

THE MOBILITIES, IMMOBILITIES AND MOORINGS OF WORK-LIFE ON CARGO SHIPS

Maria Borovnik

ABSTRACT

Despite the rather obvious mobilities of cargo ships, there are not so obvious immobilities. Both are negotiated through global economic processes; the (ir)regular and repetitive processes of ships criss-crossing international waters and encountering ports of differing nation states, and the agency of people involved in these processes. This paper, based on an ethnographic fieldwork period of 29 days on a container ship, argues that the highly mobile shipping industry can immobilise or constrain, and that seafarers apply mooring or anchoring strategies to deal with these constraints. Similarly, shipping technology does not only enable mobile processes or link to fixities as enablers; it also can become constraining or immobilising. The circumstances of these immobilising dynamics are linked with neoliberal processes within the shipping industry. These include increasing speed and restructuring, and the need for workers from developing countries to compromise their employment conditions to remain competitive. Immobilities are also linked to increased border security after transport sector related terrorist attacks that started in 2001. In contrast to these paralysing factors, this paper discusses the enabling and anchoring mooring processes by linking these to a positive view on social construction of place.

INTRODUCTION

Cargo ships are mobile within, and mobilised through, a network of ‘assemblages’ (Latour, 2007). On ships, cargo is organised, loaded and unloaded, and people are sporadically brought together and taken apart from each other.¹ These social and material assemblages of cargo ships induce change and temporariness, and make them places of connections, cosmopolitanism and coerced identities. Ships literally move and re-arrange place. These shifts take place within a capitalist system of social relationships, where work-life on

ships is shaped by global competition, speed and security. Rearrangements include a grand set of ‘multiple fixities of moorings’ that enable and perform what Hannam, Sheller and Urry (2006:3) describe as ‘the fluidities of liquid modernity and especially of capital’.

The shipping industry articulates such performances, as this paper will argue, and in the process immobilises people. The argument in this paper addresses the question of how people deal with a continuing rearrangement of place. The concept of *multiple fixities of moorings* will be split in two categories. The first addresses the fixity of immobility, a paralysing, unavoidable process that is driven by forces of globalisation and international waves of hyper security, and in this sense *disembodies* from human agency (Elliott & Urry, 2010). In contrast, the second category addresses human agency, the anchoring or moorings that make it possible to *connect* socially and emotionally, and in doing so, also enables people to remain economically functional. Fixity in the context of *immobilities* has aspects of distance, monotony and uncertainty, and in the context of *moorings* is linked to shared experiences, predictability and some certainty.

After a decade of fieldwork, mainly with seafarers from Kiribati and Tuvalu in their home countries, I had the opportunity to experience a period of twenty-nine days, between Christmas 2009 and New Year 2010, on a containership travelling in the South and South East Asian region. This paper will refer mainly to this on-board fieldwork period, in which I conducted interviews with a group of twenty multinational seafarers, the majority of which were from Kiribati, and others whom originated in Tuvalu, the Philippines, the Ukraine and New Zealand. I also wrote daily journal entries to note my observations and experiences while travelling with these men and the one woman accompanying her husband. I will base most of the material presented here on my journal entries. This research was considered sensitive by Massey University and received full ethics approval. Seafarers had a choice to sign consent forms and were at all times aware of my research. I am protecting seafarers’ identities by not revealing nationalities and by generalising status. Seafarers from Kiribati, Tuvalu and the Philippines occupied all sections of the ship departments and comprise ratings, as well as higher ranks. Those from Ukraine and New Zealand occupied higher ranks of the engine and deck departments.

Based on my observations and the narratives of seafarers during these twenty-nine days, this paper will focus specifically on the seafaring experiences created by the intersections of ship and shore. Such intersections of mobility could be seen as situated accomplishments.² Driven by mundane work and social

interactions, they create spatial arrangements and routines through mobility; hence, forming a system pattern of symbolic interaction that is economic and social (Aden, 1999: 60). Ports as well as cargo ships, referring to the accomplishments of shipping and the social interactions that occur between ship and shore, are similarly places between the static and mobile, with different degrees of *intensities of staying* (Morris, 1988; Normark, 2008: 241). These intensities of staying can be described as fragments. Interactions on ships are fragmented, mainly through the temporality of staffing, the links to and delinks from geographical time-zones, and the containerisation of work time that is interrupted by security controls and port activities. Interactions in ports become fragmented with time and place constraints. By facilitating speedy turnaround of cargo, to reach markets and consumers as fast as possible, container terminals in particular are the most extreme example of fragmentation as they require enormous space and complicated technology. As a result, shipping and commoditisation have gradually relocated activity away from human interaction.

