

# **'NATURAL BORN' SAILORS? RECONSIDERING STEREOTYPES OF FILIPINO GLOBAL SEAFARERS**

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In this paper, I show that a separation between land and sea is imagined and results from specific historical processes. Chief among these is the misreading of states as static landmasses, whereas in Southeast Asia – the location of the paper's case study - regional and wider interconnectivity by sea has always blurred land and water. Only in the 60s/70s, did a labour market for global seafaring take off in the Philippines, and as I argue, it was at this point that the conceptual split between land and sea became reconfigured. This labour market, emerging in the 1970s with the lifting of restrictions that enabled employers to take advantage of cheap, Third-World labour, forms the specific case study of this paper. Through it, I glimpse how the wage work of a highly-regulated industry separates sea from land as it does crew from home community.

The paper discusses the emergence and nature of the stereotype of Filipino 'natural' seafarers. This I follow with an examination of the imagined contrast between land and sea in the context of state formation, which leads into an account of how the sea has linked the Philippines to a wider world and hence played a political role in the making of an independent nation. After this, I evaluate empirical evidence for the linking of old and new forms of seafaring implied by the stereotype of the Filipino 'natural' seafarer, followed by ethnography of how the related configuration of land and sea is experienced by Filipino global seafarers today.

## **Introduction**

The sea is of unending relevance to anthropology and can be studied in numerous ways, some of which I have drawn upon in this paper. And yet, anthropologists have paid surprisingly little attention to one of the most striking aspects of the sea – global shipping - continuing instead to make significant contributions to topics of longstanding interest such as indigenous fishing (e.g. Firth 1946, Acheson 1979, Hviding 1996, Butcher 2004),

navigation, voyaging, and enskilment (e.g. Finney 1976, Feinberg 1988, Palsson 1994). Clifford (1997:23) celebrates boats in his rallying of anthropologists to study journeys over static field sites in an effort to highlight the hinterlands of anthropology. He begins to ask questions about violence within his central metaphor of travel but ultimately chooses to retain the word's 'European, literary, male, bourgeoisie, scientific, heroic [and] recreational' connotations (Clifford 1997:33),<sup>1</sup> which limits the ability of his style of anthropology to illuminate the sea as a site of politics, past and present.

In this paper, I show that a separation between land and sea is imagined and results from specific historical processes. Chief among these is the misreading of states as static landmasses, whereas in Southeast Asia – the location of the paper's case study - regional and wider interconnectivity by sea has always blurred land and water. Here, the quintessential seafarers of the European, colonial imagination are the Islamic pirates of the region's southern seas,<sup>2</sup> themselves integral to the making of state (Warren 2002).<sup>3</sup> While historical and indigenous seafaring (fishing) connected land to water, today another form of seafaring exists: global seafaring on a wide, institutionalised scale, in which Filipinos in particular crew the tanker, passenger, container, car-carrying and other vessels of the international maritime industry that carries 90 percent of world trade (Stern 2008).

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<sup>1</sup> Cited by Hutnyk (2004:23), to whom I owe these thoughts about Clifford's failure (in his use of the travel metaphor) to get beyond Imperialism (Hooks 1995:43, again, cited by Hutnyk 2004:23).

<sup>2</sup> Immortalised in the writings of Joseph Conrad that fed off and deepened eighteenth-century European's mistrust of the Islamic world (Warren 2002:398). Conrad was one among Imperial writers who 'wielding their pens as instruments of empire', fictionalised the environment, 'creating powerful literary structures that would frame and reinforce the patterns of dominance over particular geographical areas and conquered subject peoples' (Warren 2002:391). In particular, 'Conrad has shown in fiction how many European men...suffered from a deep malaise in the presence of the dreaded "Illanum". Many Dutch, German and Eurasian traders lived in fear that these Muslim maritime raiders would sweep them and their fledgling enterprises and daredevil schemes into oblivion; and several relied on opium to comfort themselves and assuage their anxiety in the face of "the terror"' (Warren 2002:392).

<sup>3</sup> In the latter part of the eighteenth century, Europeans found 'piracy' flourishing extensively only here, where it was 'pursued as a calling, not by individuals, as was the case with most of those who had followed the profession of buccaneering in the West, but by entire communities and states with whom it became to be regarded as the most honourable course of life - a vocation' (Warren 2002:1).

'Historical' seafaring was also global but unlike its contemporary, was piecemeal and unregulated. I distinguish between Filipino, contemporary, global seafaring and Filipino, historic, global seafaring because the latter takes many forms, as the following summary shows, and is not regulated and institutionalised as is the current form, nor does it involve as many people. Although figures vary as to the number of global seafarers deployed today, the actual number deployed is certainly in the hundreds of thousands, which, in turn, equates to a mere single-figure percentage of those training in the hope of securing a contract at sea. In other words, those training to, or already working in international waters for months at a time, and those working within the industry on land, is significantly larger than ever before.

Philippine involvement in maritime trade grew in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when Chinese seamen passed through the Sulu Sea to acquire products from the Spice Islands, establishing trade bases in the Philippines around Laguna, Mindoro and Cebu. This, in turn, promoted intensive and extensive internal trade which co-ordinated forest products for export and distributed imports (Hall 1985:24). When the Spanish arrived in the sixteenth century, and solicited and regulated the import of high-value goods from China for transshipment from Manila to Mexico in return for silver (between 1565-1815), it used Filipinos to crew its galleons (Corpuz 1997:19). The conditions were tough and many jumped ship, becoming among the first Asians to settle in Mexico and North America (Gonzalez 1998:26). Other Filipinos worked in royal dockyards during Spanish occupation. By around the mid nineteenth century, Filipinos also crewed on Canadian and American trading, surveying and whaling expeditions to the coast of British Columbia and Alaska, and on large American and European passenger ocean liners as cabin boys, deckhands and domestic helpers, even before American control of the Philippines (Gonzalez 1998:26). Records of seamen's bethels in American ports, from throughout the nineteenth century, show that Asians - including Chinese, Filipinos, and Indians - were often members of the crews (Chapman 1992:75).

Modern shipping began in the Philippines in 1849,

...with the coming of steamships, such as the *El Cano*, the *Magallanes*, and the *Reina de Castilla*, which cut travel time from Spain significantly. The Americans, for their part, encouraged the development of steel-hulled steamships. By 1932, the Commission of Public Utility was issuing Certificates of Convenience for merchant ships owned by several local and foreign shipping lines. Travel as well as trade benefited enormously following these maritime improvements.

