Seafarers in Kiribati – Consequences of International Labour Circulation

A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Geography
at the University of Canterbury

by

Maria Borovnik
Department of Geography
University of Canterbury
2003
Meinen Eltern

(To My Parents)
Contents

List of figures v
List of tables vii
Glossary viii
Abbreviations ix
Interview Coding xi
Acknowledgements xii
Abstract xvii

Introduction 1

Chapter 1: Are seafarers migrants? – A conceptual and theoretical framework 11

Introduction 11

Theoretical concepts of migration and labour circulation 12
Labour migration in the Pacific 13
Migration and circulation 18
Transnationalism 24
Summary 27

Situating Seafarers: “there is his home, there lies his business” 28
Seafarers’ “maritime culture” 29
Seafarers working in a global industry 33
Seafarers at the “edges” of transnationalism 38

Conclusion 43

Chapter 2: Kiribati’s economic and global position and the establishment of the Marine and Fisheries Training Centres 45

Introduction 45

The Kiribati economy 47
Placing Kiribati in the MIRAB model 49
Cultural influences on the economy 53
Cultural differences between the Gilbert Island groups 54
Urban development 59
Chapter 3: Conducting fieldwork in Kiribati: Methodology

Introduction

Preparation
Fieldwork objectives
Fieldwork techniques
Familiarising with the Kiribati background
Contact with employment agencies
Human ethics and interview coding

Conducting fieldwork
Field relations on Tarawa
Field relations on the outer islands
Conducting interviews and transcribing them

Close

Chapter 4: A seafarer’s life – Effects on the health and wellbeing of seafarers and their families

Introduction

Occupational factors
Causes of occupational accidents
Working conditions and safety
Deaths
Working with different nationalities
Environmental influences on health
Dangerous geographical regions
Drugs and drug trafficking
# Lifestyle factors

- Emotional stress 143
- Alcohol consumption on board 149

# STDs and HIV/AIDS amongst seafarers in Kiribati

- A “seafarer’s life” and the risks 158
- Protection 160

# Conclusions

**Chapter 5: Who benefits from remittances?**

**Effects on extended families, communities, and the environment** 167

- Introduction 167
- Remittances studies – main arguments 169
- Remittances data and data analysis 173
- The use of remittances and who benefits 184
- Land sales, internal migration and urbanisation 192
- Conclusions 205

**Chapter 6: Consequences of the repetitive absence and presence of seafarers** 209

- Introduction 209
- Community changes 212
  - The structure of Kiribati society 213
  - The perception of seafarers in communities and their influence on Kiribati society 217
  - Urbanisation and social problems 223
  - Alcohol abuse in Kiribati 228
  - Summary 231
- Changes in personal relationships 233
  - Parents and sons 235
  - Parents and daughters in-law 238
  - When the husband is a seafarer... 240
  - Jealousy and domestic problems 246
  - Childcare 250
- Conclusions 252
Chapter 7: Discussion: Hybrid identities and the local and global dynamics of employment 255

Introduction 255

Seafarers’ ‘hybrid’ identities? 257
Living on board: being seafarer and being I-Kiribati 260
Moving between places 264
Performing identities:
  Cultural transformation or cultural flexibility? 268

The institutionalised dynamics of seafaring 273
Negotiations between labour unions and the SPMS 276
Compensation payments 280

Conclusions 282

Conclusions 285

References 293
Figures

Figure 0.1: Staff and a group of students at the Marine Training Centre in Betio 2

Figure 0.2: Fisheries Training Centre in Bikenibeu: Students in exam preparation 4

Figure 0.3: Seafarer at home on “holiday” on Beru island, doing daily fishing work 5

Figure 0.4: Beru island: Seaman’s father and his daughter 7

Figure 2.1: The Republic of Kiribati 48

Figure 2.2: Kiribati account balance 50

Figure 2.3: Maneaba in Koinawa, Abaiang 57

Figure 2.4: Catholic Church in Koinawa, Abaiang 57

Figure 2.5: Maneaba in Eriko, Beru 58

Figure 2.6: Protestant Church in Eriko, Beru 58

Figure 2.7: Scattered living in Betio, Tarawa 61

Figure 2.8: Children in Bikenibeu, Tarawa playing on a dumped car 68

Figure 2.9: Mr Yang Zhikuan, the Ambassador of the Peoples’ Republic of China in front of the impressive building of the Chinese embassy 74

Figure 3.1: The Gilbert Island Groups 95

Figure 3.2: Main entrance to the KPC Headquarter, Antebuka 104

Figure 3.3: Beru island – Southern end 108

Figure 3.4: Seafarer’s wives and children on Beru 111

Figure 3.5: Women on Abaiang 113

Figure 4.1: An officer at FTC takes an exam 131

Figure 4.2: FTC dormitory 135
Figure 4.3: Number of deaths from Tuberculosis or Hepatitis in Kiribati 1992-1996 138

Figure 4.4: Alcohol related dismissals from German ships 150

Figure 4.5: Number of HIV/AIDS cases in Kiribati 153

Figure 4.6: AIDS warning posters are put at central places in Tarawa 156

Figure 5.1: Remittances from seafarers to Kiribati between 1979 and 1998 175

Figure 5.2: Three examples of allotment distribution per ship 177

Figure 5.3: Monthly remittances to wives (1999) 179

Figure 5.4: Monthly remittances to parents (1999) 179

Figure 5.5: Remittances sent to wives 1999 by status of seafarer 181

Figure 5.6: Remittances sent to parents and relatives by status of seafarer 1999 181

Figure 5.7: Secondary school students of Hiram Bingham High School, Beru 188

Figure 5.8: A seafarer’s house in Tarawa with rain drainage 190

Figure 5.9: Typical seafarer investments are video hires 191

Figure 5.10: Water tanks on Tarawa 1999 195

Figure 5.11: Polluted coastline at low tide, lagoon side, Antebuka, Tarawa 196

Figure 5.12: Map showing land ownership boundaries in Butaritari 201

Figure 5.13: Example 766w/20 in Antebuka, block without road access 202

Figure 5.14: Part of Betio, South of Betio harbour 203
Figure 6.1: Abaiang island: Unemane standing beside the grave of an ancestor

Figure 6.2: Family on Tarawa

Figure 6.3: People watching a video on Beru

Figure 6.4: Children in front of a seafarer’s house on Tarawa “watching a video”

Figure 6.5: The mother of three seafarer sons in Abaiang

Figure 6.6: A seafarer’s wife and her newborn baby on Beru

Figure 7.1: Two local I-Kiribati seafarers working on an inter-island supply vessel, wearing ‘westernised’ clothes

Tables

Table 2.1: Mean Annual Precipitation (in mm) (1996) 49
Table 2.2: SPMS employed I-Kiribati and Tuvaluans 1989 – 1999 79
Table 3.1: Interview coding for this thesis 101
Table 3.2: Coding of focus groups in this thesis 102
Table 5.1: SPMS monthly salaries (1998) 182
Table 7.1: The top 10 seafarer supply nations, 1999 273
Table 7.2: The percentage of ITF registered vessels of SPMS employed seamen sailing under German flags in 1999 277
Table 7.3: The percentage of ITF registered vessels of SPMS employed seamen sailing under foreign flags in 1999 277
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Babai</td>
<td>Large taro-like plant (Cyrtosperma chamissonis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botakis</td>
<td>Feasts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boti</td>
<td>Seating location in the <em>maneaba</em> allocated to a <em>kainga</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bubuti</td>
<td>Unrefusable request</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buia</td>
<td>Sleeping hut, usually above the ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-Kiribati</td>
<td>Descendant from Kiribati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-Matang</td>
<td>European descendant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kain Kiribati</td>
<td>Originating from / belonging to Kiribati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kainga</td>
<td>Extended family (and family land) of common descent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kam bati n rabwa</td>
<td>Thank you all very much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kokioki</td>
<td>Fermented coconut milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koko</td>
<td>Being jealous, jealousy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ko na Mauri</td>
<td>Greetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ko rabwa</td>
<td>Thank you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lavalava</td>
<td>Garment worn by men and women as a skirt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maneu</td>
<td>“My sister”, sibling of a different gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maneaba</td>
<td>Meeting house of a community or village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pandanus</td>
<td>Pandanus tree (Pandanus tectorius)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tareu</td>
<td>“My brother”, sibling of the same gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te aomata</td>
<td>A real person, a real I-Kiribati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te katei ni Kiribati</td>
<td>The Kiribati way of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te mauri</td>
<td>Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te raoi</td>
<td>Peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te tabomoa</td>
<td>Prosperity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tibuta</td>
<td>Kiribati style blouse worn by women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaine</td>
<td>Old women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unimane</td>
<td>Old men of respected status; council of old men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utu</td>
<td>Family group, or group of relatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te mauri, te raoi</td>
<td>The Kiribati greeting of “everlasting blessings”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ao te tabomoa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AMAK</td>
<td>Aia Maea Ainen Kiribati; The National Women's Federation in Kiribati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIM</td>
<td>Centre for International Migration and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSE</td>
<td>Deutsche Stiftung für internationale Entwicklung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EEZ</td>
<td>Exclusive Economic Zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSP</td>
<td>Foundation of the South Pacific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTC</td>
<td>Fisheries Training Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNE</td>
<td>Gross National Expenditure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GTZ</td>
<td>Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSDG</td>
<td>Hamburg Süd Dampfschifffahrt Gesellschaft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMO</td>
<td>International Maritime Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITF</td>
<td>International Transport Federation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JICA</td>
<td>Japan International Cooperation Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KFS</td>
<td>Kiribati Fishermen Services Ltd.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KIOSU</td>
<td>Kiribati International Overseas Seamen's Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KOSEA</td>
<td>Kiribati Overseas Seamen' Employment Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPC</td>
<td>Kiribati Protestant Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTC</td>
<td>Marine Training Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTS</td>
<td>Marine Training School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NASDA</td>
<td>National Space Development Agency of Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ÖTV</td>
<td>Gewerkschaft für Öffentlicher Dienst, Transport und Verkehr (since 2000 renamed in &quot;verdi&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAK</td>
<td>Reitan Ainen ni Kamatu; KPC women’s organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RERF</td>
<td>Revenue Equalisation Reserve Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIRC</td>
<td>Seafarers International Research Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPC</td>
<td>Secretariat of the Pacific Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPMS</td>
<td>South Pacific Marine Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STD</td>
<td>Sexual Transmitted Disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YESS</td>
<td>Youth Centre of the Kiribati Protestant Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZAV</td>
<td>Zentralstelle der Arbeitsvermittlung</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interview Coding

To ensure confidentiality interviews containing private information or information that could be embarrassing for people are coded in numbers as followed:

**Interviews are coded as followed:**

- Interview codes > (100), (200), (300) are seafarers (30)
- Interview codes > (400), (500) are seafarers’ wives (34)
- Interview codes > (600), (700) are parents and siblings (37)
- Interview codes > (900) are key interview partners (35)

(MN 07/99) refers to a talk with someone in a month (07) of the year 1999

Some interview partners are coded twice, for example with a (900) number and a (500) number when they are both, directly related to a seafarer and also functioning as a key interview partner.

Some interview partners are mentioned by name when speaking in an official role, and are coded when revealing private or delicate data.

**Focus groups are coded as followed:**

- (focus group i) Seamen’s Wives Association, Tarawa 31/03/99
- (focus group ii) *Unimane*, Taboaki, Beru 22/05/99
- (focus group iii) *Unimane*, Nuka, Beru 29/05/99
- (focus group iv) *Unaine* (KPC), Nuka, Beru 01/06/99
- (focus group v) Foundation of the South Pacific, Tarawa, 02/08/99
- (focus group vi) Youth leaders, YESS Centre, KPC Antebuka, 08/08/99
Acknowledgements - *Kam bati n rabwa*

Te Mauri
Te Raoi
ao
Te Tabomoa

This thesis would have never been possible without the contribution and support of a wide range of people. I wish to return my love and thanks to all, and wish everyone to be blessed forever, *te mauri* (health), *te raoi* (peace) and *te tabomoa* (prosperity).

My sincere gratitude goes to the people in Kiribati I met and talked to, especially those who have allowed me to conduct interviews and focus groups with them, for their openness, welcoming friendliness and kindness, their generosity and patience. I will never forget my time in Kiribati which was life-changing and contributed much to my inner growth. I would like to express my gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Kiribati for having granted my research visa and for all employees who kindly granted access to information and who agreed to conduct interviews with me. I especially thank the Secretary of the Kiribati National Council of Churches, Kianteata Teabo, who enabled me to stay in Antebuka. My warmest thanks go to the Kiribati Protestant Church community in Antebuka, and especially to the Moderator Baiteke Nabetari, and his wife, and all my neighbours and friends. Many thanks also to Kaingateiti Maerere, Erite Awira and Terubetaake, Claude Maerere, Terauango Beneteri and Mweroa, Amerika Miteti and Kateteke Amerika. I wish all the people in the KPC community happiness, health and blessings.

Many special thanks for the kindness and support from managers Peter Lange and Raimund Gross, and the employees of the South Pacific Marine Services in Tarawa and to Rasmus Sieg and Rüdiger Weiss in Hamburg. Many thanks to Captain Superintendent Lutz Wesemann, and all the staff at the Marine Training Centre. I also wish to thank very much the manager of the Kiribati Fishermen Services, Nauan Bauro, and the principal of the Fisheries Trainings Centre, Bauro Tabuera.
Many thanks to the Kiribati Labour Union (KIOSU), in Betio, Tarawa, and the International Transport Federation (ITF/ÖTV), in Bremen, for having granted information and having been available for interviews.

My warmest thanks go to those people who have helped me in interpreting interviews, and to all who have helped me to find seafarer related interview participants. I want to thank especially Manana Itaia, who supported and accommodated me on Beru, and interpreted most of my interviews on this island; Tarota Falani, who helped me to find interview participants on Abaiang and who interpreted many of these; and Terauango Beneteri, who interpreted some of my interviews in Tarawa. Also many thanks to the pastors of Nuka and Taboiaiki on Beru who facilitated meetings with the unimane and to their wives, for the interpretation of some of the interviews. I wish to thank the pastor of Eriko who accompanied me at some occasions and interpreted interviews with fathers of seafarers. My warmest thanks to the unimane of Beru.

Many thanks to Rudolph and Ruth Oltmann for their hospitality in my first month on Tarawa; and to Gary and Elaine Dovidaitis for having invited me to stay on Abaiang. I would also like to thank Sally Moore and Nona Cresswell, volunteer workers on Beru.

The University of the South Pacific in Teaoraereke, Tarawa provided office space and most importantly computer and internet access during my time in Kiribati. Many thanks to all staff at the USP, and especially to director Temakei Tebano and his assistant Tekirua Riinga.

My first meeting with Dr Ueantabo Neemia-Mackenzie had not only initiated this fascinating journey into research on seafarers and families from Kiribati, but changed and enriched my life immensely and led to some beautiful friendships, that I would otherwise not have made. I will always be filled with gratitude for Ueantabo and his wife Rakeiti Mackenzie, who became supervisors, instructors, friends, family, and important initiators into my understanding of the Kiribati culture. Many special thanks (Kam bati n rabwa) to Rakeiti, Ueantabo and to their sons, to Rakeiti's mother, Suitube Kiritome, and to her brothers and sisters, especially Itineman Kiritome and his wife and her parents, for their hospitality, welcoming and kindness during my time.
on Tarawa. I wish happiness, health and blessings on Ucantabo, Rakeiti and their families forever.

I appreciate the contributions of the many different I-Kiribati and I-Matang I have not explicitly mentioned here, and wish them all health, success and happiness.

The Department of Geography facilitated a University of Canterbury research grant for my fieldwork in 1999. I would like to thank the Geography Department not only for its generosity but also for having provided office space and material during the time of my PhD. Many thanks to all of the Department, for their kindness and support. Special thanks to Professor Bob Kirk, former Head of the Department, who not only granted permission for my PhD, but acted always as my guardian and motivated me immensely.

I feel incredibly thankful and filled with gratitude and good wishes to Professor Eric Pawson who, despite being Head of the Geography Department found time under very busy circumstances to provide outstanding supervision for my thesis, especially this year, after my main supervisor Dr Doug Johnston went on sabbatical leave. Many thanks for having been motivating and uplifting, and for all the thorough feedback.

Many warm thanks and kind regards also go to Professor Peter Hempenstall, Head of the Department of History, University of Canterbury, for his supervision also in an incredibly busy time this year. My appreciation goes to Peter for the many thoughtful and essential contributions to my thesis, and for inspiring discussions on Pacific aspects.

Special thanks and best wishes go to Dr Doug Johnston for his constantly warm, patient and kind supervision during the years of my PhD.

I am filled with gratitude to all those in the Department of Geography who have been particularly interested and supportive towards my thesis, and for their feedback and contributions. Special appreciation goes to Dr Garth Cant, Dr Henry Connor, Dr Julie Cupples, Peter Mayell, Tim Nolan, Associate Professor Ian Owens, William Sabandar, Lee Thompson and Dr Peyman Zawar-Reza. The Department is very
fortunate in having the best technical staff in the world. I would like to thank all of them very, very much! Many thanks especially to Anna Petrie, who has been a constant ray of sunshine during my time here; and to Marney Brosnan and Dean Aldridge who scanned and formatted my slides. Special thanks to Victoria Guyatt for her lasting cheerful and positive attitude.

I wish to thank the Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies for their support and good communication during the years. Special thanks and best wishes to Kate Scott and to Moana Matthes.

Many warm thanks to Professor Richard Bedford for his interest in my research. I also wish to thank Dr Samuel Agyei-Mensay for his feedback on Chapter 4 of this thesis.

When I came to Christchurch, I knew nobody. I feel very blessed for the countless lovely people I have met, and the kindness I have experienced. My good wishes and gratitude to those that have been encouraging and supportive during my thesis writing. Many special thanks to my friends from the Latin-Caribbean dancing groups, and to AVON Toastmasters. My warmest thanks go to Hamish Bryce and his parents, Diane and Brian Foley, Gwynn Harrison, Rachael Hudson, Séan Joyce, Marian Maguire, Clare Peach, Michael Perkins, Zoe Protonotarios, Riki Setu, Dr Anna Smith and John Yi-Jiang. Special thanks to Peter Nicholson for his support during the last months of my thesis, the many shouted dinners and midnight coffees, and for his patience. Many thanks also to Candy Vanderhoff for her passion and enthusiasm, when working on Kiribati (maneaba) architecture while she was in Christchurch.

I am filled with heartfelt gratitude, love and warmest wishes for Terry Mitchell for his love and friendship and his innumerable contributions to my thesis.

I would like to thank Geraldine Murphy from the University of Canterbury proof reading service.

To all my wonderful friends in Germany, who have been sending their support and good thoughts to me my gratitude and love, especially to Dr Hortense Reintjens-Anwari and Dr Shams Anwari, Günter Friedeberg, Hansjerg Gölz, Christoph Kassel,
Jacek Jonetzko, Wilfried Kruggel, Dr Monika Laufenberg, Lilo Rosse, Tante Marianne and Onkel Wolfgang Traut, Margarete Schmitz (Tante Mausi), and Dr Patrizia Wackers. Special thanks to Barbara Staudt for having been a wonderful inspiration during her time in New Zealand.

Many thanks and love to my brother, Georg Borovnik, for his love, encouragement, and support, and for his kindness in having taken over the responsibility of looking after my father. I have dedicated my thesis to my parents. I wish to send my love and thanks to my father, Josef Borovnik, for always having been so proud of me, and for his generosity, love and faith in me, and for the good cooking and the many hugs he gave me, when I was in Germany. Without my mother, Helga Borovnik, I could have never completed my thesis. I wish to send my mother my love and gratitude for her incredible financial support and for having encouraged me constantly, and for the many parcels, filled with chocolate and other good things, she sent to me. I will be always carrying in my heart the love and support of my parents and my brother during the time of my PhD.
Abstract

Research on seafarers has not been a common theme in migration discourse. Yet, seafarers are a unique occupational group, and an increasing number are recruited from developing countries, such as Kiribati. The majority being men, they are recruited by international agencies for contract work on board ships of different kinds, registered under so called “foreign flags”, and travel globally. Seafarers from Kiribati circulate between home islands and spaces that are denationalised and often occupied by different nationalities. Research on seafarers can therefore be placed at the peripheries of discussions on transnational research.

The argument in my thesis is that socio-cultural, economic and environmental factors in Kiribati are closely linked to each other. The strong sense of being I-Kiribati (descending from Kiribati) and the cultural meanings of te aomata (being a real person), as being linked to a genealogy, being kind to strangers, hard working, resilient and being able to face hardship, influence the likelihood of employment with German and Japanese agencies. The cultural background, together with the physical strength of I-Kiribati men, makes them globally competitive when an excellent standard of education is provided.

The Marine and Fishery Training Centres are internationally recognised and are the largest maritime Training Centres in the Pacific. However, seafarers cannot build a transnational network, as they are temporarily migrating out of their cultural framework and their extended family system, moving transversally across maritime areas in the world. This thesis explores how the special form of mobility and the evolving, yet incomplete, articulation of transnationalism affects the social, economic and personal life of seafarers and families remaining in Kiribati. It also investigates the changes of identities that develop through a repetitive change of cultural backgrounds.

Research, including six months of fieldwork on different islands in Kiribati, was aimed at understanding the consequences of the temporary absence and presence of seafarers for extended families and their communities; how the employment effects the health and wellbeing of seafarers and their family members; and the impact of remittances on families, communities and the environment in Kiribati. It was also aimed at illuminating whether and where the employment has influenced some of the cultural elements in which I-Kiribati seafarers are embedded.
Introduction

“The pattern of an I-Kiribati is: you don’t foresee into future. You usually live here now” (Tokata Niata, Kiribati Provident Fund)

“Time is money” (SPMS officer)

“Take one day at a time!” (young girl from YESS)

“When you marry a seaman, you marry the house, that is what we say” (23 year old woman)

The Marine Training Centre in Betio on South Tarawa, established in 1967, is the pride of not only the Kiribati government but also of those German shipping companies that are involved in its development. Every year young men from all islands in Kiribati have a chance to sit exams to enter the training school that prepares them to work on German merchant ships.

I am invited to observe the intake test for course 75. On 22 March 1999 participants that have passed the exam have come to the Marine Training Centre (MTC) and are interviewed by the chief officers. The officers ask apparently simple questions in English: what school are they from? Do they have family in Tarawa? What is the reason for them coming to the MTC? How old are they and so on. Some men tremble and look pale in fear. When someone is very frightened he will not be taken, explains Ray, who is from New Zealand and works as Chief Engineer at the Centre. Crews on board ships depend on every individual, so in the case of an emergency everyone needs to remain calm and know what they have to do. Therefore these interviews are a test in themselves.

After a thorough health check and lunch, the selected group of one hundred young men collect for the first time in the main meeting room. Lutz, the German Captain Superintendent, and Etekiero, the upcoming Chief Officer and Second in Charge from Kiribati, explain that the MTC is structured like a real ship. The students’ first exercise will be not to leave the “ship” for the next two weeks. This exercise is to let the men become accustomed to ship discipline. The exercise teaches the importance of following orders and to stay on board in emergencies for their own safety when
overseas. After these two weeks, some students might feel that they cannot live under these circumstances. They are allowed to leave and to try another entrance test later if they wish. Everybody is provided with a uniform and a number from 7501 to 7599. All students are asked to take off any earrings or necklaces for security reasons: “Always be safe”, says Lutz. Later he explains that about 60 per cent generally complete the 15 month course successfully.

The I-Kiribati (descending from Kiribati) students are going to learn techniques of safety, engineering, maintenance and catering on board a ship. Their experience at the MTC will also prepare them to live together with people from different cultural backgrounds. Ship crews on German owned merchant ships are often composed of a mix of different nationalities from Pacific, Asian and Eastern-European backgrounds, while officers on ships are, with few exceptions from Germany, or of another Western European background. The I-Kiribati men need to become accustomed to good English language, but also to an environment of different cultural and behavioural backgrounds. German officers understand the main behavioural codes of I-Kiribati, but they have to gently introduce what will be required of Kiribati seafarers on German merchant ships. There are many rules which are different from behaviour
codes in Kiribati. Authority, for example, in Germany is demonstrated by a loud voice and short sentences, while in Kiribati it is shown by gentle, soft speaking and long explanations. The employment agency, the South Pacific Marine Services (SPMS), has a booklet with instructions for captains and officers on German ships that explains these and other differences to assist with a harmonious flow of interaction on board.

Some months later, at exam time, Bauro, the manager of the Fisheries Training Centre (FTC), shows me the school grounds in Bikenibeu. The FTC has been established by the Kiribati government in cooperation with the Japan Tuna Fishing Company. The centre prepares young men for work on Japanese fishing vessels, which includes long line fishing, pole and line fishing and purse seining. There are similarities to the Marine Training Centre, Bauro explains. For example, safety instructions are the same, but the kind of work is different. Originally the training for fishery work took place on MTC grounds, therefore uniforms and disciplinary rules are quite similar. However, the FTC is not run as a ship but rather as a school, which Bauro regrets. He had been educated as a merchant seafarer and officer by the MTC before he took over his position of manager at the FTC. The length of schooling here is shorter as well. While seafarers for German merchant ships receive training over fifteen months to fulfil international requirements, seafarers for Japanese fishing ships need only to be trained for six to ten months. However, cultural differences are part of the learning process as well. For example, students bow to show respect, eating and sleeping habits are different, and seafarers going on Japanese vessels will have to speak some Japanese.
Before I started my fieldwork, Ueantabo Neemia-Mackenzie, who was then Director of the Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies in Christchurch, explained to me that it is a great challenge for men in Kiribati to be trained in one of the training centres and to work overseas. The work and the opportunity to earn cash is regarded as masculine, and families are proud when one of them has passed the entrance test. Ueantabo calls seafarers “our boys”, and this is what I heard them called by unimane, the eldest men and unaine, the eldest women of Kiribati during my time there. “Our boys” reflects the unity of people in Kiribati which reaches beyond family groups. “Our boys” also reflects the family hierarchy which requires that each young man becomes a caretaker for his parents as well as for his wife and children, regardless of the other circumstances that come with this task. “Our boys” are those that have gone through a period of disciplined training and are now working overseas – some have done so for 30 years already.
Kiribati seafarers work generally on contracts for one to two years overseas before they return home for a short period of “holiday”. Labour circulation has become the best alternative to working as a Kiribati government official. However, long periods of absence of young men must have an effect on the Kiribati family system, particularly spouses and children. The following example illustrates some aspects of this.

Only a couple of days after I arrive on Tarawa, I am invited by a woman who is married to a seafarer to come with her and visit her family, which is quite unusual in Kiribati. She is employed by the Kiribati government and though her husband works as a seafarer on German ships the family can rent a government house in one of the villages. They pay A$4 rent and electricity costs A$20 a month. Her husband, who comes in from fishing, has taken leave from work overseas for a while. At 5pm the water supply truck stops nearby and the entire family helps to fill buckets with drinking water which will last for the next 24 hours, another privilege for government workers. Drinking water is usually drawn from wells and can have a rather brackish quality.
While frying fish, the woman tells me that her husband had been married four times before she met him. With all his former wives he had the same problem, namely that they were wasting his money and lent the video and all the things he brought home to their families, and some of them were regularly drunk, which he did not appreciate. She and her husband are happy together now, basically because she works and can provide her own money for her family, and she would never drink, but she does not want him to go back overseas. She prefers to work, though being pregnant, than see him go overseas again. However, he wants to go back. He tells me that it is better for their relationship to be overseas, because it is easier to love his wife more when he is absent for most of the time and seeing each other only for two to three months each year. His wife disagrees and says that what he really wants is to come back from overseas to drink every day. He takes her comment with humour and says that it is all right to work overseas when there are no children, but with children it is much better to stay at home, because otherwise he misses his family very much.

When dinner is ready I am invited to eat at the same time as the man. They explain to me that this is the custom. However, the food served to him is corned beef while I receive delicious freshly caught fish. They explain to me that he is not allowed to eat fish straight after coming back from fishing. I see a group of children waiting for their dinner and feel a little awkward at being honoured so greatly. However, when I leave a few fish behind for the children they are not allowed to have them, again because of the custom. Later I learn that it is good behaviour for a guest to eat with great delight and as much as they can regardless of how much will be left over for others.

This example shows some typical and some rather unusual aspects of the situation of a seafarer family and the connectedness of people to custom. Firstly, this family lives on their own: unusual in Kiribati, where wives settle with a husband’s family and children are not only under their parents’ supervision, but also the supervision of their father’s parents. Secondly, this woman is his fifth wife. This is indeed unusual and linked to his frequent absence and the mismanagement of money by his former wives. Mismanagement of money may be attributed to the fact that handling cash is still rather uncommon in Kiribati. The custom of borrowing by family members makes it difficult to keep wealth in one household as it is distributed to a whole range of people. The Kiribati custom also strongly discourages women from drinking. Thirdly,
the house’s rent is paid by the wife, not by her husband, and she works although she is pregnant and they have children. Currently he supervises the children. Fourthly, the lack of quality fresh water on Tarawa has become severe and this will remain a problem with increasing urbanisation. South Tarawa is overcrowded because of lack of employment opportunities on the outer islands. However, even South Tarawa does not supply enough work. Finally, it is interesting to notice the emphasis of a husband on the love for his children rather than for his wife. It is not common to show love and affection between spouses in public. However, people in Kiribati love their families and feel part of their extended families in an essential way. Children and parents can then appear externally as more important than wives. Good behaviour is more important than affection, and love is shown by appropriate behaviour and loyalty. However, the external picture would remain incomplete without a more in-depth view, which reveals the deep connectedness between spouses in private.

Figure 0.4: Beru island: Seaman’s father and his daughter.
Source: Maria Borovnik

Differing from other forms of labour circulation, seafarers never settle in one particular place but are on a constant global journey. Whether on merchant ships or working for fishery companies they are constantly on board one fishing vessel at any
fishing ground anywhere in the world. Network building or taking a family with them is impossible. This thesis will explore the nature and special circumstances of seafaring on international merchant and fishing vessels and how it affects the people and environment in Kiribati. The first part will analyse the structure that is created by employers from Germany, Japan, Korea or the United States and contract workers from Kiribati. It will define and give different emphases to seafaring within the framework of transnationalism and labour circulation. The main goal of this thesis, however, is to clarify the intersection of culture, society, economy and environment in Kiribati and to show how the process of seafarer labour circulation influences not only people’s economic situation but also values and behaviour, and how it leads to new cultural laws and meanings that also affect the land. While some quantitative material has been useful, the main tool is qualitative data. Altogether 136 taped interviews and 6 focus group discussions were undertaken to understand individual points of view. However, most of the information gained was in living amongst Kiribati and having had interesting, humorous and sometimes sad talks to friends, neighbours, and people, and also German officers, and expatriates from Australia, New Zealand, Japan, the UK, United States and China.

Chapters 1 to 3 of the thesis will establish the conceptual framework, setting and methodology. Chapter 1 works on a theoretical concept of seafarers as “multinational communities” circulating in “transversal” international spaces. The political, economic and geographic situation of Kiribati will be explained in the second chapter and emphasis here will lie on structural issues. Kiribati, lacking natural resources other than labour, is a country that depends highly on external economic input. Therefore migration or circulation of seafarers are a strong factor for the growth of the Kiribati economy. The importance of the foreign labour agency for Kiribati will be analysed and some challenges will be discussed.

Studies on international contract labour circulation have become increasingly important in the last decade. However, there is still a lack of qualitative research based on an individual and household level and on labour circulation in general, but especially on seafarer circulation where special circumstances are involved. As can be seen in the consequences in Chapters 4 to 6, my thesis will fill this important gap on three levels. Firstly, interviews with migrants as well as with some German seafarers
reveal how they deal not only with their work situation on board, safety on board, health and wellbeing on board, but also how they organise money and how they manage to maintain links to their wives and families at home. Secondly, interviews with wives and parents of seafarers give insights into the economic and social situation of families at home. Thirdly, the above mentioned perspectives together with interviews from key people from Ministries, agencies, companies, and others begin to build a picture of how much the culture and environment have changed since Kiribati seafarers became involved in worldwide employment. The three “consequences” chapters are structured by the three major themes: Health and Wellbeing; Money, Land and Internal Migration; and Culture and Environment.

The last and final part of the thesis will discuss how Kiribati seafarers handle their repeated change between cultural contexts. It will analyse how men adapt between values and expectations at home, shaped by the “Kiribati way”, and values abroad that are not only influenced by the “western” market economy, but also by a mix of nationalities onboard, and by contacts with different geographical regions and cultures while travelling. The final discussion will also link consequences, analysed in Chapters 4 to 6, to the national economy, and to discussions about globalisation and labour migration issues. Kiribati seafarers are facing enormous global competition, with labour agencies placing pressure on the government to keep wages to a minimum. The international structure of competition on the one hand and of labour rights and international maritime laws on the other hand, create a dynamic that reflects on Kiribati and the two major seafarer agencies in two ways; the peripheral location of Kiribati and the competitive pressures will become increasingly awkward for Kiribati employment prospects, while at the same time the excellent reputation of the Marine Training Centre and the Fisheries Training Centre should increase chances for employment of I-Kiribati overseas.
Chapter 1
Are seafarers migrants? – A conceptual and theoretical framework

Introduction

Research on seafarers has not been a common theme in migration studies. Yet, seafarers are a unique occupational group. The majority of them are men who are recruited by international agencies and work under contract on board ships of different kinds: merchant cargo and container ships, deep-sea fishing vessels or cruise ships. They travel, some for more than two years, either globally or regionally over varying distances. Seafarers work away from their homes and families and alternate between longer periods of times on board away from home, and shorter break periods. The seafarers of Kiribati work at most, if not all, of the world’s maritime regions. Their vessels are mainly German owned ships flagged under German International Register, so called “foreign flags”, or Japanese, Korean or United States fishing boats.

The following introduction to the framework places seafarer migration or circulation into the existing theoretical context of labour migration. It is my aim to find a place for this particular type of movement within the current established terms. To achieve this, I will first provide a brief overview of migration in the Pacific, then discuss the difference between migration and circulation, and finally discuss the concept of transnationalism. Seafarers undertake a particular type of circulation, and have established a special form of social identity. Hence locating them within theoretical migration and transnational concepts will contribute a new perspective.

My thesis on Kiribati shall provide some new insights into the definition of seafarers, and serve to illuminate the global employment dynamic and how labour circulation impacts nationally and internationally. However, it will contribute mainly to work on the consequences of labour migration, and of the repeated absence of men for longer periods of time on individuals and families left behind. To achieve this, I have divided current theoretical discussions into different sections. This chapter will first of all establish a general theoretical framework on the main themes: international contract labour migration, discourses on seafarers, and their global recruitment. Chapter two
will follow up with an introduction to the geographical and economic context of Kiribati and the establishment of the two main training schools on Tarawa island. Theories on the consequences of seafarers’ employment are manifold and very important in contextual theoretical discourses on the effects of international labour migration. They will therefore be discussed in detail, as the first part of each of the three “consequences” chapters, chapters four to six.

**Theoretical concepts of migration and labour circulation**

Globalisation effects, the internationalisation of capitalist industrial production, lower costs and increased speed and accessibility of international transportation and communication have made repetitive temporary migration, or circulation, much more common (Portes et al. 1999, Tsuda 1999). While classic labour migration research has focused on rather linear, *uni-directional* movements such as the development of temporary migration into long term migration or immigration (Bürkner 2000; Hugo 1997), research especially in the last decade has needed to capture the increased willingness of contract workers to circulate between home and employment. It has become easier, less risky and less costly to circulate in rather short terms between home and international contract labour jobs (Tsuda 1999, Bürkner 2000, Duany 2002). Particular labour markets in many nations have evolved, with low paying, low status jobs, characterised as “least desirable” and which tend to be disliked by national populations (Castles and Miller 1993, 188; Hugo 1999, 3). As a consequence, unattractive working conditions and low salaries have made contract labour for foreign workers possible. Castles and Miller (1993, 189) argue that to stay in business employers might have been forced to improve employee conditions, if foreign labour had not been available.

Circulation is beneficial for governments of both the sending and receiving countries. Social links between migrants and families at home seem more likely to be maintained when there is a regular returning, and a labour supplying country does not lose labour power permanently. Rotating labour instead of permanent migration might produce less social pressure as well as greater control on labour politics in

Modern technology, communication and transport facilities have had a particular impact on the Pacific island region. As Bedford (1997b, 4) referring to Macpherson (1996, 27) declares, the "tyranny of distance" that has caused the sea to be regarded "as something which separates communities of migrant origin and destination and to view these as two separate and distinctive worlds" has largely been overcome by modern technology, and has created "multi-local 'meta' societies and cultures" (see also Bedford, Ho and Lidgard 2000, 19). These transnational societies, which exist not only in the Pacific, "use complex social and technological networks to promote movement of ideas, commodities and people between places" (Bedford 1997b, 4).

The aim of the following sections is to clarify the main terms and theories in current research on contract labour migration, especially in the Pacific region. By sorting and focusing on relevant terms, two goals are established. The first is to discuss relevant concepts for Pacific island migration and to provide insights into the current development of contract labour migration in the Pacific. The second is to discuss the changing meanings of "migration". Migration movements have become more complex, as mentioned above. New concepts have tried to capture the complex dynamic of different simultaneously occurring movements which can be either linear, two-directional or circular, permanent or temporary. The emphasis of this chapter lies on circular movements. Critical to this discussion are the developments of two processes: immigration with incorporation into the new country, or integration of families, cultures and economies at home into a transnational network.

**Labour Migration in the Pacific**

Pacific island countries, lacking sufficient economic resources other than labour capital, have had a history of forced or voluntary forms of permanent or temporary international labour migration since 1830. The international migration system in the region has developed in three broad historical periods (Goss and Lindquist 2000, 388): the age of indenture, from about 1830 to 1940 (see more details for this period in Crocombe 2001, 63ff.); the period of government-sponsored guest workers to Europe and the Pacific Rim, from 1940 to 1970; and the current era of contract
labour, to the Middle East from 1970 onwards and to newly industrializing economics of Asia (see also Castles and Miller 1993, Skolnik and Boontinand 1999). These movements are based on permanent migrations or on temporary contract work.

There are several detailed discussions on Pacific island migration and development studies (for example Connell 1990, 1999; McCall and Connell 1993). Connell and Conway (2000) analyse Pacific migration and mobility in comparison to the Caribbean. Goss and Lindquist (2000) review Asian-Pacific labour migration from a post-colonial point of view. Bedford (1997a, 1997b) reviews in detail four different perspectives on Pacific island movements, that he calls 1) the population environment perspective, 2) MIRAB-economy and dependency perspective, 3) the "meta societies" and a new cultural perspective, and 4) the restructuring and globalisation perspective. After having reviewed more current literature, Bedford's concept seems to be the most appealing for this chapter. A similar setting is laid out by Rapaport (1999, 277f). The following section provides a brief summary of Bedford's concepts with some discussion added.

The population-environment perspective, which is called "demographic transition theory" by Rapaport (1999, 278), originated in the 1950s and 1960s and was based on quantitative analyses of people-environment relations (see also detailed information in Connell 1999, 38). The relationship between population pressure and emigration to overseas destinations has become more complex in the 1990s (see also Hugo 1996). There is a continuous, and in some cases urgent concern about high population growth in the Oceania region with implications for more access to Pacific Rim countries. Different parts of the region also have varied access rights to the metropolitan areas in the Pacific Rim. This ranges from free access to one or two countries to very limited external access (Crocombe 2001, 64-68). Countries in the Central Pacific are at risk from the negative effects of sea level rise (Bedford and Brookfield 1978, Hunt 1996). However, the most serious problem is caused by continued rapid population growth, due not only to high birth rates but also to internal rural to urban movements (Bedford 1997a, 10, Connell and Lea 1999, Rapaport 1999). Population pressure upon natural resources in an environment where these are rare and vulnerable, which is particularly the case in low-lying atolls, leads to environmental pressure and is called by Hugo, (1996, 110) environmental migration. One of the consequences for Pacific island
countries is population displacement. However the option for resettlement and population redistribution in the Pacific is limited (Hugo 1996, 119). Bedford (1997b) argues that resettlement attempts within the Pacific, to move people from densely settled areas have been quite difficult to put into practice (see also Bedford 1967).

Land resources and land ownership are very important issues. Population pressure increasingly affects land resources. The absenteeism of landowners, either through rural-urban migration or through international migration can have effects on property rights (Crocombe and Meleisea 1994, Ward and Kingdon 1995). Land is part of the identity of many Pacific islanders. New migration trends that include long-term migrants into contemporary Pacific island social systems have initiated new and less restrictive developments in land tenureship. However, there is the danger that land, especially in rural areas, can lie dormant or underused. Migration has a number of economic and social impacts on Pacific island communities, such as the impact of remittances, but also age-selectivity of migration, redistribution of work at home and in cash-earning activities and the adjustment of those left behind (Bedford 1997b, 11).

The MIRAB economies and dependency perspective incorporates two dominant concepts in Oceania migration and development research. The focus here lies on remittances and their influence on the transformation of island societies and economies. Remittances are a main theme in this thesis, therefore the theories regarding remittances will be handled in detail in Chapter 5. At this point, only a brief overview will be given of the main implications that theories of economic effects of migration have for Oceania, following Bedford (1997b) and Hayes (1991). The two economic perspectives are in contrast to each other. The MIRAB (acronym for Migration, Remittances, Aid, Bureaucracy) economy perspective regards the impact of remittances on the Pacific as fuelling internal consumption of imported goods in the island and raising expectations for higher material living standards (Bedford 1997b, 12; Bertram and Watters 1986; Bertram 1999). Regular flows of remittances, facilitated by migrants with access to Pacific Rim countries and to other international employment, together with aid from former colonial powers, and income from the state bureaucracy, is considered sufficient to keep Pacific island economies afloat. The main question that arises is whether this system would be sustainable long-term or whether remittances would decline over time. Rapaport (1999, 278) argues that
decision-making in this model is collective, based on and linked to kinship units, ensuring transnational links between migrating family members and those at home (see also Hooker and Varcoe 1999).

The sustainability of this system was criticised by Connell (1988), who promoted greater self-reliance rather than greater dependency of Pacific island states (see also the general critique from Hannerz 1997, 108). However, when Hayes (1991, 25) challenged the question of sustainability and the applicability of theories for Pacific island economies, he indirectly initiated a large amount of research on remittance flows, migrants’ remittance behaviour and the use of remittances. The results which are discussed in Chapter 5 have underlined the sustainability of the MIRAB concept. However, the concept does not diminish the structural differences that exist between Pacific Islands and industrialised countries, and which underlie the dependency theories of the Pacific. As expressed by Connell and Conway (2000, 57), “migration is primarily a response to real and perceived inequalities in socio-economic opportunities that are themselves a result of dependent and/or uneven sectoral and regional development, a function of the penetration of capitalism into these global peripheries”.

Remittance flows have been the main factor keeping migrants and migrant families in touch. The new “meta-societies” and “new” cultural perspective explore the transnational exchanges between families at home and migrants living in metropolitan countries in the Pacific rim. I will discuss migration and circulation theories in a separate section below and will emphasise transnationalism in particular because this concept has gained great attention in migration research and is of concern for many different regions. However, Bedford (1997b, 19) emphasises that the new attention in migration has started to focus on the multiple cultural “meanings” of international mobility of Pacific islanders, “meanings which go far beyond a simple conceptualisation of migration of cheap labour from island satellites to the metropoles on the rim”. There is more interest in the displacements, homelessness, alienation and the uncertainty of places, and on “multiple identities that Pacific Islanders have as ‘immigrants’, ‘return migrants’, ‘non-migrants’, ‘overseas-born’, ‘island-born’ – the labels usually ascribed by researchers to sub-groups of people living on either the island or rim countries of Oceania” (Bedford 1997b, 19). Discussions of the new
migration concepts, including gender concepts, identity concepts and concepts of return migration are the subject of the consequences-chapters in this thesis (see also Chapman 1991, Young 1998, Lawson 2000).

Restructuring and globalisation have transformed the global capitalist economy since the early 1970s and have had a strong impact on all Pacific Island countries. Current forms of contract labour migration have been established in the Pacific-Asian region during times of fast economic growth in industrial Asian countries, when labour deficiency and demand for workers have required gaps to be filled temporarily with low paid positions during labour-intensive periods (Inglis 1997, Hugo 1998). Goss and Lindquist (2000, 385) speak of a “new age of migration” in the Asia-Pacific region. Receiving companies benefit from increased labour forces entering countries on short term contracts. Temporary migrants cannot take advantage of social welfare support available to citizens (Gibson and Graham 1986; Goss and Lindquist 1995) and can easily be sent home when demand declines (Appleyard et al. 1992). Contract labour in a foreign country often places migrants in an inferior legal and political position. Control over migrants is part of the benefits for foreign employment agencies and governments, which regulate national socio-economic structures by restricting foreign labour rights (Hugo 1997; Goss and Lindquist 1995, Glick Schiller and Fouron 1999, Roberts et al. 1999, Joly 2000).

Significant wage differences between countries, decline of income, or lack of job opportunities for people from developing countries, such as the Pacific Islands, on the other hand, are major incentives for people to migrate. People move and take on international contracts when the economic situation is unsatisfactory, but tend to return home when their contract has finished, or when the socio-economic situation abroad has become unattractive (Duany, 2002). Telecommunication facilities as well as cheaper and faster transport have made this possible, although these facilities are often not available for Pacific Islanders. For example, during the 1990s all mainland-based North American airlines ceased their direct flights to island countries south of the equator, and international air transport in the Pacific is not cheap (Bedford 1997b, 26). Both international transport services and communication services are still heavily subsidised by Island governments. It is often cheaper to travel internationally than between Island countries. These are only some examples of the complications that
contract migrants from the Pacific have to face. With two-thirds of the world's working population living in Asia and the Pacific (Goss and Lindquist 2000, 386), Asian countries are in many ways competing in regard to labour supply with Pacific island countries (Crocombe 2001). Indonesia, the Philippines and Bangladesh have considerable labour power available, but the distance to their industrial neighbours is shorter, and political access can be attained more easily than from the Pacific. However, some of the countries in the Asia-Pacific region have developed from labour source to labour destination countries, or into a transition stage which includes both dynamics. Examples are Malaysia, Korea and Thailand but also Palau, Guam and the Marianas (Goss and Lindquist 2000, 387; see also Castles 1995, Hezel and Levin 1996, Tyner 1998, Stahl 1999, Alegado and Finin 2000). A very important factor for the employment of labour in a competitive market, such as the Asia-Pacific market, is the level of skills and education, and the level of language abilities people have achieved (Stahl 1999. Zhao 2000a). This is an area where Pacific Island countries have a chance to overcome transport and distance problems.

There have been different responses from Pacific Island people to globalisation impacts. Social reactions are maintained in new identities, such as the “Pan-Pacific identity” (Macpherson 1996, 27 in Bedford 1997b, 29) which distinguishes Pacific Islanders especially from Europeans in Pacific rim countries, but also emphasises cultural differences between Island cultures.

**Migration and Circulation**

The focus on contract labour migration has shifted from linear notions of immigration and a generalised use of the term “migrant” or even “immigrant” into more specific terms emphasising the circular and temporary dynamic of current processes (Pries 1996, 1998; Connell 1999; Bürkner 2000; Hampshire 2002; Parrado and Cerrutti 2003). These processes can be compared to a similar dynamic which was a focus on Pacific rural – urban migration research in the 1970s. Bedford (1973, 1981) distinguishes explicitly between “migration” as a permanent move to another place of residence and “circulation” as a “great variety of movements all having in common the lack of any declared intention of permanent or long-lasting change of residence” (Bedford 1981, 19, see also Connell 1999, 42). The terms “migration”, or “immigration” describing permanent processes, in contrast to “circulation” and other
terms describing temporary processes will be explained in this section with respect to international dynamics.

A decade ago, Massey et al. (1993) used the term migrant and migration not only for immigrants, but also for contract labour migration. The authors did not define a particular term for circulation. Instead, they emphasised that successful socio-economic migration will lead to repeated migration, a process they also called "cumulative causation" of migration (Massey et al. 1993, 451ff). Appleyard (1992: 253), however, orders migrants into six categories, wherein he distinguishes two categories of contract workers: "temporary contract workers" and "temporary professional transients". The difference between these is the level of skills and contracts, and the type of movement. Temporary contract workers are described as being on the lower range of skills and remain in the receiving country for defined periods of up to two years. Temporary professional transients on the other hand, are skilled and professional workers "who move from one country to another" and are usually employed by international or joint-venture companies. It is not explicitly pointed out by Appleyard that both could be repetitive and lead to circulation.

However, Jordan (1997) describes in his theory of migration systems that permanent movements and temporary movements are linked to the skill level of migrants. Low-skilled labour seems to move for shorter periods of time than high-skilled labour. Similarly Castles (1995, 510) defines contract labour migration as "temporary international movements of workers, which are organized and regulated by governments, employers or both". The author adds that contract labour migration is limited by duration and that the process must be organised by government or agencies, because otherwise it "would be seen as a spontaneous or illegal one". Again, emphasis is on a regulated backwards and forwards movement rather than on a movement that might have multiple dynamics. In fact, spontaneity in the movement is excluded by Castles. Koser and Salt (1997, 288) express their concerns about using the term migration for rather short-term assignments or commuter assignments of contract work. The authors prefer the term "movement" to "migration". However, the term movement, though a diplomatic alternative, is in my opinion too general. Seafarers for example move not only between home countries and ships, but they also move in many different directions across the oceans.
Reitz (2002: 1005f) uses the term "sojourner" for "immigrants" that move from one country to another seeking to improve economic opportunities. "Workers who experience a series of jobs or employment relocations may find that these more often involve movement across national borders, with no particular move necessarily perceived as a final destination". By putting the terms sojourning and immigrants together the author creates a paradox. The definition of sojourners is rather different in Model and Lin (2002), who suggest that sojourners are "tied migrants", who move to join family members. The term sojourner is mentioned only peripherally by Hugo (1997, 277), who expresses the concern of Asian governments that sojourners, meaning foreigners working in contracts mainly in the 3 D (dirty, difficult, dangerous) jobs category, will "settle permanently, and thereby upset the existing social, ethnic and political status quo". Connell and Conway (2000, 62) use the term "overseas sojourners" as equivalent to return migration. Most authors have used the term sojourners almost interchangeably with temporary migration or labour migration (see also Skeldon 1995, Goss and Lindquist 2000, Itzigsohn 2002, Oh 2002). I conclude that sojourning is rather a descriptive term covering the temporality of linear forms of migration. Though it includes an aspect of backwards and forwards movements, the circular movement of regular returning and perpetuating labour migration is not expressed by it. I conclude therefore that the term is not entirely useful for the movements of seafarers.

Though economic factors might have initiated migration (Roberts et al. 1999, Glick Schiller and Fouron 1999, Tsuda 1999), it is possible that socio-cultural factors develop subsequently and continue to sustain the migrant flow independently from economic factors (Tsuda 1999: 22). This can be the case when the socio-economic status of returning migrants has increased. Contract labour migration then not only has a repeating effect, which develops into circulation, but also a stimulating and self-perpetuating effect, when other members of communities, particularly younger people at home begin to work abroad (Osteria 1997; Massey 1989, Appleyard 1992, Massey et al. 1993,). When people, even without economic pressure, begin to see multiple opportunities in labour migration, then it is not driven only by economic factors. Social networks in the country of work can provide opportunities to explore new cultures and areas, language abilities and socio-economic status can rise with
increased mobility (Connell 1988, Massey 1989, Appleyard 1992, Massey et al. 1993, Osteria 1997, Tsuda 1999, Hampshire 2002). These, then, have the capability to develop into a social-economic migration network (Goss and Lindquist 2000), where families maintain a household at home but send family members into labour migration to improve household incomes (Roberts et al. 1999, 242; Hooker and Varcoe 1999).

Circulation as a free movement of labour between a labour supplying and labour receiving country, as distinct from permanent migration, does not necessarily lead to a loss of human capital, but rather to a widening of the community’s level of education, and occupational and language skills. Duany (2002, 358) argues that circulation, as a form of physical and social displacement, is one possible form of mobile livelihood practices. Duany (2002, 357) referring to Chapman and Prothero (1983, 1985) distinguishes and defines circulation as “a movement that does not alter the long-term distribution of people”. Population movement in this standard definition of circulation ultimately “terminates in the community in which it originated” (Duany 2002, 359). This is essentially different from immigration, where there is a risk that migration functions as a selective process that will draw well-educated, skilled, productive and highly motivated people away from supplying communities (Massey et al. 1993, 453), and that can lead to a social-economic redistribution and problems in immigrant countries. Chapman (1991, 267) questions the labels of emigration or circulation, especially for people in the Pacific, because these terms reduce the dynamic and complex social process of movements “to a mechanical sequence of discrete events, abstracted from the broader structural contexts of environment, history, culture, society, economy, and polity”.

Because of the complex circuit and moves in often multiple directions, Duany (2002, 359) prefers to use the paradoxical term “circular migration” for his study on Puerto Ricans, where movements are facilitated by free trade agreements between the US and the island, and by the long history of forced migration. The term circular migration is differentiated from linear forms of migration, such as permanent migration, where people move from one place to another, and also from constant border crossing in both directions, which he also calls “recycling” or “swallow” migration, in which people move regularly and frequently over sustained periods of time (Duany 2002, 357).
The explanation Duany gives in regard to the particular dynamic between Puerto Ricans and the United States is that a persistent pattern of economic, political and social relationships (Roberts et al. 1999, 242) are one influence for migration patterns. Another influence is a history of colonial connections or other historical connections between two countries which can also be a reason for the establishment of what he calls “circular migration”. Tsuda (1999) observes the same process between Brazilian-Japanese migrants to Japan. The current circulating streams of migrants from Brazil to Japan originated in former migration from Japan to Brazil.

The Pacific Islands are historically linked with European and Asian countries, and the USA. Colonisation and Asian migration into the Pacific in earlier times nowadays facilitates some of the contract labour outgoing from the Pacific into Asian and Pacific Rim countries (Crocombe 2001, 51ff; Chapman 1991, 265; Rapaport 1999, 174). Some countries, such as The Federal States of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands, similarly to Puerto Ricans, have had free access to the USA since 1986, with Palau since 1994. Cook Islands, Niue, Samoa and Tokelau have privileged access to New Zealand and Australia (Crocombe 2001, 65). Crocombe (2001, 66) describes movements from the Pacific to Pacific Rim countries basically as permanent movements and out-migrations, especially when they concern those countries with special visa agreements as mentioned above. Niue with currently 92 per cent of its people living in New Zealand, and twice as many Cook Islanders now living in New Zealand as in their homeland, are examples of the consequences of Pacific immigrations which leave land and villages deserted (Crocombe 2001, 66, Bedford, Ho and Lidgard 2000, 19).

There are also “circular migration” movement dynamics recognised between Pacific island countries and “satellite communities” in the Pacific Rim (Hayes 1991, 3), such as New Zealand, Australia, and the United States. People from Samoa, Tonga, Tokelau, and the Cook Islands for example have continued to move between countries and have maintained strong links to their home countries. Links to home countries are maintained by flows of reciprocal remittances and goods, family members from home, ideas and information (Hooker and Varcoe 1999, Goss and Lindquist 2000). However, links are also maintained by not giving up inherited rights to access to land.
Though Kiribati and Tuvalu have special visa waiver agreements, there is limited movement from Tuvaluans and I-Kiribati to New Zealand, which is mainly caused by the irregular air transport connections and high costs (Bedford, Ho and Lidgard 2000, 21).

Migrant connections to homelands were recognised in earlier observations on migration. However, the focus then was on how migrants adapt themselves to, or are socially excluded from, their place of immigration (Vertovec 2001, 574). The current focus is on more levels of the migration process, including the dynamic of movements between nation states, which has become less well contained and is instead more fluid. Bedford (1997a) suggests that nation states are no longer important for defining resident rights. Glick Schiller and Fouron (1999) and Roberts et al. (1999) explain that now that large groups of migrants have settled permanently, holding two nationalities, the concept of nation states needs to be questioned (see also Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc 1995; Pries 1996, Tesfahuney 1997, Lawson 2000). "Mobile livelihood" as the process is called by Duany (2002: 358) means "the spatial extension of people’s means of subsistence across various local, regional, and national settings". Mobile livelihoods have created dual or multiple residences that connect circular migrants with support from work, family and the state, and which create a permeable border zone between areas (Portes 1999). Success depends on preserving their original culture rather than on abandoning culture and language as was expected by classical immigration processes. Young (1998) argues that movement as a complex process in itself is central to the sense and construction of place and identity of Oceanic people, and that relationships can be enhanced by it. In contrast to this, Skeldon (1995, 534) argues that bi-locality is achieved in some cases by male migrants placing so called "astronaut" wives and "parachute" children in the country of destination while men return home for different lengths of time. The author explains that this "risk-minimization strategy", which occurs mostly with wealthier groups of migrants, can cause powerful and influential "rootless" populations, without clear national identities. However, Chapman (1991, 289) concludes that both "circulation" and "migration" are integral parts of "a broader, regional system of mobility connecting the individuals, the families, and the wider communities" of different political entities. The author suggests that it would be more appropriate to
integrate and accept the interchange and interaction between Pacific Island people instead of analysing and separating movements into a “dualistic logic”.

Modern Polynesian “dual-identities” are facilitated by their skill in adapting to metropolitan societies and at the same time staying rooted “in the neotraditional culture of the home society” (Hayes 1991, 9). As Hayes points out, there are similarities between Atlantic-Caribbean microstates and those of the Pacific (see also Connell and Conway 2000). Both have developed a transnational system, with a flow of people, money and goods that links them to geographically or historically connected metropolitan countries. Bedford (1997a, 45) labels the Pacific a region of transnational societies which have experienced extended international migration with cultural, economic and social ties between the islands and the metropolitan countries of the Pacific rim. Bedford’s suggestion is to regard the Pacific as a region that is “interconnected” rather than “scattered” throughout the ocean (referring to Hau’ofa 1993), but also internationally connected. Bedford states that “rather than thinking in terms of “sources and destinations”, Hau’ofa, amongst others, argues that it is better to think in terms of transnational social and economic relationships at family levels, which in some respects transcend the national state as the primary socio-economic grouping of peoples” (Bedford 1997a, 49; see also Chapman 1991, Young 1998).

Transnational relationships will be discussed in detail in the following section, since I regard the debate on this relatively new concept as very important for the situation of seafarers and their families at home. The usefulness of this concept however is limited and this will be the focus of discussions in the second section of this chapter.

**Transnationalism**

Transnational relationships between two countries are caused initially by labour migration, especially the new international trend in the 1980s (Pries 1996). The process has resulted in some permanent migration with the consequence of transnational migration networks. These complex networks are shaped by social spaces and are not just a process of leaving one country and arriving in another one (Pries 1996, 460). Pries (1998, 136) states that transnational social spaces are the hybrid outcome of elements of identity and social structure of the “pluri-local” sending and destiny regions of migration.
Contract migration into metropolitan countries and “global cities” allows spouses and sometimes families to live together during overseas employment (Sassen 1998, Pries 1996). More people follow initial migrants and live in a growing community of foreign workers. The transnational migration network then develops into a complex and dynamic system including a range of people who settle permanently, and others circulating between places (Roberts et al. 1999, Bürkner 2000, Connell and Conway 2000, Duany 2002). The network can be highly institutionalised and controlled by recruitment agencies or governments (Pries 1996, 1998; Goss and Lindquist 1995, 2000). The institutionalising process, partly facilitated by fast and accessible communication facilities such as the internet (Tyner 1998), though not a key theme of this chapter, is an important aspect with regards to the new development in international labour movements. It is one example of the borderless dimension of the new economy and the complex dynamics of migration that have developed along with it.

The term transnationalism was created in an attempt to define those very complex dynamics which have developed alongside globalisation processes (Bürkner 2000). Transnational political, economic, social and cultural processes extend beyond nations but are practised in a particular given set of states by individuals. Therefore, these movements of people, though they are linked to global flows of economic restructuring, new technology, goods and ideas, are transnational but not global (Glick Schiller and Fouron 1999, 344). There are contrasting understandings of the function of transnationalism. Vertovec (2001, 576) warns that the term has become “over-used” and the range of migration phenomena has become too wide to describe transnationalism: from migrant communities to all migrants, from ethnic diaspora to all travellers and tourists. However, Meijering and van Hoven (2003, 175) come to the conclusion that transnational communities, though having been associated with more permanent migrant groups, have more recently been observed as groups that are more mobile and changing.

Transnationalism is defined by Duany (2002, 357) as the “establishment of frequent and intense social, economic, political, and cultural links between two or more countries”. Portes defines transnational communities in more detail (1997, 812) as
"dense networks across political borders created by immigrants in their quest for economic advancement and social recognition. Through these networks, an increasing number of people are able to live dual lives. Participants are often bilingual, move easily between different cultures, frequently maintain homes in two countries, and pursue economic, political and cultural interests that require their presence in both". Hayes (1991, 9) defines transnationalism as "communities consisting of two or more population 'nodes' separated by large distances while apparently maintaining social relations of rights and obligations as would be operative in a previously geographically bounded system”. Meijering and van Hoven (2003, 174f.) refer to transnational social spaces based on negotiations between attachments to different places, which are based on the perceptions of these places.

These definitions, which are only examples amongst others (see eg. Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc 1995, Glick Schiller and Fouron 1999, Portes 1999, Vertovec 1999, Faist 2000, Itzigsohn 2002, Yeoh et al. 2003), show that currently the concept of transnationality lacks a clear defined framework and is a discourse rather than a complete theory (Yeoh et al. 2003). Hayes’ and Duany’s definitions include indirectly the long-term or historical dimension in transnational links, which are not included in Portes. The frequency of movements is included in Duany’s definition but not in Portes’ and Hayes’. Also Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc (1995), Glick Schiller and Fouron (1999, 344), Vertovec (2001, 576), and Itzigsohn (2002) in contrast to Duany (2002) and Meijering and van Hoven (2003) regard transnationalism more as a permanent, or even an immigration process. However, Portes et al. (1999, 225) indicate that the “regularity” of movements makes the concept of transnationalism distinct from other migration concepts. Hayes emphasises the “rights and obligations” communities bear, since these are a major part of Pacific island cultures.

Portes et al. (1999, 219) conclude that since there are many inadequacies in using the term transnationalism, it must fulfil at least three important guidelines to be accepted as useful: a significant proportion of persons must be involved, the process must prove to be resilient over time, and the activities must not already be captured by any pre-existing concept. The authors add that “the more distant the nation of origin is the less dense the set of transnational enterprises” (Portes et al. 1999, 224). Bedford
(1997a, 1997b) and Vertovec (2001) indicate that there are consequences in the form of changing identities and the emergence of sub-cultures that occur with long-distance transnational lifestyles. Both authors agree that these changing identities are empowering and that they can function as a mode of expressing their nationality or even be used as a form of resistance (see also Portes et al. 1999, Goss and Lindquist 2000, Lawson 2000). These debates lead into concepts of the meaning of migration and also into discourses on the emergence of transnational cultures and identities in contrast to incorporation or assimilation into a new nation (Faist 2000, Lawson 2000, Itzigsohn 2002). Lawson (2000) argues that assimilation and marginalisation are experiences that happen simultaneously. Migrants desire modernity, but also experience exclusion and alienation. “We can also pose questions about hybrid migrant subjectivities, drawing on the idea that migrancy creates especially fluid forms of subject position, a ‘state of between-ness’…” (Lawson 2000, 174). Transnational research not only provides ideas on migrant subjectivity and processes of belonging and alienation, especially of postcolonial migrants who cross borders into “western” countries. It also examines the places through which migrant identities are formed and the complex experiences of processes of inclusion and marginalisation, and on the other side, their experiences of global modernization, urban progress and national belonging (Lawson 2000, 176).