These fragmented contemporary experiences of speedier environments of ships and ports are compromised situated accomplishments, adapted to speedier turnaround and border control. Despite the obvious mobility that shipping embodies, there are underlying immobilities articulated by the containment of cargo ships and the remote and restricted access to shore. These immobilities have shifted the space of interactions between ship and shore from shore to ports and even back onto the ship, and have created narrower and more focused centralities of interactions. For example, seafarers observed that security patrols enter ships more frequently since the event of 11 September, 2001 and further away from shore; shore activities that seafarers used to undertake away from ports and closer to city centres or suburbs are now done mostly within custom zones of ports; traders selling their goods on ships have become important for both entertainment and for purchasing opportunities of items that make ship life less monotonous. Generally, dynamics of (im)mobilities aboard ship are linked to the length of time spent on it and are in immediate contrast to a lack of time spent ashore. This immobilised work-life affects seafarers that have the longest contracts the most (Borovnik, 2011; Klein, 2002). These seafarers are usually from developing countries.

The following sections discuss these situated overlapping ship and shore related processes between mobility, immobility and mooring. In the first section on *mobilities*, I will compare the interactions between ship, shore and people to 'loops' (Bissell, 2012) or a continuous, yet irregular, kind of ebb and flow of coming and going. Then, in the second section on *immobilities*, I will investigate two main factors that immobilise seafarers. The first factor is economic,

mainly articulated by time-constraints. The length of time spent in any one contract leads to constraints that are inextricably linked to the shortage of time caused by rushed turnarounds and the inability to move away from work and ship. Seafarers must work in lengthy contracts to provide financial means for their families at home. The second factor is related to global, maritime and national security; border control and piracy can lead to a variety of constraints and to less shore leave. Finally, I will investigate in the section on *moorings*, how anchoring spaces reassure sanity and a sense of settling among the ship life's mobility.

MOBILITIES

Mobilities related to the shipping industry can be described within a context of loops in that they are functions of proximities and neighbourhoods. Those loops addressed within shipping are 'pointillist' in that they are aiming toward economic goals (Bissell, 2012). They also articulate 'transversally' and in doing so create two different patterns. One is a loop created by the port to port movements of ships; the other is created by ship to shore and shore to ship movements of people. These loops are linked to a geographical scale of fixities; on one end of this scale are ships that seemingly have very little geographical fixity as they are criss-crossing latitude and longitude during the process of mobility, on the other end is the strong geographical location of ports, fixed and determined by latitude and longitude, experiencing the ebb and flow loops of water as well as people.

Ships are mobile machines, archetypical symbols of modernities that move capital and people. Ships have been defined and symbolised as both spaces and places, but mostly as marginal spaces of 'in-between-ess', constituting relationships between movements and moorings. Ships provide opportunities, identities, and in some cases even transgressions, in freedom from land (Stanley, 2008). They are described as protecting cocoons surrounded by a marauding sea (Bachelard, 1994:124), and yet they seem also places of statelessness or lawlessness (Stanley, 2008). Sampson (2003) refers to hyperspaces as they seem unreal, almost placeless, which is similar and yet in some contrast to Foucault's (1994) positioning and emphasising on the fluidity and marginality of ships as heterospaces.

Ships move across de-territorialised, and what Steinberg (1999, 2001) described as *empty*, and sometimes dangerous ocean space in a criss-crossing, transversal pattern (Borovnik, 2005). In doing so, they create *pathways* (Young, 1998), or relationships between routes and roots when crossing borders, and

touch-basing different nations with their movements (Gilroy, 1993: 12). With such movements, connections between different environments and societies are being established and things and people are being kept in circulation (Leontis, 1997). In an earlier paper, I discussed maritime space in the context of *emporion*, a term referred to by Leontis (1997: 181) and applied by Crang, Dwyer and Jackson (2003) as ‘traffic in merchandise, especially by ship’. This concept is useful because it leads away from the fixities of nation-state boundaries as separating, and emphasises the fluidities of ocean space as connecting and positive because of a ‘common interest of keeping things in circulation’ (Leontis, 1997: 189; see Borovnik, 2005: 135). Cargo ships connect not only merchandise (commodities), they also temporarily bring people of different nation states in contact, either as multinational crewing communities, or during different activities in ports or on shore.

The contemporary shipping industry can in some way be seen as a pioneer of globalisation as it is a capitalism facilitating sector. Ships take a crucial part in carrying raw materials to sites of manufacturing, and manufactured goods to sites of consumption. Within a highly capitalised cargo shipping industry, container ships are perhaps the most functional, fastest mobile factories (Symes, 2012). Capital is transported and created through a multitude of assemblages that are part of the contemporary shipping industry and has reached its peak in container shipping. This highly mobilised contemporary system is a multinational division of labour, where ship construction, ownership and management, cargo management, crewing management and recruitment, cargo and crew are located and operated dispersedly, and under a variety of legislations, operations and time frames (Alderton, Bloor & Kahvesi, 2004; Sampson, 2003). The social and physical mobilities of the shipping industry is somewhat symbolised by the practice of *flagging out*, the restructured territorialisation of cargo-ships, that allows them to be owned and flagged under different nation states (Chapman, 1992). More capital is accumulated through the avoidance of social and welfare costs, and with the possibilities of employment of multinational crews for competitively low wages.

