

The Social, Cultural and Health Aspects of Food in a Global Industry *The Case of Seafarers*

Dr Polina Baum-Talmor
Solent University, Southampton, UK



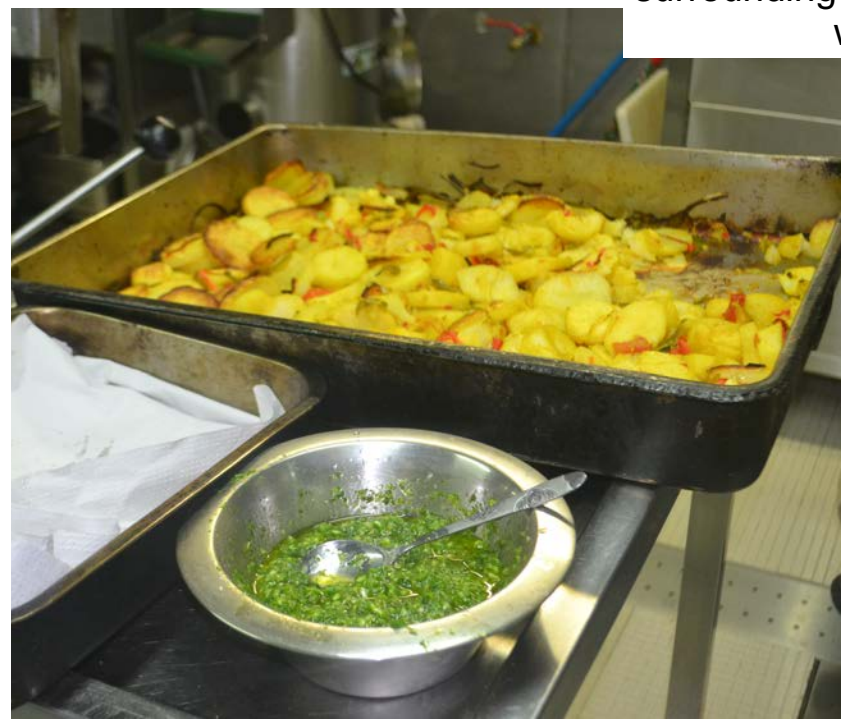


When I say 'food on board ships', how many of you think it looks something like this?
Most of our familiarity with ships would be through either cruise ships
Or ferries.



In reality, food on board cargo ships, ships that in many cases carry the food we consume on a daily basis, is quite different.

Today I will try and present to you the complex picture surrounding food on board cargo ships, and the people who work in these spaces, the seafarers.



