

## PERSPECTIVES FROM THE INVISIBLE WORKFORCE: LESSONS LEARNED FOR THE CGPCS

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### SUMMARY

*The shipping industry is often referred to as the Invisible Industry. Although 90% of all goods are transported by sea, many consumers are not aware of the industry's significance in our lives. Even more compelling, most are not aware of the people who move these goods. Thus, the Invisible Workforce may be a more accurate title. In this article, I discuss these invisible workers and their perceptions of maritime piracy and how their perceptions may be useful to the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS).*

The shipping industry is often referred to as the Invisible Industry. Although 90% of all goods are transported by sea, many consumers are not aware of the industry's significance in our lives. Even more compelling, most are not aware of the people who move these goods. Thus, the Invisible Workforce may be a more accurate title. In

this article, I discuss these invisible workers, their perceptions of maritime piracy, and how their perceptions may be useful to the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS).

During 16 months of research, which included over 60 days at sea with the seafarers who transit piracy areas as well as at seafarers' missions around the world, I met seafarers who were dedicated, often homesick, family men<sup>1</sup>. This was consistent despite the fact that I sailed with different companies, the ships flew different flags and the crews were multinational. As context around the seafarers' perceptions, I also did ethnographic fieldwork among ship owners, crewing companies, seafarers' missions, maritime schools, seafarer-relevant NGOs and unions in Denmark, Ukraine, India and the Philippines.

From my ethnographic fieldwork regarding the risks of maritime piracy to merchant seafarers, a central impression is that there is little knowledge outside of the industry (and sometimes within) about the lives of seafarers. This was consistent regardless of where in the world this research took me.

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<sup>1</sup> Female seafarers comprise only 2% of merchant-marine crews worldwide, the bulk of whom work in the cruise-line and ferry sector; they are unlikely to sail

through piracy areas, although some do. See IFT Seafarers. "Inside the Issues: Women Seafarers." IFT Webpage at [www.itfseafarers.org/ITI-women-seafarers.cfm](http://www.itfseafarers.org/ITI-women-seafarers.cfm); retrieved 7/11/2014.

This also holds true for how governments and NGOs address maritime piracy. I have not done research within the CGPCS and so I cannot know how and why the group participants were selected. Maritime piracy is a serious challenge to international trade, and it poses an existential threat to seafarers. For this reason, I note with concern that seafarers' organizations, which are in a unique position to communicate mariners' experiences and perceptions of maritime piracy, do not appear to have a more prominent position in the group's membership.

In this article, I examine how seafarers frame the problem of piracy and the effects of piracy and armed robbery on seafarers. I address the double role of employers as both victims of piracy and as security providers to seafarers, how seafarers understand piracy not only as a crime that occurs at a geographical location but on victims' bodies and discuss their perception of the role of ship owners. The body of ethnographic data collected also includes perspectives gathered from two organizations participating in the CGPCS and representing seafarer concerns: the Seamen's Church Institute of NY & NJ (SCI) and the Maritime Piracy Humanitarian Response Program (MPHRP).

As noted above, my research was not carried out within the CGPCS. Furthermore, as

an outsider to the CGPCS, I do not have access to the CGPCS's internal documents nor to a large portion of its participants' personal perspectives. Instead, my expertise lies in the personal and cultural perspectives and logics with which seafarers from over ten countries have presented me. These perspectives may be useful to the CGPCS as a source for comparison to pinpoint where there is convergence and where there may be conceptual contradictions. Based on ethnographic data and analysis, this article offers an academically mediated view on maritime piracy from the seafarer's perspective.

## FRAMING THE PROBLEM

In order to address the problem of maritime piracy, we must first agree on which major challenges piracy poses. Both academic and industry literature foregrounds legal definitions, the local conditions in Somalia, the challenges of apprehending and prosecuting pirates, hardening measures on board (including armed guards), and the costs of these endeavors to both nation-states and industry stakeholders.<sup>2</sup> These are relevant and important ways to address the problem. They do not however address how seafarers, the main human victims or potential human victims of piracy, frame the threat.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example: Bueger, Christian. 2013. "Orchestrating the Response: Somali Piracy and Ontological Complexity" in: *Global Policy* 4 (1): 86-93; Chalk, P. & Hansen, S. J. 2012. "Present day Piracy: Scope, Dimensions, Dangers, and Causes" in: *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 35:7-8, 497-506; Feldtmann, B. (2011) "Should we rule out criminal law as a means of fighting maritime piracy? – An essay on the challenges and possibilities of prosecuting Somali pirates" in: *Festskrift til Per Ole Tråskman, Norstedts Juridik AB*, p. 179-188.

<sup>3</sup> There is debate among trauma psychologists and anthropologists about whether people who have been abused should be referred to as victims. I choose to use

"victim" in this paper to describe individuals/groups who have been adversely affected by piracy. Whether or not the term stigmatizes or facilitates assistance (or both) is beyond the scope of this paper. See Garfinkle, Michael Stuart, Katz, Craig L and Sarachandra, Janaka. 2012. "The Psychological Impact of Piracy on Seafarers." New York: The Seamen Church Institute. Seafarers were interviewed at the harbor in Port Newark, New Jersey, or via Skype.

See also: Ziello et al. 2013, "Psychological Consequences in Victims of Maritime Piracy: The Italian Experience." *International Maritime Health* 64(3): 136-141.

Seeing maritime piracy as a crime committed at sea may be a reasonable way to conceptualize the problem. This approach contributes to reducing or even eliminating attacks at sea which is essential to protecting seafarers and to which the CGPCS has contributed in substantial ways. Some of these changes include heightened global attention to the problem, the regulations regarding the deployment of armed guards on board ships and a rigorous international system for vetting guards.<sup>4</sup> In some cases, stricter legal structures have been adopted nationally to protect seafarers' rights in connection with piracy and armed robbery. Other than this national example, the *effects* of piracy that become inscribed on the victims' bodies and their memories do not appear to have been addressed effectively within the international arena.

The effects of piracy travel with each victim, regardless of where he or she is in the world. From the seafarers' point of view, this makes (legal) geographical constructions – such as “high seas”, “territorial waters”, or even national borders on land – in this context, insignificant. Piracy continues to affect a seafarer because the horrors of being beaten and held against one's will exist in the body and mind, and not within the set of coordinates on a planning chart defined, for instance, by the Joint War Committee.<sup>5</sup> This alternative way of framing the problem offers a different way of understanding legalistic perceptions of the ‘scene

of the crime’, placing it precisely where it has had its most significant human effect: on seafarers' bodies and in their minds.