Selected international recruitment has enabled a variety of hierarchies, which are a combination of old colonial officer and crewing structures and contemporary salaries that vary with the different recruitment agreements. It is possible that officers of higher rank from developing countries would work side by side with officers of lower rank who are earning a great deal more, despite the difference in rank, because of their European origin.³ The following two journal entries show that seafarers are aware of these salary differences, which can cause sensitive reactions by crews:

One of the engineers used to work for a long time with crews of different nationality. He explained that already just on this ship there are different wage scales related to the different nationalities and that talking about wages can be a sensitive subject (Journal entry, 22 December 2009).

I asked a couple of ratings this afternoon if they have noticed a bit of resentment between crew members knowing that they are on different wage scales, such as this is the case on this ship. The men said that on this ship things are usually all OK, but that they have experienced situations on other ships where this could have been an issue. One of them mentioned that there is sometimes resentment against some of the 'white men' that don't perform as well as others do and yet they earn a lot more (Journal entry, 25 December 2009).

Crews of the same rank and experience can also sometimes work under significantly different contract agreements. These agreements include length of contract, length of leave, availability of pocket money, and permission for alcohol consumption (Alderton, Bloor & Kahvesi, 2004).

The just described external and internal structures have effects on both ship movements and on the irregular or regular mobilities of people. Firstly, ship movements are influenced by a combination of arrangements between ship and cargo management, and furthermore, by agreements between the ship's flag state and the coastal nation states in which ports are located. Some ships, for example 'my' containership, have pre-arranged loops, and circulate a repeating schedule between ports of South and South-East Asia. Other ships, however, operate more in a gypsy-style fashion, picking up cargo agreements underway, and hence, could be travelling globally without particular long-term agreements, creating rather open ended loops. Moreover, different loops are created between so called roll-on roll-off (ro-ro) vessels that operate in areas where ports are in closer proximity to each other, and vessels that travel in a combination of short and long distance. These various operations have different effects on seafarers. The smaller, busier loops of ro-ro ships require more energy and create a more intensive fatigue than the medium to larger sized loops of vessels travelling longer distances (Wadsworth, *et al.*, 2008).

Secondly, the mobilities of people can range from regular, for example three or six monthly contracts and similarly regulated off time, to irregular, when operating under one-off contracts of different lengths, when extending or shortening contracts, and when it is uncertain how much off-time will be experienced.

These (ir)regularities vary particularly with origin of seafarers, and operations of recruitment agencies. The (ir)regular boarding or disembarking of people creates an officer and crew peer environment where individuals or smaller groups will leave the group and be replaced with newcomers at different intervals. Hence, multinational crews are constantly reassembled depending on the nationality and contract agreement, and on outer circumstances, such as access to and from shore, replacement availability, and weather. It is possible for some crew to change ship during one contract. During the time on 'my' containership, which was during a period of economic recession (2009/10), someone told me that he had already worked on two ships, both of which were being laid dormant, because of the economic situation, before he boarded this current vessel. Typical rhythms of staffing changes are that officers have usually shorter contracts than crews, and seafarers from more remote developing countries have longer contracts than others: for example, crew, engineers and officers from the Philippines work in longer contracts than those from the Ukraine or New Zealand, and those from Kiribati work longer contracts than those from the Philippines.

Applying the concept of *loops* is possible, not only to describe the actual mobilities involved in ship or people's movements, but also because the loop 'prioritises the passage' (Bissell, 2012: p.n.a.). Thus, similarly to the notion of *emporion*, loops focus on the fluidity of the shipping industry, which is more suitable to the shipping context than focusing on the fixity of place or even routes. When engaging in loops, David Bissell (2012: p.n.a) argues, 'one is always simultaneously facing the point of departure *and* arrival, which has the effect of creating a very different sense of orientation.' The difference is in the switch from an awareness of starting and end points to a movement awareness, where the actual travel, or mobility creates a new effect of intimacy, and therefore in itself fills a space (Bissell, 2012, referring to Connor, 2010). This new intimacy is articulated in a need to continue travelling, such as the need for many seafarers to go back on board, despite the separation from families and the isolation from the familiar. Mobility in itself becomes the familiar. The following narrative describes this intimacy effect: the strange call, or pull, of the ship and the sea and the craziness of having to follow this call despite any adversaries or common sense:

Another of the engineers says that 'only crazy men do this job', because someone must be crazy to sign up for a contract where everything about the contract is uncertain and unsafe. ... When a seafarer signs up for a contract to go on board a ship he never knows what is going to happen next. Will there be dangerous weather, like ty-

poons, or will there be something wrong with the ship, or other dangers? Will they get on with the crew and what kind of captain will it be? And so on. So he says, it is totally crazy to sign up at all! ...