Outline

Background

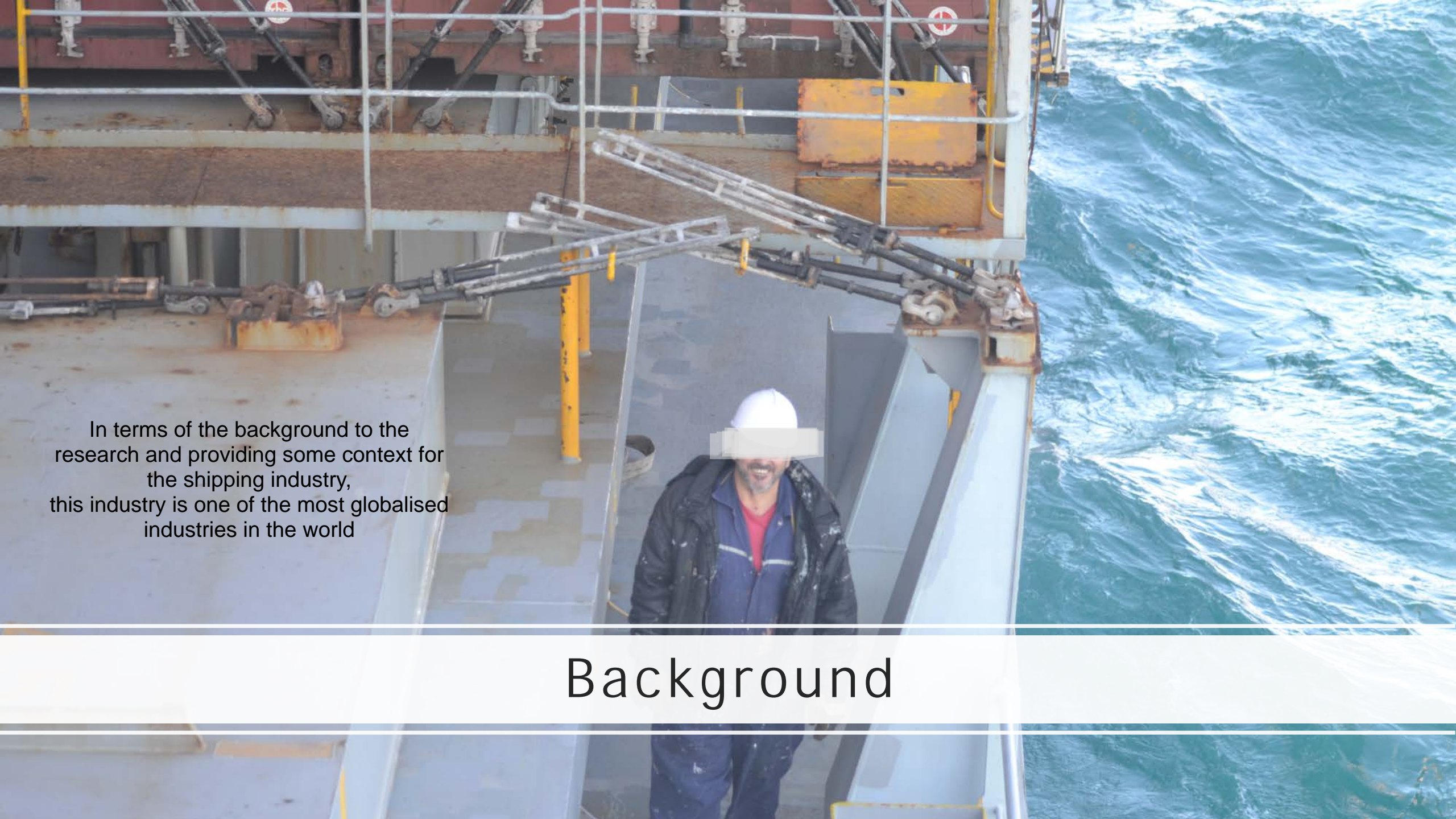
Methods

Food on board ships

Future Directions

The aim of the paper today is to extend our understanding of the cultural, social and health issues surrounding food on board cargo ships.



A man wearing a white hard hat and a dark jacket over a red shirt is standing on a ship's deck. The deck is made of metal and has various equipment, including yellow storage boxes and metal railings. The ocean is visible in the background, with waves breaking. The man's face is partially obscured by a white rectangular box.

In terms of the background to the research and providing some context for the shipping industry, this industry is one of the most globalised industries in the world

Background



So in a typical scenario, the ship's owner can be based in Germany, the ship flies a Panamanian flag, the crew is recruited through 3rd party recruitment agencies from Europe, Ukraine, Russia, The Philippines, and the ship might be carrying containers from the USA to Spain... Globalisation shapes employment in shipping, including the composition of workers on board ships and their work conditions.