In a project related to CGPCS's work, the UNODC provided welfare support to 600 *prisoners convicted of piracy*.<sup>6</sup> Research left me with a clear impression that piracy victims were met with a general absence of basic welfare that addressed their needs upon their return to their home countries. While some nations seemed better equipped to support victims when they returned home, the bulk of seafarers in the international fleet do not come from these places. Criminals' human rights must be protected, but it seems a bitter irony that many victims are confronted with a variety of post-incident crises, in part, because piracy has been categorized as a crime that starts and stops at sea.

## EFFECTS ON BODIES AND MINDS

I would like to briefly discuss the adverse effects of piracy on seafarers that became apparent in interviews and informal conversations. It is important to note that seafarers are subjected to varying treatment by their captors. Some have been subjected to physical torture. Others were ‘lucky’ enough to have ‘only’ their freedom taken away and forced to live under foreign and uncomfortable conditions. Somdeep,<sup>7</sup> a victim I met and interviewed in India was sailing again.

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.iso.org/iso/catalogue\\_detail?csnumber=42146](http://www.iso.org/iso/catalogue_detail?csnumber=42146), retrieved 10/2/2014.

<sup>5</sup> The Joint War Committee “comprises [insurance] underwriting representatives from both the Lloyd's and IUA company markets, representing the interests of those who write marine hull war business in the London market.” This committee defines areas of piracy risk for insurance purposes, which in turn forms the basis for the ‘hardship pay’ that some seafarers receive.

[www.lmalloyds.com/Web/market\\_places/marine/JWC/Joint\\_War.aspx](http://www.lmalloyds.com/Web/market_places/marine/JWC/Joint_War.aspx) (see ‘listed areas’ link); retrieved 7/21/2014.

<sup>6</sup> See for instance UNODC. 2014. Counter-Piracy Program. Nairobi: UNODC, p. 2, at [www.unodc.org/documents/easternafrika//piracy/UNODC\\_Brochure\\_Issue\\_11\\_wv.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/easternafrika//piracy/UNODC_Brochure_Issue_11_wv.pdf), retrieved 7/18/2014.

<sup>7</sup> The names used in this article are pseudonyms to protect privacy.

He explained that his captors did not hurt him and that the experience did not limit his ability to lead a fulfilling life. Victims subjected to mental and physical torture, on the other hand, gave examples of how piracy accompanies them in their post-incident lives. This does not mean that they stop sailing. On the background of an attack near Lagos, Federico, a Filipino seafarer told me that, since the attack, he severely scolds his children for insignificant transgressions. Another seafarer, also from the Philippines, Captain Minas, was shamed into silence on the background of his experiences in the Gulf and off the coast of Somalia because he believed his family and friends would call him a “coward”, a position that his wife confirmed. Because he cannot bear returning to sea after a series of attempted attacks, he abandoned seafaring and took a job on land, even though it does not meet his family’s financial needs. Matthew, a western European man described how his marriage fell apart, isolating him further, because the piracy attack changed the way he interacts with his wife in fundamental ways. Upon returning to duty at sea, Frank, a seafarer from Western Europe could not sleep because of flashbacks from the attack. Federico, who had been held against his will – beaten, shot at, and bound so tightly that his arms turned black – continues to be affected long after his contract ended. He shakes when recounting the story, and tells me that he makes a hiding place in his cabin so that potential attackers might overlook him. Even though he has completed many voy-

ages since his attack, his ongoing fear compelled him to install extra locks *inside* the doors of his home.

Many of these seafarers were not offered physical or psychological help.<sup>8</sup> One employer in the Philippines required a victim to re-join immediately after an attack because otherwise his contract would not be fulfilled; it even planned to send him to the same area. A maritime lawyer in the Ukraine told me how a young victim was excluded from maritime school because he was unable to pay for his tuition and did not attend class after returning home from an attack. No organization, employer, or state actor stepped in to support the youngster. In one particularly brutal case which, like so many others in the Philippines, was kept secret for years, it became known that the employer blatantly ignored and then tried to hide the abuse that its employees suffered from pirates. The seafarer whose captors repeatedly beat his back for years still has pain. Even though a proper medical examination was never conducted, this employer stamped ‘fit to sail’ on his documents, making a compensation claim almost impossible. He was not paid back wages nor reimbursed for his stolen property. Piracy victims from Ghana suffered from similar treatment upon being released after almost three years in captivity, as documented in interviews carried out by the Seaman’s Church Institute.<sup>9</sup> Some of these cases are ongoing, and we may hope that compensation and proper treatment is offered in time,

<sup>8</sup> Whether a victim of piracy needs psychological treatment is up for debate. Some research on this issue questions whether the effects of such crimes create trauma or whether it is more meaningful for those effected to address themes of heroism, duty and bravery. See anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes’s work on this

theme in Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. 2008. “A Talent for Life: Reflections on Human Vulnerability and Resilience”, in: *Ethnos* 73 (1): 25–56.

<sup>9</sup> See for instance this youtube video of their research <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=alh1rKOWrMI&list=PL55FA87827536CA44&index=1>; retrieved 9/30/2014.

## THE COMPANY AS A VICTIM

As noted earlier, some of my ethnographic research was carried out among employers: crewing companies and ship owners. While my main focus is on the seafarers, it was clear to me that employers are also victims of this crime, both financially speaking but also as individuals who, for the most part, took responsibility for their seafaring employee's safety and security needs. Before continuing with more of the seafarers' perceptions, I would like to present some of the challenges with which employers - ship owners and crewing agencies - were faced in connection with safety and security issues, as they presented themselves to me in the field. These perspectives are helpful in setting the stage for how the seafarers with whom I was in contact conceptualized the threat of piracy. Here I will address what I refer to as "Financial Victimhood" and "The Human Factor".

### Financial Victimhood

Ship owners explained that if a risk is detected and there is something that can be done to mitigate that risk, security solutions are chosen that they find to be effective. This goes for financial risks as well. Piracy certainly represents a threat to human life, but it is also a financial threat to ship owners. If an attack is successful, seafaring employees are victimized and the company may become a financial victim as well.

