

Maltese Fishing Villages



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Maltese Fishing Villages: The Fishers' Changing Identities

Stephanie Cumbo

**A dissertation presented in fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Maltese Studies**

June 2023



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DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

I, the undersigned, _____, declare that this dissertation is my original work, gathered and utilized especially to fulfill the purposes and objectives of this study, and has not been previously submitted to any other university for a higher degree. I also declare that the publications cited in this work have been personally consulted.

Signature

Date

Name in Block Letters

To my parents, Maria and Ċensu Cumbo,
and all the Maltese and Gozitan small-scale fishermen

Preface

This research focuses on the key protagonists of the Maltese fishing enterprise; the fishermen. Fish has become an everyday commodity and staple food, yet, given contemporary and complex supply chains systems, it is easy to forget the people who source this food for the costumer. To raise more awareness, and to generate an appreciation of fishermen, this research will explore their sense of identity and their own rationalisation of their existence. This study will open a window unto their world for a better appreciation of a community of people who are as colourful as their beautiful traditional fishing boats. Fishermen faced hard, yet natural dangers in the past. However, although today their life is made safer thanks to technology, they now face certain complexities, problems, and anxiousness most of which ensue from legislations and commercial interests that threaten their existence. Indeed, the fishermen's resilience is being put to the test each day albeit via completely new challenges that are a reflection of the changes society has gone through over the last decades.

Even though technology has made it possible for fisheries to substantially grow into industrial enterprises, small-scale fisheries continued to make use of traditional fishing methods. Since their fishing gear is both passive and selective, small-scale fishermen have always managed to make a living for themselves and their families whilst respecting nature's delicate balance. This is further accentuated by their seasonal switching to different species which enables stocks to recuperate while others are being targeted. To this end, small-scale fishermen have always adapted to nature's needs rather than exploit nature to meet theirs. Their sustainability, coupled with an array of other advantages, highlight the need to protect them which can only be achieved by understanding them. This research thus aims to capture an accurate a picture as possible of the Maltese small-scale fishery within an international context, with the information provided rendered even more relevant seeing as the greater part of the worldwide fisheries, as with the Maltese fishery, is small-scale in nature.

Being from Marsaxlokk, undisputedly the archipelago's main fishing village with strong familial ties with the sea, the subject has always piqued my interest. With paternal grandparents and their predecessors having been full-time fishers followed by my father who opted to being a part-timer with no fisher offspring to continue the legacy, a reality which is experienced by most fisher families, it soon became apparent that the small-scale sector is phasing out; a phenomenon which required explanations. Answers could only be provided through investigation and analyses, which gave rise to this research. The idea of delving into the subject was originally borne from the need to contribute to

my village's heritage. Seeing as I could not do so by taking up fishing myself, I went about it by researching on the subject which, back in 2013, translated in my Master's degree dissertation. Recognising the need to expand the territory and provide as wholesome a picture as possible of the Maltese small-scale fishing community, I decided to level up the research by including an array of fishing communities as found in different localities which bear an affinity to fishing. Some villages thus associated have already phased out whereas others have all but disappeared with few fishermen left to voice their concerns. Each subject area was researched in its entirety until all the possibilities were exhausted and the interrelationships which are leading to the fishermen's predicament have been explored. The contributing factors of those holding on against all odds have been studied and presented with the hope that action is taken to stabilise the situation and, preferably, to reverse the damage by catering for the sector's needs in a bid to ensure their survival. If left unchecked, an entire subculture with traditional and cultural ties deeply rooted in Maltese history and who remained true to the local identity, will be lost.

At this point I would like to take the opportunity to express my heartfelt thanks to all the people who supported me in one way or another throughout the research process. Special thanks go to my main supervisor Dr Rachel Radmilli whose dedication, advice and professional guidance helped me to continuously refine my work and keep me on track. Her enthusiasm and belief in my potential boosted my confidence and saw me through this journey. My appreciation also goes to my co-supervisor, Dr Alicia Bugeja Said. I would also like to express my gratitude to Prof. Henry Frendo who encouraged me into furthering my studies. A big thank you also goes to Prof. Carmel Cassar, director of the Institute of Maltese Studies, who met my requests and smoothed out any problems I encountered along the way. My appreciation also goes to Daniel Borg, former secretary at the institute.

My infinite gratitude goes to all the fishermen who participated in this study without whose contribution this work could not have been possible. They opened a window unto their mesmerizing world the like of which is hard to experience elsewhere. Their passion, enthusiasm and love harboured for their job explains why their disappointment and bitterness ensuing from uncomprehending outsiders is even more pronounced. They answered all my queries and were more than happy to provide additional help when required irrespective of being continuously on the go with little time to spare. Their expertise and vast knowledge on everything related to fishing is outstanding. Likewise, I would like to thank the women who accepted to be interviewed. The sacrifices borne by these formidable, yet humble women, is nothing short of their fishermen kin's. I would also like to take the

opportunity to commemorate the late Rosaria Grech who, apart from participating in the study, had been a long-time family friend and whose kindness knew no bounds.

A big thank you is also due to the retired boatbuilders whose masterpieces still grace our waters and whose work forms a quintessential part of the Maltese culture and legacy. Their craftsmanship, which can never be matched, is nowadays translated into to-scale traditional boat models reminiscent of their love for a job which is no more.

And finally, my heartfelt thanks go to the two most important people in my life; my parents, who have always encouraged me to pursue my dreams. Their unfailing support saw me through thick and thin and I owe all my life achievements to them. I have been thoroughly blessed in having them as parents.

Stephanie Cumbo

September 2022

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Introduction

What Are Small-Scale Fisheries?



Introduction

What Are Small-Scale Fisheries?

Fish and other marine derived products have long been considered an essential source of nutrition. Fossils from archaeological digs revealed that the origins of fishing can be attributed to pre-hominids some 500,000 years ago with its progressive development ensuing with the appearance of Homo sapiens¹. The huge development made since its first inception has enabled the consumption of a wide variety of fish and other sea products to become an everyday commodity. To be sure fish consumption increased steadily along the years from an average of 9.9 kg in the 1960s to 16.4 kg in 2005 per capita.² 'In 2013, fish accounted for about 17% of the global population's intake of animal protein and 6.7 % of all protein consumed.'³

Fisheries worldwide had to evolve and expand to meet the high demand. Consequently, upgrading of fishing techniques, boats, and eventually technology, ensued. Notwithstanding the inevitable changes that had to be undertaken by all the fisheries in developed countries, some took it to the next level and grew into exponentially large capitalistic enterprises. These fisheries have developed to such an extent that an altogether different categorisation from the rest of the fisheries was called for. They henceforth became known as industrial, large-scale fisheries as opposed to artisanal, small-scale fisheries. A thorough description of the latter and its distinction from the former is the quintessential element for setting the picture to this research seeing as it represents most of the Maltese fishery.

Defining Small-Scale/Artisanal Fisheries

Small-scale, as the name implies, refers to the small nature of the fishing craft used. On the other hand, the term artisanal refers to low levels of technology.⁴ The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) in its draft of the 'Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication' (SSF Guidelines) used both

¹ "The History of Fishing." Alimentarium. 15 December 2021 <<https://www.alimentarium.org/en/knowledge/history-fishing>>.

² "How Much Fish is Consumed Worldwide?" Greenfacts: Facts on Health and the Environment. 6 October 2021 <<https://www.greenfacts.org/en/fisheries/1-2/06-fish-consumption.htm>>.

³ "The Importance of Fish to Man: Not Just a Food Source." 27 July 2016. Masifundise: Development Trust. 6 October 2021 <<https://www.masifundise.org/the-importance-of-fish-to-man-not-just-a-food-source/>>.

⁴ *First Regional Symposium on Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, 27-30 November 2013, Saint Julian's Malta*. A. Srouf, N. Ferri, D. Bourdenet, D. Fezzardi and A. Nastasi (eds.) (Rome, FAO of the United Nations, 2015), 16. <<https://www.fao.org/3/i4861e/i4861e.pdf>>.

terms interchangeably and considers them to relate to one another and to refer to the same segment of fisheries.⁵ To this end the FAO issued the following description to encapsulate all the characteristics it holds to be representative of artisanal/small-scale fisheries.

Traditional fisheries involving fishing household (as opposed to commercial companies), using relatively small amount of capital and energy, relatively small fishing vessels (if any), making short fishing trips, close to shore, mainly for local consumption. In practice, definition varies between countries, e.g., from gleaning or a one-man-canoe in poor developing countries, to more than 20-m. trawlers, seiners, or long-liners in developed ones. Artisanal fisheries can be subsistence or commercial fisheries, providing for local consumption or export. They are sometimes referred to as small-scale fisheries.⁶

FAO also came up with a graphical representation to further highlight the inter-relationship between artisanal and small-scale fisheries in a way that combines both vessel-size; representative of small-scale, and degree of technology; representative of artisanal. It clearly shows that small boats have relatively low technological investments which increase as the dimensions get larger. In other words, small-scale fisheries are indeed artisanal in nature.

