“Nowhere near Somalia, Mom” On containerizing maritime piracy and being good men

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Abstract: Just as containerized goods appear to flow seamlessly across the planet's oceans, internationalized and standardized certificates present seafaring labor as uniform and seamless. But underneath these certificates are the intimate and unequal entanglements of local masculinity norms, age, and kinship ties that sustain the maritime labor supply chain. In this article, we follow how three young, male seafarers from eastern India find ways to contain piracy risks at work and poverty risks at home, and their sense of obligation as men, sons, husbands, and fathers. By delving into the unequal conditions for industrial male workers from the Global South, this article demonstrates how containerized maritime labor commodities are not uniform but are dependent upon economic inequality and intimate kinship ties to be productive.

Keywords: gender, global capitalism, inequality, kinship, maritime labor, maritime piracy, masculinity

I met Hardik, a marine engineer, in 2012 on board a container ship trading in the Indian Ocean while doing research on merchant seafarers and contemporary maritime piracy. In the process of a piracy attack, seafarers can be subjected to considerable violence and kidnapping. But Hardik often wanted to talk about his concern for his loved ones at home. His dirty boiler suit and oil-blackened fingernails from working in the engine room stood in stark contrast to his tall stature, bookish glasses, and soft voice. He was recently married and he and his wife, who was expecting their first child, lived with Hardik's parents.

Some months later, after he signed off, I visited Hardik in his hometown on the eastern

coast of India. He introduced me to his family, his seafaring friends, and their families. One of our first stops was for lunch at his and his parent's house. As we enjoyed the meal his mother prepared, we talked about risks at sea. His father reasoned, “There are risks everywhere. It's no different on the ship.”

Hardik countered: “The ship is safer.”

His mother laughed and said, “That's because he knows that his father will take care of him when he's home!”

Hardik laughed and nodded in appreciation. Considering shipboard risks, such as serious accidents, storms, social isolation, and piracy, this exchange puzzled me. Did Hardik's father protect him from risks like these at home? It did not

seem so. But Hardik had also warned me not to discuss risks at sea with his parents. After lunch, Hardik showed me the school he attended as a child. Closed in the meantime, the buildings remained dusty and abandoned in the hot May sun. As we peered into the empty classrooms, I asked Hardik why he chose to be a seafarer. He told me about a boy in his class who always wore nice clothes, adding, "His father was a seafarer." From that point on, Hardik wanted to be a seafarer, too.

Hardik belongs to a global workforce of approximately 1.5 million seafarers who, literally, move the world's economies. Anthropologist Anna Tsing writes (2009) that as the standardization of big industry in the twentieth century grew pervasive, economic concerns regarding labor and production were perceived as separate from "cultural" or "noneconomic" concerns, such as gender, ethnicity, kinship ties, and age. Their role in class formation was relegated to the "noneconomic" realm, seen as irrelevant to labor and production (Tsing 2009: 158). I recognize this logic in my work with seafarers, and according to geographer Deborah Cowen, it pervades modern logistics more generally (Cowen 2014: 114). On the factory floors of "Taylorism," these ideas sought to optimize profits. They are applied across divergent sites and commodities, and from a maritime industry perspective, we see them in the innovation of the intermodal container (Martin 2014)—called "containerization"—in the international streamlining of maritime labor commodities (ILO 2004), and in the construction of maritime space (Steinberg 2001).

Leaning on Tsing's critical reference to the "noneconomic" realm, I argue that for Hardik and his friends, local masculinity norms, kinship ties, and age are containerized but not irrelevant to the seemingly smooth flow of global labor to the merchant maritime industry. By retelling a series of events on a day spent with Hardik and his friends in his hometown, I show that through various acts of containment, they are the very nutrients that feed these seafarers' families and the global maritime labor supply chain.

