Ars Artium: **An International Peer Reviewed-cum-Refereed Research Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences**
ISSN (Online) : 2395-2423 • ISSN (Print) : 2319-7889
Vol. 5, January 2017
Pp. 88-105

Life of Female Seafarers: Stationed at the Port of Durban - A Study

*–Mariam Seedat Khan**
*Gunasekharan Dharmaraja***
*Belinda Johnson****
*Roxana Vahed*****

Abstract

Women have taken to sea, serving on board ships which were previously a male dominated industry. They can be found at all levels in the industry. They have historically constituted a small percentage of seafarers. They continue to establish themselves in the maritime sector at all levels, despite traditional perceptions that seafaring is reserved exclusively for men. Women seafarers from Russia, England and China have always been part of the maritime industry. The presence of women lends itself to new and complex areas of development on board cargo vessels, cruise, passenger ships and ferries. Women face many challenges to maintain a growing presence and growth as seafarers. While the demands and expectation of women may vary, common for all, are the challenges that faced in maintaining a healthy work life while also paying close attention to their family responsibilities. This paper seeks to explore the challenges that female seafarers experience on boards ships at sea; while at the same time maintaining and nurturing a relationship with their family.

Keywords: Women, Seafarer, Communication, Family, Balance, Work.

**Mariam Seedat Khan, Senior Lecturer, University of KwaZulu Natal, Durban, South Africa. Email: seedatm@ukzn.ac.za*

***Gunasekharan Dharmaraja, Associate Professor of English, Tamil Nadu National Law School, Tirichirappalli, Tamil Nadu (India)& a Former Post-doctoral Fellow, University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. Email: gdharmaraja@gmail.com*

****Belinda Johnson, Research Scholar, University of KwaZulu Natal, Durban, South Africa. Email: Johnsonb1@ukzn.ac.za*

*****Roxana Vahed. Research Scholar, University of KwaZulu Natal, Durban, South Africa. Email: vahedfam@law.co.za*

Introduction

Maritime literature has shown that women have long been a source of service during the 1990s. Their presence has steadily increased during and after the Second World War. Unfortunately, accurate statistics are unavailable as the numbers fluctuate from country to country. The overall increase in the number of women retained in service is a situation which can be heralded as a victory for all women who are trying to break into male-dominated professions. The increase in the number of women in the profession has occurred as a result of the worldwide expansion of the maritime sector and the subsequent and accompanying shortage in the supply of existing seafarers in terms of meeting labour demands. There are roughly 27000 women currently working in the profession, the majority of who have been relegated to the traditionally perceived female occupations and roles in the service industries such as kitchens, hotels, catering and hospitality areas of seafaring. This trend is similar to that found in other male dominated professions, where women may have entered the workforce and have broken through the "glass ceiling," however, the majority of them "are locked into lower paying, lower echelon, and female-dominated jobs with little opportunity for advancement" (Anon 32). In the seafaring profession, it is apparent that the gendered perceptions of female skills have been transferred from land to sea. In the light of the limited number of women who occupy senior or high ranking positions on ships, the important question that will need to be continuously addressed is: how can women seafarers are empowered to overcome gender-related challenges in the maritime sector?

The number of women currently pursuing a seafaring vocation is approximately 1-2% of a population of 1.25 million seafarers however the registration of Union membersare rarely accurate. Women according to the Seafarers International Research Centre have "in 2000 accounted for over 18% of total Seafaring labour force in the cruise fleet" (Anon 11). The employment of women on Cargo ships create a difficult working environment whilst, women seafarers on pleasure cruises find that their working conditions are easily accepted as they are the stereotypical role of women.

Women holding positions of rank are few and far between in all categories of vessels. It is within this historically male dominated context that women seafarers experience many different and complex challenges in the work environment. Information on the number holding these positions are difficult to ascertain as "of the 27 trade unions that responded to the Seafarers International Research Centre, 13 reported that no data on women members" [were available] (Anon 12). The acquisition of data is an area that needs attention. Although these challenges vary from ship to ship, it is critical to advance the gendered question of 'How are women coping in a male dominated profession?'

Despite the increasing number of women employed in the maritime sector since 1980 (Chin 21), we see that life on board ships continues to cater almost exclusively to the needs of the male seafarer. Women have both historically and in the current environment continued to encounter gender-based challenges as a result of pursuing a career at sea. The prevailing perception of life at sea is that it is 'an unsuitable job for

a woman' because of the global construction that women are the 'fairer sex' who is not capable of handling manual labour that is required on board ships.

On board ships women begin their duties by negotiating acceptance at the outset amongst an all-male crew; facing scepticism; sexual harassment; lack of support from superiors and co-workers; unequal pay and treatment; lack of support for pregnant seafarers, to mention bit a few challenges. Personal ordealsinclude leaving family, friends, sometimes a partner and children behind. Risks include loneliness, suicide, fatigue and long trips. A Maritime-Executive who was interviewed in 2010 said that the maritime sector used to be one that was closed off to the historically disadvantaged, including women, but this is changing and we are geared for even greater success stories.