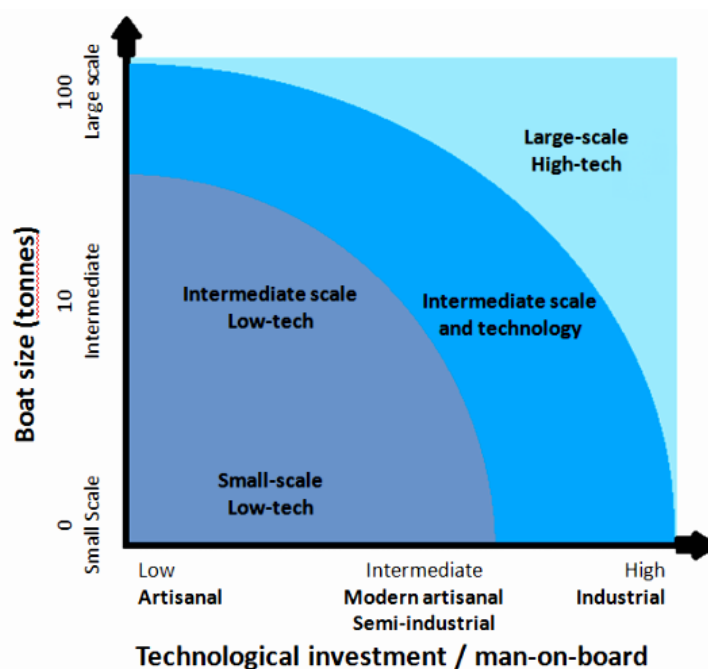


Diagram 1: Graphic definition of small-scale/artisanal fisheries and large-scale/industrial fisheries as per vessel size and technological investment

(Source: Artisanal Fisheries)⁷

⁵ *ibid.*, 15.

⁶ “Small-Scale and Artisanal Fisheries: Key Features of Small-Scale and Artisanal Fishing.” FAO, 27 November 2015 <<http://www.fao.org/fishery/topic/14753/en>>.

⁷ Diagram 1. Cf. “Artisanal Fisheries.” FAO, 22 July 2019 <<http://thefishproject.weebly.com/artisanal-fisheries.html>>.

From FAO's point of view, artisanal/small-scale fisheries can encompass fishing vessels larger than 20 meters. Europe is more restrictive in terms of size and places a 12-meter limit for vessels to classify within the said category as highlighted below:

Some clarification is provided under the provisions for European Fisheries Fund (EFF) support: Council Regulation (EC) No 1198/2006 on the EFF specifically refers to 'small-scale coastal fisheries' with Article 26 defining 'small-scale coastal fishing' as fishing carried out by fishing vessels of an overall length of less than 12 meters and not using towed gear. The Data Collection Framework (DCF) also makes a clear distinction between vessels over and under the 12m in length.⁸

The term small-scale fisheries as defined by the European Union (EU) will henceforth be used in this study in relation to the Maltese fishermen since most of them operate from less than 12-metre-long vessels.

Characteristics of Small-Scale/Artisanal Fisheries

The SSF Guidelines recognise that these fisheries tend to be deeply entrenched in their local communities, have a long-standing link to neighbouring fishing resources that can be traced back in history through generations, have strong values and traditions, and support social cohesion. In these fisheries, fishing is a way of life which is embedded in a cultural richness that is of global importance. Small-scale fishers are also directly dependent on the land adjacent to their fishery resources since it ensures and facilitates access to their fishery, provides space for fish processing and marketing, and is also important for housing and other livelihood support. Small-scale fisheries are family-based businesses with the owner of the boat going at sea himself, most often accompanied by other family members.⁹ The first regional symposium on sustainable small-scale fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea specified that these fishers operate from small ports and their fishing grounds are mainly comprised of inshore areas and areas that are difficult to access by trawlers including the rocky sea bed and canyons on the continental shelves.¹⁰ It further highlighted that small-scale fishing depends on a great number of different fishing techniques with over 50 different types of fishing gear being attributed to them with the most common used by Mediterranean based small-scale fisheries

⁸ Grazeme Macfadyen, Pavel Salz and Rod Cappell, *Characteristics of Small-Scale Coastal Fisheries in Europe* (Publications Office of the EU, 2012), 20.

⁹ *Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication* (Rome, FAO, 2015), x. <<https://www.fao.org/3/i4356en/i4356en.pdf>>.

¹⁰ *First Regional Symposium on Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, 27-30 November 2013, Saint Julian's Malta*. A. Srouf, N. Ferri, D. Bourdenet, D. Fezzardi and A. Nastasi (eds.) (Rome, FAO of the United Nations, 2015), 28. <<https://www.fao.org/3/i4861e/i4861e.pdf>>.

being static nets particularly gillnets and trammel nets.¹¹ Moreover, these fisheries are ‘species driven’, therefore, the gear used depends on the fish being targeted and is thus selective in nature. These fishers catch a high variety of species with up to one hundred different demersal fishes, several small and large pelagic species, and crustaceans. What species is targeted depends on multiple factors including the distance of the fishing ground from the coast, its depth, the sea bottom characteristics, and the time of the year. Their catch is prestigious and has a high economic value as it is generally sold fresh.¹² It has also been recognised that this sector’s fish commercialisation is most often the prerogative of the fisher’s family who may own a restaurant, a small shop or sell the fish in other villages. On other occasions the catch is sold to regular customers, is directly marketed to restaurants, or sold at the surrounding markets. Apart from these examples of straightforward selling, the marketing channels can be of a complex nature with several intermediates such as retailers and wholesalers being involved. Small-scale fisheries’ catches are mainly high-quality and exquisitely fresh due to the relatively short time it takes to its landing. It is also deemed prestigious due to the nature of its harvesting which is done with selective and non-destructive gear characteristic of small-scale fisheries.¹³ By specifically focusing on the small-scale fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, the characteristics highlighted by this symposium are an accurate description of the Maltese small-scale fishing enterprise.

Resilience is another characteristic for which small-scale fishing communities are renowned. Indeed, their survival and the handing down of large repertoires of skills and knowledge accumulated over the centuries from one generation to the next testify to their ability to survive the test of time. Their durability, irrespective of the transformations and challenges experienced in all spheres of life through the eons, attests to this reality which, within the context of communities, can be collectively referred to as ‘community resilience’ defined as ‘the ability of a community to cope with, and adapt to, social, economic, environmental and/or institutional change and utilise community resources to overcome adversity and take advantage of resultant opportunities.’¹⁴ Resilience theory specifically aimed at analysing the concept within communities interlinked with, and dependant on their natural surroundings, is analysed from a socio-ecological perspective by which the said communities are able ‘to adapt to change and reorganise after [a] disturbance, thereby maintaining ecological structure and

¹¹ *ibid.*, 20.

¹² *ibid.*, 27.

¹³ *ibid.*, 31.

¹⁴ Linda McElduff and Heather Ritchie, ‘Fostering Coastal Community Resilience: Mobilising People-Place Relationships’, *Area*, 1, 2 (2018), 187.

function and associated ecosystem services.’¹⁵ Any small-scale ecologically dependent community develops adaptive strategies from its deeply entrenched understanding of its relationship with the environment.¹⁶ To this effect in coastal fishing communities resilience is interlinked with the environment whereby both the diversity of the marine ecosystem and the integrity of the social aspect are maintained through the implementation of adaptive approaches that safeguard both dimensions.¹⁷ The approaches thus taken are influenced by the fisheries legislations in place, the community per se, the family units and the gender norms.¹⁸

The Decline of Small-Scale Fisheries

A more recent characteristic of small-scale fisheries is their relentless decline. Dramatic losses in terms of vessel numbers have been extensively suffered during the last two decades. Indeed, the number of small-scale boats has nearly halved between 1986 and 1996 in the French regions of *Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur* and *Languedoc-Roussillon*, whereas in the *Cilento* area in Italy the fleet experienced a reduction of around 25% between the 1995-1996 period and 2001.¹⁹ The situation is rendered even more alarming since the heavy losses occurred during a mere ten year, and a five-to-six-year period respectively. The following table presents the losses suffered by all countries except for a few.

	2000	2005	2010	% change 2000-2010
Belgium	S	1	1	0
Bulgaria	2,694	2,443	2,217	-18
Cyprus	706	824	962	36
Germany	1,886	1,772	1,369	-27
Denmark	3,176	2,619	2,318	-27

¹⁵ Erik Gómez-Baggethun, Victoria Reyes-García, Per Olsson and Carlos Montes, ‘Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Community Resilience to Environmental Extremes: A Case Study in Donana, SW Spain’, *Global Environmental Change*, xxii, 3 (2012), 640.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ Philip Symes, Jeremy Phillipson and Pekka Salmi, ‘Europe’s Coastal Fisheries: Instability and the Impacts of Fisheries Policy’, *Sociologia Ruralis*, lv, 3 (2015), 248.

