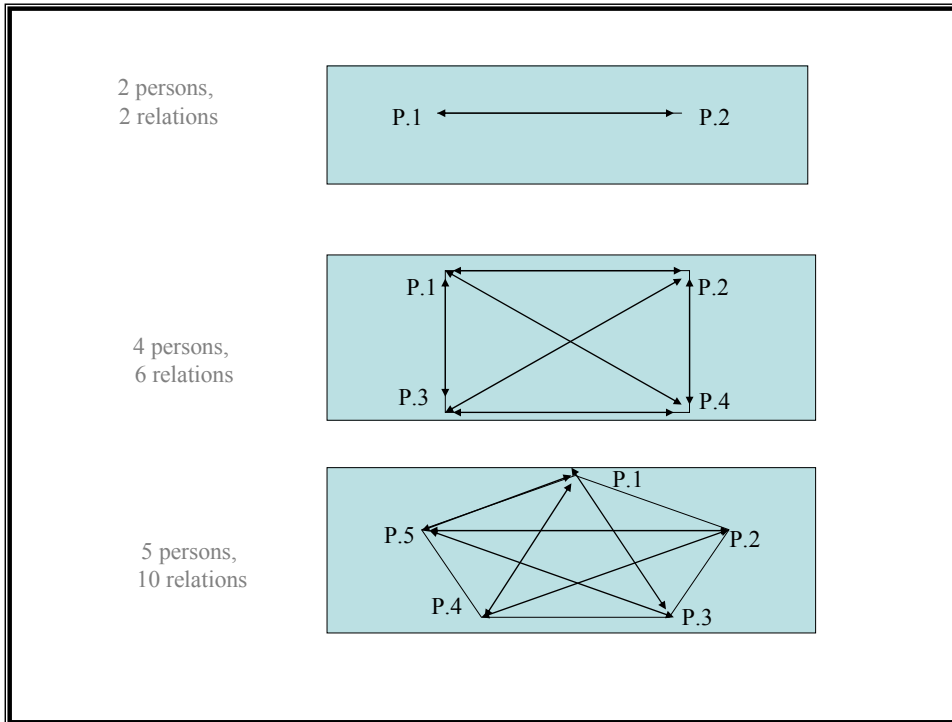
### ***Two-Dane' vessels***

A chief engineer who had sailed on board a ship with a crew of 22 in which only he and the master were Danes, reported:

*"...the captain and I had sailed together for almost three years so we had got to the stage of not having much to tell each other that we did not know already. (...) But I can tell you that there is a tremendous difference between being on board a ship where there are four or two Danish officers. (...) We are normally out for 3-4 month spells and if there are four of us on board, a couple of new men come out while you are on board, maybe with some newspapers with them and letters and perhaps some news from home, or it may be someone you have*

not met before who can contribute something that you have not heard before, etc. It does not sound very much but when you're in the middle of it, it makes a tremendous difference whether there are two or four Danes on board."

**Frame 15. Numbers of social relations and people**



The tremendous difference can be explained by considering Frame 15 (where you can imagine each relationship as a string connecting two people) which shows that the number of relationships grows proportionally faster than the number of people. Moreover, as several interviewees pointed out, relationships with an individual can become as it were overloaded after some weeks together. As one of them indicated, the problem is perhaps not so much relations with Filipinos as the relationship with a single Dane. Neither should one ignore the fact that the old contradictions between engine room and deck officers has not totally disappeared. There are stories of a chief engineer and a captain who only communicated with each other by means of small notes. At least a single Dane vessel does not have that problem!

***Why is loneliness more pronounced in mixed ethnicity crews?***

Danes have various responses to this question, sometimes in combination (all quotations are from Danish officers):

- Lack of common background: you simply do not have anything to talk about when your backgrounds are very different:

*"Well, you can't have a political discussion (...) Politics in the Philippines, well we are totally indifferent about that just as they are indifferent about how things are at home with us. (...) But you do miss many of the discussions you can have about social things. (...) How can you chat about nothing? They have nothing in common with us, socially, family-wise, or politically or anything."*

- Natural grouping: Some people accept as a fact that one's ethnic/national identity indicates your social grouping regardless of where you come from:

*"Social life on board is dying and I believe it makes absolutely no difference whether people come from the East or are Poles (...) They stick together, quite naturally too. (...) Of course it can go well work-wise but socially there is nothing and I don't think we will ever get over that. I mean, it is clear that there is nothing wrong with that. It is quite natural. That's how it is. (...) I even think that it would be exactly the same if we had people as close to us as say five Norwegians. The five Norwegians, they would stick together."*

- Language: Even though one of the advantages according to many Danes is the Filipinos' knowledge of English (although there are others who say that many of them cannot speak enough English and others yet again who say this applies to Danes), a foreign language does impose restrictions on communication:

*"I cannot sit and chat away in English because I run out of words at some point or other and even then you don't know whether he has understood everything."*

*"For example, when you are talking to a Brit, they will give you back the words you don't know in English but Filipinos often don't speak better English than most Danes. If a Dane needs a few words to be able to hold a reasonable conversation and he doesn't get them back, the conversation stops."*

Spin-off from unsatisfactory working relations: Some of the many Danes who considered that foreign seamen's lack of qualifications was the greatest problem (cf. s.5.2), said that it could affect social relations:

*"If there is somebody who does not have the qualifications, then you can't go around feeling glad and smiling all the time because you are so unsure about sailing with a guy like that. Then it affects social relations as well."*

This effect can be due in part to the fact that the Danes themselves become a bit irritated off-duty, too, and partly that the Filipinos themselves might think that someone is bearing a grudge:

*"Taken together with the fact that they are not so good at speaking workwise, then maybe we do get a bit irritated with them and then it becomes more difficult to stand and chat because in the back of their mind, they are thinking, 'he's angry with me'."*

The Filipinos isolate themselves: Unlike the other arguments, here it is the Filipino attitude itself that limits comradeship, *'they stick together'* and Danes often associate this with their exaggerated respect for authority and their mutual cohesiveness, cf. Chapter 7.

*"The Filipinos shut you out."*

*"They sit and take care of themselves. They have no contact with us, none at all."*

*"We will never become a single crew. They don't want to socialize with us."*

The Danes isolate themselves: In some of the quotations, there is some self-recognition that the Danes themselves do not do enough to strengthen social relations. This may be because they are already slightly burned out: *"In the end, those of us who have been here for many years ...we are not geared up to much social activity. We have got used to thinking.. Ah yes, it's 20:00, so we can just pop up to our cabins and read a book or whatever."* The two 'single Danes' made almost identical statements, that if you make an effort yourself, there is no problem: *"Yes but it is up to people themselves, isn't it. We also have to be a little open-minded. No, I have not had the problem, I have always mixed with them as much as I have felt proper."*

There are others, engineering and watch keeping officers, who are critical about some captains who themselves create an unnecessarily great distance.

*"We Danes come into 'their' mess on birthdays, etc., and have great fun singing karaoke. This business of 'daring' to be together makes in my best estimate for a good atmosphere on board. 'Dare' is perhaps the keyword since often it is difficult for various captains since they feel they lose authority, but that is rubbish."*

*"In how many ships have you seen the captain come down and watch a film in the saloon? There are practically no ships where he would do that. He sits up there by himself. (...) And there is something else we should pay more attention to, are we social enough on board? I don't know if we are because when we come up and see the captain, first officer, chief and first engineer in ships with Danish crews, they don't have so much social contact with the rest of the crew."*

I have myself experienced a very great difference in the social environment on the vessels I have sailed with and there is no doubt that the attitude of the captain was the most decisive factor. But it is also clear that being burned out means, amongst other things, that people find it difficult to establish social contact and this may be a vicious circle.

## **8.2 Loneliness – difference between Danes and Filipinos**

*"We wait for lunch, then we sleep, then wait for dinner, then sleep, work. That's seaman's life. When you are new it's exciting, you want to see all the new places, but when you are not new anymore you know all the places and it's boring. You only do it for money. It's hard. And when you don't work the time goes very slowly. But if you are on shore it goes too fast."*

That is how a Filipino describes life on board. Loneliness is naturally not restricted to the Danes and comparisons between the ship and prison are also to be found amongst Filipinos. But in the Filipino interviews, loneliness was not related to crew nationality. It should be added that few of them were in management (they always had a Danish captain over them) and none of them was in a minority in the crew. So their situations are not totally comparable with the Danes. The fact that they often indicate their preference for mixed crews does however indicate further differences.

In a recently published major survey on multi-ethnic crewing, one of the conclusions was that segregation between ethnic groups was greater and collaboration worse in crews of two or three nationalities than in those of more than three nationalities<sup>39</sup>. This corresponds well to statements made by several Filipinos:

*”Once I sailed with many nationalities. There were Canadians, New Zealander, British, Filipinos, Irish, Polish, all at the same time. Then there was no problem. Because when you sail with many nationalities, you have to interact!”*

Why do Filipinos not equate loneliness with mixed crewing in contrast to many Danes and why do they not appear to suffer so much from social isolation despite longer tours and for some of them at least, despite experiencing discrimination? One of the explanations may be that more of them than the Danes actually have experience of multi-ethnic crews. The two Danes in the interviews that were currently sailing with very mixed crews (the one sailing under a foreign flag) had only good experiences to relate.

Some of the older Danes talked of the good old days before the introduction of DIS when *‘everything was different’* and when there was apparently less friction in relations with other nationalities:

*”I was in a ship once, and there were Danes and I don’t know how many different people, Europeans, Colombians, Blacks, Indians, Arabs and the like. At that time we were so mixed that we just had to get on together...Now suddenly there are two categories.”*

These sometimes nostalgic accounts are generally in contrast with the present situation. Possibly, as someone remarked, because they were younger then; possibly because foreigners then were not regarded as direct competitors (cf. s. 5.1).

Another explanation might be that some Danes stick to the principle that the flag aft is Danish and insist that everything from working language to the food has to be Danish, an insistence that can give rise to a great deal of frustration (more all of which in the next chapter). A third explanation can be as follows:

### ***Difference in working identity***

A community consists, however, not just of the people around you but also those whom you have in your thoughts and with whom you identify. Parallels may be drawn here to a Norwegian survey about life on a drilling platform. The author found various adaptive strategies amongst groups (of the same nationality). The motto of one could be: *‘The platform is my home’* and the other: *‘The platform is where I have to be to be in my home’*. It struck me how much this reminded me of Danish and Filipino strategies: the Danes endeavour to create a home for themselves on board, for example with pot plants in their cabins and I have several times heard them referring to the ship as *‘home’*. One of them related how his wife became cross when he told her when he went home that he had forgotten something *‘at home’*, that is on board his ship. Another explained that once after work he had said to his Filipino fitter, *‘you can go home now’*. Later that evening he discovered that the fitter was most upset: he thought he had been fired but the Dane had only meant he could knock off work.

The Filipino motto might on the other hand be: *‘The-ship-is-the-place-where-I-have-to-be-to-stay-in-my-home’*. Their minds are directed towards their family who have a much clearer *‘presence’* in their eyes and are the object for their work. My experience is that a Danish seaman’s first question is whether I have sailed before and with whom. A Filipino will start by asking how many children I have. I had this difference confirmed in reading

Lamvik's book about Filipino seamen. One of his more important points is that at a symbolic level, they never leave their families. And their hard lives and long separations are a kind of sacrifice for the family. They are on board 'on mission' for the family<sup>29</sup>. This may explain why they are apparently better able than Danes to deal with the feeling of loneliness. Naturally there is a difference in degree. Danes' families also play a part and Filipinos also find values in their lives on board but there can be no doubt that it is a Filipino speaking here:

*"I can sacrifice my self to be here because of my family. I don't like the children complaining that they cannot study so that's why I sacrifice myself to work on the ship."*

Several Danes complained that Filipinos are 'just there for the money'. Even though some add that this actually also applies to the Danes, there is some truth in the observation with the rider that the money is not an objective in itself but the result of a sacrifice for the family. Some Danes take this to mean that they do not have professional pride. That is a truth subject to modification but it is also correct that in the west we have learned to a degree that is definitely not universal that our identity is created via our work. As a Dane remarked:

*"[In Denmark] when you work for a company, you are half engaged to your company, in that you try to fulfil all the demands they impose on you, you get involved in your job. You are glad when the company is doing well but get no more in pay. But you are glad because it is as if you have been part of making it that way. And it is (...) a matter of upbringing in Denmark. They lack this of course, they have no feeling of identity, they are completely indifferent to whether they are at [shipping company] or [shipping company], just so long as they have a job where they earn their USD 1000 so they can support their families."*

The quotation above is evidence of an overall difference in adaptive strategies. It should be added, though, that the contractual differences in employment (cf. s.5.1) may play a part. Added to which, there is an extra link for the Filipinos, namely the manning agency, with which they can identify (several Filipino seamen's wives I spoke to did not know the name of their husband's shipping company, only the name of the agency). Despite that, it is my, and others', experience that the Filipinos who have been working for the same shipping company for a lengthy period can perfectly well evince great loyalty to it, as evidenced by the illustrations in Frame 16 and the following quotation from a captain:

*"They have a certain pride. They have in any case at [shipping company], those Filipinos. Some of them have been there for fifteen-twenty years. They have a little pride, that's sure. They are pleased for the shipping company and they feel they are well treated. That in any case has a lot to do with it."*

### **8.3 Communality**

Nowadays in Denmark practically everybody can afford to travel to exotic places and the seaman has lost something of his status as a well travelled person. Most of us have probably become a little blasé about meeting strangers. Perhaps that is why there are more Filipinos who have an eye to the enrichment that comes from meeting other nationalities: '*More language to learn, more knowledge.*' Differences in backgrounds can mean that you do not have much in common to talk about, except that that it in itself can give rise to a conversation. A Danish female seafarer reports:

*"M is the seaman that I have talked most to here on board. (...) We have talked about everything possible, the situation at home, beliefs, wind and weather and also the exciting topic of why I as a woman am at sea. He thinks I should be in a more feminine job because he thinks that being at sea is nothing for women because there are no such delicate beings as us ...but we haven't finished discussing that yet so we shall probably take that up again some other day."*

The few interviews I have had with cadets contained relatively many positive accounts. By virtue of their age and intermediate position, cadets can meet foreigners on a more equal footing. Neither do they have the older seaman's more or less nostalgic picture to which they compare the present situation. Here is first a Danish then a Filipino cadet:

*"I have had some incredibly good Filipino friends who have taught me lots of things, also when we have been ashore, taught me some social and cultural things, that kind of thing. I learnt Spanish from one of the Filipinos. I think I have learned many things from them. (...) I have tested some thresholds with respect to tolerance and how I see myself when I am together with others. And I have become considerably better at getting work to go smoothly by having a good atmosphere, by chatting to people and laughing with them. These are things I can also use here in Denmark. It means so much to have fun at work, as indeed it has been, and the Filipinos have helped a good part of the way. We could naturally always talk about girls and sex and the kind of things one talks about when there are lots of guys together, and that kind of bound us together. (...).*

*FK: When you are off-duty with them, do you have so much fun as with Danes?*

*- Yes definitely because they can let go in quite another way than we can and they can sit and sing and be happy and much more free in some ways than we can. I have also benefited from that, quite definitely."*

*"In [company] I was working with Danish cadets. It is good because I learned from them and they learned from me. We shared experiences, and we had parties together and went swimming together. [Example of learning from each other]: Cargo operation, because some of it I did not know. And they could learn of me other parts of cargo operation, safety matters and sighting stars. (...) I have no experience of discrimination. (...) There was a Danish cadet, I talked much with him, we were good friends."*

Here it should be noted that cultural differences are more than counterbalanced by being of the same age, a factor that often gets forgotten if the focus is solely on cultural differences. A young Danish officer says:

*"I have also been sailing, four Danes together and I actually felt more lonely because they were considerably older than me."*

### ***If you are a good leader I am a good follower***

The comradeship that can arise between two people or a smaller group can in certain circumstances include the whole vessel. There are naturally differences in crews and in how much they are prepared to socialize but everything indicates the management has an important part to play. A Danish chief engineer reports:

*"Sometimes you come across a crew that is just so social so that you too ...we feel that we are also welcome down there and we sit a little longer and they invite us to share whatever specialities they are preparing. (...) We lay off India and they caught octopus and put them*



*on the hatch to dry and then on the barbecue afterwards; then we had to taste and so on. Yes, well. You do come across crews when it is really social but the two seniors in there, it helps if they are very social."*

The fact that the two seniors are social does not necessarily have to mean that they should arrange lots of leisure activities. Day to day support is just as essential. A Filipino AB compares a captain and his relief thus:

*"[Captain A] is very good, very sweet to the crew. He comes here and sits and talks with us, also when we have a party. If you talk to that captain, he talks, if you don't talk, he talks! (...) It is very important with good relations to each other. If you are a good leader I am a good follower. If you are not a good leader I am not a good follower. [Captain A] he says 'good morning guys', 'good evening guys'. [Captain B] he only comes down to eat and up again... Always he's up, we're down."*

**Frame 16. Filipino loyalty to their shipping company**

Top: Tricycle decorated with the company logo.

Bottom: Seaman's wife in her living room with wheel and model ship from her husband's company.



This description of a good and a less good captain (in social terms) thus corresponds well to the following account from a Danish captain whom one might think was the same person although this is not the case:

*"I have a very relaxed relationship with the crew regardless of where they come from. I have never been someone to keep a distance. (...) One of the reasons they like me compared to my relief was that he never greeted them. He just came and sat down and ate, and if he met someone in the passageway, maybe just a 'Hi'. Whereas I, regardless of whether they are Danes, have always gone into the crew mess and said 'Good morning, enjoy your meal.'; and given them a wave if they were standing on the bridge or ...small things like that. It means that they get quite another relationship with me as their captain, I think. (...) If you show them (...) that you are not just a ...stone face, who just gives orders, but use a lighter touch and make a joke once in a while, you get the crew to stick much better together."*

A morning greeting from the captain apparently has a great symbolic value. Possibly because it is evidence of a leader who respects his employees, one who listens and is ready to give them the necessary backup and accept his responsibility right the way through. Frame 17 gives specific examples of a leader who gets 'good followers': he looks, listens and speaks.

As he remarks, these are characteristics that are important for every leader but they may be even more important for a foreign crew.

### ***Getting the crew to 'stick together'***

One of the things I discovered by participating in daily shipboard routines is that most of the long working day is often passed in loneliness, on the bridge where you are often alone, in the engine room where ear defenders isolate you, or on deck where most of the maintenance work is also done alone and with a great deal of noise. Added to which is that with communication being in what is for all a foreign language, it is even further restricted by the background noise.

Even though the physical environment is restrictive, there are not many opportunities when the whole crew gets together: when evaluating fire and boat drills and on special festive occasions (see next chapter for meal times). It is the quality of the time people spend together on and off duty that is important. It also fluctuates a great deal.

## Frame 17. See, Hear and Speak!



Illustration by Carsten Madsen and Jørgen Koefoed. (Write, speak and be heard: a handbook on mediation).

Chief Engineer M - In [shipping company] we had problems with the crew complaining that it took 3-4 months before they got their pay. (...) And it was the same here at [shipping company2] so not long ago we had a real bust up down there when we said: 'This cannot be right'. 'They said: 'We have done all we can'. So we tried another route in the ship I was on because ISM\* had come and we, the captain and I, wrote a non-compliance order against the shipping company stating that our crew had not been paid, which caused an incredible uproar. The crew manager called me and said: 'M, you signed this, what do you mean by that?' 'I think that the people you have employed out in the Philippines to employ people are part of the company; it is you who make the contract. Next time you are out there making a contract, then you must write that when you transfer money to the Philippines, [it must be] transferred two days after. You can go into any bank in the Philippines and say: 'So and so much money must be transferred to this and that bank account. And they must send you a telex confirming the transfer and when you have, then the non-compliance order will be cancelled, but not before'. But it really helped because now they have been out there and got hold of them. (...)

There is no doubt that if the crew find out that the [supervisor] says that he stands by what he says, if they come and ask about something and the supervisor thinks it is right and backs them up, then you have the crew 100 percent with you.

One instance I saw was when the first officer was killed, a Chinese, (...) then two months on one of the Chinese came to me and said: 'M, that insurance we have, could you try and look at it? "What is the problem?' 'Well ....his family have not received any money' (...a detailed description follows of how the chief engineer had followed up on the case which ended with discovering that an employee of the manning agency in Hong Kong had transferred the insurance money to his own account).

Chief Engineer N: If you had not looked into the matter, no-one would have ever discovered anything at all.

Chief engineer M: Probably not but I can tell you, after that I could go down and ask any of the crew: 'Could you do that?' 'Yes!' Even if they had to stand on their heads, they would do it! Because they knew that someone would back them up and that is most important. I think generally that Danes, too, if they discover that in your role as their superior, that you say: 'I will try to do something about that', then you must try to do something or you must say they must themselves sort it out using this or that channel. But for a foreigner it is very, very important.

Examples of how differently evaluations and safety meetings can go according to Danish officers can be seen in s.7.4. It is obvious that at these meetings, communication is not only limited by Filipino reticence. In extreme instances, one might actually say it is sabotaged by the supervisor or the shipping company concerned, for example if the shipping company fails to send a single foreigner on a safety course. On the other hand, there are some supervisors that get everybody to speak up and this indicates that active participation by Filipinos in these meetings is directly proportional to management's attitude. Apparently, informal meetings have a favourable impact. A chief engineer reports:

"If there has been time for it, then on a Saturday morning I say: 'Let's all take a little safety meeting down in the engine room where all engine room crew are together. Then I find some things that affect safety and put it on the agenda. It could be something about (...) them covering a fire extinguisher, small things like that that I take up and say: 'You all know perfectly well that that is no good if somebody comes on board, etc.' Then we have someone or other start the meeting and I usually ask about a few other things we need to talk about. Then they have warmed up a bit and are more minded for a dialogue and then it often happens that they produce something or other, (...) whether he could get a pair of gauntlets and small things like that. And if there are perhaps some bigger problems, sometimes they then bring them up. (...) It's something I have introduced because as chief engineer I need to have some contact with them all in the course of the week. It can be a bit difficult to get them to speak up, for ten minutes just the two of us, because they are a little shy and they don't really want to say anything. But they will if they are all together. If there is a Filipino who thinks he would like to have a pair of gauntlets, then it is better if they all want them, then it is like not him that has asked for something and it is all spread across more people. (...) That is one method I have used to get into contact with them, too."

This account is in direct contrast with another when the Filipinos did not get a chance to 'warm up'. A Danish engineering officer gave a brief account of the meetings: *"On some ships you do the drills just to hold the drills - and then there is nothing more to it. (...) 'Any questions?' you ask, but then the Filipinos definitely have no questions."*

A sense of community feeling can also be strengthened by some leisure activities. Not only do they counteract the monotony and feelings of loneliness but they also have a positive effect on working relations and vice versa. The classic leisure activity on board is the barbecue which has a great advantage that it is held outside and is thus in a neutral area, since it is obvious that all indoor areas quickly become regarded as belonging to one or other ethnic group (a problem that probably disappears when the crew consists of many nationalities). Smaller events also work and on board tankers and other vessels where it is impossible to have barbecues, a party would generally be held in the Filipino area, preferably with a little karaoke. But just as for evaluation and safety meetings, there are great differences in the dividends of such a party from a Danish perspective. Some people think that they do not improve relations since people group into their nationalities. One captain said for example: *'These kind of events don't help because they are practically doomed to failure in advance'*. Others give lively accounts of good barbecues. This applies to practically all the Filipinos but also many Danes. *'I have never had such fun'*, said a Dane in the middle of his account. But it is also clear that it is the Danes who have to make an effort to mix. A Danish captain who sailed as the only Dane reports:

**Frame 18. Loneliness and togetherness**



Loneliness at work



Barbecue on board

"If we are out at sea and it is reasonable weather, then on a Saturday afternoon we have a little barbecue together and have a bottle of wine. (...) but I will say this about the Filipinos, that we are different types all of us and if you isolate yourself, then it is probably not fun but I mix with them and have a nice time, have a chat with other people and I also think they like it."

Parties on board are generally associated with drinking alcohol and there are several witness statements indicating that controlled and moderate consumption has a positive effect. It has to be remembered that the vessel is not just a workplace but also where all activities go on for months on end, often without long stay ashore. 'They must not take the fun out of our lives' as one Dane said. There is a multiple effect on social lives. It partly marks the high point in daily routines when it is difficult to tell weekdays from weekends, and it can help loosen things up if there are difficult subjects to be addressed (which can be difficult on a ship<sup>33</sup>). One Dane tells of a workmate who was told his brother had been killed. Throughout the tour, they 'treated' him over a bottle of beer and he could 'cry for an hour'. 'I really believe we saved him from going to a psychologist because by the time we landed, he had by and large dealt with the loss of his brother.' Problems do not have to be so dramatic. A Filipino speaking of parties:

"This is the time when you can have a conversation, because you are under the influence of the drinking. And sometimes you talk about your problems and the Danish also explain about the problem. The party is the one time where the Danish and the Filipino are having conversations. That's the time they are meeting. Especially when you drink a little bit."

Off-duty life naturally means other things than barbecues and I, too, have enjoyed being able to play table tennis on board. I wrote in my diary: 'It gives a kind of fellowship in which all barriers, cultures, ranks, gender, age disappear'. Despite the difficult conditions and the shortage of time, there are usually opportunities for strengthening social life, including some events that from a health point of view are in line with a barbecue. On one ship, for example, they invented a game that fitted it in with conditions on board, 'Deck golf' and I had great fun in Rotterdam spending an afternoon on the Heyplatt sports ground with most of the crew displaying their skills in various sports. There for the moment there were no Danes or Philippine's, officers or men but a *team* having great fun.