It is significant that focusing on piracy as a maritime threat - something that happens in

a geographical location, rather than on a body - serves some of the seafarers' needs as well, by attempting to stop new crimes from being committed. Averting further attacks also serves the ship owners' financial concerns: once an attack is averted or stopped, the voyage may continue. Cargo can be delivered; hopefully, with minimal delay. New crewmembers do not need to be flown in, and crisis treatment is unnecessary; both can otherwise be time-consuming and expensive. In addition to their concerns for their crew's well-being, ship owner office staff who were responsible for security and safety on board referred to the added costs of having a ship detained in the event of an attack. This interrupts the ship's planned route and leads to significant financial losses for the company. If a company can avoid reporting the crime, security specialists in the field explained to me, then time and thereby money are saved. As a financial security measure, this practice protects the company from being further financially victimized by the bureaucratic demands placed on them after an attack. Federico, who was beaten severely and held captive near Lagos, told me that the incident was not reported and there was no form for de-briefing on board or other support from the company. Luckily, I did not hear many stories like this. There is no clear data on the amount of underreporting in the industry, but the financial benefits of doing so are clear. An article in ISWAN from September 2014, states that, "IMB estimates that nearly two-thirds of such attacks go unreported."<sup>10</sup> Failing to report may be seen as a questionable yet effective way of mitigat-

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.seafarerswelfare.org/news-and-media/latest-news/seafarers-affected-by-increase-in-piracy-related-violence-off-west-africa-coast>, retrieved 10/2/2014.

ing the financial risks of attempted and successful piracy and armed robbery attacks. Underreporting is a particular problem in connection with attacks in West African waters.<sup>11</sup> Frank, a young seafarer who was subjected to an attack along West Africa told me that the owner waited to report the attack, explaining that even a delay in reporting can be of financial value for the owner. Reports documenting an attack can be important for seafarers looking for compensation for their injuries and stolen property. Seen from this perspective, underreporting may save the ship owner costs, but it may contribute to heightening the financial burden on the seafaring victim.

In a way, insurance policies are the ‘armed guards’ that protect a shipping company from becoming the financial victim of piracy. Insurance policies protect the ship owner from having to cover the costs of, for example, compensation for injuries, ransom, or mental and physical treatment post-incident. Of the seafarers with whom I spoke who were offered post-incident care, treatment seemed to be defined by company insurance policies and not always by the seafarers’ needs. For example, Brian’s company insurance policy provided him six sessions with a psychologist. Once the sessions ended, it was irrelevant whether he continued to experience trauma. My research focus is not on after-care and insurance and so it is not possible for me to know if these cases are representative of a more general practice. They do, however, suggest that this possibility may be considered. Of course, insurance policies for shipping companies cover much more than the likes

of mental health treatment. Without proper insurance, an attack could threaten the financial survival of a shipping company. In a report from 2011, *Oceans beyond Piracy* evaluated that the “total cost of war risk and K&R insurance was approximately \$635 million”, which, for perspective, is approximately half of the total cost for military anti-piracy engagement in the same period.<sup>12</sup> Dmitri is a crewing agent in the Ukraine. He told me that the company for whom he previously worked went bankrupt after one of its ships and its crew had been taken hostage. He explained that the costs connected to freeing the crew was more than this small company could manage and they went under. He works for another agency today.

In fact, seafarers often explained that they would rather work for a financially robust owner because they felt that such employers would be in a better position to protect them from harm than less wealthy ones. One engineer told me how he had been offered employment with a small company for a significantly higher salary. He turned the offer down because he felt safer with his current and well-established employer, despite a significant difference in pay. Another young officer explained that he was worried about taking time off to finish his exams because he could not be sure his employer would take him back after the many months this takes in his country. Instead, he continued to sail in a lower rank to be sure he could work for a company that he felt had the necessary resources to protect him. It is significant that both of these men expressed significant distrust in their local

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<sup>11</sup> Zach, Danielle A, D Conor Seyle, and Jens Vestergaard Madsen. 2013. *Burden-Sharing Multi-Level Governance: A Study of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia*. Oceans Beyond Piracy.

<sup>12</sup> Bowden, Anna. 2011. *The Economic Cost of Piracy*. Oceans Beyond Piracy.

governments to provide any dependable social welfare and legal transparency.

The sub-contracting system that provides many companies with seafaring labor also, inadvertently, offers the ship owner some protection from financial loss in connection with piracy and on-board injuries. It is logistically difficult to keep track of seafarers who come on board via a manning company. In a conversation about piracy threats and the relationship between seafarers and the ship owner, Albert, a ship owner office employee told me, “We’ll never see them again.” The non-officer crewmembers were hired through a manning company and, even though this individual was practically responsible for their security while on board, there was no relationship to the seafarers (except perhaps to high-ranking officers). More important, Albert did not seem to feel an obligation to know. People holding such positions are not alone in this evaluation; while individuals with ship owner safety or security positions may feel responsible – and during my research I met many who do – the sub-contractor system makes it *easier* for them to remain uninvolved. A seafarer’s post-incident care, whether this refers to medical treatment, compensation, or mental-health care, often fall to the manning company – if at all. This allows the ship owner some practical distance to the victim. Federico explained that neither his crewing agent nor the ship owner took responsibility for his losses in connection with a piracy attack. He did not feel equipped to pursue the issue, particularly in the face of what he felt was a powerful and threatening adversary.

## The Human Factor

Addressing piracy as something that poses a financial threat to ship owners and their sub-contractors may seem like a cynical approach to the phenomenon, but seafarers with whom I spoke were often quite attentive of the economic tension between ship owners’ wish to protect their seafaring employees from harm and their wish to protect the company from financial harm. As noted above, the latter may very well facilitate the former and so it is no wonder that seafarers are aware of this tension. It is ethically problematic to compare victimhoods, but it is important to recognize that ship owners and their sub-contracting partners are also the “human” victims of piracy. Not in the way that their seafarers are, but as individuals who are on the receiving end of desperate crew members’ calls, who have been put into the position of negotiating for the lives of their employees and who have offered support to family and friends when a solution seemed far away.<sup>13</sup>

Dmitri, the crewing agent to whom I referred earlier, had been the liaison between a ship owner and the crew’s family during a hostage taking. The months of negotiation and mediation had been very stressful and physically taxing. The crewmembers’ families were understandably desperate for news about their loved ones and they visited his office on a daily basis for months. Dmitri was the only person they could reach, his boss “disappeared” and so he did his best to answer their questions and offer consolation when there was no news. Family members had his cell phone number and

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<sup>13</sup> Froholdt Lisa Loloma. 2010. “A Year after CEC Future”, *Mercator* March 10, 172-181.

called him at on weekends and nights. He was on call 24 hours/day. He was also the person at whom they directed their anger. At one point, some of the family members became convinced that he was lying to them. He explained that, “some of the relatives were good. Some were cruel and rude.” Dmitri was sick for months after the crew was finally released and he still has health problems that stem from this period.

