

**A fantastic world:
Sail Training as a transforming
experience for young people from
different countries**

**Master's thesis in Anthropology and
Ethnography**

SUMMARY

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My master's thesis has led me on a path both personal and professional through the fields of anthropology. The degree in Anthropology supposed a thoughtful and theoretical process about people as made up of interrelationships and an analysis of this from the view point of different cultures. On the other hand, the master's thesis has also made me put this into practice, involving for me a significant amount of time, just understanding this procedure once the thesis had been written.

Firstly, I must thank my tutor mainly for his careful monitoring and support. I am also grateful to the main institutions involved in Sail Training such as STI International, STA E and At Sea Sail Training for considering my purpose and letting me do the fieldwork. I also appreciate the trust that the families of the young Spanish trainees have put in me to undertake an adventure like this one because there was a great deal of preparation. Finally I am grateful for all the cooperation from the people who are part of this thesis because they accompanied me on this trip.

. The title

A fantastic world is a good metaphor for this experience in Sail Training, where everybody is required to find strategies to interact, to learn to listen, to learn to understand, and above all, to respect and learn from the differences. A fantastic world that empowers one with one's line or way of life, which as Tim Ingold says, always takes you a little further. This experience which aims to change the lives of young people, allows them just to be, and in this way opens a door to a vast symbolic sea of opportunities for them, induced by the action of shared intentionality.

. Contextualization

. Presentation of STI International (constituted by 29 countries, with education and development of essential skills for life as a target / regardless of nationality, culture, religion, gender or social origin / it is a charity), STA E and At Sea Sail Training.

. What are the Tall Ships Races, the 2011 and 2012 TSR (map) that were part of the fieldwork for this thesis?

. Summer 2011: Constantia (Sweden), SIRMA (Belgium), St-Iv (Estonia).

. Summer 2012: Lord Nelson (United Kingdom) and Pelican of London (United Kingdom).

. Classification of races and Cruise in Company and four types of ships.

. Watch System and organization within the ship, participants from different cultures and social strata.

. History:

. Pioneers Allain Villiers and Irving Johnson. '*This is not a life at sea if not to use the sea to teach young people to live life*'.

. Outward Bound schools:

- Kurt Hahn, a well known teacher at that time, founder and director of Gordonstoun School. Objective: To survive at sea by teaching confidence, tenacity, perseverance, constructing experiences in harsh conditions.

- Connection with the theoretical framework:

The name of Outward Bound means undertaking outward direction. Michael Foucault pays tribute to the work of Gaston Bachelard '*The Poetics of Space*' in exploring spatial metaphors of the poetic imagination and intimate spaces, but unlike those internal dreams, Foucault directed his central interest to outside spaces. He returned to Bachelard from the inside to the outside. The space we live in is a set of relationships cut across time; it is '*the space through which we are drawn outside us*' or '*where the erosion of our life takes place*'.

Interestingly the name of the first schools to use Sail Training ships as part of their training at school was Outward Bound, which derives from the international maritime signal *Papa* and *The Blue Peter* (a blue square around a central white square), which indicates that the ship is leaving port, undertaking outward direction.

In addition, Tim Ingold speaks metaphorically of a world consisting of lines, he speaks about lifelines being empowering. When one assumes this as one's own, as does a wayfarer or a seafarer, it is said that this line 'goes out for a walk', creating maps with its own experiences and relationships.

. After the war and within a favorable financial climate these Sail Training activities promoted learning as an alternative to regular classrooms.

. The first international meeting in 1956 with a race from Torbay to Lisbon was the idea of Bernard Morgan. The 1964 races (Plymouth - Lisbon - Bermuda - New York) were a long voyage of the Tall Ships fleet across the Atlantic, which

kept their officers together from May to August, forging friendships through sharing sail training experiences that occurred in different countries.

. Structure of the thesis:

The thesis is structured with an introduction followed by historical background, and the methodological and theoretical frameworks, which draw the route taken in theorizing a Sail Training experience from an anthropological point of view.

In addition to meeting all the families of the Spanish trainees and all the organization during the three months prior to the fieldwork in summer 2012, I conducted 29 interviews at the end of each sailing leg among the crews of the ships I had sailed with. The main questions in all the interviews were about the importance or relevance of the human aspects in a Sail Training experience; what does the boat mean to the permanent crew; and specifically for the trainees, how each had lived this experience and how the group dynamics had gone.

The duration of my fieldwork was 20 days (from 21st of July to 8th of August) in summer 2011 and 19 days in summer 2012 (from 4th to 25th of August).