Globalisation in Shipping

Methods



Non-participant observation on board ships



Recorded and informal conversations



107 participants



Aged 21-66

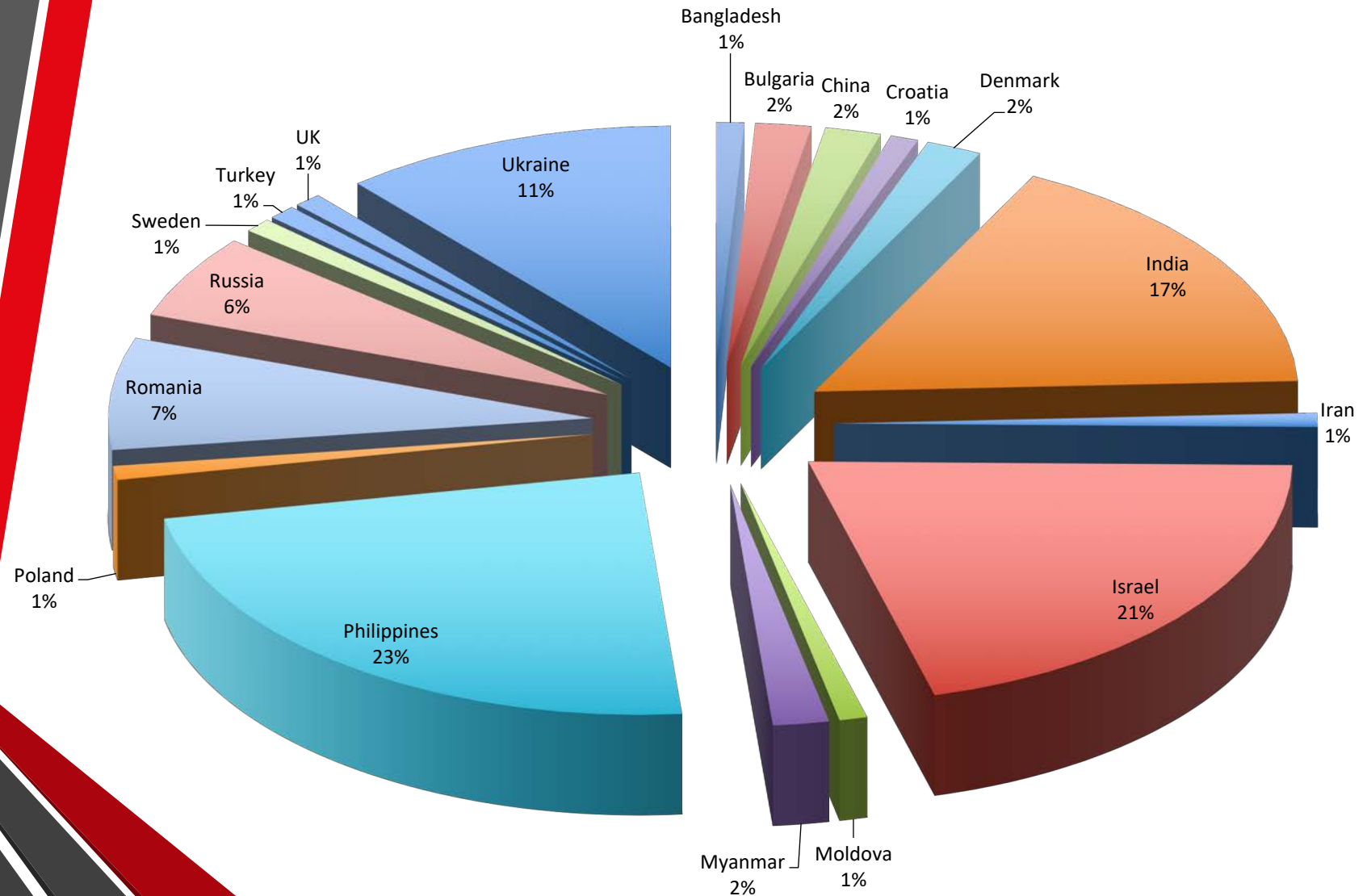


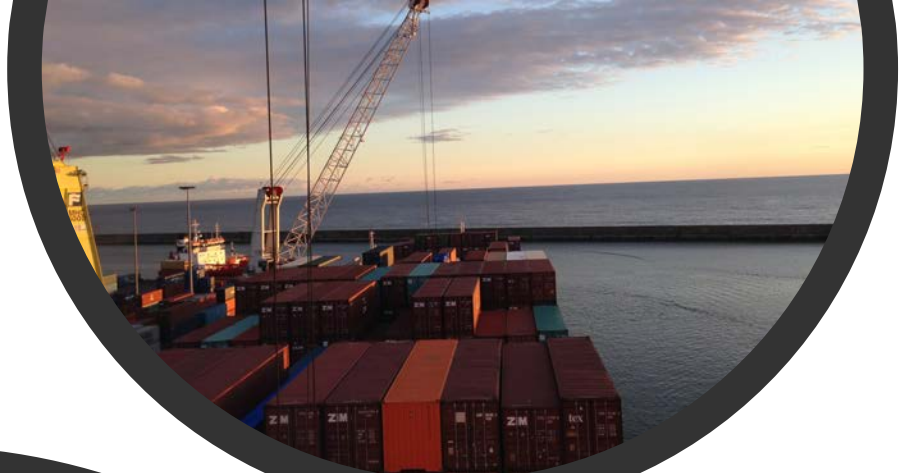
Nationalities: Over 80% - from developing & emerging economies