This is a particularly disturbing story, considering the human costs for the crewmembers and for the crewing office employee responsible for handling the situation. The good news in this story, however, is that the crew was treated well once the owner again had influence over the situation after their release. Their wages were paid and their stolen items reimbursed. They were given time to recuperate and guaranteed jobs when they chose to go back to sea. Yevgeny, another crewing agent in the Ukraine summed it up nicely:

“We know the seafarers, the families know us. The wives call us. It’s a reputation. If you don’t protect your people, they won’t come to you.”

Some employers take advantage of seafarers who are willing to accept dangerous working conditions and irresponsible employment policies because they are desperate for work. Hopefully, these good examples offer direction to those who consider cutting ethical corners in exchange for financial gain.

## **THE SEAFARERS’ PERSPECTIVE: WHO IS A SECURITY PROVIDER?**

With these perspectives in mind, let us return to the seafarers. Various actors are playing important roles in the fight against maritime piracy. These include military forces, local governments, and lawmakers. It is however consistent in my data that, for the seafarer, the most significant security provider is the owner. As discussed above, ship owners are also victims of piracy. However, seafarers consistently explained that they depend on the company for their security and safety, a position that may be traced to the lack of transparency in countries from which many seafarers originate. There is sometimes relevant national legislation in place to protect seafarers, but they are often not aware of it or feel that it might be detrimental to their career to make use of it. In some more fortunate cases, industry stakeholders have fought for more rigorous local legislation (see footnote 9 in this article) and seafarers are knowledgeable and capable of utilizing it. But for seafarers from countries where corruption is endemic, the struggle for legal protection and representation are, at best, existent. Considering these perspectives, seafarers count on ship owners to be security providers. Seafarers repeatedly told me that they could not depend on their governments for help if they were subject to a piracy attack. This is in part because nations do not (officially) negotiate with pirates, but it is worth noting that this sense of neglect was sometimes exacerbated by governments’ failure to provide security in other threatening situations on land (such as violent crime).

In principle, seafarers’ labor unions could function as a kind of security provider by pressuring owners to provide armed guards, to pay hardship allowances, and to secure fair treatment for union members. In some places, this is the case. Unfortunately, many



seafarers are not unionized. One maritime lawyer in the Ukraine told me that 90% of all Ukrainian seafarers are not unionized. One seafarer explained that unions were there to control people and that ship owners pay them. The implied consequence was that their loyalty would not be with seafarers.

In the Philippines, seafarers were either not members of a union or they were not aware that they were and did not turn to them for this reason. Many of the seafarers with whom I spoke did not trust unions, especially those in countries with financial difficulties and high levels of corruption; they often referred to such institutions with great suspicion. In India, unions seemed to be so insignificant that they were rarely even mentioned. One ship management employee explained that unions in India were “a disaster”. A teacher at a maritime school shook his head when I asked about unions and said, “Seafarers will never unite.”

Adding to this bleak picture, seafarers and their employers often told stories about how authorities in the countries whose ports they frequented to unload and load cargo – otherwise known as “global trade” – jailed and abused them. The industry refers to this as “the criminalization of seafarers”<sup>14</sup>. There may be instances when such arrests are warranted, but abuse is not – and neither instills feelings of trust in seafarers.

Seafarers were sometimes critical of the military forces that patrol piracy areas. They shared anecdotes about how ships were attacked even when warships were nearby. They said that it could take hours or

even days before the nearest warship might reach them from somewhere in the vast Indian Ocean, and that military forces seemed unwilling or unable to rescue seafarers who had been taken hostage. This is not meant to suggest that the military is doing a poor job. As part of my research, I spent time on board the Danish frigate *Iver Hvitfeldt*, which was part of NATO’s naval mission. The experience gave me a firsthand impression of the challenges navies face when addressing piracy, including the danger that a rescue operation could pose to hostages. On board *Iver Hvitfeldt*, one officer told me, “We’re also seamen. We would give our right arms to protect our colleagues.”<sup>15</sup> Despite the military’s goodwill, notable competence, and knowledge, the seafarers’ lack of faith suggests that the kind of protection provided by military forces does not fulfill the seafarers’ perceived security needs.

This brings us to the company. From the perspective of the bulk of seafarers with whom I spoke, the company is seen as the sole provider of security and safety. The reason is simple: as opposed to other security actors, companies can define each ship’s specific safety and security needs because they are, in theory, knowledgeable about their vessels’ strengths and weaknesses as well as their crew’s abilities. Additionally, wealthy and responsible companies may choose to hire private intelligence companies that understand current threats. They hire armed guards, provide security equipment for the ship, and offer security training for the crew while less wealthy and/or responsible companies may choose

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<sup>14</sup> Seafarers and the Criminal Law Survey [www.seafarersrights.org/images/seafarers\\_and\\_the\\_criminal\\_law\\_survey](http://www.seafarersrights.org/images/seafarers_and_the_criminal_law_survey) ; retrieved 7/12/2013.

<sup>15</sup> Anthropologists on a study tour in a high risk area, SEAHEALTH, [www.seahealth.dk/en/publication/antropolog-p%C3%A5-studietur-i-high-risk-area](http://www.seahealth.dk/en/publication/antropolog-p%C3%A5-studietur-i-high-risk-area) ; retrieved 7/18/2014.

to forego these strategies. The tools available to ship owners to protect their crews are not available to other actors in the same way. To exclusion of all other security actors, seafarers see ship owners as the first and most powerful security provider for crews while on board. This puts them in an all-powerful position vis-à-vis the seafarers.

For example: One evening, I was chatting with a group of Filipino seafarers over a game of pool at a seafarers' mission somewhere along the African coast.<sup>16</sup> They had left the High Risk Area (HRA)<sup>17</sup> and were heading north along the west coast of Africa on a bulk carrier. I asked one of them if he was worried about sailing north, and he said, "No." Then he looked at me and asked, "Why?" I told him about the trouble in the Gulf of Guinea (GoG)<sup>18</sup>. He said that he did not think there was a problem because there had not been anything in the [public] media about it, and if there were a problem, they would have armed guards. In this case, the company did not tell the crew about the risks of piracy along the Nigerian coast. They had armed guards through the HRA, but the point of this anecdote is that the seafarer depended on the company to inform and protect him, and his perception of risk was defined by what the company and the media communicated to him. Because the company withheld certain information, he believed he was not at risk. Furthermore, the crew's lack of knowledge meant that they did not take any anti-piracy precautions. Well-informed readers will know that

it is difficult to provide guards in and around Nigeria due to local laws, and that a hardship allowance is generally not paid in the region. The lack of guards, however, does not indicate a lack of danger. Later that evening, I looked up their route and quickly found several news articles about recent attacks in the exact area through which they would be sailing. A bulk carrier sails 'low and slow,' so they were particularly vulnerable. We had exchanged e-mail addresses, so I forwarded the articles to them; they never responded.