And yet, he loves going on the ship, although he doesn't know at all why that is so. For example, he knows a man who is 65 years old with huge hands, about double his own hands' size. This man is a bosun – he works really slowly, literally like a bit of a crab moving on deck, but he is used to hard work, as his hands indicate, and still works hard. So, the engineer asked him, 'Why do you still work? You are old, you are of retirement age already, why don't you stop working and enjoy your grandchildren and a good life as a pensioner?' The old man responded that he tried to do that and that he had spent three or four months sitting at home and looking after his family, his grandchildren and all that. But, after a few months he just did not feel he was himself anymore, he felt like he wanted to go away on the ship, and so he did, and now that he's back on the ship he feels much better, much happier, much more himself:

And so, the engineer says, this is how it is also for him. After some time on land something is starting to push him to go back to sea. He feels like he needs the different life, the adventure, the change that the seafarers' life brings. He says it is useless to talk to anyone on land about it, because at home seamen have this reputation of leading an easy, happy life, where money is being handed out to them just like that. Nobody on land, for example his father in law, does understand at all how hard, how uncertain and often even unsafe the seaman's life is. So he has given up explaining this to anyone (Journal entry, 4 January 2010).

The narrative of this engineer describes the contradiction that lies within the seafaring employment as one of the more uncertain, globally driven, and even dangerous environments. These uncertainties and dangers are contrasting with the steadiness and rhythm of mobile work, whether on deck or in the engine room, where one moves about while keeping occupied. This is in contrast to the settled life at home where things seem to remain still. On land *observing* grandchildren grow up is interpreted in this example as a process, and one that is a great deal slower than working on a cargo ship.

This attraction to going back aboard ship is experienced across different cultures. I have heard seafarers from different nationalities speak about the sea

that seems to be drawing people back into their seafaring occupations, despite all hardship. When working in a seafaring job it seems as though one is simultaneously in two worlds – a timeless, steady world of movement as well as a crazy, dangerous world of events – and as such one is captured by an *extensive loop*, a transversal encounter of non-linearity (Bissell, 2012). This extensive loop experience, however, can be greatly immobilising as it is for one of the officers in the following description:

For days nothing but ocean all around – a very pretty sight – but one of the officers mentioned this evening that these are the loneliest times, when there is nothing but sea and no telephone to phone his wife (Journal entry, 3 January 2010).

Satellite telephones make it possible at all times to contact families, but these phone calls are costly and are therefore avoided. Globalisation has drawn people from ever farther places into the shipping industry, yet, not providing all with equal opportunities to connect with home. The following section will continue to describe immobilising factors in the shipping industry and how container shipping has decreased options for seafarers to connect with shore and home. These factors are within the almost paradoxical intersection of the highly mobile enablers of globalisation that have given employment options to people from remote, nonindustrial countries in the Asia-Pacific, and their constraints on the physical movements of people while working aboard ships.

IMMOBILITIES

Two major immobilising factors in the shipping industry can be observed in my fieldwork data. Neoliberal globalisation, emphasising highly competitive free market policies and hence, putting enormous pressure on all actors involved, particularly on seafarers, is a first factor. A second factor is related to security, border control, patrolling, and piracy prevention. In the following I will explain how the combination of these two interlinking factors has contributed to monotony, limitations and disempowerment for cargo ships' crews and officers.

The practice of *flag of convenience*, already mentioned above as part of the assemblage of the shipping industry, accelerated in the 1980s as a consequence to address a period of recession and has since become part of mainstream practice (Alderton & Winchester, 2002; Chapman, 1992; Klein 2002).⁴ This *flagging out* to the flag of a nation with a system that allows lower social and welfare employment standards on ships has provided opportunities for both

shipping owners and migrant workers. Seafarers from developing countries, without viable employment alternatives and willing to work under difficult circumstances for the sake of financially supporting their families, have gradually replaced highly waged crews and officers and are cost efficient for the shipping industry, especially when spending lengthy times at work. Global crewing and recruitment operations have created a variety of contracts, where salaries are negotiated, and time lengths range from three months to up to twelve months depending on the administrative investments involved for different groups of seafarers⁵. Longer contracts are more efficient for shipping companies because they allow for reductions in transport costs, which will make a significant difference when employing seafarers from remote locations. And efficiency makes shipping companies viable on a highly competitive global market. Longer contracts, however, have placed seafarers into a long-term constraint of ship-space. Therefore, economic circumstances around the shipping industry have become a double edged sword. On one hand they have provided excellent opportunities, on the other hand they have led to constraints and immobilities for seafarers bound into a highly competitive employment market.

The construction of high-capacity, highly competitive and remotely located container ports has made the operations of the shipping industry speedier (Notteboom, 2007), but has also increased time pressure. Faster turnarounds do not allow crews to spend much time ashore, and in combination with border control force seafarers to quickly handle personal phone calls, shopping and some quick entertainment within restricted port areas. Some studies have shown that the time constraints and lack of relaxation, effects of the speedier cargo operations could lead to burnout syndromes and fatigue and it has been recognised that work on ships is particularly stressful (Borovnik, 2011; Carter, 2005; Leszczyńska, 2007; Wadsworth, *et al.*, 2008).