It is explained in the methodological framework that I started working with the Emerencià Roig work on Catalonia Fisheries and the 19th century navy, and I also collaborated in a study of maritime heritage with the University of Girona at the beginning of my master's degree. At that time, at a meeting at the Barcelona Maritime Museum, I met Miquel Borillo, who spoke to me about the existence of these training vessels. With my professional career so far in educational services, I decided to acquaint myself with Sail Training in summer 2011 as a possible place to do my fieldwork. This first contact with the field, together with my collaboration from an anthropological approach to this experience in the presentation *How to learn*, at the annual STI Conference in Toulon in November 2011, led to the birth of my thesis.

. Anthropological perspectives:

The present work is innovative from an anthropological perspective because the college studies done up to now about Sail Training in Sydney by Finkelstein and Goodwin have a sociological focus. Analyzing the experience from psychological or behavioral standpoints is Grocott at the University of Otago (New Zealand) and Jane Rogers (South Australia); and at the University of Edinburgh there is Allison and McCulloch whose focus of study of this experience is educational¹. Publications in journals such as *Journal of Experiential Education*, *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Leadership*, *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, *Ethnography and Education* and *Oxford Review of Education*, also have an educational perspective².

¹ FINKELSTEIN, J. & GOODWIN, S. (2005) *Sailing into the future: final report on ARC linkage research project*. Sydney: Department of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Sydney.

GROCCOTT, A. C. (1999) *Sailing and self-esteem: the effect of a ten day developmental voyage at sea on the multidimensional self-concept*. Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Otago, Dunedin.

JANE ROGERS, C. (2004) *An Evaluation of the One and All Youth Development Sail Training Program*. Flinders University, South Australia.

McCULLOCH, K. (2002) *Four days before the mast: a study of sail training in the UK*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh.

² ALLISON, P. & POMEROY, E. (2000) 'How shall we 'know'? Epistemological concerns in research in experiential education' in *Journal of Experiential Education*, 23(2), 91–97.

DAVIDSON, L. (2001) 'Qualitative research and making meaning from adventure: a case study of boys' experiences of outdoor education at school' in *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Leadership*, 1(2), 11–20.

GORDON, S., HARCOURT-SMITH, K., HAY, K. & PRIEST, S. (1996) 'Case study of Blue Watch on STS Leeuwin' in *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Leadership*, 13(1), 4–7.

McCULLOCH, K. (2004) 'Ideologies of adventure: authority and decision making in sail training' in *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 4(2), 185–197.

McCULLOCH, K. (2007) 'Living at sea: learning from communal life aboard sail training vessels' in *Ethnography and Education*, 2(3), 289–303.

McCULLOCH, K., ALLISON, P. (and others)(2010) 'Sail Training as education: more than a mere adventure' in *Oxford Review of Education*, 36:6, 661-676.

. The content of the thesis:

The hypothesis of the thesis is based on analysis of whether the Sail Training experience in these training ships has a transforming effect on young people, because even if they suffer, once the trip is over, all of them speak about it in extraordinary ways. That is to say that on the ship there exists a kind of social relationship that creates strong ties amongst the participants. These relationships could be called 'primordial' in the same way as kinship relations, community relations and ritual relations are. They are relationships in which all participate with each other.

The trainee Pedro Suasi talked about his first Sail Training experience like this: *We had a pretty bad time, what with the weather and everything, but we did it, we were all pretty close. We trusted each other because of course, when I slept, the ones steering the ship were another team and if this team screwed up, then they could have put us in danger too. It was a question of trust. And when you're at the helm also you think that there are people sleeping in the boat and of course, you can not ... you have to be careful with this...*

The theoretical approach to the new perspectives in kinship anthropology from M. Davis Schneider on, has an open field of symbols and meanings in understanding a particular culture. They are present in the vision of the person as a '*dividual individual*' by Marilyn Strathern, and also in other ethnographies such as the one by Roger Bastide, which talks about the divisible person, or that of Jorgen Prytz Johansen which tells us that the person is a 'participation' of others.

Kinship therefore involves an internalization of the difference, as Johansen says of The Maoris: '*An internal solidarity of souls*' or as Aristotle says of children, that they are some '*others*' of their parents. As Marshall Sahlins says, kinship is '*mutuality of being*'.

The officer Ben Swain explains that in an experience like this one, *'the young encounter friendship, they discover what being a friend is, and this reassures them!'*.

Lucien Lévy-Bruhl : *'participation is therefore not only a fusion of beings who lose or retain their identity at the same time'*, but just part of the constitution of these beings, which it is given as necessary so that the people may exist. Participation by Lévy-Bruhl then, *'is inherent in the individual'*, *'a condition of existence'*, which, as Pedro rightly said, *'you have to be careful with'*.

On the other hand, Johansen, with his ethnography about the Maoris and their internal solidarity of souls, introduced us to the work of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro about the extraordinary synthesis of kinship, magic and gift exchange as forms of participative influence, in which, Viveiros de Castro proposed that magic is not a wrong version of physical causality. Contrary to this, magic works through the influence and purpose on how people generate effects between one and the other.