But I have often wondered how much the quality and content of off-duty lives depend on a single person, namely the captain.

### ***Common story, common stories***

'You may not know it but in reality it is you that is being surveyed. We study how an ordinary person gets on with a seaman's life," was what the captain said to me in fun on one passage. It is true to say that, irrespective of their nationality, to an outside observer, seamen are slightly special and because of their special living conditions, they have a strong sense of identity as seamen. The difference between a seaman and an ordinary person may sometimes be more than the difference in nationality.

## Frame 19. Time for a yarn



It has often struck me on my tours and on other occasions with seamen how good they are at storytelling and how important it can be for their comradeship (see also<sup>39</sup> for similar observations). It undoubtedly comes from the time when there was nothing else to do in the evening, before every officer's cabin was equipped with TV and video (which according to some can emphasize loneliness) and even before they had electricity on board.<sup>41</sup> In the ship where I found the best transnational relations, it was also clear that telling stories was something that bound them together. The best stories came when most of the crew had been ashore at a karaoke bar in Brazil. The Filipino cook had unintentionally annoyed an Indonesian. Several Indonesians got up ready for a fight. But when the whole crew, Danes and Filipinos also got up, the Indonesian realized they were in a minority and calmed down. It all happened several voyages back but several of the men now on board had been there.

What I want to illustrate with this story is yet again how important it is to have the same people on board or at least some who have been with the company for a long time. Regardless of whether people have different cultural backgrounds, they always have lots in common if they have shared experiences at sea. Filipinos may be more occupied with their families but they also talk a lot about the maritime life (even though it is in tagalog, the Filipino national language, you can recognize the names of Danish shipping companies and captains) and a couple of mutual acquaintances can give rise to a lot of conversation. A Dane says also of the advantage of having the same men on board again:

"There have been many of us over the past eight-ten years. If you talk to some other people, they will know them too. So you actually can have a conversation with them."

Like Duval<sup>33</sup> I have also noted that they often tease/joke on board (another way of protecting yourself against conflict situations). On the one hand, humour can break boundaries but on the other hand, it can be a conditional on culture and hence give rise to serious misunderstandings. Always having to be careful not to be misunderstood can even harm relations. Here again, having the same crew members again is most valuable because they then know each other so well that they can allow themselves to joke. Here are two examples from my tours:



The Danish first officer came to the fore-castle where I was working with the Filipinos and wanted me for another duty. He said to the Filipinos: *"I am taking her with me because she is afraid of being alone with you!"* I asked him later whether they might not misunderstand something like that. 'Yes,' he was quick to reply. *'I would never have said that to new men, they would have been insulted'*. But he allowed himself to say it because he had sailed with the bosun before and so knew him well.

On board the same vessel, a Filipino first officer came to the bridge when off duty while the captain and the pilot were on the bridge. The captain asked why he was not asleep: *'I just wanted to see whether it is all being done properly'*, replied the first officer to everyone's amusement.

## 9. Mess, accommodation and galley

There are two reasons for my using a chapter to focus on the mess and accommodation. It has partly been included as an example of how cultural and structural matters merge into each other so it can be difficult to see where one begins and the other ends. It is also an area with which many seamen are specially concerned, especially the Danes which may in part be down to there most often being a Filipino cook. What can really get Danes hopping mad is a Filipino cook who is not qualified for the job and has no understanding of western cookery.

All the focus on the galley and food is an indication for one crew manager that everything is going well on board: *'If people have nothing other to complain about, they can always complain about the food, even though it is good'*. This is, however, only one of many explanations and it ignores the fact that meals on board have a nutritional, a recreational and a social function. Unsatisfactory meal times may also be regarded as the final straw that breaks the camel's back and it is indicative that the greatest wish of several Danes was to have a Danish cook even though they also mentioned many other problems. Of course, the crew manager's views can also be reversed, as echoed by this Danish steward: *'One thing is absolutely definite when you're sailing: If people don't get good food, they become miserable and unreliable. Regardless of whether they are Danes or Filipinos, if the food is good and well cooked, then their problems are not so great'*. It is also possible to argue that the recreational aspect of food is growing at a time when leisure on board and ashore has become sparse. Another Dane emphasized the role of meal times by expressing this reservation: *'There are not so many things that you can enjoy on board a ship nowadays'*. Further, in recent years in Denmark there has been a sharp focus on nutrition and a balanced diet and this focus is starting to affect shipping. A seafarer, for example, can lose his ticket if his BMI (body mass index) is too high.<sup>ix</sup> All of this contributes to added awareness about diet even though it is not directly the nutritional value of their diet that occupies most seamen. Finally it appears as if all the frustrations generated amongst Danes by working with foreign seaman crystallize in the region of the galley. When some Danes invoke their right to their own culture, it is preferably 'meat balls like mother made them' that they have in mind. Maybe that is especially why this chapter deals mostly with Danes. Elsewhere it has been demonstrated that complaints about food could be a symptom of entirely different problems.<sup>42</sup> Amongst Danish sailors, they may relate to the lack of quality socializing at meal times.

### 9.1 Social and cultural implications of meals

Some cooks are themselves highly aware that their role is not just nutritional. A Danish steward saw himself as a 'kind of welfare officer' and a Filipino cook who made three different kinds of food every day for the three ethnic groups, said:

"The cook is always the main attraction in the ship. (...) Different attitudes, ideas, and also different taste: the cook is always the target. I've sailed with many nationalities (...), but when it comes to blame someone: Always the cook! (...) Yes, the relationships on the ship are important. For me as a cook, that's one of my responsibilities, that everybody is happy! "

---

<sup>ix</sup> Statutory Instrument 903 of 28/09/2000 on medical examination of seamen and fishermen

A Danish captain reported that he was soon to sail with an all Danish crew and added that it would be lovely. When I asked why it would be lovely, he replied:

*"Mostly because of the food I would say. The greatest social problem we have, that is the diet, I think. We have Filipino cooks. They are clever enough as such, they make good food but they cannot make the food that our stomachs are used to, so it is not ... We survive but it is not the same as saying: 'Let's go down and have something to eat that we are really looking forward to,' it's not. (...) People go down and eat and eat and then get up and go. If we had a Danish cook who made a special effort with the food once in a while and you had some nice rare steaks or something else delicious, then you would spend a long time sitting and eating and talking and covering a lot of ground. You don't do that this way. Messes empty very quickly. Then it becomes a bit boring in the end, I feel."*

Note that the interviewee refers to diet as a social problem. The problem consists especially of the meal no longer being an occasion for people to get together and socialize. The problem is greatest on board ships where there are few Danes and where the Filipino officers almost always choose to eat with the men. As such, it does not matter whether there are separate or common messes, because the Filipinos then eat at their own tables or possibly in the duty mess. However, one captain, as the only Dane, does say that the officers show consideration and eat with him. Many Danes express a genuine regret at the lack of togetherness whereas it is possible to detect in others a reluctance to share a table with the Filipinos (... 'their food smells and their table manners are pretty awful') even though they maintain that the separation is by the Filipino's own wish. Most Filipinos themselves say, too, that they would rather eat together because of the language and the food (in some ships they are expected to eat Danish food if they sit with the officers) but a Filipino officer says that he moved over to eat with the men after having been harassed in the officers' mess by an individual Dane.

It is especially on festive occasions that Danes get most disappointed that they cannot sit and enjoy their food:

*"I have never been so disappointed as on that Christmas Eve! We had bought suckling pig, straight onto the barbecue, they had stood there practically the whole day and it was all beautifully arranged and they had all helped to the cook, nothing was missing. As skipper, I and the cook were the last to sit down. It took ten minutes, I tell you, then they had finished eating! Then they all shot off to one of the small tables and wanted their dessert and I felt really disappointed, and so alone. (...) It was not because they did not want to be with us. We got together afterwards and sat and talked, but it was not the nice time..."*

This captain otherwise had good relations with his Filipino crew. The question is whether they were aware that his expectations had been disappointed. Table manners and meals as a gathering point for socializing as we know it in Denmark, are a Danish phenomenon.<sup>43</sup> I have been for three weekends with a seaman's family in the Philippines without seeing the whole family at table once.

### ***'It's a Danish vessel with a Danish flag!'***

In Chapter 5, we saw that the feeling of being disadvantaged was widespread amongst the Danes. This feeling was most commonly expressed in accounts of meals, as in the following conversation:

*"Here up north we prefer to have rye bread and cold cuts once a day but they don't know about that at all down there and hot meals twice a day is not our culture. But culture is nothing we Danish seaman can demand, it is only all the others who can demand it."*

*- To say it as it is, the Filipinos have to be there, we may have to be there. That is very much how ...what I am saying is not quite right but that is how we often feel."*

Other people claim that more attention is paid to the foreign crew or that the Filipinos get more per diem allowances for their food than the Danes. Statements like that are not always based on having to meet the wishes of all on board but do reveal an expectation (not without parallels with the immigrant debate in Denmark) that it is the others who have to fit in with Danish conditions and that customs follow the flag - so long as *'it is a Danish ship with a Danish flag'*. But in practice in most cases a solution is found that meets practically everybody's wishes. In vessels with Danish cooks, they make rice for the Filipinos, who also get 'to stand out there for half an hour in the evening to make their own food' and there is often a Filipino mess attendant to look after their food. Some Danes also approved of helping the cook to learn to make Danish food. There were actually a couple of positive accounts of being internationalized and getting used to each other's eating habits. As one Filipino puts it: *'the taste changes sometimes when you taste the things many times in a period'*. But there are some indications that Danish demands sometimes verge on the unreasonable:

*"I can remember I was there one New Year's Eve and he [Filipino cook] had discovered that in Denmark we have cod at New Year. So that is what we got, just that and potatoes and a sauce of course. Many of the Danes who sail don't like fish so they were very dissatisfied."*

*That cook must have thought the Danes were ungrateful! The quote shows quite clearly that eating habits in Denmark are undergoing rapid change and are becoming more and more varied so it can be difficult to hit on everybody's taste. It also shows that the threshold has moved between what one might objectively characterize as a bad cook and the more subjective expectations Danes have of him. Perhaps the notion of missing meatballs as mother made them will disappear with a new generation of Danes.*

## **9.2 Qualifications**

As with other professional groups, there is a great difference in Danes' assessment of the cooks' professional abilities but most also feel that they do not have the necessary formal qualifications. Most captains or stewards claim that their cooks are trained for 10-21 days, unless you are unlucky enough to get a builder or such like out as a cook. A Danish steward on tour in a vessel with Filipino cooks put it like this:

*"It is not because they would be worse if they had just had the same training. But most of them have only an 18 day training at a school. (...) They learn exactly the same things as Danes but they do so in 18 days where we others have taken four years as apprentices and six months at school, and they try and learn it all in eighteen days; they just can't."*

**Frame 20. The Mess**



The Captain and the Filipino cook seen chatting in the mess



The author in her usual spot in the crew mess

There generally appears to be great confusion about what qualifications cooks are required to have, who should regulate them and whether requirements have been met or not.

Training for cooks does not come under STCW as for all the others and Denmark has not acceded to ILO Convention 69 which regulates this area. According to the Danish Maritime Authority (interview) this is because it would require cooks on board all ships to have been certificated. Manning for ships' crews is done individually but the standard practice is that the requirement for a ship's cook only applies for crews larger than ten. The Manning Act (No. 15 of 1997) stipulates that a cook shall have a ticket as a ship's cook and that on board a DIS vessel, this can be replaced by a 48 month apprenticeship in cookery, including at least 24 months on seagoing vessels (s. 8 (2)). The Danish Maritime Authority states that they have an unwritten agreement with the Danish Maritime Catering Union and that the 48 month requirement does not necessarily have to be fulfilled if there is 'substantial equivalence', that is, comparable qualifications. The Maritime Authority further remarked that *'it is incredibly rare for cases involving the qualifications of cooks to be submitted to us'* and they were accordingly not aware of special problems in the area. The Maritime Catering Union, for its part, felt that *'there is only about 10% compliance with the formal legal requirements, since cooks can currently be certificated on the basis of many convoluted routes, by way for example of merit recognition, etc.'* The 'approximately 10%' corresponds by and large to the figure given by Danish seaman in the present survey.

To cut a long story short, the Danish Maritime Authority feels that it is the Danish stewards and captains who would have to demonstrate any problem and maintain that they have not been made aware of any problems in this area. The Maritime Catering Union feels that the Maritime Authority does not fulfil its regulatory duties (but acknowledges that it is incredibly difficult for the Danish Maritime Authority to deal with training and employment documents from hotels on the other side of the world, for example), the captains and stewards feel that they are being let down by the shipping companies and by the Danish Maritime Authority and that it does not help to sack under-qualified cooks since there is the risk of the next one being even worse. Crew managers say that either that they cannot find their way around the legislation or that it is up to the Filipino manning agencies to check certificates. The confusion is not been lessened by the fact that training as ships cooks ceased in Denmark several years back and apparently it is extremely difficult to see how one can today acquire a ticket as a ship's cook.