There is a need, therefore, for much further detailed research that includes the perspective of individual perceptions and perspectives of identity, differences and diversity. The following chapter section will discuss the usefulness of the concept of transnationalism in regard to the seafarer situation.

**Summary**

Research in the last twenty years has illuminated two main developments that derive from an initial fixed contract labour migration. The development into long-term stays or immigration with economic and social consequences for both the origin and immigrant country has continued to be a main concern for labour politics, even though governments have restricted this process. However, the focus of research has changed from a one-directional, bi-polar process into a process of different circular movements and the development of transnational spaces and mobile livelihoods with transnational communities, where both permanent migration and circular forms of
migration are placed. There are several reasons for this development: firstly, governments and international companies gain economically, especially from unskilled temporary migrants. They have more control over the migration process, legislation and work regulations and migrants themselves. Secondly, migrants and their families have begun to build their own social-economic security network by using transnational spaces as new identities. And thirdly, the multi-dynamic process of circulation and mobile livelihoods is made possible and facilitated by historical connections and globalisation processes. Portes (et al. 1999, 228) summarise this process as follows: “whereas, previously, economic success and social status depended exclusively on rapid acculturation and entrance into mainstream circles of the host society, at present they depend (at least for some) on cultivating strong social networks across national borders”.

_Situating seafarers: “there is his home, there lies his business”_

The space seafarers live in during their time of contract work is narrow, but multinational; a dynamic space, rather than a place defined by clear boundaries. Though transnational spaces seem to have a borderless dimension, the concept can only be partly applied. Seafarers have to be defined more particularly by understanding the multiple dimensions in which they are living, and the circular dynamics by which they are influenced. Though theories on labour migration and circulation have become popular, seafarers seem to have been placed rather vaguely amongst the terms that are used in recent discourses. The following discussion aims to contribute to close this gap, through analysing current concepts and suggesting a suitable conceptual location for seafarers.

The global dynamics of recruitment and labour conditions of seafarers are a consequence of the economic pressure that forces shipping companies to rapidly rationalise. The rationalisation has led not only to better and faster technical equipment, such as the rise of container shipping and new satellite communication facilities on ships, but also to a process of “out-flagging” into new national agreements with countries that have less restrictive workers’ rights and conditions than the original shipping owner nations have to offer. The employment of cheap
labour from regions such as Southeast-Asia, Eastern Europe, the Pacific and more recently China and Latin American countries, is part of this process.

A definition for seafarers is based on the fact that they are both contract workers being placed into a restructuring global world economy, and social beings working in a “foreign-flagged” space that has not only unconfined boundaries, but can also be described as a multi-national-mini-community. Matters of identity and transnationality in terms of being socially, economically and mentally linked to a local region, while being physically apart from it, will have to be incorporated into a definition of seafarers.

The following section is structured into three parts. The image of seafarers and their situation in a maritime culture as opposed to a soil culture will introduce the theme. The second part will place seafarers in a global context. The recruitment of “cheap labour”, working conditions, and labour rights are the focus of this section. My goal in the third part is to bring these conditions together with the individuals acting as social beings. I will then discuss how seafarers can be placed in discourses on transnational communities, to provide a working definition for seafarers that would fit the fact that they are working abroad as international, global ‘travellers’ with a regional/local identity.

**Seafarers’ “maritime culture”**

The image of seafarers created over time is quite ambiguous. There is the romantic image of the sailor who lives isolated in the mysterious realm of the sea, un-bound from the land, travelling free and unattached. On the other hand there is the idea that “the isolated ‘wooden world’ of the deep-sea vessel results in a distinct maritime culture based on the shared experience of danger, confined living spaces, and an all-male community” (Land 2002, 412, referring to Rediker 1987). Included in this picture is the image of the stereotypical anti-authoritarian sailor with egalitarian values speaking a “sea-jargon” language filled with swearing and cursing, based on the idea of “pirates”, in contrast to those leading a respectable life living on land. Even more isolated are fishers. The author Land (2002) refers to Melville’s (1851) *Moby Dick*, arguing that fishers (here whalers), as the ultimate seafarers, have almost become “extraterrestrial” beings:
"...he alone resides and riots on the sea... There is his home; there lies his business... he lives on the sea, as prairie cocks in the prairie; he rides among the waves, he climbs them as chamois hunters climb the Alps. For years he knows not the land; so that when he comes to it at last, it smells like another world, more strangely than the moon would to an Earthman (Melville 1851, Chapter XIV quoted in Land 2002, 412)

Seafarers are often stigmatised. To many on the shore, sailors appear marginal, unworthy or even disloyal. Seafarers used to be marginalised as “others”, a group of people with different values from those living on land. This “othering” is grounded in the perception of the “nation” as being connected with “the idea of patriots as sons of the soil” (Land 2002, 415), linking people emotionally to the physical environment of a place or territory (Gustafson 2001, 670). Though it has been widely recognised that family and kinship bonds are very important to seafarers, and to support to these bonds are often primary reasons to work onboard (Lane 2001b, Kahveci 2002, 2000, Thomas 2002), their social and regional identity is tightly connected with the particular place on shore to which they “belong” (Zhao 2002, 2001, 2000b; Gilroy 1993, Land 2002). Seafarers are often portrayed as “irresponsible rovers with no commitment to family, home town, or fatherland” (Land 2002, 415). In reality, maritime life and labour on ships are rather multifaceted and sailors remain bound in complex ways to families and communities of their region of origin. Even deep-sea voyagers used to spend great amounts of time on shore, though not always at home. This has changed with the process of globalisation, as will be seen later. However, it is questionable, as Land suggests, if a “free standing” “maritime culture” exists at all. “It would be more helpful to talk about maritime subcultures, emphatically in the plural, each bound to and intersecting with the peculiar circumstances of different trades, localities and nationalities” (Land 2002, 416). Castles (1999, 7) argues that the “other” of the nation state is generally placed on migrants, who “could undermine myths of cultural homogeneity and national identity”.

One of the consequences of this process of “othering” can be that seafarers begin to develop a communal identity over time (Richardson and Jensen 2003, 13). People tend to “cluster in community organisations” rather than being individualised or socially atomised. Richardson and Jensen stress that a consequence is the rise in the importance of national states with their clear boundaries during the process of a
denationalising and globalising world (see also Featherstone 1993). The construction of identity where places have manifested boundaries and national identities, is a process that is enhanced by mobility. Gustafson (2001, 668f) argues that mobility can be associated with “uprooted individuals” lacking social integration. However, there is an increasing notion that links mobility with open-mindedness and with being rich and powerful, in contrast to place attachment, local or national identity, which can also be interpreted as being restricted, poor and powerless. Gustafson states that the notions of “roots”, or place attachment, and “routes”, or mobility, depend much on the perception of people as either contradictive elements, as described above, or as complements, where mobility confirms the preference and attachment to particular places (see also Clifford 1997). This thinking can be transferred to seafarers, who while travelling without settling have established strong identities with their local and national roots. It will be discussed later how the different environment of seafarers has established a new travelling community, which is caused by the denationalised spaces that are constructed by globalising processes.

The rise of nationalism reinforces the process of “othering”. It was a process which occurred at the end of the eighteenth century, in the aftermath of slavery at a time when, a quarter of the British navy was composed of Africans. Gilroy (1993, 3) calls the ideas of national belonging and the sense of ethnic difference “cultural insiderism”, which distinguishes people from one another and “at the same time acquires an incontestable priority over all other dimensions of their social and historical experience, cultures, and identities”. Stigmatising is built on this insidership and, as Colley (1992, 309) states, stigma, based on ethnicity or class could make “loyal members” of a nation make feel elevated. As a consequence, the institution of a “brotherhood of shipmates” in “the age of nationalism”, foreign nationalities and “races” (Gilroy 1993, 6), tended at times to exclude foreign seafarers and set them up as scapegoats “to bear the stigma and suspicion that might otherwise attach to all seafarers” (Land 2002, 416).

As a result, as Gilroy puts it, sailors are “crisscrossing” or “moving to and fro between nations, crossing borders in modern machines that were themselves micro-systems of linguistic and political hybridity” (1993, 12). Foucault (1984 in 1994, 184f.) labels “the ship”
a piece of floating space, a placeless place, that lives by its own devices, that is self-enclosed and at the same time, delivered over to the boundless expanse of the ocean, and that goes from port to port, from watch to watch, from brothel to brothel, all the way to the colonies in search of the most precious treasures that lie waiting in their gardens, you see why for our civilization from the sixteenth century up to our time, the ship has been at the same time not only the greatest instrument of economic development, of course ..., but the greatest reservoir of imagination. The sailing vessel is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations without ships the dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police that of the corsairs.

As a heterotopia, a ship is “outside all places, although they are actually localizable”, which is a concept linked to the utopian concept of unreality, with the difference that the ship as heterotopia would be both unreal and real (Foucault 1984 in 1994, 178). Heterotopia are defined by Hetherington (1997, viii) as “spaces of alternate ordering”. Hetherington explains that “[h]eterotopia organize a bit of the social world in a way different to that which surrounds them. That alternate ordering marks them out as Other and allows them to be seen as an example of an alternative way of doing things”. Foucault (1984 in 1994) has used the ship as a symbol of a dreamed space rather than a high technological machine, as Gilroy (1993) did. When ships are regarded in this sense, they are idealised and constructed as “other” spaces, again in contrast to soil and nation which might then be “real” spaces, and idealised as a “reservoir of imagination” as quoted above.

For Gilbert, the Atlantic “ship” is a symbol for modernity, constituting relationships with outsiders looking for western civilisation while struggling for emancipation, autonomy, and citizen-ship (Gilroy 1993, 16,17). The ship, often called “she”, bears an almost “female” aspect in contrast to the constructed male aspect of “fatherland”, which as Gilroy points out has become an institution constructed to combine the important identities of nationality, citizenship and masculinity. Gilroy derives his concept from contrasting ideas of identity based on roots and rootedness in modern African cultures rather than on “a process of movement and mediation that is more appropriately approached via the homonym routes” (Gilroy 1993, 19). This idea is applicable to Pacific Island cultures with their deep rootedness in a history of ancestor systems, but I would add that in some Pacific Island cultures “routes”, such as circular movements, are also identity building and reconfirming elements. “Those who live in the islands celebrate both rootedness and local travel and movement. Those who have
followed routes beyond the ocean still celebrate their roots back home” (Jolly 2001, 425, see also Diaz and Kauanui 2001).

However, though Gilroy’s book *The Black Atlantic* has brought up so many useful and comparable ideas, I would like to note that the Atlantic has always been regarded as a rough, wild and dangerous ocean, a sea with grand and challenging wave movements that are in contrast to the calm and peaceful “Pacific” Ocean. The Pacific was named after the Latin word for peace as in contrast to the rougher Atlantic Ocean. In most of the historical literature, such as those works mentioned in Land (2002), Linebaugh and Rediker (2000), and in Gilroy’s book, the ideas, identities and even stereotypes of seafarers have been based on the Atlantic Ocean, while a large number of today’s seafarers, though they might be working at places on the Atlantic Ocean, are now recruited from Southeast Asia, Asia and the Pacific Islands. Secondly, though it is not a prime subject of this thesis, it must be mentioned that there is an increasing number of women seafarers working especially in the new rapidly developing cruise-ship industry (Zhao 2002, 2001b).

The following parts of this section link the employment of seafarers to the mechanisms of globalisation, shipping industry and business. I aim to look at the employment of seafarers in regard to a system of dynamics linked to a complex global development. This system, though a great deal driven by private investments can only be influenced on the international or national level, because the investments themselves include a range of different national and international agreements (see ILO 2000).

Seafarers have recently gained a place in migration research concepts, being mainly regarded as vulnerable objects of labour exploitation, and symbols of repression, especially when they are recruited for cheap contracts (see Chapman 1992). The main research centre in Cardiff, the Seafarers International Research Centre (SIRC), comprises a team with different social science and maritime backgrounds. The SIRC works on gaining insights into the particular fields of seafarers that have been rather neglected in research so far, including health and welfare issues, identity and social relationships, recruitment and working conditions (SIRC 2000). One of the SIRC contributions was to provide a report relating seafarers’ activities to the International
Labour Organisation, as a basis for decision-making (ILO 2000, 93). The positive outlook of SIRC on seafarers is that they are regarded as pioneers in global development, living literally as “global villagers” (Wu 2002) or “global citizens” (Lane 1999b) while travelling in a multi-national space, yet remaining rooted in their own culture.

**Seafarers working in a global industry**

The development of the shipping industry, especially in the 1970s and more rapidly in the 1980s and 1990s (Lane 1999b), is a dramatic example of globalisation processes. The global economic dynamic required fast and efficient rationalisation in the shipping sector which has been conducted at all levels of the industry. Examples include merging ownerships, the development of high-speed shipping techniques and high capacity container shipping. Geographical adjustments have also occurred in the form of building large modern ports in remote areas, far away from urban centres. Other elements are the recruitment of cheap international labour on international registers, or on flag of convenience contracts with nations who offered special agreements including tax and social welfare (see in detail ILO 2000). Since the 1950s the most important technical development in cargo utilization was containerization (ILO 2000, 12; see also Johnsson 1996, Li and Wonham 1999). At the same time the first shipping owners (American fleets in the 1950s) began using the Liberian flag. The practice of allowing foreign shipowners to register vessels under one’s flag, which is then called “Flag of Convenience” has since grown. These foreign flag registers have been termed offshore, secondary, second or international (ILO 2000, 17).

In summary, the characteristics and advantages of offshore registers are: control of a merchant vessel by a non-citizen; easy registration access; low taxes on the income from ships; usually low annual fees based on tonnage made; guarantees that future freedom from taxation may be given. Manning of ships by non-nationals is freely permitted, and the country of registry has no power to impose any government or international regulations, nor has the country (which is usually a country of small power) the power to control the companies themselves. This creates tax havens for shipowners.
Another strategy is moving management abroad, for example, from Germany to Cyprus. The result of this survival strategy is that ship managers in the 1990s became centred in “both the old and new metropoles of world shipping: in Europe – Hamburg, Glasgow, the Isle of Man, Geneva, Piraeus and Cyprus; in the United States – in and around New York; in Asia – Hongkong, China Singapore and Kuala Lumpur” (ILO 2000, 14). Gross tonnage percentage in open (international) registers climbed from 44.5 per cent in 1989 to 64 per cent in 1999. The number of vessels registered increased from 19.5 percent of the world fleet in 1989 to 28.7 per cent in 1999 (ILO 2000, 20). The most powerful international registers over time are the Panama and Liberian flags (UP 2001). However, standards of these large international businesses have grown, and shipowners are continually searching for cheaper open registers (such as Cambodia and Belize) to remain competitive (Winchester 2001, 4).

Hence, the contemporary shipping industry is staffed with multinational crews in international waters under multinational management but outside national boundaries (Sampson 2003). Sampson describes modern ships as ‘hyperspaces’ (2003, 259). Seafarers are recruited worldwide by using formal and informal recruiting mechanisms. They live together in multinational cargo (or fishing) ship communities and may have developed a transnational hybrid identity (Vertovec 1999, 451), or even cosmopolitan characteristics when moving between these modern deterritorialised, isolated hyperspaces, across international waters and shores, and home (Sampson 2003, 255).

There are many similarities to international contract workers, working in rather isolated places for international joint venture companies. Contracts in many Asian countries for example involve personal control over contract workers. This includes a hierarchical system that puts international workers on the bottom ranks, in respect to the duration of contracts, the restricted freedom of leisure time and restrictions in regards to communicating with families at home (Firdausy 1997, Yeoh and Huang 1998, Goss and Lindquist 2000). Similar observations were made by Gibson and Graham (1986) with Filipino workers in Middle East construction contracts, where restrictions were based on Islamic codes of conduct and included great control over personal decision making, leisure time activities and general behaviour. Contract work especially in the mining industry (Sweetman 1995), can be directly compared
with the restricted space seafarers work in. International contract miners generally live apart from their families, work some distance from a metropolitan or urban area, are accommodated in workers’ villages and are segregated and physically restricted in their activities. As already discussed above, these types of contracts give governments and international employers control over workers and limit the potential for conflicts and political problems.

The main difference between general contracts and seafarer contracts is that ships are contained entities with special national agreements: they are “deterritorialised” (Sampson 2003). Seafarers cannot leave the ship when they have finished work, but stay and share this situation with members of their crew, which is often of mixed nationality (Zhao 2002). Most merchant and fishing vessels are male only crews, which are structured hierarchically, determined by nationality, age, education (and gender on cruise ships). The hierarchical structure is also expressed in a dual structure of crew ratings and officers. Officers are usually composed from “western” high-wage countries and crews are recruited from “developing” labour supplying low-wage countries. Goss and Lindquist (2000, 386) state that contemporary contract labour migration is “remarkably similar to historical forms of indenture, and patterns of movement can only be explained as the effect of political economic relationships and cultural compatibility, themselves often a legacy of migrations in the past”.

The effects of global technological development and faster ship movements on container ships with greater capacities have dramatic consequences for working conditions of seafarers. While a couple of decades ago turnaround time in ports was reasonably lengthy and seafarers could relax and establish land based links (Land 2002), these have shortened drastically and seagoing hours and days have increased. Together with a decrease in staffing on many vessels, the increase in stress levels (Bloor 2000, McNamarra et al. 2000, Sampson 2000) causes concern for the health of both officers and crews of vessels (as will be discussed in Chapter 4).

The geographically remote location of modern container ports also has an effect on working conditions for seafarers: remote ports have fewer facilities needed by seafarers to relax properly, to equip themselves for times on board and to contact families at home (Lane 2001a). The length of time seafarers spend on board, a cost-
saving measure for shipping companies, can increase to more than 24 months on some international registers, which causes distress to the seafarers and their families, especially the children of seafarers, and can sometimes break up marriages (Kahveci 2002, 2000).

“Fracturing the link between national training and employment in national fleets was essential for the construction of a global labour market” (Lane 1999a, 24). International agencies such as Seafarer Unions, the ILO and the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) have started to use international control on ship quality and manning of ships. Lane (1999a, 24) speaks of a “labour market fluidity”, where shipping managers constantly monitor and accept or discard sources of labour supply. One of the measures is a minimum level of education and safety qualification. Those nations that have agreed on these international standards do not allow vessels to unload in ports of their territory unless these requirements are fulfilled.

The global competition and over-supply of cheap maritime labour has forced wages down. Eighteen percent of world wide employed seafarers work for less than US$500 per month. Sixty per cent of seafarers earn less than US$1,300 (ILO 2000, 59 table 3.1). Low skills, transport costs and administration costs for seafarers can be restricting elements for the employment of seafarers. However, as the example of China shows, some seafarers are willing to work for wages below a benchmark, for the sake of employment, even when their education and skill level is high (Zhao 2000a).

In conclusion, the globalisation process in the shipping industry has consequences in industry rationalisation by using high technology and cheap international labour. This process has caused a “vicious dynamic” by using less restricted international registers together with the cheap labour available which has resulted in a lowering of the quality of life for many people (ILO 2000). However, there are also examples of high standards, based on what Lane (1999a) calls “values of pride in craft”, where shipping companies blend technical skill and sufficient mastery of the social structures. Lane (1999a, 23) states:

It was precisely the prevalence of this culture that made the reputation of the ships' crews of such companies as Blue Funnel, Lauritzen,
Wilhelmsen, Hamburg Sued, Messageries Maritiems, NYK. These and other directly comparable companies self-consciously set out to establish and sustain both procedures and a style designed to approach the highest standards of professional seamanship among all crew members regardless of rank and nationality.

Lane argues that though many nations provide excellent technical training capable of improving the competence of their seafarers, the difference is that those colleges were “organically linked” to shipboard societies, and hence sustained “an occupational culture” saturated with the “mundane rituals and symbols” of pride in craft (Lane 1999a, 24). In other words, the new development has made the occupation as seafarers a different, “shallow”, one, where the old “nation based” identities have dissolved and made way for exploitative techniques.

**Seafarers at the “edges” of transnationalism**

As a result of deregulation processes and structural changes of the shipping industry, “there are at any one time approximately one million seafarers aboard ships, operating in international ports and waters, who live and work in communities which are multinational and which exist beyond national boundaries” (Sampson 2003, 260). The lack of ethnic identity of a ship, and the context of seafarers living in a confined space, with people of different nationalities who have to interact socially, creates an unusual reality, which is discussed by Yeoh (et al. 2003) and Sampson (2003) as the “edges” of transnational space. Seafarers have little choice about the people they live with. Hierarchically organised, there are boundaries between officers and crew, who often occupy different working, communal and recreation areas. Officers and ratings are often recruited from different countries. Officers are often of European or US origin, while crew ratings are from countries such as Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe or the Pacific (Zhao 2002, 2001). English is expected to be used as a common language, which causes communication difficulties, but has the effect of diminishing distances between different nationalities who can use English as a symbol of an occupational-culture (Sampson 2003, 266). Conversations between mixed nationalities are related according to Sampson’s study “around love and marriage, sex and family life” (Sampson 2003, 267), which are obviously “international subjects”. The author found that seafarers in contrast to workers on land appear “cosmopolitan” and “often choose to socially interact with, and forge friendships with, seafarers of
other nationalities aboard, both learning about and from them in the process” (Sampson 2003, 268).

The establishing of “networks across societies” (Sampson 2003, 273) of Sampson’s sample Filipino seafarers, which basically means communication between Filipinos in Holland and the Philippines, is secured by phone communication twice a month and by mail. Remittances are sent regularly by active seafarers. Most seafarers work on board because of financial reasons. They are found to have more regular contacts with their homes when compared to land based workers. Sampson (2003, 273) found that in contrast to interviewees who worked on land, seafarers had a much more positive attitude towards working in multi-ethnic groups. Land-based Filipino contract workers (in Holland) had to face discrimination, racist abuse and discriminating attitudes, such as assumptions of their being criminals. In contrast, seafarers hardly ever reported discriminations. Sampson’s conclusion is that active seafarers do not feel like “outsiders” in their working environments because they “are more prepared to get to know people from other countries” (Sampson 2003, 274). Sampson concludes that Filipino workers who are land-based in Holland have formed part of a transnational community by having retained their Filipino identity, and by intending to return to the Philippines in the future. They retain links with their families and friends, assist them financially and help them gain access to the Dutch labour market. They maintain regular links to Philippine communities and families by phone and mail, and by visiting their homes on a regular basis (Sampson 2003, 275).

By contrast, Sampson finds that seafarers working on ships with multinational crews do not live and work in societies with a specific ethnic identity, and as seafarers “are not ‘outsiders’ but are automatically members of the ‘communities’ formed aboard ships” (Sampson 2003, 276). They move between spaces without nationalities and operate beyond national borders and they are not influenced by the nationality of shipowners or by the states their ships are registered with. Ships are in Sampson’s point of view “truly ‘hyperspaces’ and the seafarers who occupy them form distinct, if miniature, ‘global communities’. Such communities and hyperspaces are substantially different from transnational or diasporic spaces, networks and relationships”.

39
Wu (2002, 4), a member of the same SIRC research centre as Sampson, argues in a similar line of statements that because of the number of different nationalities on board, with 38 per cent of the international merchant fleet adopting multi-national crewing patterns of more than three nationalities, seafarers must be regarded as “global villagers” or “global citizens” (see also Lane 1999b), though they still hold national passports. Living on board has given seafarers a chance to establish new “transnational” social links that are un-linked to their own national identity, but allow people to identify with their ship community without the consciousness of being outsiders. The interesting aspect is that emphasis on the multinational community onboard and introducing seafarers as a pioneer type of world-citizen almost links to old views on shipboard communities as “remote brotherhoods” as discussed (see above) by Land (2002), though the term “global citizens” includes female seafarers and is therefore more appropriate. A common language and common “international” themes shared by seafarers can be understood as what Bhabha (1990) labels the “third space”, which is a space where cultural diversity and cultural difference come together without disallowing difference, but which instead enables new structures and new initiatives by allowing “other positions to emerge”. In this sense shipboard communities are hybrid, where the related elements of culture and the differences between cultures are simultaneously shared by people on board (see also Gilroy 1993).

The notion of a “global civil society” is discussed in Schulz (1998, 588), who argues that a society based on transnational, international or global networks is in contrast to the competition of national states during the process of globalisation, especially in the last thirty years. Richardson and Jensen (2003, 13) argue that social identity, especially when induced from dominant institutions, which would be in this case the competing shipping owners in a globalisation process of labour cost savings, will only become so when social agents, here seafarers, are able to internalise identities in a process of individuation. This means that seafarers will only identify themselves with their new onboard multi-national community in time, when they begin to construct and perceive their work as “part of” their life. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7. However, applying the term “global citizens” to seafarers means that they are in some way looked at as pioneers of a “new world citizenship” based on integrity rather than diversity. These communities are based on consensus. And this is in
contrast to the competition that seafarers share with different labour exporting countries.

This is a fascinating concept, because it questions power relations caused by globalisation forces. It is also in contrast to the arguments of Featherstone (1993), who doubts that a “global culture” with increased tolerance and cosmopolitanism, including an increasing familiarity with “the other” would really be possible. The author argues that the dissolving of boundaries such as occurs in globalisation processes has reinforced the drawing of boundaries, and referring to local cultural identities, partly to regain a sense of home and wholeness, and partly because of the inability of hegemonic cultures to allow equal participation and increased autonomy of regional ethnic minorities. Featherstone’s discussion is based on the global as a whole, but must be recognised when using terms such as “global cultures”. The SIRC conception of seafarers as ideal “global villagers” is linked to the particular space that ships offer, which seems to allow the idea of an “ideal society”, such as one of “world citizenship”. This idealised concept needs more research and further investigation.

Other definitions of seafarers are also linked to discourses on transnationalism, but they rather consider the process of “travelling” than the space seafarers live in. Seafarers would fit in Portes et al.’s (1999, 226) wider description based on first circular labour: “What made the venture of transnational for the (first circular) labourers (in the nineteenth century) themselves was their short tenure abroad, their dependence on home country networks for initiating the trip and investing its eventual profits, and the regularity with which subsequent trips were made” However, Vertovec (1999) as discussed above, warned that the concept of transnationalism can become over-used.

Vertovec (1999, 458) indicates that there is need for new approaches to migration, such as for “transversal migration”, placing the social and cultural communities of seafarers into this new concept, which he does not explain further. The word “transversal” means “a geometrical line cutting a system of lines”. “Transversal migration” thus refers to the travel pattern of seafarer voyages, which is “crisscrossing” (Gilroy 1993) rather than circulating. Vertovec combines these unusual travel patterns with the classical term “migration”, but the question is: are
seafarers migrants at all? The term “transversal”, though rather descriptive of the process of travelling, does not necessarily include the circumstances where seafarers leave their home country, not to live in another country but in a “deterritorialised” space, or as Sampson (2003) suggests above, “hyperspace”, on ships that are operating in international waters and travel from one part of the world to another. The term “hyperspace” will need to be proved as an informative, accurate term for the place seafarers move in. The suggestion of defining ships as “hyperspace” is in my opinion quite near to the point, but it is not entirely satisfying when taking into account that a “hyperspace” is defined as a simulation of space: no originary space exists (Johnston et al. 2000, 365). In this case, the term migration would make no sense. It is also necessary to clearly distinguish that there are two different processes discussed by Sampson: the ship as a deterritorialised space as in contrast to national space on land; and transnational communities on land in contrast to a new “global” community on ships.

Connell and Conway (2000, 66) define seafaring (referring to Kiribati and Tuvalu) as “contract-labour circulation ... with institutionalised saving schemes and recruitment mechanisms”. This definition is accurate, however, it does not describe in any way the “transversal” dimension, or distinguish seafarers from other forms of contract labour circulation.

The debate on defining seafarers as mentioned above is new and has begun quite recently. In addition to the suggestions above, Yeoh et al. (2003, 215) discuss in their review on Sampson’s notion of the ship as hyperspace that the author could have considered “Foucault’s idea of the ship as ‘heterotopia par excellence’”. Yeoh (et al. 2003) prefer the concept of ships as spaces of “alternate ordering”, such as in Hetherington (1997), rather than the “deterritorialized cultural vacuum”, that is implied in the term “hyperspace”. Heterotopia refers to the above discussed dimension of seafarers as “others” and ships as idealised, almost unreal spaces. However, this concept would contradict those attempts of the SIRC team members, who work hard on a concept that takes stigma away from seafarers and instead place them in some way beyond narrowing definitions, when referring to the flexibility and tolerance seafarers develop in dealing with multi-national circumstances aboard. The utopian background of an idealised society, the predecessor of the “heterotopia”
concept does therefore in my opinion, and in contrast to Foucault’s interesting idea, not fit the reality of seafarers. Therefore I reject the suggestion too that ships should be conceptualised as “heterotopic” spaces.

In conclusion, I would want to include the following characteristics of seafarers into a working definition: the institutionalised contract-labour circulation of Connell and Conway (2000); the idea of transnational links to home regions; the concept of “global communities” of the SIRC team (consisting of Lane, Sampson, Thomas, Yeoh, Wu et al.); and the ‘transversal’ dimension of Vertovec (1999). Thus, seafarers become transversal circulators and members of a global community with transnational links to their home regions.

**Conclusion**

The framework of my thesis is built on two elements: theories of migration, circulation and transnational identities with special regard to the Pacific; and seafarers as an occupational and social group. More detailed theoretical elements such as on remittances and social and cultural consequences of seafarers’ circulation for home countries are part of subsequent chapters.

My main goal in this chapter was to discuss and analyse in detail how seafarers and their particular working and living circumstances are to be situated within existing concepts. It was important firstly, to introduce mainstream research on international contract migration in the Pacific region, which has similarities to other regions, especially the Caribbean. However, the Pacific region is closely linked to economic development in Asia. Secondly the term “migration” had to be differentiated from more detailed concepts, such as circulation, sojourning and finally transnational networks.

All the above mentioned theories have been used in respect of the international contract work of seafarers. However, seafarers are working in very different environments from other contract workers, though the legal situation and restrictions can be similar and are linked to the global economic dynamic that influenced economic development, especially in the 1980s.
Seafarers have to be seen as being bound in both a global economic system, where they are competing for jobs with other nationalities, and as social beings, working apart from their families. These occupational features are the basis for a common identity that has led to an almost “cosmopolitan” attitude amongst all nationalities of seafarers. Hence, seafarers have begun to fill a niche in the transnational network concepts on migration. Though they cannot be described as migrants, and quite often cannot establish a kin-based community while living onboard ships, they still are very strongly connected with their families at home by regular communication with them and by sending remittances. Seafarers are going beyond the social network building of typical migrant communities abroad, by establishing temporary and multi-national work-based communities on board ships. They are therefore pioneers in the development of “global communities”.

A definition of seafarers must take into account that they live in confined spaces, crisscrossing maritime space around the world, circulating in long-term contracts between home and work, and keeping those special transnational links that were mentioned before. Thus, I call seafarers “transversal circulators” rather than migrants, and I agree with the SIRC concept of “global citizens” though I have discussed that this concept could have a tendency to become idealised and needs to be contested for applicability in future research.
Chapter 2
Kiribati’s economic and global position and the establishment of the Marine and Fishery Training Centres

Introduction

Economy, culture and environment in Kiribati are linked to each other, and these elements influence Kiribati’s international and global relationships in a more powerful way than might be interpreted from looking at the rather negative national economic data and the remote location in the centre of the Pacific. To examine this statement is the aim of this chapter. The first section will provide a summary of general geographic and economic data in Kiribati and explain the national economy in respect to the MIRAB model as developed by Bertram and Watters. I will then provide a brief overview of the cultural background, especially of those elements that have shaped the Kiribati way of life, which is based on a system of pride in being a te aomata, a “real” Kiribati, and on shared wealth (bubuti) but also on family obligations, and on the ability to face hardship. These elements have shaped not only Kiribati’s international politics but are also responsible for the attraction of I-Kiribati men to German, Japanese and Korean employment on merchant and fishing vessels. The arguments in this chapter link discussions on development aid as trade with labour trade. The reason for this is that “trading” development aid or extracting cheap labour from a country that has few economic alternatives are linked to the global economic and political structure. There is secondly a link between private off-shore investment and international development aid in that investment is profitable because it is partly substituted by financial inflows by means of aid.

The chapter is for this purpose divided into two further sections. The second section will explore the Kiribati trade in aid, and the nation’s relationships with economically powerful states which are interested in Kiribati’s strategic position. It will become clear in this section that the Republic of Kiribati with its extended Pacific ocean area functions as an important strategic buffer region between nations such as China, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and the United States. The remoteness, the
comparatively small population, and the location along the equator make Kiribati a potential place to undertake economic activities that are not wanted in dense industrial areas or require the particular geographical location, such as nuclear testing, satellite tracking, or the launching of rockets (see Dé Ishtar 1994, Bargh 1999, Crocombe 2001). Thus there are economic and political reasons to invest in aid for Kiribati, which are likely to remain over time.

Though the German private investment seems at first view not to be directly linked to the above mentioned strategic international relationships, the third chapter section will make clear that there are advantages for economic investment in Kiribati in addition to the strategic reasons mentioned in the second section. Kiribati appears dependent on foreign employers because of the lack of resources and the remote location. However, the dynamics of national politics regarding labour recruitment to Germany, Japan and also South Korea and the USA are influenced by aspects of Kiribati culture, based on community rather than individual decisions, and by politics that are influenced by a sense of pride and solemnity which is included in *te katei ni Kiribati*, the Kiribati way. These are part of the reasons why foreign shipping companies tolerate expensive transport costs, and why *I-Kiribati* men have a chance in the very competitive low-waged labour market. The investment in the *I-Kiribati* seafarers’ education and employment pays when combined with the physical strength and willingness of men to face difficult conditions on board and extended periods of times away from their families.

Bertram (1999, 337) suggests using classic modernisation models of economic development with caution in Pacific Island countries, because they are based on either domestic capital accumulation or on outward-oriented export-led growth, while it is rather a paradox that independent Kiribati (like other independent Pacific Island states) remains relatively poor in comparison to “integrated” Pacific Island countries, which are linked to the US, France, Australia, or New Zealand. Furthermore, Hennings (2000) argues that a Pacific Island economy based on subsistence and values of even distribution of wealth requires a different approach to the worldwide fashionable theme of standardised politics which is based on economic profit and accumulation. It is possible and necessary to integrate seemingly un-economic factors such as elements of the Kiribati culture into common modern elements of the
economy (see Baldachino 1999, Saffu 2003). Crocombe (2001, 457) states that the Kiribati government has been stable and its limited resources are among the best managed in the Pacific. Throsby (2001, 1) underlines the importance of “political stability, social cohesion and cultural resilience of the I-Kiribati” for economic management of the Kiribati economy with its serious problems.

Though the chapter does aim to explain the links between different factors such as economy and culture, it is not meant to overlook the poor and difficult situation of the Kiribati economy. It is also not intended to emphasise investment in Kiribati as exploitative. It is rather my goal to describe the economic dynamics that are created from, and affected by, different levels of international, and private investment, and in which the nation of Kiribati plays an active role. As will be shown in Chapters 4 to 6, employment of Kiribati seafarers has a range of consequences for the country, some of which are positive, especially regarding the financial input, the enhanced lifestyle, and higher education for many I-Kiribati. However, there are also consequences related to the long-term separation of people and working conditions that affect the health and well being of people in a negative way, which leads to some suffering. These elements are linked to the negative aspects in the Kiribati economy, such as having no employment alternatives, no resources, limited land surface and being located in a remote situation, which is one of the reasons why employment agencies can put pressure on working conditions and wages.

**The Kiribati economy**

The Republic of Kiribati consists of 33 atolls in three island groups, the Gilbert, Phoenix and Line groups. The land area of 810.5 square kilometres is scattered over 3.5 million square kilometres of Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), extending 4000 kilometres from west to east and about 2000 kilometres from north to south (see figure 2.1). “No other country in the world has as scattered a land area as Kiribati in relation to its total land mass” (Tisdell 2002, 905). Distances between islands and to other countries are long, and transport services are costly, infrequent, and complicated.
THE REPUBLIC OF KIRIBATI

\[\text{Figure 2.1: The Republic of Kiribati. (Note: Caroline Island (south east) was renamed 'Millennium Island' in 1999). Source: Van Trease 1993, xix.}\]
While only Banaba is volcanic, 32 atolls are low-lying, coral islands with soils that are highly alkaline, calcareous and shallow with low water-holding capacity, little organic material and few available nutrients; they “are among the poorest of the world and thus present an important challenge to agricultural production” (Thomas 2002a, 164). Drinking water is received from slightly brackish freshwater lenses, which collect rainwater and are part of the porous surface.

Rainfall is variable and low, because of Kiribati’s climatic position in the dry oceanic equatorial zone. The Northern Islands receive more precipitation than the Southern Islands (see table 2.1). The southern Gilbert Islands have at times been affected by severe droughts (Maude 1977, Geddes et al. 1982).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tarawa</td>
<td>945</td>
<td>188 (May)</td>
<td>18 (Aug.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arorae (South)</td>
<td>968</td>
<td>156 (May)</td>
<td>1 (Feb.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butaritari (North)</td>
<td>2263</td>
<td>350 (Apr.)</td>
<td>26 (Aug.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mainly as a consequence of having a scarce natural resource base, Kiribati population lives at an economic subsistence level. The population was estimated around 81,000 people in 1995. The growth rate between 1995 and 2000 was 1.8 per cent per year (SPC 2000), which means that there will be estimated 97,000 people living in Kiribati in 2005. The population profile is youthful with 41 per cent under 15 years. Most of the 66 per cent economically active people work in unpaid or irregular paid subsistence and village activities such as fishing, cutting copra, working in babai pits, farming and selling donuts and handicrafts. Only 11 per cent of the total population, 8,000 people (which is 17 per cent of all adults), are in regular paid work (SPC 1998, with data based on 1995).

**Placing Kiribati in the MIRAB model**

When Kiribati gained its independence from Britain in 1979, its major economic resource, the mining and export of phosphate on Banaba, was exhausted. The new independent state was in a situation of having to cope without a solid economic
income. The challenge the country had to face was expressed by Ieremia Tabai, the first President of the Republic.

Since Independence (...) we have been faced with the twin problems of lack of natural resources and a colonial legacy that ignored economic development. Our task therefore is a formidable one, our options for development opportunities very few indeed (Ieremia Tabai 1986, as quoted in Van Trease 1993, 49f).

The graph in figure 2.2 shows that Kiribati material living standards are not tied to output; “indeed, only half the absorption of goods and services in Kiribati is supported by domestic production” (Bertram 1999, 343).

![Kiribati Graph](image)

*Figure 2.2: Kiribati account balance. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) lies consistently below the Gross National Expenditures (GNE). The negative balance coincides with 1979, the year of independence and the year of phosphate exhaustion. Source: Bertram 1997, 4; 1999, 343*

Bertram (1999, 1997) explains that trade deficits that are financed by overseas capital inflows usually put countries in danger of becoming more and more indebted, and then having to either reduce imports or raise export revenues to balance accounts. Today, the Revenue Equalisation Reserve Fund (RERF), which was established by the colonial administration in 1956 on the basis of phosphate revenues held in Britain, is a stabilising element in Kiribati’s very slowly growing economy (Throsby 2001, 2). Independent Pacific Island countries such as Kiribati suffer poverty in comparison to dependent Pacific territories (Bertram 1999, Ogden 1989). Responsible for this is population growth higher than economic growth, and limitations because of geographical isolation, small size and a lack of resources. These issues are
compounded by low levels of export. Trade takes place only with bilateral partners outside the region and is regulated and supported by special agreements (Bertram 1999, 339).

Official aid in the form of payments without a required repayment makes up to one third of the Kiribati revenues in 1999: A$26.3 million. The sale of fishing licenses in the Kiribati Exclusive Economic Zone worth A$29.4 million, and the flow of remittances from mainly seafarers and migrants working in Nauru worth A$10 million, have been the other important sources of Kiribati revenues (budget data from National Economic Planning Office (NEPO) 1999).

As mentioned above, only 11 per cent of the adult population is in paid employment, with 77 per cent of these working in government related employment (Throsby 2001, 2; also based on SPC 1998 report); and a further 19 per cent work on German, Japanese, Korean or USA fishing vessels (data from SPMS, KFS, Ministry of Labour). The services sector accounts for about three quarters of income. The agriculture sector with copra, fishing and seaweed contributes about 10 per cent of GDP. Copra continues to be the country’s most important export commodity. The government subsidises copra prices to balance fluctuating world prices and to equalise freight costs from the outer islands. The second most important exported product in Kiribati is fish. Marine product export is expanding with deep ocean fish, but also pet fish, seaweed and beche-de-mer are important. There are plans to produce black pearls and to develop a baitfish and milkfish industry (Thomas 2002a, 170; Throsby 2001; Kiribati Newstar October 2001a, AUSAID 2003). Overall, the impact and influence of government activities on the Kiribati economy is high.

Bertram defines populations that rely heavily on disposable income sources such as aid, remittances, interest and dividend payments or other official transfer payments and that “do not arise directly from the sale of commodities” (Bertram 1997, 5), as rentier economies. The term ‘MIRAB economy’ (made up of Migration, Remittances, Aid, and Bureaucracy) summarises such an economic situation. However, the main arguments of Bertram and Watters (1985) were to challenge the thinking behind the strenuous efforts of aid donors and international agencies, both then and now, to drive small island
economies away from what seems to be their natural and preferred pattern of resource allocation under the international conditions of the late twentieth century and to force them into a development model transferred from mainland Asia (and before that, from the writings of the Classical economists). The (usually rather limited) theoretical analysis behind the island development plans and international agency programmes of the 1980s conceptualised the status quo in Polynesia and Micronesia as ‘dependent’ and ‘unsustainable’, leading to the proposition that resources and policy support should be allocated away from, rather than towards, strengthening and developing that status quo’ (Bertram 1997, 1).

Bertram (1997) suggests that the classical modernisation growth models which regard “unsustainable” economies as dependent and which promote market forced growth need to be reconsidered. Bertram’s conclusion is that instead of focussing on the Gross Domestic Product, the focus must be on the material standard of living or the Gross National Expenditure, that has been consistently “and apparently sustainably ahead of GDP” (Bertram 1997, 2). In addition to Bertram and Watters, Poirine (1998) argues that MIRAB economies have reasons to be sustainable since they offer useful economic and strategic benefits to countries that provide so called non-tradable aid. Long term benefits are linked to political commitment and the provision of space on the other hand (similar arguments appear in Altenburg 1996, 1999; Mueller-Mahn 2000). This will be discussed further in the second part of this chapter.

Bertram stresses that the MIRAB model, though a macro-economic model, was not developed without considering the cultural elements of Pacific Island countries. His example of the Marine Training School of Funafuti, Tuvalu, which is linked to the original model in Kiribati (which is pivotal for this thesis), shows that the “implicit social contract” which embraced Tuvalu’s society enabled cash income to spread over time across islands in kin groups and communities of each island. “Individuals were expected to rotate back into the local population after a set period at sea, thus freeing up jobs for the next wave of MTS graduates – a process which made perfect sense in the Tuvalu setting but violated standard neoclassical labour –market theory” (Bertram 1997, 10).

The influence of cultural elements on the economy is a continuing theme of this chapter and the entire thesis. The next paragraphs will discuss this further, by first
describing the population structure, and then the cultural elements in Kiribati that are responsible for a similar share of cash income as described above by Bertram, and for the well-being of people in Kiribati, in contrast to the country’s economic difficulties.

**Cultural influences on the economy**

Kiribati culture is based on the proud recognition of being *I-Kiribati*, also described as *te katei ni Kiribati*, the Kiribati way.  

[The] I-Kiribati are recognized by others by their way of life, *te katei ni Kiribati*, the unique identity which distinguishes them from others (...) Even though there have been many changes since the coming of Europeans, I-Kiribati are still I-Kiribati. Not only by *te katei ni Kiribati* but their blood and heart. There is national pride in the evolving I-Kiribati identity (Itaia 1984, 121f).

Itaia develops the meaning of *te katei ni Kiribati* as: being part of a Kiribati genealogy; following social obligations and being tied to their kinship; treasuring properties like land, canoes and houses; keeping skills and knowledge secret; not embarrassing someone in public; and having a strong character or sense of identity, *te aomata*. The codes of *te aomata*, which means being a real person, are to be respectful, to follow the advice of elders, to keep away from danger, to be loved, to keep good relationships and to remain close to the group one belongs to. A *te aomata* is friendly to strangers, “hard working and resilient and able to face hardship during times of drought – hunting for food on land and at sea” (Itaia 1984, 123).

The symbol of *te katei ni Kiribati* is the *maneaba*, the meeting house. The *maneaba* could also be a symbol for the sense to belong to and serve a community, and for “the tradition of consensus politics in Kiribati” (Van Trease 1993, 59). Van Trease cites Jeremia Tabai’s view on the development of Kiribati, including a strong subsistence lifestyle and the ability of the Kiribati people “to survive on their own, admittedly with the bare minimum of necessities of life, supported by a very strong community spirit which forms the basis of their self-reliance” (Tabai 1987, 43 in Van Trease 1993, 52). Government is then seen as serving the basic needs of every member of the community (Ogden 1989, 365).

The most important cultural element influencing the Kiribati economy through loyalty and maintenance of family ties is the *bubuti* custom, where people have to give other
members of their family what they might ask for. The request is non-refusible. The *bubuti* system is part of the collective values of Kiribati culture. A family group is self-reliant and economically independent when the system is intact. Individual needs and desires are subordinated in favour of the needs of a family group and then in a wider sense to the needs of a village community (see Geddes et al. 1982). “This culture of cooperation and sharing makes for effective use of the limited resources provided by the country’s island environment” (Throsby 2001, 3f). Throsby argues that the “cultural underpinnings of Kiribati society” must be recognised in the economic structure of the country. Cultural values are in his point of view responsible for intact working political processes that are “relatively free of the sorts of social tensions that are common in other countries” (Throsby 2001, 4). Since these values are very common and important for Kiribati, they need to be recognised, because they influence all layers of Kiribati society and are part of any political or economic decision (see also Grimble 1952, 1957). These values are also part of the reasons why people from Kiribati are attractive for foreign employment as will be seen in the third section of this chapter.

**Cultural differences between the Gilbert Island groups**

The Gilbert Islands became a British protectorate in 1892 and they became a British Colony in 1916 (Macdonald 1982). The colonial period lasted until 1979. Before colonial times, the Southern Gilberts were primarily “democratically” organised. The Northern Gilberts were primarily “feudal”. Islands, except those with a high chiefly hierarchy, were autonomous political entities with a final legal authority in the hands of the *unimane*, the eldest of each kin group. The *unimane* decided on the use of land and surrounding lagoon area and were seated in the *maneaba*, or community house in specific seating locations, *boti*, which referred to each specific group. In the Southern “democratic” settings, decision making was based on a consensus of the authoritative group of eldest men (Lundsgaarde 1968, Geddes 1975, Lawrence 1983). Extended family groups were organised in villages and island councils with one official Magistrate at the head of each council. However, the *maneaba* system has a functioning parallel to colonial structures. Settling disputes and punishment on outer islands is still regulated by the group of community *unimane*. 
Extended families used to live and share land, facilities and maneabas in close
neighbourhoods, but they now tend to be more segregated from each other, and family
units have become smaller (Macdonald 1982, 205). Villages are quite often organised
in Protestant, mainly in the South, or Catholic communities, mainly in the North
(Lawrence 1992). Senior Social Welfare Officer Naan Imatang explained that
the Church is quite influential now in the country and that’s why, you
know, the maneaba system is declining [in] its own role... There is a
transition... from the traditional maneaba to the modern maneaba,
which is the church. And that’s happening everywhere in the North
and the South. But you know they have still their maneaba system. [It]
is an important element of the community (interview 907).

The maneaba is not only used for communal and council gatherings, but also
functions as an entertainment place for the village communities, where regular island
nights with food, dancing and sometimes movie screening takes place. However, the
role of the maneaba is to embody the respect and trust given to the unimane, the elder
men of a village or community. It is the place where their advice is formally given.
The maneaba is based on “the political concept that people must meet together to
decide on their own welfare and to solve problems” (Tabokai 1993). The influence of
the Church is expressed in using the maneaba as their main place for gathering and
following the maneaba structure, by replacing the elders with a pastor and Church
ministers. Church gatherings are held separately from village maneaba gatherings (see
figures 2.3 to 2.6). Since the Church is influential, to study at the Theological College
is a way of gaining status and respect outside the common hierarchical order (see
Meleisea 1992; Macpherson, Bedford and Spoonley 2000 on similar issues in Samoa).

Other significant differences between the Southern and Northern Gilbert Islands have
developed as a consequence of coping with climate differences. The Southern Gilbert
Islands experience frequent droughts and receive less precipitation than the Northern
Gilberts (see table 2.1). The Northern Islands have more vegetation, more copra
production, a good amount of breadfruit vegetation and plenty of babai growth, which
provide families with reliable nourishment over the year (figures 2.3 and 2.4). Marine
life is more abundant in the Northern Gilberts where compared to the Southern
Gilberts due to the higher rainfall. These more favourable climatic conditions
considerable improve the fishing. Resource scarcity has resulted in a greater
population pressure on the Southern Islands (Lawrence 1992). To ensure a reliable
and complete water and food supply for all, the Southern Island societies had to
develop a community system with strict obligations and rules followed by severe
punishment if these rules were trespassed. The Southern Gilberts have thus developed
a stricter *maneaba* system than the Northern Gilberts (interview 907). There are a
range of restrictions on the Southern Gilberts that ensure an equal share and the
protection of the environment. In some villages, for example, people are not allowed
to use outboard motors for fishing trips. This is to make sure that those villages that
cannot use motor boats for fishing because of coastal or other environmental
limitations are not disadvantaged, and overfishing in scarce fishing grounds is
prevented. It is also essential to keep the environment tidy, which means not allowing
leaves to lie around and to grow grass to prevent the pollution of groundwater which
is already scarce and of brackish quality (see figures 2.5 and 2.6).

While the *unimane* are important on all Kiribati Islands, there was a “feudal” system
in the North. Chiefly clans owned most of the land, followed by family clans ranking
lower, owning smaller pieces of land (Sewell 1983, King 1999). Families on Abaiang,
for example, were organised in clans with special tasks, and marriages were arranged
inside each clan (Rural Planning Unit 1991, 1). This system had been annihilated and
reorganised by the British colonial government. However, there are still differences
between the Northern and the Southern Gilberts, where some families in the Northern
Islands own larger pieces of land, while land in the Southern Gilberts seems to be
distributed more evenly. The *maneaba* system in the Northern Gilberts also appears to
be more mixed and flexible than it is in the Southern Islands (interview 907). People
also explained that *babai* and *pandanus* grow poorly and are rare on Beru, and
accordingly they have more significance and are more protected than on Abaiang,
where they can be grown throughout the year and harvested easily. *Babai* has a strong
cultural meaning on all Kiribati Islands, including the resettled ones.
Figure 2.3: (above)
Maneaba in Koinawa, Abaiang. Notice the grass vegetation growing on the ground.
Source: Maria Borovnik

Figure 2.4: (left)
Catholic Church in Koinawa, Abaiang. Note the lush garden vegetation in the foreground
Source: Maria Borovnik
Figure 2.5: Maneaba in Eriko, Beru. Notice the very scarce vegetation and tidy looking ground.
Source: Maria Borovnik

Figure 2.6: Protestant Church in Eriko, Beru with breadfruit tree in foreground.
Source: Maria Borovnik
A second consequence of the harsher climate in the Southern Gilberts is that people are more inclined to resettle, either to the Northern Gilberts, or even to the very remote Line Islands, in order to enhance the quality of life and to provide a better future for their children. People from the Southern Gilberts are also interested in purchasing land in the Northern group, which will be a topic in Chapter 5. “ Somehow you will notice that a lot of people from the South bought their lands on the other side... Maybe because it’s different. I mean, the life is much easier there” (Naan Imatang, Social Welfare 08/99). However, some families from the North exchange land to be able to live with their children during their secondary schooling times on Beru or Nonouti (interview 907). National resettlement schemes, such as to the Phoenix and Solomon Islands and later to the Line Islands, which were conducted in order to relieve population pressure especially on those islands with harsh natural conditions, have been discussed by Bedford (1967), Bedford and Macdonald (1982), Connell (1983), and Tonganibeia (1993) and will not be explored here in detail. Currently, the scheme on the three northern Line Islands of Kiritimati, Tebuaeran and Teraina seems to be successfully developing. Movement of people, especially from the Southern Gilberts, using several working schemes and subsidies for purchase of land on these islands, is still in process (Ministry of Commerce 07/99).

The differences between the Northern and Southern Gilbert Islands are marked by slightly different dialects in the Gilbertese language. However, most important is that families in the Southern Gilberts seem to be more private, self-reliant and exclusive of unrelated people than is the case in the Northern Islands (interview 907). Every single island in Kiribati has particular features in its social organisation, which will not be treated further (see Geddes et al. 1982), but South Tarawa as the capital and urban centre of Kiribati has experienced a quite different development in comparison to all other Gilbert Islands.

**Urban development**

Urbanisation processes began with the centralising of South Tarawa during colonial times, in 1946 (Rapaport 1999, 274). In order to gain employment, people from the Gilbert Islands but also from Tuvalu (former Ellice Islands) had either to move to Tarawa to work in government jobs, or to Banaba (Ocean Island), where they worked in phosphate mines (see for example Watters 1977, 121). The very first labour
migration in Kiribati started in 1901 with recruitments to Banaba (Rapaport 1999, 273). Retired people returning to Kiribati have made an impact on Tarawa. Both workers from Banaba and government employees received a large retirement deposit which enabled them to build brick houses and to develop small businesses. Returned workers from Banaba and more recently from the phosphate mines on Nauru, are used to a rather urban lifestyle, and tend to settle in Tarawa. Some of the effects of labour migration to Banaba and Nauru was discussed by Geddes et al. (1982) and will not be explored further (see also Tonganibea 1993, table I: 301). The largest cash income group, government employees, live on South Tarawa. Kiribati’s net urban growth, indicating internal migration, is on position eight with 0.8 per cent, in comparison with 24 Pacific Island states, where American Samoa and Vanuatu have the highest rates with 4.5 per cent, followed by the Marshall Islands with 4 per cent. (Rapaport 1999, 276, table 22.3).

The population density on Tarawa is much higher than on the outer islands and therefore the village structure is culturally mixed. Average population density in Kiribati is 100 persons per square km (based on data 1995). However, South Tarawa (an area of only 16 square km) has a population density of 1,800 people per square km. Forty per cent of Kiribati’s population lives on South Tarawa. The average household size is between 6 and 7 people, but 26 per cent of households in South Tarawa contain more than 10 people, while in comparison only 14 per cent of households include more than 10 people in all of Kiribati (SPC 1998, 14). The large household sizes are a consequence of a continual flow from family members of the outer islands migrating into the urban centre of South Tarawa. This will be explored more in Chapters 5 and 6.

Families belonging to different religious congregations live in close proximity to one another on Tarawa, and although there is tension between such congregations on the outer islands, on Tarawa there is more interaction between neighbours and non-relatives from different congregations. The government’s leasing policy which allows people, especially government workers, to lease land and to some extent buildings, has encouraged a greater mix of people living together than on the outer islands (see figure 2.7). However, the policy has also resulted in people leasing land, with the effect of others illegally squatting between villages. Connell and Lea (1998, 28) make
the bubuti custom responsible for the overcrowded situation on South Tarawa, where families on Tarawa cannot refuse the request for accommodation from relatives who want to migrate from the outer islands. This, with special reference on families with seafarers, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Figure 2.7: In contrast to the outer island lifestyle: scattered living in Betio, Tarawa. Source: Maria Borovnik

Most of the cultural elements are persistent in Tarawa. People still gather in maneabas give respect to the unimane, though this seems to be declining. Unrelated people are not responsible for looking after their neighbours’ children, or helping with each others work but would also not be invited to family events. The maneaba system is not as strong as on the outer islands.

On the outer islands it is far more better than Tarawa. Because on your ordinary island, where [people] come from, Butaritari, Marakei... you have to obey the rules of the islands, the eldest, hmm? But here in Tarawa you see a lot of people coming from [different] places, it is mixed on Tarawa here. From the Northern I-Kiribati, Southern I-Kiribati, hmm? So in Tarawa [the old men system] is very rare. To see them sitting in the maneaba... and to give advice to boys or to girls. But on the outer islands you have to see this. But it’s getting weak, and weak, and weak (Seamen’s Chaplin, KPC 09/99).
Problems can arise where “modern” economic development and traditions come together. Jones (1995, 5) argues that there is a conflict between Kiribati cultural maintenance and the development of urban planning. Planning is a non-traditional activity and traditional lifestyles dominate the urban way of life in South Tarawa “and are unlikely to be reversed in the short term in the light of high rural-urban migration/home island trends”. Jones sees problems where the pressing urbanisation and urban development need modification, while the tendency is that cultural parameters and practices dominate the Kiribati lifestyle to ensure the maintenance of the socio-cultural system (see also Ogden 1989, 365).

Urban development is of great concern in Kiribati. About 70 per cent of the urban population lives without any sanitation, and sewage causes hygienic and environmental degradation in the Tarawa lagoon. Waste disposal and the pollution of fresh water lenses affect the nutrition, health and well being of the I-Kiribati. There is also the danger of environmental damage through imported products. The ecological system of coral islands like Tarawa is vulnerable and limited (Tisdell 2002). Though issues of urban management seem to be difficult in Kiribati, they seem to work well in comparison with other parts of the Pacific region (Connell and Lea 1998, 29). Throsby (2001, 8) argues that “despite the crowding in South Tarawa, Kiribati has the lowest population density of all the Micronesian countries and the second lowest degree of urbanisation”. The annual rate of urban growth in Kiribati is estimated to be 3.1 per cent (Rapaport 1999, 276, table 22.3). Urbanisation processes linked to internal migration will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Trading with development aid – international relationships

When Beniamina Tiinga, the Minister of Finance in 1994, was asked if the country was overdependent on foreign donors and lenders, he answered:

Given the very narrow resource base of the country and the generous aid funds available one can argue that Kiribati has to be dependent on foreign donors and lenders. The word ‘overdependent’ is rather extreme and difficult to justify given the fact that foreign donors and lenders are more than geared to provide assistance. I think the issue is: why should we use our scarce resources when there are grants readily available? Following this, one could then ask a question on the effective use to which aid funds are put. This is an important
question and Kiribati has been trying to ensure that such grants are used effectively in order to reduce our dependency on external aid in future (Beniamina Tiinga 1995; source the Courier 149 (1/2), 15)

Tiinga’s answer reflects Kiribati’s position of being an independent country with a difficult environment operating internationally with countries in a more favourable economic situation. In the Kiribati cultural context of collectivism and its values of equality, as mentioned above, it is expected to share wealth, therefore aid donors are put into a position of (i.e. are socially constructed as) wealthy partners, sharing with Kiribati because they are “geared” to do so. On the other hand, the above mentioned Kiribati values of pride and self-reliance do not allow any dependency, because in Kiribati custom it is “unethical” (see for example Tabai 1987, 47 in Van Trease 1993; see also discussions by Geddes et al. 1982, 1OfL). As a result, Kiribati is able to accept aid, when these finances are used “effectively in order to reduce dependency on external aid” (Tiinga 1995, see quote above).

Aid to poor developing countries is regarded by hegemonic governments and trans-state organisations such as the World Bank or United Nations (Roberts 1995) as ethical, an altruistic means to reduce poverty, to support economic development and to balance some of the inequalities between industrialised and developing countries. By doing so, rich aid donor countries satisfy their ethical needs and promote their development and export programmes. Gibson (1993) argues that those notions originated in humanitarian elements and political motives to prevent the spread of communism, when the aid process became a trend along with the establishment of development assistance in Europe from 1947 onwards, and the Marshall Plan 1948 from the United States (see also Roberts 1995). Gibson’s critique is against dependency and the negative input of capitalism, by pointing out the imperialistic pressures that aid places on Pacific economies, and some negative results that occur because of an increase in dependency. However, in opposition to dependency theories, Poirine (1998, 1999) not only questions altruistic motives that seemed to be the original motives of aid donor countries, but argues that aid is never without rewards for rich aid donor countries.

Poirine argues that if altruism were the only reason for granting aid then countries with the lowest per capita income would receive the most aid per capita, and this is
not so. The author argues that small island countries receive more aid than other less-developed countries. He further shows that offshore islands, or "small island territories or associated states receive on average 36 times more aid than small independent states" because of their great strategic importance (Poirine 1999, 832). In contrast, Crocombe (2001, 362) argues that the Pacific Island nations' market product is their sovereignty, and the trade of their strategic rights in return for cash or benefits. Poirine's main argument is that "aid is a payment for an invisible strategic service. This service consists of the strategic advantage provided to the donor nation by the geographical position of the receiving country" (1999, 831). Advantages can be military bases, nuclear weapons testing grounds, radar bases, missile bases, chemical weapons destruction sites or advanced outposts from which to launch or guard against an attack. During World War II Pacific Islands provided landing and refuelling stops for airplanes. Poirine argues that

Since the end of World War II, colonization and forceful annexation have become unacceptable, and thus island territories or associated states with strategic value are now being lured with rents to obtain the services they are able to offer. This is especially true of independent islands states with limited natural resources that have agreed to offer strategic privileges, such as use of land for military bases or have refused to grant such privileges to rivals of the donor state. In other words, the payment of a strategic rent, generally qualified as aid, has replaced military conquest and colonization as a means of securing strategic outposts throughout the world (Poirine 1999, 834f).

To maintain security and confidentiality, isolation and low population on islands are valuable, and are perceived as the best trading assets in finding partners for aid. Poirine shows that a higher standard of living and some valuable export activities (such as tourism, or the sale of fishing licenses for example) will decrease aid substitutes, because the more activities are involved, the less will a country be inclined to provide strategic services. Islands with a scarce population and with low living standards are also easier to convince to commit to a special relationship with a world power (1999, 842). Poirine's analysis combines economic advantages with political, strategic advantages, and he suggests that countries should retain strategic interest in a long-term policy to secure goodwill, trust and loyalty.

Poirine has made it clear that Pacific Island countries are strategically important, and are equal partners in monetary negotiations. However, his analysis, though critical of
dependency issues, does not discuss critiques of Bargh (1999), Hau’ofa (1998), Tarte (1998), and others (for example Firth 2000; Wace 1980), who warn that the Pacific, when used as an attractive investment area because of its qualities of remoteness and low population density, is marginalised and dismissed with regard to the population that lives there.

It should now be evident why our region is characterized as the “hole in the doughnut”, an empty space. We should take careful note of this because if we do not exist for others, then we could in fact be dispensable (Hau’ofa 1998, 397)

Crocombe (2001) takes a different perspective in contrast to Poirine and dependency advocates. He argues that Pacific Islands consciously trade their “advantages” of ocean space, isolation and even air space (for shuttle and missile experiments) against cash. This rather empowering perspective, which does not deny the difficult and economic underprivileged position of Pacific Island countries, will be part of my arguments in the following section.

What can be concluded is that there is a conflict between economic sustainability and environmental and human ethics in current theoretical discussions on the Pacific area. Another critique might be that “trading aid” is becoming a fashionable theme of recent economic development. As Weiland (2000) states “Trade policy is the most important element of cooperation”, and aid for developing countries might then become something they have to provide for, or work hard for, which would then have potential to be exploitative again (see here also Lensink and Morrissey 2000, Lensink and White 2001 on a project for The World Bank assessing aid).