Seafarers frequently told me that the Indian Ocean posed the biggest threat, and there was no significant threat off the coast of Nigeria. However, recent statistics suggest the opposite.<sup>19</sup> In 2013, 486 seafarers were attacked by Somali pirates, whereas 1,871 seafarers were attacked by West African pirates. Of course, seafarers may and should educate themselves about possible risks, but many of them do not have the skills to sift through a plethora of news sources and ascertain which are serious and trustworthy. As described in the story above, they look to the ship owner's practice for an indication of the possible risk profile, and then form their opinions and take action accordingly. The seafarer based his conclusions regarding the risk of piracy on his company's misleading behavior. If we consider the ship owner to be a security provider and not merely a potential financial victim of piracy, then in this case, it did not fulfill its responsibility.

<sup>16</sup> I refer to this place in such vague terms so as to protect the identity of the seafarers to whom I refer and to obscure the location of my access points during fieldwork.

<sup>17</sup> The High Risk Area refers to the greater Indian Ocean, specifically, 10° south and 77° east, as well as the Gulf of Oman to 25° north.

<sup>18</sup> The Gulf of Guinea area has experienced multiple pirate/armed robbery attacks with a generally different character than those originating from Somalia.

<sup>19</sup> Vestergaard, Jens and Conor Seyle, Kelle Brandt, Ben Purser, Heather Randall and Kelle Roye. 2014. *The State of Piracy 2013*. Oceans Beyond Piracy.

There are also positive examples. One seafarer explained that, since the company took such good care of him when he suffered a head injury on board (he fell), he was sure that they would care for him in the event of a piracy attack and/or kidnapping. He added that his family had faith in the company for the same reason. This trust also goes for companies that, at first glance, might not be considered ‘good’ companies. At one of the maritime schools I visited in India in 2013, a seafarer approached me in confidence during a lecture break. He told me that he sails on a bulk carrier – ‘low and slow’ – without armed guards. The ship calls on ports in and around the Arabian Gulf, which was then an area particularly prone to piracy. But there were no guards on board, he told me, because the company did not “want witnesses”. His ship was carrying cargo to Basra in Iraq. Pirates had recently taken some of his colleagues on a sister ship, but the company bought them free within a matter of days, and they were returned unharmed. His employer assured him this was company policy, which his colleagues’ experience confirmed. He felt safe, he told me. I did not want to know what type of cargo they were carrying or the name of the company – and he did not tell me. Not wanting witnesses, as he put it, suggests that the company was involved in criminal activity – not only because they may have been transporting illicit cargo, but also because they had close relations with pirates that made release within such a short period of time possible. In this seafarer’s

view, the company provided dependable security. Thus, regardless of the context, the company functions as a security provider and seafarers depend on them – and not others – for this service. The point is not to advocate for illegal activities as long as the company provides adequate security, but it tells us something important about how security is perceived from the seafarers’ point of view.

One of the strongest motivators for seafarers to choose a life at sea is that it allows them to provide for their families. Security is often defined in military or state terms, where the focus is on maintaining territorial borders<sup>20</sup>. This concept has evolved in a variety of ways. In the CGPCS’s work, the notion of ‘territory’ seems to include commercial interests in addition to state, state-like, and military interests. But how might we define ‘security’ if the most significant threat to some seafarers is poverty? This is not the case for all seafarers, but it is important to remember that the largest group of merchant seafarers worldwide is from the Philippines, where over 40% of the population survives on less than US\$2/day.<sup>21</sup> Randall, a Filipino seafarer explained to me: “We’re not worried about piracy. We’re worried about poverty.” Poverty was also a significant concern for my informants from India and Ukraine, each in their own way. For seafarers from financially unequal countries, the most significant contribution to their security, defined more broadly as “human security”,<sup>22</sup> is their salary. Some companies are not willing or able

<sup>20</sup> Bubandt, Nils. 2005. “Vernacular Security: the Politics of Feeling Safe in Global, National and Local Worlds”. *Security Dialogue* 36 (3): 275-296.

<sup>21</sup> The World Bank. Poverty & Equity Webpage. <http://povertydata.worldbank.org/poverty/region/EAP> ; retrieved 7/16/2014.

<sup>22</sup> Owen, Taylor. 2004 "Human Security - Conflict, Critique and Consensus: Colloquium Remarks and a Proposal for a Threshold-Based Definition" In: *Security Dialogue* 35 (3) 373-387.

to pay seafarers' salaries while they are being held captive and, once they have been released, some seafarers are not able to keep working, either due to physical or emotional injuries or because it is too expensive to renew their expired certificates, and they do not dare complain for fear of being blacklisted. Ship owners' role as an employer adds another layer to their position as security providers.

Summing up, there are of course many security providers of relevance to seafarers. But when at sea, many of these actors may only move into action through the ship owner. Ship owners hire guards, install razor wire and buy robust insurance policies. Captains may of course make independent decisions based on their judgment of a given situation, but captains did not always feel that their discernment was respected and this was perceived as a threat to their further employment. Other actors may simply not be in a position to help, such as war ships that are many hours or even days' sail away or nation states that cannot and do not negotiate on behalf of hostages.

### **The Double Role**

Discussing how the threat of piracy is framed, or if ship owners are victims of piracy and/or security providers against piracy, may seem like splitting hairs. Early in my research, a global maritime insurance expert explained that there are no statistics about the risk of piracy and flag states, but they can see a relationship between piracy and the amount of technical problems under a specific management company/ship owner. Technical problems do not cause piracy, but there is a kind of trickle-down effect. He explained that badly managed ships have a hard time recruiting competent

crews, they cut corners on other issues, and they may not be financially resourceful. All of these variables contribute to the vulnerability of being attacked.