I begin by situating my arguments in scholarly literature on the role of gender and labor and, specifically, masculinity and to standardization processes in global supply chains and critical logistics. Thereafter, I continue the story with Hardik's friend Dulal and a discussion about masculinity and the affective skills required to keep a seafaring job. Leaning on the container as metaphor, I show how dishonesty functions as a strategy to contain the contradictory goal of providing for families by endangering one's life. This leads me to another friend, Sachiv, whose story illustrates how essential, following Tsing, "noneconomic arrangements" are in the global supply chain of maritime labor and how various forms of containerization disrupt this tenuous and intimate balance.

Following labor "goods"

The overwhelming majority of merchant seafarers are men¹—and significantly, men of color from countries that struggle with widespread socio-economic inequality. The Philippines and China provide the industry with the largest amounts of seafaring labor globally (see Markkula, this issue), while India, Russia, and the Ukraine jockey for second place.² By working at sea, seafarers like Hardik can earn a good salary and work toward better lives for themselves and their families, a goal that is intimately linked to their specific kinship ties and expectations of what it means to be good men, sons, husbands, and fathers.

There is a rich body of literature that addresses the relationship between gender and labor, where those dealing with global labor supply chains and migrant labor are particularly relevant for my arguments (Barker 2012; Contreras and Griffith 2012; D. McKay 2007; Parreñas 2009; Tsing 2009; Yeates 2008). These contributions have offered important insights about how gender, ethnicity, kinship ties, and age intersect on globalized labor markets, resulting in the exploitation of laborers. Many of these works focus on laborers in nursing, home

healthcare, childcare, and those whose labor is defined as “affective.” But, following Tsing, how these “noneconomic realms” intersect for men in globalized labor markets is often underrepresented (on seafarers, see Fajardo 2011; S. McKay 2007 for important exceptions). With this article, I hope to shed more light on this theme.

With the introduction of streamlined global supply chains, jobs have increasingly been outsourced to laborers from countries where wages are lower and occupational health requirements less restrictive and, thus, cheaper (Cowen 2014: 124; ILO 2004: 60). Anthropologist Aihwa Ong has referred to this as “labor arbitrage” (2006; see also Mannov 2021, forthcoming). Arbitrage usually refers to the “practice of buying low in a market and selling high elsewhere” (Ong 2006: 160). But, Ong argues, moving the work of production to locations where labor costs were lower, works according to a similar logic: “same skills, different prices” (Ong 2006: 160). Cowen offers similar arguments about outsourced labor in global supply chains, and both associate these processes with heightened precarity (Cowen 2014: 14; Ong 2006: 164). For outsourced logistics workers, such as seafarers, this can include heightened physical dangers on the job (Cowen 2014: 96). Seafaring has always been a dangerous job and can include accidents, storms, social isolation, and piracy. The latter may entail beating, stabbing, shooting, death threats, torture, and kidnapping (Mannov 2021, forthcoming; OBP 2015). But with the introduction of labor arbitrage, the cost of labor from Western countries is becoming prohibitive (Mannov 2020). As a result, these jobs are often left to workers from the Global South, for whom risks to their physical and mental health are wagered against the security that a steady income brings (Mannov 2021, forthcoming).

In order for labor commodities to be arbitrated, they must be considered interchangeable (Mannov 2021, forthcoming). As Ong explains: “same skills, different prices” (Ong 2006: 160). This means that if Hardik wishes to provide for his family by working as a marine engineer in the global shipping industry, he needs to be

legible as an interchangeable labor commodity with specific skills. The standardization of seafaring certificates, called the UN STCW Convention,³ does that work. As a marine engineer, Hardik’s international certifications document his specific yet interchangeable skills. In the introduction to this special issue, Leivestad and Markkula draw our attention to the “leviathan movement of goods” across the globe that the shipping industry facilitates (see Leivestad and Markkula, this issue [pg 3]). It is, however, worth noting that from the shipowner’s perspective, the cost of maritime labor is a significant part of operating costs, alongside the cost of buying vessels and fuel to run them (Stopford 2009: 221). In this way, seafaring labor is a “good” that is also subject to supply chain logics (Mitroussi and Marlow 2010). Thus, just as goods are containerized, making their transportation faster, easier, and more profitable, the standardization of seafaring certificates does similar work.