Stress has increased even more with the introduction of global security measures that are specifically targeting the transport sector. A first trigger for increased surveillance and border control was the attack in New York on 11 September, 2001. This event triggered a global fear of the transport sector as endangering because of possibilities to carry weapons of mass destruction. This fear was exacerbated by attacks in Madrid 2004, London 2005, and Mumbai 2008, all either misusing or targeting the transport sector. Random patrolling has now become more frequent. Unexpected patrols boarding the ship further and further away from ports wake up seafarers and rob them of their few opportunities to rest as well, as making them feel criminalised. In some ports, such as along the Indian coast after the Mumbai bombing in 2008, access to shore is only allowed during daytime. All crew have to be back by

9pm, which gives less options for crews to organise themselves around shore leave. The following description shows how seafarers feel that there is not a lot of opportunity to go on shore in some places, and how restrictions have made their situation really uncomfortable:

One of the officers talks about the manifold restrictions on shore nowadays. He says that he cannot understand why seafarers are so much targeted. After the Mumbai bombing there are quite a few changes now in India. For example Chennai used to be a port where seamen could stay on shore for a long period, even overnight if they wanted to. This officer used to stay out until late. But now having a late night on shore is not possible at all anymore because the shore stay is restricted by port officials to 9pm in the evening, which means everyone has to leave town already at 8pm. This is pretty dreadful because Chennai is so hot that no one likes to go there during day time and usually, before the Mumbai event, all would go on shore leave at about 5pm and stay overnight or for a late night. Now, these restricted conditions would only leave a few hours or so. He then talks in length about the strangeness of restrictions also in US America, where he feels no one wants to be a seafarer anymore and yet now they are so restrictive to seafarers who are mostly strangers (meaning foreigners). It just does not make sense in his point of view (Journal entry, 20 December 2009).

The officer in this example, who commented on this restrictive situation, also had some thoughts about the absurdity of xenophobia, where it seemed as though in some nations, such as the USA, where foreign workers are filling into less desirable jobs are being regarded as strangers, not to be trusted. These thoughts are shared by some scholars writing on the hypocrisy of migration laws and border control, such as Bakewell (2008) and Munck (2008). De Haas (2008) argued that most security responses are exaggerated and that border control only shifts illegal action, but does not eliminate it. The issues brought up here, however, are that security responses are directed against a perceived threat from the transport sector and are immobilising seafarers in the process. The few ports with longer turnarounds and options for actual shore leave, that would allow seeing something different from the accomplishments of the shipping industry, are being jeopardised and the feelings of freedom are restricted. The following quote exemplifies this:

I spent some time with X today. He says interesting things such as 'we are prisoners on board this ship' in response to my question if

he will go on shore today. He does not usually go on shore because there is not enough time for him and he can rarely make it. I don't think that he has been on shore during his time on this ship. He says things like the above with a big smile in his face, but his eyes are serious. And when I ask sincerely if he really feels like a prisoner, he confirms 'yes'. They (referring to others in his department) really are like prisoners. They can never leave the ship and they have quite strict working hours. He feels that he has many responsibilities that need attending to (Journal entry, 25 December 2009).

Interacting with people outside the ship-environment, having time to move away from the ship space, taking time to distract oneself from the emotional pain caused by distance from families and communities at home, and the pressure caused by having to contain oneself within the hierarchies and multinationalities of ship-life is important for one's own sanity. Even smaller time patches away from it all, spent with a group of local girls, or mates from different cargo-ships, or spent with people one had been acquainted with at earlier times, spent with window shopping and sightseeing, or the consumption of local products, provide the social anchoring point (or mooring) that keeps the required discipline to sustain the hard work and hardship of separation from loved ones in place. Not having these opportunities for shore leave, or having only limited ones, is an immobilising process. Seafarers working maximum hours during peak times do not go on shore leave, although they might have opportunities, because they are too tired and would rather spend their off-time asleep. The following journal entry describes Christmas Day 2009, and how crew and officers dealt with having reached port, and the lack of sleep that prevents many from going on shore leave:

Christmas day morning started with a bit of noise. I feel sorry for the men as nobody seemed to have had much sleep at all today. During port time watch-keeping is extended to six hours instead of the usual four hours per shift. This means that the third mate's time is from 6–12 twice rather than from 8–12, and the second mate's is from 12–6 twice a day, rather than from 12–4. Ratings on watch keeping duty are also scheduled for six hours. The first mate's watch-keeping responsibility is all day round and the captain should usually only spend wake time during ship sailing and dealing with port agents. The agent left this morning, just after 6am. They had to wait for the pilot to come in until almost 3:30am last night, although the pilot was supposed to come at midnight.

One of the officers had to help out when a piston was being exchanged yesterday (a procedure that took more than twelve hours), so he had a long day, too, and he told me that he never leaves the ship during his contract, his watch-keeping times and other duties do not really provide any shore leave opportunities. A rating who had been involved with the piston exchange was very keen to go to church on Christmas day. He was so tired today, he told me that he could fall asleep any moment, but it is important to him to go to see the church on shore so he will stay up and go as soon as he has a chance (Journal entry, 25 December 2009).

These observations show that opportunities for shore leave have to be balanced with work responsibilities and are not always possible. External factors, such as the availability of pilots, permission for entering a port, and technical issues will determine options to spend time on shore for both officers and ratings. The above also shows that fatigue can be caused by sleep disruption.