**Foreign investment in Kiribati**

Investment in Kiribati has three major advantages for the investing countries: commercial access for trade of commodities; access to Kiribati’s large fishing areas; and access in a politically strategic area (as in Poirine 1998, 1999). Neemia (1993, 231) shows, “[a]s with most aid recipients, Kiribati tends to be tied, not only to donors’ programmes and perceptions, but also to donor products and services and individual projects”. Therefore one of the goals of the Kiribati government is to maintain a degree of control over these programmes and products, which aid donors have to offer. The following paragraphs will analyse the patterns of foreign
investment in Kiribati and illuminate the “trading” sides of development aid. I will discuss how the Kiribati Government evaluates the investment by using elements of the Kiribati way of life to affirm socially constructed values to affirm its strong position as trade partner.

Australia is not only the main development aid donor with A$11.4 million in the financial year 2003 to 2004, but also the main commercial partner of Kiribati. Australian exports to Kiribati have risen from 21 million dollars in 1997, to A$38.1 million in the financial year 2002-2003. Imports to Australia from Kiribati have, in contrast to this, been constantly low and were A$285,000 over the period of 2002-2003 (AusAid 2003). Kiribati’s currency is based on the Australian dollar and one of Kiribati’s main commercial institutions, the Bank of Kiribati is a joint venture, 75 per cent now owned by ANZ Bank, which replaced Westpac Australia (Kiribati Newstar 3 October, 5 November 2001). Craig Gallagher, the First Secretary of the High Commission of Australia in Kiribati, described “the Australian as a good international citizen” when he explains that aid is “focussed on the region”, to maintain regional “stability”, and to support growing development. Australian aid focuses on education, recognising that labour is Kiribati’s only resource. Skilled labour increases opportunities for I-Kiribati on the labour market. However, there are no chances for people from Kiribati to work in Australia. The Australian government offers 60 university scholarships for people studying mainly in Fiji and Vanuatu. As Gallagher says, Australia’s goal is to keep people from Kiribati (and other Pacific Island countries) inside their own region rather than to encourage immigration to Australia. It is relatively uncomplicated and efficient to manage a country with a population size lower than a medium-sized Australian city, but it would cause problems for Australia if it were to relax its immigration policy on I-Kiribati entering the country, argues Gallagher (MN29/7/99).

The Australian Government also negotiated in 2001 with Kiribati to send Middle Eastern refugees asking to immigrate to Australia, to Kanton Island (Phoenix group), as a possible solution to illegal immigration to Australia. In 2001 the then President Teburoro Tito agreed to take up to 500 asylum seekers for settlement on Kanton, and negotiated later for permanent settlement in Kirrimiti (Christmas Island). Australia had already sent 1,000 refugees to the neighbouring Republic of Nauru for temporary
settlement. This plan has been heavily criticised by supra national organisations such as Amnesty International and the Centre for Refugee Research at the University of New South Wales (Kiribati Newstar October and December 2001).

There are other commercial trading partners such as New Zealand, China and Japan. New Zealand spent NZ$3.1 million on aid for Kiribati between 1995 and 2000 and the same amount is allocated for 2003 to 2004 (NZAID 2003). More than 53 per cent of aid is spent on education. New Zealand offers 30 working scheme places per year for Kiribati. Eleven per cent of the New Zealand development aid went to “outer island development”, including seaweed development and subsidies to the Marine Training Centre (Laureen Ford, Deputy High Commissioner, and Mike Fudakowski, Development Officer of the New Zealand High Commission, 23/7/99).

New Zealand’s relationship with the Pacific countries we give aid to is a unique one. We are partners, neighbours, and in some cases family. And we all benefit when our region prospers and develops peacefully (Aid Minister Marian Hobbs, NZAID 2003)

New Zealand has a great interest in peace keeping, but also in securing “important recoverable deposits of minerals” in the Pacific (Cozens 2002, 6).

One of the reasons for trading aid with Kiribati, is that the country as a growing cash economy is increasingly attractive for trading commercial products, which has effects on the environment of Kiribati. Australia is already taking care of the recycling of can disposals. However, there will be more challenges coming, for example in disposing of toxins such as fuel and batteries, or the removal of dumped trucks and cars which have yet to be organised (figure 2.8).

Japan’s main trade with Kiribati is in motor vehicles. Japan has opened a market for second hand cars by “using Kiribati as a dumping ground for old Japanese cars” (interview 929), but is also an important partner for any technical product to Kiribati. The public bus system has increased as a consequence of increased imports. The car trade has opened a range of employment and business opportunities, such as sales of bus tickets, motor engine repairs and sales.

67
Japan is, beside the USA, the main fishing nation in Kiribati’s EEZ. Japan’s role in the Pacific, especially in respect of access to fishing grounds, has been discussed in detail in Tarte (1998), who argues that, being the world’s leading fishing nation, Japan’s aid to the region has mainly evolved from its fisheries’ diplomacy. Tarte (1998, 160) argues that Japan managed “through its aid policy and its sheer economic weight in the region, to continue to enjoy cheap, unimpeded access” to the EEZ of several Pacific Island countries, including Kiribati. As will be explained in the third part of this chapter, the sale of fishing licenses is also connected to the labour trade.

Trade over large fishing grounds in Kiribati links economic and strategic factors. The large fishing area is not only economically attractive, but has also political importance for Kiribati, which became apparent when the former Soviet Union signed a contract with Kiribati in 1986. The effect of the agreement with the Soviet Union was first to threaten Kiribati political links with the United States, Australia and New Zealand, but developed into an increase in aid and development assistance from all states and a
shift into more control for licenses of particularly American and Japanese fishing vessels (discussed in detail in Van Trease 1992; also in Tarte 1998 and Crocombe 2001). The Soviet Union contract was only short-lived and the main competition is now between the USA and Japan. Tarte (1998) discusses in detail the politics of the USA as an ally of the Pacific Island states against Japan. Though Japan still dominates the region, there is increasing competition amongst nations for access into the Pacific, including the USA, China, Taiwan and South Korea. One of the problems is the under-reporting or non-reporting of catch by international vessels fishing in the Pacific region (Tarte 1998, 163; see also Kawaley 1999). Australia helps to monitor Kiribati's EEZ, to prevent overfishing and unlicensed fishing. There are also international interventions against overfishing in the region.

Kiritimati (Christmas Island) (see figure 2.1) was occupied by forces of the United States and Britain during World War II and has subsequently, between 1957 and 1963, been used as an area for atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons by both the British and the Americans. With 321 square kilometres Kiritimati is the largest coral island in the world. This island is one of the most strategic and geographically favourable places in regard to Poirine's statements above. Consultants assessing Kiritimati as a possible space station for launching vehicles (HOPE-X) into the orbit state that "even elsewhere in the Pacific, the combination of unused infrastructure on remote, undeveloped and unpopulated land may not exist. Additionally, Christmas Island is far enough east that the post-re-entry operations will occur over the very sparsely populated Pacific Ocean, rather than over Asia, minimizing public safety risks" (Dames and Moore 1995, 4).

The National Space Development Agency of Japan (NASDA) conducts research in areas such as Earth observation systems, tracking and data acquisition, satellite systems, and launch vehicles (Dames and Moore 1995, 1). NASDA was interested in 1999 in a landing area for their shuttles, which is on land (they already occupy a sea-based area in the Pacific), and which is far away from highly populated Japan. Kenichiro Kida explained that NASDA reviewed the shuttle launch area on Kiritimati and decided in 1998 to negotiate with Kiribati on a multi-corporation level, which involved three Japanese companies, Mitsubishi, IHI and Nissan motors and one aviation company from the United States, Lockheed Martin. Mitsubishi, the company
Kida works for as a marketing representative, is responsible for the promotion of the Japanese project. Originally the project was planned to be a NASDA project only, but since the Japanese economy experienced a down-turn in the nineties, NASDA decided to cooperate with other companies to cover the financial side of the project (interview 950).

The negotiations in Kiribati at the time of my fieldwork were at a point where Kiribati had asked for a proper airfield, a port and reconstruction of a road that was established by British and American forces during World War II.

And at the first meeting Kiribati government requested NASDA to construct a hotel. Because if there is a hotel, maybe [more] tourists [will] come! But NASDA is for space activity. So they don’t construct a hotel. So... Mitsubishi promotes Christmas Island [and] NASDA ask[ed] us, Mitsubishi, to cooperate, to try to construct a hotel (interview 950).

However, the jobs that Mitsubishi fulfils here are first, the HOPE-X landing agreement, the landing construction and the construction of the hotel. But in 1999, Mitsubishi and Kiribati had not yet signed the contract. Kida explains that the United States was also interested in Kiritimati as a launching site.

But there are no infrastructure. (...) They don’t have [a] water supply, they don’t have any power supply, solar energy. They have nothing. So the American investor passed the thing. They turned [the project down] so they don’t lose money <!>. Their policy is very short term. It’s a very high risk! So everybody wants to pass.... Everybody is just looking for Christmas Island<!>. Nobody [is] going to the Christmas Island. So [it is] too expensive to invest money. So... now they [the Kiribati government] wait for NASDA’s decision (interview 950).

NASDA was much in favour of signing the project for Christmas Island. Kida mentions that the project would be feasible in the long-term perspective. The Americans had withdrawn from the project because their policy is for three to four years only, Kida says. However, in 1999 the Kiribati government had taken its time about its decision. Kida explains that Mitsubishi (NASDA’s negotiating company) made its first offer in August 1998, and in March 1999 the business plan was presented.

But [the] Kiribati government didn’t reply anything. So I came here. And try to obtain the [business negotiations]. But [they are] not still...<laughs> received yet. They are [taking a] very slow pace <!>. Everything takes a long time. Maybe the committee [meeting] will be
Kida comes to the conclusion that “you need a lot of time and a lot of money” when you are in Kiribati. The first flight of a Japanese rocket from Christmas Island was on 18 October 2002, and two satellites were successfully placed into orbit. Japan will spend US$22.4 million on two rounds of testing of the space shuttle on Christmas Island. NASDA plans 10 more launches over the following three years. One of these launches will carry Japan’s first spy satellite (Space 2002, 2002a).

As will be seen also when discussing the Chinese viewpoints below, the politics of taking time and not coming to a decision hastily is one of Kiribati’s strengths in negotiating, an aspect which is rooted in the Kiribati culture. It is a common and polite behaviour in village meetings to take appropriate time to come to a decision. However, here, at international level and with one geographical and political advantage on their side, the Kiribati government can use time as a tool of control and self-reliance, in considering the best arrangement for the Kiritimati project.

China “trades” development aid by linking money to the purchase of technical products made in China. The Ambassador of the Peoples Republic of China in Kiribati, Yang Zhikuan (see figure 2.9) said:

When I say economic cooperation I don’t only mean aid! I mean cooperation! You know? Mutual cooperation... like trade! They buy things from us, we buy things from them. We provide a technology and a machinery and they provide their facilities. Something like that. Cooperation! Joint venture! Not only aid.

Of course aid is one part of the cooperation. For example, they bought the machine from China. And now we... help them to install the machine and train their people. It works very well. And they bought aeroplanes, small aircrafts from China and also landing crafts from China. [They] used their own money! Not aid! <laughs> When we give aid, it must be done in a way of being connected with trade. I am saying this because if we give aid we ask them to use the aid to buy things from China. And not from Australia or America. <laughs> That’s the agreement.... That’s the kind of aid (interview 941).

China provides aid to Kiribati in the form of financial projects. Another representative, Mr Fu, the Economic Advisor for China, explains that one project involved providing and paying for, four Chinese doctors for the hospital in
Nawerere, Tarawa or a desalination plant on Betio, for example. There are also two scholarships provided for I-Kiribati students going to Chinese universities. In 1999 China negotiated a 46 thousand US dollar project which it is being offered to Kiribati. However, Mr Fu explains that it is surprising how long he has been waiting for the Ministry of Finance to decide what to do with these 46 thousand US dollars. “The first time the Minister for Finance said they want[ed] a generator for [the] outer island school. The second time, [he] said, the chain [saw]! They want to do furniture. Maybe [to] use to the ceremonies in another island. And some material, they said, they need. So now, we wait for them” (interview 940). The interesting point here is that China’s representatives are waiting for Kiribati to decide, regardless of how much time it takes for them to decide. The question of why they would not withdraw from this generous offer and instead grant the money to a country in more desperate need than Kiribati, was answered by Fu with “we already signed the contract”. China also began negotiations on fishing agreements with Kiribati in 2001 (Kiribati Newstar 26 October 2001b).

China has built a satellite dish in Bonriki, Tarawa, which is used for satellite tracking and has nothing to do with the American military base on neighbouring Kwajalein, Marshall Islands, as the Chinese Ambassador ensures. The satellite tracking station is a communication satellite only. And the reason why it has been built on Tarawa is “because of the geographical position” Yang says, “and not because we want to compete with Japan or the United States” (interview 941).

Of strategic interest for China are political agreements with Pacific Island countries in competition to Taiwan. Taiwan’s diplomatic relationships with countries are not recognised by China: “They cannot have diplomatic relations with Taiwan, because Taiwan is part of China and not a solid [sovereign] state. It is a province of China, that is our principle”, states Yang. Taiwan’s role in the Pacific, however, makes Kiribati’s position in the centre, tucked between Tuvalu, the Solomon Islands and the Marshall Islands, which are all linked to Taiwan, quite important for China. This is not explicitly recognised by Mr Yang, who argues that China’s relationships to Kiribati are because of China’s general policy to have relationships with all countries in the world and “Kiribati is part of the world”, he says. The Ambassador continues to explain that development aid is grounded in ethical reasons in China:
In China <!>, if some people only make friends with rich people, people would say: no good. If you make friends with rich people and also poor people, that’s complete. <laughs> And... make friends with the poor people and help them. Of course our capabilities is limited, but still we want to help. Not just help! And also let them to develop with the help (interview 941).

The Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji expressed his appreciation for the Kiribati government’s “one China” policy to Teburoro Tito, the President of Kiribati at a meeting in Beijing 2002 (Xinhua News Agency, July 4, 2002 p1008). The meeting in Beijing was to strengthen cooperation between Kiribati and China that had lasted already for more than twenty years. However, the Chinese satellite tracking project, which is regarded with some suspicion amongst people in Kiribati, played a major role during the election process in 2002, up to 2003, after President Tito stepped down. The new President Anote Tong, inaugurated on 8 July 2003, stated before the elections that he will review the Chinese lease and “take the appropriate actions at the right time” (Pacific Islands Report, July 2003, see also reports in January, February and March, The Press 2003).

Being part of the Commonwealth has been an advantage for Kiribati (and some other Pacific Island states), because investors from China have access to Commonwealth countries by special trading agreements in the form of the Foreign Investment Passport Programme (FIPP) with Kiribati (Kiribati Newstar February 2001). These, also called “green passports”, are worth “fifty thousand US dollars?!" Yang reckons. These passports are used to enter Commonwealth countries by first coming to Kiribati and then leaving for an industrialised country in order to make an investment.
Figure 2.9: Mr Yang Zhikuan, the Ambassador of the Peoples’ Republic of China in front of the impressive building of the Chinese embassy. China establishes embassy buildings in countries they have relationships with to show that “China is a big country. We have enough funds. We can afford it! But for some countries maybe for economical reasons they cannot afford. But we could. We are able to do it!” Yang says it also shows respect for the country China has international relations with: “If you have an embassy... here in the country [they] will be very happy. [It means] that you are very respectful to them, you know?”

Source: Maria Borovnik

Summary

Kiribati’s foreign relationships are a synthesis of different aspects, including geographic, economic, political and cultural factors. The examples above reflect the multi-faceted dynamic of international influences and trade that Kiribati was undertaking in 1999 at the time of my fieldwork.

There are important general conclusions to make. Firstly, Kiribati’s low GDP and poor trade balances are closely connected to a world system which is organised and directed by Japan, the United States, China and Europe, especially former colonial power, Britain. These nations dominate the globalisation process in which Kiribati seems to take part as a peripheral and seemingly powerless country, already taken advantage of in colonial times, by exploitation of phosphate, over fishing and nuclear testing.
However, Poirine's arguments condemning development aid as a trading item against strategic services fits the Kiribati situation excellently, and Bertram's and Watter's (1985) forecast of aid as a sustainable element for Pacific Island economies works in the Kiribati case. When looking at aid from this perspective, it becomes clear that the four hegemonic "pillars", Europe, the United States, Japan and China, had at some stage, or have currently, an interest in Kiribati's geographic situation. The vast ocean area with a relatively small populated land area serves as alternative to the highly populated and densely industrialised areas of economically powerful states. To use Kiribati's geographic location in exchange for development aid serves also to advance political importance: British and American nuclear tests, space shuttle projects and satellite tracking stations of the USA, Japan and China. These aspects are what Crocombe (2001, 387) calls "the value of isolation". Added to this must be the interest in the large fishing grounds which have been of more political relevance in the eighties but are still attractive to states such as Japan, the United States, China and also South Korea. Australia and New Zealand have under those circumstances good reason to be involved in the Kiribati economy, to ensure a peaceful climate in a region economically "off-shore". In a more long term future, the same dominant countries that have influence in the Pacific now, will most likely start to compete for the minerals beneath the ocean seabed.

The Kiribati government, even though it recognises it has a poor economy, is not a powerless actor. On the contrary, the government has been preserving dignity in firstly using the strength of negotiation and awaiting the appropriate time for action, as shown in Japanese business promotions and the negotiation over Chinese projects. Time, part of Kiribati socio-cultural values is in this context a tool of control, which makes investment (or literally "aid") appear as almost needless or rather, negotiable. A second tool is grounded in the I-Kiribati values of te aomata of being friendly to strangers, but always loyal to the Kiribati community. The negotiations with the former Soviet Union can be understood in this spirit of self-respect and friendliness to all nations. Te aomata makes Kiribati able to negotiate with any government, when it is useful for the Kiribati community.
Labour trade – training, recruitment and employment on international merchant ships and fishing vessels

The two previous parts of this chapter have covered the geographical, economic and political framework of Kiribati with special regard to international relations. The final part will now concentrate on Kiribati’s largest economic potential: labour. The employment of people involves private investment of foreign companies in Kiribati, which is a different economic aspect from those mentioned above. Kiribati’s peripheral location makes transport of contract labour difficult and expensive, and companies have a large world-wide labour pool available. Therefore investment in labour from Kiribati appears at first sight risky. Secondly, the small land area and the island environment have not been attractive for off-shore investment in industry.

It is, on first view, rather surprising that the largest employment agency in Kiribati, the South Pacific Marine Services (SPMS), is from Germany, a country without particular international strategic interest in Kiribati. Managers of the SPMS describe first contacts with Kiribati as a coincidence. However, as will become clear, the initiation of the German project in Kiribati was a calculated investment which is best described by the process of the so called “new international division of labour” (Frobel, Heinrich and Kreye 1980, 13). It will also become clear that aspects other than those restricting labour employment such as “remoteness” and being “small”, work in favour of employment of male I-Kiribati. Those aspects are rooted in the Kiribati way of life, the commitment of men to care for their families even if a long-term separation is involved, the physical strength of people and in their ability to cope with harsh environments, such as the 3-D jobs (dirty, difficult and dangerous) that ocean going vessels require.

The system of cheap labour employment in a political context, including the Kiribati and international labour unions, and the role of the Kiribati government, will be the subject for discussion in Chapter 7. Consequences for I-Kiribati seafarers and their families will be discussed in Chapters 4 to 6. The purpose here is to describe the framework for the education and recruiting of I-Kiribati by mainly German and Japanese agencies.
**German marine training and recruitment**

German labour recruitment on Tarawa, which has been proved to be successful for both the Kiribati government and the German employment agency, began as a coincidence, as Rasmus Sieg, one of the managers of the Hamburg Süd Dampfschiffahrtsgesellschaft (HSDG or Hamburg Süd) announced in his seminar 12 January 1999 in Hamburg.

It was a coincidence (*ein Zufall*) when in 1966 a Hamburg Sued vessel travelled through the Pacific from Brisbane to San Francisco and needed urgent medical assistance. A radio call for help was answered by Radio Tarawa in Kiribati. The ship sailed to Tarawa and landed the sick seaman in Tarawa’s large lagoon. The captain noticed many strongly built male inhabitants standing around doing nothing, and he discovered that there were many such young men in the country without work. He reported these circumstances and his impressions to the shipping company in Hamburg (*source SPMS unpublished material, translated*).

And from here, labour recruitment of the “strongly built” male *I-Kiribati* began. Note that Hamburg Süd appears in this quote almost as the “saviour of unemployed labour”, very much in the same way that aid from industrialised countries is promoted as altruistic and humanitarian. The aspect of trade is neglected here. It is also not mentioned that the British owned China Navigation had already employed some seafarers on ships since 1959 (Connell 1983, 33). However, the project of high standard training of *I-Kiribati* seafarers, initiated by this German “coincidence” has been beneficial for Kiribati, and has extremely important positive financial effects on the Kiribati economy, which are mainly illuminated in Chapter 5. As mentioned above, the employment ratio in Kiribati is generally low with 11 per cent of people in paid work. Of these an estimated 3 per cent are seafarers working on German ships. The figure will be at around 4 per cent when seafarers on Japanese and Korean vessels are included, and data is based on figures in 1995 (SPC 1998, table 12, 25).

Just as the project initiated by Hamburg Süd has been beneficial for Kiribati in financial ways, it has been also quite profitable for the shipping companies involved. Sieg (1999) explained that German shipping companies were in dire need of labour recruitment, because vessels, sailing under the German flag at this time, were lacking skilled German labour. Fröbel et al. (1980, 15) argue that a world-wide process of national economic recession forced companies to relocate production to “sites where
labour-power is cheap to buy, abundant and well-disciplined; in short, through the transnational reorganisation of production”. The global development including the development in faster technology has been discussed in Chapter 1. While HSDG as a shipping company did not relocate its production site into open registers, in contrast to other German shipping companies, it definitely was looking for cheap labour with the above mentioned qualities of being resilient, semi-skilled, physically strong and easy to manage. The *I-Kiribati* men not only provided those qualities but “had also the reputation of being traditionally excellently skilled seafarers and magnificent navigators” (Köpper 1995, 112; see also Grimble 1957, 52ff., Grimble 1972, 213ff.). Therefore, the only skill that needed to be provided was a thorough education which would enhance the basic qualities of *I-Kiribati* labour and would suit conditions on HSDG ships as well as German and international regulations, which were at this time required for employment on German registered vessels. This education was provided by the initiation of the Marine Training Centre on Tarawa. The successful labour recruitment process in Kiribati, is due to an excellent working scheme involving the Kiribati government, international aid and private initiatives from German shipping companies.

Whitley (1980) reports that the Marine Training School (later Marine Training Centre) was founded in 1967 “by the government of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, with a grant from the United Kingdom, assistance from the United Nations Development Program, also a British shipping company and a West German Shipping company”. The purpose was to train seamen for employment on overseas vessels, initially aboard ships of the two sponsoring companies. It was originally a goal of the British colonial government “to provide employment outside the Gilbert and Ellice Islands for young men with primary education only, and give these young men an opportunity to obtain earnings in excess of what they could earn at home” (Whitley 1980, objective i). However, Köpper (1995, 113) mentions that Hamburg Süd was interested in recruitment of semi-skilled labour to be employed on the company’s vessels only, and therefore the Marine Training School was equipped to fulfil international seafaring standards. The standards have since risen, such that although the intake test is open for everyone, secondary school education is now necessary to meet the requirements for the test.
The first 38 trainees graduated in 1968 after a training programme of twelve months (Sieg 1999). The annual intake in 1969 was already 150 and rose in 1970 to 300, while the course was reduced to nine months because of increased labour requirements by the German and English companies. Seafarers were employed on vessels by Hamburg Süd and by the English company China Navigation. In 1970 the HSDG established the South Pacific Marine Services (SPMS), a "non profit" employment agency built originally from ten German shipping companies, of which nine are still involved, with HSDG as the main investor and organiser. Labour recruitment through the SPMS has been successful now for more than thirty years as table 2.2 shows. Contracts in 1999 were between 14 and 17 months' work on German container ships, bulk carriers, coasters and tankers worldwide (including Antarctica). There were options to work consecutive contracts, and working hours were regulated according to the nation of the ship's flag.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>I-Kiribati</th>
<th>Tuvaluans</th>
<th>Vessels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>788</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>863</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>822</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>811</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>987</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>890</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>1160</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>1205</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>1203</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>1226</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>1366</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the first trainees were employed under the German International Register (GIS or German flag), they are now employed either under the German flag (76 vessels) or under foreign flags (85 vessels) such as Liberia, Cyprus, Antigua, Panama and Ireland. The dynamics of "flags of convenience" as a tool to work with cheap labour
and to remain competitive in the growing container ship market, have been mentioned in Chapter 1.

Tuvalu established a Marine Training School on Funafuti after independence from Britain and separation from the Gilbert Islands in 1978. The school works under the same system as Tarawa and there are 650 Tuvaluan seafarers registered, and 241 employed with SPMS in 1999 (Sieg 1999). Alternative employment from German shipping companies not working under the SPMS scheme exists in Tuvalu. It is evident that the employment of Tuvalu seafarers was depressed since separation, owing mainly to economic rather than political factors. Since 1996, however, there has been a rapid increase in demand for merchant seafarers worldwide including those trained at the Tuvalu Marine Training School.

The success of the German project lies in the construction of the Marine Training Centre (MTC) as a joint project of private investment and development aid. The initiative of the HSDG to build the Marine Training Centre was originally sponsored by German development aid (from GTZ). The German contribution to private investment in Kiribati must also be seen in a context described by Fröbel, Heinrichs and Kreye (1980), who argue that Western industrialised countries, though experiencing a long-term fiscal crisis (during the seventies) had to compromise. “The state has been compelled to provide grants, loans and tax concessions to private business on an increasing scale, hoping that this will stimulate domestic investment [and] reduce the rate of unemployment (…)” (Fröbel et al. 1980, 4). While the first goal, to stimulate domestic investment was achieved by Germany substituting the HSDG project, by keeping the main management of the company in Germany, the second goal was in some way undermined, by decreasing wages for German marine personnel and looking for alternative recruitment overseas (see Chaper 7).

Aid for Kiribati was granted by the UK until 1984, and since then New Zealand has been the main aid donor for the MTC. In 1999 the MTC budget was, outlined by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Co-Operatives (unpublished information): The Kiribati Government provides A$628,142; Germany (SPMS) provides the salary of the Captain Superintendent and of one German Chief Officer; and New Zealand provides the salary of the Chief Engineer. Therefore, the Ministry of Labour functions
as the employer of MTC staff. The budget of the Kiribati Government is subsidised
by aid donors, such as Australia, New Zealand, the UK and the EU. New Zealand has
not only provided the salary of one Chief Engineer, but is the main aid donor for
school equipment. The salary of one German Chief Officer is not valid anymore,
because the (highly waged) German Chief Officer was exchanged later in 1999 for a
(much lower waged) Kiribati Chief Officer. In a similar process of localisation and
rationalisation, a German Second Manager of the SPMS in Tarawa was replaced by a
Kiribati Second Manager. These replacements of foreign expertise by indigenous staff
appear as particularly politically correct, since one of the explicit goals of aid donor
countries is to lead a developing country into self-reliance (Gibson 1993).

The Marine Training Centre is now the largest internationally recognised marine
school in the Pacific region. In 1978 a school in Samoa opened after an SPMS
initiative and with aid from Germany (mainly CIM, ZAV and GTZ). However, when
the German institutions withdrew their sponsorship, the school closed in 1983 (a
similar process happened in Tonga). The Marine Training Centre in Tuvalu is still
sponsored by international aid from Australia, New Zealand, EU, and Germany. The
Training Centres in Tuvalu and in Kiribati would not be feasible for the SPMS if
sponsorship by the Kiribati Government, which is fuelled by aid from Australia, New
Zealand and other international agencies as mentioned in the above section, was
withdrawn.

**Fisheries training and employment**
The Fisheries Training Centre, a project in cooperation between Japan and Kiribati,
was first established as a Fishery Training Course in the MTC compound in 1989.
Köpper (1995, 132) describes the fishery project as initiated by MTC as an alternative
to merchant seaman training. However, already in the first few years of fishery
training, with about ten to twenty trainees, it became obvious that the Japanese FTC
project needed to be separated from the German MTC. The compound was too small
to supply sufficient trainees for the increased labour demand from SPMS and to be
efficient for the increasing number of fishery trainees. The FTC project shifted in
1995 to the compound in Bikenibeu, where it trains 36 people per course lasting
seven months (interview 911). Up to then the project and employment of fishers on
Japanese fishing vessels was managed by the Ministry of Labour. The FTC was
initially completely financed by Japanese aid (JICA). The compound in Bikenibeu was funded by Japan and several staff were imported and employed by them. The FTC-Budget today, as reported by Ministry of Labour, Employment and Cooperatives, is distributed with the Kiribati Government providing A$297,754; and Japan providing the salary of the Chief Instructor.

In 1995 the employment of Kiribati fishery trainees was handed to the Kiribati Fishermen Services Ltd. (KFS) which is managed by a joint venture between Kiribati (1 per cent share) and the Federation of Japan Tuna Fisheries (99 per cent) (Nauran Bauro, KFS manager). The KFS supplies the salaries of two Japanese teaching staff for the FTC and paid for the training boat on the Bikenibeu compound.

There are up to ten fishing companies involved with KFS who employ fishers from Kiribati (interview 911) for work for pole and line fishing, on long-line trawlers and purse seiners. The KFS manager, Nauran Bauro, reported that there were 569 men registered in 1999. Contracts on long-line trawlers can last for up to two years, where seafarers work mainly aboard with very little time on shore, sometimes only after six months aboard. Most fishers work currently on purse seiners for up to one year. The Ministry of Labour negotiated in 1999 to ensure more employment on long line trawlers. I-Kiribati are facing great competition in the fishery employment sector, mainly from Indonesia and Vietnam. However, Nauran Bauro explained that Kiribati men are attractive for Japanese employers, because they are resilient, hard working, and of strong physical stature. Holiday breaks to spend time in Kiribati are regulated by Japanese ship owners and are restricted to three to four weeks only. This is due to the seasonal work that fishing requires. Working hours are under Japanese law.

Japan’s regulations for foreign workers up to 1999 did not allow I-Kiribati to work in Japan. The crew had to be picked up either in Guam, the Federated States of Micronesia or the Mariana Islands (which has led to further international contacts and agreements between these Pacific Island states and Kiribati) (interviews 901, 902). The 1999 negotiations between Kiribati and Japan have resulted in a change of regulations in Japan, which needed to restructure its recession-hit economy in the nineties, and direct flights to Japan are now possible. Time onshore in Japan was also restricted, and seafarers told me that they usually had only a couple or three days in
Japan during their contracts. The catch is mostly taken by mother ships coming into fishing grounds and taking off loads.

The Japanese involvement in the labour trade is in some way connected with the agreement on fishing licenses, as mentioned in the section above. Bauro Tabuera, the FTC Principal, believed that the Fishery Project had to do with the “good connections” that Kiribati had already established with Japan, which was visible in the projects the Japanese were involved with, such as the hospital and the Betio jetty harbour. However, he also considered that the Japanese provided employment because the Germans were doing so already, and that there might be a chance that the United States would feel attracted to employ I-Kiribati as well.

South Korea could also be included in this list, as it started employment of unskilled fishers in 1997. The initiator and employer for I-Kiribati in Korea is a retired seafarer on German boats, who also acted in 1999 as MP for Marakei. In 1999 the Ministry of Labour of Kiribati negotiated with companies of the United States for possible employment on their purse seining ships; a few people are working there already. Ngutu Awira, the Senior Labour Officer explained in an interview:

That is one area where we can influence their position, in the current employment, you know? That they are fishing in our waters and the Kiribati waters are giving them a lot of advantage because we are scattered, we are scattered over several millions of miles of ocean, you know? (...) And I think that is just an important factor… the shipping companies would [it] find attractive to employ Kiribati people (interview 901).

The Ministry of Labour is interested in an increase of overseas employment and the working conditions for people are only a second priority. “Those people can survive on the vessels. ... We want to increase the employment opportunities.” said the Secretary of Labour, Teekabu Tiikai. The Secretary of Labour also explained that the employment overseas would be beneficial for Kiribati by importing those skills that fishers learn in Japan. Teekabu explains the Government’s position in terms of the above mentioned te katei ni Kiribati spirit:

You know, with a country like Kiribati, if you want to develop a fishery... you have to work hard. Maybe it is not a luxurious job! And all that. But we have to train some people to work hard like that, so
how can we develop our own fishery when we, you know, like luxuries? That’s the way it is (interview 902).

Kiribati men are required to work for the benefit of their home community. Therefore the government would negotiate only when there are serious complaints about the treatment of I-Kiribati, but hard working conditions are part of the I-Kiribati life already. They are no reason for the government to interfere, when there are options for the nation to earn income through labour contracts.

Summary

Focusing on the two major labour recruitment projects in Kiribati, it can be concluded that the intervention of the German Hamburg Süd shipping company in 1966 had major positive consequences for Kiribati. The amount of remittances received has increased about ten times since the project started (data in detail available in Chapter 5), and recruitment of I-Kiribati has been successful and has increased steadily. The German project has also indirectly initiated the establishing of the Fishery Training Centre, and further employment on Japanese vessels and then later on Korean and United States ships. Skills gained from such employment can be used for Kiribati’s own development inside the country.

The shipping companies make profits from the low wages, the long duration of employment on board and also from the physical and cultural features of I-Kiribati, who are physically strong, well behaved, of good nature and easy to manage. The same features are welcome on Japanese fishing vessels. It can therefore be concluded that I-Kiribati, though disadvantaged by high transport costs, are able to compete on the world market not only because of their skills, gained at the Training Centres, but also because of their cultural background. The government policies emphasise values of resilience and collectivism when employment opportunities are searched for, even though working conditions are reported to be extremely tough, for example on long-line trawlers.

The private investment of shipping and fishing companies in Kiribati is added to, and involved in, international aid projects, and fits therefore into the two earlier parts of this chapter, by contributing to a diverse interconnection of national and foreign economic aspects.

84
Discussion and Conclusions

It was the aim of this chapter to explain the Kiribati economy by illuminating different aspects. The environmental and cultural circumstances, which have led to a rentier economy such as described in the MIRAB mode, were described in detail. An analysis of the international relationships between Kiribati and its main trading partners was the second aspect. Both elements were put together then to reveal the connections between the employment projects from Germany and Japan and Kiribati. The reasons for employment of I-Kiribati are connected with both the disadvantaged geographical and economic structure of the country and with the advantages of location and cultural background.

Since Bertram and Watters developed their MIRAB model in 1985, a remarkable shift in Pacific Island economic development theory amongst scholars can be observed. Firstly, there is a shift away from dependency theory, though it is recognised that countries such as Kiribati need external economic support. Secondly, there is increasing recognition of the importance of the subsistence economy (Hennings 2000), and transnationalism in the form of permanent migration from Pacific Island countries such as Samoa or Tonga (James 1997). There is also acknowledgment of the benefits from remittances from temporary labour circulation such as from seafarers into Kiribati and Tuvalu (and other Pacific Island countries) (Connell 1983, Bertram 1997). Pacific Islanders begin to identify increasingly as a Pacific community, though each island culture has unique structures that are either based on family or community values (Hau’ofa 1998, Tarte 1998). Ogden (1989, 371) concludes that “[t]he paradox of Pacific development is a constant process of reconciling communitarian, village-based views of self-reliance with the very different goals of statist perspectives of self-reliance, against the background of their evolving MIRAB economies”.

The idea of the subsistence sector as the basis for Kiribati’s economy is expressed in the advice for planning by the National Economic Planning Office (NEPO) in Kiribati, to “maintain the strength of our subsistence culture – so that we can always ‘weather out’ any severe shocks to the world economy, without the widespread poverty and deprivation which has been experienced in the most severely impacted
countries” (NEPO 1998, 13). NEPO refers here to the East Asian crisis in the late 1990s. Economic planning in Kiribati needs to avoid being negatively influenced by fluctuations of the world economy by recognising the subsistence sector as a strong back up for any problems caused by a crisis. Tisdell (2002, 908) states that high transaction and transport costs reduce benefits from international trade; therefore an increase of merchandise exports does not seem very promising for Kiribati. The author suggests instead, and this goes along with Bertram’s and Watters’ MIRAB model, expanding exports of semi-skilled labour as already happens with merchant seamen and fishing crews.

What is missing in theoretical discourses however, is the cultural element in political negotiations that influences decision making by the country that receives aid. Kiribati cultural codes of pride and fair sharing can and must be recognised as an important input in negotiations over trading with development aid. Massey (2002, 294) stresses that places are internally complicated rather than coherent. “Places need to be negotiated” rather than being focussed on as “local communities”. Different cultures need to be recognised as having their own history, timing, structure and meanings. Geddes et al. (1982, 10f.) for example discussed the different meaning of development for people in Kiribati, which is based on a philosophy of “living well” rather than of wealth accumulation. Potter defines development as “a multifaceted series of processes which impact on people and places in different ways and at different times” (2001, 425). Therefore countries need to follow their own paths of development and not be pressed into models of “developed” countries (Crocombe 2001; see also Cowen and Shenton 1996). The concept of “core” and “periphery” must be revised in Potter’s view (Potter 2001). Kiribati with its central location at the global periphery, the extraordinary large Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and its geographical position at the Equator might serve as a microcosm for the Pacific situation.
Chapter 3: 
Conducting Fieldwork in Kiribati: Methodology

Introduction

My first insights into research with people in Kiribati and with seafarers started in 1996 with my initial meeting with Dr Ueantabo Neemia-Mackenzie. Being interested in finding a research subject that included fieldwork in the Pacific and which would fuel my interest for mobile lifestyles, synchronised providentially with Ueantabo’s interest, for he was at this time Director of the Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies. Ueantabo was looking for someone to conduct research on the consequences of seafarer employment for Kiribati. He felt that there were many changes visible: economic, cultural and social changes, as well as those affecting the Kiribati environment. He thought it was advantageous that I was German, as the main employers were a group of German companies. As I learned later, people from Kiribati regard “being” German as “belonging” to a cultural or even a mutual “kinship” group. Ueantabo’s view was that the managers of the German shipping agency (SPMS), and the Captain Superintendent and other German staff at the Marine Training Centre, would talk to me in more detail and with more ease, because I spoke their language, and because we belonged to the same culture.

Ueantabo’s judgement was accurate: to be of the same nationality as the managers of the biggest international employment agency and training centre in Kiribati was a great advantage, though cultural backgrounds in Germany can be quite different, depending on the particular region people come from. Findlay and Li (1999, 56) argue that migration and the experience of living amongst “others” has been shown to reinforce self-identity, which might be one of the reasons why people of the same national background tend to “stick together”, even when the reasons for being in a foreign country might be quite different or even conflicting. Other indicators, such as age, gender and occupational background also influence rapport. However, being able to use our native language made my communication with Germans easier from the beginning.
It was in Ueantabo's view helpful for fieldwork in Kiribati that I was female, because my gender would facilitate access to wives and mothers of seafarers, while a male researcher would not easily gain access. The dilemma of conducting fieldwork amongst different genders has been discussed (amongst others) by Scheyvens and Leslie (2001, 122f). The authors showed that it is quite often a disadvantage to conduct fieldwork among the opposite gender, but the authors described that it could be positive for women when interviews were conducted by a male fieldworker, for example in the case of Papua New Guinea, where the researcher was of same background but from a different village (see also Tooke 2000). As will be discussed later, the combination of being German and being female turned out to be useful for data gathering in Kiribati, but it also placed me in a range of conflicting roles, which sometimes hindered or restrained the fieldwork process. I am therefore aware that my position in Kiribati was rather fluid and unstable (Katz 1994, Lal 1996, Findlay and Li 1999, Berg and Mansvelt 2000, Till 2001), but it exposed me to fascinating fieldwork dynamics. I sometimes felt as though I were mediating between the three major agencies: the employers, the labour union and the government. My contact with individual seafarers, their wives and families offered me a clear inner position and mission statement for my fieldwork: I conducted fieldwork on an individual level and not for agencies. I constructed the inner guideline for myself that I communicated, shared and wrote for individual people and their families rather than for organisations above them, even though the latter might gain insights from the results of my findings. This awareness helped me mentally and emotionally always to come back to a level where communication took place between individuals, and where I refrained from taking sides. This again helped me connect with individuals, I-Kiribati and Germans and people of other nationalities, on levels of sharing and respect for each other. This perspective also made me reflect and understand that any conclusions I drew from my interviews were based on the knowledge of the people I talked to and filtered through my process of reflecting and understanding.

This chapter on methodology is structured into two main parts. The first part will describe and discuss the preparation for my fieldwork and the reasons why I chose to use techniques based mainly on qualitative methods. My research background is one of mixed-methods and my study in ethnography which was associated with my Geography degree provided some fieldwork training. My earlier experiences of
fieldwork were based on questionnaires and quantitative analysis, but included also qualitative techniques. I worked for my masters' thesis with people who organise fairgrounds (in the Australian and New Zealand region called carnival people) using qualitative methods, as well as questionnaires and other quantitative techniques with visitors to these events. Carnival people are a highly sensitive and in some ways marginalised, mobile, occupational and social group. My work with them required flexibility, confidentiality and was conducted at weekends, or sometimes for a period of several days over two years of participating and observing in the field. The experiences I gained from this were very helpful in preparing for Kiribati, and shaped my "positionality", the way I behaved and was perceived by people in Kiribati, in many ways (England 1994; Herod 1999).

In preparation for my fieldwork in Kiribati from March to September 1999, I had to choose the islands I wanted to focus my study on, and places I could live in. I had to gain a basic level of language understanding and to plan the material to be taken with me. I needed to have good knowledge of what was required of a woman in Kiribati and to understand some behavioural codes (Bernard 1995, Kearns 2000, Bailey 2001, Myers 2001, Price 2001). Ueantabo contacted the Kiribati National Council of Churches, and in particular the Kiribati Protestant Church (KPC), and asked them to support my research, especially by providing accommodation, which they generously granted. He also contacted at this time the Director of the University of the South Pacific in Tarawa, Temakei Tebano, to support my study in Kiribati with office space, which he kindly supplied. Temakei was most helpful during my stay on Tarawa, and after a long time of trying to acquire my research visa, which was an unexpectedly complicated and expensive procedure, Temakei's word finally led to success: I could officially start conducting interviews two and a half weeks after arrival.

Rakeiti Mackenzie, Ueantabo's wife, spent hours introducing me to "the field", telling me all she found important about Kiribati and trying to teach me some basic I-Kiribati language. I was also fortunate to have been part of the Pacific Islands Political Science Association Conference (PIPSA) in Christchurch in December 1998, where I mixed with a group of very enthusiastic Pacific Island researchers of both European and Pacific descent. Some of them gave me long lists of advice on what to expect and what I should take with me, which was useful, exciting, and some of it made me feel a
little uneasy. When I left for Kiribati, I felt well prepared and a little overstocked with material (which was costly, because the airline to Tarawa allows only 20kg baggage) and unsure about how some of my living circumstances would be.

The second part of this chapter concentrates on the fieldwork experience and outcomes. It contains a discussion on the methods I used, how successful they were, and how different circumstances affected the sampling of data. At all times during my time in Kiribati I was made aware of my own background and identity, which was as an “I-Matang” (European, westernised), in contrast to those of the I-Kiribati I lived with and talked to. Though my first naive intention (Katz 1996, 174 labels it “exoticizing impulse”) was to adapt and merge into Kiribati culture, I very quickly found that this was impossible, especially in only six months and with a busy schedule. Some researchers emphasise “power” relationships in the field (Pile 1991, Kobayashi 1994, Staeheli and Lawson 1994, Wolf 1996, Rose 1997), which can be particularly difficult and shaped by contrasts when the researcher is from a “westernised” country doing fieldwork in a developing country. How we represent ourselves and to develop a good “code of conduct” behaviour that impacts positively on the self-respect of people that are researched is relevant (Bailey 2001, 107; Sidaway 1992, Wolf 1996, Scheyvens and Leslie 2000). My awareness of an existing “power relationship” that was not intended by me arose when I felt I was treated with more respect than I was used to in my own country, “only” because I was “I-Matang”. In buses I always had a “good” seat, and I was to sit in front of the maneaba and to eat first. In return I was expected to eat from all food offered and as much as I could and to gracefully accept my honoured place. Berno (1999) discusses in detail how deep the impact of people visiting Pacific island countries can be, by using the example of the Cook Islands. However, I found that comparison could be drawn with Kiribati. There is a need for awareness of a host-guest relationship between people in Kiribati and people visiting the country, and it is essential that this relationship is fuelled by respect and tactful manners. Till (2001, 52) discusses that acknowledging that we are “outsiders” is not enough to avoid unintentional misunderstandings or hurt feelings, and that we must choose our appropriate behaviours with each situation and contact we make in the field.
Katz (1994) argues that “[e]thnographers are displaced persons – first to see, then to speak. One goes to the field as a kind of ‘stranger’, and draws on that status to see difference and ask questions that under other circumstances might seem (even more) intrusive, ignorant, or inane to those who answer them”. The author argues further that relations of power or powerlessness in the field are “complexly interwoven in the fieldwork process and the ways I report on my work” (Katz 1994, 69). In order to accomplish something from our fieldwork, we need to recognise that our situation in the field is one of “betweenness”: inherently unstable. England (1994, 86) argues similarly that “there exists a continuum between the researcher and the researched”. This betweenness is influenced by the researcher’s biography and by the perceptions and interpretations of fieldwork experience. To integrate into the research process can cause feelings of vulnerability for researchers. However, as these authors describe (see also Ganesh 1993, Katz 1996, Lal 1996, Rose 1997, Stebbins 1998, Herod 1999, Tooke 2000, Myers 2001, Hyndman 2001), the relationship between researchers and others will always be more uncertain than certain, diverse and problematic rather than simple and controlled. To embrace this aspect of uncertainty in fieldwork and to reveal ourselves in our work and reflect on how we conduct our research, how we gain our information and how we come to conclusions is essential to the success of the project. When I began to accept my I-Matang role in Kiribati, I began to conduct myself with more confidence and felt that I put not only myself but also people around me at ease. However, I experienced a constant juggle between being a “typical” I-Matang, one who behaved impatient and superior, to striving to be a “different” I-Matang, one who had adopted some important behavioural codes by showing caring and respect for others (similarly discussed on fieldwork in Zanzibar in Myers 2001, and Rose 1997). The reward for doing the right thing, was always enormous, and the repercussions if not so acting were painful.

**Preparation**

The preparations for my fieldwork, conducted over six months from March to September 1999 in Kiribati, included: developing research objectives; deciding what methodology would be appropriate to use; deciding what islands to conduct research on; becoming familiar with the Kiribati culture and environment and with behavioural
codes; understanding some of the structures of the main employers for seafarers; organising myself physically and financially; and asking the Human Ethics Committee at the University of Canterbury for feedback on, and permission for, the chosen techniques. In September 1999, after having left Kiribati, I went to Germany, to conduct interviews with the Hamburg Süd headquarters of the South Pacific Marine Services in Hamburg and the German Transport Federation labour union headquarters in Bremen.

When “methodology” is defined as “a set of rules and procedure for doing research” (Graham 1999, 81), then preparation is needed to design and to follow a set of guidelines. The “research methods”, defined as “a way of doing research” (Graham 1999, 81), had to be chosen and a tool-kit of techniques was needed that would be applied in the field. The following paragraphs discuss the aspects listed above.

**Fieldwork objectives**

The central focus of the study was the examination of the human and environmental consequences of seafarer labour migration for people in Kiribati. The main task was to study social and kinship structures and to understand how the absence of men in their productive stage of the life-cycle might affect these structures: in what ways did social and cultural structures differ from those thirty years ago, and how much of these changes would refer to the particular circular nature of seafarer labour migration? The environment in Kiribati is closely connected to the *I-Kiribati* culture (as discussed in Chapter 2). I decided to work with individuals and to use a qualitative approach. I found that doing this would add greater understanding on how “migration” (see discussions on the term in Chapter 1) and especially the particular type of seafarers’ circular absence from Kiribati, influenced the home country and families left behind. My aim was to understand changes in Kiribati by approaching groups of individuals from different levels: firstly to find people in key positions and to talk to *unimane* and *unaine*, older people, to understand the basic socio-cultural structures; secondly to talk to different family members: seafarers, their wives and their fathers and mothers, to understand how seafaring affected individuals and families; thirdly to find access to the major employment agencies, to the government and to schools to understand the mechanisms of employment of seafarers, and the influences that remittances of seafarers have on the development of Kiribati.
Fieldwork techniques

In the view of some authors there has been a shift in the mainstream discussions on the use of field methods and techniques to study migration or other forms of population mobility. While from the 1960s to the end of the 1980s mainly quantitative approaches were the main tools in the population geography literature (Bedford 1997b), it has been recognised that fieldwork methods based on either biographical interviews (Halfacree and Boyle 1993, 1995; Lawson 2000) or on mixed-methods (Findley and Li 1999; Graham 1999) would widen the range of data gained, and that research would be enriched when different data perspectives were embraced. Skeldon (1995) and Silvey and Lawson (1999) comment that complex approaches have been common, especially in population geography research in the Pacific for decades, more perhaps than on population research in developing countries. It is my conviction that quantitative data always must be illuminated by additional qualitative information; and that both techniques complement each other. Graham (1999, 830) speaks of “interweaving” methods “used in conjunction” to enrich our understanding (see also Winchester 1999). Meth (2003) stresses that using different methods such as focus group discussions and personal interviews, or personal diaries, provides an opportunity for individuals to share with others in a social constructed context, and also to share more intimate data.

In the case of my fieldwork in Kiribati, qualitative methods, based on open and semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and participant observations seemed to be most appropriate in dealing with individuals and smaller groups (Bernard 1995, Findlay and Li 1999, Hay 2000). However, I also strived to find population statistics and economic data to illuminate how seafarers’ circular movements affect national and regional levels. Remittances are measurable data and they have a place in the National Development Plan in Kiribati. It was one of my goals to find any quantitative material that could provide insight into the impact of remittances at the national and regional level. To explore personal effects, and the use and meaning of remittances for families and communities, I planned where possible to explore this with individuals separately (data description and results are in Chapter 5).
**Familiarising with the Kiribati background**

As discussed in detail in Chapter 2, there are mainly two different cultural regions in Kiribati, referring to the Gilbert Islands (see figure 3.1): the Northern Gilberts and the Southern Gilberts. The islands of Kuria, Aranuka and Abemama in the Central Gilberts can be seen as a third region, because the cultural system differs from the Northern Gilberts, though both in contrast to the Southern Gilberts used to have a chiefly system with some hierarchical order of the islands. There are also regional differences: each island has a particular reputation. People usually refer to more than one home island. It is common for parents to have married across islands and to have bequeathed pieces of land to their children.

When I had to decide where to go to, Ueantabo advised me to go to at least one island of each region, and to a new “resettlement” Line island: Tabuaeran (Fanning Island). Tabuaeran would be interesting to go to, because of the new seaweed farms that are the largest in Kiribati, and because there was less tourism development than on Kiritimati (Christmas Island). I could have picked up some interesting regional differences from the Gilbert group because of this. From a geographer’s point of view, it would have also been desirable to find out if there are differences between families who live on more remote islands and those who live closer to urbanised Tarawa. My consideration was that regions closer to Tarawa must show sub-urbanised infrastructure and are perhaps more attractive for returning seafarers. In contrast, remote islands might contain more “traditional” features and would be harder to access for seafarers coming back for only short periods of times. After having consulted Ueantabo, I decided to go to Beru, a remote island in the Southern Gilberts, to Abaiang, the closest island to Tarawa in the Northern Gilberts, and to Tabuaeran of the Line Islands (see figure 2.2, page 48). I would mainly stay on South Tarawa, the urban centre of Kiribati. As soon as I arrived on Tarawa, I had to find out when and how I would travel to the outer islands.
I thought that Tabuaeran could be challenging to go to, because it is more than 2000km away from South Tarawa. I decided to go there at the very end of my time in Kiribati, taking a plane or a boat, and then to leave the country from there. However, this plan appeared rather impractical when I checked my options on South Tarawa: the flight was hugely expensive. I would have had to go over Fiji, Hawaii and Kiritimati to arrive at Tabuaeran. To take a boat trip was not quite as expensive and
more straightforward, but it would take three weeks or more. Added to this, both flights and boat trip were dependent on different circumstances, such as how many people booked, the weather, and the availability of food storage, and there was no committed time the agency could tell me when the boat would leave: maybe in August, maybe earlier or later. This was impractical for me, since I had a certain time I needed to be in Germany. This example is also a very good way of explaining differences between the I-Kiribati way and the I-Matang way: time has a different meaning. However, this also shows the reality of life in Kiribati, as mentioned in Chapters 1 and 2. Transport facilities are very expensive and access has become difficult, especially since development of faster aviation technology and the service withdrawal of some major airlines in the Pacific: a decade ago, direct flights between South Tarawa and Christmas Island were possible and less expensive.

I mentioned before that my frequent contact with Rakeiti and Ueantabo and their family and some of their friends enabled me to familiarise myself with Kiribati in some ways. I learned a little Gilbertese, unfortunately never more than this, though Rakeiti’s efforts to teach me were tireless. At family events I learned about the unique dance techniques in Kiribati, which are indeed quite different from other Pacific island dancing, and involve much more than hip movements. In Kiribati, each minimal movement of a dancer, such as finger movements and the angle of arms and head, symbolise a cultural and environmental meaning, such as the movements of the crab, and these dancing figures have to be very exact. Each dance must be conducted with a particular dress, or decoration, which also can differ depending on the theme of the dance.

I also learned in the year of preparing for my fieldwork, how important smiles and laughter in Kiribati are (see also Berno 1999 on Cook Islands). It was explained to me that growing up in a harsh environment with limited resources and times of hardship, the I-Kiribati learned to downplay pain as a survival strategy. When something happens to a person, such as banging their heads against the roof of the lnaneaba (which is often the case...), people laugh and make fun of it, and the affected person would join in very quickly, laughing at him or herself. Doing this educates people from childhood on to overcome pain very quickly and not to exaggerate any painful feelings. As I learned later, laughter is also used to educate people to dress properly.
and to wear their hair tidily. Laughter can feel quite humiliating at times, which is part of the educational process. However, it seems to be a means of looking at the smaller difficulties in life in a positive way. Delph-Janiurek (2001) discusses the occurrence of laughter in interviews in respect of mutual understanding of humour. "Shared humour demonstrates that participants draw on the same particular strands of socio-political ideology or sets of discourses, thus sharing the same interpretative framework for a piece of talk. ... A sense of sameness and consensus amongst participants in conversation is thus realized through shared ‘humorous’ laughter" (Delph-Janiurek 2001, 417). Doing research in Kiribati requires an understanding of the particular humour and to distinguish between the different meanings of laughter, such as embarrassed and nervous laughter, teasing laughter, or happiness. When doing so, access to people is easier; however, the different meanings have potential to lead to misunderstandings.

In contrast to the meaning of laughter or perhaps added to this, it is important to understand the differences in emotional expressions between women and men, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. Emotional expressions are generally to be repressed in public. I learned from Rakeiti and other friends that it is polite to appear emotionless when farewelling or welcoming family or spouses at the airport, even though one might feel an overwhelming sadness or joy. Women are supposed to suppress their emotional expressions more than men. It is considered unreliable and weak when a woman shows her feelings towards someone in public, especially a man. There are many behavioural codes for gender roles, which will be discussed in more detail later. However, I needed to know some to be able to behave, and especially to dress appropriately. Kearns (2000, 115) stresses the importance of the way we behave or clothe ourselves when we are in the field, which he calls "incorporating" in the field. I learned, for example, to always have my shoulders covered and to wear garments that covered my knees. Very soon after I arrived on Tarawa I learned that it was more tactful to be dressed in lavalava or in a wide skirt rather than long pants, though Ueantabo’s family and others assured me repeatedly that being an I-Matang, it would be fine to wear long trousers. Women in Kiribati wear tibuta, blouses that are beautifully decorated and quite loose, ideal for tropical climates. However, though it was taken with delight when I-Matang women wore tibutas, it was a mistake and rather embarrassing wearing especially coloured tibutas in church. I also found that I
was sometimes surrounded by I-Kiribati girls wearing modern T-shirts and fashionable long skirts, while I was dressed in tibuta and lavalava.

**Contact with employment agencies**

I had already contacted the South Pacific Marine Services (SPMS) in 1997, when I was still in Germany. I found that the headquarters initially were not too impressed when hearing about my research but offered immediate information on their project in Kiribati by sending me Ralph Köpper's (1995) dissertation on the effects of the Marine Training Centre as a joint privately initiated and governmental development aid programme on Kiribati. Köpper’s thesis was funded by the Hamburg Sued shipping company and included valuable basic information not only on the Marine Training project but also the Fisheries Training Centre on Tarawa and other similarly joint funded projects in the Pacific. The SPMS headquarter in Hamburg felt that with Köpper’s dissertation, sufficient research on the employment of seafarers in Kiribati had been done, and though they did not want to restrict my undertaking, they were not in favour of any further research.

When I met the managers of both the SPMS on Tarawa and later in Hamburg, I felt a great deal more welcome than in 1997, and I have gained immense support for my research in the form of abundant material on remittances, employment data, and any other information I wanted. I also found that managers and employees of the SPMS office were genuinely interested in the wellbeing of their registered seafarers and their families, often being in a conflicting position having to serve their company’s interest and to care for seafarers. However, saying this, it is clear to me that I might subconsciously be inclined to look at the German company more positively and to take it on trust that they will act ethically because, being German myself, I could have been unwittingly identifying with them.

On one occasion I was confronted with a situation where a seafarer’s wife on Tarawa did not allow her sister in-law to conduct an interview with me because she felt I was biased, because I was German and had frequent contact with the German management of SPMS and MTC. I cannot estimate how many women on Tarawa felt the same way. Her reaction was understandable, however, though I could not agree with her behaviour towards her sister in-law, who signalled to me that she was very happy to
talk to me and apologised for the situation, which she could not change. A similar suspicion came initially from the KIOSU, the seafarer’s labour union on Tarawa. First, it took several efforts to meet with those in charge, and then it took a while before they warmed up to our talk, and I felt a certain amount of aggression during the talk. As will be discussed in Chapter 7, at the time of my fieldwork, the union was in negotiation with the SPMS on wage increases. My interview with the KIOSU was only enabled when the negotiation came near to a conclusion. I would have liked a more frequent contact with KIOSU delegates to understand their point of view correctly. However, I had a chance to clarify some of their perspectives when I was invited to talk to delegates of the Transportation Federation in Germany, which is a contact node between the International Transport Federation in London and the KIOSU on Tarawa.

I felt the SPMS persistently promoted their human attitude and emphasised that their employment was not only a benefit but a blessing for Kiribati. The company seemed to gain pride and dignity from the feeling of adding to the welfare of a developing country, which was illuminated during several casual talks and during interviews. Lane (1999, 23) has emphasised the good reputation of companies such as the Hamburg Süd, operating from “values as pride in craft”, as discussed in Chapter 1. It was one of the driving forces for the owners of the SPMS shipping companies to keep alive a project that was not only profitable for themselves, but also beneficial for Kiribati, though the global competition was high. The above mentioned cultural distinctions of I-Kiribati, which were part of the reasons for the choice of place, are still driving forces for the pride of German shipping owners to have found a pool of valuable employees. As discussed in Chapter 1, these values of identity and pride can be seen as positive for the employment of seafarers in contrast to newer, profit-oriented values. However, as will be discussed later, the company uses the argument of global competition to put the Kiribati government and labour unions under pressure regarding wages (see chapter 7). The rhetorical influence of SPMS managers becomes visible in some of Köpper’s arguments, which are in my opinion, at times idealistic. Also, Klikauer and Morris (2002, 99) seem to base their article in some way unreflectingly on SPMS material when they place emphasis on the “sponsoring SPMS” for example, which is in this wording not quite accurate. I found a very similar caring and positive attitude at the Japanese based Kiribati Fisheries
employment agency. However in contrast to those positive examples there seemed to be a rather inhuman attitude by those who were responsible for the employment of seafarers on Korean ships.

**Human ethics and interview coding**

The dangers of reinforcing colonised patterns of colonisation are discussed in Kobayashi (1994), Wolf (1996), Rose (1997) and Cupples (2002). Sidaway (1992, 403) discusses the ethics of conducting research by “foreigners in ‘advanced’ capitalist societies in the (mostly ex-colonial) global periphery referred to in shorthand as the “Third World”” The process of acquiring knowledge of a foreign environment involves many difficulties, including cultural misunderstanding and translation of cultural differences. Critical self-awareness must go beyond the selfish interest of a researcher to gain data (Myers 2001). Sidaway (1992, 406) advises the researcher to “avoid actions that violate ethical standards and cultural understanding” as far as possible when in the field. However, Scheyvens and Leslie (2001) argue that research can be positive for people when it enables them to articulate their needs.

Part of my decision to conduct research in Kiribati using mainly qualitative methods was based on the assumption that this was the most appropriate approach in a country where culture is based on oral traditions and communication is mainly spoken language. I submitted my research design to the Human Ethics Committee of the University of Canterbury (as required when doing research on people), who granted their permission for me to proceed. I undertook to inform interview partners about their rights not to answer questions and to interrupt, or end the interview at any time. I also assured each person of the confidentiality of their data. To ensure privacy, I decided not to document participants’ names when interviewing on a personal basis. While it was not useful in the field to give each participant a written explanation of their rights and confidentiality to read and sign, I always started interviews with participants by explicitly informing them about these rights. When working with interpreters, I informed them and gained their agreements on confidentiality of the interview, and asked each participant if they felt comfortable about having an interpreter present. When conducting focus group discussions, I informed the participants at length about the purpose of my thesis and asked them for permission to
tape the discussion. Names were not recorded, and people could in most cases not be identified.

After returning from fieldwork, and in order to avoid that people could be recognised by Ueantabo, I decided not to discuss my data or experiences with him. This was a difficult decision, and as a consequence, our contact developed at some distance. While writing the thesis I decided to use numerical codes, for example “(interview 924)”, and general descriptions, such as “young woman” (for a focus group participant) or “a father” (for an interview participant) rather than names, to fully conceal the identity of key interview participants, especially those who wanted to remain anonymous, and of all women and men related to seafarers (table 3.1). I decided to use double codes when a person fulfilled two roles, for example a key role, such as working in one of the Ministries, and being related to a seafarer or being a seafarer himself and working at the MTC or at a different institution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.1: Interview coding for this thesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview codes &gt; (100), (200), (300) are seafarers (30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview codes &gt; (400), (500) are seafarers’ wives (34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview codes &gt; (600), (700) are parents and siblings (37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview codes &gt; (900) are key interview partners (35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(MN 07/99)</strong> refers to a talk with someone in a month (07) of the year 1999</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It would have been neater to have used pseudonyms, as can be often found in publications where interview excerpts are used. However, I refrained from doing this, because firstly I could have chosen the name of one of my participants by accident, and secondly, because I found that names in Kiribati have cultural meanings, which I did not want to confuse. Only when a person was officially interviewed in his or her role as a government employee, is their official name attached to their response in this thesis, and only when this response is related to their role in the government. Numerical codes are put in places where the same person responded in a personal context. A code referring to month and year, such as “(MN 07/99)” is placed when referring to informal or formal, but unrecorded, talks to people (see table 3.1). The
Numerical codes differ from fieldwork codes, used to detach interviews on tapes and in interview notebooks. I also conducted focus groups which are coded as “(focus group i)” for example. When referring to members of a focus group, I used general terms such as (“girl 1”), or described the content in the form of a summary (table 3.2).