The container is a helpful metaphor for my arguments. Cultural geographer and design theorist Craig Martin explains that before the introduction of the container, handling diversely shaped and sized cargo was work intensive and expensive (Martin 2014: 436). With the container, ideally, “inconsistencies of commodity shape and form were smoothed out through the unifying force of homogenised, unitised and standardised containers” (Martin 2014: 435). Of course, a commodity retains its shape, whether packed in a container or not. But the container conceals its “inconsistencies” (see Leivestad, this issue). Martin’s unruly shapes and forms remind me of Taylor’s innovations in factories at the beginning of the twentieth century. Work was “dissected” and divided “into their component movements” (Cowen 2014: 107). The standardization of both the container and seafaring labor are steeped in this organizing logic. The container as metaphor helps me illustrate how seafarers “contain” their emotions and details about their personal lives and how this serves and is embedded in the logic of labor “containerization.”

The standardization to which Martin refers is facilitated by a construction of the ocean as

a single, seamless space. Geographer Philip Steinberg explains how the representation of the ocean has changed in ways that reflect political and economic power shifts through history (2001). For example, pre-modern empire powers attempted to cartographically stretch their territorial reach "thousands of miles into open waters" (Wigen 2011: 140), whereas the current representation of the ocean in international maritime law has its roots in a seventeenth-century spat between Portugal and Holland over which mercantile empire could claim rights to valuable resources in the ocean. Jurist Hugo Grotius resolved the conflict by arguing that the sea may be understood as "free," or *mare liberum* (Grotius 1609), a framing that introduces the notion of the commons, thus constructing the ocean "within a wider context of freedom of trade and navigation" (Dua 2019: 35–37).⁴ *Mare liberum* is the basis for the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which governs all activity at sea, privileging a view that is conducive to global trade and obscuring other shapes and forms of oceanic space (see also Schubert, this issue). This activity includes the STCW and other maritime conventions. Thus, the logic of containerization at work in the standardized container and in standardized maritime space is also present in Hardik's standardized certifications. With these global perspectives in mind, I return to Hardik's hometown and to his friend Dulal.

The inconsistent shapes of masculinity

After Hardik showed me his school, we met his friend Dulal, who also sails in piracy areas. As we walked up the narrow footpath to his current family home (see Figure 1), Dulal explained that he bought a house for his family and he hoped they would move there together. The house they were living in now had been in the family for generations. His father would never leave, he told me. "People are like laborers here. Fighting for 100 rupees. Fighting over water." Dulal pointed to a pipe sticking out of the ground

FIGURE 1. Photo of the footpath leading to Dulal and his family's home. Source: author.

on the footpath. This was his family's access to drinking water, serving approximately 100 people from the immediate neighborhood. In the new house, water faucets were indoors. He did not want his parents to have to fight over water in the heat, he explained. If not for the house loan, he would stop sailing. "I'm stuck," he said.

Dulal's family paid for his education, they chose the woman he would soon marry, and they lived together in a house provided by previous generations. Dulal contributed to this long-term exchange by buying his family a more comfortable house. In order to finance this, he sailed. In fact, he asked specifically for routes through high-risk areas, in order to benefit from the hardship allowance his employer paid. He did all this because this was his understanding of how to be a good man and son in his family and community. Dulal's story is specific to him. The alley, the house, and the pipe in the ground are the sites of his life and his relationships, tied to his family's traditions and history. They are particular and inconsistent in the sense that

they are not the same details as those in other seafarers' lives. Yet, these are the details that have led him to a career at sea, where his labor is a standardized commodity on a global market.