A containership, as well as other cargo ships, is designed for maximum cargo efficiency. Seafarers' cabins, in quite some contrast, take up minimal space and are in close proximity to cargo. Finding sleep in a ship cabin under any circumstance (even the most comfortable) is not easy. The ship movement during seagoing times can, under rough conditions, shift and shake bed and cabin furniture in irregular intervals, and make sleep impossible. Even under good conditions, noise created by movements, the sounds of wind, waves and weather, the cracking clatter of containers when adjusting to the movement and the rushing past stairwells from peers is a constant companion during seagoing times and can be quite unsettling when trying to sleep. When in port, there are the sounds of cranes, ropes and metal, the loading and unloading, the commands from different people, agents entering and leaving the ship, sudden requirements to be up and going, which again will lead to sleep disruption and in the long term, to a subtle underlying feeling of tiredness. Bissell (2009:16) discusses how the *kinaesthesia* of the materiality of a travelling device has an effect in that it can 'serve to fatigue and tire the travelling body'. Yet the travels of seafarers go beyond the commute that sedentary workers experience in trains or buses, in that the on- and off-work periods are not as clearly distinguished, and that the travelling device, the ship, serves as both work and home space. Consequently, the kinaesthesia of the ship potentially serves to be an exacerbation of fatigue and burnout syndromes that are in addition to unusual and long working hours and the hard physical and mental seafaring work. Seafarers must apply strategies to sustain or even overcome these physical and mental stress factors. It is important to find emotional outlets or anchors in the

mobile livelihood of a constraint ship environment, where social contacts are fragmented, firstly because of the work requirements and secondly because of the irregular contact with port and shore.

MOORINGS

Moorings, in contrast to both the fluid mobilities and ‘things that stand still’ (Franquesa, 2011:1015), are a form of fixity or are ‘enabled by fixities’ that ‘may influence further movements’ (Adey, 2010:23–24; Hannam, Sheller & Urry, 2006). As already argued above, I will make a further distinction that lies within fixity. The shipping industry has been argued above to be an immobilising process, influenced by neoliberal globalisation, in particular, during economic recession and within a global security context. *Moorings*, in contrast to *immobilities*, are discussed here as positive and enabling as they allow a certain agency, and hence, moorings in this sense, are the kind of fixities that potentially enable further movement. They perform as anchoring space within the dialectical processes of the mobilities and immobilities of the global shipping industry. As such, moorings are linked to notions of place – on a continuum between the static and the mobile–constituted by social interactions.

Merriman (2004:146) argued in the context of movements that these can be seen as ‘associated’ and ‘integral to the construction and performance of landscapes and places’ rather than going across these. He went further by pointing out the possibility that movement itself could become associated with the experience of *being at home*, rather than remaining ‘prolonged or repeated movements, fixities, relations and dwellings’ (Merriman, 2004:146). These arguments resolve in a certain overlap between the sense and construction of place within social *and* mobile actions. And, they also point out the similarities between place and movements, both neither static nor fluid opposites, but instead dynamic and settled, providing a ‘sense of place’, stability or rootedness. Doreen Massey (cited in Cresswell, 2004:66) argued that:

... in the middle of all this flux, people desperately need a bit of peace and quiet – and that a strong sense of place, of locality, can form one kind of refuge from the hubbub’. So the search after the ‘real’ meanings of places, the unearthing of heritages and so forth, is interpreted as being, in part, a response to desire for fixity and for security of identity in the middle of all the movement and change. A ‘sense of place’ of rootedness, can provide – in this form and on this interpretation – stability and source of unproblematic identity. ... [However,]

on this reading, place and locality are foci for a form of romanticized escapism from the real business of the world.

Moorings can function as source of stability. Notwithstanding, they are not a source of *unproblematic* identity – a notion that was criticised by Massey. They might provide forms of romanticized escapism, which in the context of constant, irregular and transversal movements, as described above, can stabilise the otherwise disquieting feelings of uncertainty. Hence, moorings are helpful anchoring spaces within the unsettling, lonely, and physically demanding work on cargo ships. They provide a somewhat artificial sense for place attachment. Barcus and Brunn (2010) explained moorings in this context when equalling these with roots, place attachment and social and psychological well-being. The authors argued that ‘moorings are influenced by cultural signals ... that an individual perceives as important and that constitutes an item as mooring’ (Barcus & Brunn, 2010: 284). Place attachment to home in the seafaring context is then temporarily acted out symbolically, or through mobile means of communication.

Moorings combat against the craziness of shipboard life, the craziness of travel and of exposing oneself to the monotony, the uncertainty, the tiredness, and the unpredictability of the ship movement. Moorings are articulated as: engaging in ship neighbourhoods, hierarchies, playfulness, shared memories, such as Christmas, feelings of ‘being home’ when having particular food items prepared, music, particular songs, and also the predictability and routine of jobs and situations. Around Christmas and New Year, the memories about family and community rituals rise to everybody’s surface. I observed random acts of kindness, such as someone anonymously putting gifts in front of people’s cabin doors with a kind Christmas greeting, as well as shared activities, such as preparing a pig for the Christmas barbeque, that are usually handled within one department.