The manning threshold of ten does not explain much with respect to this survey since no correlation has been determined between the size of crew and satisfaction with the food.

### ***Getting the same crew helps***

To take a positive view, it should be mentioned that most Danes have also come across good cooks (on the three tours I have had with Filipino cooks on board, I could not complain about the food, a feeling I shared with the rest of the crew). The Filipinos are also generally regarded as willing to learn so they can in time improve their professional competencies and adapt their cooking to match Danish needs. One Dane claims that Filipino cooks: "...are more willing, they do more to make people satisfied than a Danish cook normally would."

Here again, it is seen as a great advantage if they have been with the shipping line for some time: *"Those that have been employed for some time, they naturally improve along the way."*

Some shipping companies rotate their Danish stewards among various ships so they can more or less train up the Filipino cooks. We have to face the fact that this practice can give rise to conflict from both sides. It may in part be difficult for a Filipino cook suddenly to be acting under someone who is there to control and train him, and also the Dane may feel that he is training up other people to take over his job. It is perhaps not a coincidence that it was just such a steward who was quoted in Frame 4 as not feeling sorry for the Filipinos that 'got the Danes kicked out.' Others take a more sanguine view, however. For them, too, there can be satisfaction in seeing the same cook after a time:

"I had a case last year when I had one [cook], and I asked: How did you learn to bake that bread? I could see that it looked very much like my own and so he said: 'Yes but it was you that gave me the recipe in 1994' adding that it was excellent bread; 'what I do is I divide the dough and take some away and I finish it off for the Danes, and I do the other for the Filipinos.' It is very strange to come across someone after so many years and see him still using my old recipe, right? That can only be a good thing."

### ***Hygiene***

One area where, according to the Danes, the lack of qualifications is really noticeable is in hygiene which is regarded as very poor. This applies to lack of knowledge of the principles of cleansing and handling goods, deep-freezing, etc. by the cook and his assistants. Complaints also come from Danes who are otherwise highly satisfied with the food and Filipinos generally. Some quotes, all from Danes, tell their own tale:

*"I am absolutely certain that if the health and safety inspector were to come to our galley, it would be closed instantly."*

*"It applies right across the board, hygiene and cooking and goods handling, that is, keeping the cold stores tidy. For example, (...) if he has to go down and get some meat, he goes down and hacks off a piece of meat and the rest is chucked back on a shelf without being wrapped up again. And then it sits around there, fish and meat and poultry, all mixed up. (...) It is not an exceptional case, it happens everywhere."*

*"The electric meat slicer, I have taken the blades off and I am not lying when I tell you that there was a layer of slime on the other side."*

*"You don't stand there and peel potatoes with earth on straight onto the meat that is lying, draining off in the sink, do you? (...) What is more, if you finally cut a couple of slices of meat for sandwiches, if it is not eaten, then it goes in and out of the fridge for a couple of weeks until it is absolutely green."*

*"They find hygiene difficult and it is because they don't understand it and I am not putting them down when I say so, it is simply because they come from another culture where they don't think such things are important."*

### ***Lack of shipping company back-up***

It is probably fortunate for the Filipinos that most Danes acknowledge that they cannot accuse people who do not have the training to do their job:

*"At the very least, it is easier to say to a Danish cook who can't cook and a Danish cook who is just a pig that he at least has the professional background for knowing better. And you*

*can say to him, 'D'you know what, we can't use you so go home'. It is much more difficult with a Filipino that does not have the background. Where should he have got it from? It is up to us others to teach him when he comes on board. It is the skipper who should keep an eye on him and check whether he takes five kilos of beef out, cuts off two kilos and then re-freezes the final three."*

Instead, several Danes turn their frustration on their shipping companies. In some instances the shipping company apparently expects their Danish officers to train up the cook: *'When you complain back to the shipping line about the fact that he cannot cook, they say well go and train him. I should not have to train him to cook! He is a professional cook, it's not up to me. (...) I can't even season meat balls or whatever. I think that is a bit off, the approach from the shipping company at home.'*

The greatest frustration applies to hygiene:

*"The worst thing is that they do not understand (...) that they must not use a chopping board for cutting up chicken and pork and then vegetables afterwards. They don't understand when I tell them off for doing so. They have not learned anything and the rest of us have to put up with it. It is probably the department I am most critical about. But it is not [their fault], again it is the shipping companies because they are totally indifferent, just so long as they can get Maritime Authority approval for somebody that can be used as a cook, then they don't care."*

Confronted with this kind of statement, a crew manager responded that *'if hygiene is so bad as some of them claim, they would spend all day at death's door.'*

I rather feel we should draw the line at waiting for a couple of deaths to test the veracity of the Danes' claims.

Amongst the interviews there was a shipping company, according to the Danes, where the hygiene in the galley and the rest of the vessel was absolutely nothing to complain about. Because of its cargo, the shipping company depended on maintaining strict hygiene, so it is possible, also with a Filipino crew, to have a high standard of hygiene, if everybody agrees to prioritize it.



## **10. Discussion of proposed improvements**

In this chapter I review proposals that could improve the working environment for both Danes and Filipinos (and should preferably benefit other nationalities) in mixed crews. The proposals first reflect suggestions made by those involved in the survey and secondly, those that arise from the good and not so good examples revealed by interviews and observation, and thirdly proposals that arise from the analysis of results itself. It should, however, be noted that not all of the proposals suggested by respondents have been addressed, either because they were too unconstructive or unrealistic. This applies for example to the proposal to only employ Danes on Danish vessels or to out-flag the entire Danish fleet. Several Danish unions propose employing foreign seamen and/or allowing these trades unions to accept them as members and negotiate on their behalf. This could possibly solve many of the problems especially the marginalization of Filipinos and their lack of legal status. The proposal is deemed, however, unrealistic at this time. Other proposals have not been included because they were too specific. This applies especially to certain comments from Filipinos such as a request for all side-effects of medicine on board to be in English. In reviewing the proposals, it is also possible to differentiate between three levels (although not without some overlap): (1) individual input on board (in which the captain would play a central part); (2) shipping company policies and (3) overall maritime policy with involvement of the regulatory authorities and organizations.

Most of the following proposals have already been introduced by some parties, either by individual seamen or as more general shipping company policy, and may therefore provide inspiration for others.

### **10.1 Qualifications and language**

Proper qualifications and ability to speak English may be regarded as the two jokers in the survey. So long as there are not absolutely clear guidelines on these two points, it is very difficult to assess the efficacy of the other proposals. When it comes to language, the problem is far greater for other nationalities (especially the Polish or Thai repair crews and others that are not part of the safety crew) but they also constitute examples of communications being limited by insufficient linguistic ability by both Danes and Filipinos. It is not just a matter of safety but also of well-being on board so there should at the very least be the requirement for all crew members to be able to communicate with each other. The extent of the qualification problems amongst foreign seamen has been very difficult to determine. According to most Danish seamen, it is very extensive but according to the shipping companies and the Danish Maritime Authority, it does not exist. It is obviously incredibly important to have the extent of the problem revealed and this requires a far more open and legal debate about the whole shipping industry than is the case right now. Danish seamen need to be specific and precise in their complaints and they should be able to prove and demonstrate the problem far more consistently, without being afraid of being accused of racism or losing their own jobs. There must be also much clearer lines about grounds for dismissing or not re-employing Filipinos which would in itself ensure a proper level of qualifications, and the legal status of employees.

The special confusion about the training of cooks may be taken as a clear example of the advantages of clarifying the extent of the problem. For many Danes, food is the be all and end all and it can be difficult now and then to differentiate between references to insufficient qualifications and what may be attributed to not knowing about Danish cookery. With respect to the latter, Danes must learn to swallow their pride or rather, swallow some bowls of rice. But on the other hand, they deserve having their complaints about the lack of elementary hygiene and handling of raw materials taken seriously. The current confusion about requirements for cookery qualifications and the way in which many people in authority apparently turn a blind eye to hygiene requirements can only make complaints and frustrations run amok.

## 10.2 The same people

Even though most people indicate that it is a good thing to switch vessel and crew now and then so that people do not get too fixed in their ways, taking on a new crew is a massive load. The wish for some continuity amongst the crew applies irrespective of nationality but appears to be even greater when it comes to foreigners, partly so as to minimize communication problems arising from the linguistic and cultural differences and partly because it is apparently more difficult for Danes to establish trusting relationships with foreigners. It is actually not a problem that the survey has revealed that cannot be minimized by ensuring contractual relationships with the shipping company. Having the same crew members again is often a direct wish and even more often mentioned in asides regardless of the topic. It is often difficult to differentiate whether this is mainly about safety or for social reasons since the two things are often perceived as two sides of the same coin.

- Trust: Filipinos must first be able to demonstrate that they can do their job and thus not feel that they are being judged throughout the tour for a mistake made at the beginning. One of them put it like this in the questionnaire:

(Advantages working in Danish ships): "Permanent superiors on board, because they already know (...) what I am capable of, and they have a strong confidence in me when it comes to suggestions and cooperation for a harmonious atmosphere on board.

(Disadvantages): New superiors on board, because they tend to evaluate me first and foremost. It's like treading on a hanging rope, that you don't like to commit a slightest mistake to get their nods. As the saying goes, first impressions last. So affecting my job, because I feel tense and nervous."

Filipino comments also correspond to the asides made by many Danes, such as the chief engineer saying that the greatest problem was that they would not admit their mistakes while adding: "*There are extremely few who know us that will come up and say 'there is something wrong here'*". It is also clear in this and other interviews that this is primarily about reciprocal trust: "*It is probably unconscious but there is a change in our attitude to him [who has been with us before], he gets asked to do more and more.*"

- Becoming accustomed: "*If you have the same people for a long time, they get accustomed to our way of doing things. And we naturally learn more about them, too. It is mutual.*" The more obvious cultural differences (such as summoning someone with a gesture which insults a Filipino, and that Filipinos lose face if they get a dressing down in the hearing of other people) are now well known and it is possible to avoid elementary misunderstandings. The

Filipinos ‘eventually get to appreciate our sense of humour and learn about our lifestyle and thought processes’. They not only learn about the way Danes act but also about the ship-board culture and business processes on board.

- Personal knowledge: Quite apart from cultural differences, there are also individual variations which require acclimatisation since every person has different expectations and limits: *‘When we know each other already, we know a little about the other person expectations, reaction patterns and working rhythm. If you have first have to get to know someone, it can easily take a month before they are really up to speed about the way we work.’* Here there are several Danes who indicated that it makes a big difference if just one of the Filipinos is a returnee: *‘Then everything goes quietly and smoothly. Someone you know! And that is the same if he is a Danes, see? (...) Then they don't go spreading those stupid rumours ...he is a stupid pig, etc.’*

The Filipinos who have longer service also are more aware of their important role as mediators or bridge builders, for example by telling new arrivals that the Danes don't bear grudges or that something has just been said in fun. But regardless of nationality, it also increases a sense of security and thus job satisfaction if there is somebody you already know in a new crew: *‘The day I join ship, it makes me glad when there is somebody I already know.’*

Other advantages mentioned are that it increases employee loyalty (*‘affection’ for the vessel*), that it cuts the risk of getting people who are under-qualified and naturally it increases employees’ job security with all the advantages that brings with it for themselves as well as their workmates and the shipping company (cf. s.6.1). For many Danes who have got used to working with Filipinos, the worst scenario is seeing them replaced by another nationality: *‘Some of the Filipinos are now getting up to an acceptable standard at work since they have been with the shipping company for many years and we have trained them up after all. (...) The moment they go and some new arrive, we have to start from year zero again.’*

Even though some shipping companies refer to Filipinos as having full contracts, it still means that much more could be done to retain them. Several Filipinos have their own proposal:

*‘The company should give considerations for the ratings who are with the company for many years by giving them incentives like return bonus (seniority) or stand-by fee once you sign your contract.’*

During the survey, we saw some examples where, for inexplicable reasons, people were not re-employed often after many years of service (s. 6.1); some, after many years as a boatswain, had to work as an AB. There were also some crew having been required by manning agencies to sign up at a higher rank than they were qualified for. It should be noted that several examples come from the shipping companies which themselves claim that their foreigners have full contract status.

The fact that there are so many advantages from long service may be explained by the mutual acclimatisation that increases employee competencies, defined as an ever changing ability to modify one’s skills in practice in a given social and organizational context. The professional competencies of the individual do not only depend on formal qualifications but also on interaction, as evidenced by many of the quotes in this section. Filipinos with long

service on board Danish vessels often have outstanding social, professional and cultural competencies - as bridge builders, they are worth their weight in gold when it comes to all aspects of collaboration and should be invested in and treated as such. In addition to incentives such as return bonus, holiday pay and free access to continuity training, work could be done on making the basis for being fired or not re-employed less random than it apparently sometimes is. The first step could be to make it mandatory to hand over evaluations on board. Second, manning agencies should be called to account when someone with years of service disappears from the shipping company.