### Table 3.2: Coding of focus groups in this thesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(focus group i)</td>
<td>Seamen’s Wives Association, Tarawa 31/03/99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(focus group ii)</td>
<td>Unimane, Taboaki, Beru 22/05/99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(focus group iii)</td>
<td>Unimane, Nuka, Beru 29/05/99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(focus group iv)</td>
<td>Unaine (KPC), Nuka, Beru 01/06/99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(focus group v)</td>
<td>Foundation of the South Pacific, Tarawa, 02/08/99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(focus group vi)</td>
<td>Youth leaders, YESS Centre, KPC Antebuka, 08/08/99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I have had permission from SPMS and from the Westpac Bank of Kiribati to gain insights into remittances data under a promise to keep the data, which included peoples’ names strictly confidential. I have used this data for quantitative analysis only and have taken care that confidentiality is maintained. Neither names of people, nor of ships appear at any place in this thesis.

In addition to recording interviews I kept interview notebooks, but took care not to write names of interviewees into these, and used codes instead. I also kept two diaries, one with personal notes and one that I call a “logbook”. The logbook had scheduled meetings and other plans on the right hand side, and notes on what happened actually and why on the left hand side, a system suggested by Bernard (1994). This way my fieldwork had a consistent structure, which was essential, having only six months available, and it was easy to follow a plan. I attempted to record as soon and as accurately as possible what I heard or observed in my note taking, so as to increase validity in my research, following Wolcott’s (1994, 349) advice.

I provided all interpreters with some cash payment, and I also contributed to the households I lived in. I always took little gifts, mostly tobacco, garments or biscuits to people I interviewed, in order to show respect for their willingness to talk to me and
for their hospitality. However, I always felt that people were giving me back more than I gave them.

**Conducting fieldwork**

In this section I will firstly discuss my field relations on Tarawa and then on the outer islands, introducing people I lived with, talked to and techniques I used to gain access to people with knowledge about seafarers, economic, environmental and social changes and to women and men who were related to seafarers. Then I will proceed to a discussion of interview situations, obstacles that arose during interviews, and interview transcriptions.

**Field relations on Tarawa**

My fieldwork started in March 1999. I was picked up by a Kiribati Protestant Church (KPC) representative and was unexpectedly and immediately offered a place to stay by a German development aid funding assistant, Rudolf Oltmann, who worked for the Protestant Church and lived on the compound. I lived with him and his family for one month. Then I moved to the Youth Centre (YESS) of the KPC compound into a small room, where I stayed for the rest of my time under the supervision of my neighbours and of two young women who, as I heard in the last week of my stay, were asked by KPC to live in the room next to mine for my protection.

To live at the KPC compound was the best I could have hoped for. The headquarters of the KPC in Antebuka was a safe place, respected by all people in Kiribati. And even when I conducted interviews in Beru and Abaiang, people were happy to know that I came from Antebuka. People on the compound were not related to each other but had constructed their own little community, and it was possible to feel included in it, though personal access to any of the families living there was not really encouraged. Kiribati culture is strictly based on a family system and people do not interact much with those they are not related to (see chapter 2). I spent at least a couple of hours each day with my neighbours, two women, mother and daughter, and the daughter's little baby, and heard many stories of their lives and about things that happened with their family members and friends. During these talks I learned more about their culture, the *I-Kiribati* world views and therefore expanded what I had
learned from Rakeiti. I also felt that the KPC was in many ways a “neutral” space, from where I could reach the different places I needed to contact. One of my windows opened to the community hall of the YESS centre, where I witnessed all sorts of different community activities: women’s bingo meetings, YESS youth leader meetings, and a popular rock band practising.

One sad day I came home and accompanied the community in their wake for Tiontín Arue, the KPC General Secretary, who died suddenly and was put into the YESS centre community hall over night. Tiontín had been in contact with Ueantabo and arranged my stay at KPC. When he suddenly passed away he followed his first wife, who died only a few months before, after having given birth to their youngest son. Tiontín was loved by the KPC community as a hard working, kind and caring man. He was honoured by KPC by being buried in the roundabout at the entrance of the compound (see figure 3.2).

One of my most important contacts and friends was Kaingateiti Maerere. She was introduced to me by Rudolf and worked in the Journalistic Department of the KPC,
where she edited, published and printed the monthly KPC journal. Kaingateiti conducted an interview with me in order to let the KPC community know about my arrival and undertaking and then wrote an introductory article about my research for the KPC leaflet. Kaingateiti's endeavour was of great importance in integrating me into the Antebuka community. I am very grateful for her tireless efforts in asking everyone in the neighbourhood to talk to me, and to find families who were willing to conduct interviews with me.

Teruauango Beneteri and her sister Mweroa lived temporarily next door, in order to look after me. They became close friends soon after they cared for me during a few days of high fever I experienced. Teruauango helped to interpret a few interviews with people on Tarawa.

To gain access to seafarers' wives, I contacted several women's organisations on Tarawa: the national Kiribati women's organisation (AMAK), and the KPC women's organisation (RAK). The General Secretary of the KPC women's group organised a focus group meeting with the Seamen's Wives Association on Tarawa. I found that this organisation was initiated by Charlotte Schulz-Wolfgramm, a German anthropologist who conducted interviews with seafarers' wives in the early nineties and encouraged them to join and establish a support group. The project established in 1995 works quite successfully. The Seamen's Wives Association consisted in 1999 of about 600 members, who were almost without exception from Tarawa. They have established their own centre, built from funding granted by international aid organisations, such as the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) who granted A$3,000 aid in kind, Canadian Aid which granted A$10,000, and fundraising amongst seafarers who contributed about A$2,000. The women come together every week, basically for chats, but also for activities, such as cooking, playing bingo or sewing together. Some of the women working for the SPMS have decided not to join the Seamen's Wives Association, since it had participated in a demonstration against adjustment of wages in the mid 1990s. These women felt they could not support these demonstrations.

The focus group meeting on the 31 March 1999, at the beginning of my time on Tarawa, initiated not only first contact with seafarers' wives, but also gave some
indication of the problems facing them, which I later discussed with the women in more detail during individual interviews. These were problems with in-law families; partnership problems caused by living apart from each other; safety issues when living neolocally (on their own); economic problems or benefits, such as being proud of having their own house or having cash available; and sexual and health related issues. The women did not talk about child care, but children were mentioned at times. The women told me that having children was safer for them, and also more comfortable when having to be without their husbands.

My second concern was to contact the Marine Training Centre and the South Pacific Marine Services, and also Governmental institutions which were related to my project or which could provide information on cultural, social, and environmental change, and economic data. Rudolf Oltmann was in personal contact with all German managers and staff of the Marine Training Centre and the South Pacific Marine Services, and it was therefore possible to gain access to these institutions rather quickly and in an unconventional way, which I felt was a great advantage. I was regarded with some initial suspicion, but was soon welcomed to both institutions and established frequent communication and conducted interviews with Peter Lange, (and later Raimund Gross) manager of the SPMS, Lutz Wesemann the Captain Superintendent and Chief Engineer Joachim Ilge and with Etekiero, who stepped into the Chief Engineer role, when Joachim left. I also had a chance to talk to other I-Kiribati officers at the Marine Training Centres, two of them related to Rakeiti Mackenzie, but did not conduct in-depth interviews with them.

Lutz Wesemann invited me to participate in the Marine Training Centre Intake Test activities on 22 March 1999, which started at 8am and lasted all day long. On this day I had the opportunity to understand the mechanisms of recruiting students for the MTC. I also had a great opportunity to meet all staff, especially when I was invited to mark intake tests with them, and to join officers during their one-on-one interview procedures. I also witnessed some medical checks, such as hearing tests and eye tests, talked to medical and technical staff and to students and applicants of the test, who were selected from all islands in Kiribati (including the Line Islands), in relation to demographic figures of these islands (see details in Introduction Chapter). After this initial experience I gained greater access to the Marine Training Centre and was
invited to visit the Centre and to talk to anyone on the compound at anytime. One of
the German technical staff enabled me to conduct interviews with seafarers returning
from their first trip overseas, by releasing each man for an hour from class and by
providing a secluded place where the interview could be conducted in private. The
other technician, who had worked for the MTC for eighteen years, allowed me to
conduct a detailed interview with him. I also contacted Dr Taylor at the Marine
Training Centre who was the medical advisor for seafarers and conducted an
interview with him at a later date.

My visit to the Fisheries Training Centre included a walk about the compound in
Bikenibeu on the 23 July 1999, and an interview with Bauro Tabuera, the manager. I
talked twice to Nauran Bauro, the manager of the Kiribati Fishermen Services, and
conducted a detailed interview.

Peter Lange left Kiribati in May and Raimund Gross arrived and stepped into the
manager role. Raimund’s managing style was fairly different from Peter’s and I spent
less time talking to him, mainly because Raimund was overwhelmed with work in the
first few months of taking over. However, both of them were positive towards me and
supported me greatly. I spent about three weeks, and up to eight hours every day, in
the SPMS office copying allotment lists which became the basis for my overview on
remittances sent to Kiribati. During this time I established a warm rapport with all
SPMS employees, conducted several interviews with seafarers and wives of seafarers
whom I met during this time, and was allowed some insights into the administrative
mechanisms and the background of the employment agency.

I conducted 35 taped key interviews (see details in table 3.1), and added to this
several manually recorded interviews with people at the Ministry of Labour; the
Ministry of Environment and Social Development, especially the Cultural Centre, the
Social Welfare Office, and the AMAK (women’s affairs) Centre; the Ministry of
Finance and Economic Planning, especially the Statistic Planning Office; the Ministry
of Home Affairs and Rural Development, especially the Land Survey Division; one
lawyer working at the Attorney’s office, the People’s Lawyer, the former People’s
Lawyer and now Chief Registrar at the Court; one journalist and representative for
those Korean employed seafarers who had not received their wages; the Protestant
Seamen's Chaplain; the National Aids Coordinator; the SPC HIV/AIDS Coordinator; the Ambassador and the Economic Advisor of the Peoples Republic of China; the First Secretary of the Australian High Commission; the Development Officer and Deputy High Commissioner of the New Zealand High Commission; several "expatriates" who are married in Kiribati and have conducted businesses for more than ten years; the Seaweed Development Advisor of the Seaweed Corporation Kiribati; the Japanese Mitsubishi Corporation Marketing Specialist; and secondary school teachers on all islands. I was also in contact with women and men from Peace Corps and other international volunteer workers.

*Field relations on the outer islands*

When I think back, I divide my time in Kiribati between "before Beru" and "after Beru". The contrast between urban life on Tarawa and life on the remote Beru island is tremendous. I spent three weeks on Beru, which was my first outer island experience, and when I left, I felt much had changed: my respect and love for people in Kiribati had grown, and I had begun to relax and to be more accepting of life as a whole.

*Figure 3.3: Beru island – Southern end. The island has no harbour, all goods for the island must be transported by small boats.*  
*Source:* Maria Borovnik
Beru (see figure 3.3) has particularly sparse living conditions, the climate is extremely dry, and there is a lack of fresh food, such as babai, pawpaw fruits, breadfruit trees and green vegetables, a meagre coconut growth and even a rather difficult catch for fish. Beru’s population has declined by 0.9 percent between 1990 and 1995, with 2,784 people living on 17.7km², a population density of 158 people per km² (SPC 1998, 7). People have to live resourcefully on Beru as babai, and also pandanus are regarded as very precious and are reserved for special occasions (as mentioned in chapter 2). Despite these conditions, everyone was willing to share what they had with others.

I lived in Rongorongo with Manana Itaia, who supported me as interpreter, host, teacher of Kiribati culture and behavioural codes, religious advisor and friend. I cannot imagine Kiribati without her. Manana is a Protestant Church Minister, widowed, with two teenaged daughters studying in high schools on Tarawa. She taught English at the Hiram Bingham High School in Rongorongo, Beru during my time on the island. Beru is a mainly Protestant island, and because I was linked to the KPC it was relatively uncomplicated to find people linked to seafarers who were willing to conduct interviews with me, joined by Manana as my interpreter.

Our strategy was to conduct introductory focus group meetings with the unimane of a village, organised by the pastor of the village, and to ask official permission to contact seafarer families in the particular village. We did this in two different villages with the help of the village pastors. When we arrived for such a meeting, we were equipped with tobacco, tea, milk and sugar and prepared for the official ceremony of introducing myself and my project. The village elders had decided to invite only those unimane who were fathers of seafarers. After the welcoming procedure where the elder gave a speech, then Manana and then myself responded with speeches, we offered our gifts, which were received by the person opposite us. Our gifts were received with many expressions of appreciation and shared amongst all men. Then we began to talk about general problems and perspectives that the old men of this village had on seafarers, remittances that often did not arrive in time or were not sufficient, and about their thoughts on the changes that had taken place. I-Kiribati call their share of remittances “allotments”. I found that these fathers of seamen were proud of their
sons, but also very concerned at having them work in what was, in their view, a dangerous environment (see Chapter 6).

It is customary in Kiribati to *bubuti* (request) when it seems necessary, and the men of one meeting asked me if I could use my influence as *I-Matang* and as an academic to ask the employers of the SPMS to send money at an earlier time of the month. This was one of those conflicting situations that I mentioned in the introductory part of this chapter. In situations like this it was of great value that Manana as the interpreter could mediate in the most appropriate way. However, in one of the villages the *unimane’s bubuti* request was to send them eye glasses and bible material when I returned home. I was delighted to be able to respond to their request by initiating fundraising collections of eye glasses, not only in New Zealand but also in my home Protestant Church community in Germany, and was able to send three parcels of eye glasses to this village on Beru. After these first group meetings, all men agreed to conduct personal interviews with me, and the eldest village *unimane* offered to ask women related to seafarers to conduct interviews with me.

I found that it was very difficult to conduct a focus group meeting with women only. It is not customary for women in Kiribati to speak, or even sit in a *maneaba* during meetings with the village elders. However, one day, I managed to talk to a larger group of women after a bingo fundraising event at their Church. On this day the village pastor’s wife helped as an interpreter. This time, most of the younger women withdrew into the background or disappeared, which shows their respect for the older women, and the discussion took place mainly between *unaine*, the elder women of the village, some of whom were mothers and some were wives of seafarers. The women talked about the benefits they gain receiving the allotments and mainly praised their sons and husbands. The changes that had taken place over time, that they talked about were more related to general changes: the work load of women had diminished since it had become normal to cook with rice and use flour and sugar. However, some of the changes were related to the increased influx of cash. Again, after the group meeting I gained access for some personal interviews with mothers and wives of seamen.
I conducted 38 interviews with people on Beru in three different villages. The majority were parents of seafarers, wives, and seafarers on holiday or retired. I mostly conducted interviews with either mothers or fathers separately. Twenty one of these interviews were conducted with either Manana, the pastor of one village, and the pastor’s wife of a different village. It was difficult to estimate how many seafarer families existed per village. One of the pastors told me that of 50 families in his village, 10 families had a seafarer son. Wives present on this island lived with only one exception (a nurse working on Beru) with their parents in-law (see figure 3.4). Some parents reported that their son’s wife stayed on Tarawa, or with her own parents on a different island.

The second outer island I travelled to was Abaïang. Abaïang is the second most highly populated island in Kiribati, with 6,020 people living on 17.5 km² in 1995, and has the largest population growth rate of 2.8 per cent between 1990 and 1995. Tarawa’s growth rate was only 2.2 percent in the same period of time. With 344 people per km² Abaïang has the highest population density of all outer islands in Kiribati. There is a large jump to Tarawa which has 1,799 people per km². Abaïang can be regarded as a suburbanised centre, as will be discussed in more detail in
Chapter 5. People have a good amount of _babai_ and _coconut_ production because the island is rainier and more fertile than Beru. Some households can carry out green-vegetable gardening. _Babai_ was more used for daily consumption on Abaiang, though the _Babai_ has symbolic meaning all over Kiribati and is always used for special occasions. However, it was apparent that people in the Northern Gilberts had in many ways better access to food than in the Southern Gilberts.

I spent two weeks on Abaiang, an island only a short distance north of Tarawa with a mainly Catholic population. I lived in the Protestant village Morikao with Gary and Elaine Dovidaitis, a couple from England, who I met through KPC in Antebuka, and who had generously offered me accommodation. Employed in a British volunteer contract, the couple taught in the KPC High School in Morikao. I was fortunate when Gary and Elaine introduced me to Tarota Falani, a Kiribati nurse who is married to a Tuvaluan seafarer. Tarota lives at the hospital on Abaiang with her mother. Tarota agreed to work as an interpreter for some of my interviews, and accompanied me on sometimes long distance travel along the island strip. She also helped to find people, who I could visit on my own.

I sometimes travelled large distances by bicycle on my own to interview seafarers, with scant information on how to find them in some remote village. On some of these journeys I met incidentally people related to seafarers and conducted interviews with them. It seemed to be easier to travel on my own on Abaiang than on Beru, where people were very concerned about my safety. However, the reason for this can also be that I was much more part of the community and more observed in Beru villages than I was in Abaiang. I conducted 29 interviews on Abaiang, eight of them translated by Tarota. I never collected people for a focus group meeting on Abaiang. One reason for this was that Abaiang’s societal system was originally not based primarily on the village _unimane_. However, a second reason was that my access to key people in dominant Catholic villages was not given in the same way as it was on Beru, where I was part of the Protestant community. Especially with Tarota’s interpretation, I gained excellent information during my individual interviews with people on Abaiang, therefore the lack of group meetings did not diminish the quality of information gained on this island.
Figure 3.5: Women on Abaiang surprised me on my last day with a botaki, a feast and gift that they had prepared. As Tarota's mother told me sitting in front of a kerosene lamp seven women were weaving this mat during the night before my day of departure in tireless work, two women at a time on each side of the mat.
Source: Maria Borovnik

Conducting interviews and transcribing them

One of the challenges when conducting interviews in Kiribati is the lack of privacy. It is expected of people to always be in company, and it is regarded as unusual and can lead to gossip when people withdraw into privacy. Myers (2001) discusses the ambivalent situation that occurred in Africa, where he needed to find a balance between his own desire for some privacy and the wish to join selflessly in the customary sharing of company at the place where he lived. To conduct interviews with a degree of confidentiality the locality must match a person's feelings of safety (Elwood and Martin 2000). In Kiribati this can be very difficult to achieve at times. In fact, on one extreme occasion, the woman I interviewed was so concerned that someone could listen to us, that even after we shut all the glass windows in the room, she conducted the interview almost whispering and I had great problems in understanding anything at all during the process of transcribing. In this case I was grateful for my detailed comments in my field book on this day.
Interviews were most often conducted at people’s homes, and especially on the outer islands this was almost always the case. Elwood and Martin (2000, 542) discuss the idea that conducting interviews with people at home might help with “interrupting power hierarchies between researcher and participant”. I find this argument problematic when applied to some of the situations in Kiribati. When interviews were conducted at home, I had to ask family members to leave us alone for a while, and/or then retired with the person to a maneaba some distance from other family members. However, I felt that this could give rise to some suspicion and could have an almost dramatising effect on the interview, and could make the interviewee uneasy, as they felt separated and isolated. It is therefore not enough to think of people’s home as a safe space; instead the circumstances of social bondage must be taken into account as well (Daly and Dienhart 1998). Thus, I agreed on some occasions, but only when I interviewed parents, that other family members could be present. On one occasion, I found myself sitting in front of an entire extended family, including both the participant, who was the mother of a seaman, her in-laws and her parents, her husband, several daughters in-law and some of their husbands and several children. The interview was translated, and every now and again some of the family members present made little comments. The information of this interview can be seen to be enhanced rather than reduced by the particular situation.

When on several occasions I interviewed members of the same family, I decided to always interview mothers before daughters in-law, parents before their sons, and always wives before their husbands. I felt that this strategy could assure better confidentiality for people who might want to reveal some embarrassing or delicate information. The problem of potentially exposing difficult situations when interviewing couples is discussed in Bailey (2001). I interviewed 30 seafarers, 34 wives of seafarers, and 37 family members of seafarers, mostly mothers and fathers (see table 3.1). I used SPSS spreadsheets to organise basic data gained from interviews. I chose this particular statistical programme because of the many options of defining variables it includes, which makes later access and understanding of larger data material easier, and because I was already familiar with its functions.

The seafarers interviewed were between 22-49 years old; seven of them were retired. They had started at one of the Training Schools between 1964-1995. The majority of
seafarers were employed by the SPMS. Forty per cent of them went only to primary school, which means that two thirds had some secondary school experience. The period seamen spent overseas ranged from 7 to 36 months at a time (with the mode at 16 months). The time they spent at home ranged from two weeks to 12 months (with the mode being 3 months). I interviewed 43 per cent of seafarers on Tarawa. However, 69 per cent of all seafarers reported that they spent their holidays mainly on Tarawa.

The seafarers' wives who I interviewed were between 21 and 44 years old and they had been married between one year and 28 years (with the mode at 10 years). The number of children the women had ranged between none and eight (with a mode of 2). The number of years their husbands had been going overseas already ranged between three and thirty. Twenty three of the women I interviewed had been only to primary school, which means that more than three quarters of them had attended secondary school to some extent. Thirty six of the women were employed, and 43 per cent lived with their husbands’ parents.

Those fathers and mothers I interviewed reported that their seafarer sons were between 19 and 45 years old, and that they had between two and eleven children (mode 5). Forty one percent of the mothers and fathers were never employed, and thirty five percent lived with their daughters in law. Though 82 per cent of the interviews with parents were conducted on outer islands, only 35 per cent told me that their sons came to visit them back home on the outer island.

There is plenty of useful literature on the gendered position of researchers in the field (Brewis 1992, Ganesh 1993, Staeheli and Lawson 1994, Morton 2000, Moreno 2000, Cupples 2001, Kearns 2000, Scheyvens and Leslie 2001). As a woman in Kiribati, I often felt unsafe, lonely and vulnerable, unaware that I was well looked after. It was also sometimes unavoidable to cause suspicion, because I had to conduct many interviews with married men, and I also had to socialise in public places, because networking especially between I-Matang, and access to a great deal of information was easiest when drinking beer together. Doing this while at the same time encompassing a female position must have caused some confusion amongst I-Kiribati. When dealing with Kiribati married men I tried to avoid any pain for their
spouses by conducting interviews within view of wives if possible. However, on two occasions interviews were interrupted because it caused too much stress on the wives.

While I was under Rakeiti’s supervision, I felt like a part of the women of Kiribati on occasions, helping in the kitchen and eating with the women in the kitchen after the food was served to men, children and guests. This was a privilege and pleasure I had on only one other occasion during my time in Kiribati. As mentioned above, regarded as a guest in Kiribati, even though I strived to be integrated, I was supposed to eat first and sit in front of the maneaba, while I-Kiribati women sat at the back. Brewis (1992, 134) explains that she consciously avoided being in this place amongst men during her long term fieldwork on women’s sexuality in Butaritari. Brewis managed to join women constantly and on purpose, because this facilitated her access to women. While during my time in Kiribati I often joined women in maneaba meetings on Tarawa, it would have been regarded as an offence if I had chosen to do so at unimane meetings or gatherings that I was invited to on outer islands. My research embraced men and women, and it also involved many activities and was conducted in a rather short time. Therefore I needed to handle each situation as it appeared appropriate to me, which meant that I never became really intimately close to a larger group of people, but only to a few families and individuals.

Some authors not only emphasise their gender and their sexual preference, but also their skin colour (see eg. England 1994, Delph-Janiurek 2001) to make their own identity “transparent”. Though I agree with a need for self-critique and transparency, I feel that emphasis on being “white” or “heterosexual” added to male or female gendered identity causes in itself a drastic contrast that I would rather want to avoid. I agree with Rose (1997) that reflexivity in its partiality and imperfection is unavoidable in working with others, and therefore researchers must keep away from a “false neutrality” or universality that places researchers in a detached, superior position (see also Katz 1994, Lal 1996, Forbes 2000, Kearns 2000). We must recognise the vulnerability of people that we conduct research with, and be aware about our role when conducting interviews, focus groups, or when participating actively or passively in the field.
My fieldwork required me to be flexible, because I talked to different age groups, nationalities, and genders. I felt each single person needed my attention, empathy and respect, independently from their nationality, gender or power position. Sometimes the “outsider” position I maintained during my stay, though growing deeper into the community in Tarawa over time, had positive sides. Brewis (1992) also mentions that interviews with an I-Matang enabled some people to speak more openly about intimate subjects (see also Scheyvens and Leslie 2001). Seafarers seemed to feel at ease, especially when I knew some of the places they used to go to. They were also used to expressing themselves more outspokenly because they often worked with mixed-nationalities on board ships and had to adapt new communication strategies which seemed to have made most of them more confident.

Interviewing is a “two way interaction” (Stevens, 2001, 69), whereby the atmosphere and the depth of the talk can take unexpected turns. Sometimes when people began to inform me about what they felt important about their culture, interviews could go a long way off-track from the seafarer subject, but had potential to lead to an increased understanding of the dynamic as a whole. Stevens (2001, 70) says that interviewing is a complex chemistry to catalyse, and can develop into a “magical openness” when researchers communicate the value of their research well and listen attentively. Widdowfield (2000, 199) argues that the way researchers interpret and read situations can influence the interview situation. The author claims that emotions therefore have an important place in fieldwork and influence how research is carried out. On some occasions, but not always, a particularly personal and empathetic atmosphere arose during interviews with Kiribati women, which facilitated a degree of intimacy. A few times this occurred after the tape recorder was switched off and when we shared personal talks on our mutual experience of being separate from our partners. During talks and interviews, especially with women, I was also often asked about my own marital status.

It was not my initial intention to talk about HIV/AIDS and I did not expect that the subject would arise. The reason for it was perhaps firstly, that many women had been to informative workshops, which are now frequently conducted in Kiribati to alert people and to prevent a dramatic increase in the numbers of those infected. There are also information bill boards at all main centres in Tarawa. People then seemed to have
wanted to discuss the subject in more depth. Secondly, I felt that almost all women were very scared about the danger that HIV infection obviously implied, and wanted to relieve some of their emotions which was not possible amongst their families. Women have to follow their husbands’ desires regarding intimate decision making, and are therefore vulnerable to infections with STD and HIV (Brewis 1992, Armstrong 1999). To talk about sexual subjects during interviews was challenging for me, and it was not my intention to do this before I started fieldwork. However, a lot of people began talking about it, so that I began asking more openly, to find that most people wanted to share some thoughts about it. Scheyvens and Leslie (2001) and also Davis (1986, 248) discussed similar issues, and suggested that fieldworkers can add to some empowerment of people, especially on occasions where interview participants feel they can reveal information to the fieldworker and have control over what and how much they reveal. The details on HIV/Aids will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Transcriptions were challenging in many respects: the interviews were between one hour and three hours long, and quite a few had poor recording quality because of background noises which were hard to avoid in the open door environment in Kiribati. It was challenging for me to understand some of the accents, given that English is not my first language. I had to listen to interview sequences over and over again to make sure that I understood. When I conducted interviews in Kiribati, I was not aware that these would be challenges. While it is not difficult to understand people when talking to them face to face, transcribing without the person present takes away the facial expressions and gestures and therefore imposes some difficulties in understanding them. It was very helpful that I had taken brief notes immediately after interviews and on rare occasions during the interview. I also felt that I needed to give people time for interviews, as having time is one of the best ways in Kiribati to show respect for people. As a consequence, transcription time was extremely lengthy, too.

Another obstacle was that quite a few people, especially when they were shy, did not talk freely, and the flow of the talk was interrupted: there were often long silences between sentences, or it could happen that a person began a sentence and stopped without completing it, which is indicated in transcribed text by hanging dots at the end of the last word spoken, such as in “yeah...”. I did not always wait for the person to continue, because it appeared to me in many cases that they had finished talking.
after a while of silence. As a consequence, I needed to keep asking questions in order to gather information. There were a couple of issues arising from this. Firstly, perhaps may not have waited long enough. Secondly, I kept thinking about how to ask questions in a way that was open, without implying an answer that could be interpreted as the answer that I wanted to hear. I learned that I-Kiribati tend to be very pleasing to their guests to show them honour and appreciation, which sometimes can lead to anticipating what the other person would like to hear (see also Davis 1986, 258). After a few weeks I started to get a feeling for the occasions when that might be the case, and I developed a general attention and suspicion on how to interpret answers. However, usually after a warm-up time, people opened up and talked more freely and from their heart. This needed time to happen. Ideally, I would have been at each village for a long time and become acquainted with people very well, to be able to establish trusting relationships with my interview partners. When transcribing interviews, I had an opportunity to evaluate one more time if an answer given was “polite” or to the point. However, there were many occasions where people seemed to feel at ease talking with me.

Transcribing had the advantage of enabling me to reflect on data with more knowledge and a much better overview on the material. As an example, the Kiribati language differs culturally in some way from English. Brothers, and husbands for example, are gendered opposites to sisters and wives in English. In Kiribati language a “brother” (tareu) is a sibling of the same gender, while a “sister” (maneu) is a person of different gender, and the word “husband” is used for both husband and wife, such as in “spouse”. Especially at the beginning of my fieldwork, I was confused, but when transcribing it was easy for me to understand and to use the correct label in texts. There was also some confusion for me when people talked of their “spouses” when they were not married, until I understood that the meaning of “being married” applies to legal and de facto relationships. In many cases couples elope and get unofficially married, sometimes because of a romantic arrangement opposed to their parent’s will, but often because of lack of financial means to celebrate a wedding, which is hardly ever mentioned because of embarrassed feelings linked to this. When transcribing, I could more comprehensively understand the context of the person’s marital status. I also developed a habit of putting comments into special brackets during my transcriptions that explained emotions that could be heard on the tape, or to
describe how a person said something, following advice given by Tolich and Davidson (1999, 123).

People always lowered their voices when revealing something that had a special, delicate or embarrassing meaning for them. In these cases transcribing was often impossible, and I relied on notes taken. However, I could analyse a subject as a special one, when people used this vocal technique, and as a consequence I analysed emotions while transcribing. In contrast, people frequently raised their voice to express emphasis on particular parts of their sentences. I indicated this vocal technique with a quotation mark “!” which interrupts the flow of the sentence and demonstrates the sentence-part that my interview partner emphasised.

It was a great concern of mine that the data could have been unreliable because of the above mentioned reason. However, I feel that talks with interview partners were most often genuine, and that people in Kiribati, when having overcome their shyness, are very honest and express their concerns in depth.

**Close**

This chapter contains discussions on the methodology of my fieldwork in Kiribati. My position in the field (positionality) encompassed different roles, such as being female and being German, and this could have been in some ways an advantage. I had access to many different people at different hierarchical levels and of different nationality and gender. People in Kiribati are required to suppress their emotions to a degree, especially publicly, but also while dealing with other family members. It seemed therefore that as long as their confidentiality was assured, people had an opportunity to talk about difficult issues they could otherwise not share. Knowing that I would leave the field could make people more relaxed when revealing embarrassing or difficult information.

It was an advantage to be of the same nationality as an economically powerful and dominant institution in Kiribati, as access to official information seemed easier because of it. I do believe, though, that there are other factors that enable access to
material for people, independently of nationality, such as showing a great deal of genuine interest in and attention to them, and enthusiasm for my work, which was part of the reason I was accepted by many different people in different positions. In this chapter I have chosen to give an overview of what I felt was remarkable, and of what was ordinary during my fieldwork. The choice of material put into this thesis is of course only one way of looking at Kiribati, seafarers, their managers, unions and their families. However, I have tried to reveal as much insight into my research process as I feel was possible.
Chapter 4:
A seafarer’s life: Effects on the health and wellbeing of seafarers and their families

Introduction

Working on board vessels is a typical 3-D job, difficult, dirty and dangerous, highly stressful and therefore it affects health. The main argument in this chapter is that working on board leads to physical and psychological stress (ILO 2001; Sampson 2000). The chapter will emphasise the links between working conditions, stress and the consequences that arise from these. Lifestyle studies have shown that seafarers tend to smoke and drink more, exercise less and consume more sugar and fat (ILO 2001, 87). It is also aimed to show how the absence from wives and families affects health. When a family network functions positively and communication is frequent, the wellbeing and health of seafarers and also of family members can be improved immensely. Matters of compensation payments after serious accidents are discussed in chapter 7.

Issues of health and wellbeing are structured into two interlinked categories: occupational and lifestyle factors. The category “occupational factors” will discuss the occurrence of occupational accidents leading to injuries and deaths of seafarers. Furthermore, it will be explained how working conditions such as the length of time overseas, working hours and working on different types of vessels can cause accidents. Occupational factors are also linked to the exposure of seafarers to different environmental conditions, dangerous environments and to infectious diseases such as malaria and hepatitis. “Lifestyle factors” are the second main focus of this chapter. Length of absence from home, homesickness, alcohol abuse and exposure to sexually transmitted diseases are factors that severely influence a seafarer’s wellbeing. The circumstances caused by the threat of HIV/AIDS will be used as a case study. It has been claimed in developed countries that transport workers, such as seafarers and truck drivers, have a high prevalence of infectious diseases, such as STDs and HIV (ILO 2001). As Kiribati has recently been seriously affected by the impact of HIV/AIDS, it is important to discuss sexual health issues. It is not the intention of this chapter to stigmatise seafarers, although this is the danger when discussing serious
issues such as HIV/AIDS in the context of seafaring. However, for this thesis, it is essential to discuss the subject of infectious diseases, including HIV/AIDS transmission.


**Occupational factors**

Medical research on seafaring occupations shows that fatal accidents on board ships generally occur at a higher rate than in shore-based industries (Hansen et al. 2002; Hansen 1996, Hemmingsson et al. 1997). There is only a small amount of research about risk factors and accidents at sea, though international concern about the problem is rising. Hansen (2002) provides an overview of the work on occupational accidents on merchant ships and reports that there is no data available for occupational accidents in fleets under the Panama and Liberia flags, nor as yet from Bermuda, Cyprus, and Malta registers. A lack of statistics on worldwide shipping accident injuries was identified by Talley (1999, 1365:1) and he is concerned that neither the International Maritime Organisation nor the International Labour Organisation has published any statistics about seafarers’ accidents. The ILO (2001)
report recognises that reported morbidity and mortality levels amongst seafarers are "surprisingly high" (ILO 2001, 85). Research about fishers in Kiribati reveals that there is a lack of reporting and information about working conditions and their influence on fishers' health on fishing vessels. Fishers on Korean vessels, according to interviews, work under extremely difficult circumstances because of heavy labour and long hours, and can suffer from malnutrition and over-use symptoms, such as muscle pain in arms and legs. There is no information available about accidents or other health related problems on Japanese purse seiners and long line trawlers, other than a very small amount of interview material. The lack of information is partly due to disparity between the safety and ethical or legal standards of different governments. The considerable variation in safety conditions on "foreign flagged" ships is discussed by Alderton and Winchester (2002).

**Causes of occupational accidents**

Detailed quantitative studies on Danish ships (Hansen 1996, 2000) reveal that the frequency of occupational fatalities onboard ships is up to ten times higher than on shore (Hansen 2002, 2). Talley (1999, 1365:2) came to the same conclusion, reporting on worldwide shipping fatalities. Referring to Goss (1991) he argued that "worldwide accidental injuries on commercial ships are underreported by a factor of approximately ten". The in-depth analysis of Hansen (2002) shows that there is a significant correlation between accidents and ship type, age of seaman, a seafarer's time on board, change of ship, nationality and type of occupation aboard. Talley's (1999) research shows that most fatal accidents are caused either by human action or by fire explosion (see also McCarthy and Talley 2000). His analysis also leads to the conclusion that accidents vary by type of ship and the type of equipment on a ship.

One indicator of accident risk is, according to Hansen et al. (2002), the type of occupation of seafarers on board. Deck crew have the highest risk of being involved in an accident. The routine on deck involves heavy work, such as lashing and unlashing of cargo, mooring and anchoring operations, handling of general stores, clearing up on deck and cleaning, repair work, maintenance, painting, tank cleaning, rigging and taking in gangways and pilot ladders, opening and closing of hatches, routine tasks, and preparing the ship for a voyage. The highest number of accidents occurs during loading and unloading, mooring and anchoring operations, and
maintenance and repair work (Hansen et al. 2002, 12). Marine engineers also have a high number of accidents but these are generally less severe than the accidents of a deck crew. The highest rate of accidents for marine engineers happens during repair and maintenance work in the engine room. The ILO (2001, 86) reported that engine noise levels tend to exceed acceptable levels and affect hearing, alertness and mental health. Seafarers working in engine rooms also seem to have increased risks of cancer (ILO 2001, Saarni, Pentti and Pukkala 2002). Service crew doing catering and galley work can have accidents when preparing and serving food. However, the effect of accidents during serving work is not as severe, and they seldom cause a permanent disability. Talley (2002, 10) summarises human causes of ship accidents on US merchant ships.

Causes of ship accidents classified by the US Coast Guard as human causes include stress, fatigue, carelessness, operator error, calculated risk, improper loading, lack of training, error in judgement, lack of knowledge, physical impairment, improper cargo stowage, inadequate supervision, improper mooring/towing, design criteria exceeded, psychological impairment, intoxication, failed to yield right of way, improper safety precautions, failed to keep proper lookout and failed to proceed at safe speed.

It can be concluded that a combination of difficult and dangerous work and some lapses in human behaviour together cause accidents. However, it has to be taken into account that stress and fatigue can be directly linked to type of work, working hours and environmental conditions. Work on board is more dangerous in rough weather (Hansen 1996) and under difficult working conditions. Sampson (2000) argues that the modern, highly globalised, competitive shipping industry which has caused a downsizing of crew numbers, fast turnarounds and limited shore leave is responsible for increased fatigue of seafarers. Hansen (1996, 273) states also that poor medical care on board increases risks for fatal outcomes of accidents.

Risk of accidents on board associated with length of time aboard the ship is the same on all types of ships, except for tanker crews, where the risk appears to decline after the first month according to Hansen et al. (2002). This is a surprising result, since both Talley (1999) and Nilsson et al. (1997) found that tanker crews have a higher risk of accidents than crews of other ship types. During loading, unloading and tank-cleaning of tankers, the deck crew is exposed to high concentrations of benzine and carcinogenic, toxic chemicals. Medical studies on coastal tanker crews show that 85
per cent of crew members report acute symptoms of headache, nausea, vertigo, fatigue and dizziness (Nilsson et al. 1997, 394; see also Moen et al. 1992, 365, ILO 2001, 86). In addition, irritation of the eyes and upper respiratory tract is common amongst the crews. The study of Nilsson et al. reveals that chemical tankers can have negative effects on the nervous system of a crew and can lead to cases of intoxication, with sometimes severe consequences. Damage to the nervous or respiratory system caused by heavy and long-term exposure to organic solvents may cause brain dysfunction. Moreover, nausea, dizziness and eye irritation can increase the risk of accidents or lead to diminished ability to operate correctly on the ship. Talley’s quantitative analysis resulted in a significant correlation between a large number of crew fatalities and tankers. This was higher than between crew accidents and container ships or bulk ships (Talley 1999, 1365:6).

I discussed safety with a seafarer (interview 107), who has been working for several years on board different German merchant vessels and has also achieved an officer rank during his studies. I asked if he found the work as a crew member on a gas tanker dangerous.

I would say...the dangerous ships are the container ships. Gas tanker... I wouldn’t say that.

A gas tanker is not dangerous?

Of course the cargo is very, very, very highly dangerous, but the safety standard and the technology of safety and the management of safety is so high! ... Not only high in technology, but also high in manpower! We have a special routine. We don’t rely on the machines. The machine check it... we do it again. And you see, we always do a two time safety!

Yes, I see! Why do you think that the container ships are more dangerous?

Because... here sometimes inside the container... you might put something dangerous and you never see it! And you don’t have any documentation about it. But in the gas tanker... they tell you... whenever the sea temperature... the sailing inside the water... change... you have to do a little bit of [changing]. So, every time you monitor the water temperature changes ... you change a little bit. OK? And then you are safe... you are always playing on the safe side. But container ships, sometimes what is happening... . One of my ships... the container is leaking and smoke start coming out. Me and the chief mate... go to the document. Nothing in it. ... And they said... oh, more or less like radio active and, we are already a dead man!

Oh! And they just put it in secretly?

Sometimes.

Without telling you?

Sometimes. (interview 107)
The seafarer’s comments on the safety of his work on board a gas tanker in comparison to work on a container ship underline the results of Hansen et al. (2000). The seaman’s comments also raise questions about illegal and dangerous cargo and the threat to the crew, which have not been discussed in current literature. However, on the 23 June 2003, the ‘Baltic Sky’, a Greek ship, registered under Comorin flag was confiscated. The ship travelled from Albania to Sudan and carried 680 tons of TNT dynamite (Deutsche Welle 2003).

Amongst all cargo ships, Hansen et al. (2002, 5) report that coasters, or so called “roll on roll off ships”, have the highest risk of accidents. These ships are used on very short voyages and have many turnarounds per week or even per day. The highest rate of accidents on these vessels is related to cargo handling and lashing of cargo, which happens more frequently on coasters than on general cargo or container ships that spend longer periods of time at sea. This information is congruent with opinions of some German officers, who mentioned that the work on coasters is in many ways harder and more exhausting because of longer working hours and the physical activity involved. The work on coasters becomes more stressful the closer the ports are in one area. From my notes after a talk to a German officer:

Men working on ships sailing only between European ports have usually to work harder than those on long journeys. The hard work is due to loading and unloading work in ports. The most comfortable work is the one for seafarers sailing the Pacific. They can go home more often than others and they have fewer ports and the longest trans-ocean journeys (MN 24/03/99).

The seafarer mentioned above (interview 107) also talked about his experiences on a coaster. The coaster he worked on was a tanker that loaded different fluid cargo, depending on the charter.

We take... we carry quick oil, very quick oil... from San Sebastian in Brazil to what is the... other one? Rio de Janeiro. And this is only, let’s say sixteen hours and we’ll be there again. And... the cargo all the tanks... and the ship was, you know, three hundred metres, [a] very big ship. This one is three hundred metres. The discharge [is] here... [then] you have to proceed to Rio de Janeiro, you have to load the gate but a different cargo! And they were... they are in big tanks, you know?! (interview 107)
When the cargo changed, tanks had to be thoroughly cleaned. The tanks are large and it takes hours to clean them. Seafarers who worked on this ship had little sleep at turnaround times.

Normally we have to work only eight hours a day. Extra hours is all our overtime, if you like. But in times of... in terms of cargo operation and... safety, sometimes you sleep six hours... or eight hours, and all the rest of the hours you have to work. ... So we have to work hard, work hard, work hard, and then take the time. ... We are nearly to port, the chief mate would make a little bit of plan: "you two... go and take a rest of six hours". We are in port, we sleep. All of us. Those two men... take safety check. (interview 107)

The seafarer describes two different hazards during his work on a coaster: Firstly, the heavy work of loading and unloading which includes the cleaning of tanks. Secondly, the lack of sleep over a period of a few days, when the crew sleeps relatively little and works most of the day; six hours sleep leaves eighteen hours work. This work continues over a few months up to a year and can lead to over-use syndromes as well as to accidents. Seafarers have over a period of several months only some days with low intensity work to recover; following days with high intensity work. As previously mentioned, Talley's (1999, 1365:8) analysis shows that human actions are significantly responsible for fatal accidents. Environment and ship type in his analysis were secondary causes. This is in line with results of Hemmingsson et al. (1997) and Hansen et al. (2002) who show that the occurrence of accidents on board is more frequent when dealing with heavy and dangerous work. Therefore it can be concluded that the frequency of work involving physical labour, such as in coasters, and the extent to which crew members are exposed to intoxicating environments, such as in tankers or container ships with dangerous goods, are the greatest factors influencing the rate of accidents on ships.

**Working conditions and safety**

Talley (1999) has found that most accidents on US tankers, containers and bulk ships are caused by human actions, and mentions fatigue amongst other reasons (see also Sampson 2000). The following examples from Korean boats show that insufficient sleep and relaxation time are common on fishing vessels and can influence the wellbeing of a fisher. I-Kiribati employed on Korean fishing vessels face not only constant lack of sleep but also a lack of leisure time over a period of more than one year. In addition, crew members have to deal with an unfamiliar type of food and
insufficient food which does not support the heavy work on fishing rods. In the following example parents (interview 802) talk about their son on board a Korean trawler: “He just said...that the food...[is] maybe not so good. Maybe not enough. **Only small food?** Yes and he...[was] fat and now...he is getting small. <laughter>”

Note that they use the word “maybe” twice. People from Kiribati are reluctant to criticise and the fact that these parents mention a lack of food and that the son is losing weight shows their great concern about their son’s health and safety. The laughter has a double meaning. Firstly it shows their embarrassment and concern. Secondly, laughter about the misfortune or accident of another person in Kiribati is meant to introduce a sense of humour into a bad situation. It makes the incident look smaller and not so relevant, and therefore helps to overcome the pain (see chapter 3).

The same parents also report that the son has never been on land since he started working aboard, which, at the time of interview, was about one year.

A fisher says that the work on a Korean long liner has been quite hard. He worked sixteen to seventeen hours every single day for two years and never had a break during the day. He spent eight months to one year on board the ship and had then five days on shore. His wife translated: “No one talked to him. Just work on the ship.” She was worried. He also said that “the food was not enough!” He had lost a remarkable amount of weight (interview 302). A third example is a fisher who returned from a Korean long line trailer because he was sick. His stomach ached and his leg was injured “my leg is – not strong”. He complained that the food was never enough and they were served with only rice and tinned fish and a small amount of fresh fish. He used to work between sixteen and eighteen hours every day. The shifts were organised in a way that each fisher had only three hours sleep, eight to nine hours work and then again three hours sleep. Lunch time was “Very small! Only five minutes.” Dinner had to be taken quickly as well, because it would have reduced his rest time. This man spent one year on board his ship without a day of break and he never went on shore during this time (interview 301).

There is a lack of medical research on the monthly working hours and on lack of sleep on board over periods of time. US, German, Danish or Swedish flags for example are under regular surveillance of safety and working conditions, while ships under Korean flags and flags of open register do not have the same standards of control (Nilsson et
al. 1997, 397; Talley 1999, 1365:3, Hansen et al. 2002, 2; Alderton and Winchester 2002). The guidelines of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and International Labour Organisation (ILO) for seafarers suggest that “the limits on hours of work or rest shall be (...) 14 [maximum] hours [of work] in any 24-hour period; and 72 hours in any 7-day period; or (...) 10 [minimum] hours [of rest] in any 24-hour period; and 77 hours in any 7 day period” (IMO/ILO 1999, p8, article 5). These guidelines take into account that work aboard ships can be periodically more intensive, as long as there are sufficient hours of rest. Those standards are not entirely met on all German ships, and as the seafarer above (interview 107) describes, they are not at all met in the Korean examples. However, safety standards and control have been found as one of the most significant options for prevention of fatalities on ships. It is therefore desirable that international organisations achieve a worldwide consensus on this issue. Both maritime schools in Kiribati, FTC (Fisheries Training Centre) and MTC (Marine Training Centre), provide excellent examples for good training in safety and safe behaviour on ships, which is essential for the wellbeing of seafarers (see also figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1: An officer at FTC takes an exam. Fishers have to know different knot types as part of their safety training for Japanese vessels. Source: Maria Borovnik
The new MTC chief officer (second mate) and teacher, Eteldero, explains how the important issue of safety is taught at MTC.

Safety always comes first. You have to get used to your ship, like [this is] what we train them here. We always send them into that part... you have to know your ship, you have to memorize the nearest exit, you have to memorize how to apply the fire extinguisher! ... Normally seamen have a little bit of study time, but not really study time, we call it the familiarising time. He has to familiarise, the ship: its display, the door. ... When the ship is suddenly sink[ing]: Ah! There is the nearest... life boat or the nearest... boat for me. If I’m leaving board... the nearest boat is from there. So, apart from just free [time], he has to get used [to] the familiaris[ing] of safety ... of the ship.

Talley (1999, 1365:10-11) discusses the importance of ship safety and safety education in detail and also provides an overview of articles written on this issue. He is concerned that “although there is a worldwide parity trend in vessel safety standards, there are significant differences in their enforcement across nations” (Talley 1999, 1365: 11, see also Alderton and Winchester 2002). Part of the safety training must be a good fire fighting training. However, Hansen (1996, 269) warns that one of the reasons that makes the maritime workplace a high risk place is the lack of direct access to professional medical care at sea. Primary prevention of certain diseases is needed and possible. Improved training, improved systems of work, improved safety awareness, and greater use of personal protection devices are needed to prevent fatal injuries. Medical training of ships’ officers providing medical care on board and specific training of doctors giving medical advice to ships should be improved to meet the needs.

Deaths
The main causes for deaths on board ships are accidents, according to Hansen (1996). These are due to maritime disasters, such as shipwreck, capsizing, explosion, and fire on board. In those cases where accidents were occupational, coasters were the main type of ship where accidents leading to death happened. Deaths which occur on duty, are due mainly to falls, either into water while securing gangways or ladders, from a container, or from a mast while not using a safety belt. Seamen can fall overboard while working in bad weather and not using safety jackets or lines. Other seafarers who fell overboard in Hansen’s study were found to have used or misused drugs. The main reason for deaths off-duty was intoxication from alcohol and other narcotics. Some seamen drowned after having been ashore, in most cases under influence of
alcohol. Those who died tended to be young, inexperienced seafarers who were alone at the time the accident happened. A couple of incidents happened where seafarers were killed in traffic accidents ashore (Hansen 1996, 269-272). Alcohol consumption appears to be high among seafarers (Hemmingsson et al. 1997, 662, ILO 2001) and needs great attention. Hansen (1996, 273) comments that younger seafarers are more in danger of deadly accidents and need good guidance. The problem and influence of alcohol will be discussed under lifestyle factors. Hansen (1996), Hansen et al. (2002) and Talley (1999) suggest as already mentioned above that attention has generally to be given to a high safety standard on board. The author suggests that an improvement in the availability of appropriate medical care for people with heart attacks could possibly have diminished the number of natural deaths on board. The ILO (2001, 87) report high seafarer suicide rates. Up to 10 per cent of the deaths in Hansen’s sample are suicides (1996).

It has been noted by German managers that cases of deaths have happened amongst I-Kiribati seafarers. Some of the deaths have been caused by accidents on board (for example one person died because he fell from a container), on shore in car accidents, and suicides. In some cases it has been reported that drunk seafarers fell overboard. There was also a case of an I-Kiribati seafarer being killed during a fight with knives (MN24/03/99).

**Working with different nationalities**

Foreigners on Danish merchant ships in the study of Hansen et al. (2002) had a lower risk of accidents than Danish seafarers. “Foreigners may indeed have fewer accidents due to a different behaviour. The difference could represent a genuine difference in behaviour causing differences in the accident rates among different cultures in the same workplace” (Hansen et al. 2002,4). Another reason for a lower rate, the authors suggest, could be underreporting by foreign workers and a lack of knowledge about their legal rights, together with problems of dealing with authorities of a different country. German officers said that I-Kiribati were very modest and hardly ever complained about anything as long as they felt they were handled with respect. This can sometimes lead to misunderstandings, such as that an I-Kiribati seaman answers with pleasure if asked if he liked working on a particular ship and will be sent there again, even if he suffered and did not like it. In case of fishers on Korean long liners it
is reported that when the conditions on board had become too hard some tried to quit work. One fisher (interview 302) tried to quit after one year, but the captain of his ship did not allow it, though it is written in his contract that he can do so. He knew that. However “The captain didn’t allow because he was a hard work man”, translated his wife. Though he would have had a right to go back to Kiribati he did not feel that he had any other option. It was important for him to understand that the reason for his stay was because he was a hard working man, because this allowed him to keep a sense of power and self-esteem (which is important in Kiribati cultural values). Issues of workers’ rights on German vessels, and the influence of labour unions are discussed in chapter 7. I-Kiribati fishers are not part of a labour union, while it is obligatory for seafarers on German merchant ships to be labour union members.

Several seafarers mentioned food as a reason for dissatisfaction while being aboard. Complaints about food on German ships are not about a lack of quantity (see similar results by Sampson and Thomas 2000). However, German food is very different from traditional Kiribati food and this can cause discomfort. The following 44 year old retired seafarer (interview 105) talked about the food on German ships.

Most of our people don’t like the German food. Because it’s very different from [here] so they don’t like. But they have nothing to eat! So they have to like [it]. And... because the Germans... don’t use rice. And so they have to ask the captain to get some rice. ... Potatoes, they don’t like. And... vegetables... they don’t use vegetables. 

*How about noodles?* Yeah. They like noodles. 
*Sausages?* They don’t like sausage. 
*No?* <laughs> *It’s very “German” to have sausages, isn’t it?* 
Yeah! Yeah, that’s right. 
*Cheese? How about cheese?* They don’t eat cheese. <laughter> 

Japanese vessels are built for Japanese bodies, which means that facilities on board are built in a smaller size than is useful for I-Kiribati bodies. Fishers from Kiribati have to cope during their time aboard with sleeping in beds that are too small. A comment from one of the German staff (interview 931), who had heard about such problems that I-Kiribati have with these beds says: “These boxes they got.... [on Japanese ships] just as wide as that <shows> and built for Japanese men! And those [I-Kiribati men] with their big feet! This is probably not quite a beautiful life (translated)”. Figure 4.2 shows the bedrooms at the Fisheries Training Centre. When they were shown to me during a tour of the FTC, the manager told me that those beds
are already built in a small size to help I-Kiribati to adjust to the reality on board Japanese tuna vessels.

![FTC dormitory](image)

**Figure 4.2:**
*FTC dormitory*

**Source:**
Maria Borovnik

---

*Environmental influences on health*

Occupation aboard ships brings seafarers into contact with many different regions, climates and cultures in a short period of time. Environmental factors are seen as a secondary cause for accidents (Talley 1999). Discussion in the following paragraphs will focus on firstly, the danger of rough weather conditions on seafarers in general, and the effect of the cold on I-Kiribati seafarers in particular; and secondly the effect of tropical and other infectious diseases on seafarers. Extreme weather conditions are listed under environmental causes of accidents in Talley (1999, 1365:10) and are labelled as a possible hazard for the seafarer’s occupation in Hansen (1996, 269).
As mentioned before, safety standards on board are seen to be crucial and must be high. German officers told me during an intake test for the Marine Training Centre that seafarers need to speak a sufficient amount of English. Good communication on board during rough times at sea or other hazards can be life saving (MN 03/99). There was only one seafarer who mentioned that he had been a bit seasick during his first week on board, and one who reported being scared during rough (Atlantic) seas. The greatest impressions of I-Kiribati seafarers regarding weather conditions are their experiences in regions in winter time. Coming from a tropical climate they need time to adjust to cold weather. The following examples show that working and living in colder countries during winter time has been a challenge. The interview excerpts also include some impressions of how seafarers experience their first period abroad from Kiribati. Experiences linked to first impressions of unfamiliar cultures will be mentioned again under lifestyle factors (and in Chapter 7).

Several seafarers experienced dislike of cold weather. One seafarer joined his first ship as a 19 year old in Hamburg in wintertime. This was his first time outside his tropical home country. “But I don’t like the winter, alright? I don’t like the weather… it’s cold! It’s very cold” (interview 107). Another seaman started in Ghana and worked for eighteen months on the same ship, an 18 year old general cargo vessel, travelling around West Africa while mostly working on deck, clearing rust. Then, after a period of six months at home he joined his second ship, a brand new container ship, in China and travelled from there to Spain. Here are his comments about working in a Scandinavian winter.

[From] Spain [we went] to… around… what’s the… the most cold one up there? … Norway! Hmm… Scandinavia! … That place. We go there. That was very cold, wasn’t it? It’s very cold!
How did you cope with that?
Whah!! <laughs> It’s not good for us, hm?! First time we [were] cold… very cold. … We need plenty of clothes and… jacket! Yes. We [were] still not satisfied! Because first time cold… it’s quite. It’s very cold for us. But maybe after one month, two months. We feel comfortable. Then it’s better? Yeah. Much better for us. <silence> (interview 110).
The following seafarer, age 24, talks about watch keeping at sea. Watch keeping at sea increases the ship's safety. It is necessary especially in bad weather conditions. However, during cold or rough weather watch keeping is hard work.

We just take watch in port. But we can also take the watch at sea. Especially when the weather is bad. Bad weather. At fog! It's very strong fog. But we can start now.

Is this hard work to do, the watching?
Ah yeah! Yes? Why?
During the wintertime, yeah? Because you cannot stay inside the accommodation. You stay outside!

Outside all the time?
Ah yes. You can do... In rainy season, no! You [t]ake a raincoat but you can feel! It's bad. It's a bad work with the bad weather (interview 109).

Another risk for seafarers is travelling through tropical environments. The risk of being infected with tropical diseases, such as malaria, is higher for seafarers than for other occupational groups. Hansen (1996, 273) suggests that a seaman should be treated as having malaria if he has a fever and has recently visited a malarial zone. The author shows that “malaria is a serious health problem for seamen visiting endemic zones, even though they stay ashore for short periods of time” (Hansen 1996, 110). The awareness of malaria amongst seamen is important; even more experienced seafarers with good knowledge of this health risk can still have a problem with malaria infection. In some cases, as Hansen et al. (1996) found, malaria was acquired on board ships. The most common geographical risk areas for seafarers in this study were some areas in South-East Asia and the region along the West African coast.

Earhart et al. (2001) raise awareness of the likely spread of infectious diseases aboard ships, since the ship environment is small, and outbreaks of viruses such as influenza can happen in a short period of time, and have the potential to disable a crew for up to several weeks (see also ILO 2001). During his time on board a merchant vessel, Encandela (1991, 145f.) experienced a captain who had contracted tuberculosis.

The fact that the afflicted member was a captain became a sobering realization that no one was protected from the danger of ship life. Further, the incidence of infection and subsequent tuberculosis testing of all members served to place more emphasis on the common experience with danger and powerlessness among all members than on distinctions of social rank or work function.
Tuberculosis tests were taken during seafarers' medical checks before being employed on board ships owned by German companies. Tuberculosis infections amongst Danish seafarers were similar to those amongst the general Danish population according to Hansen et al. (1996). However, Hepatitis-A infections have occurred amongst Danish seafarers overseas and the authors advise vaccinations (Hansen et al. 1996, 109). The situation for I-Kiribati seafarers might be slightly different to seafarers from other nationalities since Hepatitis-A is relatively common amongst the Kiribati population. Therefore it can happen that I-Kiribati might be infected with Hepatitis-A already, possibly undiscovered when going aboard (MN 03/99, interview 918). Statistics from Kiribati show that both tuberculosis and hepatitis have become increasingly a risk for morbidity amongst the Kiribati population (see figure 4.3). Some attention needs to be put here, since seafarers might be one risk group for infections. Note that statistics in Kiribati might be under-reported. Also note, that the statistics do not make any distinction between types of hepatitis.

![Number of deaths from Tuberculosis or Hepatitis in Kiribati 1992-1996](image)

**Figure 4.3:** Number of deaths from Tuberculosis or Hepatitis in Kiribati 1992-1996.

**Source:** Data from Department of Social Welfare, Kiribati 1997, 51
Hepatitis-B in the study of Danish seafarers is significantly linked to intravenous drug use and can also be sexually transmitted (Hansen et al. 1996, 109). Since no case of intravenous drug use is known in Kiribati, as will be discussed below, only the matter of sexual transmission will be important for I-Kiribati seafarers. Issues of sexual health will be discussed under lifestyle factors.

**Dangerous geographical regions**
Some of the ships Kiribati seafarers work on go to ports in politically or geographically unsafe regions, for example, in the Mediterranean Sea or South Africa. Some regions must also be seen as dangerous in South America and Asia, because seafarers are approached by drug dealers trying to persuade them, sometimes using violent threats, to carry drug packages from one port to another.

Matters of maritime security have become increasingly important, especially since the threat generated by the September 11 attack in New York, 2001. An article in the “Africa News Service” (25/02/2002) talks about current issues of security at sea in the African region (using Somalia as example). Representatives of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) were asked if they were “still against the arming of ships in piracy hot spots”. The ILO says: “It is a problem. Under current international law, it is difficult to get UN protection ... One answer might be for ships to travel in convoy. But things have changed since September 11 and the US is introducing new measures which include proposals to tackle piracy and armed robbery.” The newspaper also discusses the situation of seafarers being “trapped in foreign ports when their ships are impounded”. The ILO has not yet found an answer to these concerns.

However, though there is increased concern for maritime security since 9/11, a worldwide security never existed, not even before this date. It will be mentioned in Chapter 6, for example, the case of parents worried about their son, especially when they knew that he was employed on a vessel travelling the Mediterranean during times of war in Serbia. Another person told me that he was much threatened by the sight of the military at the airport in Cairo, on his first overseas employment. He had seen guns such as in Egypt only in US movies at film nights in Kiribati, and thought
that security personal at this airport meant severe danger for him. Another seafarer
(interview 111) worked on a coaster between Italy and Algeria, starting in 1996.

And then sometimes ... Sometimes... we went down to the North Africa again.

To North Africa?
Yes. And also Algeria! And then sometimes Tunisia. It's not so good
country. ... 

And it is not such a good country?
Ah... Yes! Yeah, yeah, because what I mean... When I was... alongside
in the boat! They also get soldiers! Yeah, soldiers. They. Just the....

Because of the military? Yes. Military.

Were you afraid? Yes. Hmm. Because sometimes the bomb! Boof!!!”

Huh! Yeah.

Oh yes, Algeria! That's right... In Algeria, yes, yes. It was in Algeria.
(interview 111)

Seafarers from Kiribati have experienced dangerous situations in African countries,
where they have been victims of robbery, and in South America, where violent drug
dealers may force seafarers to take drug parcels on board ships. There are other
dangerous situations elsewhere in international waters.

Drugs and drug trafficking

Drug taking itself is not a major problem amongst I-Kiribati seafarers. According to
(unpublished) SPMS data, four percent of dismissals from ships during 1998 were
related to drug use. (The major cause of dismissals is alcohol consumption, see figure
4.4 below, with 61 per cent of all dismissals related to alcohol misuse.) The exposure
to drugs and options for drug taking for I-Kiribati seafarers is linked to a world wide
network of drug dealers using seafarers to take drug parcels on board and carry them
to different ports. Some of those dealers threaten seamen with violence. Therefore to
be in ports in regions where drugs are passed onto international ships, such as South
America, can be a major threat for seafarers. Armstrong (1998, 13) mentions the
problem that Pacific Island seafarers can be faced with during their work:

Concerns were expressed about seafarers carrying packages of drugs from
port to port. It seems that young men are easily tempted by what appears
to be a lot of money ($2-3000US) to carry a package. One union
concerned about its members being caught with drugs in their possession
has strong policies about possess[ion] or use of drugs and all training
includes information about the penalties for drug smuggling. Recently an
I-Kiribati man was sentenced to 16 years in jail in Columbus [Columbia]
for drug smuggling. During the field work for this project Radio Tuvalu
carried a news item about a Tuvaluan seafarer arrested in Los Angeles for drug trafficking.

During my stay on one of the outer islands, it was announced that two I-Kiribati seafarers were caught with drugs in Germany and put under arrest. The SPMS has produced an educational video that seamen watch before they leave the Marine Training Centre. The video explains to them, using the technique of role play, the dangers and the prosecution they face when giving into the threat of drug dealers. It shows that seafarers can easily be tempted into taking the offer of a drug agent for a great amount of money. It explains that the money is not worth the years of prison that they face when caught. It also shows options for preventing a forced situation, mainly by reporting it to the captain of the ship who then can take action. “You can go to your captain and say this has happened to me I was forced to. They give... the captain is a man who... to seek advice”, suggests a 34 years old seafarer (interview 101), who would also be particularly attentive in those ports to protect himself.

