



Wednesday, June 11, 2014

Short Term Mobility Report

This May-June, Dr Vito Pipitone and I have continued our collaboration on the qualitative database regarding the political economy of the Mazara del Vallo trawling fleet in the last half-century. Our activities followed these lines:

- Archival research at the Camera di Commercio di Palermo [fisheries companies' historical files];
- Archival Research at the Biblioteca Regionale, Palermo [files from Cassa per il Mezzogiorno, L'Ora];
- Data collection of Mazarese trawlers' arrest files, Capitaneria di Porto di Mazara del Vallo
- Joint laboratory work, CNR-IAMC, sede di Mazara del Vallo

Since we had established contact with the Camera di Commercio di Palermo, we were able to access the CCIAA database upon our arrival, and have found their personnel helpful and cordial. In the last week, Dr Pipitone and I have completed our data gathering at the Capitaneria di Porto di Mazara del Vallo, and have begun incorporating our newly attained data into our existing database. Finally, we have drafted our long-distance collaboration work plan for the academic year 2014-2015.

General Introduction

The focus of our wider research is on the rise and fall of the maritime network that developed between Mazara del Vallo—a Sicilian fishing town located at the southwestern tip of Sicily, ninety nautical miles northeast of the African shore—and the North African coast in the aftermath of World War II. From the 1960s to the 1990s, the Mazara del Vallo fishing fleet exponentially grew and continuously expanded its operation to the North African fishing banks (followed by a later decline). After the war, and especially since the 1960s, the Mazara fleet saw increasing funding from the regional government of Sicily as a part of the massive governmental intervention through the *Cassa per il Mezzogiorno* and its affiliated entities. The maritime practice at the center of this expansion was motorized trawling, a fishing method that, unlike any other, transformed economic investment into southward spatial expansion, specifically into Tunisian and Libyan territorial waters.

Already by the end of World War II, the trawling fleet had begun the constant expansion of its fishing grounds to the south. In Mazara, this practice is still called “stealing fish [*rubare pesce*].” After independence in 1956, Tunisian patrol boats started to enforce the country's sovereignty in its



territorial waters. This post-colonial political situation brought about waves of arrests of the Mazara trawlers. After each arrest, a protocol for the trawler's release would be initiated, through both official and personal connections with Rome. In the continuous contacts and clashes that ensued, also known as "the Fish War," two interconnected and overlapping groups of subjects were formed: the fleet's "crafty captains [*capitani bravi*]" and its boat owners, who gradually entered the local and national political scene. Captains became famous and rich by fishing illegally in Tunisian waters, while doing their best not to get caught, arrested, or shot. The captains were goaded by their boat owners, who in turn rose to power through their mediated connections with the powers that be (in Rome and Palermo). Moreover, captains were expected to work until they themselves could own their own vessel.

Ownership structure initially followed kinship lines, and later diversified. Most owners who expanded their ownership bought their first boat during the 1960s, their second one during the 1970s, and their third and fourth one during the 1980s. The buying of a boat depended on grants and or loans, which were initially spread quite evenly (that is, with less effects of political affiliation). From the 1970s, political connections with either Rome or Palermo contributed to owners' ability to expand their fleets.

These political connections were summoned after each arrest. The more connected the boat owner, the higher rate of arrests per boat per year, and the faster the boat would be released. Each wave of arrests thus initiated a reactivation of political connections, which probably reaffirmed effective alliances and perhaps replaced less successful ones in favor of new connections. Owners' careers thus included the creation and manipulation of political connections, changing kinship and partnership strategies, the acquisition of funding and subsequent construction of new trawlers, and the periodical deployment of all connections for the liberation of an arrested trawler.

Through a reconstruction of "The Fish War," we show how continuous arrests of the town's trawlers solidified the fleet's operation and interlaced the town's vicissitudes with the maritime network of illicit mobility that gave the Channel scene a new kind of dynamics. This research project is built upon the combination of various archival sources in order to develop qualitatively-informed panel data analysis.

Project Description

In the last 5 years, Dr Vito Pipitone and I have constructed a quantitative database that captures the dynamic processes that shaped Mazara's history and produced its national and international importance. In our collaborative research projects, we are developing a quantitative microhistory of the relationship between contentious spatial expansion, class formation, and networks in the history of the Mazara fleet's operation in the Channel of Sicily.

Specifically, our research examines the effects of contentious spatial expansion on the relationship between political connections and economic behavior. We use panel analysis of yearly data for individual actors in order to examine the interaction between spatial, social, and political




dimensions of the Sicilian fleet's expansion. It uses of panel analysis of yearly data for individual actors, in order to examine the expansion of Italy's post-WWII largest fishing fleet (itself driven by technological development coupled with development politics) and the effects of [1] ships' arrests in North Africa, [2] political connections in Rome and Palermo, [3] technical modifications in the vessels, [4] national and regional investments, [5] as well as changing kinship and partnership relations, on boat owners' careers in the second half of the 20th century. The fleet played an important role in the increased attention that Italy paid to the Mediterranean and to its relationships with North African countries in 1960-2010.

These last two weeks have been crucial to our ability to consolidate our previous work and to plan our future collaboration. It is our aim to combine quantitative methods like historical network analysis, GIS methods, and panel data analysis with a broader ethnographically based, historically informed, cultural anthropology. This combination will serve us in promoting real and deep interdisciplinary research, which unites various methods and attentions from the earlier phases of research conception through joint publication, as the future of social sciences.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to the *Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche* for trust in our collaborative project, as well as for its continuing financial support and warm welcome at the CNR-IAMC, sede di Mazara del Vallo.

Sincerely,


Naor Ben-Yehoyada