While at sea, seafarers depend on the ship owner, who may or may not offer security measures; e.g., guards, hardware, knowledge, care, 'useful' relations to pirates, and wages. For this reason, it seems appropriate to consider ship owners both as victims of piracy *and* as security providers. However, as financial victims of piracy *and* security providers, ship owners are in a challenging position. With this double role, it may be difficult to define solutions that incorporate the victims' perspectives. As noted earlier, employer representatives have negotiated with pirates, received desperate phone calls from crewmembers being tortured while held captive, and communicated with hostages' families. This has taken an emotional toll on those tasked with such duties. Other employer representatives have not risen to this challenge and have shirked their responsibilities, as some of the examples in this article illustrate.

There appears to be built-in contradiction in the employers' role as a business actor in the pursuit of profit and as the exclusive provider of security for seafarers while at sea. Certainly, the fact that this is an asymmetrical relationship does not mean that ship-owners per definition capitalize on their existential advantage. The conditions surrounding work at sea however makes it easier for them to do so. It seems therefore imperative that we direct our critical gaze at those employers who gain a market advantage by cutting ethical corners or abusing seafarers' rights.

## Geographic Focus

At this point, I would like to address the geography of piracy more explicitly, in terms of its relevance for seafarers. Part of the international struggle against piracy off the coast of Somalia includes stopping a crime that hinders trade and abuses seafarers in that region. In this sense, directing anti-piracy activities to this specific geographic focus makes sense. If statistics are any indication, this focus has led to significant success. But if the fight also addresses the *effects* of piracy, then we must examine where piracy leaves its debilitating mark: namely, on seafarers and their families.

A seafarer's workplace is a moving piece of metal that brings them and the ship's cargo around the world, and it is *this* location that must be secure. Locating piracy as a solely Somali phenomenon locks our perspective in a land-based idiom, which is contradictory to the fluidity of the crime: it can, in principle, happen anywhere, and where there are low numbers or no piracy today, there may be a significant threat tomorrow.

The number of victims of Somali piracy are unclear, finding them has proven difficult, and attacks in the Indian Ocean have drastically decreased over the past year. If the crime continues to be addressed as something inherently Somali, it would be tempting to conclude that the problem has been resolved. However, simply because attacks have all but stopped off the coast of Somalia does not mean that the effects of the crime have stopped in the victim. In addition, I would venture that this geographical bias lies at the core of the concerns that I

have heard from some security specialists about seafarers' security complacency. As noted earlier, some seafarers have come to identify Somalia as *the* site of danger, and this may lead them and employer representatives responsible for security to let their guards down in other areas. Ships move and piracy threats rise and fall around the world. Addressing the root causes of the crime, including problems at its geographical place of origin are key in efforts to stop it. Shifting our perspective slightly to include the site where the crime is committed, namely on board moving ships and on human bodies, is essential for understanding the vulnerability of seafarers to the crime, the challenge of complacency and the ongoing effects of the crime in its human victims.

## WHO REPRESENTS SEAFARERS' VOICES IN THE CGPCS?

As noted at the beginning of this article, seafarers' organizations do not appear to be prominent members in the CGPCS. It is not possible for me to know why this might be the case or how seafarers interests might be represented in the group otherwise. I do take note that out of 83 participants listed on its website, only two groups directly represent seafarers' perspectives: the Seafarers' International Union (SIU)<sup>23</sup> and Seamen's Church Institute of NY & NJ (SCI). Since these two organizations are included, it would seem that seafarers' perceptions of the threat are relevant to the group's work.

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<sup>23</sup> The SIU "represents professional United States merchant mariners sailing aboard U.S.-flag vessels" ([www.seafarers.org](http://www.seafarers.org); retrieved 7/11/2014). In 2011, only 1% of the total merchant-marine fleet flew an American

flag (see: [www.theshippinglawblog.com/2011/04/article-worlds-top-ship-registries-flag.html](http://www.theshippinglawblog.com/2011/04/article-worlds-top-ship-registries-flag.html); retrieved 7/15/2014.)

The other 81 participants represent countries, military forces, and international governmental or industry organizations.<sup>24</sup>

One of the aspects that was blatantly clear to me during fieldwork was that merchant mariners come from all over the world. This means that merchant shipping crews are often a very diverse group, with varying motivations for sailing, different living conditions in their home countries and different social norms. Based on this recognition, it strikes me as essential that the organizations representing seafarers' perceptions of piracy take this work force's central characteristic as a basic point of departure. Of the approximately 1.2 million seafarers worldwide, those from the United States constitute just a small fraction, with the majority coming from East Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Indian sub-continent.<sup>25</sup> Seafarers come from all over the world, and Ukraine, Russia, India, and the Philippines are some of the largest providers. In addition, the flag of the ship does not necessarily correspond to the owner of the ship or the nationality of its crew.

The SCI focuses on representing this heterogeneous group. Although it describes itself as "North America's largest mariners' service agency", their targeted group are men and women in the international merchant marine.<sup>26</sup> Within this organization, Douglas Stevenson<sup>27</sup> is the lead professional addressing piracy. Mr. Stevenson has

years of experience as a U.S. Coast Guard officer and now is a maritime lawyer and advocates for seafarers worldwide through the SCI. Out of the 83 organizations listed as participating in the CGPCS, SCI is the only one with the stated purpose of protecting the interests of seafarers in relation to piracy, regardless of nationality. Within that organization, only one person – albeit a capable one – is in charge of seafarers' needs regarding piracy. I was in regular contact with Mr. Stevenson during fieldwork and I met him in England, Ukraine and in Denmark, where he was travelling as a representative for SCI.

The other organization with which I had contact during my fieldwork is the Maritime Piracy Humanitarian Response Programme (MPHRP).<sup>28</sup> This would appear to be relevant for the CGPCS. They are not listed as participants in the CGPCS, but various communiques refer to their contribution to the group<sup>29</sup> and it began attending meetings after its establishment in 2011. MPHRP has offices in the UK, Ukraine, the Philippines and India, and it is funded by industry stakeholders. During my research, I spent time with representatives from Ukraine and the Philippines and participated in some of their events. They graciously shared their insights with me and were helpful to me in practical ways.

The representatives from Ukraine and the Philippines have some experience in the

<sup>24</sup> [www.thecgpcs.org/about.do?action=structure](http://www.thecgpcs.org/about.do?action=structure) ; retrieved 7/21/2014

<sup>25</sup> International Chamber of Shipping, "Number and Nationality of World's Seafarers." At [www.ics-shipping.org/shipping-facts/shipping-and-world-trade/number-and-nationality-of-world-s-seafarers](http://www.ics-shipping.org/shipping-facts/shipping-and-world-trade/number-and-nationality-of-world-s-seafarers) ; retrieved 7/11/2014.