The following excerpt from an interview with a retired seafarer (age 49) includes both the situation of having to handle drug dealers asking seamen to bring drugs from port to port, and also that of taking a cigarette from someone in a foreign country for example in Central America. “So when he... when he came back... [he said] don’t take a cigarette!” To take a cigarette from a stranger can be dangerous because it can contain drugs.

I have been told! ... By the – officers. ... That the drugs are very... are very difficult to... to bring from some port to another port. 

Do you know people who have done it?

Sometimes when the port... we went ashore people ask us if...you can bring drugs over the... they have to take the drug as to buy some... some drugs. Where about? In Central America?

Central. Most of the Central America.

So, when you went into a bar they would ask you?

Yes, or while you walk they just came.

And then what would you do?

You get fined if you leave drugs... you can get problems. That’s why... we are not allowed to use drugs. We are not to allowed to... even have drugs on board. Yeah. But nowadays... they are very easy! ... Sometimes they [the drug dealers] say... it is a very nice talk. That the money that you get from this... [they] show you... so much money! But... you say no ... or whatever. For what they want us to do. But you are not allowed to have any drugs or something like that on board. (interview 106)
Another retired seafarer, 44 years old was dismissed and sent home from Pakistan, because his captain thought that he had taken drugs. This man assured me that this was not the case. However, he mentioned that Pakistan is a region where seafarers can be confronted easily with drugs. The following interview excerpt reveals that drugs such as LSD and cocaine have also become an issue for I-Kiribati seafarers.

In that time nobody did. Because it was too early. Nowadays they... They use drugs? Yes! I-Kiribati? I-Kiribati.
Really? What kind of drugs? Marijuana or... ? Marijuana. And how about Cocaine and Heroin and things like that? Have you heard from the LSD? They also use... Cocaine and... . Younger people? Yes. Younger! ...Yes! But the... some of them use for their own... And some of them they just carry from one place to another. Do you know those people who do that? No. I don’t know. But I just heard from the other seamen, it’s going on. ...
How would you estimate the number of people... are there a lot? How would you estimate the danger for Kiribati? That people use cocaine? Oh! It’s very dangerous. ... I don’t know the exact number. But I have heard... I just heard... one or two. (interview 105)

This information is similar to information from an anonymous informant who told me that they have seen cocaine in Kiribati (MN 07/99). I have also heard from parents on an outer island that have adopted a child from a former seafarer who could not properly look after her anymore, because he had become “mad” after having taken some drug-like essence; they have no idea what exactly it was (MN 05/99). It is generally not common in Kiribati to take drugs, though people smoke and drink. Most people asked have not heard of anyone taking drugs. Wendy Armstrong, the STD/HIV-Aids coordinator for seafarers in the Pacific region of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), told me in her interview that intravenous drug use is uncommon in the Pacific region. Guam is the only country where this has become a problem. “But... but there is a basic fear about sticking needles in your veins around this part of the world. So it’s unusual for people here having a hard drug problem. But in Guam it’s a big one” (Armstrong 17/07/99).
**Lifestyle factors**

Recent studies on emotional stress experienced by seafarers have gained some attention (Zhao 2002, Thomas, Sampson and Zhao 2003). Agterberg and Passchier (1998, 710) found the lack of research into psychological problems of marine personnel surprising. "Work on board a merchant ship can be stressful because it involves heavy physical labor, a confined space, a restricted social group, and a lack of normal social and recreational resources" (Agterberg and Passchier 1998, 708). The main psychological problems are loneliness, homesickness and "burn-out" syndromes. These become worse the longer the time spent overseas on board, when communication between crew members is difficult and during public holidays. This emerged during my interviews with seafarers and their wives, and is also a finding of the report of Agterberg and Passchier (1998, 709). Emotional stress has to be taken very seriously, since there are consequences such as increased alcoholism, increased unsafe sexual activities with different partners and even suicidal attempts involved.

**Emotional stress**

In opposition to the romanticised view of seamen as a “special breed” or of a “seafarer’s life” as a great adventure (see Chapter 1), Hemmingsson et al. (1997) found in their analysis that seafarers showed a significantly high risk of psychiatric diagnoses related to alcohol or drug abuse. While work pressure is the common stress factor on vessels travelling short distances, as mentioned above, it is common for seafarers to suffer monotony, loneliness and homesickness, and from the limitations on board when travelling longer distances (Agterberg and Passchier 1998, 709). Wickström and Leivonniemi (1985) have found an alarming high incidence of suicides amongst seafarers. Encandela (1991) explains in addition to this that the dangerous and dirty work on board can increase hierarchical structures and can make crew members working in particular low and dirty jobs feel demeaned and labelled. Encandela explains that there is a sense of powerlessness amongst crews on board, facing the potential for accidents and illness that seems to always exist on board ships. This sense of powerlessness can create solidarity of all ship members “against the powerful dangers of ship work” (Encandela 1991, 147). However, the danger of accidents can be used to underline hierarchical structures. The author uses an example of a wiper in the engine room, told off by his chief engineer for having put other
members of the crew in danger by not keeping the floor appropriately clean. Especially amongst Asian workers, feelings of shame or “losing one’s face” when making a mistake can lead to psychological stress, and even to suicide (Agterberg and Passchier 1998). Being handled with respect is very important for people from Kiribati and is mentioned in guidelines for German shipping companies. Conflict tends to be harboured and released under the influence of alcohol.

Seafaring is one of the few chances for I-Kiribati men to go abroad. However, as will be shown, soon after their first excitement, seafarers miss their families and their country and feel they want to go home. The length of time spent overseas is one of the causes of emotional stress. The results here are similar to those from Agterberg and Passchier (1991, 708), who found that loneliness, homesickness and “burn-out” syndromes related to the heavy physical labour onboard ships with long periods away from home, were the main psychological problems for seafarers. For people in Kiribati, family attachments are very strong. The length of absence from families is therefore psychologically draining. This is in contrast to European seafarers, who as Hemmingsson et al. (1997) have found, show significantly high levels of problematic family backgrounds, which led the authors to the conclusion that not only the circumstances around the occupation can be seen as a risk factor for sailors, but that also “being a seaman in itself was one of the risk indicators that remained significantly associated with all outcomes, and also remained among the highest relative risks” (Hemmingsson et al. 1997, 667). People in Kiribati differ very much from this in that they generally feel great responsibility and love for their families. The reason for their stay overseas is not to avoid home, but to support other family members (this has been emphasised by many interviewees, and is also discussed for example in Crocombe 2001 and Brown 1997). The obligation of earning money and sending remittances back home is often the only driving factor for people from Kiribati to work abroad. Though some I-Kiribati seafarers also seek adventure and the sightseeing of different areas, the responsibility for their family is more important.

Seafarers report some anxiety and excitement when going overseas for the first time. This excitement usually does not last. The following examples show how the perception of going overseas changes over time from excitement into homesickness
and, as can be seen in the second example, even into depression and alcoholism. One seaman, who went on his first trip to South Africa in 1983, when he was 18 years old:

"The very first trip, I think is a very big thing. How was it? Oh, it was no – very interesting for me. And I thought it was – I start an adventure! Were you more scared or more excited about it? More excited. Yes, more excited.

The same man reflects on how he started to feel different after a while.

Well, when I first went out, I wasn’t actually very homesick. You were not? You were just excited. Yeah, that’s right. Because I came – the ship kept on going to different places all the time! And you sort of, you know it’s a good place, you can see, you know you look forward to see new places. And then, on the second ship, yeah, I sort of started feeling lonely and started [being] very homesick. Why was that? Well, you get to spend a lot of time on the ship. And you are there about six months already and you are thinking, ah, I’ve been here too long really, you know, it’s time to go at home. And you miss your friends, and your lifestyle and what you were used to do at home. Like me, if I would get work in Kiribati – there is no way I would like to stay in another country. I’d come back to my country again (interview 101).

One of the reasons for lonely feelings is the long time overseas. This sailor had spent 16 months working on one ship.

Another seafarer (age 44) has retired. He never wants to go back onboard again. He describes his depressed feelings as a sickness coming from the sea. This supports Agterberg and Passchier (1998, 709) who mention that problems were often presented as a somatic complaint: “loneliness is often ‘translated’ by the sufferer into a stomach problem; the physicians concurred that such presentations are more frequent among seamen than in the general population”. The seafarer does not mention a stomach problem, but he says that he felt sick. It was a feeling of being sick, that even though he was aware it was not in his body, still felt like a real sickness. As a consequence, he started heavy drinking (interview 105).

Were you always homesick, or was it worse in the beginning, or was it worse, when you were married? I can not exactly [say] if it is homesick… or something else. But I <clears his throat> I believe there must be some kind of sickness in the sea! When you are at sea. And if you spend too many… if you spend a long time at sea, you make it… something like a… a sickness. You can call it a sickness.
Is it kind of a depression?
Yeah! That’s it! Yes? Do you become depressed. Yes. Why do you think is it? I don’t know.
Do you think it is because you can’t go somewhere? You are always locked in the ship?
No, no! No... I don’t know... how it’s happen. But... in my case, when I got the feeling... I am sick. I think, I’m sick. But it’s not body.
How about other people, have they been depressed, too?
I don’t think so. Because they spent... less time than I.
I mean, why did you spent two years? Why did you not go home after a year?
Because if I go home in... in one year, let's say, one year. And my balance in the bank... is low! So, I went to sea.
To have more money.
Yes.”

The confines of the ship environment was in this sailor’s point of view not the case for his depressed feelings. This man thinks his feelings are caused by “the sea”, and that the extended contracts and the long period on board, up to two years, are responsible for his lonely feelings, and the homesickness. I have asked several times in Kiribati if seafarers felt that they were “locked” on board but no one seemed to have this experience. The interview with this man, who also reported a severe alcohol problem, raises the problem of mental health care for seafarers. Hansen (1996, 274) explains that “mental instability [was] a characteristic of several of the seamen who committed suicide or disappeared from the ship” and he suggests that “some of those who disappeared from the ship may have had calentura: a behavioural phenomenon known for centuries, the predominant symptom being an irresistible impulse of seamen to jump into the sea from their vessels”. The authors advise that the basic health education for ship officers should include knowledge about psychiatric disease. Agterberg and Passchier (1998, 709) mention that mental health care in harbours can only be conducted temporarily. One retired I-Kiribati seafarer (interview 108) believes that it would be beneficial for seafarers “if they have a pastor on board. And after maybe after four o’clock or four thirty, when changed, they can have a talk to the pastor about something. At home. I think it would be helpful”.

The main reason for becoming homesick is not only being on board for a long time such as described by the examples above (interview 105), but being apart from their families. “It’s [a] long time you see no parents! But for me... that’s why I stay on the
ship more longer, because I like to... make some more money, eh? The more you stay on the ship, you can get more money. That’s why I tried to stay more longer (interview 109)”. Parents and wives are missed and worried about. “It was a little bit hard. Because we’re homesick, yeah? First time you join the ship! You feel sad every day! Every day?! When you... you just remember your parents, your father, your... yes. Your sisters (interview 109)”. Some seafarers are constantly worried about what might be happening at home especially when the mother or the wife stays on her own (interview 113). Others miss just being with their family.

And then... when I was on board... sometimes... always remember Kiribati! <laughs> Yes? Always? Always. Hm. When I work and... Ah! I... I think about my families and... Yeah. Because I... sometimes we... sometimes, I thought, what are they doing on the outer island. Or <laughs> Or what else. ... What kind of food now they eat! Yeah. Yeah! Maybe fish! <laughter> (interview 111)

Some older seafarers tend to stop working aboard after having been married; divorces are common amongst seafarers (see chapter 6). One of the seafarers (interview 101) finds it much harder to leave for work on board ships since he is married and has a child. Seafarers rather avoid talking about their feelings towards their wives. Information about this and how much they miss their wives was easier to gain from interviews with women. In these interviews it became obvious that seafarers tend to be jealous, which though in Kiribati is a sign of love, leads to emotional tension on board, and can cause suicide. The SPMS reported two suicidal attempts and one suicide in 1998. Another person drowned for an unknown reason. As several interviews and talks to people and the managers of both employment agencies revealed, the main reason for suicides or suicidal attempts amongst I-Kiribati seafarers in fact are problems with their wives, divorces, adultery or the fear that their partners could commit adultery. The difficulty here is that it is not culturally acceptable for a man to talk about his private problems, and especially not with people who are not members of his family. Therefore he has to swallow his emotions and is thus at greater risk of depression, overreaction or even suicide.

The wellbeing of seafarers is also greatly influenced by how much they support each other during breaks and leisure time, and how seamen organise their leisure time. The following examples show good coping strategies to overcome loneliness and feelings of homesickness. Some seamen said that they experienced homesickness at the
beginning of their work, rather than later. It is easier for them to cope after a while and the main coping strategy is keeping oneself busy. Another strategy is to have good communication with other crew members, which is especially positive when there are peers from Kiribati on board.

One man (interview 113) explained to me that he overcame his emotional stress by talking about home with other I-Kiribati. There were twenty others with him on board his first ship. In the same situation as he was, his fellow I-Kiribati sailors explained to him that his work on board has purpose. The purpose is to support his family and therefore he should enjoy himself and make the best of the situation. The reassurance of cultural values here, the value of caring for their family by sending remittances, links an I-Kiribati abroad back into his cultural network and this strengthens his mental wellbeing. This example shows that working conditions for I-Kiribati improve when they are employed in groups. Several seafarers reported that they have been working on ships of German companies with groups of usually between five and eleven I-Kiribati; twenty is rather uncommon. However, in contrast, on Japanese and Korean ships only two or three I-Kiribati are together at most. Communication is vital not only as a safety issue, but also because Kiribati is an oral culture and talking is important. Good knowledge of the language spoken on ships is also vital. I found the knowledge of English amongst fishers working on Korean boats rather poor. They also mentioned that Korean officers did not communicate much at all. Therefore fishers felt lonely and isolated.

A remarkable example of how to overcome monotony and loneliness on a ship is given by the following 24 year old sailor, who invested his salary in electronic music equipment and founded an I-Kiribati pop-band, playing a mixture of traditional and English songs to entertain the crew.

We also make a group of singers. Have a band overseas.

*Oh really? Are you in a band on the ship?*

I always make the song – sound.

*Are you the singer?* Singer. Yes!

*What kind of songs do you sing? English songs or Kiribati songs?*

A mix up. Kiribati songs! And also English songs. I always make the English songs to Germany officers. Is better. When they like to... when they like the music! They can make a... what? A... tararara <makes a singing noise>. That’s on my last ship. We have a small group of band. We bought everything from Belgium. Speakers! Big speakers! Amplifier.
The mikes! Microphone. We have everything. We bought from Belgium and then we have practice! Every afternoon. After five o’clock, we start practice to the… Yeah. Yeah, that’s more interesting in my – on my last ship. It is very good! <laughter> (interview 109)

It is obviously beneficial for the wellbeing of Kiribati seafarers to have company from home on board. Those are only a substitute for the family, but the support and understanding of each other’s situation can soothe people’s feelings and lead to better coping with emotional stress. The next sections show some negative effects of stress and the absence from home.

**Alcohol consumption on board**

Alcohol consumption seems to be high amongst seafarers. Hemmingsson et al. (1997, 664) find that people choosing the occupation of seafaring come significantly often from a social background where “high alcohol consumption, parental divorce, having been apprehended for drunkenness, poor home conditions, drug abuse, contact with police or child-care authorities, and having run away from home were generally more common among seamen than among other unskilled occupations”. The survey for this study had been conducted with Swedish males. There are two important issues arising, when looking at this data. Firstly, it can be concluded that this study among Swedish seafarers will be similar to any other western European or “western society” population, but significantly different from a population from Pacific island countries. In Kiribati, people did not usually have a drinking problem before they went on board vessels, though some men have told me that they had consumed alcohol already at school. Men caught drunk at the Marine Training Centre are usually dismissed before having a chance to be employed overseas. However, a second concern that arises when looking at the results from Hemmingsson et al. (1997) is to find that the range of officers and crew members that seafarers meet on board might come from backgrounds that can influence the behaviour of I-Kiribati in a negative way. Since this was not part of my own research, it could be material for other studies on social issues amongst seafarers.
Alcohol consumption on board is related to risky work (Moen et al. 1992). The consequences of alcohol consumption are an increased risk of fatal accidents (Hansen 1996). The SPMS reports that 61 per cent (79 cases) of all early sign offs of contracts in 1998 on German ships have been dismissals related to alcohol consumption. As can be seen in figure 4.4, alcohol on board amongst I-Kiribati can also lead to increased violence, assaults and refusal to work.

Seafarers often get advice from the unimane, the elder in their family, usually the grandfather, before they leave home. One seafarer told me that his grandfather advised him not to drink heavily which he finds reasonable, because he already observed that fights on board happen easily when people got drunk. He said that one of his friends used to get very drunk and then started unknowingly to destroy things, such as the ship computer. At times his friend went around drunk and knocked at everybody’s doors. When I asked him for the reason, and if he was treated badly before these things happened: “Is nobody bad to him. But... is from his mind! For us we think, oh, maybe something... maybe something crazy in his mind. If he take the beers” (interview 113).

It needs to be mentioned that dismissals in general occur with only about ten percent of all employed I-Kiribati. Therefore the behaviour of some seafarers is not to be generalised to all Kiribati crew members. However, it has been observed that alcohol abuse amongst I-Kiribati can lead to violence and offence. As has been stated, some I-Kiribati use drinking as stress release, especially when they feel lonely or homesick.
but also when boredom and monotony take over. Drinking is a culturally accepted excuse in Kiribati to show emotions (as will be discussed in Chapter 6). Many young seafarers drink because beer is part of their leisure time pleasure and is also part of the social life on board or on shore. Hansen (1996) warns that younger seafarers need more supervision since they are in danger of having accidents related to drinking when they are on shore. Another problem with younger men from Kiribati is that they seem to have no limit when drinking. So called “binge” drinking is common. Room (2001) mentions that in some societies drunkenness can be used to provoke bad behaviour. In the case of Kiribati seafarers, drunkenness is one option to release emotional tension on board. Since alcohol is accepted on board, it is possible that the natural conclusion deriving from Kiribati’s cultural background follows, that the release of emotions is accepted as long as it is under the influence of drunkenness.

One of the MTC technicians, Klaus Kluge, worked as a seafarer from 1959. He describes how much the lifestyle of seafarers has changed during the decades. He believes that there was not as much alcohol consumption on board as there is nowadays, and he relates the increase of drinking mainly to increased work pressure. He explains, as described in Encandela (1991) and Sampson (2000) as well, that the improvement in technology and the increased speed in the maritime industry has the effect that seafarers have less time on shore and spend more time under pressure. In addition, there are not only fewer people working as a crew but a greater mixture of nationalities makes working conditions harder, in his point of view. People have to work harder, do not understand each other because of language problems, and feel more easily alienated (interview 931).

Older I-Kiribati seafarers told me that alcohol consumption is a real problem on board ships. Those that have successfully overcome the problem are still working on board. Others have retired either voluntarily or because they have been dismissed. The above mentioned sailor retired because he felt that alcoholism has taken over his life too much and made him unable to function as a good family member and as a good worker.

I spent all the money on drinking, what else? And they for example, when I returned from my first contract. And I spent all the money about in a month! Maybe for drinking.

You send something home or...? No.

What was the reason that you started to drink?
Well <laughs> ... Mainly when we are... we feel the lonely! And... when we remember Kiribati and our relatives. And we used to drink to cloud a... something in our home. We used to drink to forget about what we, what’s came to our mind... in our minds. And maybe some three of us or four, we used to drink all the time. (interview 108)

He also felt ashamed about the fact that he could start fights while fully drunk. He never remembered what happened, but others told him that he was a “trouble maker”. He finally decided not to continue with this behaviour, especially since it was unacceptable to start fights at home.

To be... a trouble maker! Is not so good.
It's not so nice? Yes. And maybe that’s why I... I changed. I don’t like to be a trouble maker all my life. Especially when I... when I walk in my home island. I used to make trouble. (interview 108)

Armstrong (1998) reports that “binge drinking” and alcohol have been raised as issues of great concern through research amongst Pacific island seafarers of different countries in the Pacific region. She quotes the chief instructor of the Fisheries Training Centre who told her that both the training centre and the agency for the Japanese fishing companies are very concerned about alcohol abuse. “There have been several instances of crew members having been dismissed from Japan Tuna vessels for this reason”. (Armstrong 1998, Appendix 4, 21) The manager of the Japanese employment agency told me that he had heard of warnings from Japanese fishing companies to stop employment of fishers from Kiribati if they do not control their drinking (interviews 902, 905). There is no alcohol on Korean long liners as reported by fishers. The SPMS manager told Armstrong that alcohol is a major factor in the lives of seafarers. “Some ships are ‘dry’ and forbid alcohol in any form, as a result there are black markets as well as a tendency to ‘binge’ when ashore” (Armstrong 1998, Appendix 4, 28). One of the major concerns for Armstrong regarding drinking is that drunk seafarers tend to become engaged in unsafe sexual behaviour and so risk becoming infected with sexually transmitted infections, in the worst case with HIV/AIDS (Armstrong 1998, 10).
STDs and HIV/AIDS amongst seafarers in Kiribati

There is a growing number of seafarers in the Pacific who have tested HIV positive. The first HIV positive tested person in Fiji was a seafarer (1984) (Armstrong 1998, 3). There were two cases of HIV positive seafarers in Kiribati in 1998. In Kiribati in 1999 twenty two of the twenty seven HIV cases (of which 11 had developed AIDS) were seafarer related, two were possible travellers and there were three others. HIV positive tests were discovered because people were sick, or because they came to a regular test, and two were discovered because of a blood donation. In 1998 seventy Gonorrhoea cases were found in Kiribati. (All figures from a non-taped interview with Aids Coordinator in 08/99). The figures in Kiribati look small in comparison to the world wide threat of Aids with 5.3 million people registered as newly infected in the year 2000. There are 36.1 million people in total living with HIV/AIDS, and 21.8 million people died of AIDS in the year 2000 (UNAIDS report 2000). However, as can be seen in the figure below, HIV/AIDS is increasing steadily in Kiribati.

![Number of HIV/AIDS Cases in Kiribati](http://spc.org.na/aids/General_Info/hivcases.htm)

*Figure 4.5: Number of HIV/AIDS Cases in Kiribati.*

**Sources:** Pacific AIDS Alerts (1994, 1997), Kiribati Aids Coordinator (1999) and http.spc.org.na/aids/General_Info/hivcases.htm

Transmissions of HIV/AIDS amongst I-Kiribati are found through heterosexual intercourse. There is no evidence for HIV/AIDS transmission due to intravenous injections with narcotics. Homosexual transmissions are possible, but not recorded. Homosexual practice exists, but it is difficult to uncover, and though accepted, is rare in Kiribati. People in Kiribati tend to build their own explanation of how Aids has developed.
Aids! Aids! Aids come from animal, you know, really from there.

_Why do you think it comes from there?_

Because to me, [it is] my understanding when I attend a course. They show me Aids and I think it is from some other species from... carried from the animals. What do you think? Like horse, dogs!

_Ah, you mean from animals! How can it come into your body when it comes from the animals?_

I think... some of the... I don’t really know but to me, but I don’t know what is... Like to me I always saw blue movies, something like that. Like some, some, some make love to horses, like in the blue movies. ... I think, oh, maybe that’s why everybody get the Aids! <laughs> Because its carried out from the animals (interview 411).

The explanation of this woman shows how confusing some video material, such as adult “blue” movies, can be for people in Kiribati, and it also becomes apparent that some of the information workshops on Aids/HIV which are conducted by several voluntary agencies in Kiribati can have a confusing effect. The information given, that the HIV virus is derived from animals, is mixed with some unusual material this woman saw on a video. The lady also explained to me that she does not believe that Aids is transmitted homosexually, which she also heard in the workshop. It did not make sense to her the way it was explained. She also knows homosexual men in Kiribati and they are in her opinion exactly like all the other I-Kiribati: friendly, caring for their families and hard working. Therefore, in her point of view, Aids can only originate from animals and cannot have anything to do with homosexual contact.

“And then I think, maybe there is another kind of sickness we don’t really know what it’s come from. But to me it’s from the animals. I don’t believe that gays got the Aids... I don’t believe that (interview 911)”.

In Kiribati testing for HIV or other sexual related infections is particularly difficult. Armstrong (1999) mentions that the World Health Organisation has advised multiplying known cases in any Pacific island country by ten to achieve a more realistic number of HIV-infected people than is actually reported.

The World Organisation always told us that when there are known figures... we multiply it by ten for the unknown. So you can assume that there are at least around three hundred here that have HIV. The government does not have funds to sort and test people. They don’t have the resources to support people when they were tested positive. And it’s not necessarily a “head in the sand” situation it’s just a matter of priorities in a way. ... I think the other thing we need to be very careful about is that... it’s no longer a seafarer’s problem here, which, you
know, people very little [know] about. Because I think the seafarer community is incredibly stigmatised (Armstrong 17/07/1999).

The known number of HIV/AIDS cases in Kiribati are only those that have been tested. Armstrong (17/07/99) explains that the threat of HIV has become very serious in the last decade for Pacific Island countries, whereas the Pacific had been relatively untouched by the epidemic until recently.

Kiribati started to attract a lot of media attention. Because for a very small country there were more and more records of HIV infections amongst the seafaring community. And the media attention was particularly... it was sensationalized. ...When it was first diagnosed here... it was more people with Aids than with HIV... so what was happening was... sailors were coming home and going to doctors because they were sick” (Armstrong 17/07/1999).

In Kiribati, preventive health care is not common, and a deterrent for taking tests on sexually transmitted diseases is that privacy is rather unnatural for I-Kiribati people. Thus, it is extremely difficult to remain anonymous after a positive result. It is of great concern for the National Aids Coordinator to be in good contact with HIV positive tested people and to ensure that only a few medical personnel know about a case. Secondly as Dr Taylor says, there is a lack of good facilities for testing for STDs (interview 918).

International studies have regarded seafarers as a high risk group for being infected with, and being capable of transmitting HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (Armstrong 1998; Goethe 1989, Estebanez 1992, Hansen et al. 1994, Jenkins 1994, Sesar 1995, Towianska et al. 1996, Demissie et al. 1996, Hooper 1997, MacDonald et al. 1998). Sesar et al. (1995, 20) found that seafarers are more exposed to HIV infection, mainly because of long absence from home and family, voyage conditions and monotony. The authors reported (about Slovenia, 1995, 22) that younger seafarers and those that have not received thorough sexual education were the highest risk group for being infected with HIV/AIDS amongst this occupational group. Demissie et al. (1996, 821) report that 9.6 per cent of the mainly Ethiopian sailors in their sample were infected with HIV. More than eighty percent of infected sailors were younger than forty years old. The risk and prevalence of HIV infection in their study was increased in lower age groups; it was observed to decrease with increasing levels of education and in higher income groups; and it was found to
increase with people having had injections of any kind. The authors mention a decrease of infections with advanced education level when the Aids education programmes were undertaken at quite early stages of the epidemic in Ethiopia.

Warning posters have been set up at central places on Tarawa, such as the airport, Bairiki, and Betio (figure 4.6). The HIV/AIDS project for seafarers in Kiribati, conducted by SPC, wants to increase sexual health education and the distribution of condoms at crucial places as a main tool for prevention, and as an important asset to general safety education in the Marine and Fishery Training Centres and on board ships. The aim of this project is to raise awareness at a gate keeper level, amongst officers and teachers, and from there to provide better knowledge about HIV/AIDS and other STDs and also knowledge about methods of prevention to maritime students and personnel. There are also sexual health education programmes undertaken by the Foundation of the South Pacific (FSP).

Figure 4.6: AIDS warning poster opposite the SPMS office in Betio.
Source: Maria Borovnik

Most of the sailors are away from their homes for long periods of time and they are likely “to engage in risky sexual behaviour irrespective of their marital status” (Demissie et al. 1996, 822). Already in 1988, Goethe et al. (1989, 58) conducted an
international survey amongst seafarers in Hamburg. Results showed that 22 per cent of all persons surveyed had had a venereal disease. Armstrong (1998, 9) summarises:

Investigations into the seafarers in the Pacific region reveal similarities to their international peers. Due to the nature of their job, seafarers are away from their home and families for long periods. These prolonged absences and long periods at sea foster an environment for seafarers to have frequent casual sex with a variety of partners; paid and unpaid.

Jenkins (1994, i) also says that seafarers in Papua New Guinea are frequent buyers of commercial sex. Since the amount of time available in ports is very short, seafarers frequently share sex partners among themselves. "Women are brought on to ships clandestinely and this also leads to sharing ..." (Jenkins 1994, ii). Armstrong and Jenkins find that sailors quite often contact women that fall into the lowest paid category of sex workers and therefore are at greater risk of being infected with HIV/AIDS. Sesar et al. (1995, 20) state that "sexual contact, especially frequent sexual contacts with prostitutes is of great importance in the transmission of infection. It has been confirmed that in some areas, especially in some seaport cities, about 80 per cent of the prostitutes are infected with HIV". Interviews with seafarers in Kiribati revealed that commercial sex seems to be indeed a part of the leisure time activities of many seafarers. I-Kiribati seafarers do not have a high salary and therefore tend to save money by being with lower paid sex workers. The following interview excerpts show this. This 24 year old seaman (interview 109) was asked what he and his colleagues usually would do when they have some time out on shore.

When in port? You mean when we spent one day in port? In harbour?
Yes.
Yeah! In Bangkok!
Bangkok? How did you like Bangkok?
I like, for there are plenties, plenty ladies there! <laughter>
Ah, yes. That's a reason, isn't it?
Yes. Because plenty ladies and they're also cheap, hmm?!
Cheap?
Yes, they are cheap there.
You mean when you buy a lady, then you don't pay as much.
Yes. That's. You can just pay twenty dollar?!
For one woman? Twenty dollars?
Yes. Twenty dollar, or thirty dollar for all day. Yes?
For a whole day?!
For one day. Yes. Sure. (interview 109)

The sailor explained to me that people look forward to places such as Bangkok, because in Europe, for example in Hamburg, it is much more expensive to be with a
commercial sex worker. "In Central America it's very easy to find a girl. And in Korea... some place like that" (interview 105). To be with women at ports is seen as an asset to leading a "seamen's life", as several people in Kiribati argue:

For example. Especially when we were... in port... it's a port. Then we think, some ladies and "seamen life"! Seamen like them. They use to went ashore. They are playing with the ladies. Is this called "seamen's life"... a combination of ladies and drinks? Hmm, hmm! (interview 108)

Not only do seafarers have opportunities for casual and commercial sex, they are also in danger of infection when injured and in need of blood transfusion in countries with a high prevalence of HIV, and where blood is not screened and needles are reused (Carlin 1991). However, they are in no greater risk than other groups of people who are mobile, such as truck drivers (Bwayo 1991, Jenkins 1994, Singh 1994, Morris 1996, Jackson et al. 1997, McGlgeyo 1997, Nzyuko et al. 1997, Marcus 1997, March 1999, Mupemba 1999, Rao 1999, Bryan 2001) army recruits (Morris 1996), migrant workers (Bain 1998, Girdler-Brown 1998, Lydie and Robinson 1998, Bryan et al. 2001) sports groups and politicians (Armstrong 1998b, 5). Some of the publications in recent years have labelled seafarers as the cause of spreading HIV/AIDS into Kiribati. This is a dangerous and vague conclusion and it must be taken into account that seafarers undergo regular medical examinations and are therefore more likely to be discovered with HIV/AIDS than other groups that travel outside Kiribati, such as students and politicians (see Carlin 1991, Jenkins 1994a, Monsell-Davis 1995, Towianska 1996, SPC 1997, Pacific AIDS Alert 1998, Armstrong 1999). Though there has to be great awareness that a focus on HIV/AIDS on seafarers might increase the danger of stigmatising it, is still very important to discuss the lifestyle that seafarers lead, and the risk they face, and how dangerous it can become for a country like Kiribati, where neither adequate health screening facilities are available, nor good hygienic circumstances can be found anywhere.

A "seafarer's life" and the risks

To be with different girls while working overseas is part of the so called "seaman's life". This label embraces the occupational group as one community or family that is faced with a rough and dangerous lifestyle on one hand and with the entertainment and joys on the other hand. This label can be used to allow seafarers to be
promiscuous and to drink excessively, but it is also a stigma. Not all seafarers behave like this. However, in the following paragraphs examples will be used that show the identification of Kiribati seafarers with their lifestyle and how this exposes them to the danger of sexual infections, fatal not only for the men but also for their partners and families back home. A retired seafarer explains that when work on board was finished: “At sea... we... we always watch video or... talk... or drink. But when we... when we are in port, we go on shore every time. And what do you usually do, when you go on shore? Every... always... we always go for drinks! Just for drinks! And maybe... looking for some girl.” The man explains that when he was married, he stopped going out with girls. And also that it is “safer” to take care of his sexual needs by himself: “You can make it on your own!” (interview 105).

_do you find it unsafe to go with a girl? Is it unsafe?
Yeah, like when you go... there are some places... there are some different places. Because some place... the girl give you a medical card. And so that’s... that’s safe. You don’t....
Then you don’t care anymore. No.
You think that is true, when she gives you a medical card, you think it is fine? Yeah.
And in other places? No!
And... how about using condoms... have you thought about that?
Ah! No, don’t use condoms.
Why not? I don’t know why. But I don’t think, I like the condom.
You don’t like them. Yeah.
So, sometimes even, when the girl shows you a card, you would just go with them, but without condom.
No, because... you know where the ship goes, where the ship will go! And... so... if you like, because we know where the... the place is good for girls. So, we can wait for these places.
Ah, so you wait only for the good places. Where the girls have the cards? Yes. (interview 105)

This man had retired and worked at a time when seafarers were not aware about the threat of HIV/AIDS. The following interview excerpt is taken from a (translated) interview with a woman, age 34, whose husband also believes in a medical card that sex workers show when they come on board. Her husband showed her photos with other women from overseas and talked about them, and he also told her that he used condoms when with other women. His explanation is that he is leading a “sailor’s life”. “She was so concerned about these diseases and one time, she has already talked to the husband not to go. She wanted him to stay. But you know, he said he couldn’t because of the kids! Now they have children and they... he asked, you know to
support them". The interview was translated, though the woman could understand some English. Note, that the interpreter is concerned about this wife and gives her advice during the interview.

Well, he tries to explain to her that that’s the sailor’s life. And she has to accept it, because everybody... everybody does that.  
Did you ever hear about Aids and sexual transmitted diseases? Yes.  
Do you talk about it with your husband? Yes.  
What does he say?  
Yes, you know, he said that... she should not worry, because he is... they are more experienced sailors and they know... you know, what type of women. And when the like when the women came on the board they brought with them the cards or what... the cards.  
What does it mean “the cards”?  
She doesn’t know. And she doesn’t know whether it’s true, what he’s told her whether it’s true or not, but that’s what she said the women... Like you know the women brought the card with them, and to show that... you know maybe they are not... they are not having Aids or so.  
Does your husband use condoms? Yes.  
When does he use them, with you, or with the other women?  
Yes. You know he use the condom when he... Not with her but with those women. <Interpreter says: Well I am just telling her, I am trying to encourage her, you know to be more... you know... to insist that her husband use the condom! You know because of those diseases, you know.>  
How do you know that he really uses the condoms?  
That’s what he told her.  
That is what he said? Yes.  
And she believes him?  
Yes, she believed him whether it’s true or not, but she’s... that’s what he said so she believes it. (interview 424)

Seamen regard themselves as “experienced” and that they would know where to find the right “type” of women overseas. The beliefs that these experienced seafarers share are dangerous, and they do not make these men less at risk than younger seafarers. However, one of the men has reflected in the next example, that younger seafarers, especially when they just started going overseas, “take it easy”. When asked what he thinks has changed in Kiribati in the last twenty years and in respect of seafarers, the first thing he says is:

“We have Aids now, we got... <laughs> Yeah. And....  
Do you think the Aids spreading has to do with seamen?  
Ehm... I would say yes! Because, most of them take it easy, you know, in the first ages, you know. Now they... are not...  
Now they know about it and...  
Yes, that’s right. (interview 101)
Being single and young and having heard from elder seamen about the so-called "seaman's life" together with lack of experience of how to drink modestly, puts younger seafarers into more danger of unsafe sexual behaviour. The risk of heavy drinking and safe sex is discussed a little later. Younger seafarers are generally at greater risk of being infected with HIV/AIDS in all international seafarer populations studied, as has been mentioned above.

**Protection**

The main tool to protect against HIV/AIDS, other than celibacy, is the use of condoms. Armstrong (1998 and 17/07/99) and Jenkins (1994) both noted that Pacific seafarers do not tend to use condoms. Both authors found that there was a lack of knowledge about HIV/AIDS infection in general, and that also people frequently did not know how to use a condom (Armstrong 1998, 11). An infrequent use of condoms has also been reported from international studies amongst seafarers. Demissie et al. (1996, 822) reported that Ethiopian sailors used condoms infrequently. Jenkins (1994, 16) also reports that "Many simply admitted that they were often too drunk to take notice and, even if they had condoms with them, too drunk to remember to use them", and this can also be the case with seafarers from Kiribati.

*How was it when you were on the ships or when you were on shore?*

We know it, but sometimes, when we get drunk, we forget about it. *<laughs> Forget about the Aids.*

*You didn't use condoms?*

Yes... No, we don't... we did not use the condom. We just go with the women. But we think that in Central America there is no Aids. In those places, because there were small ports. It's hardly that they... they have foreigners there, because only one or two ships at second time, a long period. Small ports that we deliver those... from the EEC, the milk! The milk from the cow, you know? From the Trinidad to Nicaragua, yeah. (interview 103)

In this example, the seaman says that neither he or his colleagues nor the commercial sex workers would remember to use condoms when they were drunk. "The prostitutes, they were also drunk. *So they didn't care?* Yeah. They didn't care. We were also drunk, that we didn't care. *Nobody cared. Nobody!* (interview 103)"

The association between risky sex and alcohol was subject to a quantitative analysis undertaken by LaBrie et al. (2000). The authors questioned the validity of self-reports
of sexual behaviour because of the private matter. Using the "unmatched-count technique" (UCT), participants were provided with a chance to answer sensitive items without having directly to admit a given behaviour (La Brie et al. 2000, 322). The authors concluded from their analysis that drinking can be an important mechanism involved in risky sex. Condom use falls under influence of alcohol, even when a person intended to behave safely. "Perhaps persons drinking alcohol are disinhibited from doing what they might intend to do – use a condom during sex" (La Brie et al. 2000, 323). Condom use patterns are widely studied in research about the spread of the Aids/HIV epidemic (eg Amuyunzu-Nyamongo et al. 1999, Orubuloye and Oguntimehin 1999, Mupemba 1999). Research in traditional African societies has revealed that condom use, even when known as protection against HIV/AIDS, is widely inconsistent (eg Barnett et al 1994, Caldwell 1999, Anarfi 1999, Jenkins 1999, Varga 2000, Wojcicki 2001, Oppong and Agyei-Mensay 2003).

The reasons for infrequent condom use are a lack of knowledge and appreciation of the usefulness of the condom, followed by a lack of pleasure (Anarfi 1999, 85). Condom use among younger people is considerably more rare, not only in African countries, but also in developed countries (Varga 2000, 43; Morris et al. 1996, 1270). Younger men are also more exposed to non-spousal partners, according to Morris et al. (1996, 1269). Most studies of truck drivers want to achieve more condom distribution amongst them and commercial sexual partners (eg. Mupemba, 1999,135). Quite alarming is the report of sex workers who are economically dependent on their customers and do not use condoms when they are surrounded by competing women who make risky compromises (eg. Singh 1994, 138). Since mobile occupational groups such as those of seafarers and truck drivers tend to visit commercial sex workers more than other people, some authors (eg. Morris et al. 1996, 1270) suggest targeting safer sex skills and information about the risks and options of negotiation of safer sex to sex workers, especially young women. A wife in Kiribati chose to follow her husband when he was drunk, because he tended to go with other girls when drunk. She could control him at home, but overseas would have no chance (interview 430).

Kiribati men tend not to use condoms with their own wives. This is also a phenomenon mentioned by Bryan et al (2001, 1416) who did research on Indian truck drivers and other mobile groups and found that these occupational groups were more
likely to use condoms with commercial sex workers than with their wives (see also Im-em 1999 on Thailand). This is a difficult issue since as mentioned above, I-Kiribati seafarers do not use condoms consistently overseas, and this puts their wives at risk when meeting their husbands at home. A lack of communication between spouses and the difficulty of discussing sexual health and the use of condoms in Kiribati culture makes this issue complicated.

In Kiribati ... seafarers report they cannot suggest using condoms with their partners as, their partner would then suspect them of having sex outside the relationship. Discussing sex is difficult between husband and wife, especially when they meet after a long separation. The I-Kiribati culture is structured very strongly around family, fidelity and trust. The society is patriarchal, men are the breadwinners and head of the household. There is an expectation that women will do as their men say and not ask too many questions when they return from sea duty (Armstrong 1998, 11).

Some women talked to their husbands about their fear of Aids. Unfortunately the husbands tended to react unfavourably, and therefore the chance of having a fair conversation with fair consequences for wives is low. Open communication between spouses would have the capacity of increasing safe sexual behaviour. One of the seafarers I interviewed knows that if he becomes infected, it would likely be carried on to his wife. His responsible feelings are in conflict with situations where he feels a desire for contact with women when working overseas. Here it becomes quite obvious how difficult it can be for a man who spends on average about seventeen months away from his wife, to deal with his feelings of love for her and with his desire and loneliness on the other side

Yeah, I did think about that [HIV/AIDS].
What do you think about it?
Well, I was really afraid, you know, I... if I not... and I'd be really... I would never forgive myself if I sort of find somebody... (interview 101)

This man also mentioned that it is traditionally not common for women in Kiribati to ask too many questions about the behaviour of their husbands or to mistrust them. It is acceptable for people from Kiribati to show jealousy. Therefore his wife as many other wives would do, asked him if he has been with someone else. However, it is unacceptable to question his loyalty any further. There are many examples, where women are in line with their culture and behave as they are expected to. One woman (interview 423) knows that her husband is loyal, because he has shown that he is
trustworthy by not drinking and by being a church member. However, it is interesting that when asked if her husband goes out with other women, her first reaction is, “she has no idea” and then she confirms to us, the interpreter and myself, instantly that her husband is unquestionably noble. Her husband has told her about some seafarers’ behaviour, thus she is aware about it. Being firmly rooted in her traditional role prevents doubt spreading in her mind. “She trusts him, because he is a church member and involved with church activities and that is the kind of trust that she has with her husband”. Another wife explained that she is willing to take the risk of Aids infection and death rather than discussing the subject or using condoms. “She don’t care, because she loves him and if they both got Aids they both die together” (interview 418).

It has also been observed that people use tools deriving from traditional beliefs to protect against infections (Barnett 1994, Jenkins 1994, Orubuloye et al. 1999, Wojcicki 2001). It is common in Kiribati to use traditional health methods (Brewis 1996). Dr Taylor and his assistant both told me in an informal talk, that they are concerned about the number of I-Kiribati using traditional medicine for severe sexual diseases (MN 03/99).

Wives of men who practise unsafe sex overseas are in particular danger in Kiribati of becoming infected with HIV/AIDS even when they live monogamously themselves. Research such as Painter (2001) about relationships in sub-Saharan countries, Poudel et al. (2000) about women in Nepal, Appleton (2000) in Tanzania, or Nath (2000) in India, has shown that women in patriarchally organised countries have very weak positions regarding the negotiation of condom use, or to discuss or change a husband’s promiscuous lifestyle. The research of Gangakhedakar et al. (1997, 2091) was conducted with women in India, which is a culture that “discourages communication between men and women regarding sexual behavior” and where married women have little ability to discuss and to negotiate the use of condoms or the fidelity of their partners. Communication problems between spouses of long-distances truck drivers are discussed in Marcus (1997, 437).
**Conclusions**

The seafaring occupation creates manifold risks for the health and wellbeing of people working on board. It has been discussed in-depth that not only the type of ship or the crew position on board, but also travelling through different environments, can cause discomfort and lead to accidents, and also to other severe health problems, such as heart disease, cancer and infectious diseases. Infectious diseases, such as malaria or tuberculosis, are easily spread in the constrained ship environment. The bulk of research on seafarers is based on quantitative data and is medical. However, there is increasing awareness of the lifestyle effects of the seafaring occupation, the mental and emotional stress that is caused by being on board for long periods of time, and by the global competitive development of the shipping industry with relatively short rest hours and small crew numbers. Most alarming are firstly, the high incidence of suicides and suicidal attempts amongst seafarers, secondly the common incidence of alcohol abuse, and thirdly the risk of sexual infections, especially with HIV/AIDS.

It has been argued above that Kiribati seafarers do not differ much from their European colleagues in respect of the lifestyle and risks that go along with their occupation. However, it has been explained that there are some significant differences in the cultural background of people and that the reasons for going on board ships can differ significantly. I-Kiribati's main reason for working on ships is to care for their families, and they cope with hard conditions abroad as much as possible, in order to fulfil their obligations. However, the effects of being absent from home are similar for all seafarers. Even when there is initial excitement, feelings of loneliness, boredom and homesickness can occur. Emotional stress is soothed with alcohol and foreign women. Both can have devastating effects on the home country. Alcohol abuse can lead to dismissals, with the consequence that the income flow to family members at home will stop; and to violent outbreaks, which can damage the seafarer's career and their self image. Consequences of alcohol abuse on the environment in Kiribati are discussed in chapter 6.

The most dangerous consequence of the seafaring lifestyle is the possibility of becoming infected with HIV. Leading a "sailor's life" seems to be for stress relief, and to label it this way makes it excusable. However, the patriarchal background of I-
Kiribati men makes protection against infection difficult. People are not used to condoms and there are manifold difficulties in communicating condom use to their wives: It would be embarrassing to do so, because men would have to admit that they were promiscuous. Condoms are also not comfortable for many men, therefore they tend to easily believe medical cards shown by girls. Women in Kiribati are increasingly afraid of infections. They have, however, no real chance to negotiate fair protection with their husbands. This is a tremendous problem not only for seafarer families, but for all families in Kiribati. Educational programmes are focused first on high risk groups, such as seafarer families, and the training centres. However, there are also activities to encourage more communication between spouses, and this means that there might be a significant change in the Kiribati culture in future (which will be further discussed in chapter 6).
Chapter 5:
Who benefits from remittances? – Effects on extended families, communities and environment

Introduction

Remittances sent back to people at home are the most measurable positive outcome of labour migration. Economic benefits of employment by foreign shipping agencies have led to a process of circulating international migration in Kiribati, as can be seen in more detail in Chapter 2 where the economic structure of Kiribati is explained. The significance of remittances research for national economic policy is high, especially because of indirect effects that lead to more economic growth in origin countries than expected and as revealed by official data (Brown 1997, 615, Taylor 1999). However, economic factors also apply to household and individual levels. To earn money and to be able to financially support their families are the main motives for seafarers to leave wives and families behind for extended periods of time.

It has been acknowledged widely that there is a need for studies on an individual and household level, in search of a detailed picture on remittances flows, where they really go to, who in particular benefits, and whether remittances are a reliable source of income over a longer period of time (Brown 1997, Simati and Gibson 2001). It is recognised that remittances do increase the quality of life for people, but there is also concern that they create economic inequalities (De Haan and Rogaly 2002; Taylor 1999, Connell and Conway 2000). Studies of remittances, particularly in the Pacific region, point out that the cultural connection of Pacific island countries has much influence on the flow and steadiness of remittances from migrants to extended families at home. However, the bulk of these studies have focused in detail only on Polynesian Samoa and Tonga, and migrants who live permanently in metropolitan centres not too far from their home countries. Pacific island cultures, though they have a lot in common, do also differ from each other in some ways (Hau’ofa 1998). Therefore the flow, use and effects of remittances can vary between Pacific island countries, because of cultural reasons (James 1997).
The following chapter about the effect of remittances in Kiribati adds to current discourses in several ways, but differs in others. This study is based on interviews with individuals as well as on detailed quantitative information about wages of seafarers and amounts of remittances sent and received, in the form of allotment lists (lists with detailed amounts of money remitted to each family member), and national income lists. It is important to realise that seafarers constitute a specialised form of migration, which can be described as a “transversal”, circulating, temporary contract labour migration. This is discussed in more detail in chapter 1. A contrast with some other forms of migration is that the process of remitting money back to Kiribati is obligatory, and in many ways institutionalised (Connell and Conway 2000, 66; Thomas-Hope 1999, 191). The amount of remittances sent back home is organised and reported by ship owners, then by employment agencies and finally by the Bank of Kiribati. The money and goods in kind are sent to seafarers’ own accounts, wives, parents and other family members. There is a difference between seafarers, and a transnational family network of migrants who live permanently in Pacific Rim countries sending remittances to their families at home as described by Connell and Brown (1995), and Bertram and Watters (1986). The difference lies in the temporary, circulating form of seafarers’ employment and the institutionalised process of remittances flow involved, which are distinguished from permanent forms of migration (as discussed in chapter 1). Therefore the concern about actual declining remittances which is discussed in some remittances studies on Pacific islanders does not apply. However, questions such as who really benefits from money sent back to Kiribati, and how the money is used, are major issues which indirectly also touch on the aspect of reliance on remittances as well as the aspect of remittances stagnation or decline over time.

The first part of this chapter will provide a brief overview of recent theoretical trends in studies on remittances. Quantitative data gained from my fieldwork will then be analysed. The second part of this chapter aims to look in more detail at family processes in Kiribati, how the remittances flow is incorporated into these, and how this affects community life in Kiribati. Two major consequences will then be discussed in more detail, firstly land sales and secondly the growth of internal migration to Tarawa.
Remittances studies – main arguments

Perhaps the most important recent trend in migration literature about remittances is a shift from a rather suspicious and negative perspective about the increasing dependency of migrant sending economies on remittances and the increase of migration, both seen as undesirable by modernist development theories, to a more positive and encouraging outlook on migration and the positive effects of remittances. It is now more and more recognised that official national data do not mirror the real impact of remittances and that there is more need for detail, especially for micro level research. There are arguments that governments should introduce less restrictive policies for migrants and encourage the flow of remittances back to migrants’ countries of origin (Brown 1997, 1998; Poirine 1997, Ahlburg and Brown 1998, Taylor 1999, Orozco 2002). Taylor (1999, 71) gives an example of policies in Asian countries that have encouraged migrants to remit; research in Asia seems to promote more positive development outcomes than research in other regions.

Research on remittances can be summarised in two major themes, firstly how remittances affect the sending area; and secondly how the motives of migrants to remit are being influenced by factors such as their original motives for migration, their capacity and their willingness to remit.

Most research on remittances derives from economists, and thus is structural and based on quantitative methods. Macro-level impact is quite often based on official data on remittances flows, which has to be taken with caution, since informal remittances are not included, and official data is then quite often an underestimation of national income. Brown (1997, 617) reports that taking all remittances sent to Tonga or Samoa, including unrecorded remittances such as goods in kind, pocket money, donations and other informal payments into account, they would then represent approximately two thirds of the GDP in both countries. The GDP estimates themselves would also appear higher. Meyers (1998) comes to the same conclusion for several Latin American countries. Thomas-Hope (1999, 183, 192) found similar results in Jamaica, and Taylor (1999, 70) in Mexico, and Adams (2003, 5) reports the same for labour exporting countries in general. Taylor also found that the largest multiplier effect of remittances was when they flowed into rural households, which he
interpreted as an equalising effect on income distribution, especially when non-migrant households benefit. Connell and Conway (2000) came to similar conclusions. They regard increased quality of life for extended families as a positive outcome, independent from any direct further investment into the national budget (see also Menjivar et al. 1998). Remittances first of all increase the budgets of families and their abilities for increased consumption. In earlier discourses, consumption use of remittances as opposed to investment and production has been seen as rather negative, leading to dependency on more remittances and as restrictive to national self-sufficiency. However, Taylor (1999, 69f.) states that increased consumption may indirectly increase income by stimulating investment and production of people in the community and that the “multiplier effect” of spending expands demand and creates jobs. Savings spent for schooling must be seen as a family investment because it increases employment opportunity. Housing improvement leads to increased well being and better quality of life, and can also be considered as investment. Ebiri (1985) noted that remittances increased capacity of consumption as well as for import of goods. Taylor (1999), Bedford (1997, 17) as well as Connell and Conway (2000) state that shifting perspectives have resulted in a more realistic picture of positive impacts of remittances. The limited productive potential of remittances has been linked to migration motivations: poor quality of land, lack of basic infrastructure and public services, and market distance (Leinbach and Watkins 1998, De Haan 1999, Taylor 1999, Connell and Conway 2000, Glytsos 2002). In many rural areas remitted money is only used to cover the most basic needs. Mooney (2003, 1167) concludes that migrants’ savings and remittances are a “socially organized practice that has a collective meaning within migrant networks”.

A large amount of literature is based on surveys undertaken with migrants in countries of immigration and aims at finding out about the motivation of migrants and their economic capacity to remit. Since the impact of remittances is highly relevant to receiving countries, it is of great concern that remittances might decline or be unsustainable. Policy goals are to understand migrants’ links to their home countries and to intervene in any possible decay of remittances. Brown (1998, 619) worked out four factors that influence the long term steadiness of remittances flow: “demand-side pressures” are family and community ties; “supply-side factors” are education, income and wealth of migrants; “motivational characteristics” stress motivations to
remit, and as well there is "duration of migrant's absence" (see also: Brown 1994, 1997, Connell and Brown 1995; Ahlburg and Brown 1997). Family bonds are seen as most important with regards to maintaining a steady flow of money remitted home. There are high correlations between a close family member staying at home and the amount and sustainability of remittances which increase when migrants' children are living in the country of origin (Brown 1994, Menjivar et al. 1998, Simati and Gibson 2001, Orozco 2002). The importance of family bonds is globally recognized (Stevenson 1997, Leinbach and Watkins 1998, Meyers 1998, De la Briere et al. 2002, Glyksos 2002, De Haan and Ben Rogaly 2002, Regmi and Tisdell 2002, Yeoh and Boyle 2002). A study undertaken amongst Tuvaluans in New Zealand shows that remittances do not decline over time but have rather a tendency to increase (Simati and Gibson 2001). Altruism as the only motive is generally discounted by authors. Regmi and Tisdell (2002, 92) conclude for Nepal that "remitting behaviour is guided by 'contractual arrangement' or 'repayment of family loan', by the migrant's degree of psychological attachment to relatives, and to a large extent by self-interest of migrants in inheriting property and enjoying high status in their family and society." This is in line with Poirine (1995) who regards remittances as "informal loan agreements" between family members, and claims that money transfers are therefore likely to be sustainable and will not decline over time. Remittances are seen as both repayments for former investments into migration and further investment into education of family members who will later take care of the retired migrant. However, when migration has involved employment that provides a pension, then the whole family will benefit from a returned migrant's retirement as Thomas-Hope (1999, 197) describes.

Some investment motivated behaviour that is based on strong bonds between family members and between migrant and the migrant's family, has been in the form of small island businesses supported by money and goods sent home. This networking process is linked to transnational processes (as discussed in chapter 1) (see Sampson 2003), labelled by Connell and Brown (1995) as "transnational corporation of kin", using this term from Bertram and Watters (1986). Another very important factor that keeps remittances sustainable is the intention of migrants to return home (Thomas-Hope 1999, 190). Migrants who want to return home are regarded as most likely to send consistently higher levels of remittances (Brown 1994). Ahlburg and Brown (1997)
found the targets for remittance policy must be those migrants who are indecisive about their intentions to return home, since the motivation to return correlates significantly with the motivation to remit. The authors came to the rather odd conclusion that governmental policies should aim to keep migrants abroad and in a state of intention to return home, because this would imply the best outcome of remittances sent back home.

The main conclusion that can be drawn here is that remittances are indeed flowing in large amounts and are highly important to migrant sending countries, especially those of the Pacific. Limitations to development through remittances in migrant sending countries are the same as those that have limited economic potential in home countries and have encouraged migration in the first place: poor alternative economics, poor infrastructure, remoteness and poor market access.

Research based on qualitative analyses on remittances is still relatively rare and focuses quite often on gender issues. The main arguments are that women migrants might gain increased status in the absence of their husbands (Espiritu 2002). Differences between the motivations and remitting behaviour is another focus in gender based research (Menjivar et al. 1998, Osaki 1999, Yeoh et al. 2002). There is also the question of whether women gain power and status when their husbands migrate (Hoodfar 1997). Osella and Osella (2000) have studied the meaning of money for men’s roles in Kerala (India) society. They note that cash is a signifier of masculine status and therefore the ability to accumulate or enjoy money, earned during migration, can increase a man’s status. Wealth linked to power and landownership is an impact of migration discussed in Stevenson (1997) who undertook a qualitative study in Yemen (these issues will be further discussed in chapter 6).

There is a lack of qualitative research on remittances, particularly in migrant origin countries. James’ study (1997) in Tonga is of interest. She discovers certain gaps in generalised research on remittances sent to Samoan and Tongan communities. Her main argument is that Samoan and Tongan communities are based on differing social and cultural parameters, and that these need to be considered when accurate results are required. James’ research underlines the importance of looking into the detail
instead of using broad and generalised terms such as “transnational corporation of kin” or “large contraflows of goods” (James 1997, 4, 8 referring to Connell and Brown 1995, 23). The exchange of symbolic goods between Tongan women at home and migrants abroad has a deep cultural meaning which intensifies family bonds in the long term, leading to strengthened obligations to send remittances.

James (1997, 5) also points out that to have fulfilled their family duty is more important to Tongan migrants than a concern with how the money is used. Money has social meaning but has a primarily important meaning for the status of a family. The cause for this lies in the strong family based Tongan cultural structure. In contrast to Tongan migrants, Samoan motivations are more community orientated. There are two important conclusions that can be drawn from James' study; the need to understand the importance of meaning and symbolism in exchange of money or goods in kind in Pacific island countries, and secondly, that this meaning is different in each Pacific island culture.

Employing these theoretical backgrounds, the analysis of data gained from research in Kiribati focuses firstly on how negotiating migration and decision-making at home influence the remittances flow. Secondly whether remittances decline or not; thirdly, how remittances are used; and fourthly whether remittances strengthen the status of the seafarer and his family and particularly whether they strengthen the status of seafarers’ wives (this is discussed in chapter 6). The following parts of this chapter will analyse quantitative data on both macro and micro levels. This will provide an overview of the remitting behaviour of seafarers. The subsequent chapter sections focus then on the use of remittances and their effects on families and communities in Kiribati.

**Remittances data and data analysis**

Data has been collected from a variety of sources. All three employment agencies, the German South Pacific Marine Services (SPMS), the Japanese Kiribati Fishermen Services (KFS), and the Korean Kiribati Overseas Seamen Employment Agency (KOSEA), have provided salary lists. The SPMS has kindly allowed access to data on remittances in form of ‘allotment lists’ up to 1997 to support research and with
confidentiality regarding names of individuals assured. Allotment lists record money remitted to each seafarer and family member on a monthly basis, and are produced by shipping companies for each ship. From a statistical viewpoint the SPMS data is the most accessible and most reliable. The Ministry of Finance lists of remitted income are mainly based on SPMS data. Remitted money from Nauru or from fisheries agencies is not regularly recorded in full content. My analysis is therefore based mainly on SPMS data. In 1997 the allotment distribution system by SPMS employed seafarers changed to being allocated directly by the (WestpacTrust) Bank of Kiribati. The Bank of Kiribati has also, with assurance of confidentiality, been able to provide accurate data on allotments sent in the years 1998 and 1999. However, the most useful data for analysis was found to be the SPMS ship allotment lists from 1996, since they were complete for this year, showed consistency and could be used to look at individuals that received money for each month. The Bank of Kiribati data was sorted by account number and therefore could only provide a general overview, but not an idea about which family members benefited directly.

To understand who benefited from allotments sent from one ship over one year, another challenge appeared. Though each seafarer had sent money to a number of people, those names cannot clearly be recognised as female or male, nor is it possible to understand whether the money was sent to a wife, a parent or to a different family member. To be able to still gain good information about money sent to either closer family members or extended families, I decided to give different codes, firstly to a seafarer who sent money to himself and secondly to a family member who had either the same first or second name as the seafarer, which I indicated as being a close family relation. All other names that appeared on the list and had no name in common are regarded as a more extended relationship to the seafarer. Qualitative material is based on interviews with 30 seafarers, 34 wives and 37 family members (16 (individual) fathers, 13 (individual) mothers, 3 parents and 3 siblings). I asked with few exceptions all of these interviewees how much money they either have sent regularly or received monthly.

The impact of remittances from seafarers on the Kiribati economy is significant. Whitley (1980) reports that the amount of remittances sent back in 1974 was A$800,000 with an additional A$200,000 brought back in the form of leave pay at the
end of contracts. As figure 5.1 shows, remittances have grown almost ten times between 1979, from A$1.3 million, to A$9.7 million in 1998. This is only the amount of money sent back as allotments, which are registered. Added to this must be A$913,000, of money that seafarers remitted in 1998 at the end of their contract and A$1.35 million that was paid in cash (unpublished SPMS data 1999). Thus the real amount remitted back to Kiribati from seafarers in 1998 was almost A$12 million dollars which does not include commodities that men bring back, such as stereos, television sets, fishing nets, kitchen tools, generators, CB radios, jewellery and so on.

![Remittances to Kiribati in Australian Dollars](image)

*Figure 5.1: Remittances from Seafarers to Kiribati between 1979 and 1998.*

*Sources: SPMS Data, 1999 (unpublished); Ministry of Finance, table 16.5, p.271*

Remittances data from seafarers working on fishing boats are not available in this form. The list from the Ministry of Finance that should include remitted data from Japan, Korea and Nauru, sometimes does, but usually does not. Remittances reported from the SPMS are regularly revealed to the Kiribati government and have been the basic structural data on income from migrants for the Ministry of Finance (MN 07/99). When remittances from the about 400 fishers in Japan and Korea and about 300 workers in Nauru, as reported from Ministry of Labour, were added to the Ministry of Finance data, the amount of remittances sent back to Kiribati, and the impact of remittances on Kiribati economy would appear greater. *Table 2.2 (chapter 2, p77)*, shows the expansion of seafarer employment in Kiribati from 1989 to 1999.
The employment of seafarers has almost doubled in this decade, from 788 to 1366 (plus 241 Tuvaluan seafarers). This explains the steady increase, and the almost doubled amount of remittances (from A$5.6 million in 1990 to A$9.7 million in 1999), sent home.

Most of the remittances are sent back to Tarawa, though most seafarers are born on the outer islands. For example, seafarers remitted A$962,018 (about 12.5 per cent of all allotments) to the outer islands. In the same year it was registered that 1358 seamen originated from the outer islands and 336 from Tarawa (unpublished data from SPMS, 1999). This occurs partly because seafarers remit money to their own bank accounts in Tarawa, even if they return to their home islands during holidays. However, as interviews have revealed, the amount of money sent to parents and wives on outer islands is significantly smaller than that sent to those living on Tarawa (see figures below). Life on Tarawa is more expensive, therefore the amount needed is higher. It is important to note here that there is also a tendency for wives of seafarers and even some parents from outer islands to settle in South Tarawa, which is another reason for a higher amount of remittances in Tarawa. This will be discussed in more detail later.