### 10.3 Leadership

Management and especially the captain have a very important role on board because of the hierarchical structure, the closed environment of the ship and the lack of separation between work and leisure. Some interviewees complained that as an officer, advancement to managerial positions was automatic, irrespective of whether those involved had leadership abilities or not. Several made comparisons with conditions ashore where leaders are required to be qualified and trained in leadership. Management training was one of the most important proposed improvements in these interviews.

#### ***'If you feel you respect them, then there are never problems'***

It is banal to indicate that satisfactory working and leisure relations predicate managerial respect for employees. The special problem here is whether to exercise such respect on the basis of universal principles or whether this requires attention to be paid to people's culture. The answer is 'yes and no' rather than 'either/or' but it is also striking that the Danes that used the simple device of treating others as they would like to be treated found it much easier to make collaboration work even though they rarely queried whether Filipinos should be treated in a certain way. The role models for good relations I have seen in this survey by way of observation and in interviews have been based on the management principles of respect based on perceptiveness. Awareness of cultural factors naturally helps but without respect for your fellow beings, it will not help much.

One example that can be mentioned is that of *'being dressed down in the hearing of others'*. Many people have found that working with Filipinos means that it is very important to avoid this situation. But several Danes have commented that it is merely down to bad management style. One captain reports that he learned from his mistakes after having 'lost his cool' and having given his Filipino crew a dressing down: *'previously they had been very keen to work but after that they became miserable and contrary.'* He further relates how he shared his experience with a new Danish officer: *"...not long ago during a fire drill, there was a [Filipino] who made a fool of himself and [the officer] told him so immediately while in the hearing of the others. I had not had the chance to explain to him...so we talked about it afterwards, the officer and I, and he could see that he had not got much out of it because the wretched man who had made a fool of himself went all ham-fisted."*

Note that the captain's natural reaction was to discuss the episode with the officer *afterwards*, and not while the Filipinos were listening. In such an instance, cultural considerations do not require you to be convoluted. It is sufficient to show the same respect for em-

ployees regardless of their rank and nationality. How many Danes give another Dane a dressing down while Filipinos are listening?

And if you lose yourself control, it is not irreparable if you are ready to talk about it. Here a Filipino cadet is praising his Danish superior: *'when we do something wrong, they tell us it's wrong in a good manner. And they excuse themselves if they have been speaking loudly.'*

### ***Consistency and flexibility***

Being consistent and requiring something of your employees is also a kind of respect and some Danes have noted the Filipinos' ability to accept responsibility growing with the responsibility Danes have in fact delegated to them. In other words, competent employees need a competent leader, cf. s. 10.2. It is just as bad to take over all responsibility from an employee throughout an entire trip because you do not trust him but dare not dismiss him as it is to delegate all responsibility to him without having given him the time to familiarize himself with the vessel. Consistency is also about being able to prioritize your demands. All the areas that are vital for safety at work and for the vessel require consistency. A single interview revealed, for example, that the Filipinos can comply with strict hygiene standards if they are highly prioritised on board. There is also a great difference between whether Filipinos are good at complying with safety rules and there is much to indicate that they in any case quickly learn to do so if management consistently accepts the responsibility. A Danish officer reports, for example, that after fourteen days during which all the managers on board 'got together on the safety rules,' they had only one problem left, they did not have enough harness and lines. He added that *'this is the same consistency that we show to the Danes who have also been saying 'Why have I got to have harness on here?'*

There is no contradiction between being consistent on the one hand and flexible and accommodating on the other and of 'suck it and see', which is in fact in line with the important health and safety regulations in 'Teknisk forskrift om arbejdets udførelse' (Technical regulations for working on board vessels, Chapter AIA, 1<sup>st</sup> July 2002). The regulations deal among other things with planning work from a 'properly responsible health and safety point of view, with due respect for the employee's age, ability, competency and other preconditions' (Rule 3). Here the employee's cultural background is regarded as an 'other precondition'. In one of the vessels I sailed on board, the captain was consistent as well as flexible. At the beginning when he did not know the Filipino crew, he asked an officer whether any of them were afraid of heights before he sent them up aloft. If there was anything they did not understand, he generally concluded, it was because he had been not good enough in his explanations.

## Frame 21. Respect for your employees

The extract below is from a Danish chief engineer and it illustrates the fact that respect for employees is universal. It also demonstrates that there is always a power game between people and especially on board a ship. So management have a special responsibility for showing respect to their subordinates and not being guilty of abuse of power. Respect includes respect for employees' rights which is especially important to somebody whose union is far away and who is in a marginalised position.

"I would say that I have never had problems sailing with Filipinos. There might once in a while be a troublemaker who stirs up the others but that can apply when you are sailing with Danes, there is no difference and I believe all cultures are the same. If there is just one who causes trouble, it can ruin an awful lot. I have never had real problems with them and never for myself in private, I have never felt lonely. (...)

I also think one problem is respect for your employees whether they are yellow, green or blue – or brown. I have to admit that I have also sailed with people that are completely indifferent to how they are, the foreign crew members. First, I think this is a major human failing but also professionally because you get so many problems to deal with if they have other problems. (...)

The shipping companies would naturally prefer to have no problems and that is precisely why I think so many senior officers more or less ignore or overlook problems. Not all, far from it. But some have what I would call a dim view of people but in any case they do not have respect for their employees and neither would they, if they were Danes, that is by the way, but it is as if respect for your employees must shine through because [otherwise] it makes for a bad working environment and in the final count makes for problems and expense for the shipping company. (...)

(About overtime): If the first officer's view of and respect for his crew, I would not say foreigners because that is immaterial ..., if he says 'you can have this, you cannot have that and refers to the agreement, that is how it is, that is the agreement and that we cannot change,' then you can solve problems that way. But if there is someone who immediately makes like a fearsome Captain Hook, 'that is how it is and it is me who decides and you can stand on your heads and do everything I want, or whatever, but it won't be different. (...) It is clear that there are some people who only listen to what the shipping company says and actually go so far as to ignore contracts and other agreements just because the shipping company has said so and so, and I think this is a very big mistake. This is where as the captain or chief engineer you can say, there is nothing we can do, it is in the agreement and that is what you are paid for. (...) This kind of person would also say the same if they had been his own countrymen. When I was a cadet I had some people try to cheat us, [but] we knew so much about it that we knew our rights, the few that we had in any case, those we could protest about but it was us Danes that that they tried to trample on."

Being flexible can also mean compromising with less important factors. To take the reply of 'Yes Sir' as an example: a Danish officer reports that he cannot stand being called Sir: *"We had this fitter on board on the last ship and he always said 'Sir'. It is all well and good the first time they are on board but after a while they should stop doing so. But the fitter continued to say 'Sir' and one day I told him not to call me Sir, 'just say Chief' – No Sir, he then said. He wouldn't!"*

Note that the Dane actually got the Filipino to say no! Here the compromise could be for the Filipino to keep saying 'Sir' so long as he continued to say no when he meant no. It is important for safety on board for yes to mean yes and no to mean no, and Filipinos must understand that. But Danes also have to understand that the title of Sir or Chief is unimportant for safety. Another Dane noted that it is perfectly possible to infringe Filipino taboos sometimes if you are otherwise flexible and accommodating in daily work routines: *"The officer I was together with last time, he really liked me, even though I got angry once in a while, because he came and shook my hand and said that he was glad for the way he had been received when we changed watch and so on, always with a smile and a joke. And I sometimes came along when he was on duty and stood and chatted, you know, about anything and everything."*

Being consistent can in some cases mean sticking up for your employees' rights and ensuring them fair treatment even if this is against the shipping line or manning agency's position, as illustrated in frames 17 and 21. Another Danish officer reports that they were told on board that it was only possible to find one relief for the two Filipinos who should have paid off before Christmas. The problem was then which should they choose: *"They found out about it themselves and when one of them went home, the skipper said: 'I won't put up with this anyway'. So he contacted the shipping company at home and said: 'I won't put up with it, we have to compensate this man in some way or other, he should have something for this.' And he got DKK 4,000, no, USD 1,000 to stay an extra week and that was very reasonable, I thought. But on other ships, they don't get anything."*

Unlike the Danes, Filipinos do not have a network and a union close by to protect their interests so they are highly dependent on a leader who can treat them fairly.

## **10.4 Social focus**

Most of the interviewees were aware that the lack of social life on board was not solely due to there being fewer Danes on board since they could recognize the negative trend from all Danish crews. But the problem is exacerbated by differences in backgrounds and by communication having to be in a foreign language and so it is even more important to avert this in vessels with few Danes.

Everything indicates that the problem is more pronounced on vessels with only two Danes and many respondents proposed raising the minimum number of Danes on board. Slightly surprisingly against the background of the many Danes who thought that social life on board was highly problematic, there was only one interviewee who directly indicated focusing on social lives as the most important area of input. This came from a chief engineer who stopped sailing and could not 'dream of starting again', especially because of social isolation and the expenses on the home front: *'In the end, it was only the money that kept me going.*

*Practically all Danes talk about preferring to be ashore. But few say that they want to continue.* For him, it was important to *'focus more on social lives over a wide front'* for example with such facilities as a gym and table tennis. Like several others, he added that there often were facilities on board but the rooms were small and unattractive.

As it is now, social life on board is a highly dependent on the captain, which is perhaps unfortunate since this means that it is them that risk being hit by social isolation. A survey of Danish navigators showed that loneliness was the greatest problem amongst respondents.<sup>44</sup> A man who himself suffers to some extent from social isolation is naturally not geared up to liven up the shipboard social life so this may mean a vicious circle. The ability of a single man and his need for a social life should not affect the entire crew and it is something which could partly be delegated on board (what about a welfare officer?) and could also partly be strengthened by the shipping company, for example by way of shipboard facilities and design. Shipping could do much more to increase the overall focus on better leisure time and social lives.

At the start of this survey, state grants for TV tapes were cancelled and this gave rise to some bitterness amongst the interviewees. Often the fact that the Filipinos refuse to contribute to the video scheme causes problems on board and one would have to assume that any contribution to a ship's social club or the like would give problems, too (it must not be forgotten that 80% of Filipinos' pay has to be sent directly to the Philippines).

During an interview, one cadet mentioned an example of a recruitment magazine from the Merchant Shipping Recruitment Board.<sup>45</sup> He was clearly shaken by reading about something, including the 'camaraderie' on board ships that did not fit in with the reality he had experienced on board: *'Of course it could just be slick advertising and so on but it does not seem especially intelligent to me because then people will not sail very long when they find out that it is not at all true.'* To be provocative, one might ask whether the Shipping Promotion Board's rose tinted pictures of a reality that cadets cannot recognize is the way to deal with a recruitment problem. Perhaps it would help more to focus on getting the reality on board to approach that of the picture of shipping they would like to present? Perhaps the modest funds that would be required, for example to support setting up a ship's social club and other social and leisure activities, would be a good investment.

## **10.5 Strengthening communication**

### ***Internal communication***

It would be a considerable exaggeration to say that seamen are good at handling conflict.<sup>x</sup> This can be explained by the need for self protection in a small closed environment and you can hardly expect them to sit in a circle talking about their problems. But in fact, vessels where they do have some kind of informal meetings or where safety meetings are taken seriously and are possibly open to all, are far better at handling social and collaborative problems. How many Filipinos know for example that a Dane could be so disappointed when

---

<sup>x</sup> There were several accounts in the interviews of violence on board (by Filipinos in Danish accounts and by Danes in Filipinos reports!)



they leave the table early at a festive meal? Creating a forum in which people could legally talk about things could possibly counteract the negative impact that a single discriminatory person can have on board, too. Safety meetings appear in many instances not to work as intended. The mental working environment has eventually been recognized as a fully valid component of the working environment and many Danes would welcome greater focus on it. But this has apparently not been reflected in the content of these meetings. Partly because there is no separation between on and off-duty life on board and because discriminatory behaviour can occur, and in part because foreign seamen do not have the same network as Danes, it could be even more important to prioritize and expand the role of the safety organisation in mixed crews.

