

Globalisation and Women Seafarers in Cruise Shipping

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This paper concerns women seafarers employed on cruise ships. It draws on data collected for SIRC's study on women employed in the world cruise fleet. In-depth interviews were used as the major means of investigation, although data from other sources are also employed for today's presentation. The SIRC study examines many aspects of women's work and life on today's cruise ships. My presentation here, however, focuses on the globalisation of the industry and its effect on women's work and life as seafarers on today's cruise ships. Specifically, the paper is intended to answer these questions: How much has the world cruise shipping industry been globalised? What are the major characteristics of the globalisation process of the seafarers labour market for cruise shipping? What is the profile of the women seafarers employed on world cruise ships as well as the major issues concerning women's work and life at sea in the context of globalisation?

First of all, let us examine some major aspects of the globalisation process of world cruise shipping in the past twenty years.

Globalisation of World Cruise Shipping

Modern cruise shipping is one of the youngest sectors in the maritime industry. It took off in the 1960s when jet airlines were introduced to commercial service and destroyed the liner trade (Cartwright & Baird, 1999:23-28). The nature of cruising has changed fundamentally from a mode of transport to entertainment, and to its current status of maritime tourism. The industry has been globalised in the past 20 years and the globalisation process was particularly intense through the 1990s, as indicated in terms of capital, labour and market composition (passengers and geographic coverage).

Development of the Cruise Fleet

Cruise fleet is the largest growing sector of the world maritime industry since the mid-1980s with an average growth rate of 9.6% as illustrated in the following table (ISL, 1998).

Table 1. Development of World Merchant Fleet, 1988–1998

Ship Type	Av. Growth Rate
1. Bulk Carriers	3.4
2. Cargo passenger	-5.6
3. Chemical Tankers	4.0
4. Container Ships	9.0
5. General Cargo (Multi-deck)	-2.5

6. General Cargo (Single-deck)	4.9
7. Liquid Gas Tankers	5.3
8. OBO Carriers	-5.8
9. Oil Tankers	2.2
10. Passenger Ships	9.6
11. Reefer Ships	1.4
12. Ro-Ro Cargo Ships	4.3
13. Ro-Ro/Passenger Ships	7.7
14. Special Ships	0.8
AVERAGE:	2.76

Source: ISL Bremen (1998).

Cruise Shipping Companies

There are 47 cruise shipping companies operating around the world, with a fleet of 250 ships. The industry is dominated by four gigantic companies located in several world regions: Carnival, Royal Caribbean, P&O Princess and Star Cruise (Table 2). Combined, these four companies account for over half the total number of large cruise ships.¹

Table 2. Dominating Cruise Companies

Company	Location	Ships	Berths	Passengers
Carnival	Miami (USA)	45	60,000	2,400,000
Royal Caribbean	Oslo (Norway)	26	32,900	1,700,000
P&O Princess	London (UK)	18	29,450	900,000
Star Cruises	Pulau Indah (Malaysia)	19	24,000	600,000

Sources: GP Wild International, 1999; Travel Weekly Official Cruise Guide 2001; Mather, 2002.

Growth of the Market: Passengers and Destinations

The number of the passengers carried by cruise ships has increased by 800% since 1980 (Table 3).

Table 3. Growth of Passengers 1980-2001

	1980	1990	2001	Growth (since 1980)
Passengers Carried	1.5 million	7.5 million	12 million	800%

¹ A most significant development in this sector, as reported by Mather (2002:2), is that RCCL and P&O Princess are engaged in merger discussions. The two companies combined would turn them into the largest cruise company in the world, with a capacity to control 70-75% of the world cruise market. In response, Carnival has issued hostile bids to take over P&O Princess. The merger is under consideration by the British Monopolies Commission and the US Federal Trade Commission.

Sources: Zhao, 2000; Mather, 2002.