Research Methodology

With an extensive review of scholarship; the use of ten in-depth interviews conducted with female seafarers in the Port City of Durban, accessing internet blogs and conducting an online survey we attempt to provide a glimpse of the life of a female seafarer. This paper is based on interviews that were conducted with staff at the Durban Sailors Society. Staffs were interviewed at the offices at Bayhead as well as the offices at Umbilo road. A focus group meeting was held with eleven members of the sailors Society. This meeting was hosted by the Sailors Society in Bayhead on the 11 November 2012.

Due to the nature of the seafaring industry, data collection might be a challenge, due to the limited availability and access to willing participants. Also, because the industry is male dominated, accessing female seafarers might be a challenge. Lastly, language might be a barrier to data collection as seafarers come from different parts of the world. However, English is used as working language. For the purpose of this study, the researchers intend to use a non-probability sampling method namely the convenient sampling method. According to Davies "in convenience sampling you (the researchers) simply take what you can get where you can get it and interview the first eighty people you meet who agree to cooperate with you; you cold-call telephone numbers; you meet up with students at a union bar; or you email a thousand students and ask for volunteers" (55-56). This method is suitable for this study since access to seafarers is not easily available thus the researchers will gather participants at the Port of Durban Sailors Society using the convenient sampling method. However, more participants will be gathered using the snowball technique. According to Babbie (287), This research intends to explore and examine the occupational culture of seafaring from the perspective of female seafarers and examine how they make sense of and reinterpret their gendered identity both on-board and ashore. Here the focus is placed upon what kind of identity management strategies are utilized by women in order to cope with gender related issues. This will therefore explore how women seafarers' identities are affected by the nature and context of their work.

The Attitude of Male Sea

Mbambo, 29, is originally from Esikhawini on the North Coast of KZN but now lives in Glenwood, Durban (Maritime-Executive 2010). She laughs when she recalls the amazement of the captain of the first vessel she guided in after qualifying as an open license pilot recently. 'The captain actually took photographs and recorded a video while I was performing my job alongside him. It was very funny.' The needs and requirements specific to female seafarers are not always addressed within the maritime industry. One of the participants mentioned that "being at sea was difficult at first. I was the only cadet and the only female on a Russian cruise ship where only the captain spoke English well. But I eventually befriended another South African woman who joined the ship later and together we focused on achieving our career goals despite the challenges". Even though unions are continuously taking up the fight for female seafarer's basic human rights, there are still many shortcomings in the industry that needs to be addressed within this 'traditional' male dominated industry internationally.

The truth remains that life at sea is both emotionally and physically rigorous for seafarers of either gender. The predominance of perceptions, which encourage the belief that maritime vocations are essentially more suitable for men can introduce gendered constructs in seafaring roles and reinforce patriarchal practices. This is a socially constructed reality, which is persistent on board all ships where women are employed; it is the perception that male traits are needed in order to perform the job. A growing number of employers in the maritime sector are beginning to discover that females perform their duties well on board ships and this results in a more conducive environment on-board (Thomas 2004).

Why I Became a Seafarer?

The United Nations had actively been promoting the incorporation of women into the levels of employment in sectors of politics, economy and social arenas during the 1970s. This development was adopted by the Maritime sector that put into practice a programme which they referred to as "Women in Development" which resulted in employment at sea appearing to be appealing and financially rewarding (Anon 8). (Women Seafarer, Betty (Betty is her pseudonym) and in the interview was taken on September 2012, she says:

> All I really wanted was to earn enough money so that I can take care of my children; I never imagined that this life will be so difficult. I do not see my children for nine months every year. When I go home I don't know them. I am not sure how long I can do this for. If I do not work they do not eat. It is very simple. What would you do?

Women Seafarer, Alice which is her pseudonym in the interview taken on September, 2012 says:

> I always wanted to live the glamorous life. I really believed what I saw in the movies. I was naïve. The life on the ship is hard. The only people that enjoy themselves are the passengers. The workers like me do not have time to enjoy anything. At times the men would approach me and try and pressure me to sleep with them. Also the distribution of work does not seem fair. I have had the same job for all the time I have been on the ship while the man that joined with me has moved up the ladder.

This is Not What I Expected

While women enter the seafaring profession with high expectations, assisted by global norms, standards and regulations that emphasize gender equity and fairness, they continue to face the age-old gender-based norms, such as 'men earn and women take care of the house'. These challenges include but are not limited to: sexual harassment, economic inequality, violence, gender-insensitive living quarters on board ships, unequal opportunities to pursue career development opportunities and, gendered work environments.

