



An up-to-date study on mixed crews on Finnish cargo ships

Anne Ala-Pöllänen 2017. *Happy Ship? Etnografinen tutkimus suomalaisista ja filippiiniläisistä merimiehistä suomalaisilla rahtilavoilla.* (English Summary: *Happy Ship? An ethnographic study of Finnish and Philippine sailors aboard Finnish cargo ships.*) Kansatieteellinen Arkisto 57. Helsinki: The Finnish Antiquarian Society. 223 pp. Diss. ISBN 978-952-6655-04-8 (print). ISBN 978-951-51-3095-2 (electronic). ISSN 0355-1830.

Ethnologists at the University of Helsinki have during the last years concentrated also on maritime culture in many different ways. Dissertations have been published on such topics as harbour workers (Tytti Steel 2013. *Risteäviä eroja sataman arjessa.* Helsinki: Unigrafia.), societies based on lighthouse and maritime pilot stations (Harry Nyman 2011. *Uloimmalla rannalla: Luotsi- ja majakkamiesperheet asemayhdyskunnissaan.* Helsinki: Suomen Muinaismuistoyhdistys.) and Finnish Coast Guard Units (Miia-Leena Tiili 2016. *Ammattilaisuuden ankkuripaikat: Kinesteettinen ja kulttuurinen tieto Suomenlahden merivartiostossa.* Helsinki: Suomen Muinaismuistoyhdistys.). The latest dissertation, Anne Ala-Pöllänen's *Happy Ship? An ethnographic study of Finnish and Philippine sailors aboard Finnish cargo ships* continues this theme very well. She discusses a very interesting and current topic on Finnish cargo ships, mainly the co-operation and construction of everyday life among Finnish, Estonian and Philippine crew on cargo ships sailing under the Finnish flag. This system has become more and more common in the past years.

The purpose of the study as well as the material on which it is based are very clearly defined. As the name also reveals, it is based on mixed crews on Finnish cargo ships, and it examines the construction of encounters in space and place during different activities on board. The main purpose was to analyse how cultural diversity and maritime structural hierarchy affect the working life as well as free-time activities on the ship. Finally, it also

studies how the everyday life on these ships influences maritime safety issues. It is an important question to solve if there are conflicts in public life, and problems concerning maritime safety issues have been increasing. Another important issue in this study was to observe the meshwork that the multicultural crew and ship hierarchy constitute. It is an increasingly important question on ships with mixed crews, because mixed crews are a current tendency in shipping.

Theoretically, the study is based on phenomenological cultural analysis. It is also very appropriate for analysing the research material, which consists of ethnographic fieldwork conducted by the author in 2013, 2014 and 2015. Actually, the fieldwork was conducted on three different ships sailing under the Finnish flag, but for ethical reasons, the three ships are handled as one, *M/S Martha*. It is a good solution. During the whole process, the author has also paid a lot of attention to ethical issues, which is important when studying current themes. She has also reflected on her on-board position and status among the crew. All in all, the way Ala-Pöllänen has performed her fieldwork and the way she writes about it, tells about a very good fieldworker. She has named her method of doing fieldwork "involved ethnography", which tells all about it. On the other hand, her earlier experience as a worker on travel ships is important, but luckily she has avoided naive autoethnography.

Ala-Pöllänen knows phenomenological and cultural analysis very well. In addition to it, her information on international studies on maritime culture is remarkable. In spite of that, it would have been interesting if Ala-Pöllänen had used more multi-sensual information in her studies, because she acknowledges it as part of her fieldwork. Maybe the reason is that many of the interviews have been conducted in another language than the mother tongue of the informant and the researcher.

This study belongs to many areas of ethnological research; e.g. traditional studies concerning working culture and professions, studies on closed societies, spatial studies and studies on everyday life.

It also has a lot to say on current changes in maritime work as well as cultural diversity. When field-work is carried out in the present day, it adds to the topicality and importance of the work also outside ethnological and humanistic studies. The importance of the study is remarkable, and this study represents societal interaction very well, which is also one issue that universities emphasize today.

The main concepts that Ala-Pöllänen uses are described in the third chapter on mixed crews. These include nationalism, cultural diversity and multiculturalism. With these concepts – and also with space and place – the everyday life and work on the ships are described. Although the concepts are important and illustrative, Ala-Pöllänen could have paid more attention to nationality and tacit knowledge.

Especially chapter five on spaces and wellbeing and chapter six on working life are important and interesting chapters. Different spaces on ships, such as private, public and national spaces, are discussed along with wellbeing and comfort. Concerning spaces, the theory of Michael Foucault on space, control and hierarchy would have given more insight into these issues, but it is not analysed in the book. Otherwise, work during everyday life and related issues, such as communication, encountering different nationalities, the private and the collective and hierarchy, are discussed. According to Ala-Pöllänen, communication has an important role in many ways. In that sense, it is very remarkable that theories and studies made by ethnologists, anthropologists and linguists on intercultural communication are not even mentioned. An important part of ethnological research is intercultural communication. That is why it is not understandable that such studies concerning intercultural communication have not been made use of in this study. Using intercultural communication research, the questions of communication and its role in the safety on board and security and accidents would have been analysed better. This would also have added more importance to these current questions, which seem to become more and more common today with the increasing number of mixed crews. Communication and questions concerning it are relevant in this study and are also discussed very often. Therefore, ver-

bal and non-verbal communication are an essential part of co-operation and have an impact on the everyday life on the ships – both at work and during free time. It is also relevant how the ships accept new crew. Thus, to discuss these issues theoretically would have been very essential in this study.

All in all, the dissertation is current, well written and interesting to read. Ala-Pöllänen knows and uses with superlative skill the jargon of maritime culture and shipping, which is not well known to all readers. These words are explained in the text, and there is a list consisting of maritime words, which helps readers.

An important part of ethnological research is to return the information back to the field. This dissertation is written in Finnish, but part of the interviews, which were made in English, are also published in English in the study (they are included in Finnish in the notes). This would also help to return the information to the field and in the future, publish an article or book in English or in a language that the sailors can read. The informants represent many different languages.

Internationalism, multiculturalism and intercultural communication are issues that are very important in this study, and this publication has a lot to say on these issues. As the author writes (in the abstract): “the study finds various ways to reinforce the unity of mixed crews aboard Finnish cargo ships. As the joint-mess room is already an established practice, it is easy to enhance its policy toward more equal styles of living. Moreover, as has already been demonstrated elsewhere, multinational crews, joint spare time, and simple and clearly articulated regulations governing the work helps to orient the multinational crews in a more harmonious common life aboard ship.”

In spite of the missing aspect, the use of intercultural communication research, Anne Ala-Pöllänen’s study is a solid research on a very current theme, which is also very important internationally. I hope that this study will be widely used in shipping, because it discusses several issues that are current and important, and it also has a lot to say about safety issues on cargo ships that have mixed crews. It represents societal interaction at its best.

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