Passengers on cruise ships are nearly entirely from developed countries, especially the USA, Britain and Germany. They are usually white, middle-class men and women, sometimes with children. In recent years however, there has been a significant decrease in the proportion of passengers from North America whilst passengers from Europe and other world regions, especially Asia, have shown a significant increase, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Cruise Passengers by Region

Region	1992	2000
North America	82%	61%
W. European	14%	22%
Other	4%	18%

Source: Tourism Concern and MDS Transmodal data in ITF FOC Campaign Report 2000; Mather, 2002.

Geographically, the cruise market covers all the areas of the world. Cruise ships sail mostly in North America and the Caribbean with many also sailing in Europe, especially the Mediterranean. New markets have been opened up in Asia, with China seen as a source for passengers, destinations and the supply of seafarers (see Table 5).

Table 5. Cruise Markets by Region

World Region	Share of the Market
America and the Caribbean	58%
Europe	21%
Asia	17%
Other	4%

Sources: MDS Transmodal data in ITF FOC Campaign Report 2000, cited in Mather, 2002.

Growth of Ship Size and Profits

Throughout the 1990s, ship-owners expressed a strong interest in building large cruise ships with 2,000 to 3,000 lower berths. Ships have been built larger and larger in order to carry more passengers. For example, *Voyager of the Seas* (Royal Caribbean) is 142,000 tons with a capacity to carry 3,000 passengers and 900 crew (The Times, 1999a,b,c). RCCL's *Navigator of the Seas*, due to have its maiden voyage later in the year, will weigh 138,000 GT, carry 3114 passengers and be crewed with 1180 seafarers (Mather, 2002).

Pursuing the 'effect of the economy of scale', i.e. profit, is the driving force behind ship-owners' interest in larger ships, because it is known in the industry that both capital cost and operating cost per passenger decreases rapidly with the increase of ship size. Since the larger ships do not necessarily require a proportionally larger crew, more profit can therefore be extracted from each individual seafarer. The research found that the passenger-crew ratio has increased from the traditional 2:1 (two passengers for one crewmember) to the present 3:1 or even 4:1 (three or four passengers for one crewmember).

Globalisation of the Seafarers Labour Market

Although world shipping has always used international crew, the world seafarers labour market has become globalised in the past twenty years. Three major features can be identified in the process of the globalisation of the seafarers labour market for world cruise ships. They are the increased demand for crewmembers, the increase of seafarers from developing countries and the increase in the number of women seafarers.

Demand for Seafarers

The cruise sector is labour intensive. The rapid expansion of the cruise market and the growth of the cruise fleet leads to a great increase in demand for seafarers. As shown in Table 6, the industry employed 99,000 seafarers on its active fleet in 1999. The majority (70%) of them are hotel and catering staff. It has been estimated that potentially as many as 168,000 seafarers will be needed for shipboard employment by 2004.

Table 6. Demand for Seafarers in Cruise Fleet 1996-2004

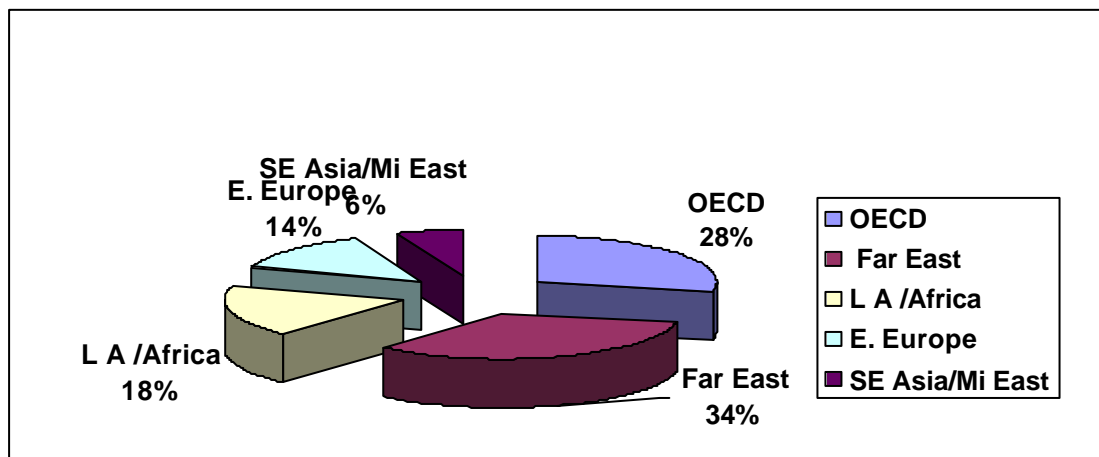
Year	No. of Seafarers Demanded	Growth (over 1996)
1996	80,000	100%
1999	99,000	123%
2001	130,000	163%
2004	168,000	210%