The following analysis of data provides information about how much money is in fact sent to family members. The amount that seafarers remit is negotiated with ship owners at the beginning of each trip. Seafarers are obliged to send some money, and it differs depending on either the shipping company they are working with, or the vessel they are on, how much the obligatory sum of remittances is. This can also, to an extent, be decided by seafarers. Seafarers reported that they are usually expected to send back between fifty to seventy percent of their salaries. There is a tendency for seafarers working on Japanese and Korean vessels to send a larger portion than those on German vessels, which might have to do with less time spent onshore in comparison to merchant seafarers. However, this also can vary with individual cases. It is the seafarer's decision alone what portion of the obligatory remitted money is distributed either to his own account, to his wife or his parents, and how much he sends to other family members. Seafarers sometimes also send money as single transfers after requests from relatives or to their own accounts. Though they have to pay transfer fees for each money transfer, the bulk of seafarers generally send money
in several different portions to their own accounts, their wives’ accounts, to parents and other family members, and to institutions such as the labour union (KIOSU). Some interviews revealed that some seamen sent money separately to the father and mother. It is noteworthy to mention that the negotiation of remittances seems to be an important issue for some men and can lead to conflict and resentment if not handled in a respectful way. This is discussed in Chapter 4. The following data shows the amount from one ship over one year that is sent to either seafarers’ accounts, to closer family members or extended family members. Here are three examples (figure 5.2):

**Example ship 1 (1996)**

**Annual totals**
- A$ 26,696 to seamen (99)
- A$ 23,022 to closer relatives (147)
- A$ 2,390 to extended relatives (46)
- A$ 120 to KIOSU (labour union)

**Monthly range**
- A$ 50 – 620
- A$ 50 – 400
- A$ 30 – 120

**Example ship 2 (1996)**

**Annual totals**
- A$ 18,280 to seamen (87)
- A$ 12,340 to closer relatives (92)
- A$ 4,260 to extended relatives (63)
- A$ 400 to Kiribati insurance
- A$ 60 to KIOSU (labour union)

**Monthly range**
- A$ 30 – 600
- A$ 30 – 510
- A$ 30 – 160

**Example ship 3 (1996)**

**Annual totals**
- A$ 63,646 to seamen
  - Including A$14,494 single allotments
- A$ 19,630 to closer family
- A$ 7,300 to extended family
- A$ 720 to KIOSU (labour union)

**Monthly range**
- A$ 50 – 700
- A$ 50 – 250
- A$ 50 – 200

*Figure 5.2: Three examples of allotment distribution per ship.*
*Source: Unpublished SPMS data 1996.*
The figure in brackets shows how often in one year seafarers sent money from one ship. This figure depends on the number of seafarers on one ship and on the flow of people on this ship. Ship examples here from three different companies were selected randomly. However, it is obvious that they seem to have a similar pattern of remitted money, and they can serve as representative of other ships. The bulk of money, about fifty percent, is sent back to seafarers’ own accounts. Note the number of single allotments sent: this is money earned in addition to the basic salary. The amount sent to either seafarers or family members ranged between A$30 or A$50 dollars up to A$700 in one case. The sums are higher when money is sent to a close family member. It can be concluded that seafarers sent the highest amounts regularly to their own accounts, the second major portion to closer family members, and smaller amounts as well as a smaller portion to extended families. When compared with Connell (1983, 46) who reported that seafarers remitted sums between A$60 and A$100, the portions sent back now seem to be a lot higher.

It is also interesting to see that money sent directly to institutions such as Kiribati Provident Fund, or KIOSU labour union is relatively small. There is no retirement scheme for I-Kiribati seafarers, therefore it is necessary to save money for retirement in personal accounts, or to invest in businesses to sustain cash income for when they return (see also Thomas, Sampson and Zhao 2003). This is one reason for the distribution of remittances as it appears here. However, it is also apparent from interviews, as will be explored later, that seafarers pay some money to the Kiribati Provident Fund to either save for retirement or to pay back loans. Those amounts have been found to be relatively small. The following graphs (figures 5.3 and 5.4) are taken from interview material of all three groups (wives, parents and seafarers) and they show what level of remittances is reported to be sent to or be received by wives and parents.
Remittances to Wives

Figure 5.3: Monthly remittances to wives as recorded in 1999 in Australian Dollars. Source: Data recorded from interviews, (Maria Borovnik)

Remittances to Parents

Figure 5.4: Monthly remittances to parents as recorded in 1999 in Australian Dollars. Source: Data recorded from interviews, (Maria Borovnik)
As can be seen here, wives generally receive greater monthly amounts than parents. Most wives receive money in a range between 100 and 300 dollars, while most parents receive from 30 to 100 Australian dollars. The data might be influenced by the fact that most of the interviews with parents took place on the outer islands, while most interviews with wives were conducted on Tarawa, and as mentioned above, there is a tendency for seafarers to send smaller amounts to the outer islands. Again, it must be noted that there is a tendency for wives, especially those from remote outer islands, to settle in South Tarawa, while many parents of seafarers tend to stay on the outer islands. However, interviews have shown that seamen, when they are married, are expected to care first of all for their wives and children, which is one of the reasons why wives receive generally larger amounts. There is also a trend, as wives have reported, for seafarers to send more money when children are in the household. Some parents let their daughters-in-law keep money for the sake of their children, mainly to be able to save for school fees. One mother on Abaiang, for example, said that both of her daughter-in-laws can keep their allotments “because they got children”, and only sometimes do they have to provide some to the mother-in-law for food (interview 629). Therefore it can be said that the data above shows an accurate picture.

So far it can be concluded that patterns and flows of remittances are influenced by seafarers: seafarers’ control over remittances is high. The bulk of remitted money is sent to their own accounts. Secondly it appears that seafarers’ wives and closer family members benefit most from remitted money. The question arises now, as to whether seamen have a tendency to keep money for themselves, which would link with the theoretical discussion of self-interest motives, or whether there is a continuing attitude of sharing money with their families. As a first step, the salaries of seafarers were taken as an approximate scale for the seamen’s capacity to send money (see table 5.1). Legal overtime money is included in this list. Not included is any other overtime money above the regular amount, nor Christmas or holiday pay that some seamen might receive. The following figures (5.5 and 5.6) show those cases where the seamen’s status was known in comparison with money remitted back (find key as table 5.1, p.178)
Figure 5.5: Remittances sent to wives 1999 by status of seafarer.
Source: Data recorded from interviews (Maria Borovnik), compared with SPMS salaries 1998.

Figure 5.6: Remittances sent to parents and relatives by status of seafarer 1999.
Source: Data recorded from interviews (Maria Borovnik), compared with SPMS salaries 1998.
The data is based on individual interviews, and conclusions must be drawn with caution. However, the following conclusions can be drawn from the above salary table and graphs. Wages increase steadily with length of time on board and acquired ship grade. Younger seafarers, ordinary seamen (OS) and able bodied seamen (AB) are generally not married, therefore remittances to parents are higher at this stage. It was expected, however, that with increasing grade and years, the remitted money back to wives and parents would increase. This is only sometimes the case. As can be seen, remittances to wives and family quite often remain on a relatively steady low to medium scale in comparison to wages earned. It must be concluded that many seafarers therefore tend to send higher amounts of money to their own accounts or perhaps use more money overseas.

How seamen use their money is discussed in more depth in the following sections. However, there are some wives who receive a relatively large amount of money: they usually have a high number of children; some have matured relationships with their husbands. There are a few cases where a seafarer has a joint account with his wife. A joint account immediately gives more rights and status to a wife, and she then handles the family budget. Some money is sent to uncles or aunts that have invested in the secondary school education of the seafarer. There are also quite a few cases where grandparents receive small amounts of money, sometimes because a seafarer grew up with his grandparents, and sometimes because the relationship to his grandparents is particularly close. The result is similar to Regmi and Tisdell’s study findings (2002) in Nepal, who found that psychological attachment to relatives are important factors in remitting behaviour. Money (or goods) is also sent in the form of single allotments.
for family members that request (*bubuti*) it. As explained before (chapter 2), *I-Kiribati* seafarers have the obligation to follow up the request of their family, according to the *bubuti* custom.

Three aspects of remittances need to be highlighted to link the material of this study into theoretical debates. Firstly, the decision-making process has been regarded as a high influence on motivations of migrants to remit. In Kiribati 82 per cent of the decisions to become a seafarer have been made by sons themselves. This is the outcome of my interviews with families and seafarers, when asked directly about decision-making. However, observation and rather indirect talk revealed that it is not only a desire of young men to become seafarers, but there are also expectations from families and communities on all young men who are successful at school, to go to the seasonal tests of Marine or Fishery Training Centres and to “try their luck”. I have been told several times that the reason why a man is either on Japanese fishing vessels or German merchant ships is because he went to the test that came to his village first and “he was lucky”, when he passed. Still the main reason for young *I-Kiribati* men to work on board ships is because of the obligation and need to provide family support. The desire for adventure comes second. Married seafarers suffer from separation from wives and families, as has been discussed in chapter 4.

Remittances are sometimes negotiated with wives and parents, and in other cases decided by seafarers themselves. A few interesting observations emerged during interviews. One seafarer said that his wife did not want more than $200 for herself and her four children, because the children would become spoiled and ask for money too often (interview 123). One wife told me that her husband sends less money to her than to her mother-in-law to prevent the mother from becoming jealous (interview 425). She also gives most of her money to her mother-in-law, which is good manners in Kiribati culture. However, her husband has arranged with his mother that she is allowed to spend a small amount on her own parents. The remitted amount to wives increases when children are in the family. I asked wives and parents frequently if the amount of remittances sent to them has changed over time. Twenty one per cent of the parents reported remittances have increased, and only 4 per cent reported a decrease. However, in 74 per cent of cases the sum had not changed. Wives have reported a different tendency. Twenty nine per cent reported that remittances had increased, 19
per cent said they vary and are sometimes higher, sometimes lower, negotiated each
time before a husband leaves. However, in 14 per cent of cases remittances had
decreased, most often linked to disputes between spouses and sometimes linked to the
fact that the wife has her own income. In 38 per cent of cases however, no changes
were reported. One seafarer said that he decided to decrease the allotments to his wife
and mother because he had the feeling they were wasting it. “Maybe she threw them
[the allotments] away! <laughs> They use [the money] for what they want! They went
to the bingo you know, every time the bingo! <laughs>” (interview 122) One time he
sent $500 extra money to them, after they requested it for the botaki. When he came
home, he found that there was no botaki and the money was gone. He really wanted to
save some money, so he decided to decrease the allotments and also not to reveal to
them how much he earns, so that he is protected from further requests and is able to
save. A more in-depth discussion about gender roles affected by migration will be
followed up in chapter 6.

In conclusion it can be said that remittances to wives and parents do not absolutely
decline, however they also do not significantly increase over time. When these results
are compared with the overall increase of remitted money sent back (as shown in
figure 5.1), it must be concluded that seafarers keep sending remittances into their
personal accounts over time. The results here linked with the analysis above show that
Kiribati seafarers have control over their money. Though men share their money,
especially when requested (bubuti), most of the money is regulated by seafarers
themselves.

**The use of remittances and who benefits**

The following section will discuss the share of remitted money and reasons for
remittances behaviour, and this information is based mainly on qualitative data,
gained from interviews. According to Connell and Conway (2000, 63: figure 3
developed from Russell 1996 and Conway 1985) “recipient strategies” are ordered
into seven main categories. Some of these categories do not apply here in the same
way as suggested by the authors, since seafarers do not migrate permanently and
therefore strategies closely linked to permanent forms of migration do not apply. It is
also important to understand, as has become obvious above, that “recipients” in Kiribati are mainly the seafarers themselves. The main recipient strategies in Kiribati are as follows: family and dependants’ basic needs; savings; flexible, human capital investments and reproduction of migration; fixed, location specific capital ventures; diversified micro-economic investments; community support realising social capital.

Taylor (1999), Connell and Conway (2000) and Glytsos (2002) state amongst others that the same reasons that have led to a migration process are also responsible for the lack of opportunities to invest money. Many families rely heavily on remittances, especially those living in rural areas with hardly any cash income alternatives, little development opportunity, infertile soils and long distances from markets. Money is most likely spent directly on basic needs without any further investment (see here also Thomas-Hope 1999, 197). This applies particularly to the outer islands in Kiribati where most interviewees said that they use all money for basic needs, food and clothes, and if there is anything left it is saved for botakis, family or community feasts, where seafarer families especially are expected to contribute money. Most parents were interviewed on outer islands and 65 per cent of them answered that they spent money for their basic needs and for contribution to botakis. People, especially on Beru where climate and soil conditions are particularly harsh, complained often that the money they receive is not enough (such as interview 618). The pressure of spending money for botakis is especially high on Beru, where many informants suffer shameful feelings because they cannot contribute in a way expected of a parent, especially a father of a seafarer. In particular, delays of remittances and their not being available for feasts causes stress and pain in Beru. One father said that there are so many activities in the village that he has to attend, because he is one of the unemane of his community (interview 612).

And when you attend... first thing, you have to bring your contribution! And so the problem is when they don’t get the money on time, they cannot get the money and they cannot bring something to contribute to that... you know in this village they have church activities, family activities and that sort [of activities] For him, like they just rely on the money from overseas and if they don’t get that money, sometimes he doesn’t go to the meeting. He just... has to wait until [the money arrives]. He said it’s embarrassing but... there is no way you can...[do anything about it]. ... If you don’t contribute a lot, it’s embarrassing in our culture. And sometimes you just go to the meeting and you just go,
pretending that nothing happened. But inside, you know, you don’t really feel good. Because people might talk, you know? (interview 612)

It is interesting to note that people on Beru most often mentioned they spent money for botakis, while on Abaiaing and Tarawa it was not explicitly mentioned as much. The conditions on Beru and islands of the Southern Gilbert group are particularly difficult, so it seems to be more important to contribute to village botakis than it might be in the central or northern parts of the Gilberts.

Wives spent 57 per cent of their allotments on basic needs which include church donations, or gave their money to parents-in-laws to buy food for the family. Sometimes money is spent on practical and luxury goods, such as bicycles or motorbikes, tape recorders, small radios and especially video players. However these were more often brought back as goods in kind by seafarers. It is the privilege of a family with cash income on the outer islands, where electricity is not provided, to possess a video player together with a generator. Generators are not only expensive and usually brought back by seafarers themselves, but they are a luxury to use because they need fuel, which is particularly expensive on the outer islands. Maintenance is a problem in Kiribati and in more than a few cases it has been reported that families possess a video player, generator or some other electrical equipment, but it is broken. A mother on Abaiaing: “The video is broken now. Why happened? They don’t know, the video is broken, and the generator, too is broken. Why? Just because of using it? Hmm! [yes!]” (interview 729). Things break often, when people borrow them. One seaman wants to buy a new motorbike because “my old one it’s already broken down”. And his generator: “Morikao (the KPC secondary school community) broke my generator. They borrowed. And also my screen. I don’t know who broke my screen” (interview 123).

What can be seen so far is that money and goods, though sent to individual family members, do indeed reach the community or village of an island in two main ways. Firstly through botakis and also through church fundraising activities and other church collections where wives and parents contribute, and secondly, through requests. It can be concluded that because of these formal and informal distribution systems seafarers’ remittances benefit a wide range of people in the extended family, village and church communities (Borovnik 2000, 316). This has potential to increase
the well-being and quality of life for whole communities. The benefits of remittances for communities are also discussed by Hadi (1999), Jones and Pardthaisong (1998) and De Haan (2002). The next paragraph shows how money flows from close family members into the family network.

There are two main categories to save money for. Firstly for school fees ("human capital investment"), and secondly for fixed local investment such as houses, land and businesses (Connell and Conway 2000). Secondary school fees are high in comparison to the economic capacity of most families in Kiribati. Added to school fees are also costs for school uniforms, study materials and several annual feasts where parents are obligated to contribute. Many children are restricted from continuing school because of lack of money and few scholarship opportunities. When a child has the ability to pass tests for higher education, the whole extended family helps to provide money if necessary. Some seafarers started to work overseas to contribute to school fees for their younger siblings. One mother said that both of her sons faked their ages and attended the MTC at fifteen and sixteen years old, after her husband died and her sons needed to take care of school fees for their younger siblings (interview 631). A teacher told me of a man she knew about who arrived in Tarawa after a 17 month contract. When he heard that school fees were not provided for one of his sisters, he left for a new contract after only two weeks on Tarawa so that he could send money to his sister (interview 909). One mother told me that she sold out several babaii pits to provide money for her children's school fees (interview 626).

Higher education is probably the most important investment for people in Kiribati, because it increases chances for employment and scholarships, and improves the quality of life for the whole family. As mentioned above, uncles and aunts of seafarers who helped to pay for his secondary school fees benefit later by receiving monthly allotments. They also usually receive extra money when school fees for their children and grandchildren are due. A survey I did amongst three schools revealed that seafarers are responsible for the payment of school fees for up to 20 per cent of the students in Morikao, Abaiang, 10 per cent in King George V and in KPC secondary school in Tarawa (see also figure 5.7). What is most interesting is that amongst 37 seafarers paying for secondary school fees, seven are brothers of students,
one is a cousin, one is an uncle and one is the adopted grandfather of students. The 27 remaining are their fathers. This result confirms the data about the involvement of all family members in investment and helping out others. Women pay the fees of 17 per cent of students: note this is a relatively high number of mothers, sisters and aunties mainly working as nurses and teachers providing school fees for secondary school children. About two thirds of all students are supported by the government. Both parents (up to 15 per cent) and wives (up to 13 per cent) of seafarers reported they had spent some of their allotments on school fees. It has become clear during interviews though that a large amount of the money for school fees is sent as single allotments by seafarers.

![Image of students](image)

*Figure 5.7: Secondary school students of Hiram Bingham High School, Rongorongo, Beru showing mud from Beru swamps. This mud is sacred because prepared as a special pie it is edible and saved lives during times of starvation.*

*Source: Maria Borovnik*

Thirty six percent of seafarers I interviewed do not save money. However, 20 per cent of them have built a house or bought land, and 44 per cent are saving either for a house, to buy some land or to open a business. It is therefore obvious that a large number of seafarers invest the money that they remit in their own accounts, planning to use it for the well-being of their families and to secure their own retirement which
also includes the financial security of their family. Note here that this is a different situation to Thomas-Hopes' (1999) study of Jamaican returned migrants, where retirement was secured by regular pensions. Not all seafarers save money for retirement. However, the attitude of many seafarers is to secure the life of their families by investing in future securities, such as houses, land and businesses. Parents spent 20 per cent of their allotments, if there was anything left, on investment in small businesses such as little donut bakeries and sewing material for tibutas (blouses) that are sold. Wives also save for investment: 30% saved for small stores or for some material for the newly built house.

Probably the main investment of seafarers' money is in houses. In most cases brick houses are built, especially on Tarawa, because it saves maintenance work. On outer islands, brick houses are noticeable and indicate status and the ability to live in luxury. Brick houses are quite often very hot and uncomfortable to live in, in comparison to traditional houses where building materials are pandanus and coconut leaves. Those have good ventilation. However, one advantage of brick houses is to save labour, especially for women, since roof patches do not have to be replaced anymore. They also seem to be more secure, especially for women who live on their own, which is increasingly the case with seafarer wives (see Chapter 6). The advantage in Tarawa is that roofs can be built to catch water in rain water tanks, another luxury investment (see figure 5.8 and figure 5.10). The building of houses must indeed be analysed as investment as Taylor (1999, 70) suggested, and it improves the security and quality of life of families as seen above.

A brick house is one of the most obvious signs of increased economic ability and status. Similar observations have been made by Stevenson (1997) in Yemen, and by Yeoh et al. (2002) in East Timor. One wife told me that her husband, who has achieved quite a high grade on German merchant ships, does not want to build a brick house in order to prevent any gossip, and because he does not like to stand out from others (interview 425). However, other people told me that to live in a brick house and to possess beautiful things such as videos makes them very proud of their sons and husbands (interview 602). There is an interesting dynamic in Kiribati culture that shows economic inequalities to a degree similar to those observed by James (1997) in Tonga.
Small businesses are supported by financial investments of seafarers in building material and stock and are then conducted by parents or wives or by retired seafarers (figure 5.9). However, maintaining a business can be challenging in Kiribati, where cultural ethics are built on equality between people, and the *bubuti* system makes it possible for families without cash income to ask for anything they need (see also Marshall 1996, Rouatu 1996a, 1996b). This has led to certain problems linked to conducting a successful business. One seaman opened a little shop together with a fuel supply on Abaiang and said that when he was around they had about $50 profit from it. However, when he left for work overseas, his wife had to look after the shop alone, and since then “plenty people now they make credit inside”. His wife “because maybe she is shy of the people that come for… asking…” cannot refuse, because this would not be appropriate in her custom. When her husband is present people seem to be more reluctant to request. “Before when we started here, we never give credit. Never. But plenty people now they… [ask for credit]. I am trying to stop [it] now” (interview 123). One father on Abaiang has to deal with the same problem of people asking for credit, which they usually do not repay. “That’s the main problem!” His strategy to handle this is “when I know that when there are people that are buying things on credit. It’s just a… what? Minimise the amount that they [can take, to]…

*Figure 5.8: A seafarer’s house in Tarawa, with the particular luxury of a rain drainage.* Source: Maria Borovnik.
only twenty or fifty dollars. And then I stop the credit. [he tells them:] ‘Well, you come now to the full amount of our payment, and then you can buy more things on a credit. You have to pay for cash!’” (interview 620).

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 5.9**: Typical seafarer investments are video hires (left hand side), small grocery stores (centre) and a pool bar, here on Tarawa.

*Source*: Maria Borovnik

When asked about this aspect of people asking for credit, which they are not expected to pay back in Kiribati culture, a father on Beru told me that there is already a process of change. “People also know that if they have something to borrow, that there are things they shouldn’t borrow. But that there are also things they should pay for it. They don’t ask for it” (interview 619). It is important to understand here that there is a cultural shift from a community consensus on equality where everybody is allowed to ask for any good, towards an economic system where people know that they have to provide money or an exchange value, such as coconuts, for goods purchased.
Land sales, internal migration and urbanisation

The following paragraphs will discuss investment in land and its major impact on Kiribati. The purchase of land is linked to different economic and cultural aspects. One aspect is the above mentioned economic shift, where money increasingly impacts on the economic and family system in Kiribati. This shift requires the introduction of a legal land tenancy system, which is based on land evaluation and is in this form new to Kiribati. Land tenancy issues in Kiribati are discussed by Geddes et al. (1982), Connell (1983), Ward and Kingdon (1995) and King (1999). Another aspect of land purchase is linked into issues of the bubuti custom, together with the problems of remoteness of the outer islands and the need to shift to Tarawa. The increasing internal migration of wives and families to South Tarawa adds to already existing urbanisation problems, which is the final aspect of this chapter.

One of the major problems that wives and families on the outer islands face is the long distance to Tarawa, while the transport system, especially to the more remote outer islands, is poor. Seafarers, when returning to Kiribati for a holiday, often have to spend several days, sometimes weeks, before they are able to go to their home islands. Sometimes, when time at home is short, for example, with seafarers working on Japanese pole and line vessels which spend only up to three weeks in Kiribati, they have to spend their entire holiday time in Tarawa, which produces stress on their spouse relationships, and also causes problems for parents. In consequence wives, sometimes together with parents of seafarers, settle either temporarily or permanently in Tarawa. The following interview reveals one of the most common problems that families share because of the fact that a son or husband lives with relatives during his time after arrival on Tarawa. Those parents live now on Beru (interview 601). I asked them: When your son comes back, does he bring back a lot of nice things for you?

You know, the son didn’t bring them anything! Because when he came back to Tarawa, and all the things that he bought were taken by those people whom he stay with... they asked him (bubuti) a lot of things to... you know they asked him to buy these things for them and even they asked for the money, too!

When he came back he brought with him you know the type of kerosene [stove] and he brought a bigger one, too. And they took that one. And they took the cooking utensils as well! And their big clock! And the watch. Wrist watch. You know he brought some for his sister but some people came and
Parents lose control over remitted goods from sons when they don’t use a strategy against the *bubuti* from relatives. Goods that finally arrive on outer islands are often hidden so that relatives cannot see and ask for them. One strategy is that a father goes to Tarawa before the son arrives and greets him at the airport. Because of his presence, relatives will feel more reluctant to ask for things. It still can happen, and the father could not refuse to let them have requested goods. Therefore, parents support their sons’ attempts to buy land and to build a house on Tarawa. When living in their own house and on their own land on Tarawa, dependency on relatives and as a consequence, obligations to relatives, are smaller, and more privacy is given.

Another important reason to advise a son to buy land on Tarawa is the future education of children in the family and that Tarawa is the urbanised centre of Kiribati, where all important infrastructure is available. Asked why the father would advise his son to buy land on Tarawa, he answered: “Yes. He would do that. He would advise his son to get... well, if he could get a piece of land on Tarawa, he would be happy. Because Tarawa is now the centre for education. And like, if they happen to have children or relatives who, you know? Who get works, then they will, you know? Then the land and the house is ready for them there on Tarawa” (interview 601). When owning land on Tarawa, people are able to provide others with benefits rather than asking for accommodation. The son’s family will also be able to look after his children when they are schooling on Tarawa (further discussions on this in chapter 6).

One Protestant wife from Nikunau has lived with Catholic relatives of her husband on Tarawa since she became ill and needed to go to the hospital. She is homesick, but
her husband wants her to stay and is planning to buy his own land and to build a
house, so that their daughter will be able to attend secondary school when she is older
(interview 404). The following interview example makes it obvious how important it
is for seafarers to support the family. This seaman, 22 years old, is from Arorae. He
plans to build a house on Tarawa. “Yes, I am planning! Because they need a house in
the family, and all is coming. They come from outer island! And want to live here.
(...) I have already [a piece of land], it’s a leased! Leased! Do you want to buy land?
Yes! I want to buy” (interview 113).

The increased settlement of seafarer families on South Tarawa adds to the stream of
internal migration from outer islands to the urbanised centre. More and more younger
people who initially resided on Tarawa to complete their school education stay in
order to find employment. Jones (1995) predicts that retired government workers can
be expected to return to their home islands in the long term. Returning migrants from
Nauru’s Phosphate mines also tend to settle on Tarawa because of the urban lifestyle.
Unlike migrant workers on Nauru, who can take their families abroad during their
contracts (Connell 1983), seafarers are in a situation where they cannot live with their
families aboard ships and thus depend on maintaining their relationships during their
short holiday times. These circumstances and the monetary ability to buy land and to
build houses contribute to the increasing transfers and settlements of seafarer families
in Tarawa and it is unlikely that this trend will decline in the long term.

Once settled on Tarawa relatives from outer islands will follow. A woman
interviewed told me that the stream of extended relatives wanting to live in one’s
house without adding income to the household can be very pressuring for those with
income on Tarawa. There is a tendency for people now to try and chase those away in
a subtle way, by acting grumpy or unwelcoming (interview 910). This is mainly the
case with more extended relatives and different with closer relatives. Rural-urban
migration in developing countries not only caused by economic factors but also by the
attraction of better living conditions is discussed by Agesa (2001) and Pacione (2001).
The social consequences of the growing urban South Tarawa will be discussed in
Chapter 6.
Figure 5.10: Water Tanks on Tarawa 1999. Source: Land Survey, GIS department, Bairiki, Tarawa

The figure 5.10 shows the distribution of water tanks on Tarawa. Note the difference between the number of water tanks built on South Tarawa, the urbanised centre in Kiribati, and North Tarawa, which is experiencing a spill-over effect already but is still structured (and regarded) as an outer island. To show the distribution of water tanks is one way of demonstrating both household density, and the ability of many families living now on Tarawa to live an enhanced life style. However, for example
Betio, the popular harbour area west of South Tarawa, has already a population density of 1800 people per square km (SPC 1998).

Urbanisation has caused environmental problems, which are discussed in detail in Connell and Lea (1998, 1999; and in Hunt 1996), and have been mentioned already in Chapter 2. Environmental problems are caused by overpopulation and by using scarce resources for construction of brick houses. Overpopulation has led to overuse of well water, which is becoming increasingly brackish and polluted; to sewerage problems, which can be dangerous in a fragile island environment and lead to pollution of reef and lagoon (figure 5.11); and to a decline in babai cultivation. The pollution of mangroves in particular, but also the use of sand for building material, are major threats to the coastal environment, and have already caused coastal abrasion and erosion. This as a consequence has led to disputes over land tenure; some of the land has disappeared.

*Figure 5.11:* Polluted coastline at low tide, lagoon side, Antebuka. Households take sand for building material in small amounts. However, there are also building companies with large digging trucks excavating in a large scale which is of great concern for Tarawa's coastal environment.

*Source:* Maria Borovnik
Land shortage has led to unregulated squatting (see also Bryant-Tokalau 1993, Storey 1998). A large number of households in South Tarawa (47 percent) have no access to toilets of any kind and are using the lagoon instead (Connell and Lea 1998, 30).

Jones (1995) and Connell and Lea (1998) suggested that urban planning is restricted by a number of problems, including a lack of infrastructure, low planning skills, and a mix of traditional values and activities interacting with non-traditional urban management. Royle (1999, 217) wants to describe the urbanising process in South Tarawa rather as “generating a denser distribution of rural-style dwellings”. The author simply ignores other aspects of urbanisation, such as the centralisation of facilities and the establishment of an urban market, as in Bairiki. Overcrowding and the polluted environment have led to poor health. Social problems “such as unemployment, delinquency, crime and violence, suicide, and substance abuse” are rising (Connell and Lea 1998, 27).

Abaiang and North Tarawa are the second and third fastest growing islands (Paul Jones 06/99). Interviews revealed that there is a tendency to settle and buy land on Abaiang and on North Tarawa (Land Survey officer 07/99). Many seafarers married to women from Abaiang compromise and let their wives live with their own parents, because transport facilities and frequencies to Abaiang are excellent and therefore living with their spouse at holiday times is easier. Most men will in this case look out for a chance to buy land on Abaiang to secure their own status and inheritance for their children. Land purchase is not only initiated by seafarers but quite often by people in need of money. The following seafarer for example, settled after he married on Abaiang with his wife’s parents. He bought two pieces of land. One was to secure the future of his children “because I am from Tabiteua [from the Southern Gilberts]!”, while the other piece of land was because someone requested an outboard motor to put on their canoe, worth one thousand and eight hundred dollars in exchange for a piece of land. “One old man…. They want an engine for the canoe. ‘Ok, I give you my land, if you buy my engine’. ‘Ok, I buy the engine’ <laughs and laughs>” What a bargain, he made! He also purchased three babai pits which makes him altogether a man of high status (interview 124). It has already been discussed in chapter 2 that there is a tendency of people from the Southern Gilbert Islands to buy land in the
North because of the better natural conditions, but also because land sales in the Northern Gilberts are easier because of a different customary land distribution.

A change in the Kiribati economy, with increased individual ownership and commercialising of land was envisaged by Lundsgaarde in 1974:

Although I hesitate to characterize the Gilbert Islands as a so called developing nation, there can be no doubt that even the most remote island setting will feel the impact of modernization. Wage earning opportunities outside the colony have created a false sense of progress in the minds of some who now feel that land ownership is only a traditional mode of survival. The future chances for deriving a living from wage income alone must realistically be viewed as a possibility reserved for a very small minority of islanders (Lundsgaarde 1974, 126).

Ward and Kingdon (1995, 48) argue that land sales in the Pacific started with the settling of missionaries and first traders. The authors explain that a strict law in the Gilbert and Ellice Island colony restricted land sales and allowed mainly the lease of lands. This has now changed (interviews 411, 920, 921, 926). Lambert (1977, 167) argued that “many people especially those with regular cash income, are acquiring lands and [babai] beds in order to provide better for their own children, not as the old aristocrats [of the Northern Gilberts] did, to increase the number of their dependents.” This is a similar observation to Stover’s (1999, 83) on American Samoa, who found that people buy individual land for security for their children and to avoid conflict amongst family members. However, it was shown by Lundsgaarde (1974) that conflict on islands, such as Tamana, with a great amount of communal land did not occur significantly more often than on islands with larger amounts of individual lands. This might have changed, especially in the urban environment of Tarawa. Ward and Kingdon (1995, 60f.) also found that there are quite a few examples in the Pacific where communal landownership was successfully kept during commercial undertakings. However, the survey on different Gilbert islands in Geddes et al. (1982) revealed significant differences in the distribution, inheritance customs, and use of land on the different islands. Of this group, Sewell (1982, 78f.) who studied Butaritari, places particular emphasis on the cultural meaning of land on this island. Communities make a special effort to ensure that land sales were to “real Butaritari”, or at least amongst real I-Kiribati, so they would not be alienated by sales to strangers. Changes in land tenure and the increase of land sales in the Pacific Islands
are also discussed in Hennings (1991), Crocombe (1994, 1999), Overton (1994), Pavihi (1994), Ward (1994), Hooper and Ward (1995), and Sillitoe (1999). The problem of negative effects on changing property rights is of concern in some Asian regions as well, and discussed by Adger et al. (1997). Macdonald (1982, 206) argues that “cash is no substitute or even the meanest land”, because land is still the basis of “status and ‘real’ wealth”.

The unemane in Nuka, Beru told me during a focus group meeting that there are cultural and economic changes due to land sales, and that pieces of land are now exchanged especially with seamen.

Like now, they see money as important. So it doesn’t matter if the man has a piece of land or no piece of land, but as long as he’s got money then… those who have land, they can give their land to the seamen, in order to buy! And they get money. And the seaman… gets the piece of land. Like that. He has used the money wisely by buying all those pieces of land. And he has like… you know, he is well off (focus group iii).

Seafarers are not only able to buy land, but also babai pits (see chapter 2) and other properties. To sell out their land is quite embarrassing for people, and they usually only do this because of financial desperation. One of the officers (interview 910) from the Land Survey Project in Tarawa explained to me:

In the older days the more land you have, the richer you are. And… maybe in terms of having a lot of copra to… get money out of it or to feed your people. And… these days it’s also like… if you have a lot of land, and say you are not from Tarawa, but you have a lot of land on Tarawa. That means, it determines that you have so much money in your pocket to be able to buy that much land on South Tarawa. Does that make sense?

Hmm. But is that a change from the older days or not?
I think there is a change.
Yes? In what way?
In a way that there are people that are being landless on South Tarawa. Because they have sold more… they sold out more of their land. And…. It can also mean that… Yes, this is… I am not being rude in saying this… but that means that the people who are selling out their land, are the people in need of money. Do you see my point? And in our… in Kiribati sense, it’s considered of as being poor.
When you are in need of money?
Hm. And if you sell out of land.

Therefore the danger of selling land is that some people become landless and then cannot draw on the resources of their land, nor will they be able to bequeath property
to their children. Land as a source of status and authority is discussed in Ward and Kingdon (1995, 7). “Less land in the family means less support for people” (David Farrier 06/99).

The government started to work on an evaluation of land in 1999, when I talked to Paul Jones, David Farrier and Nei Tabanteiti who were all involved in an AUSAID project at the Land Survey department. One goal of the project is to provide guidelines for future legal decisions and to understand the economic value and ownership of land. Land evaluation is based on coconut trees, particularly on the capacity of coconut trees to provide copra. The problems of evaluating are complex. The value of a piece of land in Kiribati is based on cultural meaning. “It is like... our people have some sort of personal attachment to their inheritance of land ... People from the suburbs wouldn’t understand the idea of demand and supply” (Nei Tabanteiti 07/99). Nei Tabanteiti explained to me that because of the special meaning that land has for people, which is linked to their ancestors, it cannot be right for them that land in South Tarawa might be valued higher than land in an outer island. The second difficulty the Land Survey has to deal with is that land is owned by multiple members, usually by members of an entire extended family and boundaries have not been thoroughly registered. “People own land, but they don’t know what the land boundaries are. So they are constantly going to court! And... trying to get these boundaries sorted out and [this] breaks violence as well. I mean, last time I was here, there was someone in jail. I think they’d killed someone or gone close to... killing someone because of the fights over the land boundaries. So we are trying to get a survey system introduced” (David Farrier 22/06/99, see also Farrier 1999).

Family land is on all Gilbert islands usually distributed in small stripes that cut the island horizontally from ocean side to lagoon side, providing access to both for all family members belonging to one kainga. “This arrangement ensures that each plot incorporates all ecological zones, ranging from the exposed and relatively infertile ocean coast, through the central region where the water table is thickest and swamp taro (babai) most readily cultivated, to the sheltered lagoon-shore area favoured for residence and the cultivation of breadfruit” (King 1999, 81). The following map (figure 5.12) shows land distribution per kainga (family land) on Butaritari as one example of what land distribution looks like in Kiribati. The different colours are one
kainga each, and each of these is subdivided among particular family groups. Each family member knows what piece of land they belong to, which is generally patrilineally organised.

*Figure 5.12:* Map showing land ownership boundaries in Butaritari (as one example for land distribution on the Gilbert islands). Each pattern represents a "kainga". *Source:* Land Survey, GIS department, Bairiki, Tarawa

Land sales, especially on Tarawa, can cause problems, because the subdividing of land can occur without agreement of the whole family, which causes conflict as mentioned above. However, a big problem is when land blocks are sold which are either too small to build on or, even worse, do not provide access to the main road. The map below shows an example in Antebuka: this block (766w/2o) is now isolated and has no road access (*figure 5.13*).
One seafarer's wife who inherited a large piece of land on Tarawa told me that the government had leased her land and she sub-leased it again from the government (interview 411). The government has leased large amounts of land on South Tarawa and built houses to rent for government workers. "The government wants us to come out with a model of determining fair rent to everyone. Because the government is
leasing land from the people... and subleasing [it] to other tenants... to those who want to occupy the government’s leased land. So we are required to sort of come up with a methodology that would give a guideline to the government in paying out the rent” (Nei Tabanteiti 07/99). The (vertical grey) lines on figure 5.14 are kainga land boundaries. It can be seen that government houses quite often cut through these land boundaries.

Figure 5.14: Part of Betio, South of Betio harbour. Note. lagoon side here is North, ocean side South. Source: Land Survey, GIS department, Bairiki, Tarawa.
While South Tarawa has to deal with overpopulation, land shortage and massive changes in land ownership, land especially on the more remote outer islands is more and more neglected when people have shifted to Tarawa. On our journeys to villages on Beru, Manana showed land to me that was “untidy” because the owner had gone to Tarawa and his family left behind did not look after it properly. We also saw deserted brick houses that were owned by government workers who now live on Tarawa. The problem of the absenteeism of land owners and property holders is discussed in Ward and Kingdon (1995) and Crocombe (1999).

The process of changing land ownership is perhaps the most severe consequence of increasing economic inequalities in Kiribati. Before approaching seafarers, when in need to sell their land, people will first want to sell their land to one of the churches. The churches who have since the first arrival of missionaries been interested in the purchase of land, are still the largest and richest buyers of land. “It’s about having a strong physical presence rather than a strong spiritual presence. And the physical presence seems to be far more important to the various churches than anything else” (David Lambourne, Chief Registrar 8/99, interview 920). For people in Kiribati it seems to be less shameful to sell their land to churches, and it might make them spiritually better people: “if you sell your land to the churches, you might be better off in heaven” (interview 920). When the churches are not interested in buying a particular piece of land, people will ask seafarers as their next option. More than any other occupational group seafarers are perceived as rich and capable of providing immediate cash exchange for land.

Land is really worth what anybody is willing to pay for it. So you might have a situation... and particularly with the churches. The churches all want to have as much land as possible! On which to build church buildings and things like that. And... they also have a lot more resources at their disposal. I know of one case where one church paid... eighty thousand dollars for about a quarter of an acre. But that’s because they really wanted that particular piece of land and they were willing to pay that much. Obviously no person, no individual here could afford to do that! And so... what I have seen is that the first organisation that is approached are the churches. And if people can’t sell their land to the church, then they approach the seamen. And it’s only because the seamen have some disposable income. And have savings! Which is unlike anybody else in the country. (interview 920)
The savings the Chief Registrar refers to have accumulated by the amount of remittances that is sent back to a seafarer's own account. Those seafarers who have been consistent in saving their remittances establish a long term security for themselves and their children by investing money into real estate, such as land, *babai* pits, houses and businesses.

**Conclusions**

The circulating and the semi institutionalised form of labour migration that seafarers in Kiribati are involved in has led to a continuous flow of remittances into the country that is mainly dependent on the number of seafarers employed. Remittances have a positive effect on the Kiribati economy and the detailed study in this chapter has revealed that, similar to conclusions of Ahlburg and Brown (1998), Taylor (1999) and Thomas-Hope (1999), the national economy of Kiribati benefits more from remittances than official statistics reveal. Remittances have led to better living conditions for families, increased cash flow, and some investment.

This chapter focussed on the distribution of money to different family members in Kiribati and on the use of remittances. Kiribati culture is based on extended families which are bound into a community and village system. Young men are expected to be care-takers for families, therefore the decision to become a seafarer is made on an individual basis with the background of expectations from their families to take on a job that will provide income. Remittances are obligatory, but again, the individual has an option to decide what amount is sent to what family member. A seafarer has to fulfil obligations to parents, wife and perhaps family members who have invested in his education or who have a particularly close relationship to him. However, he decides in what way he is going to fulfil his obligations. The data analysis has shown that seafarers in Kiribati maintain great control over remittances they send to Kiribati by firstly sending the bulk into their own accounts, and secondly by controlling how much money they send to others. It can also be said that money sent to wives and parents does not significantly increase over time or with the increased status of a seafarer on board. Therefore it can be concluded that though remittances do not decline over time, they are rather steady in the amount sent to families, while the
amount sent to individual accounts is increasing. The *bubuti* system in Kiribati provides a share of the seafarers’ remittances, not only to all family members, but also churches and communities. Seamen as much as their wives and parents are obligated to share their wealth. Because of this, money is spread more widely in Kiribati communities than officially reported, and a number of non-migrant households benefit in many different ways.

On the outer islands remittances, as expected, are mainly spent on basic needs and for community contribution. However, money accumulated by seafarers is often invested in goods that enhance the quality of lives of people, such as kerosene stoves, generators, videos, bicycles, motor bikes, but also houses; and on Tarawa also on water tanks. To own luxury goods and to own a house increases the status of seafarer families. Brick houses stand out in an outer island environment and show economic well being, which leads to increased status but also to increased obligations of family members who are now expected to contribute large amounts of money to community *botakis*. Therefore, seafarers do not always want to stand out from their communities.

The greatest impact of remittances in Kiribati is the purchase of land and the effects that come with this process. Land has cultural meaning and is the most important asset in Kiribati culture, because it provides everyone with basic living facilities. To be able to increase their ownership of land makes a seafarer family rich in Kiribati culture. However, the other side is that some families, especially non-migrant households, sometimes sell off their entire family land and are then not able to bequeath and provide the security of basic living needs for their children. As a consequence, some families are becoming poor and completely dependent on money. Many seafarers from remote outer islands buy land and build houses on Tarawa to be able to meet their families on Tarawa during holiday times, but also to provide good education for their children. To be able to provide higher education for children will in the long term increase the economic ability of families with cash income and can then lead to more social inequality. Kiribati is thus gaining the positive effect of increased highly skilled labour, which will in future lead to better economic standards on a national level. More and more relatives of seafarers and also of government employees settle on Tarawa, because of the urban infrastructure such as high schools, but also because of the job opportunities that South Tarawa has to offer.
Unfortunately the urbanisation process has a range of negative effects, such as overpopulation, decreased water quality, and social problems, especially when many people cannot find employment as hoped. This will be further discussed in the following chapter.

It is important to realise that seafarers remittances' are essential to the Kiribati economy. The positive effects such as contribution to GDP, increased quality of lives and increased economic ability for future investments of families must be regarded as higher than the negative ones. Positive and negative effects must be balanced against each other.
Chapter 6:
Consequences of the repetitive absence and presence of seafarers

Introduction

Seafaring can have negative effects on people’s health and well-being, but it increases the quality of life for a range of I-Kiribati, even those that are not related to seafarers. These aspects were analysed in the previous chapters 4 and 5. The current chapter concentrates on the repeated absence of men alternating with their short-term presence in Kiribati, and how this affects Kiribati society and culture and the personal relationships of people. It has been shown before that aspects linked to money, such as the ability to purchase properties and to provide family members with higher education, add to increased internal migration especially to the urban centre of South Tarawa. The environmental consequences of this were discussed in chapter 5.

This chapter will focus on social aspects, and on the contrast between Kiribati culture and the new elements that are brought back by seafarers. The decision to undertake contract labour requiring work apart from families has to be regarded as one way to maximise social benefits, where the hardship of being away from home over extended periods has to be faced in order to maintain and to benefit families at home. The following sections will illuminate how seafarers are perceived in Kiribati communities, and how different aspects of their employment alternating with vacation at home are affecting Kiribati culture. The circulating nature of men results in different lifestyles being imported into Kiribati culture. The chapter will be focused on: firstly how, and what aspects of the te katei ni Kiribati, the “Kiribati way of life”, have been affected. It will then give some examples of environmental changes related to this. As argued in chapter 2, environment and culture are very much linked to each other. It will be analysed how seafarers accelerate processes of social and cultural change that are influenced by different elements correlated with “westernising” processes, especially in the urban centre. Toatu (1980, 32) felt that seafarers returning to Kiribati act in quite disturbing manners: “concern has ... been expressed at the social implications, the extent to which seamen dehumanise themselves, distort local customs, and cause envy and resentment in the rest of the local population”. Though
my research has revealed that some of the already existing social problems seem to become accelerated through the circulating nature of seafarer employment, there seemed, however, much less resentment amongst the I-Kiribati population than it appeared in Toatu’s report.

Vickers and Walsh (1999, 19) stress that the strength of social ties between seafarers and their home communities are important and maintained over long distance and long-term. Jones and Pardthaisong (1999, 46) have found that the impact of overseas migration on rural Thailand has been regarded by almost all members of the community as life enhancing rather than life changing. This is linked to the economic benefits that families gain (see also Francis 2002, 170). However, there are many social aspects that might lead to problems in the future (Thomas, Sampson and Zhao 2003). These can include mental health problems, and difficulties with family members left behind (Ebiri 1985, Tyner 2002). It is widely discussed that economic explanations for the causes and consequences of migration to a sending country are not sufficient. Social dimensions must be taken into account (Joly 2000, Hampshire 2002).

Consequences for family life, which will be addressed in the second part of this chapter, have gained increasing attention in recent years with research on labour circulation (Hugo 2002). Lam, Yeoh and Law (2002) argue within the framework of transnationalism that migrants, even when separated from their families, have found ways of negotiating core issues to sustain family relations and to make relationships with wives and children work. Wives and children have to cope with the absence but also with repetitive short term presence of their seafarer partners or fathers. Morrison and Clements’ study on Australian sailors shows that the presence of seafarers creates increased stress levels in spouses. These are firstly directly related to the stress levels of seafarers, which increase when men are deployed; and secondly, stress that wives experience which is related to their husbands’ departure. Stress levels increase one or two weeks before departure and continue to be higher than at other times up to two weeks after departure (Morrison and Clement 1997, 310) Thomas, Sampson and Zhao (2003), referring to Foster and Cacioppe (1986) showed similar results. Gugler (1995, 544) describes the hardship and emotional stress that is involved with long separations.
between spouses and family members, which he feels are consequences of circular migration that have not received enough attention.

Stress for families that is caused by the separation from seafarer husbands has been discussed in Kahveci (2000), Thomas (2002), Thomas, Sampson and Zhao (2003). Particular reference has been made to stress caused by the long-term absence of seafarers from the Asian-Pacific region, and a lack of communication facilities on ships, which makes contact between spouses and families difficult. The specific situation in Kiribati is that a wife moves to her husband’s family after her wedding. This implies that a young wife might not only move away from her home village, but some women might leave their home islands to live with their in-law family on an island in a location remote from their own family. When husbands are absent, a woman is faced with living amongst a new family with a number of restrictions and duties, and often her happiness will depend greatly on her relationship with and the kindness of her in-laws. Communication between ships and outer islands are particularly difficult, rare and is usually only possible via letter writing. A lack of communication was found to be a major stress factor for relationships in Thomas, Sampson and Zhao (2003). The authors claim that increased communication facilities would enhance the well-being of both seafarers and family members incredibly.

After an analysis of talks and interviews conducted with wives and parents, I have come to the conclusion that there is one primary conflict created by the international labour circulation that seafarers are involved in: this is that people struggle between the competing desires of receiving economic benefits and meeting their basic necessities through remittances from sons or spouses on one hand; and experiencing distress, such as sadness, and fear, caused by the absence of men on the other hand. Other consequences, such as relationship problems, health problems, and social problems, which are caused by both repeated absence and the short term presence of seafarers, are seen as secondary issues by I-Kiribati, even though they can be very serious and even dangerous. This can be linked to the customary element of having to be able to deal with stress and pain, without making a fuss, and the duty to follow social obligations. The double bind between economic improvement and sacrifices made in family life has also been discussed in Meijering and van Hoven (2003, 177),
which is also the conclusion of Thomas, Sampson and Zhao (2003), especially for families with lower income seafarers, such as crew-ratings.

The majority of people I have talked to have elected to make sacrifices in favour of the economic benefits. The overall atmosphere in Kiribati is positive towards seafarers and towards the money and goods they bring back. It is perceived as mainly beneficial that men have found good employment overseas, and as will be discussed in the following paragraphs, resilience and being able to face hardship are part of Kiribati culture. Therefore, sacrifices are endured without complaints.

**Community Changes**

The perception of seafarers amongst Kiribati communities and how they affect Kiribati is the subject of the following section. People are deeply rooted in culture. This is best expressed in what is commonly called *te katei ni Kiribati*, the *I-Kiribati* way of life, which I have discussed in Chapter 2. The following list summarises the main elements of *te katei ni Kiribati* (Itaia 1984):

- Being part of a Kiribati genealogy
- Following social obligations
- Being tied to kinship
- Treasuring properties like land, canoes and houses
- Keeping skills and knowledge secret
- Not embarrassing someone in public
- Having a strong character or sense of identity

Though these key elements of Kiribati culture are continuing guidelines for the *I-Kiribati*, some aspects are changing. Some of the changes were discussed in the previous chapters. It was argued in chapter 2 that the Kiribati way of life and Kiribati cultural elements are part of the reasons for foreign employment. As discussed, cultural elements are also influencing business and international relationships, and the obligations to kinship are the main reasons not only for a steady flow of remittances, but also for a continuing labour circulation of *I-Kiribati* seamen. I will focus in the following section on cultural elements, claiming that they create strong roots for
people in Kiribati, or as Tamaetera, Director of the Cultural Centre of Kiribati, puts it: "It [to be I-Kiribati] is like a tree which grows in this soil. If I take it to another country it wouldn’t survive". This refers to all people belonging to Kiribati (kain Kiribati), people who live on the islands, and migrants, as long as they identify with and behave according to the Kiribati code of conduct, or te aomata. As mentioned in chapter 2, a te aomata, a real I-Kiribati, is respectful, especially to the elders and follows their advice, works hard, is resilient and able to face hardship, and is friendly to strangers (Itaia 1984). The aspects of identity which are rooted in a system of ancestors, but can also be reconfirmed by "routes", circular movements (Gilroy 1993, Diaz and Kauanui 2001 and Jolly 2001) have been mentioned in chapter 1.

These roots of being I-Kiribati offer each person a place and a role to fulfil. People must conform or adapt to particular rules that their society stipulates as acceptable behaviour. To belong to a family and community is safe, because the community will share and look after its members. Not to be in the community, or not to have a particular place, is undesirable and filled with disadvantage (according to interviews 914, 906) (see Macintyre 1993 who described a similar structure in Papua New Guinea). People must follow rules otherwise they become outsiders and disorientated. Roots and continuity are more important than change (Macdonald 1982). Basic rules are to live as te aomata, and to follow clear customary objectives. It will be discussed in the following section how Kiribati society is structured. How people form their individual identity when belonging to an island community and how they integrate themselves into larger kinship units is discussed by Lindstrom (1999, 198f).

**The structure of Kiribati society**

The roles that each member of Kiribati society fulfils are based on a patriarchal, vertically structured family and village system, which can be traced back to a line of ancestors. The eldest men or unimane are guidance providers, and at the top of the hierarchy (Connell 1983 speaks of society "stratification"). The elder people are most respected and younger adults must be obedient and follow strict duties (Iobi 1985, Teiwaki 1985). Married men and women have more rights than their single siblings. There are strong ties between siblings, including first cousins. Men’s responsibility is to provide, to care for, and to protect the family. It is expected of men that they have the benefit of their family in mind even if this means facing hardship. Men in
households, especially married men, are responsible for outdoor activities: fishing, cutting toddy, working in bobai pits, clearing land, building houses, working on boats and contributing to communal building and agricultural work. They represent the family at village meetings, sit in front of a maneaba and they eat first after the eldest men have been served.

Figure 6.1: Abaiang island: Unimane standing beside the grave of an ancestor. To show respect for this sacred ancestor, visitors will present gifts and receive a special initiation from the unimane which will ensure the blessings of the ancestor on Abaiang. Source: Maria Borovnik

Women serve their family. This is best expressed in serving food to everyone else first before they are allowed to have their own share. “The role of women in Kiribati means in Kiribati first and foremost the family. ... But the first thing is the husband, and then the children. All the time she has to focus on her husband first. Right?! And then after that the children. And then [the] extended family! Whoever stays there and then she will be the last one to think of” (President of the Protestant Church women’s organisation (RAK) 03/99). A woman’s role is generally inside the household. A woman looks after children, cleans the house, does the washing and cooking, weaving, sewing and roof thatching. She collects shellfish in the lagoon, provides leaves for bobai pits, and she sits at the back of the maneaba (Talu (1992); Ngaebi, Russell and Tamuera 1993). The husband’s parents are responsible for “watch[ing]
carefully over the woman, whether she behaves, you know things like that” (RAK President 03/99). The priority of looking after a daughter in-law is to make sure that she fulfils her role in this family properly, and that she does not expose herself to any danger of becoming unfaithful. Therefore a married woman has to make efforts to become physically unattractive and to stay always close to her husband’s home. The only exceptions are church activities which women are encouraged to be involved in. If it is unavoidable for her to leave the house, she needs to be guarded by members of the husband’s family. This can be difficult and will need some adjustment in cases where a woman has found employment and leaves the house for work, which will be discussed in more detail in subsequent sections of this chapter. When women marry they gain respect, and as they become older, respect grows so that they can distribute tasks to younger and unmarried women, and to their daughters in-law (Brewis, 1996).

Men, but especially women, have to follow a range of restrictions. Some are mentioned above. Women sometimes work in babai pits and go fishing, but they are not allowed to climb trees and cut toddy. Women are allowed to smoke, though it is not encouraged, young women should not smoke, and drinking alcohol is forbidden (interview 908). Women are regarded as emotionally more vulnerable, and alcohol will lead to a weakening of their emotional state, putting them in danger of attracting male attention (KPC Minister 06/99). To show emotions is generally not accepted in Kiribati, although it is accepted in men. Women are required to repress their emotions in public or in front of other family members. It is not common, and would be ridiculed should couples be publicly affectionate. It is still usual on the outer islands that marriages are arranged by parents, where both families make sure that the couple has no common relatives in their ancestral trees. The girl should have behaved well, worked hard and kept her virginity; and the boy will inherit plenty of land and is regarded as hard working and strong. It has been pointed out to me at times that there are couples that do not feel love for each other, and that some women have never experienced emotional love because of their arranged marriage (focus group v). Men are allowed to help around the household and to look after children, but they should not do the cleaning. There are restrictions regarding alcohol consumption on some islands (interview 907).
Though Kiribati’s life is open and allows insights into peoples’ private lives (see figure 6.2), family privacy is tightly held. All concerns and needs, such as childcare, household maintenance and repair, preparation of meals, and care for elderly or sick people, are met by the immediate family. This includes core family members and parents, brothers and sisters, and their children, including second cousins. Third cousins and others are regarded as extended relatives.

![Family on Tarawa. Husband drinks tea on their buia (sleeping hut), while his wife does the washing, and their children play. Source: Maria Borovnik](image)

Privacy in Kiribati is so strictly bound to family clans that there are clear boundaries in public life. The use of land, for example, is also only strictly allowed for those family members who own the land. “Well, it’s like... you cannot go to other peoples’ land. When you get coconut, or when you, you know, in some places, when you cut toddy on your own piece of land, you use your own tree and... so, when you have your own piece of land it’s more like a... you know, property to you. And you are free to do, whatever you want to do. And you know, you can plant! You can get all from your piece of land” (Secondary School Teacher 05/99). The same rule applies to fish traps. Fish traps can be inherited, and all members of the community know who the owner of the trap is. Nobody who is not closely related to the owner will touch it.
The value of ancestry and land and how this is affected by cash income of seafarers and others has been discussed already in Chapter 5.

_The perception of seafarers in communities and their influence on Kiribati society_

Seafarers are perceived as a unique group in Kiribati. This is due to their absences; they are “temporarily not part of the community” (Amon, Social Welfare Senior Officer 13/08/99). When they are present they show not only a particular kind of behaviour, but usually also economic prosperity. When I asked a group of young people how they would describe a seafarer they suggested the following characteristics:

**Boy 1:** It’s like as we see it... that you can afford more stuff... [stuff] that you need.

**Girl 1:** Video and tapes!

**Boy 2:** Motorcycles!

*Yes? But is it not only the seamen but also that when you have a job at the hospital that you could buy a motorbike?*

**Boy 1:** Aya. He got more stuff! And [that is] because he has more money. That’s the thing. Whatever he needs, he buys it straight away. *He looks as if he has the pockets full of money.*

**Boy 1:** Yes. That’s the main idea. He looks like a... rich man! Yes! And another [thing]... because the skin colour changed! <laughter> It changed to white! So you can point at him and say that’s a seaman. You know from the skin.

**Girl 2:** And they are drunk in the bus. They spend some time in the bus.

**Boy 1:** Drinking in the bus.

**Girl 2:** Yes.

**Boy 1:** But I think it’s the money. What you can say about the seamen... only the money. That makes them different. Mainly from the money. Wherever you see them... like in the dance. Looks very... rich.

*How can a man look rich when he is at the dancing? What do you mean?*

**Boy 1:** I mean... go and buy more drinks! On the table... and for more people.

**Girl 2:** And he always wears the long pants.

**Boy 1:** Hm! Aya! <laughter> (focus group vi)

On arrival, many seafarers still wear their ship uniform or casual western style long trousers, which they usually change soon after arrival on Tarawa to more customary garments, such as the _lavalava_. Quite a few of them wear a long or different hairstyle when they come back. Long hair, though customarily not approved, has become a symbol for the seamen and their lifestyle, and is now almost accepted on Tarawa, but it is unwanted on the outer islands. Seafarers going on Japanese vessels distinguish themselves by using a different hairstyle to those from German ships. One of my
interview partners had his hair in Japanese style, short, asymmetric and with some red colouring. I asked him how his wife perceived his style.

She doesn’t like it. <laughs>... I don’t know why. I just said “I just changed my hair style”. She doesn’t like it. I don’t know why. It doesn’t matter. <silence> My parents were the same, eh?! Very angry, too. I don’t care. Yeah. <laughs>. They said, “what about your hair, you colour your hair?” Like this. And I say to them, “I make a new style”. Yeah. “Ah you are so foolish!” <laughs> My father [says]. He’s very angry (interview 200).

Another difference between German and Japanese seafarers is the use of different eating utensils. “You know those who come from Japan, they use the chop stick! And those that come from Germany they use the fork and knife. ... It is their way to show off! (interview 703)” is one of the observations of a seafarer’s father, whose son goes on Japanese vessels.

The first few days after arrival on Tarawa are spent generously shouting drinks and distributing money and goods that they brought back. I have personally benefited from returned seafarers’ generosity when I worked on remittances data at the SPMS office: Men shouted ice cream or biscuits to anyone in the office just for the joy of being back. However, in some cases, men come back without or with only small amounts of money, usually due to alcohol intemperance that continues after their arrival. These men are looked at as those who use their money “unwisely”. The quote below, taken from an unimane meeting of a village on Beru summarises how seafarers are perceived by the elder men of an outer island.

The changes that the seamen brought with them are like they are more well off than the people here. Because when they come back they build the concrete houses and they have all these things, video and the... you know things like that. So they are more well off than the rest of the village people.

Another change is like when... yeah, they have long hair. You know, when they came back they wear long hair. Well, and some of them change for the better, some of them change for the worse. Like those who used to be not very good, you know. And then when they came back, and because they have all those things, they are more careful with the use of these things. But some of them, you know were worse. When they get the money and when they came back, they just you know, they use the money unwisely. Like when you know when they have their wives with them left behind and when they came back they just stay in Tarawa with wasted all the money. Not coming back to the wives.
Some boys they are single. And those are the good ones, like when they come back, they come to their parents. And some they just stay in Tarawa and wasted their money. They didn’t come here. They just stay there until they go back overseas again (focus group iii).

It was mentioned in Chapter 5 that seafarers have increased monetary income and therefore are able to buy land, build brick houses, provide their families with generators, videos, motorbikes and other luxury facilities. Parents with a seafarer son on the outer islands are very privileged as was mentioned by several people. “Because when they [the seamen] come back, like they bring a lot of things. Their own bicycle, they have their motorbike! They build their concrete houses and they have their video and you know, all these things that ordinary people won’t have. So it’s like an envy for the parents who don’t have the... It’s a privilege! (interview 601)”.

One of the consequences is that seafarers’ status amongst villages on the outer islands rises. This is firstly because of their regular contributions to their families which then spread into village and Church communities, and secondly because of a visible economic potential, which is expressed in land ownership, purchase of babai pits, pigs and buildings. Thus these seafarers, the “good boys”, are handled with more tolerance than other community members on the outer islands because of the economic benefits they deliver. A seaman who behaved in an unwanted manner, and who did not bring back any benefits for his family or the community would be handled with disrespect and punished when trespassing against the village rules. Seafarers who live in intemperance and fail to save money tend to stay on Tarawa until their money is finished and then take up another employment overseas, without having seen their families on the outer islands. Another alternative when the money has finished is to go to their home islands to be supported by their families. The family has then to cope with the stress of community expectations of having a seafarer son, meaning they must be able to contribute generously, and on the other hand, a son or husband without income who hardly ever returns (see Toatu 1980; see also Hampshire 2002 on similar social processes in Burkina Faso).

One of the major impacts on Kiribati culture is the screening of western style videos. The main supply of videos comes from seafarers. Videos are generally much loved
and requested, and there are several flourishing video rental businesses in the hands of seafarers and their families on Tarawa. The screening of videos is in many cases open to the whole village, including children, and can be a highlight for social gatherings or even feasts. The following photo (figure 6.3) is taken at an occasion during a first menstruation celebration on Beru. The first menstruation is a feast of transition into adulthood. The girl is kept separate in a rather darkened maneaba, wearing a skirt made of pandanus leaves held by a tight belt. She is supposed to eat very little during the first three days of her menstruation and each day the belt is tightened a little bit more. During this time she learns to work hard and to eat little to habituate herself to the “suffering of women”, and to teach her “how to be a selfless woman who thinks of feeding her family before herself” (Brewis 1996, 27). After three days her fasting is complete and her coming out will be honoured and blessed with a big feast, a botaki.

Meanwhile the whole extended family and village comes together every day during the three days to celebrate. Many contributions will be made to the girl and her family, while the girl’s family generously provides food and entertainment. This is one of the most important cultural lifetime events. Government workers are allowed to take time off for it, if they are a close relative. When I attended the celebration on Beru, Manana (my interpreter) and I were seated in the maneaba of the unimane as guests, joining the girl’s uncle. The uncle shouted the feast because of his financial resources which were provided by his seafarer son, the girl’s first cousin, which in Kiribati is equal to being her brother. The unimane entertained themselves by playing cards, smoking tobacco and talking to each other, while the women in a separate place were concerned with looking after the girl, telling and explaining to her how she was expected to behave as a young woman, and cooking and serving food. Many children were playing in the surroundings.