Before long, regular services to the US, Europe, and Asia became available (Pertierra 2003: 56).

Only later, in the 60s/70s, did a labour market for global seafaring take off in the Philippines, and as I argue in the body of the paper, it was at this point that the conceptual split between land and sea became reconfigured.

This labour market, emerging in the 1970s with the lifting of restrictions that enabled employers to take advantage of cheap, Third-World labour, forms the specific case study of this paper. Through it, I glimpse how the wage work of a highly-regulated industry separates sea from land as it does crew from home community. With global shipping, the relationship between land and sea changes from being one in which land and sea economies and communities are embedded, to becoming one in which seafaring labour and economy is distinct from (though linked to) other forms of localised re/production. I argue that the separation between land and sea is historically constructed – *that they are one but imagined as two* – whereas global shipping creates a structural split between land and sea and yet simultaneously, perpetuates a stereotype of the Filipino ‘natural’ seafarer. This stereotype suggests continuity between global and indigenous/historical forms of seafaring and hence between land and sea. In other words, global shipping and its rhetoric of ‘natural’ labour *inverts*; it makes the land and sea *two yet conceives of them as one*.

The salience of this stereotype dusts off the relationship between land and sea. In this paper I examine the stereotype’s origins and how it functions in ways more subtle than it at first appears. While I find no convincing, empirical evidence linking global to these more rooted forms of seafaring, I discover a degree of continuity between land and sea in the experiences of Filipino global seafarers and their families. Hence, the sea becomes a technology of imagination, a tool with which to think about the Philippines and Filipinos in relation to a wide industry and world in a number of ways: phenomenological, certainly but more so political and economic.

This paper forms six further sections. This next discusses the emergence and nature of the stereotype of Filipino ‘natural’ seafarers. This I follow with an examination of the imagined contrast between land and sea in the context of state formation, which leads into an account of how the sea has linked the Philippines to a wider world and hence played a political role in the making of an independent nation. After this, I evaluate empirical evidence for the linking of old and new forms of seafaring implied by the stereotype of the Filipino ‘natural’ seafarer, followed by ethnography of how the related configuration of land and sea is experienced by Filipino global seafarers, today, which leads into the conclusion.

**Filipino seafaring, past and present**

On the boulevard lining Manila Bay stands a bronze statue of a seafarer behind a hefty ship's wheel, donated to the city by the commonly-dubbed 'Godfather of Filipino seafaring', Captain Gregorio Oca, founder and head of the country's largest maritime trade union, AMOSUP (Associated Marine Officers' and Seamen's Union of the Philippines). While I forget the exact wording of the statue's accompanying dedication, it is in the spirit of a tribute to the 350,000 Filipino seafarers risking their safety at sea in order to help their families and country (by earning much-needed dollar remittances) (POEA 2006).

These seafarers feed a recently-created labour market. The last quarter of the twentieth century saw a number of structural changes to the international maritime industry, the most striking of which was the development of a global seafaring labour market. Instead of ships being crewed by nationals of their own flags and ports of registry as they were 30 years ago, typical twenty-first century ships have mixed nationality crews working under foreign flags. The cause of this shift was the industry's increasing preoccupation with crew costs following a state of intense competition created by a slump in world trade and a glut of ships in the 1980s. In order to benefit from the relatively cheap labour available in Asia and later, Eastern Europe, and to avoid the domestic labour requirements of registry regimes developed by 'embedded'<sup>4</sup> maritime nations, owners 'flagged out' their ships to foreign registries (known as 'Flags of Convenience' – FOCs - of which Liberia and Panama were the earliest examples). Those owners who did not take advantage of FOCs were quickly disadvantaged - especially if their governments failed to make alleviating tax concessions – and many were forced to follow suit to FOCs or at least to newly created secondary registers of 'embedded' flag states that retained some regulatory machinery while loosening restrictions about crew nationality (ILO 2004:1-3).

Of the new labour-supply nations the Philippines predominates. Global seafaring is one type of labour migration promoted under the Marcos

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<sup>4</sup> "“Embedded maritime nations” replaces the more familiar term “traditional maritime nations” to provide a more accurate description of modern international shipping. Countries such as... the Philippines have been involved in maritime commerce for many centuries and are, therefore, unquestionably, traditional maritime nations. However, only since the Second World War [has the Philippines]... developed [a] highly organized shipping industry infrastructure... comparable to those of Europe and Japan, where developments began 50 to 100 years earlier and so can be described as having become “embedded”" (ILO 2004: 4).

government (1965-1986) and continued – to varying explicit degrees - by successive administrations as part of government strategy addressing un- and underemployment (which currently stand at 7.3 percent and 20.4 percent respectively [NSO 2007a]). Remittances from such migration bolster levels of foreign exchange, at the cost – say critics – of longer-term, economic reforms. In the case of the maritime industry, the Philippine government nurtures global seafaring among citizens by not taxing income earned at sea and through intense regulation conducted by some 15 government agencies. Philippine law requires that at least 80 per cent of the earnings of these seafarers be remitted to the Philippines, a practice that in the first 10 months of 2006 earned the national economy US\$1.6bn. (Philippines Department of Labor and Employment, quoted by *Tradewinds* 2007).

Returning to Manila Bay, one might note how the bronze wheel of the statue bears little resemblance to the realities of the industry just described. Unlike the compact controls at the helm of contemporary vessels, this bronze wheel is a Romantic vision of antiquated seafaring, reinforcing a link between contemporary global seafaring and one more historic. The image of the Filipino ‘natural’ seafarer is championed by foreign employers, government, trade unions, and seafarers alike. A spokesman for one of Manila’s key training centres said that, ‘Filipino seamen have great potential. They speak English, have a deep-rooted maritime culture that dates back to the Spanish galleon era, and having come from an archipelagic country, they have a strong affinity with the sea’. The printed programme of a music concert in September 2005 (*Ang Marino Bow!*) celebrating Filipino seafarers, offers similar, the author of one of its articles claiming,

Because of the Filipinos’ natural affinity with the ocean, boys as young as three, go out to the sea with their fishermen-fathers for their sustenance. As they grow old, most of them would rather work on board oceangoing vessels so as not to disrupt their pelagic lifestyle, which they have nurtured since childhood.