¹⁸ Sarah Coulthard, ‘Can We Be Both Resilient and Well, and What Choices Do People Have? Incorporating Agency into the Resilience Debate from a Fisheries Perspective’, *Ecology and Society*, xvii, 1 (2012), 4.

¹⁹ Sílvia Gómez, Josep Lloret, Moteserrat Demestre and Victòria Riera, ‘The Decline of the Artisanal Fisheries in the Mediterranean Coastal Areas: The Case of Cap de Creus (Cape Creus)’, *Coastal Management*, xxxiv, 2 (2006), 218.

Spain	13,272	10,415	7,958	-40
Estonia	877	866	855	-3
Finland	3,544	3,244	3,266	-8
France	6,790	6,799	6,212	-9
Great Britain	6,294	5,791	5,369	-15
Greece	18,515	17,228	16,138	-13
Ireland	1,261	1,543	1,830	45
Italy	12,869	10,317	9,379	-27
Lithuania	310	196	124	-60
Latvia	812	746	685	-16
Malta	1,426	1,196	1,003	-30
Netherlands	367	254	316	-14
Poland	1,067	791	590	-45
Portugal	9,815	9,123	7,737	-21
Romania	388	419	453	17
Slovenia	146	155	165	13
Sweden	1,680	1,295	1,140	-32
TOTAL EU	87,894	78,037	70,087	-20

Table 1: Small-scale fisheries (SSF) trends in vessel numbers in EU Member States in the period 2000 - 2010

(Source: Small-Scale Coastal Fisheries in European Seas Are Not What They Were: Ecological, Social and Economic Changes)²⁰

The decline is mostly marked in Lithuania, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and Malta respectively; these being the countries which experienced a drop in small-scale fishing vessels by 30% or more in just 10 years. These drops imply that employment generated by small-scale fisheries has dropped by 20 to 30%. They have also experienced a loss of 30 to 50% in terms of income. Large reductions in small-scale fisheries in terms of boats less than eleven metres in length have also been experienced

²⁰ Table 1 Cf. Josep Lloret et al., 'Small-Scale Coastal Fisheries in European Seas Are Not What They Were: Ecological, Social and Economic Changes', *Marine Policy*, xeviii, (2018), 177.

in non-EU countries such as Norway, the reduction of which has been by 55% within the said time frame.²¹

This shows that even though fishers worldwide have long been known to be hardy people capable of handling difficult situations and renowned for their resilience, they can no longer cope with the changes. Researchers attribute the downfall of small-scale fishers to current policies.

Why the Need to Preserve and Study Small-Scale Fisheries?

Its early conception, the global expansion of the enterprise, and an ever increase in fish demand are indicators that fisheries are vital. The marine fishing sector alone is of great economic importance and is accountable for the direct employment of circa 28.5 million people worldwide. This number comprises both small-scale and large-scale fisheries with 95% of them being in Asia, Africa, and North America. Tens of millions more people are indirectly employed in the sector most of whom are women working in the fish processing industry.²²

Of further interest to this research is the extraordinary number of jobs generated by small-scale fisheries which are accountable for 90% of all fishing jobs. They also constitute 45% of the world's fisheries.²³ A quick look at these percentages clearly indicate that even though small-scale fisheries make up for less than half of the fisheries, they still manage to provide employment and livelihood to the bulk of fishers worldwide. On the other hand, their large-scale counterparts are responsible for only 10% of all fisheries employment. This explains why, amongst other things, small-scale fisheries are greatly valued for poverty eradication as they provide both employment and staple food for many local communities.²⁴ One can find equally interesting figures in Mediterranean EU countries where small-scale fisheries are accountable for about 80% of all fishing vessels²⁵ with the most common ranging between five to seven metres in length.²⁶ These provide direct employment to circa 100,000 people in the EU alone.²⁷ All the advantages of small-scale fisheries are encapsulated hereunder.

²¹ *ibid.*

²² David Rodriguez Rodriguez, *Artisanal Fisheries in the Mediterranean* (Marseille, MedPAN, 2014), 5. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350176828_Artisanal_fisheries_in_the_Mediterranean>.

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ *Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication* (Rome, FAO, 2015), ix. <<https://www.fao.org/3/i4356en/i4356en.pdf>>.

²⁵ Rodriguez Rodriguegez, 6.

²⁶ Macfadyen, Salz and Cappell, 14.

²⁷ Rodriguez Rodriguez, 6.

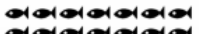
FISHERY BENEFITS	LARGE SCALE 	SMALL SCALE 
Subsidies	\$\$\$\$\$ 25-27 billion	\$ 5-7 billion
Number of fishers employed	 about 1/2 million	 over 12 million
Annual catch for human consumption	 about 30 million t	 same: about 30 million t
Annual catch reduced to fishmeal and oils	 35 million t	 Almost none
Annual fuel oil consumption	 about 37 million t	 about 5 million t
Catch per tonne of fuel consumed	 =  1-2 t	 =  4-8 t
Fish and other sealife discarded at sea	 8-20 million tonnes	 Very little

Diagram 2: Large-scale versus small-scale fisheries prevailing in most countries of the world

(Source: Funding Priorities: Big Barriers to Small-Scale Fisheries)²⁸

The catch contribution of the small-scale fisheries, which equals the one procured by industrial companies, is rendered even more noteworthy seeing that much less subsidies are invested in them.²⁹ Fewer expenses are incurred by small-scale fisheries since their devices are relatively inexpensive as opposed to large-scale vessels which require to be adequate for high-speed, long-distance travels and foul weather. Apart from fishing in more open seas close to the coast, the nature of small-scale fishing boats also allows them to fish in more restricted waters that are impossible to access by large boats. Less money is also spent on technological investments. Gadgets purchased by small-scale fisheries ‘are usually most profitably harvested, with superior returns on the capital invested compared to industrial fishing.’³⁰

²⁸ Diagram 2. Cf. Jennifer Jacquet and Daniel Pauly, ‘Funding Priorities: Big Barriers to Small-Scale Fisheries’, *Conservation Biology*, xxii, 4 (2008), 833.

²⁹ Rodriguez Rodriguez, 6.

³⁰ “Small-Scale and Artisanal Fisheries: Key Features of Small-Scale and Artisanal Fishing.” *FAO*. 27 November 2015 <<http://www.fao.org/fishery/topic/14753/en>>.

Subsistence is not only provided in terms of money but also in terms of fuel consumption. Small-scale fisheries use less than one-seventh of the fuel used by industrial companies even though they catch the same amount of fish which has the added advantage of being more environmentally friendly. Environmental friendliness is also evidenced by the amounts of by-catch generated. Due to the highly selective fishing methods/gears deployed by small-scale fishers only a small amount of by-catch is caught by the sector as opposed to large-scale fishers that catch and kill massive numbers of non-target fish, marine mammals, seabirds, and sea turtles amongst others. Another advantage that tends to be overlooked is the difference in the annual catch reduced to fishmeal and oils. Not being fit for human consumption, the fish used thus is generally referred to as 'trash' fish. The large-scale sector catches enormous amounts of these fish on purpose so it can be processed and used to feed aquacultured fish including salmon and tuna. The logic behind aquaculture is the alleviation of pressure on wild stocks, nonetheless, huge pressure is being placed on 'trash' fish stocks which form an integral part of marine ecosystems. Since small-scale fisheries do not target these species, they do not contribute towards environment degradation and the problems that ensue.³¹ Furthermore, large-scale fisheries target few fish species thus applying a lot of pressure on individual species while so doing. By catching the same tonnage from a much larger range of species, small-scale fisheries help in maintaining harmonic ecosystems in terms of equilibrium.³²

In addition to the above-mentioned advantages, small-scale fisheries are also beneficial from a sociological point of view. Apart from contributing towards poverty alleviation, small-scale fisheries also promote social cohesion. Since they are involved in shorter trips the activity tends to be more family friendly. The crew is usually composed of family members, friends or other members of coastal communities that share economic, cultural, and social interests. Women involvement, being either in terms of direct fishing, processing or the selling of the catch is 'essential to the maintenance of vibrant coastal communities.'³³

Irrespective of these manifold advantages, industrial fishing runs the show seeing as it involves mass harvesting, processing, and marketing of fish to supply worldwide markets. Being powerful, influential, and commercial in nature, industrial fishing manages to procure large profits. In 2017 alone the global market for commercial fishing was estimated to be around \$240.99 billion. By 2026

³¹ "Artisanal Fisheries." *FAO*. 22 July 2019 <<http://thefishproject.weebly.com/artisanal-fisheries.html>>.