The seaman son had also sent a generator, a stereo and a video to his father. In the afternoon the video screen was placed in one of the family’s maneaba, with an American action movie playing for all to watch (see figure 6.3). Since most people did not speak English the volume was switched off, but playing instead was a stereo with loud pop and hip-hop music. This had been a generous act of the girl’s uncle, since fuel for generators is very expensive on the outer islands (A$5 for one litre).
However, there are a few important things to notice from this scene. Firstly, the content of a movie playing is not as important as the action entertainment in it. Because people cannot hear what actors in the movie say, action movies are more entertaining than belle art screenings. This can lead to a blurred perception of western societies. Secondly, movies, especially on the outer islands, are generally screened in an entirely public environment, where everyone, including under aged children have access. This must have a psychological effect on children. On my way between villages for example, I have seen very young children, around five or six years old playing Kung-Fu style fights, with a cloth over their heads and with typical Kung-Fu arm movements. It looked like fun, however, it does make it obvious that children not only accurately observe scenes that are from outside their own culture but also imitate these. Tamaetera felt that “from seeing I-Matangs on videos” could be part of the reasons why I-Kiribati have started to wear trousers or fancy dresses. The scene described above certainly shows how “modern” material impacts directly onto a community which has continued to live with cultural values that are in great contrast from those that can be observed on the screen.

Figure 6.3: People watching a video on Beru.
Source: Maria Borovnik
A New Zealand volunteer worker on Tarawa from the Foundation of the South Pacific Islands (FSP) mentions videos as one source of how *I-Matang* women, women with European ancestry, can be perceived. “Because this is what they see on the videos. It’s a very… we white women are looked at as if we have no ethics and morals and whatsoever, and always being available. And that’s the impression that is given on these videos…” (this aspect is discussed in Morton 1995). Referring to an experience she had on the Solomon Islands where she observed common American domestic video screenings on inter island ferries and in public spaces, she says that it has a negative influence and produces a blurred perception of Islanders towards *I-Matang* women.

I mean it is just so embarrassing, sitting there [amongst people who are between two and seventy years old] watching video. And I can only think, oh my God! <laughs> The way we look! You know, they have rather domestic movies, you know, you have this thing, we women say: “no, no, no… ok!” So they don’t give up the first time you say no. I had a kid, who would have been younger than my youngest child try and pick me up in the street, because I was white. … You can’t just say it’s the seamen coming back. And as I said before, they are instrumental in bringing all this stuff in! Because they are bringing these videos in with them. … They bring influence by the experience of the western world, and they bring those practises and forms of entertainment back (focus group v).

One lady explained to me that her husband sometimes brings back adult “blue” movies and these are watched by them, and by the *unimane*, the elders of the surrounding families in Tarawa. The open air life style in Kiribati can expose children to unsuitable movie material (see figure 6.4). The lady mentions that she is concerned about her children using the video equipment, because they know “how to switch it on”. It is quite a contrast to have “westernised” movies screened at a menstruation celebration.

The private possession of TV screens and the screening of videos in households on outer islands is relatively new. Most of the TVs and videos are directly imported or sent back by seamen. It was common to have film nights in village *maneabas* or on school compounds where movies were projected on a large screen. These events were supervised and in public (Bataua 1985, Kirion 1985). It is now possible to watch imported video material of all sorts on a smaller, private level, which is of concern as discussed above, and might need some governmental attention in future. Some
regulation is undertaken by the Social Welfare Department. Senior Social Welfare Officer, Naan Imatang, who has boxes filled with adult and violent videos in his office, has to decide on what material to restrict or to disallow in Kiribati.

Figure 6.4: Children in front of a seafarer's house on Tarawa “watching a video”. One of the changes, especially on Tarawa is the increase of privacy for families, which is facilitated by the seclusion that brick houses offer. Source: Maria Borovnik

Urbanisation and social problems

The urban lifestyle is one of the main attractions, especially for young people. “On Tarawa, we like to be here... how can we stay here?” is one of the main questions of people, explains a young man to me during a KPC youth focus group meeting on Tarawa. He explains that “most of us come from the outer islands. We don’t belong to Tarawa. So, I am from Tamana, the outer island. I like to stay here. Because of [the] life here. [It] is much better, I think. Because here we got more, here we need a fan, we need a what? A light! [Electricity]. So we got more here. That’s why I think life is better here” (focus group vi). The perceptions of urban South Tarawa are different between generations. The following comment on Tarawa is from an unimane living on Beru. He was three times in Tarawa, to visit his son who invited him.

What do you think about Tarawa?
It's a scary, scary place. Frightening place.
Why?
Because of the drinking and the traffic. You know, killings and things like that. Well, he never actually sees what happened, but he heard that those responsible [for the killing] are people not working and it's a way for getting, you know getting money from people who have money.
You mean... by killing?!
Yeah, they kill to get money, [is what he heard]. (interview 703)

Urban processes on South Tarawa develop because of many different reasons (see chapter 2), and it is not claimed here that all of the negative consequences are caused by seafarers (see for example Connell 1983 and Lawrence 1992). However, there are some areas that are influenced by the circulatory nature of seafarers' employment, which exposes men for longer periods of times to western lifestyles and by association has accelerated demand for some western products in Kiribati. This is also the case with workers from Nauru coming back as well as a number of government employees or students with scholarships who have travelled internationally. However, these are comparatively small in number, and more importantly, they have been influenced by the culture of only one particular place they had migrated to, whereas seafarers have usually been travelling throughout many different places and bring back a different, but considerably expanded, world view.

There are reasons why seafarers have affected the urbanisation process. It has been mentioned in chapter 5 that seafarers tend to settle their families in Tarawa as soon as they can afford to lease or to buy land. Then they are not dependent on their extended families for accommodation when returning to Kiribati and are also not obliged to them. When they do not have to travel to the outer islands, they have more time to spend with their wives and children. There are also enhanced schooling facilities for children on Tarawa. The other reason why seafarers remain on Tarawa when they returned is the urban lifestyle with a variety of shopping facilities and food available. Particularly single seafarers feel attracted to the nightclubs and bars Tarawa has to offer. However, there is also the Labour Union (KIOSU) and the Seaman's Hostel, where seamen can meet peer groups to exchange their feelings about work, to solve employment related problems, or to find support in case of domestic problems. These institutions and the Social Welfare Office have become important places for counselling for seafarers and their family members.
One of the consequences of the internal migration to Tarawa of seafarer families is a tearing apart of the family. Part of the closer family will remain on the island to look after land and property whereas the wife and children, usually together with some of the husband's relatives, either father or mother or both, or siblings, will move to live on Tarawa. Fall (1998) discusses consequences for relationships between families in rural and urban areas, arguing that family networks generally are not marginalised by internal migration. There will be discussions between Kiribati family members and internal competition about who lives where: usually the amount of remitted money will have to be increased because of the higher costs in an urban environment, and there is a chance that care and control over wives and children can decrease. It is not common in Kiribati, as for example in Melanesian societies, to circulate from rural to urban areas frequently, or for the sake of the movement, as is discussed in Friesen (1994, 232), Frazer (1985) and Bonnemaison (1985). Latailakepa (1997) explains regarding Tonga, that when people migrate from rural to urban areas, they usually do not intend to do so permanently. However, it can happen that they will stay and settle after men have been able to purchase land. This is much more comparable to the situation in Kiribati. There is a considerable amount of circular movement between islands in Kiribati (Connell 1983, 31), which is linked to family events, such as marriages or funerals; and also to fulfil family obligations such as looking after elderly relatives, or, as described here, to look after seafarers' wives, when their husbands are working abroad.

The resettlement of seafarers' wives together with some of their in-law family can in some ways prevent social urban problems arising, such as children roaming without supervision and guidance. When the mother is present there is a chance that more responsibility towards children can be given than otherwise would be the case without a parent nearby. However, the father is usually the authority and when he is absent, problems with teenagers can occur. (The problem of absent fathers will be discussed in the next chapter section). Families sending their sons and daughters to secondary schools on Tarawa are often forced to give up parental control and to hand over supervision, especially of their daughters, to closer or extended relatives. This is particularly the case when people do not own land on Tarawa. The son or daughter lives then with a relative in Tarawa, which has begun to cause serious problems. It was mentioned in chapter 5, that these concerns are reasons for seafarer families to
consider buying land on Tarawa, and that this increased purchase of land adds particularly to environmental problems in the overcrowded urban environment.

The main social problem, if parents do not move to Tarawa with their children, is that extended relatives will not feel as responsible for a girl or a boy as parents do (according to interviews 906, 907, 908). As a consequence, children are more independent and are supervised less than would be the case in an intact family environment. One of the undesirable consequences is that teenagers have started to drink beer in public, and that women and very young girls are more and more frequently seen to attend bars and nightclubs without supervision. Brewis (1996, xx) observed on her research island, Butaritari, that it is not appropriate for “women of ‘good character’ to travel alone between villages or to sleep away from the protection of relatives. To do otherwise, women run the risk of being perceived as sexually accessible”. Therefore girls who are seen independently walking about, especially after dark are in danger of being perceived as loose and available. It puts girls on Tarawa in danger of sexual abuse, especially when they are observed in nightspots or bars.

Amon, Social Welfare Youth Provision Officer, explained that his post was created in 1996, when problems with young people seemed to have become serious. Teenage children began “to be involved with the law”, which is uncommon in Kiribati, where the unimane system provides strong guidelines and there is a threat of severe punishment in case of trespassing. The second concern, Amon says, is that “unwanted pregnancies tend to be arising and also early marriage and break down of marriages”. He speaks of a “weakening of our traditional ways in which the places of women and young boys and young girls have now broken down. Especially on Tarawa you know?” Amon explains that girls on the outer islands are still very well looked after:

They cannot be allowed to go out in the dancing for all night without any relatives or whoever to accompany them. And that is the thing that is now happening here on South Tarawa. Even worse! And that you can start [to] see that the young girls are smoking! Smoking, and then they also start drinking beer! And alcohol. That is a real change in the lives of the young girls. (interview 908)

A working group was founded on Tarawa in 1998, to tackle difficult issues such as under age drinking. Consideration has been given to the introduction of an Identity
Card to prevent and discourage alcoholism amongst young people. However, one of the greatest concerns is that some of the bar and nightclub owners, for example in the port area in Betio, have started to ask girls to be around to attract men into the club. "They lure! They attract! And for the young girls, that's really bad, you know? Because they do not know that they have been exploited in that sense! And then the question is also why do they do that? Why do they... maybe they are not very well informed of those types of things... that you have been abused!" Prostitution is officially not known in Kiribati. Amon explains that Kiribati does not have any prostitution. "That will be a personal arrangement between the her and the him, if that happens. But that is not the responsibility of the premise owner". A man can ask a girl to go home with him after having shouted her some beers, or he can give her something, some cash for example, to return "the favour" (interviews 908, 920).

The reason for this development as explained by Amon and Naan Imatang from Social Welfare, but also by Tamaetere from the Cultural Centre, and Temakei from the University of the South Pacific in Teoraereke, is that the parents are not around to look after their teenaged children. Amon says,

The parents will be even more cross! And they can even you know, do something very serious to hurt their daughter if they know. If they are aware and know that their daughter is employed with that man. But we know that as I said earlier on, that many of these girls that are doing this... the parents are not here. They [the girls] are living with their relatives. And that's why the relatives words are not as strong as the parents, you know? (interview 908)

Aspects of stimulating values and tastes for modern consumer habits and aspirations to gain these in combination to obligations to kinship and friendship networks are discussed in Osteria (1997, 416). Seafarers seem to have accelerated some of the problems with young people by their common habit of generously inviting people for drinks especially in the first week after their arrival. Tamaetere, Director of the Cultural Centre of Kiribati, says:

Because like these girls when they go to the nightclubs, if they don't have a money to... buy the drinks, they have to go to somebody who has some money. And they may select to go to seamen, when they first come back. These guys have some hundreds money with them in the bar. And unless the young girls would go in order to get a drink? (interview 906)

Tamaetere continues to explain that seafarers tend to spend more money soon after their arrival while government employees, especially those who are married, usually
have less money for drinks at their disposal and therefore tend to be more moderate in comparison. A government employee in Kiribati goes to work every day and meets his wife and children every day, therefore he is reminded of his responsibilities more than seamen are, who are temporarily not involved in community and family life. When seafarers spend vacation time in Kiribati, and especially when they stay without their own piece of land and away from their closer relatives on Tarawa, they have nothing to do. “So instead they select to spend their free day, they select to go to the bar” (interview 906). This development is particularly worrying since the occurrence of HIV/AIDS in Kiribati, as mentioned in detail in Chapter 4. Again, this is only partly related to seafarers, and mainly caused by a general development of westernisation in Kiribati. It is important, though, to acknowledge some of the areas where prevention and special care must be taken in Kiribati social policy. Community groups that have taken action include Kiribati Social Welfare, the South Pacific Commission, the Foundation of the South Pacific Islands, and also the Ministry of Health.

**Alcohol abuse in Kiribati**

Alcohol abuse related to homesickness and the working conditions on ships, and to some extent peer pressure, has been discussed in detail in Chapter 4. Interviews with seafarers about their time at home showed that there is a tendency for some men to continue severe drinking at home. An example is the following conversation with a young man (age 26):

> How do you spend your money when you are here in Tarawa?
> We spend our money here with our friends.
> Do you meet each other? What do you do?
> Most of our money is spent in the bar!
> Really?
> Yes.
> Just drinking?
> Drinking. Just drinking. That’s the word. We like to spend (interview 110).

Sour toddy, fermented juice from coconut trees, or *kokioki*, fermented coconut milk, is produced all over Kiribati. McDonald, Elvy and Mielke (1997, 386) estimate that 90 per cent of the total alcohol consumption in Kiribati is accounted for by beer, and that the per capita alcohol consumption is 1.0 litre per year. This does not appear high, when compared with the Cook Islands’ annual per capita consumption of 9.7 litres and the annual consumption in New Zealand and Australia of 8 litres per capita.
McDonald, Elvy and Mielke believe, however, that the Kiribati per capita alcohol consumption may be significantly underestimated. Although the total amount of alcohol abuse is not high in Kiribati, individual cases stand out, and binge drinking by individuals is more of a problem than a widespread use of alcohol amongst villagers. Alcohol in Kiribati is not commonly used as a reason for social gathering as is the case in western societies, though this is changing. Donner (1994, 245) argues that “drinking creates a timeless stream of involvement that is opposed to the segmented and scheduled relations of modernity”. The author considers that alcohol consumption must be understood in a cultural context. Using the example of his study of Solomon Island communities, Donner explains that there are two contradicting processes of alcohol consumption: firstly socially constructive and integrative communal processes, which are culturally rooted; and on the other hand destructive processes which are influenced by modernization and have began to lead to communal disorder.

Some of the consequences of intoxication such as its effects on young people who imitate seafarers and are attracted to drinking, and the danger of having unsafe sex, are mentioned in chapter 4. The rise of HIV/Aids caused attention to be paid to alcohol problems in cultural research (Marshall, Ames and Bennett 2001, 153, 157). In Kiribati, some so called “dry” islands protect their communities from effects of intoxication problems by not allowing alcohol consumption. People have to pay a fine if they drink and therefore ignore the island law. I heard from unimane in Beru that when someone is discovered drunk repeatedly, he will have to face punishment ranging from a reprimand to ostracising. The case would be handled on a community and not on a family level. However, even on islands where alcohol consumption is not allowed, it is known that people cultivate and consume sour toddy secretively. Most seafarers that spent time on Kiribati have reported consuming alcohol, mostly in Tarawa. As discussed in chapter 4, alcohol consumption can lead to serious mental problems and can cause temporary “black outs” in men. It has also been reported that the abuse of alcohol has led to some serious violent fits of people, including material damage or violence against wives, as the following example shows.

When we go at Betio, me and my husband. And we go and visit my uncle at Betio. We go there and he... full of drunk.
Your husband?
Hmm. And I ask him: “let’s go back to our house” and he said “no!” and he punch me. In my uncles house! So my brother was very angry.
What did he do?
He fight... He wanted to fight! But I said “No!” <laughs> Because I love my husband, so... “It’s ok!” I tell my brother, “it’s ok. It’s drunk. He[‘s] drunk.” And my brother... he was very angry. He wants to fight my husband.

A strange paradox exists in Kiribati: although alcohol consumption can be restricted and is generally not regarded as good behaviour, it is on the contrary regarded as quite excusable when people are intoxicated, though it is unwanted, and on dry islands punished. Intoxication is viewed and excused as “temporary insanity” (Lundgaard 1968), and people are not held responsible for their bad behaviour, including vandalism or violence against wives. Domestic violence is one of the dilemmas resulting from severe intoxication and will be handled later. Even the wife’s parents would rather not interfere, neither would they advise their son in-law to stop drinking. Even so, it is remarkable in the example above, and can be derived from the strong bonds between siblings in Kiribati that the woman’s brother (but not her uncle) wanted to fight her abusive husband. Similar issues regarding domestic violence (in an Indian context) are discussed in Mishra (2000).

There are two occasions where alcohol is used as a tool: firstly an intoxicating drink may be given to a very nervous dancer to help him to feel the spirit of the dance and to increase the quality of his performance. Alcoholic drinks are also taken to make people work hard when they go fishing or digging in babai pits (interview 907). However, “But nowadays, you know, they drink because they want to consume. And [for] that purpose. They want to enjoy themselves. And also they want to copy the lives of others, the I-Matang” (Naan Imatang, Senior Social Welfare Officer 08/99).

Patterns of drinking and cultural acceptance in other Pacific Islands are discussed in Donner (1994). The author mentions that in a society as in his example the Solomon Islands, where emotions are closely related to harmonious relations, drinking can be used to discuss matters of confrontation that might cause embarrassment or conflict that people are too inhibited to discuss when sober (Donner 1994, 249). Room (2001, 189) suggests that in some societies drunken comportment is conceptualised as a “time out” from normal behaviour, but there is always a “within limits” clause operation for drunken behaviour. The implication is that each society has a separate set of norms controlling
drunken behaviour, existing alongside the norms controlling sober behaviour. In this circumstance, drunkenness can serve as an excuse for behaviour which would have been inexcusable if the person were sober.

Room (2001) discusses the dilemma of cultural acceptance of drinking. He mentions societies, such as in Vanuatu or Papua New Guinea, where people might make a conscious decision as to whom they choose as their drinking partners. He says that in those cultures “changes for the worse” with drunkenness are often foreseen (Room 2001, 195). “It would seem a simple next step for a culture to hold those who drink and get drunk despite this knowledge accountable for the consequences”. The example from Beru matches this conclusion. However, on Tarawa in contrast, drunkenness has become a by-product for entertainment. Only men who have earned money can afford beer, therefore it is acceptable for them to drink. Here is a conflict between Kiribati traditional society patterns, where “masculinity” and respect are based mainly on elder men, the unimane, and a new pattern coming from outside and based on cash income that lifts younger men up in the society’s hierarchy. “With education and opportunities for a cash income, the younger men are no longer dependent on the elders for resources” (Suggs 2001, 247). Suggs uses an example from a Botswanan society, where patterns of masculinity change due to increased cash income. He states that the patterns of alcohol use are one indicator for these changes.

**Summary**

This section has focused on some areas in Kiribati community life that have been affected by seafarers. There are differences between how the rural outer islands and how urban South Tarawa has been influenced. In the outer island communities modern western style buildings and equipment are very noticeable and seafarer families enjoy an improved lifestyle as well as the ability to use cash more freely. However, the effects on Tarawa are quite different. Brick houses and electronic equipment are purchased by all employed people on South Tarawa, including government workers, business companies, and Church Ministers.

Seafarers seem to accelerate some of the urban problems that have developed since colonial time. Because they have travelled, they have access to western equipment, such as the newest videos and pop music, which they constantly import into Kiribati.
As a consequence, information on western lifestyles is available to the population without further explanation or background information on the meaning of these. Furthermore, these are put into an environment which is open to all ages and members of the community, while they are at the same time neither supervised nor properly understood by even those most experienced and respected, the eldest. This might have negative effects on the I-Kiribati perception of “western” cultures and people and especially on children. A new freedom amongst teenagers has started to occur in urban areas resulting from some dissolved families, lack of supervision, and also by an attraction to the “seafarer lifestyle”. A beginning of deterioration of respect towards the elders is shown by this behaviour.

Seafarers also bring new aspects into the Kiribati hierarchy. On one hand they provide a large group of people in the community with cash contributions and are able to increase their own status because of land purchase and the erection of modern buildings. On the other hand, many seafarers seem to behave in an out of control manner by using beer as a tool to attract people, especially young women. Since seafarers are important economic forces, the community and the unimane have to put up with this behaviour and find ways of accepting and excusing it. In this way some of the te katei ni Kiribati is changing while other aspects seem to remain constant: Being part of a Kiribati genealogy has remained constant. Following social obligations has remained constant, though it can take on different shapes. Being tied to their kinship has remained constant but is changing when parts of the family have to live on a different island from others. Treasuring property has remained constant in the way that property is still regarded as a high status symbol. However, people have started to sell out land, and cash has increasingly become more valued, therefore this aspect is also changing. Keeping skills and knowledge secret has remained constant in relation to Kiribati cultural knowledge. However, since introduction of skills training and higher education, this aspect has taken on new facets. Not embarrassing someone in public and having a strong character or sense of identity are still important values in Kiribati.
Changes in personal relationships

Community and family life are strongly connected with each other, and what affects the family impacts on communities and vice versa. The following chapter section focuses on dynamics inside families that are caused by the employment and times of return of seafarers. I will first explain the particular situation of seafarer families living with their in-law daughter, by illuminating the relationship and stress that can occur between a wife and her in-law family when a man is abroad for periods of 17 months, or in some cases even longer, with breaks that can be in some cases as short as two or three weeks. Different problems occur for families living on outer islands or on Tarawa. I will mention the terms 'family' and 'households' frequently in the following and refer to 'household' as a place of organised activities such as "production, consumption and reproduction directed to the satisfaction of human needs", and as connected to the roles, values and meanings incorporated by a 'family' (Yeoh, Graham and Boyle 2002, 2).

Aspects of well-being, which are linked to the conflict of economic benefits for families and the frequency of contact with migrants, are discussed in Hadi (1999). The author distinguishes several variables that influence how households left behind can function during times when household members have to search for employment away from home for extended periods of time. The author found that the following aspects have shown to be significantly important for the well-being of household members and the functioning of households: the amount and regularity of financial contributions in form of remittances; the duration abroad; the frequency of contact with those left behind; the number of people in one household (see also Zlotnik 1995 in Willis and Yeoh 2000; De Haan, Brock and Coulibali 2002).

The author tested these variables in Bangladesh. He found that the capacity to buy land, and build houses is positively associated with the length of migration. This also means that the longer a migrant is away from home, the more is the likelihood that the living standards for him when he comes back and for those who are staying home will rise. Women's well-being is positively associated with the amount of decision making and household participation she is allowed to have (see also Makhanya 1997). Yeoh, Graham and Boyle (2002) extend these factors to a transnational framework by
arguing that in building a multifunctional family network, migration can be a resourceful way of strengthening the family (see also De Haan, Brock and Coulibaly 2002, 44). The authors show, however, that the stress of family separation for those left behind can lead to “mental disorders among women and children, lower levels of school-performance and impeded social and psychological development among children, and the abandonment of the elderly” (Yeoh, Graham and Boyle 2002, 5). The authors also mention marital instability and a higher incidence of divorce amongst migrants (see also Brown 1983, 372). By developing a “transnational family” where migrants bridge their activities home and abroad, family ties can be strengthened. This would mean arranging families in different ways, such as moving family members closer to the migrants’ work or encouraging members to migrate. As discussed in Chapter 1 above, this option is not given for seafarer families who are living on the “edge” of transnationality, where seafarers travel on board ships instead of settling at one place onshore. However, it is known that some I-Kiribati have taken their wives on board ships and this has increased the quality of their relationship (interview 911). Partners have gained insight into the working environment of their spouses and communication and trust between spouses have increased. Being able to take a wife and children on board has been found to enhance family relationships in the study by Thomas, Sampson and Zhao (2003, 74) who recommend more facilities for wives and children on board ships.

Wives of seafarers have to cope with a range of problems while being separate from their spouses: lonely feelings that cannot be expressed in front of others, because of cultural restrictions, where women are not supposed to show emotions; financial management, either by deciding whether to give money to in-law parents, or to buy goods and manage cash by themselves, or to manage an entire household; lack of communication; and often the fear that the husband could leave and set up a different household. Divorces are common amongst seafarer relationships. When the husband is present, different problems occur. Firstly because of the short amount of vacation time where the couple is able to renew their relationship; secondly because of jealousy that can occur frequently on both sides and might be fuelled by gossip amongst in-law family members; and finally drunkenness, sometimes combined with violence, which can lead to wives returning to their own families. In case of a
marriage split up, wives are often financially not secure and childcare and maintenance can become a cause of great distress.

Children having to live without their fathers, and fathers who have to cope with having a child that they do not see grow up, is another difficult aspect causing distress amongst families. Absence of fathers can lead to alienation from their children and to a lack of parental control, which in the long term has potential to add to the social problems previously discussed. The effects on “paternal bonding” by lengthy absences of seafarers from their children is discussed by Kahveci (2002).

Relationships between spouses have to be adjusted when large amounts of times are spent apart, such as the need to communicate by letter or phone and fax only (see also Thomas, Sampson and Zhao 2003). The last section of this chapter provides some insights into how couples keep their relationships intact and how some of the behaviour between spouses has become influenced by western values.

**Parents and sons**

Before I analyse the interaction between married partners of seafarers with their in-law families, I will briefly discuss the main concerns of parents with seafarer sons. Parents generally feel proud that their son is a seafarer. One of the fathers for example comments

To him, you know the seamen are the rich people. ... Because they get more salary, much better than those people from government, because it is the overseas rate. ... Like you know, they are so proud! He is very proud! Because they knew that their sons are overseas and that they send them money! Like he got two hundred! And some people they get, they got three hundred! And that’s why it makes them so proud (interview 614).
A mother in Beru tells me that her son is paying school fees for all his nephews, and nieces, and for her grandchildren. She is very proud of him. He also wanted to help his younger brother by buying him a boat and a big tape recorder and he was planning to buy him also a video recorder. However, for parents there are many worries when they have their son overseas (interview 623).

Like every time they listen to the radio, and they would just listen and something will happen. ... He is concerned with what is really happening to them, you know on the boat, and there is some sort of accident, and that's why they listen to the radio. Well, he is concerned like, he heard a lot of [about] drugs, too. Like he told me the story, you know, they were given the drugs, and then those people [said], like if you don’t give [those drugs to] that person concerned you will be either killed or... you know? (interview 614).

Another father explains that they just heard on the radio about the war in Serbia. “And we are a bit afraid! ... Serbia! If they have a route fare to those places then we are a bit worried. What will happen if they go there? Are they safe? And things like that” (interview 619). The anti-worry strategy of most parents is to trust in God and to pray while their son is away. “She misses [her sons] but she always prays for them to be protected from everything, [all] dangerous things” (interview 629). Another strategy
for parents is not to think too much about him. One mother explains, “I don’t want to remember him a lot, because it might bring more cursing to him”. The interpreter explains, “That’s the Kiribati way of thinking. Like when you think of him a lot, and then something might happen to him. Some sort of accident. She doesn’t want him to be in trouble (interview 624)”. Fathers release their son into overseas contracts always with good advice. “He gave advice to his son and he said, if you really love me, then you will obey what I have advised you. If you obey me, then you really love me. It’s like he advised the son and it is up to him if he follows or not, since he is away” (interview 614).

Parents also wonder why “they let him stay there for a long time”, referring to the long employment time abroad. Parents feel sometimes not trusting towards the employment companies. There was, for example, a case where a dead seaman was sent back and the family was not allowed to open the coffin. The reason given was that the corpse was treated with very strong chemicals, which could be harmful to people coming in touch with them. However, people in Kiribati could not understand, for it is very important to expose the corpse for all relatives to farewell the person, and it can happen that a corpse will be exposed for many days until all relatives have had a chance to arrive in the village and be involved. Therefore, the family in this case “they were very angry” and began to suspect that something about the circumstances around this death were suspicious. “You know, they are suspicious there is no body inside! ... They don’t think that the death was properly” (interview 614). The importance of having a family member buried at home when they died “outside” Palau, Micronesia, discussed by Endo (1997), are similar to this incident in Kiribati.

When a son comes back to an outer island and adapts to the daily family life, he is regarded as a “good boy”. However, in quite a few cases sons are involved in heavy drinking, which is of great concern. “The first time when he came back, he didn’t tell them [that he was back in Kiribati]! And when he came here [to Beru], he has nothing with him. No money, no... nothing! (interview 618)”. A mother explains that “because they are not married, so they don’t bother to bring back something for the house” (interview 627). One father has two sons, his youngest son is suspended from work on German ships because of drunkenness. He said that his older son has improved his conduct since he had got married. “If the boy hasn’t got a wife, he
would go around and spend a lot of money. But if he got a wife, he can give some money to his wife and some to the baby and children” (interview 620). Before he was married the son was spending money on buying beer and going out with girls. One mother explained that her son had changed after having been married to a “good woman”.

Before he got married, when he came back from overseas he always brought with him, you know, the beer. Two bottles of whisky. But now, when he came back, after the marriage, when he came back he didn’t bring back anything. … And when he comes back… he works, you know, he helps in the family and like fishing and that (interview 625).

In conclusion, parents support their sons by providing them with guidance, good advice, prayers, and a place to come back to when needed, for example when a seaman’s money has run out. In return they are cared for and supplied with some money to increase their quality of life. Many parents feel worried when having to live separated from their sons, and there are problems related to drinking. It seems to be positive for the family when the son gets married and begins to save and establish his own family.

**Parents and daughters in-law**

Parents are usually delighted when their son gets married, and welcome their daughter in-law into their household as if she were their own daughter. The young woman will have duties and rules to follow but in return, parents will look after her thoroughly and watch over her. In “normal” Kiribati households, the married couple stays together, and a young woman who has left her family to live with her husband is looked after by her husband constantly. Parents are not too concerned about the private life of their sons as long as everybody fulfils their household roles and is obedient to the eldest. However, when the husband is overseas the responsibility for parents, and especially his mother, to look after his wife increases. “As a mother of a seaman”, a woman on Tarawa says “It is very hard for her to live with the wives of her son. Because they [the sons] are out there. And she has to deal with them… with the wives. That is her responsibility” (interview 631). The responsibilities increase when there are several daughters from different families in the same household, while their husbands are overseas. A “good wife” is obedient to her in-law parents and will stay at home at all times and do her work. Many fathers and mothers I talked to praised their daughters in-law, by saying “she is a very good woman” (interview 701).
Problems arise when either the wife does not do what parents want her to do, and especially when she leaves the house without guard, which is a serious issue if she is not back home before 7pm, when the sun sets. Disobedience to parents is one major reason for divorce between couples. A father said that, “when his son went to work as a seaman, and his wife is with his parents. And the problem is that the wife left home without permission from her husband overseas. And that’s the problem. And they divorced” (interview 617). A seaman’s mother tells us, “The wife doesn’t want to be controlled by the mother, when the husband was away. She wanted to do whatever she want to do” (interview 622). Then the parents suspected that she had an affair with another man, when the wife decided to return to her own parents, so they did not allow their son to see his wife when he came back from overseas. In the following quite similar example the parents chose the second wife for their son, because the first wife, who was his own choice was not “good for them and their son” (interview 630). She left the parents without permission. The parents felt they did not do anything to cause her leaving. She packed everything and explained that she wished to see her own parents, who lived on a different island. The mother told her to stay, but she booked a boat and left.

One of the fathers explained that his son separated from his wife because “she was a drunk” (interview 616). And when the marriage broke up the son began such heavy drinking that the father advised him to talk to a pastor about it and get counselling. The situation and difficulties of living with the husband’s parents and problems that occur while separated from their husbands, including marriage break ups, has been one of the consequences for migrant’s wives in Botswana that Brown (1983) illuminates.

It is sometimes possible for parents to fix problems with their daughter in-laws. This is the case with particularly understanding parents. Life without their husbands is not easy, and a woman might feel mistreated. This father talks about his daughter in-law,

She is a nice woman, but sometimes when she is not very happy, she left them, but they went and called her back. She went to her own relatives and then the parents in-law have to ask her to come back. And then she came back.

What is the reason that she left?
Sometimes she may not be happy by the way she was treated by him [the father] or by the mother. Maybe sometimes she is not very happy when she has a lot of work to do, but most of the time they just do work, work, work, you know? Little rest and maybe she was not, you know? Maybe it's too much work for her. She is the only one staying with the parents (interview 613).

Generally the relationship is harmonious between parents in-law and wives, but it has become obvious that living without their husbands, often far from their own families can be very difficult for seafarers' wives. The next section will analyse the benefits and challenges of being married to a seafarer.

**When the husband is a seafarer...**

Seafarers are regarded as attractive prospects to get married to. They seem to have secured a regular income, a comfortable lifestyle, and a good investment in respect of future children’s careers, which in the long term will benefit a woman. When children can gain a good education, they will then later care for their mother and the inflow of cash and means for a luxurious lifestyle will be continued when the husband has retired. To secure their daughter’s life is the rationale for parents when looking for a suitable husband for their daughter. Land property, a good ancestry and good behaviour are also important considerations. However, the ability of a man to earn a regular cash income has become a major attraction for parents and their daughters (see similar aspects in Elmhirst 2002, 157).

It is not uncommon for a seafarer couple to get married only a few days before he leaves. The following example is a very typical seafarer love story. This wife, who is at time of the interview 22 years old, married four years ago. They first met in Tarawa.

When they went to the cinema, that’s where they meet. He was drinking [laughter]. He was drinking beer and then I think he is not ashamed to go to the girl [says interpreter]. He went straight to her. [laughter, especially the woman, feeling embarrassed, laughs quite a lot].

*And what did he say?* He say that “I want you to be my girlfriend. [laughter].

*And what did you say?* “Yes, I am very happy”.

*Did you see him before?* No.

*Why did you like him? Was he good looking?* [laughter] He looks handsome!

*Did you know he was a seaman?* No. She didn’t know.

*When did you find out?* Two days after, then she knows him [as a seaman].

240
What do people do, when they are girlfriend and boyfriend here in Kiribati?
They make appointments! They just talk.
When she found out that he was a seaman, what did she think?
She is very happy!
Why? The reason is, because she is not wealthy, so she says, “I am going to marry a young seaman”, <loud laughter>
Ah! Because of the money? The money!
For how long did you wait until he married you?
Two weeks later then they married.
Though you didn’t even know him? Hmm! Yes.
That is interesting, isn’t it? Yes. She married in Tarawa. She was eighteen years old. Her husband was twenty seven. She is now twenty two. They have one child. They married and then only one day and then he go back.
(interview 503)

This husband is employed with Japanese fishing companies and he usually stays overseas for one year and is at home only for three weeks. He has not seen his baby yet, nor a photograph of it. The woman stays with her in-laws on Abaiang, while her parents live on an island in the South. Many women meet their seafarer husbands in social settings. Arranged marriages have decreased.

It is hard for women to cope with absent husbands especially in the beginning and when the marriage was based on love. As the following wife explains

Yes, for the first time it was really hard. I had to accommodate myself into the situation. I had to think he is home all the time. But then when there is nobody, I start crying.
Oh really?
Hmm. I can’t cry in front of the family. They will laugh at me. They don’t take pity. You know?
Where did you go when you wanted to cry?
I go to my bedroom. I start crying there. … That’s for the first weeks my husband left me, I stayed there by myself inside that room. And then I sent the kids to live with me or to sleep with the other members of the family. … And then I got used to that. I get used to not having my husband at home.

Did you have imaginations of what he was doing? What did you think?
Yeah. I thought, how is he now? Is he okay? Is he doing fine? Is he been fed well? Is he been looked after properly? All these kinds of thoughts they come up and I… thought, maybe he is okay. If there is something wrong I would not notice. He must call me and say, I am not okay, I want to come back. If he is okay… it must have something happened. So, I must say he is okay. I must be okay as well <speaks more and more silent> (interview 407)
There are great differences between seafarers’ wives living on outer islands and those living on Tarawa. During a meeting with a group of women from the Seamen’s Wives Association on Tarawa they explained that they are different from other women. Most of the time they feel alone, but when meeting with other seamen’s wives they feel they can share about their relationships with their husbands, which is quite uncommon in Kiribati, where women usually do not share emotions openly or disclose relationship problems. The women also told me that some of them have started to talk more openly with their husbands, which distinguishes them from other married women. Some women live on their own, which means usually that at least some children, or one in-law relative stays with them, but not the husband’s parents. Living without male protection is frightening. Rape is not uncommon in Kiribati, and many women fear “intruders”. One lady showed me a large cutting knife with an impressive blade of a large dimension, which is lying under her (western style) bed in case of an intruder coming in. Women feel safer in brick houses.

To live independently is not really the first choice for women when married to seafarers. They prefer to live with their own family. When this is not possible they feel living on their own is one alternative to avoid conflict with parents in-law (see also Brown 1983, 129). Women explain “We need our own parents. Because our husband’s parents maybe get jealous. That is why all of us want to stay alone with our kids so there is no problem. Often the parents get jealous when you stay with them. Then you must go! You have no husband! That is why we don’t trust them” (focus group i). They continue to explain that if the husband was on board during a difficult time between women and their in-law family, the husband’s parents would break the marriage, and when the husband comes back he might get divorced. One of the major problems, as I heard not only in Tarawa, is linked to the sisters in-law. They seem to be quite influential, because ties and love between siblings are usually high, but also because they appear quite often to be jealous of the wife who, being married to the income providing son, has gained some status in the household. Some sisters in-law like to undermine a woman who appears competitive to them. Women explain: “Sometimes he [the husband] trusts you but when he is away the sister in-law writes a letter to him with blah blah blah... so the husband gets jealous... angry! (focus group i)”.
To save a marriage it is essential to be at the airport when a husband arrives and to talk to him before the parents in-law.

**Woman 1:** If your husband arrives and you didn’t want to meet him at the airport, and you just go bye, bye. Your husband won’t come [back to you].

**Woman 2:** Sometimes the parents don’t want you to go to the airport to meet your husband. But you love your husband, that’s why you just meet your husband at the airport. But some ladies find it very hard to meet their husbands when their [in-law] parents say “go away!” It’s hard for them.

**Woman 1:** There’s a price. There’s a price.

**Woman 3:** But your heart was full of...what? Love, or so. <lots of loud laughter>

**Woman 3:** You just spend [time] out there, but the parents look at you and...

**Woman 1:** Staring, making faces... something like that.

(focus group i)

When a seafarer comes back and discovers that there is conflict between his parents and his wife, the situation is not easy for him. As a good son (and “real I-Kiribati”) he has to follow his parents’ advice, but he also loves his wife. When a man has talked to both sides and cannot achieve a peaceful arrangement between both parties he usually separates from his wife. However, in some cases the parents allow him to settle down with his wife independently, and the marriage is rescued, but the care for his wife and supervision over her daily movements is not given as before. This can cause anxiety, jealousy and further problems for a seafarer when he leaves her to work overseas.

When women are employed, which is often the case in South Tarawa, stress and tension between her and her in-law family can increase. There is a general idea that women who go out working are particularly vulnerable to having an affair, because they are frequently in contact with men. “And it’s a sort of thing, of seeing one another tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow. So often! And then it happened. It is naturally. It is a sort of acquainting process. It is very, very common here with office workers. And the hospital” (RAK president 03/99). Thus, parents in-law and seafarers are often more comfortable when the woman stays at home, even though this decreases cash income into their households. I found that quite a few seafarers’ wives had an excellent educational background, but stayed at home, because this was expected of them. To go to work though is an effective way to overcome loneliness and feelings of disconnection from their husbands, and also in some cases to cope with homesickness for their home-islands (interview 404).
When the husband of a woman has built his own house for his wife and his children to live in, his parents and siblings will recognise and respect his wife usually more than before. This is especially the case when the house is a "modern" looking, comfortable one. A wife's role becomes more influential when a husband has also started to buy more pieces of land and babai pits, or pigs (interview 401). Because she is now the manager of the house, decisions will be more often put into her hands. However, she will consult her husband either by letter, fax or telephone to gain his agreement on larger household projects. As long as she lives with her parents in-law, it will be the parents who benefit most from increased property. When a wife is the main contributor to household material because she is employed, her influence also grows.

Hadi (1999, 54) found that it reflected positively on women when they were encouraged to play a more dominating role, which increased when they were forced to manage households on their own. A lot of women miss their husbands very much and talk happily about times they have had with him when he was at home.

I miss him a lot. Oh, yes! Like during lunch... because my husband is a very kind man. I think he is one of the best men. I am very proud of him. Because at lunch he used to prepare food for me... make the food and serve, table and a place and there is the food ready for me and he rests and then he [used to] go to work at ten. Hmm! He always did that every day! ... I miss my lunch! That's, he always do my lunch when I come back from work. But now, no more <laughs>. I do everything. I do the cooking, the washing. When he was here he was doing the cooking... everything. He feed our pigs. He boil the rice. (interview 405)

Some women in Kiribati commented that they coped better when their husbands are gone (interview 416, 419). A volunteer worker said that she found some men are very controlling especially when they have been away from home. "As they try and gain some control over their domestic life again. Because they can see that they are actually not necessary. That is very threatening to them. Because there might be a time they might get back, and she says what do you want, get lost. They are trying to take control back to make a place for themselves" (focus group v). I asked a couple of nurses to verify and explain why this could be the case. They confirmed and explained that women have told them that

Nurse 1: Men are always demanding. They [the women] don't miss [them], you know? <loud laughter>.
Nurse 2: They are bossy.
Nurse 1: Yeah! They are bossy!
Nurse 2: They make a lot of work. <loud laughter> (focus group v)

This refers to the fact that when the husband is back home, he expects his wife to serve him and to be available. Most women told me that though they cope alright without their husbands, they usually miss their husbands very much, when away. To be able to manage without their husbands is a sign of empowerment of women in a patriarchally structured culture. One wife told me that her husband does not allow her to go and play volleyball because he thinks “it’s a waste of time” (interview 401). I also heard that some seafarers do not allow their wives to join the seafarers’ wives association, being afraid that this could lead to more freedom for their wives, and this then could lead to unwanted behaviour, or even to infidelity.

For example, O’Laughlin (1998) questions whether the concept of women being powerless by being forced to stay at home while their husbands have the choice to migrate is valid. Gendered power relations, especially with reference to patriarchally organised societies, are discussed in Rose (1993), Halfacree (1995), Ellis, Conway and Bailey 1996, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner 1997, Kanduza (1997), Lawson (1998), Lin Li and Findlay (1999), Boyle and Halfacree (1999), and Francis (2002). The authors especially emphasise the new situation of women who live in “heavily structured traditional” personal relationships while modern influences have begun to promote awareness for the rights of women (Li and Findlay 1999, 173f.). Lawson (1998, 46) also explains that though men seem to enhance their masculinity by the fact of migrating, and women have less control over their own career, the role of women, for example in Mexican communities, is beginning to change. They identify themselves more as strong women and become more independent from patriarchal control (see also Cockerton 1997).

Seafarers wives manage their households a great deal more independently than other married women do. As Francis (2002, 173) puts it “Men were too far away, for too long, to play much of a role in day-to-day household decision making”. Women who have come from the outer islands to live on Tarawa, for example, have the dilemma that there are few relatives living in the neighbourhood who could help out. They have to go and buy fish, toddy and coconut if they need to, because the husband, who is overseas cannot provide them with it.
When living without a husband on an outer island and without relatives in the neighbourhood, the dilemma for a woman can be more severe, as it is not good manners to ask unrelated neighbours for help. “Nowadays she misses him more than before, because now like when she look at their kids. They miss something. They don’t drink toddy, they don’t have fish” (interview 424). Different from the results of Koczberski and Curry (1997, 189) and Zimmer-Tamakoshi (1997) in Papua New Guinea, women in Kiribati tend not to take over “‘male only’ agricultural tasks”, but hold on to their women’s role, and “face hardship” when doing without toddy, coconut and fish.

The effect of male migration on household decision-making and the role of women as head of a household is discussed in the context of Egypt by Hoodfar (1997). Women began to negotiate successfully with their husbands and achieved some amount of control over household decision-making by reminding their husbands of their family duties, and in some cases this was enforced by using legal Islamic support. Stevenson (1997) refers to the increased management roles of women in Yemen, while their husbands work in contracts away from home. However, it has also been shown that in many cases the career opportunities and chances for women to increase their status independently significantly decrease when their husbands migrate (see for example Sweetman 1995, Lawson 1998, Boyle, Halfacree and Smith 1999, Espiritu 2002). Thomas, Sampson and Zhao (2003, 72) have found that some seafarers’ wives decided not to work because they felt “this would have a detrimental effect on their children who already had to cope with an intermittently absent father”.

**Jealousy and domestic problems**

Being jealous, or *koko*, in Kiribati is a sign of love and very common. It is discussed in Kristjansson (2002, 136) that jealousy can be an “expression of pridefulness”, and that both can act as important guardian of self-respect. When living in a long distance relationship, emotional stress and jealousy can increase. Marriages break up because one of the partners may choose to go with a different partner. Foster and Caciaoppe (1986 in Thomas, Sampson and Zhao 2003, 60) have found that 25 per cent of Australian seafarers’ wives believed that their partner was having, or had had an affair. Adultery is a serious issue in Kiribati, which is described by Okimura and
Norton (1998). "I don’t really know, but most of the seamen go, like they marry, remarry, divorce. Lots of them" (interview 914). One of the seafarers says (laughing) that “That time I had a girlfriend, we went together to school. But... once I [started working]... I lose all of them! We can keep contact but... we’re talking on the radio and that. I tell you, I lost three! (interview 107).

One of the women felt quite bitter when I talked to her, because it was only a few weeks before that her husband told her that he was staying with someone else. This is the second time that it happened. While the shock was bad when it happened a few years ago, she was relieved when he came back to her, but this time she is so hurt that she wants to separate from him.

He just write me a letter, he is staying... he stays with another woman in Australia. Only for about... it is not that he settled down, but he is having an affair. ... I try not to what? To think about him... about it. And I try to ignore what he did to me and I try to go on with my new life now. ... What I think is, I [am] better off to stay home with my kids (interview 414).

Some men have a wife on the outer islands and a second wife on Tarawa (interview 424). When a woman gets divorced her social status decreases, even in her own family, and it is not easy for her to get properly married again. Keeping a “second” wife can be common amongst male migrants (as studies have suggested). It seems to be particularly common when men circulate regularly between two main areas and when they can afford to maintain a second household in the “astronaut” area. This is discussed in detail with reference to cross-border migration between Hong-Kong and mainland China by Lang and Smart (2002). The “second wife” phenomenon occurs more between Tarawa and an outer island, than internationally. This could be due to seafarers not talking about it during interviews; I have heard of only a couple of cases where they have had temporarily a girl-friend in a different country. Secondly, because of the irregularity of their travel patterns, it is more likely that seafarers proceed to having casual sex with street workers in ports, rather than being able to establish a permanent relationship somewhere. And thirdly, I-Kiribati seafarers seem to have a particularly strong identity with their home country, therefore it is more likely they will establish relationships on Tarawa, especially when they have the opportunity to choose to stay there for a longer time after their return.
Two of my interview partners told me that their husbands had established relationships with a "second wife" on Tarawa. The woman in one case was left with her children on an outer island, while it was her husband’s choice if he wanted to return during his break from work or not (interview 424). She was informed by his relatives that he stayed with another woman on Tarawa when her last child was only three months old. A young woman told me that her husband told her only a few weeks after her marriage that he was also seeing someone else. When she complained, he told her that it did not make any difference for him in regard to his love for her (interview 502).

Problems with partners at home occur most often around alcohol. Women usually do not talk openly about domestic violence, and this is due to the fact that pain has to be endured without showing any signs of weakness. This is for example discussed in Brewis (1996), when she mentions that women are not supposed to make a noise when giving birth. When getting injured, people tend to laugh, and it is very rarely that people cry for any reason. If they do, they tend to seek seclusion. I heard people talking about having been beaten up, very severely in one case (MN 05/99, 07/99). Women tend to return to their own family when this happens, but when the husband comes to look for her, she is told that she has to return to him.

Some seafarers’ wives have affairs while their husbands are overseas. However, though this is well known and talked about amongst I-Kiribati, women would never admit that they do go out with other men. This is a story someone told me.

It’s a problem with the [wives], too. Like one lady, and she married two seamen.  
*At the same time?*  
It’s really funny! You know, to me it’s really funny. It’s really amazing, too. You know those two men, they knew!  
*They both knew about it?*  
They both knew! Yeah! But still, they still... you know they still send money back to her.  
*Both of them?*  
Both of them. And she got two... two motorbikes! She is very lucky. But what happened, they both started, you know, to separate from her. Both of them. So... the real husband and the boyfriend. So, they... now they are divorced. And then the following week, I heard, she got another husband. Another seaman! ... And you know that’s now the problem! To me it’s a big problem in Tarawa. Because you know the divorce rate is really high! (interview 909)
Some women mentioned that their relationship has ‘westernised’, by showing more love and affection to each other “the I-Matang way” than would usually be accepted in Kiribati culture. It is revealing that those couples that have good and mature relationships have found ways to communicate more openly and frequently. Some seafarers, for example, allow their wives to go out dancing and to enjoy themselves, as long as they are accompanied by a cousin (interview 411). The following woman has a rather open minded relationship to her husband.

Before he went overseas he asked... he thought something, too [he said]: “If my wife want to go to a dance... you let her go. If you see her in a dance... it’s ok for me. I allow it. Because I trust my wife”. Because I didn’t drink. That’s why he said: “I trust you, because you don’t drink (interview 403)

Open communication between spouses and an attitude of tolerance and understanding helps not only to ease stress between partners but also to prevent health problems. Seafarers’ worst complaints are a lack of communication with their wives. There were some wives who told me how important it is for their husbands’ well-being to send them regular letters and parcels to assure them that everything at home is all right and also to increase the success of their relationship (interviews 406, 411, 417). Employment agencies, Social Welfare and social volunteer workers have begun to encourage seafarers’ wives in more frequent communication. Ten minute tapes for example have become available for families, especially children to send a vocal message to their fathers, which has been received quite positively (focus group v). There are women who have adopted an open minded, mature communication with their husbands (interviews 417, 411, 407). One woman described to me that she and her husband had agreed on adopting a different style for their relationship.

Because I think the I-Matang culture is very nice. Me and him, we already decide, and we plan and we go and follow the I-Matang. Half I-Matang and half Kiribati and we try now to join. Because I know now that we are happy in that. He spoil me and I spoil him. Yes. Before he left to the bath he come <mimics a kiss in the air> even when I do the cooking in the kitchen... kiss me. And I give him like this. I show him that I love you. And he shows me that he loves me. (interview 417)

However, though this section has shown quite a few exceptions, most women follow customary expectations. They stay at home as is expected of them as ainenuma

which means woman of the house. She should stay in the house... and not outside the house. She should keep that and she should know in
mind that she is a married woman. You are always taught that it’s just like... you don’t have to stare at other boys or you don’t have to do that, you don’t have to do this! Do this! Be a good woman! Or be a nice wife to your husband! Just like that. And that is one of the main reasons why... it’s quite easy for us to stay here without a husband (interview 407).

**Childcare**

The Social Welfare Office reports disputes over child maintenance as the most frequent problem in Kiribati. It is common that the father and his family will take the children after separation. Only small children, usually still breastfeeding, are allowed to remain in the mother’s care and have to be handed over when they have reached a reasonable age, usually around five. However, when the father is a seafarer, children will be under the supervision of his parents or siblings and have then none of their parents nearby. The position of mothers is a weak one in the court, especially when she does not provide income. Without her own income a mother faces a double bind in losing her children and financial support. In most cases women return to their own families (Chief Registrar 07/99, Peoples Lawyer 08/99).

Childcare is one of the concerns when a parent migrates. This is discussed by Nagasaka (1998), who studied family arrangements for children taken on by kinship groups when one or both parents are absent. Battistella and Conaco (1998) accomplished research on the emotional impact on children. Their results are similar to Kahveci (2002), who has undertaken research on children growing up with a seafarer father spending a year or more apart from them onboard ships. Kandel and Kao (2001), and Battistella and Conaco (1998) have found that a lack of parental control over children can have negative social impacts and also reflects negatively on their school performance.
Children in Kiribati grow up in a communal environment under supervision of usually not only their parents but also their grandparents, uncles and aunts. The authority for them is their father. Fathers function as guardian, role model and introduce children into the Kiribati way of life by ensuring that each child grows into its role. The problems that arise from fathers that are absent range from alienation to some loss of control over the development of a child (Kahveci 2000, 2002). “Your mother won’t beat you as your father do[es]” (interview 906). Negative impacts on children due to a lack of a father role model have been discussed by Magi and Mthembu (1997, 264). It causes great distress for fathers when they cannot see their children growing up. One father saw his child the first time when it was already two years old (interview 424). One woman explained to me that her husband expects his children to be constantly around while he is at home. The children on the other hand find this odd and are not happy with the situation (interview 412). Another mother explained to me that her husband was very excited to see their daughter for the first time when he came home. She did not recognise her father at first, and acted shy towards him. It took two weeks before the daughter got used to him. Another woman said that her husband at his times at home missed his kids even when they left them with relatives for a short while (interview 415).
Conclusions

The analysis of impacts of seafarers on Kiribati must take into account that seafarers are only one influence in a cultural situation which is dynamic and complex. However, it can be said that because seafarers have frequent contact with western commodity goods and because of the repetitive circulating movements between home and away, they have brought in an increased amount of things that lead to a privatisation of activities, which were before more communally based and more controlled, such as the screening of videos. The import of videos has gone out of control of the supervision of elders and has already gained some attention from Social Welfare. One effect is the indiscriminate viewing of movies which are based on "modern" "western" cultures and screened publicly in not only traditional Kiribati rural (and urban) environments, but also to age groups ranging from small children to very old adults. The contrast between customary values and new western influences was illustrated by the example of a first menstruation accompanied by the screening of American action movies.

Many of the positive effects of seafarers are linked to money. Families enjoy improved lifestyles, and have gained higher status in their communities, and because they can afford to buy a piece of land on Tarawa, internal migration of seafarer families has become common. This stimulates urbanisation with negative environmental and social consequences. The chapter concentrated on social issues. The generosity of most seafarers when coming back has meant that people perceive them as "rich men" who can afford anything "straight away". Therefore they are attractive, especially for those attending bars, and which in some cases accelerates the deterioration of the behaviour of some young women.

Since cash has become important in Kiribati, it is also understandable that parents and many girls feel that seafarers are attractive life partners. Their incomes increase the chances of a comfortable life and good education for children. However, in reality this life can be quite different, when taking into account that wives will live with in-law families without their husbands over long periods of time. Although often provided with love and support from their in-law families, it has become apparent that many
women have experiences of suspicion from in-law parents and sisters, which can end in separation from their husbands.

Divorce is one problem that couples face because of long separation times, especially with a lack of communication facilities. Men and women can be tempted to find another partner. When a divorce happens, wives are usually in a worse position. Children belong in customary law to the husband and his family, and the inflow of remittances will stop in this case as well. Children of divorced parents with a seafarer husband often grow up living with their grandparents, without their parents. Women are generally not very positively regarded when divorced and can be perceived as sexually available (Macdonald 1982).

It can be concluded that many of the impacts that seafarers bring to Kiribati appear problematic when looking at the social and relationship problems that occur. Many of these problems are linked to the length of absence and the lack of communication between them and family members. There is also an increased level of alcohol abuse observable amongst seafarers, which affects Kiribati negatively at both society and personal relationship levels. However, it has also been shown that wives in Kiribati often cope effectively with the absence of their seafaring men. This has been achieved in two rather contrasting ways. One way is to surrender entirely to the customary obligations of being a "good wife". An alternative is to communicate more openly with their husbands, as women of the seafarers’ wives association have explained. Some women explained that to adapt partly to a ‘western’ I-Matang style, which allows partners to show affection and to communicate directly, can also intensify a relationship. A great amount of direct private communication between spouses is unusual in Kiribati. It will lead to an impact on Kiribati culture, should this occur increasingly among people in future.
Chapter 7:
Discussion: Hybrid Identities and the local and global dynamics of seafaring

Introduction

The thesis has discussed different aspects of seafaring and the consequences of the employment of seafarers for Kiribati. Chapter 4 has concentrated on both the physical and emotional health of seafarers, and also on some aspects which have an effect on the health and well-being of spouses and families at home. Chapters 5 and 6 concentrated on financial and cultural issues of seafaring for Kiribati families and communities at home. This chapter aims to discuss the links between the local and the global.

The aim of the first section is to work at the intersection of “home and away” for seafarers, thus linking issues that have been discussed before, by concentrating on the effects on I-Kiribati seafarers’ identity and personality. The constant circulation between home and ships, and being able to live in foreign communities, with people from different nationalities, but to adapt to their “right position” at home when returning must be challenging. It can be expected that this lifestyle has consequences for the I-Kiribati seamen’s world view, which is enriched by experiences gained while travelling “transversally” across oceans world wide, and living with different nationalities on board ships (see chapter 1). At the same time as their knowledge about different cultures is expanding, seafarers from Kiribati must conserve their own cultural meanings and positions in order to remain rooted within their families and be able to readapt to their original place when back home. These continuous roots are in contrast to a loss of identity or “up-rootedness” (Entwurzlung), a process where migrants lose economic, social and cultural connections because of the destruction or disruption of their living milieu (Parnreiter 1995, 247; see also Clifford 1992). The “backwards and forwards” (Bhabha 1994) movements between two or more different cultures, and the performance of identities during this process have been discussed in the framework of social identity (Jenkins 1996), place attachment (Gustafson 2001), multiple identities (Gilroy 1993, Hall 1997), and hybridity by Rutherford (1990), Bhabha (1992, 1994), Clifford (1992, 1997), Canclini (1995) and Teaiwa (2001). The
collision of "modernity" or "western" influences with "traditional" societies has caused particular articulations of hybridity or "mixture" amongst cultures (see Friedman 1995, Pieterse 1995). Whatmore (2002) questions the merging of differences, and universalising ambitions, and suggests that hybrid geographies instead are partial, incomplete and diverse.

The questions in this section are: whether, and how much I-Kiribati seafarers have transformed into personalities that are imbued with the new identities they have been in contact with on their "routes" across the oceans, while remaining rooted in their own "Kiribati way". Do I-Kiribati seafarers adopt culturally "transformed", hybrid identities, or are they "culturally flexible", by embodying separate "multiple" identities?

The second section of this chapter is linked to the "coerced" part of the travels of seafarers (Clifford 1992). The goal of this section is to discuss the links between national and international organisations which are involved in the employment of I-Kiribati seafarers. The employment is in many ways institutionalised. As described in chapter 2, employment agencies and government work closely together (as discussed in Ball 1997, Firdausy 1997, Koser and Salt 1997, Jones and Pardthaisong 1998, Goss and Lindquist 2000). Both gain from the process: the government has found a solution for a lack of alternative employment in Kiribati; and the employment agencies save costs by employing strong and hard working men for relatively low wages. The arrangement appears to be mutually beneficial especially when wages are compared with other employment options: for example, many seafarers earn higher wages than government workers do.

However, the third actor in Kiribati is the Kiribati seafarers' labour union (KIOSU). The German legal system requires that employees from Kiribati are members of a labour union. The KIOSU works closely with its international counterpart, the International Transport Federation (ITF), with headquarters in London, and national branches, such as the National Transport Federation (ÖTV/'verdi') in Germany. It will be argued that the interests of local and international labour unions can be contradictory (see Chapman 1992). By using the example of negotiations over wages in Kiribati in 1999, I will show how this complicated dynamic is expressed. The
interaction of the three institutions, the employment agencies, the labour unions, and
the government will be analysed. This interaction works at the conflicting issues of
global economic pressure. The aim in this section is only to illuminate the situation. It
is not intended, and perhaps not possible, to find a solution for the tension that is
caused by global and local dynamics.

**Seafarers’ ‘hybrid’ identities?**

Identity has become a widely discussed theme amongst scholars. Tesfahuny (1997,
466) argues that identities are not “static or stable, but rather shifting, multiple and
contextual”. Jenkins (1996) analyses the difference between individual and social
identities, which he describes as only differing in the position they are taking;
individual identities focus on differences, social identities on similarities.

If identity is a necessary prerequisite for social life, the reverse is also
ture. Individual identity – embodied in selfhood – is not meaningful in
isolation from the social world of other people. Individuals are unique
and variable, but selfhood is thoroughly socially constructed: in the
processes of primary and subsequent socialisation, and in the ongoing
processes of social interaction within which individuals define and
redefine themselves and others throughout their lives (Jenkins 1996, 20).

Jenkin’s main argument is based on the synthesis of self-definition and definition by
others, a process whereby “all identities, individual and collective are constituted”. In
the process of migration, identities are changed, and migrants develop strategies to
maintain a sense of who they are, to sustain a sense of self worth and self-esteem. In
the transnational migration framework, both individual “subjective” identities and
“objective” positionalities are hybrid, because they are transformed by elements of
two (or more) regions, the migrant origin region and the immigrant region (Pries
1998, 137).

In the process of migration two processes of identity construction are involved.
Firstly, the construction of new collective identities, either with the same ethnic or
social group, or with those who share the same experiences, such as members of the
same occupational group. Rogaly et al. (2002, 106) argue that migrants establish
boundaries and “collective social identities” in order to maintain a sense of self (see

257
also Richardson and Jensen 2003). These boundaries are the construction of an idea of what it means to belong to “one’s own” group, and includes a process of othering. The collective identities of foreign assembly line factory workers of similar ethnic and religious background are discussed by Castles and Miller (1993, 185). Vertovec (1999, 450) argues that a shared awareness of the experience of living away from their place of origin stimulates people’s desire to “connect oneself with others, both ‘here’ and ‘there’ who share the same ‘routes’ and ‘roots’” (also in Gilroy 1993).

Secondly, migrants try to reproduce and link to their home cultures through “social institutions and everyday practices” (Vertovec 1999, 451). This process is linked to transnational processes as discussed in chapter 1. Jenkins (1996, 64) emphasises the importance of kin groups. Kin-group membership and the social links, which express identity, are meaningful because they locate individuals in a social field, provide identification with collective values, and give substance to “the rights and duties of kin-group membership”. Establishing similarities with other (kin-) group members provides the individual with security. Lee (1980) found that there is constancy between group members, even when facing long term separation. The constancy increases when kinship links are involved. The “confidence and security among Pacific Islanders are acquired through membership of a kin group”, argues Ravuvu (1992, 330). Moving away from the security of a kin group can produce feelings of helplessness and isolation in Pacific Islanders, Ravuvu explains. “Many of us are too cautious or frightened to move into the unknown. According to the beliefs of many Melanesians, Polynesians, and Micronesians, the unknown is dangerous, the abode of ancestral spirits and other cosmological entities” (Ravuvu 1992, 329). Thus, the power and strength of a person who knows “other people and other lands”, in relation to those who do not have this knowledge, increase.

But, even from the most isolated islands throughout the Pacific, we find I-Kiribati and Tuvaluans working on German ships, ni-Vanuatu on Taiwanese ships, Fijians in peacekeeping operations in the Middle East, Cambodia, Afghanistan and in the oil industry in the Arab countries. And there is a constant flow of people from throughout the Islands on training courses or attending conferences round the world. Their observations and experiences filter back to the most remote village, building up a picture (however accurate or inaccurate) of which places are safe and which dangerous, which are the source of money and which are poor. And with it is built up a network of contacts that others may use. With such experience, power over the unknown is acquired and
one's confidence is so enhanced that the potential migrant acquires security and confidence in facing the new world (Ravuvu 1992, 333).