Making sense of these stereotypes matters because they obscure a more nuanced understanding of how these men relate to the sea and with what effect. The agenda of Capt Oca’s union (AMOSUP) prioritises the interests of Filipino seafarers as a whole in what he, like many, sees as a worryingly competitive market in which Chinese seafarers in particular are seen to pose a constant threat to the Philippine dominance of global seafaring labour. Subsequently, AMOSUP officers can be heard describing Filipinos as ‘natural’ seafarers for the same reason as do government officials concerned about the contribution of dollar remittances to the country’s economy. A labour force whose skills come with a guarantee of being ‘inherent’ is

attractive to employers and indeed, some employers speak with pride about choosing Filipino crew, as though doing so enables this crew to fulfill some sort of natural and morally-sound potential. What is ironic however is that while - as noted earlier - the quintessential Filipino seafarer is the Islamic, pirating Samal of the archipelago's southern seas; today it is primarily Catholic Filipinos who are benefiting from demand for cheap labour, over the mainly Muslim labour-supply countries such as Indonesia and Pakistan whose seafarers, in the words of one employer, 'attract delays and the cost of enhanced security [post 9/11]'. This naturalisation of labour is not, of course, unusual. Without implying the function of stereotypes to be only negative, what is crucial to this naturalisation process is that it masks and makes neutral that of profiting from cheap labour. As Aguilar (2002a:7) notes when referencing the use of stereotyping to justify abuse of Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong, 'stereotypes can be understood... as emanations of "discursive geographies"<sup>5</sup> that in turn serve to perpetuate labor market segmentation. Discourse and economy are therefore related' (Aguilar 2002:8).

Such then is the emergence and nature of the stereotype of the Filipino 'natural' seafarer. As discussed earlier, this stereotype suggests not only continuity between global and indigenous/historical forms of seafaring but also - on deeper examination - an overlap in land and sea. In the next section I look back to historical processes of state formation, a misreading of which, I argue, contributes to the construction of an imagined split between land and sea, a split that the stereotype of the Filipino 'natural' seafarer muddies and makes manifest.

### **Sea and state**

Approaching the Philippines by air makes its archipelagic nature most striking. From above, its islands erupt into view like mounds of fake turf on a mini golf course. From above too, one cannot but notice the contrast between volcanic highlands and the plains of the lowlands. As the plane descends this topographical perspective gives way to the manmade maze of Manila, the country's capital. Manila is fronted by an expansive bay facing west, from where sunset saturates the smog shrouding the 10 million who live there. To the north of the bay are cranes in port. Typically, container ships smudge the horizon and before them in clearer view are smaller vessels used for the training of global seafarers. At the south of the bay are the navy headquarters, their grey ships' bulk moored alongside pleasure boats taking tourists to Corregidor for daytrips around the island from which Philippine

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<sup>5</sup> Aguilar's use of this phrase follows Pratt's (2002).

and American troops held off Japanese invasion during the Second World War. Behind the bay, heading east, north and south, Manila sprawls and jostles. Lacking a centre or any point from where one might view it in its entirety from above, some liken Manila to sea: one navigates through it not by referencing one's sense of place within a whole but by other means, (most commonly set routes learned through practice) (Wiegele 2007). It is only by referring to a map that this seemingly endless, urban 'sea' is contained. Here, we are towards the south of the country's largest island, Luzon, itself only one of over 7,000 islands that constitute the Philippines. This total land territory is, in turn, a mere eighth of the country's territory at sea. Take this together with the fact that some 10 percent of Filipinos live outside of the Philippines, including the one and a quarter million Overseas Filipino Workers (POEA 2006)<sup>6</sup> and not only does the Philippines seem watery but the idea of a state as static landmass opposed to the sea, also becomes diluted.<sup>7</sup> On my first visit to the Philippines I came through the arrivals hall of Nonoy Aquino International Airport in Manila to a billboard advertising a telecommunications company that read 'Welcome to a world where distance doesn't matter'. How is one to make sense of such a slogan? History helps.

Before Spanish colonists named what is now the Philippines (after their prince, Philip II) and attempted to centralise its governance, the Philippines was a number of islands very much a part of the wider Southeast Asian region such that state as land, separated from other state land masses by sea, was less of a division than it has become in the modern era of the market and nation-state. Indeed, it is not only in relation to archipelagic Southeast Asia that modernity's model of nation-state divided sea and land. More widely, this separation emerged in conjunction with an enlightenment perception of space that was, 'finally capable of penetrating and occupying the great void of the sea by overcoming the *horror vacui* associated with pre-

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<sup>6</sup> The total number of Filipinos overseas is higher of course, since this figure accounts only for Overseas Filipino Worker contracts processed by the government's Philippine Overseas Employment Administration.

<sup>7</sup> This view of the state as static, territorially self-enclosed, and mutually exclusive of all other states is part of what Brenner et al dub the 'naturalisation of state space' (Brenner et al 2003:2). Here I follow those anthropologists (e.g. Gupta 1993; Appadurai, 1996) who have questioned this naturalisation and as a result, partly broken down the taken-for-granted link between state territoriality and society (Brenner et al 2003:3). To view the Philippine state space as fluid is not only to undermine the naturalisation of state space, but also to align it with Massey's conception of place in the (post)modern era of time-space compression as process rather than a single entity: 'Is it not possible for a sense of place to be progressive; not self-enclosing and defensive, but outward-looking?' (Massey 1994:147).



enlightenment empty space' and is a 'cornerstone of modernity on the basis of which western domination of the colonies could be established to repress alternative forces of movement beyond the borders of nation-states' (Kramsch & Motzenbacher 2003:11-12). Among the southern islands of the now-Philippines, this struggle of colonisers was honed on the Islamic, 'pirating' Iranum and Balangingi. Warren, in a masterful account of this history worth quoting at length, attributes this struggle to the fact that:

...almost everything that mattered to the Iranum and Balangingi had come to be defined and measured by the sea - the seas which in so many ways were invented, 'discovered', and eventually conquered by the Spanish and English. The central fact of domination and empire was the fundamental attitude and belief that the Iranum and Balangingi possessed their seas only as a natural right, since that possession, in the minds of the Spanish and the English, existed prior to and outside of a properly civilized state. What followed then, was that the sea was technically *vacuum domicilium*, and that the Spanish and English, who would control the sea and make it productive for Christ and world trade, were obliged to take over and exterminate the 'moros' and 'Illanum' of the 'eastern seas' in order that laissez faire trade and colonial Christian enterprise could be carried out successfully (Warren 2002:389).