³² Rodriguez Rodriguez, 6.

³³ Rodriguez Rodriguez, 6.

it is expected to rise to \$438.59 billion.³⁴ To this end, industrial fishing makes significant contributions to economies via a capitalistic regime as opposed to small-scale fisheries whose economic contribution is shared amongst all fishers and the wider community. Irrespective of the impressive sums generated by the monopolistic industrial sector, the reaps are envisaged to be short lived since their destructive mechanisms will cause irreversible damage to the environment which will in turn inflict hardships on worldwide communities. The damaged caused by the industrial sector is so extensive that,

[Should a moratorium be declared] on industrial scale fisheries for a term of five years, we would maintain most of today's fishing related employment, produce most of the catch that today reaches market for human consumption, reduce fuel costs dramatically, reduce subsidies even more dramatically, and otherwise invest in the future of the industry through its return to health, diversity, and sustainable future supply.³⁵

The founder and director of the World Ocean Observatory, Peter Neill, further explains that;

By limiting scale, we increase the efficiency and value of the global fishing enterprise, a reverse investment that generates greater return through savings, pricing, removal of public subsidy, continuity of work for a large majority of fishers, guaranteed supply over time, and the health of the communities where both fishers and consumers live.³⁶

The manifold advantages of small-scale fisheries highlight the importance and recognition due to them hence the need for further research to be conducted in this domain to better safeguard their interests and raise awareness of their viability to modern day society whose priorities encompass the elevation of poverty, community cohesion, food security, and environmental melioration before the situation deteriorates any further. To this end, this research aims to analyse the constituents of the small-scale fishing community of the Maltese Islands, analyse their adaptive mechanisms, and scrutinise the motives and elements that forge their resilience which has seen them through the test of time and enabled them to pass on the tradition from one generation to the next. Moreover, this research will also seek to uncover what is currently contributing towards their demise, to make good for the shortage of information on the subject, and to lend itself as a toolkit for policy makers to get an in-depth understanding of the Maltese small-scale fishery. It is hoped that relevant stakeholders

³⁴ "Commercial Fishing: How Global Food Choices Negatively Impact the Oceans." 28 September 2020. Sentient Media. 9 October 2021 <<https://sentientmedia.org/commercial-fishing/>>.

³⁵ Neill, Peter. "Industrial vs Small-Scale Fisheries: Time to Start Making Sense." 9 February 2017. World Ocean Observatory. 29 December 2021 <<https://medium.com/world-ocean-forum/industrial-vs-small-scale-fisheries-time-to-start-making-sense-1c7790f0dd62>>.

³⁶ *ibid.*

will act on the information to stop their demise and hopefully reverse the damage incurred before it is too late.

The local fishery is envisaged to greatly benefit from this study since it is primarily small-scale in nature with 93% of the local fleet made up of boats smaller than the <12m limit stipulated by the EU to classify as such and more pronouncedly so by the FAO expectations which claims that small-scale boats can be over 20m in length. The below table highlights the small-scale nature of the Maltese fishery which is rendered more pronounced seeing as 50% of the small-scale fleet is composed of boats that are shorter than 6m as per the 2015 DAF information:³⁷

Maltese Commercial Fleet						
Size of Vessel (meters)	<6	6-<12	12-<18	18-<24	24-<40	Total
Total Number of Vessels	504	431	24	33	10	1002
Percentage of Fleet	50.3%	43%	2.4%	3.3%	1%	100%

Table 2: The Maltese commercial fleet

(Source: Are the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines Sufficient to Halt the Fisheries Decline in Malta?)³⁸

As understood from table 1, the Maltese small-scale fishery is not the only one of its type facing the changing patterns of the tide. All the international small-scale fisheries are being hardly hit by the storm which equates to half of the worldwide fisheries and 80% of the European fisheries. The sheer numbers call for an overview of the predominant features that encapsulate what being a small-scale fisherman entails in its entirety. This includes an understanding of the age-old difficulties. The inherent dangers of any sea dependent job dominate, coupled with problems of a more recent nature that manifest themselves in restrictive legislations that render the whole enterprise even more unstable. Considering the sheer amount of multifaceted problems they face it is easy to question why, small-scale fishermen have not been completely phased out, yet. This study reveals the mechanisms that fuel the fishermen's resilience amongst which is the support received by fellow fishermen, the fishing community in general, and family members especially women. Further strength is drawn from their belief in the supernatural. But the most important contributor to the fishermen's resilience is undisputedly their love, indeed their *need* to venture out to sea. All these safety valve supporting

³⁷ Alicia Said, 'Are the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines Sufficient to Halt the Fisheries Decline in Malta?', in *The Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines: Global Implementation*, S. Jentoft, R. Chuenpagdee, M.J. Barragan Paladines, and N. Franz (eds.) Springer, Switzerland 2017, 217.

³⁸ Table 2. Cf. *ibid*.

mechanisms are predominant in all small-scale fisheries irrespective of nation, culture, race, and religion as research has proved time and again and evidenced by this study's theoretical review.

Chapter 1

Theoretical Review and Formulation of Research



Chapter 1

Theoretical Review and Formulation of the Research

1.1 Introduction

Having explored the research topic and its constituents in the introductory section, this chapter will further set the picture by presenting a review of the research carried out internationally on various topics related to the subject of interest and move on to provide a thorough explanation of the methodology used in this study from its formulation to its completion. An overview of what the subsequent chapters entail wraps up this chapter, but first a delineation of what is understood by ‘identity’ is called for, this being the key term of this research’s title, a term that is central to anthropology itself.³⁹

Being central to ethnography amongst others, it is next to impossible to review all the works that deal with the concept of identity and to try to summarise all the definitions ethnographers have put forth to conceptualise the term,⁴⁰ this being the research method best applied for anyone interested in studying issues related to identity as it allows researchers to obtain a thorough understanding of the group being studied, comprehend the reflexivity of the group’s identity, and experience first-hand what identity means in practical terms.⁴¹

The work of Erik Erikson delved extensively on the concept of individual identity⁴² whereas Henri Tajfel developed the idea of social identity theory to contrast what he perceived to be a representation of an individualist prejudice in American psychology. Amongst others, Tajfel demonstrated that people use social categories to identify both themselves and others.⁴³ This rises from ‘the fundamental idea of humans as social beings, created by society and bounded in their personality by norms and values shared with others.’⁴⁴ When people identify themselves thus, they possess ‘we’ social identities as opposed to ‘me’ social identities. In other words, they recognise themselves as ‘who we are’ rather

³⁹ Peter Finke and Martin Sökefeld, ‘Identity in Anthropology’, in *The International Encyclopaedia of Anthropology*, Hilary Callan (ed.) Wiley Blackwell, 2018.

⁴⁰ Laura Adams, ‘Techniques for Measuring Identity in Ethnographic Research’, in *Measuring Identity: A Guide for Social Scientists*, Rawi Abdelal, Yoshiko M. Herrera, Alastair Iain Johnston and Rose McDermott (eds.) Cambridge University Press, 2009, 316.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, 318.

⁴² Finke and Sökefeld.

⁴³ Peggy A. Thoits and Lauren K. Virshup, ‘Me's and We's: Forms and Functions of Social Identities’, in *Self and Identity: Fundamental Issues*, R. D. Ashmore and L. J. Jussim (eds.) Oxford University Press, 1997, 114.

⁴⁴ Finke and Sökefeld.

than ‘who /I am’.⁴⁵ Indeed, social identities, also termed collective identities, is hugely based on categorisation and classification, and perceived by comparisons drawn between ‘us’ and ‘them’. To this end, much of the literature on identity focuses on the nature of the indicators that define the boundaries set for an identity which contrast with others.⁴⁶ Adams (2009), remarks on the importance of examining ‘changes in and the contestation within groups about where those boundaries lie and what exactly is enclosed within them’ when looking for indicators of identity.⁴⁷

Being categorised as small-scale fishermen, the group has many indicators which classify them as such and by which they share a collective and social identity which sets them apart from their industrial counterparts. Apart from a shared restriction in vessel size and technological investment, their identity is also set apart and shaped by its unique characteristics which are heavily based on culture, history, values, traditions, the social dimension, and familial aspects as delineated in this research’s introduction. Other indicators as to their collective and shared social identities include the dangerous nature of the job, the legislative repercussions they are subjected to, the strong communal and familial support they receive, and their adherence to religious and supernatural beliefs, aspects which will be minutely examined both internationally as presented in the subsequent theoretical framework, and locally when the said identity markers/indicators will be evaluated within the Maltese context.

