

The Old Men and the Sea: Phenomenology and Historical Archive Material
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Ulla Kallberg 2022. *“Sillä ainahan merimies sentään on erimies”*: Merimiesidentiteetit muuttuvassa maailmassa. (“For Always a Sailor Is a Different Man”: Seamen’s Identities in a Changing World.) Turun Yliopiston Julkaisuja. Tom. 592. Turku: Turun Yliopisto. 271 pp. ISBN 978-951-29-9014-6 (print) ISBN 978-951-29-9015-3 (PDF) ISSN 0082-6987 (print) ISSN 2343-3191 (online).

Ulla Kallberg’s dissertation includes Acknowledgments, an Introduction, and six chapters. The first chapter discusses materials, methodologies, and theories, while the second deals with the history of Finnish shipping. Analysis of ethnographic material starts in the third chapter, titled “The Ship: Everyday Spaces and Places”. This is followed by chapters dealing with the experiences of the first trip, everyday life on board and various encounters and feelings sailors experienced during their journey. These chapters are followed by conclusions (titled “Lived Seamanship”) and References.

In her doctoral thesis, Kallberg analyses the self-image of sailors through their everyday practices from a historical perspective; written questionnaire answers from the 1960s are the primary basis for the empirical data. The research questions touch upon the self-understandings of the sailors in different situations and manifestations of gender in creating, experiencing, and living identities. The author also discusses human relationships, their impact on forming an individual’s identity, and the social reality of the sailors’ community. Furthermore, Kallberg raises the question of the relationship between sailors’ self-experience, feelings, and actions and summarises the idea rather elegantly: “The identification relies on lived experiences” (12).

After reading Kallberg’s overview of previous studies, it seems that the context for this research is quite rich. The author manages to choose literature that contextualises her research in one way or another. In general, the study is adequately contextualised by earlier research of related empirical and theoretical topics (16–27). Conceptually, Kallberg builds this research upon a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is a good choice as a theoretical background as it enables a discussion on place and space and embodied experience. The methodological section also extensively sketches a broader international domain of phenomenological ideas. Regarding phenomenology, the author argues: “Central to it is the idea of the embodiment of an individual acting subject and, more broadly, human existence and meaning” (5). While ground-

ing her approach, Kallberg refers to Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricoeur, Jonas Frykman, Orvar Löfgren, and others.

Primarily, the study relies on archived material collected decades ago. The choice of material makes it complicated for the author to double-check the evidence or comprehend the discourse present in the empirical data. The reader feels a mental tension between the lack of immediate connection with the empirical data and the impressive historical reach of the whole study. However, the material is still sufficient and intriguing. Referring to Martin Heidegger, Kallberg claims that phenomenological analysis also includes the historical dimension: “Finality, factuality, and historicity are the core of the embodied subject’s being” (29). The author also admits the limits of the phenomenological analysis, and asserts:

[The phenomenological approach] reduces too much and does not consider general social and economic structures and processes. The core problem seems to be that ethnologists work at different levels of perspective, and phenomenology does not tell us how the level of the individual and society can be combined within the same analysis. In addition, phenomenological work makes it difficult to use historical sources because there has been no thorough methodological discussion. (56, the citation translations are by the author of this review)

Kallberg summarises her view on the phenomenological approach by maintaining that: “The identities of sailors manifest themselves through work and doing. They are often almost imperceptible and manifest themselves randomly in various situations. They also emerge in internal, subjective experiences and emotional states” (5). The temporarily closed social space produces a specific set of human relationships that are more clear, complete, and exposed. However, it could be tricky for sailors to communicate these feelings and practices to researchers from outside their narrative community. They might have felt that specific narrative rules obstructed this communication. Kallberg also admits that respondents may have refrained from writing down specific experiences, which provides a cognitive challenge for the researcher. It is not straightforward to claim to approach any experience directly:

But the analysis of bodily experiences and feelings shaped into writings brings its methodological challenges. They ask how well the analysis of the material is possible to get to the actual experiences or whether it only produces a way of narrating them. How sharply these can be separated (59).