In a Sail Training ship we find that active participation consists of sharing various actions and conditions as something in common: in a community with the same interests, the ship as a whole, and a challenge to face, the voyage to reach the next port. This is an experience in which young people have an effect on each other, on those who accompany them at times of fear, they hear their mates, and they hang out while absorbing what is happening there, just being there.

The community analysis in Anthony Cohen's work as a space for interaction and symbolism, taking into account the experience of living with the personal boundaries of each participant, glimpses the effects of the community on its

participants, making them aware of their own limitations as is captured in some interviews, as when Ben Swain says: *Every journey is different because each group is different. On board you have time to think about yourself, the ship is a vehicle to go and explore, you feel this freedom, friendship, going back finding it as a chosen prison, where as Olivia Wanttime says, you have met people who you might never have known otherwise, taking part in an experience like this one.* This is not to put a stamp of legitimacy on the structural positions of society, but rather an earned recognition of essential and generic human bonds, without which no society can exist.

The community is the organization to which one belongs, greater than kinship but more immediate than the abstraction we call 'society'. People attach their own meanings to the prescriptions and proscriptions of the community. In this sense, the rules of society are less important than their symbols. So when we talk about people who acquire culture (or learn to be social), we refer to acquiring the symbols that they will be equipped with to be social. This symbolic equipment could be compared with vocabulary, in the way that symbols are effective because of their inaccuracy. Although they obviously do not remain without content, a part of their meaning is 'subjective'.

The symbolic capacity of the person is imbued with the ability of human reciprocity. And Wilhelm von Humboldt (creator of the concept of 'Bildung' or personal and cultural maturity, who considers that how we become who we are is determined by the people who love us) said: *'There is in every man, a part that affects him, contingent on its existence, which is just ignored by others, and which dies with him, and there is another part where there is an idea expressed by him with exceptional clarity, this gift is the symbol'*. Sharing something, starting with different intentions, becomes cooperation and exchange, taking into account that there are inalienable things that are part of my identity, which have intentionality, have memory and that reciprocity to them is required.

The conscience of the community is then typecast in the perception of its boundaries, limits which themselves are constituted largely by people in interaction. In this sense, the boundaries of communities perform the same function as the limits in all categories of knowledge (so that as the captain of The Lord Nelson says: *one learns from the limits that one sees in others, in other cultures and ways of doing things, but also faced with different ages or disabilities*). And the reality and effectiveness of the community border depends on its symbolic construction and its embellishment.

Everyday practices on board a ship with the watch system, meal times, time to sleep, to prepare and to clean the living space, 'embody, in themselves, the fundamental temporal, spatial and social ordering notions, which organize the [socio-cultural] system as a whole'. Internalization of knowledge is not as important as a vehicle as the practical activity in relation to the world (theory of practice). As Maurice Bloch says, cultural knowledge can not be organized in characteristical and logical manners of language. Every culture and every person who conforms to it uses his full sensory repertoire to transmit and receive messages. Jean Claude Levi-Strauss was one of the first to draw attention to the various 'sensory codes' through which information can be transmitted, and how these can be combined and mutually 'translated'.

Thus, feeling, acting and understanding at the same time the ship's day to day existence, perception has an important role (for example, steering). And most of the ship's activities take place in a group. You're never alone doing them and with each one you complete, you learn from the others something of their way of doing things. At the same time, when you are really tired, when all your safety mechanisms and personal balance have been broken down by the changing context, fatigue requires you to sleep, and this feeling of being carried along by the others implies a vast symbology of trusting others as well as of accepting that you can not do everything alone.

From that moment, it is as if life at sea on a boat can transport you with her to: the state of 'flux' that Mihaly Csikzentmihalyi named a loss of ego, a fusion of action and consciousness. This is like the experience of mystical participation of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, you have then sea legs, as is said in English. The important role that perception plays in trainees is moving between physical flow and the trip from retrospective memory they make, in the heterotopic space of the ship.

Michael Foucault says that the ship is the heterotopic space par excellence, because this is one of the spaces for reflection to which I have referred with the metaphor of moving towards the outside in the Outward Bound schools. This stands out as having the curious property of being connected to all the sites, so that it suspends, neutralizes or reverses the set of relationships designated, as reflected or represented by itself. This real and unreal space at the same time, mirrors the trainees carrying them to other parts of their past relationships while promoting awareness and reflexivity. Thus, each one of them can find a set of signs and direction markers that allow them to find their own way into the landscape of their memory.

I will concentrate then on the rite of passage (separation, transition and aggregation according to Van Gennep) generated in adolescents from their perception learning by practice and by the community flow of the group, together with the report that they will establish about it a posteriori. This Sail Training experience in a completely innovative space which breaks with all our habitual abilities and consists of taking us back to a community experience of mutuality with others, a phase of 'primordial' orality, linked to the symbolism of pregnancy as Miquel Borillo suggested in his interview, 'it is like being in a womb', reliving the first of these relationships constantly changing and moving.