Source: Peisley, 1996; Wild, 1999.

Seafarers from Developing Countries

Traditionally, seafarers placed on cruise ships were recruited from ‘traditional maritime nations’ - Western European countries such as Britain, Germany, Norway and so on. The picture has changed dramatically in the last twenty years, particularly through the 1990s. Cheap labour from developing countries has been increasingly used to reduce the labour cost in the cruise sector. As illustrated in the following graph, most of the seafarers employed on today’s cruise ships are recruited from ‘non-traditional maritime nations’ (Graph 1).

Figure 1: Cruise ships seafarers by region

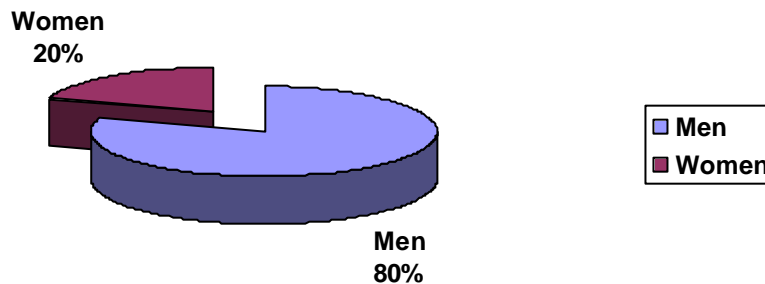


Women Seafarers

The traditional image of the crew on cruise ships was not only white, but also male. Women were certainly found sailing on these ships but their numbers were insignificant, estimated at 5% in the 1980s. Since the 1990s, women have begun to be used as another ‘new source of labour supply’. The development of the market forces, in particular the change in the composition of the passengers and the industry’s difficulty in recruiting qualified male seafarers, led to a steady increase in female employment on cruise ships.

Today, women make up 18-20 per cent of the total labour force on cruise ships – around 20,000-23,000 in number. Although the number of women on individual ships varies greatly, the average level of female composition of the workforce on cruise ships is significant.