Women seafarer's experiences at work are different from what they expected before joining the profession. This is especially the case given the public image of 'a magical life aboard a ship'. Women's realities in this seafaring industry are characterised by constant struggles as they tend to be kept in the subordinate position under a manager who in most cases is a man. This situation is not only frustrating but adds to the reasons why women's careers are short at sea as reflected by the following statement from a lady who worked as a seafarer: "I was very disappointed... [...] I thought more about it. Should I waste my time with the company if it is not willing to promote women or assist me in my career?" (Belcher et.al. 13)

Embracing Women

A small number of shipping companies have embraced the introduction of women into the maritime sector fully and have subsequently employed them in management positions which have been traditionally dominated by men. The rationale underlying this is the perceived positive contribution that women are making to this industry. Women are said to be both more alert and enthusiastic. Ship owners who have employed women managers have reported that; the social atmosphere on the ship improves with the presence of women officers. They play an important role if they are required to mediate arguments. Women are perceived as nurturers and as a result of this they tend to create a warm atmosphere aboard, this is reflected by the way in which they speak to their colleagues as given below:

> …the advantage is on board; all of a sudden the whole language changes to the positive, very positive. It's nothing like good old English, 'Oil!' It's not that. There is a 'please' all of a sudden and even between male communities everything changes. It has changed. No disadvantage, only advantage. (Thomas 11)

Socially Constructed Dual Identities

Women seafarers are forced to assume dual identities, if they are to fulfil their roles as mothers and workers. One identity is informed by their familial roles, while the other identity is influenced by the workplace. While negotiating both identities women are forced to strike a tenuous balance between the demands of both work and family. The sometimes-overwhelming nature of challenges encountered by women has led them to defy expected societal norms and therefore have pursued employment as seafarers, while at the same time ensuring the wellbeing of their family. The socially constructed nature of gendered norms reflects the overwhelming presence of men in the industry. This is a response from a male pilot meeting a female shipmaster aboard her ship from Hong Kong:

> ...No it's not possible. I'll call the traffic control. …There is a young lady here and she says she is the master. But, I have never seen a female master, so, what shall I do? Shall I disembark? (Belcher 13)

This is an indication of the socially constructed gendered perceptions that exist among seafarers. Finding a women captain on board ships is rare. Gregario argues that even the use of the term seamen to refer to seafarers demonstrate the construction of gendered job perception that sets in process the alienation that women in this sector experience.

Belcher et.al. maintains that in the global context there has been recognition that women and their labour have been under-utilised and under-developed in the maritime sector, despite an industry facing labour shortages. This acknowledgment has resulted in subsequent changes in labour recruitment strategies for women in the maritime sector. One of the areas where women appear to be attracted is the cruise sector where they work in the hotel and catering sectors, amongst others. It is estimated that in 2000, 92000 women were employed into seafaring, 70% of which were placed in the catering industry.

One of the possible reasons why so many women are absorbed into the cruise sector could be related to the nature of work these women occupy. The duties are very similar to the gendered roles or occupations that women are 'supposed to play' in traditional settings. This could also be the reason that up until now limited objections have arisen concerning the increased employment of women since in these sectors regarded as women's work, they cleaning, cooking, and waiting on tables and laundry.

Women are subject to harsh working condition where they work long hours with little or no time to rest. It might appear that because most women are doing "non-maritime" jobs that their working conditions are therefore better; this is not the case, as is reflected by the following statement from a female seafarer working on a cruise ship:

> …oh! Dear, oh! My God, what is this, a jail? So hard job, really hard. 12 hours stand up, without sit. We have half an hour to go for break. This half hour is for go to your cabin, five floors down. Take a shower, change your

> uniform for the night, arrange make up, anything, go to eat your dinner, come back, clean your teeth. You know, I just go take a shower, put my clothes \, my make-up and I go. No more time for it. If you want to eat, I don't know what time. Most people eat one, two, three o' clock in the morning. They eat half hour. My God!, never, I never take this dinner. (Thomas 41)

Although there is no much objection to employing women in the service sector where they are engaged in activities perceived as being 'women's work (such as either cleaning, cooking, serving food, doing laundry); women in this sector are subject to difficult working conditions, the stress of which is exacerbated by the physical isolation from family and loved ones.

Gendered roles tend to be reconstructed in seafaring as reflected by Filipino men working as cleaners on board ships. According to Fajardo, Filipino men, are regarded as feminine because of their involvement in housekeeping jobs whilst Filipino women perform front line work in the bars, reception areas and in shops on board. Gendered chores on the ship are different; because they are socially constructed within the context of the ship and both men and women are trapped. This further perpetuates the subjugation of both women and men.

Attractive women on board the ship are forced into having sexual relationships with a male partner for protection from other male seafarers. "The ships' doctor told a female seafarer that you are stressed and you need a male partner". This remark demonstrates the prevalence of a rather regressive and patriarchal viewpoint that is common in the maritime sector concerning the role and independence of women in the maritime sector.

Are Women Assuming Masculine Adaptive Strategies?