1.2 In Support of the Research Study: The Theoretical Framework

Fishing is a treacherous profession. Difficulties emanate from every aspect of the fishermen’s daily lives due to the unpredictable nature of their work ranging from the continuous regulations enacted with the aim of controlling the enterprise down to the labouring days they spend both at sea and onshore. The spirit of the fishermen’s instability is captured in Symes’ and Phillipson’s (2009) remark;

Regular employment and stable incomes are not conditions normally associated with fisheries. Seasonality, severe weather, fluctuations in stock abundance and market instability all conspire to inject abnormally high levels of risk and uncertainty into revenues from fishing. Moreover, it is one of a very few areas of a modern economy where remuneration is not governed by hourly wage rates

⁴⁵ Thoits and Virshup, 114.

⁴⁶ Finke and Sökefeld.

⁴⁷ Adams, 322.

but by a system of fixed shares in the proceeds from the fishing trip, graduated according to status and experience.⁴⁸

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1.2.1 Living Perilously

The most obvious hardship which is part and parcel of being a fisherman and has always been interlinked with the domain is the hard work and unsafe nature of the job. It is widely known that fishing is a very dangerous occupation to the extent that it has the worst possible safety record. The International Labour Office confirmed that about 24,000 fishermen and personnel involved in fish farming and processing are killed every year, ranking fishing and related occupations amongst the most dangerous of all occupations. In the United States alone, the mortality rate in the fishing industry for the year 1996 was sixteen times higher than it was for firefighting or police work and forty times the national average. Denmark's fisheries' fatality rate from 1989 to 1996 was twenty-five to thirty times higher than for land-based jobs.⁴⁹ The dangerous nature of fishing is further highlighted when compared with other seafaring occupations since the number of lost and missing people is much higher in the case of fishing vessels than it is for oil tankers.⁵⁰ In the United Kingdom alone, there have been 120 deaths at sea between 1994 and 1998.⁵¹

In a study carried out with the aim of investigating the medical emergencies and injuries incurred by Scottish fishermen while at sea working in different fisheries revealed that incidents are not uncommon. About 21% of the participants claimed that, at some point in their career, they had been involved in medical emergencies that required them to be taken ashore for immediate treatment. When asked about injuries at sea, a total of 74.6% of the respondents claimed that they had experienced a work-related injury. A multitude of injuries were mentioned with the five most common being back injuries (32%), leg or arm injuries (21.7%), lacerations (21.6%), other hand injuries (19.5%) and head injuries (15.6%).⁵²

⁴⁸ David Symes and Jeremy Phillipson, 'Whatever became of Social Objectives in Fisheries Policy?', *Fisheries Research*, xcv, 1 (2009), 2.

⁴⁹ "Fishing Among the Most Dangerous of All Professions, Says ILO." 13 December 1999. *International Labour Organization*. 08 November 2021 <https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_071324/lang--en/index.htm>.

⁵⁰ Chandrika Sharma. "Choppy Seas, Unsafe Work." December 1997. *Dialogue, Proposal, Stories for Global Citizenship*. 27 November 2015 <<http://base.d-p-h.info/en/fiches/premierdph/fiche-premierdph-3954.html>>.

⁵¹ Thane Lawrie et al., 'Medical Emergencies at Sea and Injuries Among Scottish Fishermen', *Occupational Medicine*, xxix, 3 (2003), 159.

⁵² *ibid.*, 161.

Weather is another cause for concern with the worst conditions being characteristic of autumn and winter. In his study of deep-sea fishing, Jensen (1997) noted that of all the dangerous situations, fishermen fear mostly sailing in and out of harbour, icing up, and waves. Sometimes, the seas break right over the ship making it difficult to hold on with the most challenging tasks being the casting and hauling of fishing gear. Even though seasickness was not a major concern, headaches, dizziness, and tension were mentioned. More than half of the fishermen mentioned the difficulty of getting sleep due to the vibration, noise and rolling. Some of them reported being afraid during hurricanes. With regards to physical concerns, many fishermen complained of musculoskeletal problems. Lack of adequate rest and sleep increased the chances of injury. The body is also negatively affected by the continuous rolling and an increased risk of damage to the lumbar region which is a possibility even during fine weather.⁵³ These results were yielded from studies conducted in deep-sea fishing, however, some features are common across all fisheries. These include;

...exposure to cold, wind, rough seas, substantial participation of physical effort, frequency of injuries during work, unpredictability and abruptness of threats, equipment failure, everyday psychological stress, and constant economic pressure.⁵⁴

It has been speculated that the loss of life and accidents in small-scale fishing fleets 'may equal or even exceed that on commercial fleets' since these boats are smaller and most often poorly equipped. Since no reliable casualty data is available, it has been estimated that each year circa 12,000 men and 45,000 boats from the small-scale fisheries are lost each year. The areas in which losses and accidents occur the most are Japan, Korea, East Africa and off the coasts of Britain.⁵⁵

A study with the aim of analysing the hazards encountered by Polish coastal and beach fishing revealed that the dangers encountered on board by fishermen are manifold. Foremost is the discomfort of having to perform duties in uncomfortable positions and on slippery decks. Water flooding and humidity are both threatening to fishermen. These conditions, along with operating heavy equipment, can cause injuries in addition to musculoskeletal disorders. Injuries are not uncommon especially in the hand region mostly caused by hooks and some species of fish. Bruises and frostbite are also a possibility. The diverse flora and fauna can also pose a threat to allergic skin diseases. All the above

⁵³ Olaf C. Jensen, 'Health Hazards while Fishing in Heavy Weather', *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, liv, 2 (1997), 141.

⁵⁴ Maria Jeżewska, Marta Grubman-Nowak, Irena Leszczyńska and Bogdan Jaremin, 'Occupational Hazards for Fishermen in the Workplace in Polish Coastal and Beach Fishing – A Point of View', *International Maritime Health*, lxiii, 1 (2012), 40.

⁵⁵ Chandrika Sharma. "Choppy Seas, Unsafe Work." December 1997. Dialogue, Proposal, Stories for Global Citizenship. 27 November 2015 <<http://base.d-p-h.info/en/fiches/premierdph/fiche-premierdph-3954.html>>.

coupled with strain and stress can have serious repercussions on fishermen that can lead to occupational diseases such as traumas, musculoskeletal disorders, digestive tract allergies, addictions, and psychoneurosis. Skin related ailments including discolouration, calluses and cancers caused by UVA/UVB can result from the body's exposure to cold, sun, and seawater. Fishermen also run the risk of losing their life in terms of drowning or hypothermia.⁵⁶

Nonetheless, the most dangerous diseases afflicting fishermen are those of the circulatory system. These result from disproportionate physical activities, disturbance of the biological rhythm, stress, extreme workload, responsibility, interpersonal conflicts, and fear of losing the job. Other frequent ailments include arthritis and eye injuries.⁵⁷ This job requires fishermen to work day and night irrelevant of statutory free days and public holidays. Small boats typical of small-scale fishing, allows little space for specialisation which induces fishermen to perform all the necessary activities on board. Lack of prediction in weather, sea condition, catch, and earnings can lead to substantial levels of stress.⁵⁸

1.2.2 Legislative Repercussions

Even though the above-mentioned strenuous work- and weather-related difficulties have their toll on the fishermen's overall wellbeing, they are accepted as part of this job. The same, however, cannot be said of the human induced legislative emanating hardships which are increasing relentlessly and the main contributors to the ever-dwindling small-scale fisheries. This naturally calls for a thorough scrutiny of the topic seeing as this study addresses the fishermen's hardcore resilience, what fuels it and, ultimately, what is demoralising even the strongest amongst them.

To begin with, proper understanding of how legislations affect fishermen requires an understanding of the intricate process by which they are formulated and implemented. Within the European context, all the fisheries of the countries embodied within the European Union (EU) are managed via the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) which is 'a set of rules for managing European fishing fleets and for conserving fish stocks.'⁵⁹ Its control of the fisheries is based on the establishment of total allowable catches (TACs) which stipulate the amount of fish that can be caught from any given area,

⁵⁶ Jeżewska, Grubman-Nowak, Leszczyńska and Jaremin, 40-1.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 47.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, 41-2.