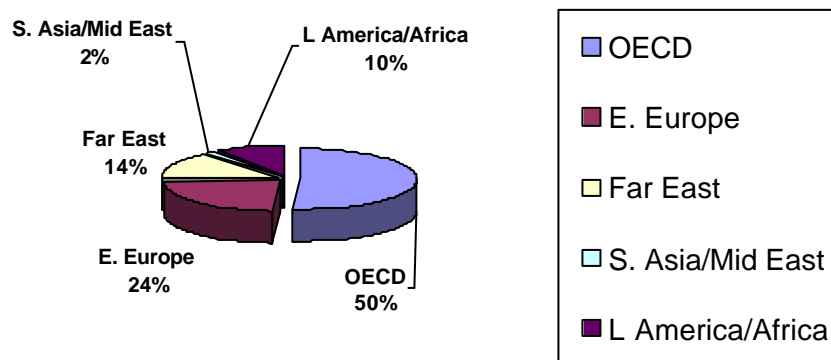
Figure 2. Women’s Participation Level



Regional Origin of Women Seafarers

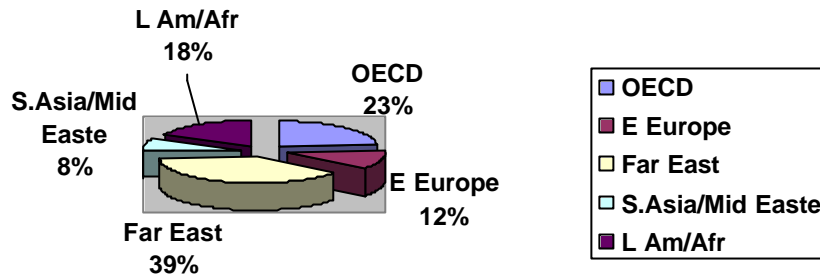
A little over 50% of the women are employed from developed countries, with the other half recruited from Eastern Europe, Asia, Latin America and other developing countries as illustrated in the following pie chart.

Figure 3. Women Seafarers by Origin



It is worthwhile noting that the regional composition of the female workforce deviates from that of the male workforce. In contrast, as shown in Figure 4, significantly more male seafarers are from Asian countries (41%).

Figure 4. Men by Region



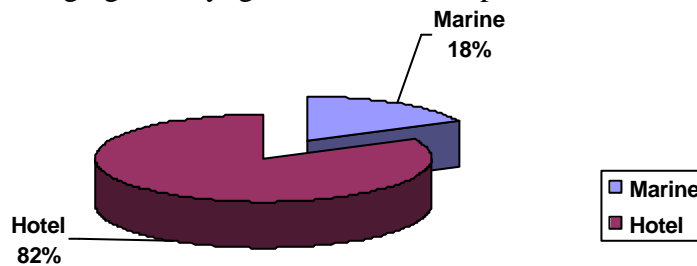
This may indicate that women are still not encouraged to take employment away from home and it is still a taboo for women in some countries in Asia to work on ships.

Women’s Role on Board

Seafarers on cruise ships are located in different departments. As shown in the following graph, marine seafarers only consist of a little over 16% of the total workforce onboard. Most seafarers (74%) are located in hotel, catering and other non-marine departments (Figure 4).

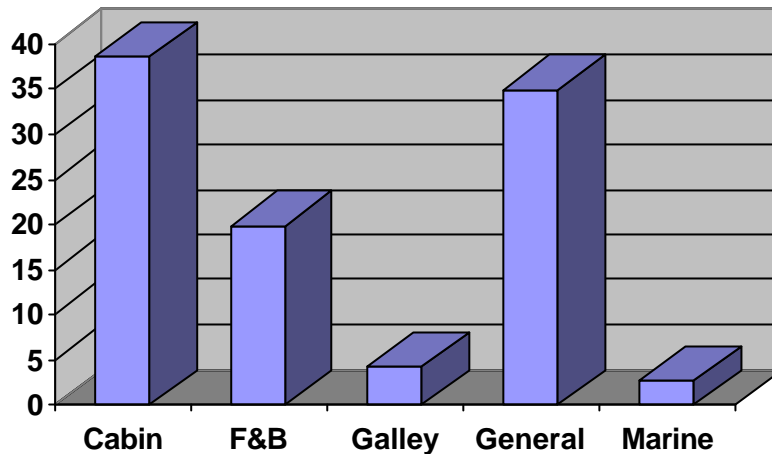
Figure 5. Cruise Ship Seafarers by departments

The workforce is segregated by gender. For example: there is only one woman



amongst all the captains in the SIRC Seafarers Database (which contains crew lists collected from 100 ships). Over 20% of the total male work force is located in the marine sector, women’s representation in the workforce of this sector is less than 0.5%. All the ship doctors are men, all the ship nurses are women. As shown in Figure 6, women are concentrated in hotel and other ‘non-technical’ sectors of the ship as cabin stewardesses, waitresses, cleaners or utility workers and their representation in the marine and the galley departments is extremely low.