While the presence of women in seafaring industry has been encouraged the number of women remains very small compared to their male counterparts and the ways the occupational culture is designed continues to reflect masculine perspectives and dominance. There is a reason to believe that the norms and values embedded in the industry reflect the dominant beliefs and practices associated with masculinity. Jobs that are male dominated often have masculine structures and masculine organisational and occupational cultures and historically been designed by men for men in a manner that allows them to draw upon masculine strengths and characteristics. (Kitada 34) Women seafarers are forced to change into different identities on board and on shore. They step into different shoes at behest of demands. The male dominated societies on board and on shore demand immediate changes in their role of works and when seafarers fail to cope switching over to different roles, their marital lives fail. Out of ten women seafarers nine are divorcees. There is evidence that suggests that women tend to switch identities or alter behaviour in relation to their working environment. They can adopt or take on a masculine identity with the intention to fit into a work environment where the perceived roles and accepted behaviour are those that conform to masculine stereotypes. However, one question remaining to ask is whether this

identity management strategy continues to only be used in public work environment or whether this increasingly influences women's behaviour and identity in their private lives and if so to what degree? Marshall in 1984 argues that the experience of female managers in the retail profession demonstrated that when they adopted masculine behaviour and strategies this resulted in a substantial degree of pressure outside of the work environment. In the retail sector, traditionally valued and gendered skills were not effective management approaches in comparison to being both being competitive and assertive. This has resulted in them displaying types of behaviour that are on the opposite side of the continuum when it comes to socially acceptable female behaviour. They found that if they inadvertently adopted either this masculine behaviour or style of managing in either their own households or in society in general, it was not accepted. Additionally, it also was not always acceptable in other forms of employment and also often and conflicted with their own images of womanhood and how they felt they were reflected in the society. Young and single female managers experienced difficulties arising from social uneasiness and an inability to identify or develop an identity that was acceptable to their family or significant others that conformed to societal expectations and was also compatible with their own views of their gender identity. This then impacted on their intimate relationships with potential sexual partners, with most of them reporting on feeling dissatisfied with this area of their private lives. Even within those professions where adopting masculine strategies is acceptable, women engaging in these strategies however often face what is referred to as a 'double bind' (Demainter & Adams in an interview). While women need to demonstrate 'male' characteristics like toughness and aggressiveness in order to perform their jobs well, unless they also simultaneously appear feminine, they are often criticized (Demainter & Adams in an interview). The problem that arises then is that they are expected to demonstrate feminine traits at work, but with masculine traits are perceived to be associated with competency and they then might be viewed as being incompetent (Demainter & Adams in an interview).

This research raises questions about the extent to which women seafarers' experiences at sea are affected because of the way in which they must manage their identity. Not only might they be forced to adopt masculine identities in certain contexts but the reverse might also arise. In this case, given the specific type of employment that many women seafarers occupy (such as the service sector professions), women might actually be conforming to adopting those traditionally gendered roles that are expected of them.

As a result, a duality of gendered identities might begin to emerge leading to women having to constantly switch between acceptable identities depending on the role being occupied or the task being performed. This could lead to a substantial degree of emotional and psychological pressure on individuals who are already under emotional duress because of the enforced isolation and continued separation from family, which could be further exacerbated by the physical duress of a demanding occupation. In any event, strategies of either adopting male identities or behaviour in order to adapt to historically male dominated occupations, or adopting traditionally

female roles and behaviour to conform with employer and male colleagues expectations are counterproductive. This is because either approach still fails to challenge the occupational context dominated by masculine outlooks and expectations. As long as the occupational context remains unaltered, any attempt to create an environment where true gender equity in terms of employment prevails will fail.

Individual Woman's Experience

Megan Steward, a maritime captain addresses this issue of masculinity and femininity in her blog Captain Meg's BlogSpot. She argues that all women longed to be loved and long to feel beautiful and as the sole woman working on cargo and tanker ships, she had to re-evaluate her perception of beauty as a seafarer. As a female officer on tanker and cargo ships she had to find a balance between being viewed as a serious professional seafarer and still be viewed as a woman. She was aware of the fact that if she dressed and beautified herself, men could be given the wrong impression of her, so she decided to be like the men and 'go natural'. However, she realized that by doing so she was neglecting to take a stand for women in the maritime industry, and as there are only a few women it is important to not lose your gendered identity for the sake of the 'job', as she feels you can be women and be a seafarer at the same time. But in the same breath she said that she abides with the prescribe dress code and will not wear revealing clothes in front of the male seafarers as it will create an uncomfortable situation, and she does not believe that people should work together if they cannot be comfortable in each other's presence. As a woman officer, Steward in 2010 claims, that one is in an authoritative position, and depending on how you deal with male seafarers who work under you, you can be successful manager or a failure. Stewart was of the opinion that:

> A woman [officer] needs to speak in a tone of voice that doesn't make her sound too feminine but at the same time shouldn't change who she is to fit in with the rest of the guys. Having a strong, confident voice and being certain in what she is saying is a big point in this. Speak in a way which doesn't come across as intimidating to the guys or that you are trying to show them up that you know better than them. There is always going to be that little bit of conflict within some of the guys having to take an order from a woman. Once that respect and trust is established by the woman being confident, strong and sure of herself and her ability then the atmosphere opens up to be a more comforting environment. (Stewart 64)

Stewarts' behaviour demonstrates that she has engaged in an alternative strategy to that of assimilating masculine strategies or a masculine identity. Research has demonstrated that some women refuse to accept the masculine definition of what constitutes an ideal worker, and find alternative mechanisms to perform their jobs well while retaining their feminine identities. (34) The problem with assimilating masculine coping strategies or assuming a male identity in the seafaring profession is that it still fails to address challenges such a discriminatory environment and inequitable treatment.