The hierarchy on board is another factor that can have a negative impact on communications. Insufficient information from the top down is not unknown amongst Danish ratings but the problem can be exacerbated by an ethnic distance. Several Danes indicated that *'rumours run riot amongst the Filipinos'* and they can easily get nervous. Both factors have probably something to do with bad communication and insufficient information. Two Danish officers indicated (the only ones to do so) that they would prefer to have some Filipino officers on board when the crew was also Filipino, *'because [otherwise] we lack the link provided by them having an officer in their mess.'*

One reports on a rescue action in a storm that lasted several days. They only had Filipino ratings on board... *'And we soon realised that they did not really know what the hell was going on and then we very quickly found out that it was very, very important to keep them informed all the time'*. When the rescue was postponed for yet another day, one fitter started to cry: *'Then I realized that they were far greater affected mentally than we had actually been aware, so I warned the skipper about this and we had a talk with them and then they found out that there was no danger. We reviewed the situation when it was all over and they reported that they were very glad that we had kept them informed about what was actually happening.'* What surprised me most about this account was that regular information was not a given. Many Danes claim that Filipinos are not to be trusted in an emergency. This claim can neither be proved nor disproved but one thing is certain, that bad information makes for fear and makes rumours spread, and does not make them better able to handle emergencies. It must be up to the officers to communicate all relevant information to the entire crew on an ongoing basis.

*'It depends on the captain ...'* I learned that this is the standard answer when I ask whether Filipinos can e-mail home, whether they get local news on the telex ...it depends on the captain. It is not without reason that the hierarchical order is pronounced at sea and that captains must accept the final responsibility but it should be possible once in a while to consider what matters should come under the captain's authority and which privileges could be reserved for the officers, and in my view this covers such matters as access to e-mail and news on board. As it is now, there are several shipping companies where the question of who should have access to what is far too fortuitous. There is no doubt, also among many Danes, that e-mail and telephone calls home and access to newspapers are very important for the Filipinos because of their close family ties and in part because of their long tours. One of the Danes complained that some of his colleagues felt that *'it can't affect them'* whether they gets local news even though *'we just have to press a button and dump it on to their table.'* His proposal for one of the most important ways of improving conditions on board was for them to have a telex paper, English books and English papers from the agency. It should be emphasized that

foreigners as well as Danes, ratings as well as officers, contribute towards some of the expenses of the Merchant Shipping Welfare Council and thus are entitled to the same services. Some Filipinos have highly educated children and thus access to e-mail at home and it should be obvious that getting the news, papers and e-mail on board should apply irrespective of rank and nationality. By making this kind of thing regular shipping company policy, it would be possible to avert any hidden discrimination - against the ratings or foreigners.

### ***Communication between the vessel and the shipping company***

It cannot be said that it is the volume of information from the shipping company to the vessel about which seamen complain at a time when communication by e-mail has become so common. Some people feel in contrast that they are overburdened and that '*control from home is so strict that one cannot actually understand why they want such well-trained people on board their ships*'. Even so, it does not appear to have improved the feeling of distance there can be between the shipping company and the ship. Danes from several shipping companies said that they were not informed about crew changes from Danes to Filipinos before they turned up on board as reliefs. It is highly improbable that such procedures promote understanding for their foreign colleagues.

The relationship between Danish seamen and the shipping companies were generally mentioned in negative terms. Several interviews were characterized by a feeling of lack of backup, powerlessness and frustration that could exacerbate conditions on board and the sense of social isolation. Some felt that Danes and Filipinos were pieces in a [financial] game in which there is no investment, only replacement. There is nothing objectionable in the fact that shipping companies mainly think in financial terms but the frustrations could possibly be reduced if the signals they send were more unambiguous and if they did not minimise or deny the existence of any problems that might arise on board. For instance, it sends a confusing signals when Danes on board have to treat the foreigners fairly at all times despite the shipping company (Frame 17 and 21), while they do not feel they can sack an incompetent employee without being accused of racism and in the worst case, without losing their own job. It is a confusing signal when they get to know that there is nothing wrong with their workmates qualifications but that they fear that the Filipinos will be replaced by other nationalities when their standard of training has improved enough. It is a confusing signal when they are told they have to operate as a team but that the best of their foreign work mates are not sure of re-employment. Some of these problems go back to the manning agencies but the shipping company employs the manning agency and cannot repudiate its responsibility.

If shipping companies are to be more prepared to listen to seamen, the latter must also do much more to raise the visibility of problems at a much more specific level and not make complaints based on rumour or pass the buck to others - the captain, relief, or fear of being dismissed. There are too many people in both camps, in the shipping companies and on the ships who, like the three monkeys, hear no evil, see no evil and speak no evil. All the interviews that report the best shipboard relations also report officers who are prepared to see, speak, hear and be heard on behalf of themselves and their foreign colleagues. If the visibility of problems is not raised, there is the risk of finding a scapegoat on board:

*"But the problem lies with backup from the shipping company (...) and so we get lots of problems with the Filipinos because it is, like, them it affects in the final count. (...) It is no*

*good taking a one-sided view of a conflict with/because of the Filipinos, it must be seen as a conflict with the law, regulations and dogma or whatever, it's part of a whole.”*

## **10.6 Stopping discrimination**

Discrimination against foreign seaman may occur at several levels and therefore activities aimed at limiting discrimination should be directed at all levels of organisations. Even though it is easy to argue that they are already treated differently by virtue of their terms of employment (for example it is difficult to justify their longer tours on other grounds), I shall only base the following on current rules and agreements.

It is necessary to make a major effort to raise the awareness of Filipinos of their rights. One good initiative is the Danish Maritime Authority pamphlet (discussed in s. 6.4) but the question is whether employers are the right people to be responsible for raising awareness of these rights. Perhaps consideration could be given to involving the Merchant Shipping Welfare Council or possibly the Danish trades unions? The Filipinos are often nervous about taking a high profile stand and therefore disseminating information requires an active effort. Apparently, too little is known about about how to proceed in the event of an accident, indicating that the duty of Danes to file a report is not always taken equally seriously. A campaign directed at this could be a possibility. Shipping companies may consider rewarding low accident rates, as some do, might have more disadvantages than advantages. Dismissal or not re-employing seamen seems sometimes to be fortuitous. At the very least, providing a copy of the valuations to employees could be made regular practice. The Filipinos mention in several instances that they have to pay for their upgrade courses - is not this something that is directly counter to activities on which everybody agrees, namely enhancing their qualifications?

The shipping companies themselves could do much more to limit structural discrimination. For example: a Filipino officer wrote in the questionnaire: *“The Danish crew during hotel accommodation they are staying in a class hotel, while the Filipino crew staying in a economical hotel or sometimes only in a seaman club.”* What justification can there be for such different treatment? The financial savings could not be very great. Is it so remarkable if, after such treatment, some Filipinos assume that they are regarded as second class citizens? There are many other examples of what one might call hidden discrimination, for example, as noted before, when access to e-mail and papers is not systematic. And for example, if the Filipinos have to stay on board long after their scheduled departure date at the end of their tour without compensation. Here and in several other instances, it is not rare for the shipping company to refuse responsibility, saying that it is up to the manning agency. The manning agencies are often the bogeymen in the interviews, but the shipping companies are still their employers. If a Filipino has been employed for a certain job that he is not qualified to do, there should be an investigation as to whether he was pressurized by the manning agency. If so, he could possibly be employed in another position instead of dismissing him and compromising his entire future.

Finally, there are examples of discrimination on board. This may be hidden (for example not informing the crew about important matters, making them do other work than they have been employed to do, etc.) which is difficult to combat but which could be restricted by having clearer shipping company policies. It may be direct, by way of unreasonable actions

[such as setting the deck crew to painting the deck at night] or by way of unreasonable or directly racist remarks (e.g. 'you monkey...').<sup>xi</sup> In interviews, most Danes clearly distanced themselves from this kind of remark, but it is apparently more difficult to take such a clear stance on board. Such things belong quite clearly to the mental working environment and it is important to establish a legal forum where these things can be discussed, cf. previous section on communication.

Finally I would mention a couple of more specific pieces of advice: To Danes and Filipinos: Take all the myths and stories about other nationalities that are in circulation with a grain of salt. There are always several versions of a story. To the Filipinos: Don't believe that you are suffering discrimination every time you are criticized. To Danes: Keep the fight to save Danish jobs away from life on board. To shipping companies: Stop calling Danes racist as soon as they complain about something and acknowledge that living together with people from other cultures can be difficult and sometimes can give rise to conflict and that adjusting does take time. To Danes and shipping companies: Send out more unambiguous signals to foreigners: Do you want responsible team players who will provide feedback, or do you want subordinates who just do what they are told without complaint?

## 10.7 Learning about a culture

Interest in giving seamen the tools to handle differences in culture in mixed crews by way of lectures, courses, etc. is relatively recent. Intercultural relations (geography and cultural sociology) has been introduced as a subject in the senior part of the training of ships officers from the autumn of 2003. How great is the need to know more about other national cultures on board, in what form and how great an impact could knowing more have on relations?

Both Danes and Filipinos know a great deal about the most common misunderstandings that cultural differences can give rise to; knowledge they have generally acquired as a result of their own experience. Even though these might have been expensive experiences, there are many who feel that this is the best way. A Danish cadet reports that he had a violent row with a Filipino whom he had told off in other people's hearing: '*I had already heard that you should not do it but I did not think about it then and now I have know and can remember it very clearly!*' The same cadet did not think that experience can be replaced by a general textbook introduction since there was too great a danger of generalisation: '*It is difficult to say anything in general about the Filipinos and it is almost a shame to prejudice people because they are individuals, too, the Filipinos. (...) You can't do that about Danes either.*'

Emphasizing your own experience and watching out for generalisations, be they from your colleagues or the text books, is a very general, healthy attitude, provided naturally that you do not start by generalising on the basis of your first experiences!

---

<sup>xi</sup> I have been careful about using the word 'racist' because many Danish seamen feel they are branded as racists. If you overwork the word, it ceases to have a meaning. But there is no doubt that the term 'monkey' which I came across several times is racist in the true sense of the word since it denies another person the status as a human being. It may be right to say that it does not matter how the Danes *refer* to their foreign workmates to me for example, so long as they *address* them properly. But it is to be feared that there can be some cross over effect from the way you refer to people and the way you address them.

There are other forms of resistance from Danes about having to acquire more systematic learning about other cultures. One Dane reports that he got a book about Indonesians which he never read: *'It was perhaps just being slightly contrary because I felt my toes had been slightly trodden on in having to learn about their culture, whereas I thought it was more important for them to learn about mine. Despite everything, they come on board our ship. But our shipping company does not take that into consideration, it is us who have to pay consideration to the others, they don't have to take us into theirs.'* Here the Danish feeling of being disadvantaged comes shining through. But it is also a reasonable argument that cultural awareness should be reciprocal. On this subject, another Dane thought that courses should be held *together* with foreigners; this may sound the ideal system provided the shipping company is ready to invest in employees irrespective of nationality. Danes report mixed reactions to the cultural activities they have seen so far, which may perhaps say more about the recipient than the message itself! Others are more interested in learning more so as to understand foreigners better, be this by way of courses or a textbook, provided that it is not too theoretical and that it is specific and relevant for daily shipboard routines.

One Dane mentioned a textbook about Filipinos: 'Understanding the Filipino seaman'<sup>46</sup> in very negative terms. I can only support him in this in that it is an incredibly generalized and condescending book. It is the only book I am aware of but one of the more specific recommendations in the English report on multiethnic crews<sup>39</sup> is to consign that kind of material to the deep. I am also afraid that attempts to write a brief and concise account of a culture in a single book is doomed to spreading stereotypes if it means having to ignore all the nuances that any culture deserves. You can never expect to use such books as a ready-to-use toolkit or like a workplace risk assessment. Courses and presentations have the advantage of involving the participants in dialogue but one should not expect too much of the outcomes. Learning to know people from other cultures (and probably from one's own?) is a lifelong task and the worst attitude I have come across, luckily from very few, is: *'I know them!* That stops any kind of potential development in yourself and others. Further, the chances of learning more only arise if one has the will to enhance the well-being of all on board. It may also act as an effective 'whip' to gain power over the crew. A Danish officer reports that he prefers telling Filipinos off in other's hearing: *'It is much more effective, they never do it again'*,

## **10.8 Safety at work**

It is difficult to draw clear conclusions about the impact of mixed crews on safety at work. Certain factors in the Filipino culture such as indirect communication and unwillingness to disagree can have negative consequences for safety at work. When it comes to unwillingness to admit one's own mistakes, a couple of interviews and some observations show that the problem is not solely down to the Filipinos. Reluctance is also associated with non-cultural factors: the fear of being dismissed and the professional pride of seamen.<sup>2,44</sup> A practice in which it is legal and a reflection of good seamanship to admit your mistakes and report events and near misses requires clear signals from management on board and the shipping company, so that reporting accidents or near-misses can in no circumstances be regarded as punishable.

A majority of Danes feel that the Filipinos have little understanding of safety at work, both with respect to use of personal protection and active participation in safety meetings. But a

minority disagree with such claims and the Filipinos themselves generally express great interest in safety at work. The statistics show that they suffer fewer reported accidents than Danes and other nationalities. Even though one reason might be under-reporting, it may well also be that they are better at protecting themselves. Could this be an area in which Danes could learn something from the Filipinos? The question must remain open. The question raised by several Danes of whether Filipinos have sufficient understanding of the long-term effects of exposure to various agents must also remain unanswered. Most Filipinos leave Danish service before the age of 50<sup>6</sup>, and we know nothing about their health thereafter. The fact that none of them has received compensation for occupational health problems should therefore be subject to an investigation. Maintenance gangs and other employees who are not members of the safety crew should also be covered by such a survey since they are also subject to Danish occupational health legislation.