Moreover, in Southeast Asia, the sea was also integral to the very process of state formation. Pre-conquest, the region of the now-Philippines was one cultural and political realm in which the islands of the future Philippines shared in its hierarchical-yet-fluid ruling practices and contacts organised through the Chinese tribute trade with India. The nature of this early Philippine 'state' did not conform to either the Weberian model of state existing from and above a growing population engaging in trade and other economic activities, nor did it match the classical, Chinese-defined state of dynastic succession within defined territorial boundaries (Abinales and Amoroso 2005: 21, 38). Rather, small *barangays* (akin to 'village', the smallest unit of governance used today) were linked through networks of independent river settlements. The type of leader characteristic of maritime Southeast Asia (the '*datu*') was elected according to his ability to attract new members to his settlement (people, unlike land, were in short supply), and by securing loyalty. Success in doing so required charisma and successful mobilising of kinship ties so as to dominate in an area's trade and warfare. Since such a 'chief's status was not hereditary, he was always at risk of being

undermined by subordinate *datus* seeking a more reliable protector or more profitable opportunities, making this model of governance inherently fluid and indeterminate. In essence, this form of governance was not centralised nor based on abstract principles or institutions. Instead, the political community was defined and space organised by personal relationships, not territorial boundaries (Abinales and Amoroso 2005:23); the latter, by extension, reinforcing a conceptual separation between land and sea.

To reiterate, until colonised by the Spanish, the notion of the islands of the now Philippines as an entity in opposition to the sea, did not exist. The archipelagic nature and maritime trade of the now Philippines within the wider region shaped the nature of the chiefdom polities (Junker 1999) that only later, with the increasing trade of the twelfth century onwards, resulted in growing populations, social stratification, political innovation and the concentration of political power (Abinales and Amoroso 2005: 38).<sup>8</sup>

This glance backwards enables us to question the relevance of thinking about the Philippines as a bounded, landmass, not only historically but also in the present day. The continued significance of water (cf. Magos) to the Philippines (as land) is marked linguistically in words such as *cabancas* – which translates as people of the same boat – and refers to members of original settler communities. These communities were themselves called *barangays* (a word which in modern times refers to the smallest unit of local governance), supposedly named after the vessel that carried the founding group to its settlement site. In modern times, the people of Sulu are the *Taosug*, meaning, ‘people of the ocean current’. Some of the oldest place names in the Philippines are also related to water. Pampanga in Luzon, Agusan in Mindanao, and Cebu in the Visayas, are all examples of the many place names derived from the native words or names for bodies of water (Corpuz 1997: 14).

Just as in earlier centuries, the Philippines was a series of islands embedded within a wider, archipelagic region, today’s Philippine state – still archipelagic but politically redefined as bounded state – continues to be, in effect, borderless. Indeed, the imprecision of Philippine political boundaries is arguably now more so since the state itself encourages and facilitates so many of its citizens’ existence outside of its political borders (significantly, enabling dual citizenship and absent voting). Archipelagic and famed for migration between islands of the now Philippines, of the region and beyond, the Philippines continues to be the fluidity of the sea surrounding it that leads to the outside and Manila is home to hundreds of recruitment agencies and

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<sup>8</sup> See also Carsten (1995:327), who speculates about the relevance of histories of maritime trade and migration within the region, calling for a historical analysis that related maritime trade and migration to political economic processes.

other institutions structuring heavily-regulated labour migration, making it a node in world markets.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, in between the early history of the tenth to the sixteenth century islands referenced above, and the present day, the Philippines has experienced 350 years of Spanish rule and another 50 under American control. This, say scholars and commentators, has only deepened the fluidity of the Philippines' borders (Rafael 1995:xiv), making Philippine nationhood inherently outward looking and Filipino migrant workers predisposed to work overseas (David 2002:40). This means that readings of 'Southeast Asian cultures' as mere 'crossroads' - 'a sum of its colonial parts, a culture without authenticity... defined in a series of negatives, by what it had failed to be' (Cannell 1999:7) - are exposed as products of a particular imagining in which the sea is the land's irreconcilable other.

### **The sea and 'the foreign'**

Such readings have been rightly critiqued by many,<sup>10</sup> including Rafael, whose work on Philippine colonialism and nationalism informs much of this next section because I find it useful for understanding the enmeshing of land and sea in the making of the Philippine nation.

In his book *The Promise of the Foreign*, Rafael adds to his earlier studies of Philippine colonialism (chiefly 1993, 1995, 2000) by examining 'the foreign' at the origins of Filipino nationalism during the latter half of the nineteenth century. His interest is in the way in which the Philippine, colonial bourgeoisie regarded colonialism 'as that which brings with it the 'promise of the foreign'. This promise is felt as the coming of a power with which to absorb and domesticate the otherness that lies at the foundation of the nation' (2006:4), a power that brought the Philippines its first, brief taste of independence in 1898.

Rafael's central trope is that of translation: the way elements of 'the foreign' are recognised as sources of potential, seized upon, reconfigured and used productively and politically. The risk is in the seizing of 'the foreign' and the reward, the successful employing of it for novel ends. Within his classification of 'the foreign', Rafael includes language, money, 'subversives', rumors, secret oaths and ghosts, all of which he considers - in the spirit of Anderson's 'imagined communities' (1983) - technology that mediate the forging of nationalism. The infrastructures relating to these media, says Rafael, broaden one's reach while simultaneously bringing

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<sup>9</sup> Tyner (2002) argues the case for Manila as a 'global city' on a par with New York, London and Tokyo.

<sup>10</sup> See Cannell (1999: 6-9) for a fuller discussion.

distance up close: they both expand and contract the world and form the basis of becoming modern (Rafael 2006:5).

This linking of 'the foreign' to modernity he explains by sketching the country's salient contact with the wider world throughout the nineteenth century, beginning with the tail end of the Spanish galleon trade that provided the sole link between the Philippines and the rest of the Spanish empire from its beginnings in 1565. By the end of the eighteenth century, confused and inefficient Spanish financial policy created scope for British and North American traders to establish merchant houses in the Philippines, who in turn provided credit to local farmers who were then able to produce surplus crops. These foreign merchants also invested in farming technology and railroads, which encouraged surplus crop production and labour migration further, and by taking in deposits and paying interest, they established a modern banking system in the colony allowing for the accumulation and circulation of capital (Rafael 2006:5-11). The social consequences of this economic revolution are evidenced, says Rafael, in the mid nineteenth-century emergence of the colonial bourgeoisie:

Becoming middle-class was thus associated with things foreign, beginning with merchants and capital with which they communicated and through which the movements of goods and people were instigated. Money as both an instrument and outcome of foreign trade enabled the bourgeoisie to gather foreign objects within domestic settings even as the very nature of the domestic itself began to appear strange and novel.