Figure 6: Women by departments



The research found that more women have begun to take important positions on today's cruise ships. Some of them have advanced to key positions as pursers, cruise directors, financial controllers, housekeepers, food and beverage managers, chefs or even executive chefs. Women are found employed in middle, or even senior positions with supervisory or managerial responsibilities. A closer look shows however, that most of these women managers or supervisors are from developed countries. Women from developing countries have much less opportunities for promotion.

Issues Important to Women Seafarers on Cruise Ships

Motivations to Take Employment on Cruise Ships

Women are attracted to go to sea by different motivations. Most Western women share a similar motivation in choosing to work at sea. Their primary objective is 'to meet people from different cultures' and 'to see different parts of the world'. Although some of them are not happy with the wages they receive, most of these women seafarers noted that 'money is not my major concern.'

In contrast, earning and saving money is the chief incentive for women from developing countries taking jobs on cruise ships in the first place. These women are always paid lower wages for working at the same position as those from developed countries. Many of them complained about the high rate of inflation in their home countries and said that (if paid in their own currency) their income taken home was significantly reduced. Nevertheless, the lack of job opportunities in their home countries and the financial needs of their families press them to seek employment on cruise ships where they can earn relatively more money in hard currency.

Recruitment Practices & Employment Terms and Conditions

Different recruitment practices were adopted in different world regions. Women in Western Europe, North America and other developed countries are evidently better supported with information and infrastructure to seek employment opportunities.

Crewing agencies are relatively better regulated and make profit primarily by charging the employing shipping companies rather than individual seafarers. Seafarers from these countries usually have clearly defined posts, are employed under specified terms and conditions, and their typical contract length is 4-6 months. No glaring discrimination against women's employment on cruise ships is found during this process, although hidden discrimination may exist. Some companies have begun to adopt progressive policies to encourage women's participation in this sector.

In contrast, many crewing agencies in Asia, Eastern Europe, Africa and developing countries in other world regions make huge profits out of the seafarers. A common practice is to charge each new recruit for their return airfare, medical examination, seafarer's book, visa and an administrative fee (Mather, 2002:17). Many seafarers therefore were already deep in debt before they even arrived on ship. In many cases, discriminative standards were set for women. In the Philippines, a major 'manning agency' refuses to accept application from 'any women of 35 years old or above', whereas the maximum age limit for men was set at 50.

Typically, the length of the contract is four to six months for women from developed countries, and 9-12 months for women from developing countries. For the same post, women from developing countries are consistently paid much less than those from developed countries. The major differences are summarised in the following table.

Table 7. Main Features of Recruitment and Employment Practices in Different World Regions

	Developed Countries	Developing Countries
Direct recruitment by Shipping Company	YES	NO
Recruitment via 'Manning Agency'	YES	YES
High Fees Charged to Seafarers	NO	YES
Glaring Discrimination	NO	YES
Length of Contract	4-6 months or shorter	9-12 months or longer
Post Specification	YES	NO
Wages for the same post	Relatively high	Low

Acceptance by Male Seafarers

Compared with women seafarers placed on cargo ships, women employed on cruise ships, especially in hotel and catering departments, appeared to be more readily accepted by their male colleagues. This is perhaps due to the fact that women's employment here often more closely reflects the types of jobs which have traditionally been considered 'women's work', for example cleaning, shop work, and working in the beauty industry. Women working in the 'food and beverage' sector such as waitresses, reported some reluctance by their male colleagues to accept them in this position as some of the tasks involved in this job, such as carrying trays of crockery and tableware, could be physically strenuous. Such a lack of acceptance typically manifested itself in offers of assistance and attempts to prevent women carrying heavy loads. As with women in the cargo industry, women working in these environments often felt that they had to prove themselves, their abilities, and their willingness to work, in order to be accepted by their male colleagues.