So, as Victor Turner said, structure is liquefied through a liminal process searching for lost kingdoms, communion with each other, where the body that modernity has separated and detached from thought, is restored in perceptive flow that develops happiness, fellowship and meeting in this 'time-stopping machine' of the ship.

In the words of Wilhelm Dilthey, this process of discovery and establishment of meaning through experience consists of bringing past and present into musical relation. At the same time, because this is a breaking-in experience over a very short period of time (a minimum of 10 days is recommended by the permanent crew), this ritual, understood as an open activity to a wide range of symbolic motivations and irreducible to technical reasons, because their actions have no intrinsic meaning, is conducive to exegesis.

The distinction made by Harvey Whitehouse about the imagistic mode of religiosity can be related to a Sail Training experience, because of its low frequency and high level of excitement, which triggers a process of analogical reasoning or spontaneous exegetical reflection, often experienced as inspiration or personal revelation.

In fact, these imagistic practices should always be a locus of conscious thought and reflection, because as they act as initializing rituals that have had prior and conscious planning, and because as Whitehouse says, they activate episodic memory, which is a type of explicit memory. For this reason, the experience will be elaborated later on in the way that Annette Karmiloff describes it as representational redescription. Thus, the evoked images from sensory stimulation in this multivocal space of nature, and the ritual symbols associated with human interests converge in this time machine, the Sail Training ship. This enclosed space for reflection allows one to elaborate a process from this experience that can last a long time, always considered as wonderful and unforgettable by each of its participants once lived.

Moreover, there are many young people with environments that can become overly restrictive or limited. In fact, we all need this structure to live, but not everyone has the same strategies to position themselves within it, especially in an adolescent stage when the only world one has lived in until then, is the be all and end all.

Sometimes a radical, absolute and groundbreaking change with everything is necessary in order to express, to show, and to become someone. Adolescence as a time of choice, transit, is a perfect age, recommendable, although probably it is never too late. The door is always open when you want to open it without fear of living.

Whether or not you need to have an open sea of opportunities is not something which can be recommended to everyone, because someone can be really destabilized depending on what time of one's life the door opens. So firstly one needs to be sure of being able to survive it and then act.

In my opinion anyone cannot live blindly, everybody needs to visit the fantastic world, act it, go through it, take it, resist it, enjoy it, act on it with the necessary roles to reach one's being, change to perform it or simply to live. Surely this is a guarantee of success to avoid indifference, stillness, and immobility, social or strange closures that might lead someone to ask for help in the best case or to social disconnection in the worst.

It's like plunging below the established social makeup, getting as far as one wants the way to be satisfied in life. The opportunity should be for everyone, a 'time machine' in our times is difficult to sustain alone, that is in my opinion why different international foundations that make up the STI, receive recognition and support to promote this activity.

The test of self-confidence, trust in others, of self-control in situations made difficult by differences in relationships, and the ways of maintaining the self-control is maximized in a Sail Training experience.

Once the ship reaches port, the performance of trainees in the Crew Parade and festival is considered, as Victor Turner said, also part of the experience. The participant tries to penetrate the essence of the experience itself. In doing so, he allows free access to the depths of his being, he grabs on to life and holds on to it. Thus, this passage is at once 'live through' and 'think again, in retrospection', while the participant wishes to go beyond setting goals and models for the future, where he or she can avoid or eliminate the dangers and mistakes of past experience.

This training and acting process will map out for the participants 'other ways of being and understanding reality', which our symbolic formations are always trying to reach and express. Therefore, this experience is probably the opportunity for their participants to have the luxury of assimilating symbolic forms generated by individual and idiosyncratic experience when facing social and emotional needs, which makes it an engaging experience and somewhat addictive.

. Conclusions:

As conclusions, I have emphasized the particularity of this ethnography in Sail training ships as an example of community and ritual in our own society.

Also I stressed that the transformation consists of altering the value of relationships, and that an extraordinary and transforming experience can only take place from the notion of person as an 'entity' in relationships. The group dynamics outlined in the second part of ethnography are interesting in this regard. In fact, the human condition always leaves this door open to a distant place where you can go, since nothing is locked in the possibility of the other, in the space that everyone can share intentionality.

Moreover, international exchanges, different ages and disabilities among members of the crew are factors that make us think more about the limits of the differences, as they require a greater effort from us to get rid of our 'usual or cultural' points of view.

Finally, I have highlighted the possibilities and symbolism of the space where I have done the fieldwork, the ship, which has its own name and personality, because it is always convertible and moldable for those who live on it and sail it. This gives it identity, considering that its identity is there precisely because it requires the whole group to make it sail, and never rests on the subject individually.