Emphasising the sea in my reading of Rafael allows me to consider the political nature of contemporary Filipino global seafarers relationship with the sea. To this end, let us return to the stereotype of the Filipino 'natural' seafarer and examine whether it is based upon any empirical link between different forms of seafaring over time.

### **Continuity in forms of seafaring?: empirical evidence**

The Visayas seems a place where water and the sea appear very much present and indeed, this - and the region's poverty (prompting labour migration) - is what is commonly given by way of explanation for the disproportionate number of global seafarers originating from the region. Making this link is perhaps understandable, particularly when one visits places within the region such as Siquijor, where both the sea and global seafarers are particularly visible against the island's small size. Siquijor's core is an inhospitable and mysterious clump of dense vegetation and caves, surrounded by communities living close to the road that tracks its coast. Siquijor is famed for black magic but what is most apparent, after the sea

visible from every angle, is the white of the uniforms of the hoards of adolescent boys attending the local maritime university. The Visayas is the country's primary source of global seafarers (ISAC 2004).

Can statistics help make sense of the lay linking of poverty, geography and global seafaring in the region? While the Western Visayas' average family income is below the national average, it is not the lowest among the nation's regions. Within the Philippines as a whole, the percentage of the population employed in fishing in 2006 was just four percent (NSO 2007a).<sup>11</sup> While I lack the equivalent statistics for the Visayas, what is publicly available is that within the Western Visayas (in 2003), only three percent of recorded 'establishments' related to fishing and five percent to transportation, of which domestic shipping is only a part (NSO 2007b). It seems then difficult to make any clear links between the (Western) Visayas' dominance among national regions of the global seafaring labour market on account of either poverty or a strong, regional involvement in fishing or domestic shipping. Furthermore, without extensive research into the lives and work of previous generations of those within the region, it is impossible to connect historical seafaring with the contemporary, global variety.

That said, part of the reason why the Visayas produces a disproportionately high number of seafarers is that an organisational infrastructure – of regulating institutions, manning agents and training/education establishments - has developed that rivals Manila's in places such as Iloilo (the 'capital city' of the island of Panay, Western Visayas) and in Cebu City (on the island of Cebu, Central Visayas, the second largest city of the Philippines after Manila). That this infrastructure exists in these cities is presumably because these places became hubs in the first place, on account of their waterways. Some of the most influential of foreign shipping companies have links to maritime schools here, increasingly recognising the importance - in the current global shortage of officers<sup>12</sup> - of nurturing seafarers from an early age. These companies offer free maritime higher education, linked to specific schools, to the most promising of high-school graduates, and in return require these young men to work aboard their vessels for a minimum number of years once graduated from university.

It seems then that regardless of whether a seafarer's father and the fathers before him worked at sea in whatever capacity, a trend towards global seafaring has emerged in this part of the Philippines in particular, partly as a

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. 30 percent in agriculture/hunting/forestry; 15 percent in industry; and 50 percent in the service sector.

<sup>12</sup> The maritime industry is experiencing an estimated surplus of 135,000 ratings and a shortage of 10,000 officers (BIMCO 2005).

result of the region's maritime infrastructure which helps keep seafaring conspicuous. Moreover, those seeking 'a better future' through higher education - which in the maritime case is required of officers - often opt for maritime over, say, nursing degree programmes, motivated by free tuition for the minority meeting company cadet scholarship selection criteria, or by generally lower than average fees for a four-year BSc programme in marine transportation (for those wanting to work in deck departments) or marine engineering (for those wanting to work in engine departments). Post graduation, recruitment depends on meeting criteria in part set by international regulation (namely the Philippines' ratification of the UN's International Maritime Organization's International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers [STCW]).

But it also depends on a series of localised practices that utilise networks of kin. According to one study (ISAC 2004), 60 percent of Filipino seafarers chose their employer because of the referral of a relative (and I imagine the number would be higher were it to include recommendations through godparents, confirmation and wedding sponsors). Correspondingly, many employers recruit a large proportion of crew through recommendations of existing crew. Some have policies about the degree of relatedness of kin that they are allowed to recommend: brothers and sons only, for example (because otherwise the number of recommendations they receive is overwhelming). What is occurring, in other words, is that localised kin networks provide easy ways to expand the supply of labour from a specific region, contributing to that region's dominance of the overall national labour market for global seafaring.

This dominance is commonly attributed to a combination of the region's poverty and the sea's presence within it. Lacking large landmasses like Luzon or mainland Mindanao, the Visayas are navigated by boat. As this section has shown however, this explanation is unsatisfactory. A better one needs to take account of organisational infrastructure, the economics of education, as well as industry processes, such as methods of selecting crew, some of which, admittedly, is rooted in the region's exposure to water that developed them in the first place.

Tourists taking boat rides along the jade Loboc River wonder at real-life waterbabes: local children playing in the river grabbing onto boats' outriggers before letting go and swooping onto another passing beam; hitchhiking, of a sort. But let us now zoom out from the Visayas and look at the Philippines as a whole. Compared to the waterbabes of the Loboc river, I know many Filipinos who have not learned to swim. On more than one occasion, I even heard seafarers confess to having a friend swim for them in a test required for the most basic of qualifications required by (international

and national) law to work at sea. Moreover, although the Philippines is an archipelago, those living in the centre of its larger islands conceivably have no experience of the coast, as was the case for Jimmy, one of my own research participants. Jimmy wanted to be a doctor but by the time it came for him to go to college and as the youngest of six siblings, his parents were elderly and his siblings had their own families, so lacked the disposable income needed for his studies. A Manila university offered an affordable four-year Bachelor's programme in marine transportation, so Jimmy bowed to family pressure and signed up. Coming from Pangasinan, in the centre of Northern Luzon, he struggled to imagine what it was to be a seafarer as trips to the coast were a rare luxury for him when growing up. Initially, Jimmy hated working at sea and after his first year went back to his parents and asked again (in vain) about studying medicine. Only after several years, by which time he was Second Officer, did Jimmy begin to love his work. Jimmy's story of 'getting used' to seafaring is, I would suggest, reflective of the norm.<sup>13</sup>

It barely needs saying that the primary incentive for Filipinos to become seafarers is financial. 'It's not some kind of natural urge, it's just how it is' said one seafarer, adding by way of explanation that were he able to find adequately paid work in the Philippines he would prefer to stay ashore. Nonetheless, this need not mean that a link does not exist between global and other forms of seafaring, whether historical seafaring, fishing or passenger shipping of and in domestic waters. Before a bronze statue stood on the boulevard of Manila Bay, indeed before the boulevard like so much of the city had been developed, a man recounted a Manila of the 1970s that was smaller and greener. Then, the shipping industry was newly deregulated and foreign owners' employing of Filipinos a novel and escalating practice not yet heavily regulated, nationally nor internationally. In such a climate, the man tells of his relative:

I have a relative, he's a retired seaman. He was at sea 30 years.  
He couldn't read or write. He was working in Manila and  
walking along one day just here, Kalaw [street], and this man,

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<sup>13</sup> Indeed the notion of 'getting used' to features regularly in Tagalog (cf. Cannell 1999:43; Aguilar 2002:436) and echoes phenomenological studies of seafaring (e.g. Pálsson 1994:901). The image of the adaptable, flexible Filipino migrant worker abounds, a stereotype that simultaneously undermines Filipinos' ability to lead. Subsequently, these dialectical ideas have, I think, contributed to both the Philippines' dominance of the international labour market for ratings and its under-representation in that for officers. 72 percent of Filipino global seafarers are ratings, nine percent senior officers and 19 percent junior officers (Salinas 2005:19).

he asks my relative if he wants to be a seaman. My relative doesn't know what this is. 'What is this, seaman?' he said. 'Sailor, work on ships' said the man. My relative, he is from Visayas so knows ships, but not working on ships. But ok he says, I know ships, so ok.

To summarise this section then, while in some cases Filipino global seafarers have a link to the sea and to indigenous/historical forms of seafaring, many do not, and fishing and domestic shipping in the region providing a disproportionate number of global seafarers is not particularly marked. The stereotype of the Filipino 'natural' seafarer appears then to rest on little empirical evidence. While it suggests a linking of old and new forms of seafaring, and hence of land and sea, the stereotype detracts from other ways in which Filipino global seafarers relate to the sea, and from other ways in which sea and land do configure in lived experience.

With this in mind, I turn now to my primary field sites: a union-run village for seafaring families recently migrated from all over the Philippines, many from places away from the coast, and, a cargo ship with an all-Filipino crew. In the following I draw on a combination of phenomenology, political economy and ideas about cosmopolitanism so as to continue my discussion of how sea and land blur in lived experience, even though empirical evidence for continuity between old and new forms of seafaring upon which the stereotype of the Filipino 'natural' seafarer is based, is lacking, (a stereotype that itself appears to blur land and sea).

### **Continuity between land and sea: lived experience**

The AMOSUP Seamen's Village is close to the town of Dasmariñas, towards the centre of the province of Cavite, directly beneath Manila. Although not on the coast, the sea is very much present in this, a maritime village, just as elements of family life in the village flow into the space of the ships aboard which its men sail. The village's grocery stores are called 'slop chests' (a nautical term), and at the entrance gate is a large anchor dedicated to the AMOSUP membership. Several houses have anchor motifs in their ironwork or on plant pots in their front gardens and almost all have ship-wheel or life-buoy clocks on the walls inside. Each style of house is named - as are the streets - after shipping companies, unions and individuals whom the union's head, Captain Oca, has deemed supportive of the Filipino seafarer, many of which/whom are Norwegian. This Scandinavian presence extends further. For example, on the side door of the house in which I lived, 'Maersk' was graffitied in a pencilled, childish scrawl. Maersk is the name of my neighbour's husband's Danish employer and since my neighbour conceived while honeymooning with her husband aboard the ship on which he was



working, Maersk is also the name of the artist. Maersk's twin brother is Odense, a name taken from a Danish ship building town.

The sea and 'the foreign' infuse the village in ways less tangible as well. Skills learned at sea have built and maintain the tangible: maritime engineers turn civil engineers on land, fixing anything from their households' water or electrical supply to broken household appliances, lists of which women compile ready for their husbands' return. Children learn how to identify changes in the weather using tricks learned from their fathers' time at sea, important in a country hit annually by destructive typhoons. Men returning from sea bring with them stories and souvenirs from places they have been. They also bring with them the industrial clock. For example, I might be talking to a neighbour and her vacationing, seafaring husband when on the dot of 10.15am, the husband would leap from his seat exclaiming 'coffee break!' - as it would be aboard ship - and go off to fetch refreshments. (Similarly, Lamvik (2002: 104) reports a seafarer holding family fire drills at home.) More generally, households' experience of time and 'normality' is shaped by the ebb and flow of men's contractual labour and the village's social structure is in part stratified according to seafarers' rank.

The village's 'identity' in relation to the *barangay* outside and beyond is that of a shared livelihood from seafaring and their being members (or related to members) of the one maritime union. Many of these are observations demanding substantial ethnographic evidence and discussion that, unfortunately, are beyond the limits of this paper. I merely allude to them here in order to glimpse the myriad of ways in which life in this peculiar village is shaped in part by the sea, the shipping industry and the wider world touched through meetings of foreigners aboard and abroad, during precious hours in foreign ports.

Often during my fieldwork I would hear residents and staff refer to the village as a microcosm of the Philippines. By this they meant that its residents were migrants from all over the country but also that the daily dramas that went on there were something of a concentrated, inflated, novella-style representation of actual life in a 'normal' community, one not recently and artificially built, filled and closely controlled by a central institution (the union). This pivotal role of the union provides a thread along which to zoom in and out between the overlapping spaces of the village, the Philippines, the ship, sea and world at large.

The village, like the ship which I describe next, is a knot of the global, industrial and of more than one nationality; the ship and the sea flow into and shape the land and village, just as the village and the Philippines travel across water and into the world and ship. Aboard ship too, experience is shaped in

part by the sea and in part by land (one's own nation as well as others) and can be read in numerous ways.

The ship aboard which I researched is owned, chartered and operated by sister Norwegian companies, under a Bahamas flag. Unusually, all its crew are Filipino. It has 12 decks and a total area equivalent to nine football fields. Living quarters are on deck 12 and the bridge above it, meaning that almost half the crew (the Deck Department) spend most of their time high above the water. Even for those working shifts in the Engine rooms at the bottom of the vessel, the ship's bulk is such that in calm weather, the motion of sea is barely felt. To reach the car decks and engine rooms requires going outside from the living quarters, across the back deck, and into a stairwell towards the ship's stern. In the open air of course, the sea is smelt and seen, as it is seen from the bridge and through every porthole uncovered by curtains. For me though, what was more striking than the sea itself was the sense of institution and industry: the mighty materiality of the ship and its cargo, the structured life and division of labour, and the bland vinyl and pine interior of the living quarters. Although these latter felt much like the spaces of a university hall of residence or office, on closer inspection they told of the sea: seemingly familiar objects had non-slip pads or rims or hooks, to stop sliding in rough weather. (For the majority of Filipino seafarers however, this sense of institution and industrial bulk is reduced because this majority are working aboard passenger vessels, which they often describe as 'like being in a hotel building'.) Moreover, such ships spend the majority of time in port or close to shore lines, meaning that seafarers employed upon them rarely experience extended periods of time in deep sea, where movement is accentuated and no land lessens the ship's isolation.