⁵⁹ "The Common Fisheries Policy (CFP): Management of EU Fisheries." European Commission. 27 July 2015 <http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/index_en.htm>.

by controlling the technical aspect of the industry such as closed areas and seasons, by implementing gear regulations and the minimum size of fish that can be caught, and finally by limiting the fishing effort which is achieved by reducing the fleets' capacity and reducing the time they can spend at sea.⁶⁰

The formulation of the CFP commences with the assessment of fish stocks by a group of scientists from the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES). The results are in turn discussed by the ICES Advisory Committee on Fishery Management (ACFM) who produces scientific advice based on the results which is passed onto the European Commission. In turn, the Commission embarks on discussions with other departments and committees such as the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee on Fisheries (STECF) and the European Parliament Fisheries Committee to formulate a proposal. The proposal is sent forward to the Council of Ministers, which is made up of national ministers from the member states, who, in turn, has the final say as to the formulation of the regulations to be established in the CFP.⁶¹ The following illustration outlines the whole process;

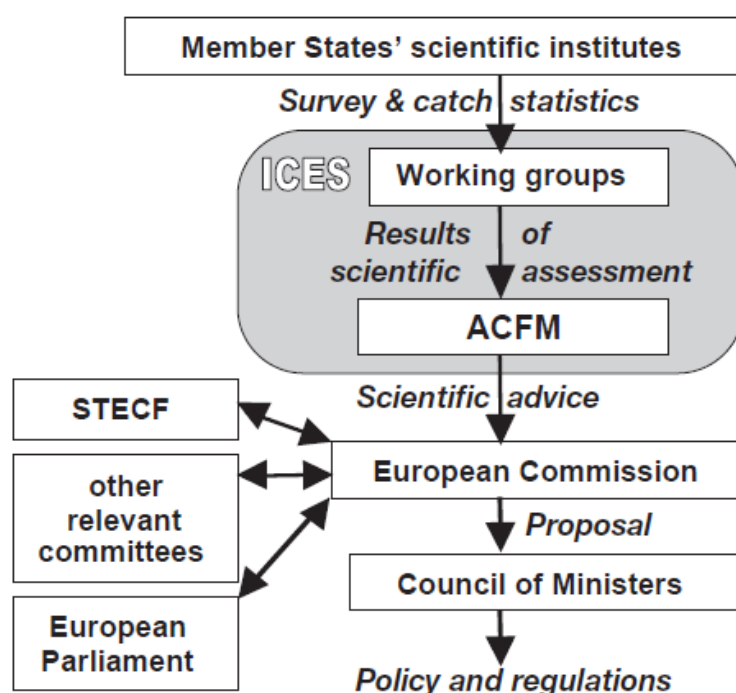


Diagram 3: The process by which the policies and regulations are formulated

(Source: Fisheries Science and Sustainability in International Policy: A Study of Failure in the European Union's Common Fisheries Policy)⁶²

⁶⁰ Tim Daw and Tim Gray, 'Fisheries Science and Sustainability in International Policy: A Study of Failure in the European Union's Common Fisheries Policy', *Marine Policy*, xxix, 3 (2005), 189.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, 190.

⁶² Diagram 3. Cf. *ibid.*

It is widely held that this system of policy making has failed in its objective to provide for sustainable fishing regardless of the scientific advice. Daw and Gray (2005) give three reasons for this shortcoming with the first being that the scientific advice provided at the preliminary stage is rarely given consideration at the policy stage. Secondly, the measures suggested by the scientists are often postponed and thirdly, there is poor enforcement of the CFP regulations. As to the latter, illegal landings, and discards amongst others, result in inaccurate recording of catches and higher fish mortality levels than the one predetermined by scientists.

Deficiencies also emanate from the fisheries science itself with the most prominent being the ‘high levels of uncertainty.’ Scientific research tends to focus its energy on the study of single fish species. It fails to perceive the marine environment as a complex ecosystem with interactions amongst its various components.⁶³ This trend is on the mend since an ecosystem perspective is being gradually implemented.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, an ecosystem approach, regardless of how accurate it may be, ‘cannot tell us how to manage fisheries; they can only predict the various ecological states that will be obtained under different levels of exploitation.’⁶⁵ The ecosystem analysis also fails to take into account negative impacts on fish stock other than fishing including consumption by whales, birds, seals and fish higher up in the food chain. Fish abundance is also affected by climate change.⁶⁶

Moreover, the scientific research is narrowly based on the biological assessment and derives its conclusions almost exclusively from the annual stock assessments. As Symes and Hoefnagel (2010) point out, ‘fisheries science may have developed an immunity to criticism and an unwillingness to give serious consideration to alternative theories of fish stock management.’⁶⁷ The high level of uncertainties throughout the scientific research process induces the general public and fishermen to question its reliability.⁶⁸ Many regulations are concerned with restricting the use of specific gears, however, the reason why such regulations are enacted and their effect on the environment are not specified. There is no study dealing with the changes in fish stocks because of the legislative changes in the Mediterranean region.⁶⁹

⁶³ *ibid.*, 193.

⁶⁴ David Symes and Ellen Hoefnagel, ‘Fisheries Policy, Research and the Social Sciences in Europe: Challenges for the 21st Century’, *Marine Policy*, xxxiv, 2 (2010), 268.

⁶⁵ Daw and Gray, 193.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 194.

⁶⁷ Symes and Hoefnagel, 268.

⁶⁸ Daw and Gray, 193.

⁶⁹ S. Matić-Skoko, N. Stagličić, A. Pallaoro, M. Kraljević, J. Dulčić, P. Tutman and B. Dragičević, ‘Effectiveness of Conventional Management in Mediterranean Type Artisanal Fisheries’, *Estuarine, Coastal and Shelf Science*, xci, 2 (2011), 322.

1.2.2.1 Total Allowable Catches

As mentioned at the start of this section, one of the mechanisms employed by the CFP is the allocation of Total Allowable Catches (TACs). TACs, also referred to as fishing opportunities, are designated catch limits set for most commercial fish stocks and usually expressed in terms of tonnes or numbers. As with CFPs, the European Commission prepares proposals for TACs on a yearly basis for most fish stocks as based on stock assessments carried out by ICES and STECF with the final decision being taken by the Council of Ministers. They are in turn distributed amongst the EU Member States as national quotas. TACs are also agreed upon by non-EU countries that happen to share fish stocks with Member States.⁷⁰ A case in point is Norway. Even though not an EU country, Norway submits to the setting of TACs for joint stocks. A study carried out by Gezelius (2002) in Uerhaven, a Norwegian fishing community, highlights the difficulties that emanate from TACs. As with many fishing communities, Uerhaven is in decline. The TAC in this community is distributed amongst the fishing vessels according to size and between different seasons of the year, however, no share of the TAC is guaranteed with the result that saithe fisheries used to be temporary closed during 1997 affecting more than half of the professional fishermen in the area. A certain amount of saithe was still allowed to be caught as by-catch while fishing for other stocks. Regardless this incentive, many fishermen remained ashore since fishing for other groundfish proved to be impossible without catching illegal amounts of saithe as by-catch. The country's government is entitled to confiscate the value of illegal catches which results in economic loss for the fishermen. Hardships resulting from this situation leads many Uerhaven fishermen to falsify the purchase slip whose aim is to record information on the species and amount of fish landed. In view of the current situation, it comes as no surprise that this infringement of regulations is the most reported in Norwegian fisheries.⁷¹

A case of inequality in quota allocation by the State is the United Kingdom (UK) whereby the quota is specifically allocated to the Producer Organisations. This is done at the expense of owners of less than 10m long vessels whose quota allocation is managed by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO). In this case, owners of smaller vessels are discriminated against and under-represented by the over 10m vessel owners. The incongruity of this situation is better understood when considering the number of personnel and vessels involved in each sector. The inshore fishery, which comprises the smaller vessels, and is composed of 2500 boats employing 3000 full-time fishermen receive a

⁷⁰ "TACs and Quotas: Managing Fish Stocks." European Commission. 10 August 2015 <http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/fishing_rules/tacs/index_en.htm>.

⁷¹ Stig S. Gezelius, 'Do Norms Count? State Regulations and Compliance in a Norwegian Fishing Community', *Acta Sociologica*, xlv, 4 (2002), 308.

meagre 8% of the annual quota whereas the larger vessel fleet, which embodies circa 600 boats employing 1700 people, get the rest of the share. This situation has led to the unemployment of many small-scale fishermen and disputes with the government.⁷²

Another case of injustice was brought forward by two Icelandic fishermen against the government's quota allocation since distinction was being made between two groups of fishermen with one group in possession of quota shares and their ability to sell or lease them to other fishermen, and the other which is left with no option other than to buy or rent the quota from the former. It was deemed inappropriate to sell and profit from quota shares that were given free by the state.⁷³

1.2.2.2 Marine Protected Areas

Amongst other measures taken by the CFP is the establishment of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) with the purpose of conserving exploited fish species. Research has concluded that abundance, individual mean size, and spawning biomass of fish in MPAs is usually greater when compared with marine areas that are not thus protected.⁷⁴ MPAs are also being implemented as a shift towards an ecosystem approach over the single-species approach.⁷⁵

Various studies were carried out with the intention of studying the effects of MPAs on small-scale fishermen in different countries amongst which is Gómez et al. (2006)'s study in Cape de Creus, in the north-western region of the Mediterranean.⁷⁶ In 1998 an MPA was established in the region with the aim of preserving both marine life and small-scale fishing. To this end, purse-seine and trawling activities were banned with its establishment.⁷⁷ Notwithstanding this change, the regulations continued to be occasionally breached resulting in disputes between the small and large-scale fishermen.⁷⁸ This study revealed that even though some fish species benefitted from the MPA, others experienced a decline. The first is true of mobile fish species and the latter of less mobile species that are easily targeted and affected by spearing and anchoring. Furthermore, the study also revealed that

⁷² Julie Urquhart, Tim Alcott, Matt Reed and Paul Courtney, 'Setting an Agenda for Social Science Research in Fisheries Policy in Northern Europe', *Fisheries Research*, cviii, 2-3 (2011), 242.