Most of the proposals noted above have the added attraction of increasing safety at work. This applies for example to such obvious requirements for all to be competent in a common language and for it to be consistently used as the working language. An active, well-briefed safety organisation will contribute, despite the composition of the crew, to greater safety at work but this is even more essential in mixed crews in which foreigners may lack elementary knowledge about Danish rules and safety standards. Some shipping companies consistently send all their foreign employees on a safety course. Filipinos are positively minded about this and several Danes note that going on a course has increased their safety awareness.

## 11. Conclusions

*“I have to admit that it felt a bit strange to read this review of interpersonal relations, split by a culture, rank and several other criteria. It is not something you think so much about when you are in the middle of it, that you are actually part of such a complex interaction. You don't think so much about anything else than now you have to get it all to work smoothly and get the best out of the time you are on board together.”*

The above is a reaction from a Danish seaman with whom I exchanged many e-mails about my thoughts in the course of this project. Maybe this reflects what many people will be thinking when they have read this report. After all, crews get everything to run smoothly on board time after time so they are constantly proving that nationally mixed crews do work. The reasonable attitude of getting the best out of the time you are on board together fortunately also characterizes most seamen irrespective of nationality. Danes also emphasize certain Filipino characteristics such as their friendliness, their hard work, obedience and sobriety. Filipinos are usually pleased to be working on board Danish vessels, primarily because of the high level of safety at work and the safety of the vessel itself.

This is far from saying however, that leisure and working relations between Danes and Filipinos (or more generally between Danes and other nationalities and for that case between the various positions on board irrespective of nationality) appear and are seen as being the best possible or problem-free. Problems often arise in the interaction between cultural and structural factors which have a mutually reinforcing effect and may together develop into a vicious circle. Problems may also become exacerbated by being ignored or played down by those in the shipping industry who do not work at sea themselves.

Some of the problems revealed by this survey may be related to the fact that Danes and Filipinos are not employed on equal terms. This means that Danes often endeavour to justify the differences in the pay and terms of employment between them and foreign seamen since they are regarded as a threat to their future employment. Filipinos find themselves in a marginalised position which makes them vulnerable and exposed when it comes to job security and legal status. This structurally-conditioned situation may be reinforced by cultural factors for both nationalities and by the fact that the hierarchical order on board often overlaps the ethnic order.

Most Danes feel that there is a fundamental difference in the quality of the work they perform compared to the Filipinos who, according to them, often lack the qualifications to do the job. These Danes also feel that this difference in quality is not recognized by the shipping companies and the regulatory authorities. Many of them have a pronounced sense of a lack of backup and of being disadvantaged, not to say discriminated against since they feel that the shipping companies impose greater demands on them and that they are not listened to or in the worst case, are accused of racism if they indicate problems about their workmates' qualifications. It is perfectly clear that the Danish attitude is characterized by this overall dilemma: their situation means that on the one hand, the Filipinos are their *colleagues* with whom they have to live and work together for months; on the other hand, they regard these foreign seamen as *competitors* who are fighting for the same jobs on unequal

terms. This dilemma may partly explain that coexistence appears to be far more difficult when Danes are *referring* to their foreign workmates than in their *interaction* with them.

Many Danes also complain about the Filipinos' tendency not to be able to admit their mistakes and about their lack of initiative and response. Ironically enough, many Filipinos complain that they are not listened to if they do make a suggestion, etc. It is precisely this kind of misunderstanding that can arise from a vicious circle and which can be explained on the basis of cultural and structurally conditioned attitudes in both parties: A Dane, for example, may have such a fundamental lack of confidence in a Filipino's qualifications and such a great belief in the advantages of his own way of working that he possibly unconsciously ignores the Filipino's proposals. On the other hand, a Filipino may have had such poor previous experience in objecting to an order and being so used to have difficulty in communicating his disagreement that he becomes unclear about his signals. The fact that there is such a great difference in how individual Danes perceive the quality of working together may also be explained by the existence of a vicious circle: It is easy for a Dane with negative expectations about a Filipino to relate them to the phenomenon of self-fulfilling prophecies (that a person's abilities very much depend on the expectations others have of him). A Filipino who faces poor expectations every day may react by way of passive resistance and thus yet again be the subject of a self-fulfilling prophecy. These examples indicate that it might help to differentiate clearly between the difficulties due to a lack of (formal) qualifications and those that are due to the lack of competencies in both parties. In the latter, the focus could be switched from the skills of the individual to the quality of working relations and the organisational framework. But this requires in the first instance for there to be less doubt about formal qualifications than is currently often the case amongst Danes.

Filipinos are not nearly so occupied with their workmates' nationality as the Danes are. They are generally pleased to sail on board Danish vessels, mainly because of the high level of safety. The often lengthy experience they have of employment under various flags together with a long history of assorted colonial masters mean that, as they and others claim, they are good at adapting to the conditions under which they have to live. But this adaptive strategy is also made necessary by an uncertain and marginalized position. Partly because of their fluid form of employment and partly because of conditions in their home country, they are often careful about demanding their rights and providing the feedback that Danes wish them to provide. It should also be said that signals from the Danish side are not unambiguous since some of them do want to see feedback while others are quite satisfied with subordinates who just obey without complaint.

Filipinos are generally satisfied with relations on board, even though most of them do have some isolated experience of discrimination on board. The Danes themselves admit that some of their colleagues do have a discriminatory attitude which can have a negative impact on the whole atmosphere on board.

Because of the special conditions on board, the transition between duty and off-duty hours is fluid and the two aspects of life on board are often considered as a whole by seamen. Problems in socializing have also many parallels with problems on duty. Here again many Danes say they lack response from the Filipinos who apparently often choose to segregate themselves and maintain a distance to their superiors. Social isolation is a problem that is especially noted by Danes on board vessels with only two Danes. Problems relating to develop-



ments in shipping, smaller crews, shorter stays on port and more administrative work may be exacerbated for some people by the fact that they are in a national minority. It should, however, be mentioned that most Filipinos and most of the few Danes that have experience of this are pleased to serve in mixed crews, that is crews with more than four nationalities, since there are no majorities and minorities and nobody to claim ownership of the shipboard culture.

Many Danes are especially sensitive about the subject of the cook, food and meal times. There is some confusion, also at shipping company level, as to the training requirements for galley personnel and many Danes also complain about hygiene standards. Complaints about the quality of food cannot be addressed independently of the traditional function of meals as a social gathering point in Danish culture and the greater focus on food may be a symptom of the strictly limited recreational opportunities on board. If this is the case, it does not mean that complaints should be taken any less seriously: there are in contrast further grounds for undertaking a thorough investigation into the qualifications of foreign cooks and the standards they should be expected to meet.

Fortunately, it is possible to note ‘benign circles’ as a counterweight to vicious circles. This applies in instances when management on board and at the shipping company are prepared to listen to the entire crew and act with due respect for their rights and individual preconditions. This applies in those cases in which at least part of the foreign crew have such a lengthy association with the shipping company that the crew can establish trusting relationships, with mutual understanding of cultural differences. This applies when people are ready to learn and let themselves be enriched by each other's differences. In justice, it should be added that this willingness is much more prevalent amongst the Filipinos since many Danes tend to believe that they cannot learn anything new from foreigners. This also applies to many of the younger Danish seamen who have close relations with Filipinos by virtue of their intermediate placing in the hierarchical scale and they accept mixed crews as a natural part of their working conditions since they have not known anything else.

Cultural differences are not in themselves either good or bad but there are many examples of them only becoming a problem when they are reinforced by structural differences, and here the difference in terms of employment between Danes and foreigners can reinforce a tendency for Danes to regard Filipinos as a threat to their future employment and for Filipinos to become marginalized. When it comes to the Danes, it appears that the dilemma, that of regarding foreigners as colleagues or competitors, will reduce in time. Possibly many of the problems described will die out with the next generation of seamen provided that any differences in qualifications have been resolved, either by evening them out or by openly admitting them, and assuming an active program to deal with the problem of social isolation. With respect to the Filipinos, their marginalized position will not change by itself unless there is an active program to strengthen their integration, their legal status and their job security.

### *A common effort*

Please see Chapter 10 for a more detailed description of proposals for improvement that can be characterized as tools for optimizing relations on board. One common characteristic for most of these proposals is that they do not only involve actors on board individual vessels but at every level of shipping organizations. The picture of the three monkeys who see no

evil, hear no evil and speak no evil (cf. Frame 6) may in many instances illustrate a chain of buck passing which means that many problems do not get acknowledged, get passed to the next level or get solved on a doubtful basis. Denying that relations between different nationalities may in certain circumstances be difficult, whether or not because of lack of qualifications, lack of legal security, discrimination or loneliness, only helps to exacerbate the extent of the problem and the need to find someone to blame.

At the same time it is clear that the presence of foreign seaman does in certain circumstances enhance tendencies that are present in the industry irrespective of nationality. This applies especially to the following areas which cross the border for the focus of this study of the ethnic/cultural divide. All of them require clear shipping company policies for best effect:

**Job security:** The fear of being dismissed (or of losing out on promotion) is to an alarming extent a recurring topic, also amongst Danish seamen regardless of their position and 'monkey policy' is often justified by this anxiety. Without taking a position on whether such anxiety is justified, it obviously has negative consequences for safety at work. Creating an environment in which, for example, it would be possible to report your own and others' mistakes without fear of punishment is incompatible with this anxiety.

**Hierarchy, leadership and teamwork:** Without in any way challenging the hierarchical structure, the survey does show that in many instances more could be done to strengthen the competencies of managers, partly to limit their power while restricting unfortunate examples of abuse of power. Development of competencies amongst individual employees is directly related to the quality of collaboration and management. Crews are nowadays so small that teamwork is essential and nobody on board is indispensable. The organisational framework must take this development into account.

**Social:** Working conditions for seamen mean very special conditions for lengthy periods apart from the outside world, so social lives on board (including meals, which are very much a social so activity) are regarded as part of the working environment. Socialising is such a serious problem for a considerable proportion of those interviewed (especially the Danes) that it demands debate and action.

# Bibliography

1. Lane T, Obando-Rojas B, Sorensen M, Wu B, Tasiran A. Crewing the International Merchant Fleet. Surrey, Lloyd's Register - Fairplay Ltd 2002.
2. Knudsen F. Efterlevelse af sikkerhedskrav på danske lastskibe i international fart. Barrierer og muligheder set fra navigatørernes perspektiv. Rapport nr. 24/2000. Esbjerg, Søfartsmedicinsk Institut 2000.
3. Søfartens Arbejdsmiljøråd. Træthed - Fatigue. København, Søfartens Arbejdsmiljøråd 1997.
4. Seale C. The Quality of Qualitative Research. SAGE Publications Ltd 1999.
5. Hastrup K. Det Antropologiske Projekt. Om Forbløffelse. København, Gyldendal 1992.
6. Jensen OC, Sørensen JFL, Canals ML. Work conditions and health in seafaring - a challenge. Tarragona, 7th International Symposium on Maritime Health 2003.
7. Flyvbjerg B. Making Social Science Matter. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2001.
8. Thomsen M, Petersen P, Thisted LN. Jobudførelse i mødet med fremmede kulturer. Tåstrup, Teknologisk Institut 1999.
9. Gillis H. Kulturgrammatik. Kunsten at møde andre kulturer. København, Munksgaard 1993.
10. Eriksen TH, Sørheim TA. Kulturforskelle - kulturmøder i praksis. København, Gyldendal 2001.
11. Knudsen A, Wilken L. Kulturelle Verdener. Kultur og kulturkonflikter i Europa. Columbus 1994.
12. Scalabrini Migration Center. The need for an International Seafarers' Center in Manila. Philippines, Scalabrini Migration Center 2000.
13. Pedersen J. *Spilteori*. Hvad er rationalitet? 2000; 115-229. Frederiksberg C, Samfundslitteratur.
14. ILO. Report for discussion at the Meeting of Experts on Working and Living Conditions of Seafarers on Board Ships in International Registers: Case studies. Rapport nr. II. Geneva, International Labour Office 2002.
15. International Maritime Organization. A Study on Fraudulent Practices Associated with Certificates of Competency and Endorsements. London, International Maritime Organization 2001.
16. ILO. The Impact on Seafarers' Living and Working Conditions of Changes in the Structure of the Shipping Industry. Geneva, ILO 2001.