"Pussies can sign off"

Months later, I was on board another ship, keeping bridge officer Dhananjay company during morning watch. As we inched our way along the coast of Angola,⁵ Dhananjay told me about the first time he sailed through "GoA" (Gulf of Aden). It was 2011, and attacks near GoA had reached a fever pitch (Dua 2019: 15). The company gave seafarers the option to sign off, which the captain, a white man from Denmark, shared with the crew. Dhananjay explained, "There was a whiteboard next to the mess where messages were posted. The captain wrote: 'We are going through GoA. Pussies can sign off.'" I raised a querying eyebrow, and Dhananjay quickly added, "Nobody signed off." Pussy is slang and has a double meaning. It refers to someone who is afraid and to female genitals. Thus, the captain's message disqualifies the masculinity and skill of a seafarer who is afraid. According to this captain, a proper seafarer is a man with no fear, or at least, the ability to hide it.

Although not as explicit as the captain, office manager Albert had similar ideas about seafarers, men, and fear. Most of my research focused on seafarers, but I also spent time in shipping company offices around the world to understand piracy from a corporate perspective. Albert is a white, straight man from a Western country with a seafaring and military background. He holds a leading position in the company and makes decisions about security and crewing. "The guy who bawls, loses respect, most of all for himself," he told me. Both men seemed to valorize certain notions of masculinity that researchers Smith and Kimmel recognize as "very traditional and stereotype definitions of masculinity" among straight, white men from Western countries, including "the relentless repudiation of the feminine . . . emotional impermeability, inexpressiveness, . . . daring, risk taking, and

aggression" (2014: 1830). As captain and office manager, both men made this version of what it meant to be a good man and seafarer the standard for getting and keeping a seafaring job. For most of the seafarers I worked with, this had little to do with not being "pussies." They were worried, but their fears had to do with providing financial security for their families in a country where profound poverty was visible every day. Dhananjay, Hardik, and Dulal were not daring, risk-takers. In fact, subjecting themselves to avoidable risks was seen as childish. They just did not have much choice. Dhananjay's story illustrates that containing fear is a necessary skill for seafaring work, but it is not codified in STCW certificates. This skill remains concealed.

Contained and containerized men

The captain's bullish behavior and Albert's position on men expressing fear may be situated in a historical debate about the industrial male worker as a universal figure. Referencing Marx and Engels, Anna Tsing writes: "class relations could be imagined as abstract, transcendent of the person-making characteristics of particular times and places, and thus, substantially gender-, race-, and nationality neutral. These white male industrial workers became figurative protagonists of a social movement" (2009: 153).

Tsing further warns that critics of global capitalism risk effacing the diverse identities that workers bring with them by imagining the industrial worker as a white man and as an abstract, neutral protagonist in a universal struggle for workers' rights. But for Hardik and his friends, keeping their job depended upon their ability to contain their "person-making characteristics": For Dulal, being a good son meant taking out a loan to finance a new house for his family, and for Dhananjay, containing his fear enabled him to retain his job and provide for his family. In addition, challenging the "neutrality" and universality of this idealized worker would reveal the inequality of the norm. Dhananjay told me the story about his captain because I

was a safe listener. He and the rest of the crew did not challenge the captain.

This discussion speaks to the notion of affective skill, something that is rarely discussed in relation to gender and male migrant laborers. Anthropologist Steve McKay is an exception. By performing meekness and helpfulness (and masking anger), he argues that that Filipino seafarers are able to retain their seafaring jobs (S. McKay 2007). This suggests that far from being irrelevant to the "economic concerns regarding labor and production" (Tsing 2009: 158), it is precisely because seafarers' stories come in inconsistent "shapes and forms" (Martin 2014: 435) that maritime labor arbitrage is profitable for shipowners. The ability to hide fear, perform meekness, and mask anger are necessary affective skills, but they are not codified in STCW certificates. The inequalities of the standardized, containerized maritime labor commodity remain in the box.