⁷³ Symes and Phillipson, 2.

⁷⁴ Amber H. Himes, 'Small-Scale Sicilian Fisheries: Opinions of Artisanal Fishers and Sociocultural Effects in Two MPA Case Studies', *Coastal Management*, xxxi, 4 (2003), 389.

⁷⁵ Gómez, Lloret, Demestre and Riera, 220.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, 224.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, 220.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, 224-5.

there was no evidence that the MPA ‘had a positive impact on the overall landings and revenues...therefore, the creation of the MPA did not significantly influence the evolution of the [small-scale] fisheries in Cape Creus.’⁷⁹

Himes (2003) conducted a study on two MPAs established in north-eastern Sicily to determine whether the management regimes take in consideration the interests of the local small-scale fishery.⁸⁰ All bottom-towed gears has been banned from The Gulf of Castellammare Fishery Reserve as from 1990 allowing only small-scale and recreational fishermen to fish within the area.⁸¹ The majority of the fishermen claimed that the reserve management was effective, however, they felt disappointed that they had no say in the management and were not being well-represented. Moreover, one of the main deficiencies reported was the occasional unregulated trawling activity which was taking place illegally.⁸² Regardless these limitations, fishermen evaluated this MPA positively by claiming that their average daily catch had increased since its creation. Exceptions to the rule were fishermen from Terrasini who experienced considerable loss since its establishment. Seeing as this village lies on the northern outskirts of the reserve boundary, many trawlers focus their fishing effort in the vicinity with the hope of catching any spill over of fish from the MPA resulting in fewer fish for the small-scale fishery.⁸³

The second MPA researched by Himes (2003) was the Egadi Islands Reserve. Like the other reserve in the study, fishermen commented on their exclusion from the decision-making process and on not being listened to either by the director or the town council which resulted in mistrust between the fishermen and the management team. All fishermen agreed on the inadequacy of the surveillance, nonetheless, refrained from criticizing the system from fear of more rigorous enforcement in their confront.⁸⁴ Overall, fishermen in the area were not negatively hit, largely because fishing activities didn’t have to change drastically. Nonetheless, drastic negative changes were experienced in Marettimo, one of the Egadi Islands stationed within the reserve. Since its establishment fishermen from the island have had to travel further from the coast seeing as it ‘is almost completely surrounded by restrictive zones, a no-entry zone on the western shore, and limited entry zone surrounding another 50% of the island.’ To add insult to injury, the reserve zone encompasses the most productive waters.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, 228.

⁸⁰ Himes, 391.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, 392.

⁸² *ibid.*, 398-400.

⁸³ *ibid.*, 402.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, 398-400.

In turn, competition between local boats and others coming from mainland Sicily in the reserve waters increased exponentially this being the main reason why fishermen from the island feel that their fishing grounds have been taken away from them. As with the other MPA major problems were inflicted by illegal trawling within 300m of the shoreline. The illicit activity incurred devastating destruction of the small-scale fishermen's gear. Further damage ensued from the increased competition with recreational fishermen. Due to all these difficulties, the catch per unit effort decreased drastically. 'Fishers are now fishing for the same amount of time but catching substantially less.'⁸⁵

Gibbs (2007) revealed the impact of MPAs on New Zealand fisheries; a country where, like Malta, Individual Transferable Quotas (ITQs) are almost exclusively responsible for the management of fisheries. The fishermen in possession of the quota can 'harvest a proportion of the total allowable catch (TAC) within' fisheries management areas (FMAs) of which ten are established in New Zealand's surrounding waters. Problems emanate when fishermen are denied from exercising their right to fish from lack of access to fishing grounds. Even though the FMAs in which fishing can be carried out are extensively large, other stakeholders are continuously closing off areas hence reducing the fishing space. Amongst these, one can mention MPAs, aquaculture facilities, and offshore wind farms. In the case of the first, the areas which are mostly favoured to be closed off as protected areas also happen to be the most yielding fishing grounds.⁸⁶ In Gibbs' (2007) words;

...despite the large FMAs where the quota is allocated to, increasing pressure for further no-take marine-protected areas will inevitably restrict fishers' access to fishing grounds and more than likely increase the costs of fishing that will act to reduce the value of individual ITQs, thus impinging upon private property rights. Threats to the value of these rights may also ultimately act to reduce the attractiveness of quota for investors.⁸⁷

As can be deduced from the above case studies, MPAs, even though beneficial in general, can cause immediate problems to fishermen by impeding them from making a decent living. MPAs do take in consideration both the biological and social issues; nonetheless, these tend to be contradictory. MPAs can be both successful in achieving the biological goals and a failure in meeting the social goals as they don't promote broad participation in the management system. Patrick et al. (2003) claim that MPAs, as with CFPs, will not be successful unless social sciences are included in both the design and

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 402-4.

⁸⁶ Mark T. Gibbs, 'Lesser-Known Consequences of Managing Marine Fisheries Using Individual Transferable Quotas', *Marine Policy*, xxxi, 2 (2007), 112-4.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, 114.

evaluation processes. In their words one of the main challenges MPAs face is their adaptation ‘to the exigencies of local situations, recognising that each location has its unique social, cultural and ecological contexts that influence the trajectory of MPA implementation and impact.’⁸⁸ The exclusion of the social sciences, which may well be accountable to most of the legislative measures negatively impacting small-scale fisheries, is a well-known deficiency in fisheries management systems as discussed in the following section.

1.2.2.3 The Exclusion of Social Sciences in Policy Making

Unlike most Third World countries where social issues – including food security, employment, fairness, fair trade and the protection of the individual and community fishing rights – are very much to the forefront of fisheries development, in Europe, North America and Australasia the social objectives of fisheries policy have all but disappeared from view.⁸⁹

With this statement Symes and Phillipson (2009) shed light on the fisheries management system of many countries. A transfer of authority over the fisheries from the national governments to the European institutions is the cause of this predicament in the EU.⁹⁰ Hoefnagel and Symes (2010) recognise three main reasons why social scientists are reluctant to assume an active role in policy making. Firstly, the linear and partial view of problems induces each discipline to formulate its own solutions without the cooperation of other disciplines. The social sciences, along with the natural and economic disciplines, are susceptible to this trend. As of late, progress is being made in applying a multidisciplinary approach which blurs the ‘disciplinary roots’ of the social sciences. Secondly, the social scientists, contrary to the natural and economic sciences respectively, lack a legitimised research centre and a permanent secretariat. In the natural sciences’ case, the research body forms the ICES and is based in Copenhagen. The economic aspect has been catered for by the European Association of Fisheries Economics for over 20 years, the findings of which can be represented in an annual conference. An effort to resuscitate the social sciences was made back in 1996 with the establishment of the European Social Science Fisheries Network (ESSFiN). This was funded for three years by the European Commission. Nonetheless, it didn’t result in a permanent establishment. Today, the MARE symposium in Amsterdam serves as a proxy to the social scientists. The third

⁸⁸ Patrick Christie, Bonnie J. McCay, Marc L. Miller, Celia Lowe, Alan T. White, Richard Stoffle, David L. Fluharty, Liana Talaue McManus, Ratana Chuenpagdee, Caroline Pomeroy, Daniel O. Suman, Ben G. Blount, Daniel Huppert, Rose Liza Villahermosa Eisma, Enrique Oracion, Kem Lowry, Richard B. Pollnac, ‘Toward Developing a Complete Understanding: A Social Science Research Agenda for Marine Protected Areas’, *Fisheries*, xxviii, 12 (2003), 22-4.