In some ways then, the sea as body of water, in a practical, physical way, makes less of an impact on the day-to-day life of these seafarers than one might imagine. Nonetheless, the fact remains that working as a seafarer means uniquely working and living in the same, isolated and floating space, where outside means danger, if not death. It is impossible to deny the sea altogether although one may engage with it to varying degrees at different points in time. While calling at a South African port for example, the crew told of fishing (presumably borrowing equipment from those on shore). They caught a massive barakuda which the Cook prepared and the crew ate. Unfortunately, because of high level of toxins in the water, a major case of food poisoning broke out among crew, causing the ship a delay of several days and subsequent loss to the company of hundreds of thousands of dollars. On a different occasion, the danger of sea became all too apparent when waves picked up off the coast of Spain and the main deck's cargo became un-tethered. The crew spoke of a scrap yard of 'dancing' vehicles, thrown

and crushed on top of one another and threatening to ignite and puncture the ship's side and sounding 'like a war'. The crew tried in vain to secure the cargo, before retreating to their collect wallets ('so that we could be identified') and mustering on the bridge to pray. Thankfully, the vessel managed to reroute to Dubai dry docks for repair and although suffering trauma, no one was physically hurt.

Dramatic incidents in which the sea becomes central are however not the norm. Nonetheless, as soon as the sea's swell gathers, it is felt regardless of a ship's size. Even on flat seas, ships vibrate, adding to a more general sense that a ship is a site that is never still, that never sleeps: there is always a light on, an exit sign illuminated, a fan whirring, a walky-talky crackling, a rattling hum, a roll, a swell, someone stopping or starting work. In this kind of environment, the fluidity of the sea mingles with that of the design of the ship and the industry practices giving it context. In other words, one experiences the environment both bodily and politically and in no one, predictable manner. To me, the ship seems a space in which tiredness, boredom, loneliness and insomnia mingle with contentment. Among crew, ideas about adventure and freedom co-exist with those about making a sacrifice so as to help one's family, financially (cf. Lamvik 2002:21).

For some, going to sea is akin to a rite of passage or pilgrimage (cf. Aguilar 2002b) and the ship is a site of liminality with the potential to craft new forms of consciousness. In the words of one crew member, 'I always meditate before I sleep; I consider my life aboard as a hermitage that separates me from the worldly things in the real which I could be more sinful than here'. Many crew members describe how time at sea stands still, or how reality is altered or absent such that seafarers are *ni morts, ni vivants*.<sup>14</sup> Lamvik quotes seafarers describing being at sea as 'just a state of mind' (2002:13) or as 'making something out of nothing' (ibid.: 183). 'The sea is a forgetting' are the words of poet Luis Cernuda<sup>15</sup> and during my own time at sea I heard similar references to constructing reality, such as these equally poetic words: 'For me, being at sea is like looking for a horizon. A horizon that's real in this sea that's fantasy'. Another says 'for me, it's like time stands still here and when I go home everything's different but I'm just the same'.

When writing about the sea, one risks being enticed by Romanticism, as I was when I found myself ask seafarers questions of a phenomenological ilk about their experience of being in a wild and watery environment. Their

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<sup>14</sup> 'Neither dead nor alive': the title of a book by Maurice Duval (2002, Paris: Presse Universitaire de France).

<sup>15</sup> In a poem entitled 'Where Forgetfulness Lies'.

pragmatic replies disappointed me. Most commonly, I would ask about the experience of living on something that moved and would be met with answers that weighed up the costs and benefits of working at sea. Of course, to not be met with poetic responses about the nature of flux is hardly surprising, not least because flux is still experienced; it still has a quality that is lived. The sea is not simply liminal, neutral, nor empty (Phelan 2007: 5), not least because within it, hundreds of thousands of seafarers live and work. Instead, life aboard the ship I sailed was a combination of elements of the life of the ports the ship pulled alongside, that of the Philippines back home, that of corporate culture (aspects of which were specifically Norwegian) shaped by the employer and industry at large, and a kind of liminality apart from/encompassing all of these. The limits of this paper prohibit me going into the details of each. The point is that the impact of the sea – as connector and container of states and cultures - on the lives of crew members begs a wider gauging of how these men situate themselves within the world at large.

Consider, for example, the following scenario. The crew is going about its work in a workspace crafted by international conventions and European employers. They speak Tagalog, and during time off, might watch a Tagalog DVD, sing some karaoke or converse with family via email and text. Some may use spare time to learn new skills or to get fit, others may meditate. Life is not without nationality, nor is it the same as being within a state. Then, this bubble is rerouted in response to a call from the Norwegian government to Lebanon, where the crew suddenly find themselves in a war zone, and then sharing their work and living space with Scandinavian nationals being evacuated. When I asked the crew about the best aspects of their work, many cited this humanitarian mission, (which took place in July 2006), with much pride and talked touchingly of exchanges with people in a place both unfamiliar. This sentiment might be taken as a snapshot of a wider interest in the world among some within this demographic. Ask a Filipino seafarer why they do what they do and typically, their first response will refer to salary and wanting to help family. But many will then also cite a desire to ‘see the world’. It is this desire that an officer-recruitment drive by the Philippine Seafarers’ Development Council (a group of Philippine, private-sector maritime organisations) targets with a series of postcards distributed to high-school students.

Sampson, in her discussion of the findings of a study of ships with multi-ethnic crews, suggests Filipinos aboard such vessels to be ‘cosmopolitan’ and ‘deterritorialised, hyperspace dwellers’, that is, actively interested and engaged in and with other cultures, forming ‘distinct if miniature, “global communities” [aboard ships]’, as opposed to being ‘transnational’, that is, living ‘physically, mentally or emotionally, in or across two separate States’ (Sampson 2003:275-276). Since Sampson is comparing ship life with

Filipino seafaring communities settled on land in European ports, she understandably over-emphasises the cosmopolitan experience at sea, which I think needs balancing with others – namely - the ways in which elements of life in the Philippines flow into the ship, how recognisable cultural forms can be transcended altogether,<sup>16</sup> and how typically, experience of life at sea involves a combination of all of these, just as it does an ambiguous and changing relationship to the sea itself. The crew responded to my vague questions about movement and flux with answers about costs and benefits (cf. Aguilar 2002a:14); the danger inherent to working at sea and that of weakening or breaking marital or other relations by their absence from home, weighed up against the rewards of seafaring (primarily financial but also voiced, for example, in terms of freedom, adventure and ‘personal growth’).