Labour on board Ship

Labour on cruise ships is hard physically and emotionally, especially in the hotel and catering departments. The organisation of production and the labour process described by Graham about the cruise ship in the late 1970s remain largely unchanged in the 1990s. The following account from a female Costa Rican seafarer employed on a large cruise ship based in Miami outlines a stewardess' typical day during the voyage:

'I get up at 7:00 in the morning, wash up, have breakfast, dress in uniform, and rush to work. At 8:00, I start making rooms, give ices, etc. I normally look after 32 passengers in 16 cabins. I can finish at 12:30 if I am lucky. If not, it can be at 1:30 in the afternoon. This always happens during spring holidays when kids are on board. Then between 12:30 and 1:30 I have lunch and return to my cabin, looking a bit of TV or VCR. But I sleep most of the time. I worked very hard the whole morning. I became very tired. At 4:30 (in the afternoon), I return to work, picking up laundry and return the laundry to cabins. Then, between 5:00 to 5:30, I rush to crew mess for dinner. I eat my dinner very quickly, usually in 15 minutes, because I know that I have lots to do. The sooner I finish (my dinner), the better. From 6:00 to 9:00, I work in cabins, turning beds, giving ices etc. I return to my cabin and go to bed immediately after that. I am exhausted.'

This woman has been working on cruise ships as a cabin attendant for 12 years. She has worked for 12 hours a day, seven days a week, for 12 years.

As market competition has become even more fierce since the 1990s, cruise companies have increasingly been seeking high productivity from the labour force aboard. This effect has been clearly felt by both male and female seafarers. Women who joined the industry in the mid 1980s note that 'the hours were better then and we were not pushed so hard for productivity.' Their experiences have also been confirmed by some male seafarers. Both male and female seafarers believe that their working conditions have slowly but noticeably deteriorated since about 1990, and these experiences are not limited to house keeping only.

Since the late 1990s, management of the cruise lines has started to press seafarers more for 'quality service'. 'This means,' as the human resource manager of a major cruise shipping company noted,

'We not only want our crew to keep the cabins clean, to serve the passengers with right wines and right foods. They must always remember, this is part of the hospitality industry and they must help the company keep our guests happy, and they can do this only by keeping themselves happy, and demonstrate it to our guests through their service and attitudes (Interview 3, London).'

Keeping customers happy as well as keeping themselves happy demands hard emotional labour from seafarers. Women seafarers tend to be assigned with tasks that demand most emotional labour. The main rationale behind this kind of 'management strategy' is that 'women are more and more preferred by our guests', 'we find they are better dealing with people, especially with difficult passengers'. As a result of such

perception of women's 'natural' ability or capacity, women are placed in areas where seafarers have more contacts with the company's customers, hence more likely to be subject to emotional labour. For example, nearly all the nurses on the 83 ships in our database are women and over 70% of the receptionists are female.

Women seafarers are further segmented and assigned with different tasks according to management's assumption of their 'different capacity' that is associated with their ethnic, national or racial backgrounds. White women from developed countries are typically placed in some 'key points' – the reception, the cruise department, the fitness centre, the shop, the hairdressing salon and so on. These places are considered to represent the traditional visual image of the cruise line as well as be the best selling points.

Although Asian seafarers, especially some Asian women such as the Filipinos, are known in the industry for their 'nice smile' and 'natural service culture' and indeed are sought after by some cruise lines, their representation is either completely missing or very low in these 'key points'. East European women are found in both sectors. But their numbers are small, although higher than that for Asians, because they are considered 'unable to smile naturally'. Stereotyping of certain social groups based on the group members' sexual, racial or ethnic identity thus pillars the division of labour on today's cruise ships - a hallmark of the industry in the 21st century.

Sexual harassment

Defining sexual harassment is a complex task and it is not our intention to offer a comprehensive definition here. In many cases, sexual harassment mirrors the power relations between the individuals involved. Some male seafarers in positions of power were found using their power to gain sexual advances on cruise ships.