Additional data - literature and maritime forums

Origin Countries





In my research I focused on cargo/container ships. Compared to other ships, such as cruise ships and ferries, seafarers working on cargo ships generally live in isolation and spend long periods away from the shore.

The nature of their work arrangements often leads to fatigue and tiredness. Also, as surprising as it might be, most ships nowadays do not have an internet connection. It sometimes takes weeks before they reach port, spending time away from their families, often for 9-10 months contracts at a time, without guarantee for their next contract.

Additionally, seafarers' work at sea is dangerous, whereas they encounter storming/rough seas; Fires; Accidents; with no immediate access to medical facilities in an emergency, and there is also the danger of pirates.

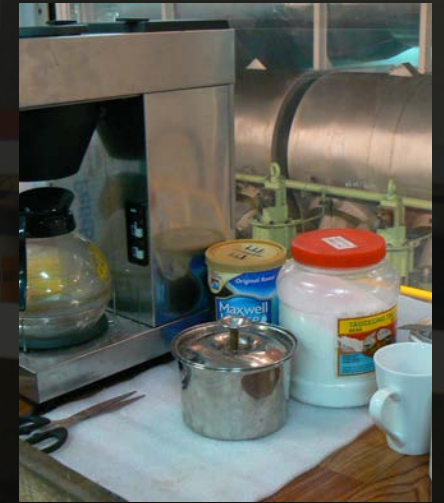
In this context, some seafarers might feel that food is a very important component of their day-to-day well-being on board.

They depend on the ship to provide them with all of their basic needs, including food, which makes it an important aspect of life and work at sea.

A Complex Picture Of Food On Board Ships



Some of the Challenges...



- No control over the selection of food;
 - Diverse dietary habits in multi-ethnic crews;
 - Irregular mealtimes due to the shifts on board;
 - Exceptionally high level of stress;
 - Limited opportunities for physical activities in leisure time;
 - Consumption of unhealthy and 'comfort' food
- (Oldenburg et al 2013; Sampson et al 2017)

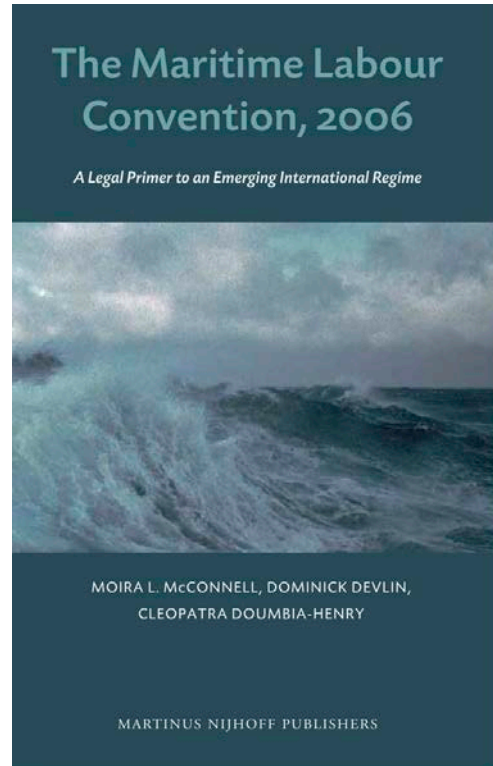
The global nature of this industry often makes the regulation of this industry particularly difficult;
As a global industry, there are two main bodies that regulate it
These are the international Maritime organisation (IMO) and the International Labour Office (ILO)
The MLC incorporates guidelines relating to food on board, e.g. minimal requirements and standards