"Nowhere near Somalia, Mom"

For Dulal and Hardik, continuing to work as seafarers helped protect their families from poverty. But seafaring as a way of providing for their families had some built-in contradictions. On the one hand, the income seafaring generated could be translated into the long-term exchanges that reproduced the social order in seafarers' families and communities. On the other hand, the risks connected to seafaring, such as accidents, storms, social isolation, and piracy, threatened the reproduction of the social order that seafaring was meant to safeguard. This meant that seafarers had to navigate between the information they shared with their families in order to maintain their social ties with one another and the information they chose to omit, so as not to worry them. Being completely honest about piracy risks could cause their families to demand they quit. This in turn, could pose risks to the family's material security. And so, in order to continue to earn money at sea, some seafarers told lies, kept secrets, and

omitted information about the risks they faced at work.

Since 2011, successful piracy attacks and hijackings in the Indian Ocean have fallen drastically. Despite this significant decline, word had spread among seafaring families: "Somalia" was the red flag. Peter, a young bridge officer from India explained: "You can talk to my family as long as you don't tell them where Somalia is. My mother asks, 'Where is this Port Sudan? Where is this Djibouti?' I say, 'Nowhere near Somalia, Mom.'"

Djibouti and Port Sudan are quite close to Somalia, and it is unlikely that one would sail to these ports without passing the Somali coast. Yet, as long as Peter did not say, "Somalia," his mother felt reassured. Hardik and Dulal had similar tactics. Dulal sails tankers, which are more vulnerable to attacks, partly because they sail more slowly and have a low freeboard, making it easier to climb on board from another vessel. He told me: "Basically, they don't know about Somalia, so I keep it that way. Nobody gives that info. I'm getting double pay for seven days. The family doesn't know that I get hardship.⁶ It's better to keep it quiet because questions will come."

As noted earlier, Dulal wanted to stop sailing, but he felt "stuck" by the loan he took to finance his house project. Hardship allowance helped him pay off his loans more quickly, but this information had to be contained. Other seafarers in his community were in a similar position. Hardik and Dulal were eager to help me meet seafarers in their town who sailed in piracy areas, but this proved difficult. One seafarer told Hardik that I was not welcome. His family wanted him to stop sailing because of piracy, and my visit, he worried, would strengthen their arguments. Dulal elaborated: "It's a very sensitive topic. We don't have other options. I have my friends. They don't tell. If I go to their home, [I don't tell]. . . . Please don't tell my family."

When Dulal introduced me to his family, I was careful to describe my research in general terms. But as we chatted with his parents, sisters, and their children under an overworked

ceiling fan, Dulal commented quite frankly on risks at sea. After we left, I asked him how he dared. He replied: “My father only understands English if you speak slowly. If he had truly understood what we were talking about, he would have confronted me. Not in front of you, but he would later. I say as little as possible about it and they don’t ask.”

Dulal was dishonest with his family, even devious, but his lie was productive (Mygind Korsby 2013: 139). It kept his family from worrying and it kept him at sea. On dishonesty, Georg Simmel writes, the “the direct positive . . . significance of untruthfulness” lies in the ability misinformation has to console, sustain [and] to reproduce family ties and roles (1906: 447). According to Simmel, no relationship is ever defined by one objective and total truth but by “what it is necessary to know for the purposes of the relationship in question” (Simmel 1906: 451). In order to console, sustain, and reproduce family ties, confirming his roles as a good son, Dulal was dishonest. In doing so, he could sustain his parents’ belief that his work situation was under control and that they could depend on his stable contribution to their material security.

I wish to tease out the differences and connections between containing information and the containerization of labor. “To contain” has a dual meaning: to suppress and to comprise of. Dulal’s work was, in part, comprised of piracy risks, and information about these risks was suppressed so as not to worry his family. By not signing off, Dhananjay kept his fear and personal circumstances from his captain, thus keeping his job. These acts of containment do different things. As Simmel notes, suppressing information can “console” and “sustain.” By doing this, Dulal was confirming local masculinity norms and kinship ties. Dhananjay also suppressed information, but the purpose was not to console or sustain but to remain legible as a containerized maritime labor commodity. But both acts of containment point back to the containerizing violence of standardized labor practices in the international shipping industry. Containment does not necessarily imply con-

tainerization, but, unless a seafarer only sees himself as a labor commodity, containerization always implies containment.