The Maritime Community is Made Up of Many Races

The current perception prevalent in the shipping industry is that black people are ill-suited when it comes to occupying seafaring professions. Out of the ten women seafarers interviewed, nine that includes one black, eight white and one Asian accepted that racial discrimination can be seen on board and also among the women seafarers. In the South African maritime context it may well is that the persistence of this stereotype and how it influences employers and prospective employees results in a self-fulfilling prophecy. This is characterized by the scarcity of African officers as well as the low numbers of African ratings within maritime professions. The following extract demonstrates the type of perception that personifies the South African maritime sector:

> Even though the Zulu and Xhosa lived on the [KZN] coast they've never been fisherman or seafarers. They've actually never been in the sea. But Cape Town, there's actually no place where you can't see the sea. Because everybody there, black, white, coloured has either got an uncle or a father that was on the tugs, trawlers or with Submarine. (Ruggunan 23)
>
> This perception is similar to that encountered by women entering male-dominated work contexts where the gendered structure of the environment simultaneously privileges the work of men whilst limiting the opportunities of women, making it less likely that they are able to live up to the expectations the 'ideal worker' (Demainter & Adams in an interview).

Within the industry it seems that it is predominantly white males who occupy the senior or higher level ranks. These are the officers' ranks, which are staffed by the senior tertiary educated crewmembers; the most senior level is the captain or the master of the ship. These are the positions that are accompanied by certain benefits such as job security, medical insurance, medical aid etc. which may in some instances also be extended to family members or dependents (Ruggunan 149). Individuals from other race groups are found predominantly at the bottom of the ratings. It would therefore appear that in order foster true racial diversity and social equity, not only must the gendered constructs in the maritime profession be challenged, but also the racial constructs.

The Global Context

The interconnectedness of the world is reflected in labour mobility and thereby allowing for the flow of capital, people, goods, images and ideologies. With improved transport and Information and Communications Technology (ICTs) people are able to work, travel and communicate with others from any place in the world with greater ease than ever before. This results in increased employment opportunities for people from developing countries, whose individual contexts might be characterised by the lack of job opportunities. It is these technological advancements that increase the pool of cheap labour available to employers. Workers can accept employment anywhere in the world, at any given time. It is not uncommon to find ships that employ workers

from specific regions in the world. Filipino seafarers are in demand, they work well, speak English and they cost far less than workers from the United States and the United Kingdom. Filipino seafarers of both genders are highly sought after.

Technology has allowed for the easy access to cheap labour from all corners of the globe. It has also played an important role in the restructuring of the maritime industry as reflected by the multinational makeup of diverse crews working on board ships. Rugunnan's study on global employment trends in the maritime industry identified that the need for cheap labour has led to a number of changes in employment strategies adopted by the maritime sector. There has been a decrease in the number of seafarers that were employed from traditional maritime nations (TMN's) such as the United Kingdom and Europe. On the other hand there has been a subsequent escalation in the number of seafarers employed from developing countries, particularly Indonesia, China, and Philippines. The reason for this is that seafarers from developing countries are substantially cheaper to employ maintain that the need for profit is the driving force behind the outsourcing of cheapest labour globally. The result is that an increasing number of women from developing countries are migrating temporarily to wealthier countries to work as seafarers as there is limited number of employment opportunities in their countries of origin.

Mobility and Technology

Seafarers are mobile workers; their profession involves movement of a somewhat peripatetic nature, not only dictated by their port of call or origin but also by the nature of the seafaring conditions. Their profession requires them to spend a significant period of time in a somewhat isolated environment sailing across the ocean in a variety of weather conditions. As they traverse the oceans either transporting goods, transporting passengers or providing services in other specific maritime industries they begin to construct a reality that identifies them as a seafarer.

Female seafarers travel between land and sea, and the two destinations may have different gendered constructs. Each gendered space has an effect on the female seafarer's identity construction. Captain Megan who is a female seafarer with experiences working on different category ships, which include cargo and cruise vessels, explains how she adapted her 'gendered identity' while working on a vessel for a long time to 'fit in with the boys'. It could be argued that several female seafarers shift from one gendered identity to another gendered identity when working on a vessel to protect themselves from male seafarers. The ability downplay their 'female' identity can help protecting them from bulling and sexual harassment whilst working at sea.