<sup>26</sup> See SCI Webpage at [www.seamenschurch.org](http://www.seamenschurch.org); retrieved 7/11/2014.

<sup>27</sup> SCI's Clinical Researcher Dr. Michael Garfinkle and Executive Director Fr. David M. Rider joined Mr. Stevenson

(their real names) in efforts to respond to seafarers affected by piracy (personal correspondence; July 2014.

<sup>28</sup> MPHRP states that more than 4000 seafarers have been held hostage since 2008 and that the industry "remains fully united in this campaign to eradicate maritime piracy" (MPHRP Webpage. "About us" at [http://www.mphrp.org/about\\_us/](http://www.mphrp.org/about_us/); retrieved 10/22/2014).

<sup>29</sup> See for example Communiqués from the 12th (July 2012) and 15th (November 2013) Plenary Sessions.

maritime industry and they rely on local experts who offer their services pro bono.<sup>30</sup> The representatives work on a part-time basis and are led by a former maritime chaplain, Roy Paul.<sup>31</sup> The organization's work includes training teachers at maritime educational institutions and crewing companies in pre-departure piracy awareness seminars. In the Philippines, I was told about a large information meeting held at Lunetta Park, Manila's outdoor seafaring job market. This is a highly popular and populated gathering place for seafarers. I also spent time at Lunetta Park during my research and it proved to be a fruitful location for getting into contact with seafarers. In both Ukraine and the Philippines, the representatives told me that they struggled to make direct contact with victims. I was told that this is "largely due to the reluctance of shipping and crewing agents to assist MPHRP."<sup>32</sup> In my experience, gaining the trust of seafarers, particularly if they have been adversely effected by a piracy attack, is a challenging and delicate process. Some seafarers are simply not willing to speak about their experiences. When they encountered victims, MPHRP representatives explained that it was difficult to provide concrete support in the way of funds or legal assistance. They have provided financial aid to piracy survivors and their families, such as covering medical bills, but MPHRP's resources are small, and I was told that its funding for the next year was uncertain. MPHRP recently collaborated with the Hostage Support Program, an UN-led project discussed below.

In the Philippines, much of the assistance given to seafarers and their families consisted of consolation visits (sometimes framed in religious terms). The value of this should not be underrated. Many piracy victims are never asked to share their stories, but during my research, seafarers seemed to benefit from voicing how pirates and sometimes their employers had mistreated them, as well as from being told that their reactions to physical and psychological violence were not uncommon. If nothing else, it made them feel better, and clinical analyses of the effects of piracy on seafarers<sup>33</sup> show that this can be essential.<sup>34</sup>

In December 2013, MPHRP invited me to participate in a 3-day training seminar in Manila. They told the attendees that, out of an estimated over 1,000 Filipino seafarers who have experienced piracy (being either shot at, abused, and/or taken hostage), only four victims had been in contact with MPHRP. That number is undoubtedly higher today as they continue to reach out to victims. While I was in the Philippines, MPHRP was working on an agreement with the government to share information about Filipino victims. Up until that point, this information was kept completely secret. This meant that organizations like MPHRP or unions were often left in the dark about who the victims were, how many victims there were, if they had been paid wages while in captivity, if they were sailing again etc. Clearly, such an environment makes locating and assisting victims very challenging.<sup>35</sup> MPHRP's potential to reach out to

<sup>30</sup> Correspondence with MPHRP; July 2014.

<sup>31</sup> His real name.

<sup>32</sup> Correspondence with MPHRP; October 2014.

<sup>33</sup> See the research by Garfinkle and Ziello et al., as noted above.

<sup>34</sup> Vestergaard, Jens and Conor Seyle, Kelle Brandt, Ben Purser, Heather Randall and Kelle Roye. 2014. *The State of Piracy 2013*. Oceans Beyond Piracy.

<sup>35</sup> However, it is compelling that, during just one month of fieldwork, I spoke with six seafarers who had been directly affected by piracy – even though my goal was not

victims and help them directly is phenomenal. Their work in the Philippines appears to emphasize training office employees in crewing and ship management companies or engaging politically over direct engagement with seafarers who have been subjected to piracy. My impressions from the work being done in the Ukraine is similar. Based on my brief encounters with MPHRP, it would seem that the organization would be able to do more with additional funding and that their services could be optimized by communicating to their audience of seafarers in more effective ways.

## Collaboration and Struggles

Unfortunately, MPHRP and the SCI do not appear to collaborate, despite having what seems like a shared agenda. SCI has shared its experience and mental-health research with MPHRP and MPHRP has incorporated SCI's work into its guidelines. SCI has been working to protect seafarers' rights in relation to piracy since the 1990s,<sup>36</sup> which suggests that its experience would continue to be useful to MPHRP. Likewise, the local knowledge and contacts that MPHRP has established could be a useful resource for the understaffed SCI.<sup>37</sup>

Both organizations' struggle to contact victims is in part due to underreporting in the industry, a lack of a victim-registration sys-

tem and government obstruction. I conducted much of my research at well-established maritime organizations in the countries mentioned. Representatives from seafarers' unions and well-respected maritime schools were sometimes unaware of basics, such as BMP4, and most of them had never heard of MPHRP or SCI. through my In addition, the seafarers that I met who had been subjected to victims of piracy in all four of the countries where I conducted fieldwork, yet none of them had been in contact with the MPHRP or SCI. In fact, they had never heard of either organization. This is of course a disturbing gap but it also offers an opportunity for organizations like SCI and MPHRP.

## Hostage Support Program (HSP)

The Hostage Support Program was approved by the CGPCS Trust Fund in 2012,<sup>38</sup> but began its work without funding. It was established with a wish to support victims of piracy, a gap that was "*particularly glaring given that so much international effort was directed at prosecuting the pirates themselves and preserving their human rights, whilst none was focused upon assisting the hostages – the primary victims of this criminal activity.*"<sup>39</sup> The SCI and MPHRP only recently began to collaborate with the HSP to repatriate seafarers who had been held hostage. Although I have not done fieldwork among members of the

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to locate victims, I had never before done research in the Philippines, and I do not speak Tagalog.

<sup>36</sup> <http://uscgproceedings.epubxp.com/issue/57858>, p. 60; retrieved 7/21/2014.