Knowing and not knowing

Hardik also kept his voyages through the Indian Ocean from his family. But, he told me later, he was sure his father had figured it out. Hardik often told his parents where he was signing on, but never shared his itinerary with them upon departure. However, upon returning, he happily told them stories about his voyages, which included anecdotes from ports along the way. After a while, and with some geographical knowledge, his father recognized a pattern. Hardik told me that they never spoke about it, but he knew that his father knew.

For Hardik’s father, knowing about his son’s itineraries could force him (back) into the role of protector. This is perhaps why he proclaimed, “There are risks everywhere. It’s no different on the ship.” In order for Hardik to grow into his responsibilities as an adult man, husband, and father, he needed to continue to provide for himself and his family. As a result, it was important for his father to continue to propagate the notion of life at sea as just as safe as (or even safer than) life on land. By knowing and not knowing, Hardik’s father contributed to the reproduction of their familial roles. Considering the significant social and financial investments that Indian seafarers and their families made for each other, choosing to exit this exchange could disrupt the family’s social order and the smooth flow of labor to the supply chain. This brings us back to that hot day in Hardik’s hometown, and to another friend, Sachiv.

Becoming a householder

After we visited with his family, Dulal and I met Hardik, who was waiting with the car. They wanted me to meet Dulal’s cousin Sachiv, who lived on the outskirts of town. But as we arrived at the address, Dulal said that there were some

"issues" between the two, so he would not come up. Sachiv was waiting for me at the door with his wife, Mary.

The apartment appeared to be newly renovated. They did not have any children, and they lived there alone. Sachiv explained that Mary is Christian and that he is Hindu. They met three times by coincidence at the mall, which convinced them that fate had brought them together. They decided to marry, a decision to which Sachiv's family was vehemently opposed. Disgust palpable in her voice, Mary explained that Sachiv's family was upset because of the dowry. She is one of six girls, she continued, and there is no dowry tradition in her family. Sachiv countered that his family was "not suffering financially! If they needed something, I would give it to them, but they are fine."

Sachiv seemed to be making two claims: First, he was defending his family against Mary's assertion that they were in some way greedy and that the dowry was their only concern. Second, Sachiv was letting me know that even though he had chosen to disregard his family's wishes about his bride and had moved away, he was aware of and accepted his obligation as their son to care for them financially if need be. He continued: "Now that my family has excluded me, all I have is my job. All of this,"—he said, gesturing to the apartment—"is paid for by me. Every penny." The break with his family did not just mean that Sachiv distanced himself on an interpersonal level. His decision had financial consequences. The route he most often sailed—Europe–Asia–USA—passes through piracy areas. The ships were protected by armed guards, but he added, it was "not 100 percent safe. You have to do what the captain and the company say. If you refuse to sail in these areas, then you have to leave the company. Nobody wants to take the risk." Risk seemed to mean two things: the risk of sailing through piracy areas and risk of losing their employment.

For many Indian seafarers, getting a maritime education is costly and involves the entire family. Sachiv was a 3rd officer at the time, and I knew that the courses and exams required to

be promoted could be costly and time-consuming. Some seafarers receive full STCW certification through their education, and they move up the ranks via sailing experience. But if Indian seafarers wanted to be promoted after their basic education, they had to take time off from work—without pay or job security—to study for and take further certification exams. This required financial support from their family. Sachiv explained, "I am afraid that if I stop to do the exams, they will not take me back. I will not leave [the company]. . . . Every rupee is earned by me. I have no backup plan, no help from my parents. I can't stop this."

We finished the interview, and Sachiv insisted on accompanying me down to the car. As we stepped into the sultry afternoon heat, Sachiv discovered Dulal sitting in the backseat of the car. The AC was running, so he got in, next to Dulal. Exuberant, they wrestled affectionately, when, suddenly, Hardik pressed the accelerator to the floor and yelled, "We are hijacking you!" The wheels screeched as we raced down the street, leaving billows of hot dust in our wake, all of us laughing hard.