'He was the bar manager, he want, he push me a lot to come to his cabin, a lot and he was my boss you know? And he give me hard time because I didn't want to, to stay with him.'

The industry has been reported as 'riddled with incidents of sexual harassment and assault, against women and men'. In 1999, Carnival Cruises was found to have nearly all accusations of rape and assault against crewmembers between 1993 and 1998, 'swept under the carpet' (Mather, 2002).

'In many cultures socio-sexual interaction is initiated by men who may therefore see such behaviours as acceptable and 'normal'. Problems aboard ship arise both when superordinates make advances to subordinates, perhaps without appreciating the pressure that this places upon them, and when colleagues behave inappropriately i.e. when their advances are unwanted and their behaviour is offensive or threatening. These problems can be exacerbated by the context of shipboard life where people are confined and unable to remove themselves from settings in which they are uncomfortable and are additionally unable to access external sources of support. '(SIRC, 2001)

Career Prospect

Except for the handful of women in managerial positions, most women seafarers do not have a long-term plan to develop their careers on cruise ships in particular or at sea in general. But there exists a clear difference between women from different national, regional or cultural backgrounds.

When asked how many more years they intend to stay at sea, women from developed countries tend to say 'in one or two years when I have had enough experiences and have seen the world.' Then, they would like to look for land-based jobs, preferably back in hotels or restaurants. A small number of women also said that they would consider setting up their own business in hotel and catering with the experiences they have gained during their employment on cruise ships. Few of the active women seafarers in this group have children. Questioned on the possibility for them to return to work on cruise ships when they have children, no women in this group views it as even an option. To these women, it is impossible to combine marriage and childcare with their employment at sea.

Questioned about staying at sea, women from Asian developing countries would say that they would like to continue to work on the vessels 'for four, five or six years'. It is the amount of time that these women feel they need to save enough money for them to build their own houses or set up their own land-based business such as restaurants and grocery stores. Many of these women are married with children. They accepted employment at sea as a result of financial needs. These women receive strong family support during their employment on cruise ships. The support is given from their husbands but also, significantly from their mothers.

Comparatively, women seafarers recruited from East European countries usually indicated that they would like very much to continue their study in higher education with subjects they really enjoy after their employment at sea. Most of them take marriage as a landmark signalling the end of their employment at sea. Like women from Western Europe, they believe that after marriage women should stay with husbands and especially with children at home rather than at sea. Despite this, married women from East European countries are found employed on cruise ships. Similarly women from Asia or other developing countries, they chose to leave their families behind and work at sea because they needed the money to support their families, especially their children.

Conclusion

Clearly, the world cruise shipping has experienced some significant changes in the past twenty years, especially through the 1990s. In the context of the globalisation of the market, and of the globalisation of the seafarers labour market, more women than ever before have entered the workforce as seafarers, with many taking roles and positions that have not, until recently, been open to women. While this is certainly a trend deserving encouragement, it is worth noting that women are not homogenous. As demonstrated above, women seafarers are recruited from different countries with different social, economic and cultural backgrounds. They share many aspects of their work and life aboard. At the same time, they also have different experiences and have

different agendas and issues of importance with regards to their employment and life on board ship. We can reasonably predict that there will be even more women participating in seafaring on cruise ships and that increasingly more women will be recruited from Asia, Eastern Europe and other developing countries. Last week, I was talking to a crewing agent in Xiamen, China, who is interested in placing more Chinese seafarers, especially more Chinese women seafarers on world cruise ships. 'But we are not interested in recruiting girls from large cities like Beijing or Shanghai. They have other job opportunities there, they are getting expensive and they can't bear the hard work aboard.... We have to change our strategy and retarget the source of labour supply. Now, I send my men to the poor area and to small cities, where jobs are scarce and labour is cheaper'. This, I believe, vividly depicts how the globalised world capital is pursuing cheap labour, female and male, by penetrating deep into the poor regions in developing countries.

END.

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