The archival data that serves as the basis of this study was collected in 1963–1964 by Professor Ilmar Talve. He created the general data collection

strategy in the early 1960s. Talve considered it essential to document the period of the industrialisation of Finland. Among other professional communities, the sailors appeared as one of the first groups Ilmar Talve paid attention to (after railway workers). Talve found collaboration with the Sailors' Union during his data collection campaign very satisfying (Talve 1999, 84–85). In his autobiography, we can also find a discussion of his overall approach:

What are our possibilities to describe a folk culture of that period (1870–1920)? Nevertheless, this job must be done at some point, as according to my understanding, this is a duty of the ethnologists, and as a professor in this area, I felt clearly that I am obliged to make it possible (Talve 1999, 94).

This data appears helpful even today and, moreover, we can also see the choice of empirical material here to pay honour to Professor Talve. Kallberg also discusses Professor Talve's ideas about collecting this archival data (41–42). My museum colleagues claim that researchers will never use 90% of the data collected for ethnographic archives. If this argument, which is based on museum ethnographers' experience, holds, then it would appear generally meaningless to collect data for the ethnographic archives "for the future". Old collections function as curiosities by themselves. They become objects of critique, reflection, or they embody curious ideas about treasuring something for eternity. Considering this often-unfortunate fate of archival material, research on this data is very much appreciated. Archives enable a relatively close look at life realities of the past, although we need to consider the methodological lens of the collectors.

The dissertation includes an extensive presentation of material, which is logically structured and discussed. The results and conclusions are presented briefly in the final part of the study enabling further reflection on the various viewpoints presented in the discussion chapters. The discussion fluctuates between the personal experiences of the sailors and their group-related identity, which brings us back to the dispute about the phenomenological potential of the data. Even though the author presents results and conclusions logically, it appears problematic to explore the self-understanding of sailors from a temporal distance. Kallberg analyses practices and feelings that were experienced a long time ago, written down later but still decades ago. How is the claim of comprehension justified?

For example, the sections "Obstacles to movement: clatter, vibration, and roar" (pages 98–99), "Condensed maritime law: rules and norms of common life" (101–106), "The invisible experiences of living alone" (107–112) or "Ships, living and change" (112–117) and several others demonstrate that phenome-

nology was an excellent choice of methodology to analyse this data and aim at its comprehension. This methodology also appears adequate in the first empirical chapter (“Ship: Everyday Spaces and Places”, 82–120). The third empirical chapter, “Everyday Life on a Ship” (159–199), is more descriptive, and phenomenology works adequately here. However, the second of the empirical chapters (“On the First Trip”, 121–158) seems ambivalent regarding the effect of phenomenological analysis.

The phenomenological approach generally appears useful for a historical study, although it has limits. In some parts of the data, the approach starts functioning less effectively. For example, there seems to be little evidence about homosexual conduct on board (141–143), and violence has been described primarily by one respondent (143–148) despite the fact that these topics are essential, reflecting liminal aspects of the initiation of the young sailors, reaching beyond clever tricks played on newcomers. However, here the researcher is restricted by the empirical evidence. The questionnaire did not include questions about homosexuality or violence, and we need to keep in mind what the scholars in the 1960s might have deemed as ‘proper’ inquiries in questionnaires.

Overall, Kallberg’s dissertation’s structure is adequately elaborated and has a logical structure. It is based on a body of ethnographic archival material and contributes significantly to our knowledge of historical Finnish maritime culture. The dissertation brings into scholarly circulation much information about the transformation period in international maritime culture (the late phase of sailing ships and the golden era of steamboats). The employed approach provides a panoramic view of sailors’ culture and traditions, thus making it possible to comprehend maritime heritage from the early and mid-20th century.

The empirical focus of the study is justified as conclusions depend on a multiplicity of evidence presented throughout the monograph. The empirical part is very prominent in this study, and without it, it would be hard to form a complete understanding of a sailor’s life. The author compares experiences presented by different Finnish sailors and analyses her body of evidence against the relevant background of theoretical literature. In this way, Kallberg demonstrates her ability to assess critically and dialogically both empirical data and theory. The monograph is a valuable contribution to ethnological archival studies and demonstrates that the old ethnographic material can illuminate the past for contemporary readers.

AUTHOR

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