Dulal has never met Mary. He explained later that he and Sachiv had been very close, and that the break between them was painful, adding: "This is why I want the whole family to move with me to the house. Because when the son moves away, the neighbors talk and they want to know what went wrong." It is acceptable if the son moves away for work, but "if the neighbors have not seen him for a while, they will ask, 'Where is he?' If the address is just across town, then the rumors start to fly, and it is hard on the parents." Dulal heard Sachiv's father's side of the story and felt that Sachiv had been unfair. He reasoned, "His father had never been strict, and he paid for his [initial] education. There had never been any bad blood between them." In Dulal's eyes, Sachiv did not reciprocate the care given to him by his family. In fact, he released himself from that system, which was not just a refusal of his family's expectations with regard to marriage; it was an affront to the entire family's moral economy. Pushing the container met-

aphor, Sachiv's lack of "backup plan" meant he was no longer contained—neither suppressed by, nor comprised of—the reciprocal family relationship, but this left him more vulnerable to the violent effects of industrial containerization.

Containing the life-cycle

Although these stories make points about a global industry, they are also about coming of age. In their work on male labor migrants from Kerala, India, Filippo Osella and Caroline Osella write about categories of masculinity that "connote the male life-cycle" in a community "characterized by a rapidly expanding middle class" (2000: 118). They explain:

The *gulfan* refers to the migrant during his periodic visits home and immediately upon return. A transitional and individualistic figure, defined largely through relationships to cash and consumption, he is typically a deracinated and not fully mature male needing to be brought back into village life. . . . [The] *kallan* [is] the anti-social individualist who, refusing to honor social obligations remains asocial and deracinated. [The] figure of the householder [encompasses] the ideal of the successful, social, mature man: a head of a household holding substantial personal wealth, supporting dependents and helping many clients. (Osella and Osella 2000: 118)

I find these categories helpful because of how they are linked. Hardik, Dulal, and Sachiv all started out as young, unmarried seafarers whose education was paid for by their parents. They went to work at sea in order to earn money. They were all *gulfan*: uprooted, with few responsibilities, earning sizable salaries. In 2013, Dulal was about to marry and Hardik and Sachiv were just recently married, indicating an adult position. Hardik was about to become a father, adding another layer to his adult identity. But because they spent a lot of time away from home, becoming "fully mature" was difficult.

Sachiv made an independent decision to strike out on his own, but Dulal's criticism suggests that Sachiv is more akin to the *kallan*, although Dulal never referred to him in this or any other pejorative way.⁷

Sachiv's decision challenged a reciprocal relationship that I heard about in many Indian seafaring families: A son's seafaring labor was for the sake of the family. Because of this, his basic education is financed by the family, and when he takes further qualifying exams, the family holds an economic hand over him until he can return to sea, presumably in a higher position with a larger salary. In exchange, the seafarer provides salary and behaves in a way that honors his family, such as accepting the bride his parents choose for him, where he should live, and even how long his sailing career lasts. In fact, getting promoted to a senior officer position quickly was an often-cited goal because this enabled seafarers to stop working at sea. With senior officer credentials, seafarers are more likely to find a management position at a shipping or crewing company ashore. Providing financial security was certainly seen as a way of caring for their family (cf. D. McKay 2007), but working ashore was seen as more honorable and made seafarers available to care for the extended family in ways that were not possible when working for months at sea. But without this form of reciprocity, the bottom fell out of the social security network. Labor arbitration works, not because "same skills, different prices" (Ong 2006: 160) but because these intimate familial agreements accompany seafarers on board, where they remain contained but productive (See Schober, this issue, for another take on family ties and shipping).

Re-interpreting tradition

Hardik also bought a house, but he would not be moving there with his parents. His father suggested that he and his wife move away from the joint family home for some time. Hardik and his parents enjoy a harmonious relationship, but because Hardik was home for just a few months

a year, his father explained, he did not know much about running a home. So far, his parents have handled family finances and home maintenance, but his father wanted him to move away so that he could learn to be an adult man, husband, and father.