Food Regulations at Sea

Maritime Labour Convention (MLC)
2006

'A critical appraisal of the Maritime Labour Convention [...] reveals that the nutritional situation on board is neither standardised nor mandatory [...], but adapted to the standard of each member state' (Oldenburg et al 2013)

Which makes it quite a grey area in terms of
Regulation and enforcement of standards worldwide, also
In terms of the types of food seafarers eat
and the quality of food they are served



Shipowners Could Fall Foul Of Food And Catering Regs Under MLC 2006

By [MI News Network](#) | In: [Shipping News](#) | Last Updated on January 3, 2017

In fact, there have been cases as recently as this year
Where crews were reportedly starving, ran out of food
Or not provided with basic food and drink while at work.



BHP Ignores Pleas To Help Starving Crew – ITF

Bulker crew said to be underpaid and short of food

08 Jul 2015 | NEWS


by David Sexton



German Bulk Carrier Detained After Crew Complain Of No Food, Bullying And Denial Of Shore Leave

By [MI News Network](#) | In: [Shipping News](#) | Last Updated on March 27, 2019

The reported cases are generally addressed through Port State Control where the ship is berthed, but there are many unreported cases relating to food. e.g. one of the seafarers I have interviewed told me how the company he worked for went into administration and how his ship was stranded off the shores of Argentina for two years, where they depended on the kindness of people on board other ships to survive.



An important aspect of globalisation exists on board ships, namely the composition of the crew on board, On board the ships I sailed with, there were between 25-30 seafarers on the ship with 9-10 different nationalities, which has an immense impact on ways they experience food on board, both from the receiving end and that of the ship's cook.

Social and Cultural Aspects of Food On Board Ships

Catering for Multinational Crews 1

Bronn, Personnel Manager, 38, India

If you ask the seafarers typically how the food is on board, then you get big, very big range of responses. Because you have a Filipino cook, making food for 30 different nationalities, I mean on a ship we normally have, we still have seven or eight nationalities on board, on some of our ships, so when you're making food for European, British, Russian, Indian, Chinese, and you have the same kind of food coming out, coming to all of them, then everybody has a different opinion to it.



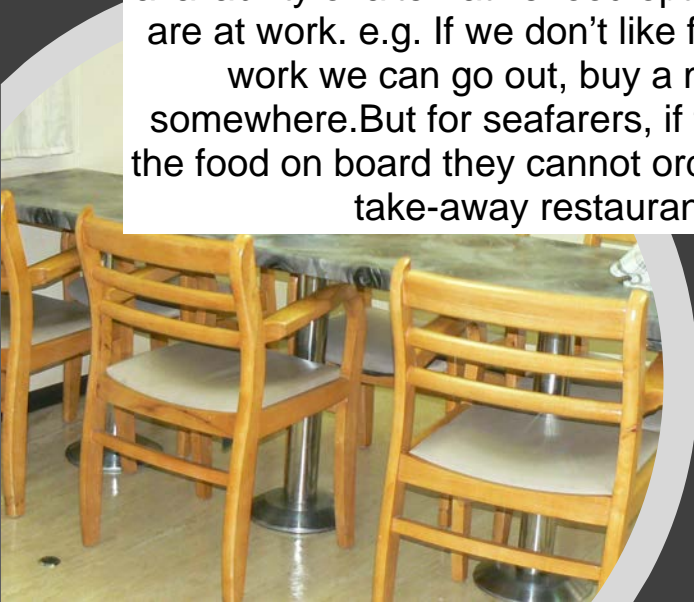
Catering for Multinational Crews 2

Stannis, Chief Cook, 50, India

Every 15 days I am preparing the food for each country. One day they [are] happy, [...] everybody [must be] happy. [...]

One day I prepare some Chinese style, Chinese noodles, Chinese fried rice, and other day I prepare some Indian, but not too hot, I make it [less] hot, so everybody like [it]. So, the Europeans [like] roasted chicken, I like to make chicken, because chicken I make five or six varieties. So one day if I prepare Tandoori [...] and next time I prepare roast chicken. Then I make a garlic chicken, and another day I prepare for the Filipinos [name of dish], Filipino style, [...] sometimes KFC.