Global technologies such as the media and the internet facilitate transnational links, but they also help maintain a cultural cohesion while living abroad. Lawson (2000) argues that “migrancy” creates a fluid “state of between-ness”, which she calls “hybrid migrant subjectivities”. These are subjectivities formed by dynamics of belonging, “place-boundedness” and identity formation during migration, which are complex simultaneous processes of “both assimilation and marginalization – of migrant subjects who desire modernity, but who also experience exclusion and alienation” (Lawson 2000, 174; see also Silvey and Lawson 1999, 124). The term cultural hybrid refers to a mixture of “local and non-local influences” (McDowell and Sharp 1999, 131). Identities can be transformed during the process of migrating or travelling between different spaces, and people can adapt new perceptions of themselves during the process (Freeman 2001, Gustafson 2001, Tyner 2002). The construction of identity is crosscut by historic, geographic, cultural, religious, collective and individual factors at different scales, which include “the neighbourhood, the transnational and the global” (Richardson and Ole 2003, 13; see also Castells 1997). Ports and airports “may be represented as key nodes” connecting physical spaces with different symbolic meanings (Richardson and Ole 2003, 12).

Bhabha (1994, 4) explains that there is a “liminal space”, a space that functions as a “connective tissue that constructs the difference” between binary categories such as black and white, upper and lower. Bhabha describes the condition of being in extra-territorial and cross-cultural spaces as “unhomeliness”, which is neither familiar nor homeless. Such spaces are stairwells, or bridges, passages that “cross”. As argued in chapter 1, Gilroy (1993) has labeled ships as a “criss-crossing”, bridging space between nations, or between modernity and “tradition”.

The following sections will analyse how I-Kiribati seafarers develop strategies to remain linked with their homes, while being involved in a new ‘multinational community’ on board ships. I will first discuss whether and how the concept of “global communities” of the SIRC team (as established in chapter 1) is applicable to I-Kiribati seafarers. Following on the arguments above of a simultaneous process of conserving identity and constructing new identities, I will explain how I-Kiribati
seafarers “reterritorialise” their own culture while travelling in “deterritorialised” spaces (Canclini 1995). Finally, my aim is to attempt to understand whether I-Kiribati seafarers have been culturally ”transformed”, or whether they have adopted “multiple” identities from which they choose to perform certain parts of at different times and places.

Living on board: being seafarer and being I-Kiribati

The idea that “unity is best built out of diversity” is addressed by the SIRC team members Lane (2001a), Zhao (2001), and Wu (2002). The team argues that a crew, a group of people living together on a ship, follow a set of rules and develop a flexibility to embrace peoples’ difference, but is “tight enough to maintain cohesion” and thus is its own “society” or “community” (Lane 2001a, 4). Lane describes the multi-national crews also as “exotic”. These crews have developed alongside rationalising of the shipping industry and the introduction of “foreign flags” as explained in chapter 1. I-Kiribati together with Tuvaluans were employed as some of the first foreign crews at the end of the 1960s. Crews from East-Asia followed in the 1980s, East Europeans in the 1990s and in the 2000s, Chinese and Latin Americans have entered the seafarer market. Lane argues that the word “exotic” describes best the employment on “western” ships, when the crew represents a wide range of nationalities. The following I-Kiribati seafarer for example describes the mixed nationalities of his first and second ships:

The crew on deck? Are same like us. Same. Kiribati. And the officers are different. All from different nations. Our captain is from Croatia. And [the] chief mate is from Philippines. And the second mate is from Poland. And the chief engineer is also from Croatia. And [the] chief cook is also from Croatia.

And the second ship? How about the crew there? Also I-Kiribati crew! And the officers are German. Only deck mate. Our deck mate is from Philippines. The rest of the officers are from Germany (interview 110).

Quite a few seafarers from Kiribati have reported I-Kiribati crews only, but the officers are of mixed nationality. One of the reasons for this is that I-Kiribati do not mix well with other nationalities is when they feel they are treated with disrespect. The following section will describe how I-Kiribati perceive different nationalities and how they feel working with them. The greatest problems were reported with Filipino
crews. This seafarer explains that usually the crew is all Kiribati, while the officers on ships are of mixed (German and Filipino) nationality.

Ah, many times or some years ago, we mix with Filipino, but now, no more Filipino now.

_Why not?_

I don’t know what’s the problem with them.

_Did you get on well with them?_

Yes! I get on well with them with some Filipino. But it’s a big problem. Because we were fighting. We used to fight! With them.

_Why?_

Only because of drinking and meet some agreements, or what? Quarrels for the job! The work eh? <laughs> Sometimes the Filipino claim us that we are not good workers, eh? I-Kiribati, eh?

_They say that?_ Yeah, yeah. And _how about the Filipinos, are they good workers?_

We don’t know! The captain, they told us, we don’t know.

_But you wouldn’t say they are bad workers?_

Yeah, no. They claim us that we are not good workers. <laughs>.

They _go to the captain and say..._

Yeah, yeah, yah! [they tell the] chief officer! And chief officers tell the captain, and the captain tell the crew. So we have done... we still fight with them But now we are separated from Filipino. Only I-Kiribati now. No more Filipino.

_Have you had any trouble because of the fighting on the ship?_

Yeah, because some men they fight with a knife.

Filipinos or the I-Kiribati?

Filipinos and I-Kiribati. All of them (interview 120).

There are other seafarers from Kiribati who reported that they felt treated disrespectfully by one or several Filipino crew members (interview 115), or that the Filipino: “fight against us”. “They always talk to the Chief mate or the Captain like: “This man no good”. Like this! They always talk about [us] like this. And they are the best! <laughs>” (interview 125). This seafarer reports that the _I-Kiribati_ were so discontented with their Filipino work colleagues, whom they perceived as arrogant and self-righteous, that they asked the KIOSU labour union to intervene. “Our union gave the warning to SPMS. We don’t like the Kiribati and the Filipino on one ship. Ok, when they are officers. But when the Filipinos go on the ship, maybe about three or two, they are very nice. But if more than five or more than six! <laughs>. _Then they are a gang?_ Could be happen! Yes. <laughs> (interview 125).

It is very important for the _I-Kiribati_ to act respectfully, politely and in a friendly manner to each other. This is embedded in their cultural codes (“being friendly to
strangers”, as mentioned in chapter 6). The system of group consensus at home, where they owe respect and obedience to the elders (unimane), but the elders in return share and care for harmony and peace in a community, makes it difficult for I-Kiribati to understand how people can speak or go against each other, or how they can keep themselves secluded from a group. European officers, for example, have their own dining space and tend to communicate mainly with each other and remain separate from crews. This is strange for the I-Kiribati men, who are used to eating together with their elders. Japanese officers have been reported to eat with all crew members, which is perceived positively amongst the Kiribati community (MN 06/99). One man explains that he talked to a man working on an English flagged ship, who told him that the captain always eats separately, and has different food from the crew. “Maybe today... captain eat a steak. The crew! Maybe sauces or something. <laughs>. [He asks] “Why?” [The answer:] “Ah. English style!” Oh! And on the German ship, every time always the same! Captain eat the steak! The crew eat steak.” (interview 124). “Most of the Europeans are the same”, concludes another man (interview 125). However, he has observed that there are differences between the Polish and the Germans for example.

Lane (2001a, 4) explains that there are differences between rather arbitrarily chosen crews in the 19th century, and the “modern seafarers’ labour market” which is highly organised. “Shipowners and shipmanagers have crewing policies which are continually reviewed as new information arrives, and whole crews are assembled by phone, fax and email and flown around the world”. Thus, crews are organised for best and harmonious functioning, and cultural collisions must be avoided when a crew has to function optimally.

Sampson (2003) argued that seafarers spending most of their time on board, in contrast to those workers in the shipping industry who are based on land, have developed more flexibility and live in an environment that is more accepting and has less discriminatory elements than shore based environments do (see also Zhao 2001). Because of the constraints of their shipboard space, which is described by Sampson (2003) as a “hyperspace”, as discussed in chapter 1, in contrast to “real” land based shore space, seafarers have to be able to adapt to different nationalities and cultures in order to be able to live with each other in the same constrained environment. Zhao
(2001) found in her study sample that several men reported that they prefer mixed crews, because they found it more interesting to meet people from different cultures. While a fluency in the English language is essential to be able to communicate with one other, but the ability to communicate fluently also increases ship safety (see chapter 4). On Japanese and Korean ships the languages spoken are Japanese (interview 200), and Korean. I-Kiribati seafarers must be able to speak these languages fluently, otherwise they spend months on board vessels without much communication, especially when there are no other I-Kiribati on board (interview 302).

A notion of seafarers as “global villagers” is constructed due to the fact that there are increasingly multiple nationalities (up to five, in Wu 2002) on board ships. The SIRC team has also found that many seafarers they talked to “enjoy their social life in the global village with multinational crews” (Wu 2002, 4). Though I-Kiribati have mentioned a few examples where the interaction between crew members is experienced as rather negative, many men have confirmed that they are, most of the time, content with their foreign colleagues on board ships.

However, as mentioned in chapter 4, I-Kiribati seafarers have problems with feelings of loneliness and homesickness. Zhao (2001, 2002) explains that this is the case with many crew members on ship. She discusses that there are usually after-duty activities, where seafarers “begin to highlight, unintentionally, their ethnic or national and other identities. At this point, unity gives away to diversity, globality to locality” (Zhao 2001, 4). The seafarers’ chaplain explained that the I-Kiribati have established their own system to conserve their cultural values.

Because on the ship, we are like a small community, coming from one country. So there are older seamen from Kiribati, they give advice. Because we are very young, we have to obey those that are older than you. 

And even when they are not the bosun?
Yeah. You have to take their advices. Because they are like your seniors.

Even if it is not your family? And even if it is not your boss, like your bosun?

Hmm!

They can have any position, but when they are older...?
No. When we are in the mess room, we have dinner, or lunch... especially in weekends, we have meetings: “You are so naughty. Most of the time you go to shore. You drink a lot. Behave yourself!”... Hmm.

263
I think it never changes. Because that is part of our culture here in Kiribati. You have to obey older people. ... Like a community. Because in Tarawa you haven’t seen a community in the maneaba? Once you sit in the maneaba, gathering place. The old men still stand up and give advice. That is what I am saying. When we have dinner, lunch, breakfast, we sit as a family. Who is the oldest on the ship, gives advice. “You are too naughty. I have to advise you never to do that. One time you go on shore, full drunk and you do that, and you do that” ... Because we are a small community on the ship. Maybe three Kiribati seamen, three Filipino, three Taiwanese... we have to behave as a team, as I-Kiribati. We have to obey each other. If not, you’ll be in trouble. (interview 913).

Other interviews with seafarers from Kiribati have confirmed this. People have mentioned that there are a lot of discussions on board ships between I-Kiribati, and that through discussions problems are solved (interview 112). One man said that “I am an old man on board, and then I try to stop them”, when crew members behave in an unwanted way (interview 123).

In conclusion, it can be said that the I-Kiribati while they are working and travelling with multi-national communities on board ships have developed strategies, based on their cultural understanding, to communicate with their colleagues. These range from friendliness and politeness, to resistance, when crew members do not respond in an acceptable way for I-Kiribati. The seafarers from Kiribati conserve their own identities by establishing group meetings whenever possible, where they establish a microcosm of their Kiribati communities. In this case those differences, such as different religious congregations, not belonging to the same family clan, or coming from different home islands are dissolved for the time being on ships. However, these peer groups only last until the contract has finished. As will be shown below, the seamen distinguish very clearly between their communities on board and their “real” communities and families at home.

**Moving between places**

The transversal movement of seafarers has been discussed in chapter 1. Gilroy (1993), Clifford (1992, 1997) discusses the problematic connections between “travels” of seafarers as “coerced” mobility and their identity as cosmopolitan workers (see also Linebaugh and Rediker 2000). Clifford (1992, 107) argues that the combination of
“cosmopolitan” migrant labourer and “traveller” is problematic, because of the political and economic pressures and the disadvantage of “poor, usually non-white, people who must leave home in order to survive. The traveller, by definition, is someone who has the security and privilege to move about in relatively unconstrained ways”. When discussing the experiences of working as seafarers with I-Kiribati seafarers, there were several people who used the word “travel” for their time overseas, by explaining that this is an opportunity for them to “see the world”.

I like to travel around! All people like to travel around! But the… main problem is money. Some people have plenty [of] moneys. They can travel around the world. And I mean, the seafarers travel around the world without fare… without fares! They work on board, I mean they arrive in Japan, another port. Korea! Hongkong! Taiwan! Indonesia, what else. I have been in (Houston?)! Norfolk! The United States. Norfolk, Italy. Genoa! And… Trieste. In Hamburg. England. South Africa, Durban. Port Elizabeth. Yeah. Rotterdam. Ireland. Sri Lanka. I have been in these countries. My last ship in 1992, when I started working on board, then I visited the States, United States, the Italy. The Germany, and France. And another… I came back to Tarawa. For holiday. And then back again to the ship, another ship. Another ship. And then I... to Africa, Australia, New Zealand. I forgot. Japan also. Tokyo, Osaka, and then Seattle, Vancouver and back to Korea, Hongkong, Taiwan, Sri Lanka. That’s why I like the work on board. Because of … so you can see all around the world (interview 115).

When I asked this man how much time he usually spent on shore, he said that it is between a few hours and half a day. Many other seafarers said that the exciting part of being a seafarer is that they can see so many different and interesting things. This seaman explains that he likes to be on the ship “all the time”. “I mean the life on the ship is the thing I like” (interview 117). Some of the younger men have become curious because of all the stories that the older seafarers talk about when they come back. “Maybe that’s the main reason why I want[ed] to be a seaman. You get a part of the world (interview 108). The following interview explains how the first time abroad was perceived by a seaman in late 1986, when he was 17 years old.

*You arrived in Hamburg, and then?*
And then I was... I was the happiest man... in the world, I can say!
*Because that was your dream?*
Yes, that was my dream! And they say, once you are in Germany, you have to go to Hamburg, because it was... where our office is, you know, that’s where the biggest port is, that’s what they told us. Ah, I was very, very happy. ... I always enjoyed very much! Mostly you see this... big, big, big cities. There is traffic lights, yeah?! And all these trains! And very high speed trains, yeah? Going along with the cities.
Yes. I know, what you mean. Yeah! Very interesting! <laughs> (interview 107).

One retired seafarer, who was 17 at the time of his first employment in 1970, told me that, though he was one of the first I-Kiribati abroad, he was not afraid, but it was “interesting to see! Ships! The big ships!” Another seafarer also went to Hamburg on his first time overseas and he says. “I can remember St Pauli, yes, yes, yes. Looking for the shopping. Some small things. But my problem... it's my first time and I joined the ship without money. That's why I stay only looking. ... I like the small things. But I am walking around and I’m looking at some discotheque. Oh! Very nice!”

Seafarers have their own impressions of different cultures. For example, a seaman who has been to Japan says: “No sightseeing, because we have not enough time to stay in Japan. They are very fast workers, there. Very fast workers. ... I think they are the very fastest in the world” (interview 109). The following man compares his own home life on an outer island with those in Africa, where he saw how difficult it is for people.

Because you see the life! Between outer island [in Kiribati] and like Africa. The life like in outer islands is very easy. It is very... is not easy for them [in Africa]! Like in Africa, [it is] more difficult to get the food! That’s why it is. In North Africa [it] is better, because you can take all your own food from the sheep! From the ocean and you drink from [the] creek! And you can make it. And also you have your own, what?! Like the lands! The land, you know?! You can plan in your own land” (interview 113).

One of the strangest things for I-Kiribati is that people, especially in Europe, appear so reserved and almost unfriendly. This seaman meets different nationalities, Germans, Russians and Polish seafarers in the Hamburg “Seamen’s Hostel”. He explains that “for the first time, it is very hard. Because they maybe... they don’t like to talk to us. We like to talk, because of our customs! And we say “hello!” And “where do you come from?” And they... they... just answer our question! And then no more! <laughs> Yeah, maybe [it means], ‘we don’t like to be disturbed’ or...“ (interview 111). He explains that he found that everywhere in Europe, but also in other areas in the world, people behave quite differently from Kiribati people. “Yeah. Our customs. For example, when we look at somebody and then we can smile to him or her! And then they... Just to them... [to show] that we are happy. Yeah. But they...
they just look! Oop! And <laughs> And then people look away. And then we are thinking, oh! But we have [a] different custom!”

This man also finds it hard that people never seem to smile. “Yeah, yeah! No smile! And here… always smile! <laughter> Yeah, when you see somebody, and they just smile to you”. And he says that this is the case everywhere in Europe, even in Italy, though he liked the Italians in particular, because they are “nice people”. And Africa?

Oh Africa! Oh! Africa! Oh! They… they are different! They like to talk to you. Ohwohwohwohwoh! <laughs> And then What! They are… sometimes they ask for some things. And ohwohwohwohwoh <laughs and laughs>” He explains that people always ask for food in Africa. “Maybe they don’t have some. Sometimes we ask the captain! ‘Oh, there are some people [who] like to eat. [Captain says]: Ok, ok, let them on board!” And [we say] “Come, come!”

Because they are hungry people?

Yeah. Yes! They are. And… for the first time I was very sorry for them. When… when they came and asked for us, get some things and… and then “uh!” I was very surprised then. Because they… before I don’t’ know that… that there are so many poor! And then… and then I realised: oh! Hmm. Oh, they are… for example, when somebody asks me for coffee. And [I]: “Ok, just a moment, I go and get it for you”. And [they say]: “Oh, thank you! Thank you! Thank you! For the…” “Yeah. Just like that. Yeah. And they like to talk! They like to communicate with you. Yeah. Oh, and then [I say]: “Enough, enough, enough!” <laughter> (interview 113).

This example especially shows how seafarers from Kiribati perceive the many different cultures they come in contact with during their global movements, and how this imprints new ideas on them. Seafarers are nowadays hardly longer than half a day in one port. These shorter turnarounds developed with increased modernisation of shipping technology as explained in chapter 1. The work on board ships is harder and there are fewer personnel on board. Thus, seafarers have only small amounts of time to build impressions, as the ship passes through the ports so quickly, that the images of people on shore must appear to people on board ships almost like “exhibitions”, in some way surreal and inaccessible. The next section will discuss how identities of L-Kiribati seafarers are performed and if the experiences of men on board ships, with their traversal movements, have led to a process of “identity transformation” or to the establishing of two or multiple “separate identities”.

267
Performing identities: Cultural transformation or cultural flexibility?

The following section adds to discourses about a concept of coherent and structured social and spatial categories such as local and global, self and other, home and away (see McDowell and Sharp 1999), in contrast to hybrid concepts that regard members of groups as mixed, fluid, and flexible, adopting different cultural attributes.

...[C]ultural meanings are no longer assumed to be unproblematically shared among members of bounded communities but to be constantly negotiated. The dynamics of culture, then, are understood to be embedded in mobility processes, in that migrants participate in ongoing reworking of their identities, as well as the places and social contexts among which they are moving (Silvey and Lawson 1999, 125).

Hannerz (1997, 126) argues that “some meanings and meaningful forms become much more localized, much more tied to space, than others”. He suggests that cultural processes “exercise their continuous influence ... along the creolizing continuum”. Meanings, in Hannerz’s point of view, are “everywhere in life, organized as a flow of meanings, by way of meaningful forms between people” (Hannerz 1997, 112). This flow concentrates in the centre of a culture and the flow is from the centre outwards.

The example above has shown that the I-Kiribati seafarers are centred in their own constituted cultural meanings, rooted in their roles they fulfil at home, and continue to draw on these values during their time away and aboard ships. I have shown and it has also been argued by Lane (2001a), Zhao (2001), Wu (2002) and Sampson (2003), that seafarers on board ships develop their own occupational identity. The SIRC team showed that this occurs across nationalities, and this was partly confirmed by interviews with seafarers from Kiribati. However, the I-Kiribati also perform a “hybrid” reconstruction of their home communities, by establishing an artificial “family” on board ships.

Tamaetera, the director of the Cultural Centre of Kiribati on Tarawa, describes how Kiribati seafarers must adapt between two contrasting environments when they circulate between home and work, which he describes as “cultural flexibility”. “What I really mean by cultural flexibility is a way to adapt to yourself into a different environment”, he says. The advantage of being a seaman is that he can bring “financial assistance” into the family. He therefore fulfils his duty of “following kinship obligations”, as mentioned above. Tamaetera estimates that seamen are
“easily adaptable” and “more flexible”, and that seafarer’s circulating movements between ships and home have fewer consequences for Kiribati than those permanent emigrations of people to Australia. Seafarers spend most of the time on board ships, they “live quite isolated”, work hard, and have in his opinion no time to adapt to a different culture. Seafarers’ life is hard work, therefore they fulfil another obligation, “working hard and facing hardship”. Tamaetera’s argument is based on the fact that all I-Kiribati are deeply rooted (like a tree that grows in this soil, as mentioned in chapter 6) in the Kiribati way of life. Therefore “they might have some change, but those things never last long. ... The changes cannot survive much in this environment. ... When they come back, well, the first time they come back, they may more be like a ‘I know’ guy yeah? But after some time come back to the older Kiribati life. ... They respect the eldest” (interview 906).

Well, I want to try to say what I mean by cultural flexibility. A guy before... working on the overseas boat, his way of living, his food, his clothing, his behaviour, even his belief, hmm? Are all nurtured and determined by the Kiribati island environment. What kind of food we have. The local way of life so that we can buy from the stores. Yeah? The kind of things that we may go to for free time, leisure time, hmm? The kind of clothes that we wear.

But... when this guy becomes a seaman and he goes overseas, he should be flexible in order to adapt himself into a different environment. So, he had to go out – before he eat a coconut. There – no coconut! Before he often eat fish, because it’s quite cheap fish provide [in Kiribati]. Or it’s free if you can go out fishing and get fish. Overseas fish is quite expensive.

So. Those are some changes. And that is why he has to adapt himself into, or try to change. In the way of living. A habit. In order to fit into that environment.

When the seamen come back from work overseas, also they buy videos and motorbikes and more like... have much leisure time. At the end, when they finish [their] money. And they haven’t called back to work on the overseas works. They have to change into cultural undertakings... They start going out fishing, hmm? Or when they fish... some of them will depend on buying foods from the stores. Like tin[ned] meat or frozen meat. But after staying for some time and part of their money is getting less and less. So they have to find other ways of survival.

They still can survive! If they stay with the relatives, they depend, I mean they all will share because they belong to this household, hmm? They have relatives of somebody who is working and get the pay, hmm?
And if he [is] on [an] outer island... this is his home island! Where he has a piece, hmm? [of land] (interview 906).

On the other hand, although I-Kiribati men are deeply rooted into their home culture, it is also embarrassing when being in Kiribati and behaving like an I-Matang. Tamaetera says that especially when returning to the outer islands, people face "exhibition" if they won’t adapt into the old styles. This means that people will make very clear to them by ridicule and remarks that this style is unacceptable. Therefore, as is reported by most parents of seafarers on the outer islands: seafarers appear to have not changed at all when they come back.

Tamaetera’s perspective is based on his own “deeply rooted” identification with the Kiribati way which he, as an unimane, is obliged to share and promote. Therein lies his strength, and there also lies the strength for those who temporarily leave Kiribati, because it will always secure the belonging to the “soil” of Kiribati. In Kiribati, as explained in chapters 5 and 6, the kainga is both family land and the family itself. Being linked to Kiribati and taking the appropriate position ensures continuity of life. One seafarer explains that he would never exchange his home in Kiribati with a new home somewhere abroad. “Well, in Kiribati it’s sort of... you know everybody, you know? You go to Australia. I mean, you go to one place and you see a whole bunch of unfamiliar faces everywhere. But in Kiribati, you go to one place you find you meet somebody that you know! You go somewhere else you meet somebody else that you know” (interview 101).

The Seamen’s chaplain discusses the difficulties that seafarers have when they move between different environments, such as the ships overseas, and Kiribati. He explains that when seafarers come back they need a place to talk about their experiences. “Especially because they have been at sea for a long time. And they have to find our place [the seamen’s hostel] as the best place to know. Where they can relax. We can talk to them about their families. And so that they can focus about the sea. Their problems at sea. And they will feel at home” (interview 913).

It is interesting to see how the chaplain uses the expression “they will feel at home” when they are at the seamen’s hostel, because in contrast to Tamaetera’s concept of cultural flexibility, this “feeling at home” amongst other seafarers implies that
Seafarers have transformed to some extent into different personalities, so that they are no longer “at home” amongst their families only. The chaplain explains that usually when people have a problem, they go home and talk to their parents about it, and they ask them for advice. This can be different for seafarers who might have difficulties that they cannot talk about with their parents, because the parents might not understand or disagree with them, for example, divorce from their wives.

The transformations that seafarers go through are another aspect. The following comment is from a seafarer, who explains how he perceives that seafarers are much more “civilised” than highly educated people working in a permanent place.

Maybe doctors, lawyers, but they only go to one country and they just learn the culture and the civilization of that country and they say when they come back: we are very big men. We are the civilized men. And when the other men come: Oh, I don’t like him, because he is... he is Japanese! He [was] going into the second world war with us. You know? Like that! – I was in Japan. They are very polite! You know? They are a very good culture. And nowadays... before, I hate the Japanese, I hate the Germans because they fight against us. ... Kiribati doctors they go to Australia and [think] “we are civilized”, we are in the world market. But they don’t know about Germany! ... And they never know about France, they never know about Japan. But we seamen go around the world! We see everything and we try to compare these things. And whenever we have a chance, whenever they come to us and say France! Straight away we are [getting] civilised to that country (interview 107).

This man uses the term “civilised” in a similar way to Bhabha’s (1990, 1992, 1994) “third space”, which is defined as “... a third space that does not simply revise or invert the dualities, but revalues the ideological bases of division and difference”, a “realignment” from displacement (Bhabha 1992, 58). A new aspect in this seafarer’s identity becomes even more apparent, when he continues to explain how important it is for the I-Kiribati to adapt some of the I-Matang values, such as that time is precious and should not be wasted. He tries to explain that “they don’t accept you, when [you] are just standing there. I have seen it. The maritime industry, and you are [a] world trade seaman. If you are a world trade seaman, and do not use time, then you are not on that world market”. This man explains that it would be good for him to adapt more to an I-Matang style.

Whatever I have to do. Whenever I stay in Kiribati. This is forty per cent of my life. I have to change it. Which is necessary to the Kiribati style. For example, the house. The way I raise my house. The way I do my management with my own family. ... Forty percent of my life, the
managements of my life, I would say I would change it [into] the *I-Matang* style. I can combine them. I mean this. Forty per cent I would change. It is a sixty per cent, I remain in Kiribati life or whatever. The way they are living, the way they talk. But I would like to change that also. *Why?* Because only one thing I have to remain the same is the culture. What I want to change is like the dressing. For example now I start to not wearing *lavalava*. I only use it on special occasions! ... For me it’s good, because I am a male. Yeah? A *man*. *Yes*. A man and <laughs> and I have a choice! (interview 107)

I have used two examples, Tamaetera, who explains from the Kiribati “inside” that seafarers move “between cultures”, performing a new identity, each time they “arrive” either away or at home. The other example, the seafarer (interview 107) is not exactly in contrast to this, because he recognises the importance of the embeddedness of culture (“the only thing I have to remain the same is culture”). However, this example shows the transformation and the adoption of new *I-Matang* values that have taken place because of the process of seafaring and the new “civilised” aspects that have entered the mind of this man.

I conclude that *I-Kiribati* seafarers have strong identity conserving strategies onboard ships, similar to those of other nationalities, as mentioned in Zhao (2001). These identities are transformed when performed on ships, because they must use an artificial synthesis of “family” and “community”, which serves as a microcosm of the real life in Kiribati. From the perspective of an “outsider”, it can be observed that many *I-Kiribati* seafarers have, to a degree, transformed and adopted some new aspects to their deeply rooted Kiribati personalities. These aspects do not disappear, as some retired seafarers still talk about their excitement when they were working overseas. However, though having adopted “mixed” or hybrid personalities to some degree, it appears to me that a concept of flexible, but not “fluid”, multiple identities, which are performed according to the situation is quite applicable to the *I-Kiribati* seafarers. In this sense Tamaetera’s concept of “cultural flexibility” is applicable, where seamen adapt to each situation. It must also be taken into account that *I-Kiribati* seamen are under pressure to adapt into their culture (as discussed in chapter 6), but that they might need some transition time, and even a place where they can talk and be relaxed about their experiences overseas: thus they construct another artificial of the family, but this time a “global seafarer family” in Kiribati.
The institutionalised dynamics of seafaring

The aim of the following section is to explain some of the consequences of the complex dynamics of the employment of seafarers in Kiribati, which involve a range of different agents. There are two main influences on the tense dynamics of employment; the national and the international levels. The following section aims to show the complex interlocking of global and local, which causes paradoxical and seemingly unsolvable situations. These situations are caused by the mechanisms of globalisation, with rapid developments in technological fields, causing competition and processes of rationalisation in the global shipping industry, but also in the global labour market. This reflects on the employment of the I-Kiribati, who are on one hand advantaged by the high standards and extremely well organised combination of training and employment. It cannot be denied on the other hand that I-Kiribati seafarers are low paid workers, not only competing with a large pool of other low paid labourers, but also competing with workers of higher waged countries and contributing to a worldwide decline in the standard of wages.

Table 7.1: Top 10 seafarer supply nations.
Source: International Transport Federation (ITF), Seafarers’ Bulletin 13, 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>244,782</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>83,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>80,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>76,482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>47,688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>43,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>42,537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>38,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>32,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>Kiribati</td>
<td>1,366</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Entering the global market, the I-Kiribati are part of a global competition of a seemingly “endless labour supply” of developing countries, which is one of the factors that has caused the “new international division of labour” (Fröbel, Heinrichs and Kreye 1980, 2000; Wheelwright 1982, Henderson 1986, Barff 1995). Kiribati
supplies only a very small proportion of seafarers in comparison to other countries as table 7.1 shows.

The large cheap, unorganised, mainly unskilled labour pool at the world periphery has replaced labour in industrialised (core) countries at times of economic deflation. Ellerman (2003) calls this process a “devil’s deal” between “North and South”.

In the developed North, many jobs, described by the three D’s dirty, difficult, and dangerous, are not being filled by native workers. For unskilled migrants, these jobs would pay many times over (e.g., 400%+) of what they could make in their home country in the South. Hence there is a deal to be struck. The North will be the primary site of development in the sense of jobs including the low-end jobs that native workers don’t want to fill. The South will be a kind of long-distance bedroom community furnishing workers for these jobs. This arrangement will satisfy many of the conventional criteria for development in the South: “increased income”, “poverty reduction”, and “improvements in living standards (Ellerman 2003, 42f.).

Ellerman argues that discussions emphasising improvements of living standards and poverty reductions blur the reality of an unbalanced global development which keeps economic conditions and wages divergent. The situation of seafarers is one example of this. Chan (2001) has written detailed reports on the disadvantages and many different scales of exploitation of migrant workers (see also Firdausy 1997, Stahl 1999, Joly 2000). She argues that seafaring has a particularly great potential to exploit migrant workers, not only because of the de-nationalised space of the oceans, but also because of the system of multiple-nationalised ships, which are flagged under an international register, and often owned by a different nation than that which the officers and crews come from (see Lane 2001b, Sampson 2003). This leads to a vulnerable legal situation for seafarers. Belcher (2001) argues that seafarers are often made responsible for shipping owners’ mistakes. In Belcher’s example, the captain of the vessel ERIKA was held responsible and put in jail, for the sinking of the ship and the environmental damage it caused, instead of the ship’s owner, who had put the entire ship’s crew in danger “by putting a substandard ship to sea” (Belcher 2001, 4).

The international organisations have only limited options to support seafarers, especially when the government is forced to work hand in hand with employment agencies.
Chapman (1992) describes the development of the International Transport Federation (ITF), which was established in 1896. The ITF worked together with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), established in 1919, to protect “western” maritime workers, by adopting several important conventions and resolutions, such as a minimum age of seafarers, the requirement of medical examinations, shipwreck indemnity, and protection from recruitment fees (Chapman 1992, 86; see also Castles and Miller 1993, Adler 1996). However the international organisations were not successful in hindering the establishment of foreign registers. The ITF also became concerned about the increasing competition of seafarers from poor labour exporting countries and “sought to sign collective bargaining agreements that would raise the wages rates earned by seafarers from developing countries to a level comparable to those earned by Westerners” (Chapman 1992, 87; see also Höfler 1992). Together with dock workers the union could force shipping companies to sign “collective bargaining agreements” through boycotts, which prevented ships from sailing (which was also explained by SPMS managers, for example in interview 930). Shipping companies would receive a “blue card” which enabled them free sailing at all ITF occupied ports. However, these campaigns had a down side.

In spite of its success, the flag-of-convenience campaign had fundamentally conflicting goals. Western unions expected the ITF to ensure that jobs would not be given to lower-paid Asian seafarers, while the Asian unions hoped to gain a competitive advantage by working for lower wages. Keeping these conflicting goals in balance while advancing the flag-of-convenience campaign was a difficult task (Chapman 1992, 88).

A complicated dynamic, which is still in progress, has accelerated the competition between high waged “western” workers, who have the choice to work for lower wages, or to lose their jobs and be replaced by cheaper labour, and workers who are willing to work for even lower wages than the ITF standards (ILO 2000, Zhao 2000a).

The *I-Kiribati* seafarers are facing particularly severe problems because of their geographical and political disadvantage: transport costs of seafarers to ports, where they can enter merchant ships and fishing vessels are high; and visa procedures are complicated. However, the establishing of two excellent training centres has
increased the chances for the *I-Kiribati*. Many of their competitors sail with much lower educational standards.

### Negotiations between labour union and the SPMS

In 1999 the negotiations over higher wages, wages that the KIOSU, labour union, wanted to have increased to ITF standards, were debated with great heat. Managers of the SPMS argued vigorously that higher wages would lead to a withdrawal of some of the nine shipping companies who supported the employment of *I-Kiribati* seafarers, and that their employment would not be feasible in the long term. The address of the SPMS was the Kiribati government. The main argument of the SPMS towards the government was a withdrawal of both their agency and their training centre. By involving the government, it was aimed to put pressure on the KIOSU to lower their demands.

The main goals of the KIOSU were to increase wages to ITF level, which would have been an increase of more than twenty percent; to increase the compensation payments for deaths and accidents, since the gap between compensation payment for a German seafarer and an *I-Kiribati* seafarer was A$50,000 (KIOSU, 02/08/99); and to change the wages from Australian dollars to US dollars: “Because they [the seafarers] want the maximum benefit from the Dollar, you know?”

The interesting aspect in these negotiations were the positions that the KIOSU and the governments adopted. The KIOSU, working in line with the ITF demanded a steep increase in wages. However, the KIOSU representatives explained that they need to aim high, to achieve a fifty/fifty deal in the end.

> It’s also a fifty/fifty compromise. Because we lose in some areas, and gain in some areas ... because when we came we had a huge number of issues to discuss. And we are trying to streamline, because that the situation is getting tough by now! And then everybody always wants to have a fifty/fifty [agreement]. It’s tough. We cannot have everything.

The KIOSU therefore plays a double jeopardy by using on one hand ITF promoted arguments:

> Actually the [ITF] level of compensation is something 80,000 US [dollars]. And there has been a lot of debate How can you value the life of a seafarer from Kiribati and from say... Germany...? [When
they] both died from the same accident?! During the same thing and
they...? So it's more like a moral question! And so far the advice
about... to agree to 60,000 Australian [dollars].

And on the other hand, they are willing to compromise. However, the KIOSU has to
face the reality of having to remain below ITF levels, and giving in to the arguments
of the SPMS managers who convincingly explain that if the wages for I-Kiribati
seafarers would rise to ITF standards, it would be more feasible for the nine shipping
companies to employ cheaper labour from the Philippines, Indonesia or China (and
any other country that is willing to let workers migrate for a cheap return). The
following figures (7.1 and 7.2) show the percentage of SPMS seamen working under
ITF agreements either on the German International Register or on foreign flags.

**Figure 7.2:** The percentage ITF registered vessels of SPMS employed
seamen in 1999 on German flags. **Source:** SPMS unpublished data, 1999.

**Figure 7.2:** The percentage ITF registered vessels of SPMS employed
seamen in 1999 on foreign flags. **Source:** SPMS unpublished data, 1999.
As can be seen, a large proportion of seafarers are still not under international agreements. The reason for this is, as the SPMS argues, that to be able to employ *I-Kiribati*, the Kiribati wages must be lower than the international standard because of the above mentioned extra costs that employment of *I-Kiribati* involves. The deal becomes fairer when taking the investment into the excellent education of the Kiribati seafarers into account. As was argued in chapter 2, the main investments in these though, are mainly covered by different sources of development aid. However, there is no doubt that the nine German shipping companies have invested time, money and personnel to make the Marine Training Centre and the South Pacific Marine Services possible and sustainable. Thus, the arguments of the SPMS are understandable.

Chapman (1992) discusses that many shipowners are “very angry at the ITF for what they consider to be the unreasonable methods it uses to force shipowners to sign up for blue cards”. One of the reasons for their annoyance is that the ITF, established a fund for “Third World seafarers, who do not receive social security and retirement benefits”, but the fund has grown more rapidly than it has been dispersed (Chapman 1992, 90). The SPMS perspective is that the ITF in fact does not benefit *I-Kiribati* seafarers with their policies, but in contrast, serves to their disadvantage. If more shipowners are forced to sign ITF contracts, less seafarers from Kiribati are enabled to work on ships.

I conducted a (non-taped) interview with two representatives of the ITF/ÖTV in Bremen, Germany (ITF/ÖTV 19/11/99). They position themselves clearly on the side of European (German) workers. In order to secure wages, was their argument, it is more necessary to raise wages of developing countries than to lower wages in Europe, a process that happened during the nineties, as a German seafarer told me (interview 933). The ITF/ ÖTV representatives in Bremen explained that German shipping companies (in total) have agreed to different ITF categories: *I-Kiribati* Able Bodied (AB) Seamen working (after successful negotiations) for US$800. These are below the lowest international category: Filipinos work for US$900, Polish AB seamen for US$1,200 and German AB seamen for US$1,600. The arguments to secure equal wages for international seafarers, to enable European seafarers to remain competitive, were based on differences in qualifications. However, the Kiribati example shows that nowadays the qualifications of some workers of the “new division of labour” are equal to those in European countries. Therefore competition for Europeans has
become very severe. The strategies used by shipping companies to achieve greater efficiencies were, as argued in chapter 1, high technology in the shipping industry, international (off-shore) registers and the employment of low waged workers. *I-Kiribati* seafarers, such as many other workers from developing countries are not only willing to put up with a lower pay, but also with very lengthy time apart from home and family.

The government’s position in the negotiations over wages is at first sight a mediator role: “We have to listen to both of them” (interview 901). However, it becomes clear over a few months that the government is quite aware of the pressure that is put on Kiribati from the SPMS shipping companies, and they cannot afford to lose the opportunities that the SPMS had offered. “We have a lot of unemployment here in Kiribati, I think we have to look for jobs!” (interview 902). The Permanent Secretary of Labour argues that if the negotiations between the SPMS and the KIOSU had become more serious “you know, should the German companies decide to not employ our people and that is a bad indication on our employment. So the next thing [is that] we would have deregistered them [the KIOSU], and we tried to negotiate with the company” (interview 902). And he explains that the government would have supported the SPMS in their attempt to keep *I-Kiribati* employed. “I think they are serious with what they are saying but the Union, they just, you know, refuse to listen to them. And they kept provoking the negotiation”. However, the Secretary of Labour also makes assurances that the government is not against the union.

Another employee of the Ministry of Labour suggests that the demands of the KIOSU for a rapid increase in wages is not reasonable (interview 901). He compares the lifestyle in Kiribati with lifestyles in the USA and explains that “a seaman in New York will say four hundred dollars is peanuts, you know? I cannot survive with that. But in Kiribati you can!”

People with four hundred dollars they are on the boat vessels, they send the money to their beneficiaries, most of them are in the outer islands! And you also have to look at the... expenses they are kept by the Hamburg companies, by the Hamburg Sued. They have to pay for the airfares, you know? From Tarawa to Japan, from Tarawa to South America, you know? You have to consider this as well. And then you can imagine how those companies in Germany can pay. So, I think that four hundred dollars as far as people send is enough, but looking at it
relatively it will be enough, you know? If you look at those in Australia in countries like Germany.

I think it is up to the union to make a very convincing case to the German shipping funds. It is up to the union to be able to convince the Hamburg Sued and other companies in Germany that they have to pay some more.

We are not supporting [the] SPMS but we have to realize the importance of the SPMS in Kiribati as an employer, you know? ... The remittances from the seamen on German shipping firms, we received 9.7 million Australian dollars. Which is about 12 per cent of our total foreign earnings for the country. That’s what I mean, you know?

Now we feel that we should not say that we support the SPMS! We should not say that we support the KIOSU, but we should say that we are supporting each party. Both parties to be able to come together and come up with and agreement on wages.

To be frank, I am speaking from a Kiribati point of view, trying not to be influenced by overseas ideas, and I say, well, four hundred dollars is enough. ... Employment in Kiribati cannot perceived in the same way as it is looked at in Western countries! (interview 901).

The outcome of the negotiations was successful. All three parties were sufficiently satisfied with the end result of their negotiations. The problem of decreasing wages in European states and the behaviour of workers is discussed by Contini, Filippi and Villosio (1998) and Sloane and Theodossiou (1998). The following section discusses the matter of compensation payments as a second example of the quite ambivalent situation that people in Kiribati have to cope with which requires high ethical standards by the employment agencies and a great amount of trust from the Kiribati side. This will continue to be an issue as long as the legal and welfare system are not well developed in Kiribati.

**Compensation payments**

Companies have a financial interest in a safe and healthy environment on ships. Seafarers from Kiribati are beneficial for shipping companies, amongst other reasons, because of the length of time they spend on board. In case of an accident, the seafarer has to be properly cared for and to be sent home. The company loses a hard working, experienced labourer and has to pay not only to send this seaman home but to fly a
replacement man back. Companies have also agreed to pay compensation in the case of severe injury, or the death of a seafarer.

Compensation payments have an effect on families of seafarers. A family in Kiribati receives an unusually large amount of money from the shipping company, in the case of an accident or death of a seafarer, but it loses the remittances. If a migrant is injured severely, he will not be able to find another job and might have to be cared for by members of his family. He might not be able to contribute to traditional labour on his family land and might not be able to go out fishing. While compensation payments in developed countries have been thoroughly discussed (eg. St John 1999 for New Zealand), the situation in Kiribati is different. There is no welfare scheme in Kiribati. Welfare happens through the extended family system. The regulations for seafarer’s compensation payments are therefore dependent on decisions between the seafarer’s agency and a seafarers’ union. Korean and Japanese fishers are not represented by a union. The Japanese regulations for illness or care after seafarers’ accidents are that “the Charterer shall bear the cost of all reasonable living expenses during such transportation” home to Kiribati. The charter companies are only 50% responsible for insurance payments. Fishers are liable for some compensation payment as regulated by Kiribati Government regulations. This is also the case for fishers working on Korean vessels. Accidents, in contracts for I-Kiribati seafarers working on Korean long liners, are regulated dependent on the KOSEA’s, the agency’s, good will. Any difficulties with compensation payments for Korean fishermen are handled by representatives of the Ministry of Labour of the Kiribati Government.

The following paragraphs will use the SPMS as an example. Compensation payments for seafarers working on German merchant ships are regulated by the SPMS agency, which works as a mediator between employing shipping companies and seafarers’ families. The special situation in Kiribati requires that the SPMS looks after families’ interests, which is a responsibility much greater than would be the case in a developed country (information from SPMS managers). While labour compensation payments are only generally discussed between the German shipping agency (SPMS) and the Kiribati seafarers union (KIOSU), in reality payments are handled between SPMS and individual families only. Managers take over the role of mediators between shipping agencies and families, and this role requires a great amount of cultural understanding.
and a fair attitude. It is of significance, and ethical, to understand that families in Kiribati generally do not know about their legal rights or legal options they have. The initiative to pay must come from the shipping company and is then facilitated by the SPMS.

Normally the family hasn’t thought of, you know, going to a lawyer. In fact I don’t know of any whether they have thought going to a lawyer. But the shipping company realises that the seaman is entitled to payment. It’s a no fault title insurance in the sense that even if the seaman was negligent or wasn’t looking after his own interest properly on the ship. That doesn’t matter. The shipping company is liable, ok? (interview 922).

Managers in Kiribati are in a different situation from shipping agency managers in developed countries. Though they are culturally sensitive and willing to help, they do not favour representing both sides. In some cases managers have found themselves between pressuring family members, and the long process of insurance companies examining the legal side and the value of payment. One means of improvement could be that a lawyer, or a group of lawyers work closely together with the Kiribati labour union on the seafarers’ side, while other lawyers represent the shipping agencies, even before accident compensation payment becomes a court case. Families need support on a short term basis, and it is therefore important to avoid a lengthy process of argument or litigation (interview 922). The SPMS would then negotiate for the shipping agencies only. In a developed country the labour union or a private lawyer would deal with the negotiations surrounding compensation payments.

**Conclusions**

This chapter has illuminated seafaring on two different nodes in the framework of “local and global”. It has firstly been argued that *I-Kiribati* seafarers when working on board the multinational environment of ships, and while travelling globally gain new insights into aspects of other cultures and the conduct of people from different ethnic backgrounds. It was explained that some conflict can arise in dealing with cultural differences on board. However, seafarers from Kiribati have developed their own strategies of “reterritorialising” to maintain their identity as *I-Kiribati* aboard. When circulating between global ship environments and their local homes, seamen have to
find ways to adapt to situations quickly and to be able to behave in both environments appropriately. Thus, men have begun to develop fluid, multiple, hybrid identities which they perform according to the circumstances they find themselves in. This means that men have found options to gather in artificial “families” or communities on board ships, but also in peer groups when on Tarawa. It has also become apparent that men have gained insight into the quality of life of people living in different countries, and that they have drawn their own conclusions, to verify their own values, or to adjust to new values (see also figure 7.1).

![Figure 7.1: Two local I-Kiribati seafarers working on an inter-island supply vessel, wearing casual “westernised” clothes.](image)

The second part of this chapter discussed the complex national and international dynamics, which are responsible for the employment of seafarers world wide, but in particular in Kiribati. By using two examples, the negotiations for higher wages in 1999, and the issue of compensation payments, I have shown, how the different agencies interact with each other, but also how local agents, such as the KIOSU labour union, and the SPMS are interlinked with global dynamics and with their international counterparts. The international union influences the local KIOSU with its own interest in protecting “western” European workers, especially with an interest in keeping wages to a standard that enables all workers to survive. This means that
these wages must enable workers in Europe to meet a basic life quality, in an environment where higher monetary means are necessary. It has become clear that there is tension caused by globalisation processes, between the need of “developing” countries to find employment at all, and the need of workers in “developed” countries to keep their jobs, and to have the means to live. The SPMS from this perspective seems a powerful agent involved in these globalisation processes, being able to influence not only unions but also the Kiribati government to keep wages low. However, shipping companies are themselves driven by the dynamics in the global market. The situation for Kiribati will not change as long as the structure causing these global dynamics remains.
Conclusions

The goal of this thesis was to analyse the nature of seafaring on international merchant and fishing vessels and the consequences of that endeavour on the people and their environment in Kiribati. The main argument contends that seafaring is a specific form of mobility and therefore has particular impact on seafarers and on the society and environment of Kiribati. I have argued that seafaring is clearly distinguished from other forms of labour migration and can be placed at the peripheries of transnationalism. The thesis seeks to contribute to this special aspect of the migration framework, which has only recently gained attention in academic literature (Vertovec 1999, Sampson 2003, Yeoh et al. 2003). Seafarers do not simply ‘migrate’ or ‘circulate’, but are ‘transversal circulators’. This form of movement together with the de-national and multinational spaces that seafarers move in combine to make this form of mobile livelihood unique in comparison to previously documented examples of transnationalism.

My analysis leads me to conclude that seafaring has features of transnationalism including the long term maintenance of social and economic links between the Kiribati seafarers and their families. Linkages include the irregular communication with families and the more regular transfer of remittances. However, it became increasingly obvious that seafaring lacks the permanence, regularity and place of other forms of transnational communities. Transnational communities existing amongst seafarers and their families are rather incomplete and differ significantly from forms of transnationalism involving labour migration or circulation to a permanent place in a host country (Zhao 2001, 2002; Sampson 2003). As a consequence of their constant movements on ships, seafarers do not communicate with their families as frequently as land-based migrant workers (Lane 2001b), and it is not possible for them to live even temporarily with, or even close by, their families. It is not realistic for seamen working on ships to settle and build permanent new community networks because the shipboard communities change frequently. Seafarers are also unable to stay ashore in particular places for long, and cannot easily make use of the economic facilities and cultural infrastructure of such an area. The
range of movements of seafarers is limited and consequently their range of communication and networking opportunities.

I have argued that this 'patchiness' or irregularity of seafaring-transnationalism has profound impacts for individuals, families and the broader Kiribati society. Thus the second goal of this thesis was to show that seafaring in its particular form of mobility has impacts on island life, that most of these impacts are specific to seafaring and may be clearly distinguished from impacts of other forms of mobility such as immigration or a more permanent form of labour migration. I have also argued that the uniqueness of the Kiribati culture makes the effects of seafaring on I-Kiribati seafarers specific and distinct from the effects felt by other nationalities. I have shown that the te katei ni Kiribati (the Kiribati way of life), as described in Chapter 2, influences employment, behaviour and the acceptance and perception of seafarers and is central to all aspects of the I-Kiribati. The particular cultural codes influence the meaning of mobility and absence from home (Young 1998), how seafarers conserve their identity when living on board ships, and how they adapt to the island life when at home. These codes also influence how people in Kiribati cope with the frequent long term absence and short term presence of men. The thesis explores how seafaring affects seafarers and people in Kiribati on different levels: on health and wellbeing; economically; on lifestyles; on the environment; and on cultural perceptions and individual behaviours. I will summarise in the following paragraphs what the effects are, how they can be linked to seafaring as a specific form of mobility, and what role the Kiribati culture has in connecting seafarers with Kiribati.

Living a "sailors' life" has consequences for men's health and as I have shown some of these can have fatal consequences, both for them and their families at home. Working on board ships exposes seafarers to manifold physical health hazards, indeed, the life style of seafaring itself can cause health problems. It has been shown that alcohol abuse is common amongst seafarers (ILO 2001) and that many seafarers, as other workers in the transport industry, and those whose work involves "travelling", tend to have sexual encounters with foreign street workers. In many cases this activity proves to be unsafe and at the very least increases the risk of STD infection (Jenkins 1994, Armstrong 1998, 1999). The danger of HIV/AIDS in recent decades has resulted in seafarers' fatalities and severely impacted their spouses at
home. It has been explained in Chapter 4 that women in Kiribati are particularly vulnerable to infection because of the restricted customary norms that give wives only limited options for communicating with their husbands on sexual health issues. Furthermore, the high risk of seafaring has an impact on the well-being of people at home. Parents and wives often have feelings of worry and unease as their sons or husbands are not only away from home but outside efficient communication facilities for most of their seafaring journeys. Several concerned parents follow their sons' journeys closely via agency news or on the radio and know when they are travelling in politically unsafe regions. As I have explored in Chapter 6, cultural issues arise in the case of fatal accidents; and in Chapter 7, there is a lack of legal support in those cases for individual families remaining in Kiribati.

The Kiribati economy benefits significantly from seafarers as discussed in Chapter 5. Remittances have grown almost ten times between 1979 and 1998 to A$9.7 million officially by 1998 (unpublished SPSS data 1999). Taking into account that seafarers are paid in cash at the end of their contracts, the amount of money going into the Republic of Kiribati may be adjusted to approximately A$12 million. This figure may be considerably more when unrecorded remittances such as the commodities that seamen bring back as gifts for their families are taken to account (see also Brown 1997, Ahlburg and Brown 1998, Taylor 1999 and Thomas Hope 1999). Unlike remittances from permanent migration to metropolitan cities such as Brisbane and Sydney, or from temporary labour migration to Nauru, remittances of seafarers are "institutionalised" (Connell and Conway 2000). Seafarers are obliged to send a specific amount of remittances back home, and this is agreed in their employment contracts, depending on their ship grade, the employer, who is usually the ship owner, and the Captain on board ship. Therefore, discussions on the decline of remittances in other countries (Brown 1997, Simati and Gibson 2001) cannot be related to I-Kiribati seafarers. However, it has been shown in Chapter 5 that though seafarers' remittances are officially increasing, the monetary levels received by wives and families are growing small if not stagnating, with seafarers sending progressively a higher proportion of their remittances to their own account. The bubuti system in Kiribati provides a share of the seafarers' remittances to members of their extended family, to village communities and to churches. Money is thus much more widely spread than officially reported.
There are several consequences of the increasing economic capacity of seafarers, affecting the society and environment of the Kiribati islands. There are firstly benefits for the individual families of seafarers, who as shown in Chapters 5 and 6 have gained respect and status in their village communities because of their improved ability to share wealth. The quality of life of seafarer families has increased visibly, notably by the well maintained buildings, the construction of brick houses and on Tarawa the ability to purchase water tanks to catch fresh rainwater. Families with regular income are able to buy luxury goods, such as motor cycles, generators and video players and some families are operating small businesses on capital generated from seafaring. The greatest impact of remittances on culture and the environment, however, is that seafarers have the financial means to purchase land due to their accumulation of wealth on their individual accounts during times on board.

Land has cultural meaning in Kiribati and the ownership of land makes seafarer families particularly well acknowledged in their communities. However, those families who owing to financial circumstances choose to sell their land may suffer hardship or even poverty as their only tangible asset is foregone. Many seafarers from outer islands purchase land on South Tarawa so that they can meet their families during their holidays, avoiding both the inconvenience of the transport infrastructure and the lost time that travel to home islands involves. The results in increased urbanisation are adding to the environmental and social burdens of overpopulation that urban South Tarawa already faces. People returning from Nauru also tend to settle on Tarawa, because they prefer an urban lifestyle (interview 906). However, the distinguishing factor between these migrants and seafarers is the small amount of time seafarers can spend with their families, made still shorter by the time taken to travel to home islands. Workers on Nauru in contrast can take their families abroad during their contracts (Connell 1983). The particular transversal mobility of seafarers with their inability to have family members living on board, makes the urban movements of seafarer families necessary. It is rather unlikely that this trend will decline in the long term.

The social consequences of urbanisation are linked to a general process in Kiribati where people are increasingly settling in South Tarawa to benefit from the central
infrastructure such as hospitals and schools and the improved job opportunities, and therefore, seafarers contribute to already existing problems. The lack of parental supervision of school children leads to increased problems with teenagers on Tarawa, including alcohol intemperance and early pregnancies. Where families have bought land in South Tarawa there are advantages in that at least one parent, the seafarers' wife, can supervise children attending secondary schools in Tarawa, something that many non-seafarer families living on outer islands cannot afford. However, as discussed in Chapter 6, the absence of fathers has negative effects on the development of children, which has already been explored in seafarer studies; children may feel increasingly alienated from their fathers (Battistella and Conaco 1998, Kahveci 2002).

Married women in Kiribati usually live with their parents in-law. Their marriages are characterised by the absence of their spouses for long periods of time with wives not usually having the opportunity to join their husbands on ships. The long and frequent interruptions to the time seafarers can spend with their wives and families can cause conflict between wives and husbands, but also between wives and parents in-law, and this can result in divorce. Separation as a consequence, leads to problems over child maintenance with the effect that children are often taken away from their mother to live in the father's household even though the father is employed overseas. Though many women have begun to live more independently, many manage the long-term separation from their husbands by obediently following cultural expectations, one of which is to stay close to their house and in-law families and to cope bravely with emotional hardship. However, there is a tendency for interaction between spouses to become slightly 'westernised'.

The perception of seafarers by most parents, especially on the outer islands, is that they are a “blessing” for Kiribati. However, long separation from their sons who would usually not only care for their parents by contributing to household activities, but would also look after their own wives and children, is worrying and can be stressful. Parents have the full responsibility of looking after their daughters in-law during the time of their son's absence. Often the lack of communication between families and seafarers creates stress and misunderstanding. It can be concluded that the particular cultural background of Kiribati together with the dichotomy that living with their families abroad is impossible for seafarers and communication facilities are
poor, are reasons for personal distress, especially between spouses, but in particular between parents and daughters in-law, some of which could be avoided within a permanent transnational community. The negative consequences for the children of seafarers resulting from these circumstances can turn out to be particularly severe once they have reached their teenage years.

It has been explained in this thesis that influences external to Kiribati are fuelled by the recurrent backwards and forwards movements of seafarers who travel from home and move transversally across the oceans. These groups are constantly influenced by the impressions of many different cultures, both on board their multinationally crewed vessels and at the ports of the many different countries visited. These influences are brought back to Kiribati and have an effect on the entire population, although one which is especially pronounced on the younger people in Kiribati. One example of this is the startling growth of video businesses as well as the private use of video tapes in an environment which provides little discretion. Seafarers often display wealth and “foreign” behaviour, at least for the first days of their return to Kiribati. There is a frequent influx to and departure from Kiribati of seafarers, however, which creates a particular and repeating influence of foreign values on Kiribati. This is quite distinct from the effects of visiting or returned permanent migrants.

I have furthermore explored in Chapter 7 that in order to cope with their changing environment, seafarers from Kiribati have begun to develop multiple and fluid identities which they perform according to the role they have to fulfil and the setting they are in at any given moment. The SIRC team labels seafarers as ‘global villagers’ or ‘global citizens’. This, though appealing, has been challenged in this thesis. It has been explained that seafarers from Kiribati, though they integrate into multinational crews, also have ways of protecting their own local identity. The I-Kiribati on board seem to maintain their cultural values for example by listening to the advice given by their eldest in the slightly changed context of the ship environment. In contrast to the publications of the SIRC team it has been shown that there is potential for cultural conflict on board ships (Lane 1999b, Wu 2002, Sampson 2003). However, it can be concluded that when cultural values are respected by officers on board ships, and when potential for conflict is kept under surveillance by crews allocated to harmonious and efficient teams, the ship environment can, as the SIRC group
suggested, enhance the understanding of men on board ship as a new peer community. This becomes obvious when seafarers gather at places such as the Seamen’s Hostel on Tarawa, to exchange experiences which differ from those of other men in Kiribati.

The notions of changing identity of seafarers and multinational communities on board ships, link finally to aspects of globalisation that have been discussed in this thesis. I have explored in Chapter 2 how the employment of seafarers by German and Japanese agencies can be regarded as one articulation of trade in aid which links industrialised countries with large populations to the geographically and politically strategic region of the Pacific (Poirine 1999, Crocombe 2002). One consequence of the great dependency on external economic influx is that the Kiribati government is in the conflicting situation of wishing to encourage external employment, but, as shown in Chapter 7, in order to achieve this, having to compromise workers’ conditions and wage levels. The government is therefore often at the mercy of global forces which allow some companies to draw on a seemingly endless pool of workers willing to supply their services for low wages under sometimes quite restricting conditions. Positive for the people in Kiribati, however, is that the employment agencies from Japan and Germany provide excellent training, which increases the chances of employment in the competitive world market and which also supplies Kiribati with skilled men when they return. I have argued and shown how the employment agencies and local and international unions are interlinked in the competitive global dynamics putting pressure on efficiency, working hours and wages of workers of all regions, including Europe and the US (Chapman 1992). The globalisation process has caused a tension between the need of workers of Third World countries to find employment at all and those sailors in industrialised countries who wish to remain employed.

The contribution of this thesis is not only to research on development and globalisation but especially to the framework of migration studies. Research on seafarers has broadened the understanding of transnational dynamics, which this thesis has illuminated. There is scope for much more research at this periphery of transnationalism. Debates surrounding identity are of particular interest, particularly when taking the special environment of ships into account, which is described as a crisscrossing of maritime hyperspace (Gilroy 1993, Sampson 2003). I defined seafarers at the beginning of this thesis as transversal circulators, members of a global
community with transnational links to their home regions. Now, I want to add that I-Kiribati seafarers have established a “cultural flexibility”, with strong roots to their culture, but with an ability to perform identities according to the place they act in, a skill gained because of the experience on board “moving” ships. This identity is global in regard to sharing a similar process with all seafarers, but particularly with those from Third World countries. However, this identity is also unique, because of the particular cultural backgrounds of the I-Kiribati which have shaped their perceptions of “other” cultures.

The thesis has made clear that research on mobility and migration and their impacts will be enriched, not only when working at the intersections between structural factors and cultural meanings of migration, but also when working on areas in research on migration that are outside permanent migration, but inside the movements between origin countries and other places.


APPLETON, J. (2000): ‘“At my age I should be sitting under that tree”: The Impact of AIDS on Tanzanian Lakeshore Communities’. Gender and Development 8 (2), 19-27.


HIV/AIDS infection in predominantly heterosexual epidemics in Third World countries. Canberra: Health Transition Centre, ANU, 235-239.


C. Caldwell et al. (eds.): *Resistances to behavioural Change to reduce HIV/AIDS infection in predominantly heterosexual epidemics in Third World*. Canberra: Health Transition Centre, ANU, 240-256.


Deutscherwelle (2003): Griechenland beschlagnahmt Schiff mit 680 Tonnen Sprengstoff. 23/06/1999: *nachrichten@dwelle.de*


KIRIBATI NEWS
http://www.usersbigpond.com/Kiribati_newstar/Archive/2001/October/26-10-01.htm

KIRIBATI NEWS
http://www.usersbigpond.com/Kiribati_newstar/Archive/2001/October/26-10-01.htm

KIRIBATI NEWS
TAR 26 October (2001): The President of Kiribati, Teburoro Tito, reportedly said he had agreed to take up to 500 asylum seekers. Source (accessed 7/03/03)
http://www.usersbigpond.com/Kiribati_newstar/Archive/2001/October/26-10-01.htm

KIRIBATI NEWS
TAR 26 October (2001a): Kiribati says Australia is untapped market for its exports. Australian Broadcasting Corporation 17/08/01. Source (accessed 7/03/03)
http://www.usersbigpond.com/Kiribati_newstar/Archive/2001/October/26-10-01.htm

KIRIBATI NEWS
TAR 26 October (2001b): Kiribati reaches fishing accord with China. Source (accessed 7/03/03)
http://www.usersbigpond.com/Kiribati_newstar/Archive/2001/October/26-10-01.htm

KIRIBATI NEWS
http://www.usersbigpond.com/Kiribati_newstar/Archive/2001/October/26-10-01.htm

KIRIBATI NEWS
TAR 5 December (2001): Amnesty International condemns Australian proposal on refugees. Source (accessed 7/03/03)
http://www.usersbigpond.com/Kiribati_newstar/Archive/2001/December/14-12-01.htm

KIRIBATI NEWS
TAR 7 December (2001): Criticism mounts against Australia’s ‘Pacific Solution’. Source (accessed 7/03/03)
http://www.usersbigpond.com/Kiribati_newstar/Archive/2001/December/14-12-01.htm


MARSHALL, M., G. M. Ames and L. A. Bennett (2001): Anthropological Perspectives on Alcohol and Drugs at the Turn of the New Millennium. Social Science and Medicine, 153-164.


for Pacific Studies, University of Canterbury; Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 117-131.


POIRINE, B. (1998): Should We Hate or Love MIRAB? The Contemporary Pacific 10 (1), 65-105