<sup>37</sup> As noted representatives from MPHRP were very helpful to me. Unfortunately, I was also made to understand that the organization was suspicious of my project and did not wish to collaborate with "academics" (I learned later that this was connected to previous negative experiences with others). Despite this, I provided

MPHRPs contact information at the lectures I gave at maritime schools in Denmark, Ukraine, India and the Philippines and referred the victims I met to MPHRP.

<sup>38</sup> Hostage Support Programme. 2014. "Lessons Learned. After Action Review. Improvement Plan". United Nations Office of Vienna and United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3



Hostage Support Program, in connection with the Lessons Learned project, I have been asked to review the HSP's own evaluation within this project and offer my own perspectives based on the knowledge I have acquired through my own research.

HSP has been instrumental in facilitating the release of seafarers whose employers abandoned them while they were being held hostage, and wherever possible, it has provided limited medical care for those still being held; 93 seafarers in total. In their Lessons Learned report, HSP seems to lack important knowledge about the other actors working to help seafarers affected by piracy. With its limited resources, the program should be able to draw upon the experiences and direct know-how that already exists in the field, some of which I have been able to gather during my research and upon which I reflect below.

In their Lessons Learned Paper, HSP recommends “[developing] a formal debriefing process for crews...”.<sup>40</sup> Such processes already exist: the SCI has trained staff to conduct debriefing sessions, as does MPHRP. In addition, well-respected ship owners have access to independent trauma psychology services (such as the one provided by Seahealth<sup>41</sup>) and expertise that they would be able to share. Similarly, HSP calls for guidelines for handling the media and family members of hostages<sup>42</sup>. Representatives from the shipping industry have ample experience with this. Early in my research, several Company Security Officers explained that counter-piracy was not a point of competition, and they were eager to address these challenges together. In

Denmark, the ship owners' organization has created an informal piracy group for this purpose, which could be a useful resource for the HSP in this respect.

HSP also cites the need to find relevant medical professionals to help hostages while in captivity. During my time on board the *Iver Hvitfeldt*, the Danish Navy was in contact with local leaders in Somalia. Navies patrolling the region generate substantial intelligence on activities in Somalia, and information that is not classified could be shared with a group like HSP. Additionally, collaboration with other navies patrolling the area could be useful for evacuating hostages, especially where exit routes via the sea are considered safer than those on land.

## MOVING FORWARD

Piracy is a serious crime. It is easy to lose sight of the fact that the number of victims is miniscule in comparison to the number of ships and seafarers who pass through these regions unscathed. It is also accompanied by sensationalism in the media and an often romanticized notion on land of what piracy is. However, given the serious effects of piracy on seafarers, and the significance of the shipping industry to global trade, it seems important to consider seafarers' perceptions of this crime, in all their diversity.

I have offered a series of analyses based on my own research in an effort to give this In-

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. p. 17.

<sup>41</sup> See Seahealth. Crisis Management Services.” At [www.seahealth.dk/en/page/crisis-management-services](http://www.seahealth.dk/en/page/crisis-management-services); retrieved 7/16/2014.

<sup>42</sup> Hostage Support Programme. 2014. “Lessons Learned. After Action Review. Improvement Plan”. United Nations Office of Vienna and United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime.

visible Workforce a voice, and to offer insights that might contribute to their welfare. These contributions include descriptions of the effects of piracy on seafarers with whom I have been in contact and the ongoing nature of the crime as it travels with its victims. In this sense, I have argued, piracy cannot only be defined as a crime that occurs in a geographical location. In addition, I have described the double position that ship owners and crewing companies hold, as victims of piracy and as security providers to seafarers. From the seafarers' perspective, the ship owner is the sole security provider at sea, in the sense that all other actors move into action through the ship owner or are not consistently available to seafarers in need at sea.

As discussed earlier, some counter-piracy measures make good business sense as well as good ethical sense. In this way, these two roles do not contradict one another. It is often suggested that such measures ensure that workers will continue to pursue careers at sea, but I am not convinced. People leave a career at sea for many reasons; piracy rarely seems to be one of them. Rather, the industry allows seafarers to provide for their families, and *that* is what ensures a steady stream of willing laborers, particularly from countries with great financial difficulties. Seen from this perspective, employers may find themselves in an ethically compromising position. Employers may feel tempted to gain a market advantage by saving money on measures that protect seafarers from physical, emotional and financial loss. This creates an uneven playing field in the industry.

In 2013, the newly ratified Maritime Labour Convention 2006 became legally binding. According to regulation 4.2, seafarers have the

“right to material assistance and support from the ship owner with respect to the financial consequences of sickness, injury or death occurring while they are serving under a seafarers' employment agreement or arising from their employment under such agreement”.<sup>43</sup>

The ethnographic descriptions provided in this article of how seafarers have been subjected to piracy attacks and unfair treatment by their employers stem from before the Convention was ratified. As we move forward, we may hope that this legislation can play a central role in cracking down on such instances in the future. Oceans Beyond Piracy, the ILO, and SCI agree that regulation 4.2 includes piracy. But with the sharp drop in attacks off the coast of Somalia, some may see this detail as insignificant. Piracy off the coast of Somalia has all but disappeared, but attacks off the west coast of Africa are on the rise, as are attacks in the Malacca Strait. The ebb and flow of this crime is apparent. It is important that companies who choose to protect their seafaring employees from piracy and armed robbery are not at a financial disadvantage vis-à-vis competitors who do not. Thus, future efforts to address the effects of piracy on seafarers could also include helping shipping companies that might be tempted to shirk their responsibilities toward seafarers for economic gain to make ethically sound decisions in the future.

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<sup>43</sup> See Maritime Labour Convention, 2006.

## About the Author

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## Acknowledgements

I performed 16 months of fieldwork, including over 60 days at sea and visiting seafarers' missions, with additional research in Denmark, Ukraine, India, and the Philippines. My focus was on seafarers and their families, but I also visited maritime schools, unions, and NGOs, and spoke to representatives of ship owners and crewing companies in the countries named above. All informants have been guaranteed anonymity, unless the information was gathered in a public forum. In order to protect confidential and personal information, I blur details irrelevant to the analyses. Qualitative data form the basis of anthropological analysis and theory, from "the bottom up". My methodology included individual / focus-group interviews and participant observations. I was in contact with over 500 seafarers worldwide from over 10 countries; they regularly sail through and call on ports in areas where maritime piracy and

armed robbery pose existential threats to their welfare.

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