Ask a seafarer about the sea, then, and more often than not, their response will reference money. A seafarer’s relationship with the sea is one in which the sea brings wealth. For ‘old-style’ seafarers of ‘embedded’ maritime nations, this is a source of nostalgia-fuelled dismay: today’s, Third-World seafarers, they feel, do not value seamanship. They are only in it for the money, a prejudice that implies that Filipino seafarers lack anything other than pure economic rationality, including any kind of political consciousness. Although in the Seamen’s Village, the degree of social mobility and related, that of reproduction of seafaring labour, is hard to decipher, money empowers. Wages from sea fund the higher-education of seafarers’ children and enables families to travel. In this regard, this community is no different to other types of Filipino labour migrants, working on land.

Being a seafarer is distinct however, partly because it means working in an isolated space that at times, provides the pause in reality – a kind of rupture resulting in reflexivity within market processes and transactions that for Miller (1994), marks modernity - for reflecting upon one’s placing in a wider world. In the spirit of Foucault, at sea one dreams: ‘in civilizations without boats’ he says, ‘dreams dry up’ (1986:27). Besides, the ILO describes the international maritime industry as the first, truly global industry (2004:2) and it is this that also marks seafarers apart from their other country men and women working overseas. Sampson’s argument (that I cited above), says that the sea (ship) is an environment more conducive than land to engaging with ‘other cultures’. The foreign friends a seafarer makes while working may (and do) visit his family in the Philippines. Certainly, foreign employers and related institutions have a presence in the village: they pay for buildings and lend them their names, and representatives from such

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<sup>16</sup> A kind of ‘cultural liminality’ rather than transnationalism. Following Sampson (2003), I take the latter to mean engagement with multiple states, rather than none.

institutions visit the village when on business in the country. These, and the other ways in which foreign influence, the sea and the industry form the village already discussed, mean that those living in the village would struggle to not sense being part of global structures and while in the village I was privy to numerous discussions indicating just that, ranging from war and colonialism, to wage differentials between Filipino and other nationalities, and power relations between their national union (AMOSUP) and its international affiliate (the International Transport Workers' Federation, based in London). When a dispute over property arose in the village, it acted as a catalyst encouraging more widespread reflection upon seafarers' relationships to their trade union and the global division of labour.

Seafarers talk of their work as a weighing up of costs and reward. Its benefits – primary among them money – bring the world closer and one's place within it more salient. Seafaring is dangerous and lonely but the latter – as well as its pettier twins, daydreaming and boredom – give scope for consciousness. Going to sea brings the possibility of perspective on life left behind. It brings potentially empowering worldliness and income. And it also provides time to think and to gossip with countrymen and foreigners about one's place within one's state (a state that rigorously manages and sugars its labour migration with a rhetoric of heroism), a global industry, and the world at large, and about alternatives within social relations of production. Much of this latter springs from drudgery, itself associated with repetition which in turn is central to Rafael's notion of translation, a process that turned 'the foreign' into Philippine independence: 'This letting loose and putting forth of the alien constitutive of nationalism involved ways of doing and making do, rhetorical practices, mechanical instruments, and repetitive gestures that could be summed up as the technics of translation' (2006:15).

Seafarers know both drudgery of life at sea and its potential costs. Their wives know the drudgery of domesticity and waiting for husbands' return, year after year. The ebb and flow of the sea, of life at sea, and of contractual labour and its shaping of the lives of households back home, is one of repetition. The degree of social mobility among these seafarers is hazy and I am not likening them to Rafael's colonial bourgeoisie that emerged from relations with sea merchants. These seafarers may not be revolutionaries<sup>17</sup> on the scale of those in Rafael's story but the movement and repetitiveness within the word revolution applies to them still. Their relationship with the sea and 'the foreign' it mediates is one through which they become global, political beings and the very falsity of the separation between land and sea is what makes the sea an illuminating tool with which to think about politics,

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<sup>17</sup> Although the two most recent attempted *coups* against the current (Arroyo) administration have been orchestrated by a Marine Captain (see Swift 2006).

whether those of early Philippine nationalism or of contemporary global capitalism.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper I have focused on global shipping in my thinking about the sea because I believe it marks a shift in the configuration of land and sea in which the economy and labour of the international maritime industry are structurally distinct from local forms. I have focused on a curious stereotype accompanying the industry's recent involvement in the Philippines – that of the Filipino 'natural' seafarer – which marks the meeting of global capital and the specificities of Philippine geography and history, and obscures diversity in the ways such seafarers relate to the sea. Upon closer inspection, this stereotype that appears to blur old and new forms of seafaring and hence, land and sea (since the former are socially embedded), is based on no clear, empirical evidence of a link between different types of seafaring over time.

The sea then, has proved a tool with which to think about relations between employers and employees and between states, in both contemporary and historical settings, drawing parallels with Rafael's 'media' or 'technology' of 'the foreign' in the context of nineteenth-century, Philippine nationalism. The ship becomes a node in a sea seeking openings for that which it carries. Hence, the historical constructing of the opposition between land and can be seen not as an end in itself but rather as a means of critiquing representations of the Philippines that sentence it to a state of cultural submission by perceiving it as nothing more than a sum of its colonial parts.

Moreover, I have argued that although shipping separates land and sea by physically isolating seafarers for long periods of time and alienating them as waged-workers in the structural relations of production, the same physical separation and isolation has the potential to shape their experience of this structural alienation. As such, ships can be seen as what Graeber, in his critique of the linking of democracy to the 'West' (itself a construction), calls 'zones of cultural improvisation' (2007:23).<sup>18</sup> Hence, wider still, I have

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<sup>18</sup> 'Democratic innovation, and the emergence of what might be called democratic values, has a tendency to spring from what I've called zones of cultural improvisation, usually also outside of the control of states, in which diverse sorts of people with different traditions and experiences are obliged to figure out some way to deal with one another. Frontier communities whether in Madagascar or Medieval Iceland, pirate ships, Indian Ocean trading communities, Native American confederations on the edge of European expansion, are all examples here' (Graeber 2007:23).

shown the historical constructing of the opposition between land and sea as a way of emphasizing the political potential of the spaces in between.

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