I observed that there were cultural similarities, such as a preference for barbecued pig and music, but also differences. The Ukraine Christmas and New Year occur at a different time to the European, Filipino and Pacific tradition, and there are different preferences in food during Christmas time. The practice of Karaoke is very comfortable to Filipinos, while in Kiribati and Tuvalu traditional songs provide more of a homely memory. Although, Karaoke could bring people of all cultures together and familiar songs could fuel feelings of homeliness, romance, Christian faith, and also a sense of the seafarers’ life or mutual experience. The following journal entry relates to a Christmas party:

Just come back from our Christmas party where there were loads of food, gifted by the shipping company, with a whole pig, and also beer and Karaoke organised by a Filipino. Filipinos like Karaoke very much and are very good at it too! One, who really is fantastic, sings at home in a band. All take part, and I also tried to be a good sport. ... One of my favourite moments was when I could persuade one of the I-Kiribati to sing 'Do-Re-Mi' from the Sound of Music. I remember how people in Kiribati love this movie. And then later I also enjoyed singing together with another I-Kiribati 'Rivers of Babylon'. Quite a few of the men picked a song about some 'Red, red wine', and another song about a 'Mexican girl'. A very good atmosphere among us all (Journal entry, 26 December 2009).

Enabling are strategies that deal with stress, loneliness, uncertainty and monotony and provides emotional grounding on which seafarers can recharge and reassess. Seafarers told me that some of the very large containerships have good facilities for entertainment and recreation, and on medium-sized ships similar to 'ours' there is usually always a table tennis option, a table football option, a movie and book library, video games, and weight lifting options. Some ships even have swimming pools:

After dinner we play a bit of table tennis! How really enjoyable! I first play against someone who works in the engine room to warm up a little – my skills are very poor – and then we play in a team of four. The men are very polite and very nice. When they play against me they play extra slow. When I do something right they give me much praise. They really are lovely. Although my team always loses they keep saying nice things to me (Journal entry, 21 December 2009).

Mooring strategies involve kindness and support, and acts of socialising or if more appropriate, getting out of each other's way. They can range from watching movies, mingling with others to not dwell too much about uncertain thoughts, or to talk to some girls on shore, when this is possible:

During seagoing times, when one of the officers is feeling a bit low, like for example as he did yesterday, on New Year's Day, he just locks himself in his cabin and does not want to see or hear of anything work related. He just keeps watching movies (Journal entry, 2 January 2010).

Being seafarer and being married is not so good, says one of the

ratings. He gets very homesick and after talking on the phone with his family it is always the worst so although he tries to phone from all the cheaper opportunities, like Chennai and Singapore, he wants to phone less and less because of the after-feeling that he gets. But when he phones less his wife is not happy. He says that the worst is to stay in his cabin when he is homesick. It is much better to mingle with everyone else and talk about it. (Journal entry, 2 January 2010).

Another rating explained that when he goes on shore it is usually in Chennai and in Shanghai, but also sometimes in Port Kelang. He likes Shanghai best also because he can talk to some girls there and go to a dance. In Port Kelang they sometimes can sing Karaoke and impress the girls. He says that he only likes the company of girls and does not do anything with them. He does not shout drinks either because on shore he does not drink (Journal entry, 2 January 2010).

Ports are obvious mooring places and spaces of fixity where the shore, when reached, makes it more possible to connect to home, or find ways to compensate for the familiar by engaging with the unfamiliar. *Yet also*, the predictable sameness of the ship movement and rituals of the seafaring jobs, the interactions among the board community, and those between ship and port community, create place. And, in this repetitive, ritual sameness, one can *settle*. In doing so, one takes up agency, and is enabled. When there is no time for people to go on shore leave, sometimes shore moves aboard in order to allow the trading of goods, as the following examples in India and China describe:

I heard that in Chennai there will be a tailor that makes shirts for US\$15. Interesting to see how this man is being quite pushy, and how he interrupts first my conversation with B and then with G. Both have a strange way of just ignoring the man who comes to ask if I am interested in his services; then he comes back and shows me the different garments that he uses; then he comes back to show me a bunch of male wallets that he also sells, and then he comes back again to show me that he also sells jewellery (Journal entry, 25 December 2009).

We have arrived in Yantiang 6am this morning and unloading took place until 12noon. The leaving procedures, including pilot on board, are rather straight forward and do not take long in this port. During the morning, several Chinese traders have come on board selling DVDs for US\$1, and digital equipment, watches, backpacks and so

on. Many seafarers are quite keen on their products, and tell me that this is definitely the cheapest one can get anywhere but one has to watch out for good quality and bear with some lemons (Journal entry, 13 January 2010).