Inaccessibility, although the snowball method is used to certain extent, is the only reason for not taking up the research on the data of understanding what happened to their female identities while the women seafarers on board as men, one can have the understanding that the sexual harassment they face on board could also be one of the reasons for this No-women status. Women seafarers face sexual harassment on board ships as a number of senior officers use their position (power) in the work place as

means of getting away with their own sexual gratification (ILO, 2003). As a result, women adopt different kinds of coping mechanisms to deal with sexual harassment. Some refrain from attending social events on-board while others de-feminize themselves just to avoid harassment. Female seafarers de-feminize themselves by adopting what is generally perceived as masculine behaviour, meaning, they dress and talk like men, they adopt habits such as heavy smoking and drinking. On the other hand, female seafarers pursue romantic relationships as a form of protection from possible harassment.

This identity construction also can influence a woman seafarer if she is placed within other gendered roles, such as being a wife and/or a mother. Being a female seafarer can be difficulty most of the time, but this can be complicated when they have to rely on technology to stay in contact with her family. The improvement of technology also allows for quality contact with their loved ones.

It is during this long absence that seafarers begin to develop an increasing dependence on technology (such as Microsoft Messenger, Skype, Facebook, YouTube as well as chat rooms and blogs etc.) This is the only possible way to keep in touch and remain connect with their own friends, family, social and community networks who remain at home onshore. There has been an increased growth in the use of such ICT's, particularly on board ships, this has been driven by the increased number of women on board ships. The availability of various forms of technology that allow for instant long distance communication, women are able to continue with their gendered familial roles while complementing them with the financial contribution they make through their employment in the maritime sector.

What the Sailors Society had to Say

Marietjie Beukes in an interview said that "One of the main reasons that seafarers visit the centre is because of the internet. They come in and call their family. It is important for us to always have phone cards available in our store. Phone cards are our best sellers. We have several private telephone booths that seafarers can use to stay in touch with family. My experience of seafarers is that they spend most of their time speaking to their family". During the time of personal interview, Yvonne Pelser said that, 'we hardly have the opportunity to see women in the centre, however when women do arrive, we see them regularly. They spend hours on the phone, and on the computer talking to their family and friends".

The Emergence of the Cyber Family

The notion of family has been reconstructed as theorists now use concepts such as "global house holding" and "transnational families" in an attempt to capture the way in which families are currently maintained and family roles are restructured and played in the face of globalisation.

Global house-holding refers to the formation and sustenance of households that are increasingly reliant on the international movement of people and transactions amongst

household members residing in more than one national territory. Transnational families on the other hand can be defined as families that live some or most of their time separated from each other, yet they hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity exists even across national borders. This global house-holding affects among other seafarers to a large extent. The long separation of mothers and fathers from their children, husbands from wives and wives from husbands challenges conventional notions of the way in which families function under these unique conditions.

The development of new forms of technology, that allow more extended travel and those that allow for new forms of instant communication, have since their inception changed every aspect of human life. It has more especially changed the nature of relationships and the dynamics therein. This reality however varies depending on the type of ship, the level of access to technology, the cost factor and the frequency of the availability of technology on board while the ship is in motion.

While the use of ICTs for familial communication and parenting may in some ways alleviate the emotional distress experienced by women seafarers to a certain degree, it does not in any way make up for their long absences while at sea. Their regular communication could also lead to different forms of psychological pressure from information that they receive from their family on a regular basis. In an interview taken by the authors, a female respondent says:

> When I speak to my family at home and they give me sad or bad news it upsets me. I am so far away. There is nothing I can do. Sometimes I am nervous to make contact with them. Nobody likes to hear bad news when you are so far away. It is very difficult you miss important occasions. I have missed weddings, funerals, school plays, special holidays and important religious ceremonies. (One of the female respondents who is not ready to reveal her identity)

A South African Context in a Global Era

There has been a reduction in the employment of South African seafarers as a result of the countries strict labour policies which have been developed to protect vulnerable employees such as those designated as Historically Disadvantaged Individuals (HDI's). Like seafarers in the TMN's (Transit & Marine Networks), thousands of South African seafarers have lost their jobs in the maritime industry because their labour costs have escalated to the point where they exceed those of seafarers that can be employed from south-eastern countries. This was a point that was raised by of the interviewees. John, which is his pseudonym, explained that the seafaring company with whom he was associated would not employ South African ranked crew members because of the current labour laws and union 'interference'.

According to John, it is far too expensive for companies to employ South African ranked officers under the current labour laws and union actions. However, when it comes to rating seafarers such as those employed in the service industries like the

entertainment, hospitality or hotel sector of the ship, South African staff are welcome. He mentioned that his company is happy to continue employing South African staff to service the hospitality and entertainment sector. This is because of the different terms of service between the maritime and hospitality industry within the seafaring profession and the subsequent different degrees of protection afforded to ranked as opposed to rating crew members.