I have stayed in contact with Hardik, and he has since moved into a new home nearby with his wife and their young child. He told me, "Actually, [I'm] learning a lot. About some taxes, water bills, electricity bills, TV bills. . . ." His relatives had been critical, having assumed that he and his parents were "not on good terms." But his father advised him "to not bother. It's your life and our life. We know better." In the meantime, he too is beginning to look for work on land so that he can be closer to his family.

The gendered work of containing existential risk

In my retelling of a series of events with three young Indian seafarers from a small town along the eastern coast of India, I have suggested that local masculinity norms, kinship ties, and age are, contrary to a Taylorian view, very much relevant to labor and production in the global maritime supply chain. Leaning on the container as metaphor, I showed how these personal elements are contained—understood doubly as suppressed by and comprising of—and containerized—a taming of inconsistently shaped commodities through standardization processes. The tenuous oscillation between containerization and containment enabled Hardik and his friends to sustain their families economically and provide the industry with a steady stream of labor.

In a place where lack of material security is on daily display, Indian seafarers recognized the opportunity that the maritime industry offered them to provide material security for their families. By inserting themselves into the global maritime labor supply chain, they were containerized as labor commodities, making themselves comparable and, thus, competitive goods on a

global market: good seafarers, just cheaper. But the motivation to work at sea holds a contradiction. Seafaring is a dangerous job, and maritime piracy represented an acute danger to Hardik and his friends' well-being and even survival. Taking such risks secures their ability to provide for their families economically, but taking these risks also jeopardizes this ability. In order to containerize themselves for the global maritime industry, to shape themselves into recognizable maritime labor commodities, they suppressed certain aspects of their personal lives as seafarers, such as their emotions or the unequal ways in which they were educated. At the same time, this suppression was intimately entangled with their need, as good men, sons, husbands, and fathers, to hide the dangerous aspects of their work from their loved ones at home. Through Simmel, I demonstrated how this form of dishonesty was productive of their central familial relations: this enabled them to "console, sustain [and] to reproduce family ties and roles" (Simmel 1906: 447), but it also made it possible for their families to continue to care for them in ways that were honored and recognizable in their community. Sachiv's story illustrated how delicate and precarious a balance this is. Telling Hardik's, Dulal's, and Sachiv's stories from this perspective charts the deeply personal connections between the coming of age among young Indian seafarers and the seemingly smooth mechanisms of a global industry that moves 90 percent of everything we consume on earth.

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Notes

1. It is approximated that 2 percent of merchant seafarers are women, the bulk of whom work on cruise ships in service rather than engineering or navigational jobs.
2. See this industry report from 2015 for more detail on the stratification of seafaring nationalities: <https://www.ics-shipping.org/docs/default-source/resources/safety-security-and-operations/manpower-report-2015-executive-summary.pdf?sfvrsn=16>; retrieved 10/21/2019.
3. STCW stands for Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping and stipulates “basic requirements on training, certification and watchkeeping for seafarers on an international level.” It was adopted in 1978 and entered into force in 1984 (source: <http://www.imo.org/en/OurWork/HumanElement/TrainingCertification/Pages/STCW-Convention.aspx>; retrieved 10/18/2019).
4. See also Glück (2015) on how the Indian Ocean is constructed as a “security space” as a global institutional reaction to maritime piracy. This entails a limitation of the sea as “free,” but similarly enables and protects the ocean as a medium for trade, if not frictionless, then less fractioned.
5. There are also significant piracy risks in the Gulf of Guinea that have gone largely unreported, an issue that is unfortunately beyond the scope of this article.
6. “Hardship” refers to “hardship allowance,” an extra percentage of a seafarer’s salary sometimes paid when risks or extra labor present themselves.
7. The Hindi term *kallan* is sometimes used derogatorily in reference to a thief. Many thanks to my seafaring colleague, Amit, for explaining this linguistic nuance.

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