Opinions on what counts as good or tasty food vary between people, as they would in any other setting. But what's different about the ship is the availability of alternative food options while they are at work. e.g. If we don't like food served at work we can go out, buy a meal deal somewhere. But for seafarers, if they don't like the food on board they cannot order food from a take-away restaurant.



Different Food at Home

Lancel, Electrician, 24, Ukraine:

On the vessel, I will not say the food was bad, but I'm used to a different diet. [...] At home, we eat absolutely different food, in Ukraine, in Europe in general. [...]

I'm used to a certain type of food, like borsht [beetroot soup], pelmeni [dumplings], and it's not that the food is not fresh, but it's food I'm not used to. On the previous ship, me and a couple of people bought some buckwheat and we were just cooking for ourselves, not even going to the mess room.





Another aspect worth considering relates to the health challenges on board cargo ships. For instance, the stressful and intense work environment on board the cargo ship and the type of food available on board, can lead to unhealthy food consumption, and consequently to various health problems among seafarers, i.e. obesity, heart diseases etc. e.g., Oldenburg in his paper from 2014 notes how: 'Seafarers experience a lot of job-related risk factors for cardiovascular diseases (CVD).' This is also the result of limited physical activity in their leisure time. Also, in long voyages where ships do not have the chance to buy new provisions the availability of fresh produce is very scarce.

So from some seafarer's point of view, food is seen as one of the only comforts they might have on board considering their stressful work environment. But unfortunately, good food is not always considered healthy food...

In this respect, there have been reports on the type of food served on board e.g. in their paper on the changes in seafarers' health between 2011-2016 Sampson et al state how: '...consumption of fried food at sea is far higher than consumption at home' (Sampson et al 2017)

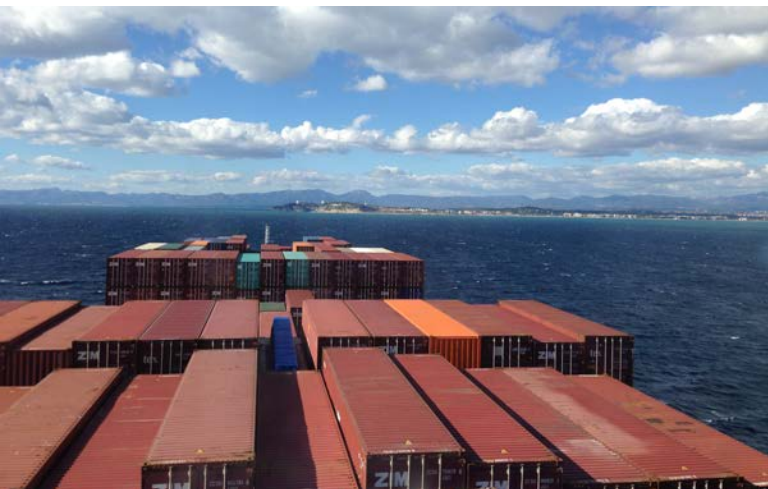


Health Challenges On Board Cargo Ships

‘Unhealthy’ Food on Board

Oberyn, Chief Officer, 40, Ukraine
Food is, I don't know, first of all, here, in terms of the physical and moral [state] [...] It's good to have a nice meal, I mean, no one is on a diet here, as a rule I gain 10 kg for every voyage [...] Because you don't have any other enjoyment [...] so one of the pleasures [on board] is consuming food. [...] I'm busy with the computer, there are constantly decisions to be made, what comes in, what comes out [...] so I have to eat properly. That's why I gain weight, because the food is not always healthy, it has more calories than at home.





Summary

- *Work on board*
- *Globalisation*
- *Health challenges*
- *Future directions*



The thought of removing unhealthy foods from the ship would not solve the problems, considering the complex picture of food I've presented today. We need to find ways of combining good food & healthy food for both the physical and psychological well-being of seafarers working on board. Obviously, more is required in terms of research due to the complexity of issues involved.



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Any questions?
polina.baum-talmor@solent.ac.uk