In South African historically disadvantaged groups also experience challenges and women in South Africa are subject to a double oppression on the basis of both race and gender. This profession has not only been socially constructed in a way that privileges males, and in South Africa, white males. While the diversity of individuals is increasing in the maritime sector, it would appear that the predominantly white male work place culture marginalizes women, limiting their opportunities. There are however, a few exceptions which are given below:

> Three Durban women have made history by becoming Africa's first black, female marine pilots to obtain an open license that enables them to navigate ships of any size and type into South African waters. (Maritime-Executive 12)

In South Africa, white males still monopolise employment as seafarers. While efforts have been made to transform maritime professions and seafaring occupations so that they reflect the diversity of South Africa, there are a series of challenges that have emerged. This was the view of recipients from historically disadvantaged backgrounds who received financial support from Transnet for a year of studies and completed their practical training. They trained as cadets while at sea with Submarine and Unicorn. While gaining work experience on board the ships they sailed to Europe and the Far East (Maritime-Executive, 2010). Once the training had been completed the students were required to undergo a rigorous oral exam. The exam was conducted by the South African Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA).

> They obtained Class 3 tickets to be junior deck officers responsible for auto piloting vessels and managing safety equipment. They then trained and worked as tug masters at Transnet, maneuvering ships in and out of the port with the aid of small tugboats. After a one year pilot training programme they qualified as junior pilots before progressing through the various license grades, starting with smaller ships of around 16 000 gross tons, then 20 000, 25 000, 35 000 and eventually finishing with an open license. Rufus Lekala was also part of that first development group and now holds the position of Chief Harbour Master for South Africa. He is also the youngest in the world. (Maritime-Executive 20)

The Training of Seafarers

South Africa currently does not have any commercial ships which are registered with South Africa as their country of origin and which fly the South African flag. This is as a direct result of the cost implications that are involved in registering in South Africa.

Owners incur less taxes and find it cheaper to register South African owned ships with other countries and to sail under flags of convenience. (Raggunan 288) It is a lack of South African registered vessels that have had a substantial effect on the training of South Africans, specifically the marginalised, women and black people. Although efforts aimed at transforming race and gender representation in the South African seafaring profession have been remarkable, practical training provided is lacking fall short at is in terms of the practical training provided.

Current regulations stipulate that all seafarers are required to complete training on board vessels for a period of twelve months. Because South Africa does not have vessels to provide this specific and essential training, the training of seafarers therefore is determined by the ship owners. The Ship owners' primary motivation is on profit and labour cost is usually the first to be cut. Sourcing the cheapest possible labour is part of companies way to cut cost. Since the current cost of providing practical instruction is estimated to be Rs. 50 000, the expense of employing and training South African seafarers it would undermine any attempt to reduce labour costs while increasing profit. It is because of this that ship owners tend to prefer to source labour from countries that have more 'relaxed' labour laws. They also tend employ those seafarers from India, China and Asia who have already completed their training and whose practical instruction therefore costs less. Despite these challenges, South Africa continues to be an important role player in the maritime industry through the development of its harbours, ports and the activities of both ranked and rated maritime professionals. The fact that since it is the rating professionals who are preferred for employment globally does pose a number of problematic issues. Since research indicates that these are the occupations where individuals from historically disadvantaged race groups and women are likely to employed, and that individuals in these jobs are more likely to be exploited, this further perpetuates inequity and discrimination against these groups.

The continued employment of young women should however be heralded as a victory published in an Interview in SAMSA, 2013. In terms of the number of young men and women who go on to join seafaring professions in the international context and in absence of ships registered in this country, South Africa continues to contribute immensely to the process of globalisation. However, it is a pity that the seemingly insoluble tension between the expensive operating environment in South Africa and the ship owners' drive to reduce labour costs contribute to the continued lack of training facilities for young seafarers. As long as this is the prevailing dynamic that characterizes the existing context, true racial and gender transformation and representation in the SA seafaring profession will continue to be an elusive goal.

Conclusion

Women seafarers face a number of challenges, both in South Africa and internationally. Whilst expansion of the maritime industry and associated labour shortages have led to an increase in the number of women being employed in the seafaring profession, these numbers are limited and for the most part confined to historically perceived women's jobs: most of those can be found in the service industry. Professional mobility

and access to benefits that are the equivalent to those accrued by male colleagues for rated female officers can only take place in an environment where both employers and employees truly commit to supporting the entrance of women into seafaring professions. In dealing with gendered constructions of identity and accepted behaviour; not only must the changing roles and jobs of women in this sector be accepted and encouraged, but the prevailing occupational culture needs to be challenged at all levels. The adoption of masculine behaviour or adaptive masculine strategies might initially allow women to function in the seafaring profession, but the subsequent and continued renegotiation of their identity could expose them to increased emotional pressures. This also fails to help women address or remove associated challenges that they encounter. Until the organisational context that allows for the acceptance of outdated patriarchal practices and paradigm shifts, potentially harmful practices will continue to threaten the status of women seafarers. The continuous challenging of a male-dominated culture will also allow for the development of a more gender sensitive work environment that caters to a specific range of needs for seafarers of both genders. In South Africa the global demand for female seafarers might be a way in which youth unemployment might be addressed. However, current labour legislation and the practice of South African ships becoming "Flag of Convenience vessels" mean that there are limited training facilities available. A continuation of this situation in the near future seems likely, which will result in limited race and gender transformation in the rated professions with the majority of HDIs still being employed in the lowest paid rating professions. Again, as long as this situation prevails, the ability of South African women seafarers to overcome gender prejudice and discrimination and expand beyond the maritime professions they currently occupy will be limited and dependent on circumstances.