17. IMO. Why the White List is working. IMO News 2001;(1):12-13.
18. Hansen S. Anerkendelsesbeviser til udenlandske officerer. Navigator 2001;(9):11.
19. Søfartsstyrelsen. De har oppet sig. Filippinske søfolk bedre end deres rygter. Nyt fra Søfartsstyrelsen 2001;(1):2.
20. Maritime International Secretariat Services Limited. BIMCO/ISF 2000 Manpower Update. 2003.
21. Ships, Slaves and Competition. Australia, International Commission on Shipping 2002.
22. Leggate H, McConville J. Supplementary paper to Reports I and II : Meeting of Experts on Working and Living Conditions of Seafarers on board Ships in International Registers. Geneva, International Labour Organization 2002.
23. Hansen HL. Udlændinge og arbejdsulykker. SøSikker 2001;(2):1.
24. Hansen HL. Værd at vide om Erhvervs sygdomme blandt søfarende. SøSikker 2000;(4):10-12.
25. Jürgensen P. Brændt freon ødelagde hans helbred. Maskinmesteren 2000;(8):14-15.
26. Søfartsstyrelsen. Simuleret samarbejde i Port Klang. Nyt fra Søfartsstyrelsen 2000;11-12.
27. Knudsen F. If you pay with peanuts you get a monkey - kulturbegrebet på arbejde i multietniske skibsbesætninger. Tidsskrift for Arbejdsliv 2003;(1):43-59.
28. Hein P. Gruk fra alle årene: et udvalg: Bind 2. København, Gyldendal 1964.
29. Lamvik GM. The Filipino Seafarer - A Life between Sacrifice and shopping. Trondheim, Norwegian University of Science and Technology 2002.
30. Jocano FL. Filipino Value System. A Cultural Definition. Manila, Punlad Research House Inc. 1999.
31. Ramirez M. A Phenomenology of the Filipino Family. Saint Louis Quarterly 1968;3-4339-353.
32. Jocano FL. Working with Filipinos. A Cross-Cultural Encounter. Diliman, Quezon City, Punlad Research House Inc. 1999.
33. Duval M. Ni morts, ni vivants: marins! Pour une ethnologie du hvis clos. Paris, Press Universitaires de France 2002.
34. Lane T, Obando-Rojas B, Sorensen M, Wu B, Tasiran A. Crewing the International Merchant Fleet. Surrey, Lloyd's Register - Fairplay Ltd 2002.
35. Likhetens Paradokser. Antropologiske Undersøkelser i Det Moderne Norge. Oslo, Universitetsforlaget AS 2001.
36. Knudsen F. Løven og barnet. Jordens Folk 2001;36(4):5-14.

37. Hasle P. Sikkerhedsorganisationens lange vej. Tidsskrift for Arbejdsliv 2001;3(2):95-110.
38. Thomas M. Lost at Sea and Lost at Home: the Predicament of Seafaring Families. Cardiff, Seafarers International Research Centre 2003.
39. Kahveci E, Lane T, Sampson H. Transnational Seafarer Communities. Cardiff, Seafarers International Research Centre 2002.
40. Jensen BL. Den isolerede sømand. 2002.
41. Weibust K. Deep Sea Sailors. Stockholm, Kungl. Boktryckeriet P.A. Norstedt & Söner 1969.
42. Kofod J. Du er dem du spiser sammen med - et brugerperspektiv på den offentlige måltidsservice. Rapport nr. 2000:09. Søborg, Fødevaredirektoratet 2000.
43. Jenkins R. "Fællesspisning midt i Jylland". Tidsskriftet Antropologi 1999;(39):37-52.
44. Torp S. Medlemsundersøgelse. København, Dansk Navigatørforening 2002.
45. . Bliv skibsofficer i den danske handelsflåde. København, Handelsflådens Rekrutteringsråd 2003.
46. Andres TQD. Understanding the Filipino Seaman: His Values, Attitudes and Behavior. Manila, Philippines, Our Lady of Manaoag Publishers 1991.

# Appendix 1

## Glossary

**AOS:** Apostleship of the Sea.

**AB:** Able-Bodied seaman.

**AMOSUP:** Associated Marine Officers and Seamen's Union of the Filipinos. Amosup is incontrovertibly the biggest trade union for Filipino seamen. AMOSUP is affiliated to ITF.

**Bosun (Boatswain):** Seaman employed to manage and allocate deck duties in conjunction with the First Officer. It is no longer mandatory to have a bosun on board.

**ILO:** International Labour Organisation. 'The International Labour Organization is the UN specialized agency which seeks the promotion of social justice and internationally recognized human and labour rights.' ILO has a maritime section:

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/sector/sectors/mariti.htm>

**IMO:** International Maritime Organisation. Under UN. The main IMO bodies are: MSC, Maritime Safety Committee, and MEPC, Maritime Environmental Protection Committee. SOLAS (Safety at Sea), MARPOL (Prevention of Pollution), STWC\*, ISM (International Safety Management), etc.

<http://www.imo.org/index.htm>

**ITF:** International Transport Federation. Umbrella organisation for trade unions in the transport sector, with a maritime section:

<http://www.itf.org.uk/seafarers/index.htm>

**Lunetta** Rizal Park (popularly called Lunetta), a large park in central Manila. At the edge of the park, the whole length of the pavements is used all year round as a kind of open air recruitment location for seamen. Hundreds of seamen gather to look for a contract. Manning agency representatives walk around, often with a board stating what jobs are on offer. I have heard crew refer to this part of the park with bitter irony as "Lunetta Shipping Company" (cf. Frame 7).

**Manning Agent/Agency, Crew Manager:** I have used the term crew manager to cover the head of the manning personnel at *Danish* shipping companies (in the Philippines called principal), with the term Manning Agents covering manning personnel in Filipino manning agencies. A manning agency specialises in locating crew (the others are called land-based agencies). There are between 300 and 400 manning agencies in Manila.

**MARINO:** Mariners Association for Regional and International Networking Organization. The initiative for the Association came from some seamen who had been blacklisted.

**NGO:** Non-Governmental Organization – volunteer-based organisation.

**OS:** Ordinary Seaman. An inexperienced hand.

**POEA:** Filipino Overseas Employment Administration. Migrant workers represent a large source of income for the Philippines, and the sector is subject to systematic control and regulation. For example, 80% of pay has to be remitted to the Philippines, and that applies to seamen, too.

**Principal:** Filipino term for the crew manager of a company

**PSC:** Port State Control. International term for national maritime authorities.

**SILAW:** Sea and Land-based Workers' Alliance.

**STCW-95:** International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watch keeping for Seafarers.

**SWAPI:** Seaman's Wives Association of the Filipinos.

**UP:** University of the Filipinos, Quezon City.

**White list:** IMO's "List of Parties giving full and complete effect to STCW 95". An IMO Safety Committee listing of countries whose reporting on national implementation of the Convention has been assessed by expert panels appointed by the IMO Secretary General as being in full and complete conformity with the Convention.

---

# **Appendix 2**

## **Questionnaire**



**Questionnaire on job satisfaction among Filipino  
Seafarers working on vessels flying the Danish flag (DIS)**

*The questionnaire was collected by 4 §16 instructors in Manila from December 2001 - February 2002. The ship owner affiliations of the respondents have not been reported.*

*In this rendering of the answers, 2 questions have been omitted because of too much variation. This applies to the number of Philippines, Danes and other nationalities on board on latest tour and to the length of the home time.*

*The number of valid questionnaires is 66. If the sum of the answers does not correspond to 66, some of the respondents did not answer the question.*

---

I kindly ask you to complete this questionnaire for research purpose. I am working at an independent Danish research unit which has the goal to develop the best possible working environment at sea. I am leading a study that aims at examining the relations between Filipinos and Danish seamen on board Danish ships. This questionnaire will be used as a supplement to interviews with Danish and Filipino seafarers.

The questionnaire is anonymous. Nobody can be recognised in the analysed results. The questionnaires will be destroyed after use. It is voluntary to participate.

Please put the completed questionnaire into the enclosed envelope and give it to the instructor of this course. Thank you very much in advance for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Fabienne Knudsen

**Research Unit of Maritime Medicine**

Niels Bohrs Vej 9, 6700 Esbjerg

Denmark

E-mail: [fak@fmm.sdu.dk](mailto:fak@fmm.sdu.dk)

## Your background

### *Age*

The respondents were between 22 years and 54 years old.

**18** were less than 30 years; **22** were 31-40 years; **23** were 41-50; **3** were more than 51 years.

### *How long have you worked as a seafarer?*

**2** had worked less than 1 year; **16** 1-5 years; **16** 6-10 years; **27** 11-20 years; **4** over 20 years

### *How many years under Danish flag?*

**15** had worked less than 1 year under Danish flag; **41**: 1-5 years; **8**: 6-10 years; **2** over 10 years

### *How many Danish companies (Danish flag) have you worked for?*

**51** had worked for 1 Danish company; **11** for 2; **2** for 3; **1** for 4 Danish companies

### *How many non-Danish flag have you sailed under?*

**11** had only worked for Danish flag; **10** for 1 other; **29** for 2-6 others; **13** for 7 or more others.

---

## Your latest tour of duty

### *What was your position on board on your latest tour?*

**21** were officer; **42** were not officer: **8** cadets, **18** AB, **9** OS, **4** other

### *Where were your main duties on the ship?*

<b>Officer</b>	Deck (also bridge)	<b>13</b>	Engine room	<b>7</b>	Service /galley	<b>1</b>	Other	
<b>Non off.</b>	Deck (also bridge)	<b>26</b>	Engine room	<b>9</b>	Service /galley	<b>4</b>	Other	<b>3</b>

### *How long was your latest tour of duty?*

**12**: less than 6 months; **21**: 6-7 months; **11**: 7-9months; **12**: 9-10 months; **10**: over 10 months

**14** were not relieved on time

**3** had not their salary remitted on time

## Your job satisfaction

*The purpose of the following table is to make out your satisfaction with various issues in the company where you had your latest tour. Please rate each issue by setting one cross for each row corresponding to your level of satisfaction.*

How satisfied are you with the following issues in the company where you had your latest tour	Very satisfied		Satisfied		Not so satisfied		Missing
	N	valid%	N	valid%	N	valid%	
Salary	20	30,8	41	63,1	4	6,2	1
Salary remitted on time	34	51,5	30	45,5	2	3	
Leave pay	22	34,4	38	59,4	4	6,3	2
Possibility for free upgrading courses	28	42,4	35	53	3	4,5	
Occupational safety on board (latest tour)	25	37,9	38	57,6	3	4,5	
Job security (maintaining employment)	18	27,7	44	67,7	3	4,6	1
Allowance and quality of food (latest tour)	13	19,7	52	78,8	1	1,5	
Respect rights of the crew from shipmaster	16	24,6	46	70,8	3	4,6	1
Respect rights of the crew from ship company	16	25	48	75			2
Recognition and confidence from your superiors	17	25,8	47	71,2	2	3	
Your influence on the planning of own work	17	25,8	47	71,2	2	3	
The atmosphere between Danes and Filipinos	23	34,8	41	62,1	2	3	

If you have any comments to the above table or if you think of other important issues, which are not mentioned, please write it here:

---



---



---



---

**Your general considerations about a good workplace**

The purpose of the following table is to identify which issues are most important to you. Imagine that you are offered a new job. How would you weight the following issues, deciding whether you would take the job or not? Please rate each issue by setting one cross for each row corresponding to the importance you give to the issue.

How important are the following issues to you?	Very important		Important		Not so important		Missing
	N	valid%	N	valid%	N	valid%	
Job security (maintaining employment)	58	89,2	7	10,8			1
Salary remitted on time	57	87,7	8	12,3			1
Occupational safety on board	57	87,7	8	12,3			1
Recognition and confidence from superiors	54	83,1	11	16,9			1
Salary	53	81,5	12	18,5			1
Respect rights of the crew from company	51	78,5	14	21,5			1
Your influence on the planning of work	51	78,5	14	21,5			1
Respect rights of the crew from shipmaster	50	76,9	15	23,1			1
Possibility for free upgrading courses	47	73,4	17	26,6			1
Leave pay	46	70,8	19	29,2			1
Allowance and quality of food	38	58,5	26	40	1	1,5	1
Suitable duration of tours of duty	37	56,9	28	43,1			1
Suitable duration of vacation	29	44,6	29	44,6	7	10,8	1
Social life across nationalities, after work	33	50,8	26	40	6	9,2	1
Relief on time	29	45,3	28	43,8	7	10,9	2
The nationalities of the crew members	17	26,2	27	41,5	21	32,3	1
Having Filipino co-workers	12	18,8	38	59,4	14	21,9	2*

*\* one missing, one error*

*If you have any comments to the above table or if you think of other important issues which are not mentioned, please write it here:*

---



---

## **Open questions**

**The following questions are optional**

- 17.** Which advantages and disadvantages are connected to working for a Danish company (Danish flag), compared to your expectations about job satisfaction?

Advantages:

Disadvantages:

- 28.** If you have any comments to the questionnaire, please write it here (e.g. elaborating some of the answers, or mentioning additional subjects).

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTION!**