The above examples show how the ‘static’ of the port environment has *moved* onto the ‘mobile’ ship; hence, spatial arrangements have created a routine in which the port and ship momentarily overlap. The degrees of ‘intensity of staying’ are in this case dependent on the (ir)regularities of the transversal loops that the ship to shore movements create when engaging in international trade routes. In comparison to Normark’s (2008) fuel station, and Morris’ (1988) motel, this situated accomplishment then refers not only to the accomplishments of the industries and histories involved, but includes a multinational overlap between local trade and social interactions, political structures of border security and the fragmented global cosmopolitanism of seafarers. The repetitions of such interactions construct an experience of the *familiar*, which provides a sense of stability and certainty. This familiarity links with Merriman’s (2004) also land-based observations, where social constructions – or situated accomplishments – perform landscape rather than criss-crossing landscape.

CONCLUSIONS

Shipping is quite obviously a highly mobile industry, symbolised not only by transversal movements across international waters, but also by the temporary assemblages of material and people. The technologies of the shipping industry both constrain and enable. Trade in merchandise operates in a time constraint space, where competition fuels modes of transport with ever increasing need for speed and fast turnarounds. This increased speed, which is caused by the enabling facilities of the transport and communication sectors within globalising processes, affects the different fields of mobilities. These effects can be demonstrated by the argument that *mobility* is ‘part of the process of social production of time and space’ (Cresswell, 2006), and that both people and material are ‘on the move’, that people travel more globally, that they travel further and faster, and both rich and poor find some “way of life” across the globe’ (Urry, 2007: 4). Furthermore, scholars engaged with the ‘mobilities paradigm’ have emphasised mainly on the enabling factors of *fixity* as a necessity for mobility.

Categories of fixities in this paper have been investigated within the context of cargo shipping, and more specifically with a case study on one container ship. At sea, two different categories have been observed that act as enablers

of movements of cargo ships and at the same time as constrainers of physical movements of people. *Immobility* or the constraint movement of people is paradoxically influenced by the mobilising forces of globalisation, where migration and employment of people from remote developing regions has become possible. Yet, the exaggerated need for speed to remain competitive in the shipping industry, and reduced staffing during global recession, immobilise and disembodies people from their human agency (Elliott & Urry, 2010). Stricter border control for the sake of global security immobilises further. In contrast, *mooring* is argued to be enabling in that it attends to human agency and the ability to connect and deal with constraints, and hence, produces emotional, social and cultural anchoring within the mobilities of the ship movement and ship environment.

These categories of fixity as both enabling and constraining become specifically relevant within a development context and the involvement of migrant workers from developing countries in the shipping industry. As this case study has shown, flagging out processes have enabled access to international employment for workers in developing countries. Yet, they have also led to a variety of salary scales and differing agreements of lengths of stay on board ships. These arrangements, especially during times of economic recession, can cause a stressful workload for prolonged time periods, immobilising seafarers when there are few opportunities to relax.

Despite such immobilising processes, moorings have been argued, in the context of seafarers' mobilities, as anchoring spaces that are keeping people in place while on the move. Moorings constitute settling spaces and also anchoring moments in time. I argued that it is the social connections, cultural processes, and the repetitive interactions with, or situated accomplishments of, places on shore that are settling and providing a shared familiarity. The stability that these shared experiences provides is not uncomplicated, as it is fragmented and compromised. Temporary settlement on ships is limited by choice and by frequent staffing turnover that requires emotional flexibility, patience and kindness.

In my experience aboard this containership, I saw people boarding and leaving, and observed how some seafarers could not bear saying farewell to others. This was partially because of the sadness of seeing someone familiar leave, and partially because the disembarking of a friend or colleague reminded of the staying behind of oneself. My last journal entry reflects on this:

It is 3 am, I am just coming back from our farewell party, feeling

very sad to be leaving tomorrow. There are two others leaving also. Things will go pretty quickly while the men will mind their work. Some will stay away purposefully as it is too sad seeing us leave—not only because it is sad seeing the familiar leave, but also because they cannot. One of the younger ratings asked me how many days it will take until I've forgotten them all?

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NOTES

- 1 This paper addresses cargo ships and the assemblages involved in general. These are even more specialised and perhaps exacerbated in a containership context.
- 2 Normark (2008) refers to the accomplishments of automobility and the social interactions that occur at and are related to the particular setting of fuel stations.
- 3 Similar observations have been made in cruise shipping by Klein (2002, 120f).
- 4 It must be noted, however, that I-Kiribati and Tuvaluans already were employed in the 1960s and 70s on German vessels, under exceptional contracts, and were

then later, in the 1980s integrated into a flag of convenience system.

- 5 Crews from Kiribati and Tuvalu have longest contracts to make up for the complicated travel arrangements that are needed for these remotely located Pacific Island nations; crews from the Philippines have contracts up to six months, depending on their recruitment agency and job status; crews from Eastern Europe generally have contracts up to four or five months; Western Europeans have contracts up to three months. It is possible to extend a contract. For example, an I-Kiribati working on a containership could spend 14–16 months aboard, if he is regarded as fit, safe and healthy. However, possibilities for extensions are limited for tankers for occupational safety reasons.

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