Works Cited

- Anon. *Women Seafarers: Global Employment Policies and Practices*. Geneva: International Labour Organisation, 2003. Print.
- Belcher, P., H. Sampson, M. Thomas, J. Veiga and M. Zhao.*Women Seafarers: Global Employment Policies and Practices*. Geneva, International Labour Organization, 2003. Print.
- Chin, C. B. N. (2008). *Cruising in the Global Economy: Profits, Pleasure and Work at Sea*. England: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008. Print.
- Fajardo, Kale Bantigue. *Filipino Crosscurrents: Oceanographies of Seafaring, Masculinities and Globalisation.*Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011. Print.
- Finke, S. *Women Transporting the World: An IFT Resource Book for Trade Unions Negotiators in the Transport Sector*. 2012. *Wowonline.org*. Web. http://www.wowonline.org/green_members/documents/WomenTransporttheWorldunionpublication.pdf.

- ---. *Women Transporting the World: An IFT Resource Book for Trade Unions Negotiators in the Transport Sector*. 2012. *Wowonline.org*. http://www.wowonline.org/green_members/documents/WomenTransporttheWorldunionpublication.pdf.
- Graham, E., & Jordan, L.P. "Migrant Parents and the Psychological Well-being of Left Behind Children in Southeast Asia." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 73 (2011): 763-787. Print.
- Gregorio, E.R. "The Filipino Seafarers' Lived Experiences Aboard International Shipping Vessels: A Basis for Health Promotion Intervention." *Acta Media Phiilipina* 46.3 (2012): 69-74. Web. http://actamedicaphilippina.com.ph/sites/default/files/fulltexts/vol46-no3-p069-074.pdf.
- Hoang, Lan Anh., and Brenda S.A. Yeoh. "Sustaining Families across Transnational Spaces: Vietnamese Migrant Parents and Their Left-behind Children." *Asian Studies Review* 36.3 (2012): 307-325. Web. http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10357823.2012.711810?scroll=top&needAccess=true.
- Hutson, Terry. "SAMSA's Drive to Build a National Ship Register". Ports & Ships Maritime News. (1 June 2012). Web. http://ports.co.za/news/news_2012_06_01_01.php.
- International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) Seafarers. "Women: Facing a Coalition of Resistance." ITF Seafarers Your Port of Call Online. (2003). Web. 12 Nov. 2012. http://www.itfseafarers.org/resistance.cfm/.
- Kitada, Momoko. "*Women Seafarers and their Identities. Diss.*" Cardiff: Cardiff University, 2010. Print.
- Klein, Ross A. "High Seas, Low Pay: Working on Cruise Ships." *Our Times: Canada's Independent Labour Magazine*. (December 2001/January 2002). Web. 20 Oct. 2016. http://www.cruisejunkie.com/ot.html.
- Maritime-Executive. "Three Durban Women Become Africa s First Black, Female Marine Pilots to Obtain Open License." *Black Maritime Grads*. (2010). Web. http://www.blackmaritimegrads.org/news/16-three-durban-women-become-africa-s-first-black-female-marine-pilots-to-obtain-open-license
- Nautilus. (2009c, May). Contents BGM 2009.
- Ruggunan, S.D. *Global Transformation of the Contemporary Labour Market for Merchant Navy Seafarers: Case Studies of Filipino, South African and British Seafaring Labour Markets.* Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, 2008. Print.
- Singh, N."Reasons Behind the Lack of Women Officers in Maritime Industry." (2011). Qtd. in. Mariam Seedat Khan, et.al." Understanding Female Seafarers who have Passedthrough the Port City of Durban." Web. http://www.academia.edu/11884569/Understanding_Female_Seafarers_Who_Passed_Through_the_Port_City_of_Durban.

- Stewart, M. "Young Women Seafarer." *Captain Meg's Blogspot*. (2010). Web. http://captain-megs.blogspot.com/2009/11/believe-in-your-lifes-purpose.html.
- Thomas, Michelle. "Get Yourself a Proper Job Girlie!": Recruitment, Retention and Women Seafarers." *Maritime Policy & Management: The Flagship Journal of International Shipping and Port Research* 31.4 (2004): 309-318. Web. 20 Oct. 2016. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0308883042000259828.
- Zhao, M., & Amente, M. S.V. "Chinese and Filipino Seafarers: A Race to the Top or the Bottom?" *Modern Asian Studies* 39.3 (2005): 535 – 557. Print.

❑❑❑

Acknowledgement: The authors are thankful to all seafarers who consented to give interviews.