⁸⁹ Symes and Phillipson, 1.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

problem lies in failing to recognise the contribution that the social sciences can play in understanding how the regulations and policies are interpreted by the fishing communities and thus their reasons for adherence or lack of conformity to the rules. The social sciences could also help in recognising the hardships inflicted on the fishing communities with the implementation of regulations and provide plausible solutions instead of leaving the emanating problems to the care of the regional development policy areas and social welfare.⁹¹ An exception to the rule was provided in the early 1990s when a socio-economic study of the fisheries dependent areas was set up by the Commission and repeated less than 10 years later. Notwithstanding, this research was mainly conducted by economic consultants and the role it was meant to play remained unclear. The results were hardly implemented in the subsequent 1992 and 2002 CFPs.⁹² The European Commission funds many projects linked directly with the fisheries, but ‘only a small proportion incorporate social objectives.’⁹³ As Symes and Hoefnagel (2010) explain;

A major source of funding for applied research is the European Commission itself, through a series of Quadrennial Framework Programmes (FPs) dating back to the 1980s and covering a wide spectrum of EU policy areas. The overall level of funding for fisheries has risen by over 30% from €117 million in 1994-1998 (FP4) to €153 million in 2002-2006 (FP6) although allocations specifically earmarked for fisheries and aquaculture have declined. The nature of the research funded by the Commission has also changed with fewer but larger projects, a strengthening of a multidisciplinary approach and a selection of topics to reflect changing policy needs. Some things do not change, with the contribution from the social sciences remaining all but invisible.⁹⁴

Hoefnagel and Symes (2010) further argue that 55% of the fisheries research in policy making is carried out in traditional areas including biological and environmental aspects along with 13% in food quality and safety. This contribution is deemed appropriate since there has been a redirection from the old-fashioned single species approach to ecosystem biology. Nonetheless, other important aspects are practically non-existent with multi-annual management plans receiving 3% of the funding, 3% for cost effective management, another 3% allocated to marine protected areas, 2% for fleet management and ultimately 0% for the socio-economic impacts.⁹⁵ As Symes and Phillipson (2009) put it;

The attitude of the European Commission to the social dimension of fisheries policy is ambivalent. It follows a pattern common throughout much of the developed world in acknowledging the

⁹¹ Symes and Hoefnagel, 269-270.

⁹² *ibid.*, 270.

⁹³ Urquhart, Alcott, Reed and Courtney, 423.

⁹⁴ Symes and Hoefnagel, 271.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

significance of social issues but refraining from translating this awareness into explicit objectives let alone operational practices. Rather than serving as an active influence in shaping fisheries policy, social issues are seen rather more as the irritating consequences of policy. At best they are considered late in the policy process and usually dealt with in an *ad hoc* manner.⁹⁶

Unpleasant consequences are bound to occur if sound social objectives are not developed in the early stages of the policy process.⁹⁷ The social sciences can help policy makers understand that for fishermen, fishing is not merely a job, but is also ‘a social and cultural way of life.’⁹⁸ Apart from providing satisfaction ‘they are extremely proud of their identity as fishers, even when they fish only part-time.’⁹⁹ The thorough embodiment of fishing in their identity has been revealed by many studies (see section 1.2.3). By consulting the social sciences fisheries managers will be able to develop policies which balance the economic, biological, and social dimensions. This will ensure a higher level of compliance from the fishermen’s behalf which will in turn result in reduced enforcement costs.¹⁰⁰ Apart from focusing almost exclusively on general issues related to employment, economic stability and social inclusion when dealing with marine fisheries, the social sciences should also focus on ‘culture, heritage, sense of place and place identity and the contribution that these make to the social fabric of the community.’¹⁰¹

A European Commission paper concerning the future of the CFP declared that the current decisions allow little space for flexibility since they are being taken at the highest possible political level therefore it recommended that the management and implementation of the decisions be delegated to the members states since they are familiar with the fisheries back home. However, as long as social sciences are not incorporated, the problem will not be solved, and the decisions taken will continue to evoke inequalities especially when it comes to quota allocations.¹⁰² This situation creates a division of responsibility which holds into account both the European institutions and the member states whereby the EU is responsible for strategy formulation to promote sustainable fisheries and the member states are responsible for implementing the strategies based on the characteristics of their fishing industry through decommissioning schemes, the issuing of vessel licenses and the allocations

⁹⁶ Symes and Phillipson, 3.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, 4.

⁹⁸ Easkey Britton and Sarah Coulthard, ‘Assessing the Social Wellbeing of Northern Ireland’s Fishing Society using a Three-Dimensional Approach’, *Marine Policy*, xxxvii, (2013), 29.

⁹⁹ Rob van Ginkel, ‘Inshore Fishermen: Cultural Dimensions of a Maritime Occupation’, in *Inshore Fisheries Management*, David Symes and Jeremy Phillipson (eds.) Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht 2001, 117.

¹⁰⁰ Patricia M. Clay and James R. McGoodwin, ‘Utilizing Social Sciences in Fisheries Management’, *Aquatic Living Resources*, viii, 3 (1995), 205.

¹⁰¹ Urquhart, Acott, Reed and Courtney, 242.

¹⁰² *ibid.*

of catch quota; a state of affair which further calls for the inclusion of social objectives at the member states' level as well.¹⁰³

1.2.2.4 Exclusion of Fishermen

Apart from the exclusion of the social sciences, legislations and policies in general exclude the involvement of the fishermen themselves; the people from all the social domains who are directly impacted by the decisions taken. This gives rise to their marginalisation which term defines communities that 'experience discrimination and exclusion (social, political and economic) because of unequal power relationships across economic, political, social and cultural dimensions.'¹⁰⁴

Indeed, the ineffectiveness of conservation policies can, amongst others, be attributed to the distance maintained from the fishermen when it comes to both data collection and consultation on measures to be taken. The scientific research conducted by ICES is done in isolation from fishermen. This is of concern for two main reasons. Firstly, fishermen are bound to be sceptical of the scientific publications if not involved, and secondly scientific research would be greatly enriched if fishermen are allowed to voice their vast knowledge. As mentioned previously, stock assessment relies entirely on official records which are inaccurate when illegally caught and landed fish are not accounted for. Inaccuracies also result when protected fish is caught as by-catch or when it is discarded at sea due to the illegality of landing it. The only plausible way forward for obtaining sound statistics and for regulation compliance is for scientific research to be conducted in cooperation with fishermen.¹⁰⁵

Johnson and van Densen (2007) suggest three forms of cooperative research with the first being fishery-dependent data collection. Presently fishermen are obliged to record their catches through market sampling, landing statistics, and the compilation of logbooks to assess fish stocks, monitor compliance with regulations and check whether quota and day-at-sea allowance have been used up. The compilation of data has several disadvantages foremost of which is the time-lag between the transferring of data from logbooks onto electronic databases. Moreover, fishermen are susceptible to recording inaccurate information as they fear it can be used against them both directly through prosecution and indirectly when manifested in further restrictions. Fishermen also believe that the

¹⁰³ Symes and Phillipson, 4.

¹⁰⁴ "Marginalized Populations." 2023. National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health. 14 April 2023 <<https://nccdh.ca/glossary/entry/marginalized-populations>>.

¹⁰⁵ Daw and Gray, 194-5.

information is private knowledge that can result in social and economic disadvantages when disclosed with other fishermen. Inaccuracies in utilising this information in stock assessments does not result exclusively from imprecise recording deliberately done by fishermen. As mentioned above it also occurs when fish is caught as by-catch or discarded. One plausible solution would be real-time data recording. Two cooperative programmes with the aim of improving this form of data collection in north-eastern USA require the inputting of the information electronically and in real-time. Even so, fishermen still fear that the data might translate in further restrictions. For example, the squids targeted in one of the programmes are short-lived organisms, consequently, their abundance varies throughout the year. Small catches in one season might result in restrictions and reduction in quota allocations all year round or over a span of multiple years. The problem could be overcome by applying pre-season surveys that allow space for fishermen to adapt their catches as based on sound stock assessment. The other programme involves a group of beam trawl skippers whose task is to record the catches of both plaice and sole by haul as based on location and time of day. The data thus collected is in turn used by scientists and interpreted in graphs and maps. These record the variations of the stocks throughout the year and seasons. Cooperation is further enhanced through the discussion of the results with the fishermen in their own working environment; the harbours. Overall, the fishermen's inclusion has created a sense of trust, appreciation, and facilitated the scientific understanding.¹⁰⁶

Since stock assessment by means of fishery independent surveys in which research vessels and sampling fishing gear are used can be equally inaccurate due to study areas being randomly selected and due to non-conformity of the fishing gears with those deployed by fishermen, Johnson and van Densen (2007) suggest a second form of cooperative research; industry-based surveys. These types of surveys are run aboard fishermen's vessels which are in turn manoeuvred by the expert skippers and crew members. Even though stations for testing are also randomly chosen, reliability of data is increased by letting fishermen select some of the stations themselves. The vast knowledge of fishermen can include information on gear use, boat operation, the interaction between gear and habitat as well as fish behaviour. This form of research has been carried out around Iceland since 1985. Some limitations include the change in fish behaviour during the surveys and statistical interpretation as based on 'random sampling vs. targeted sampling in areas of (expected) high

¹⁰⁶ Teresa R. Johnson and Wim L. T. van Densen, 'Benefits and Organization of Cooperative Research for Fisheries Management', *ICES Journal of Marine Science*, lxiv, 4 (2007), 835.

density.’ Again, the motives behind the study need to be made clear with the fishermen to gain their trust.¹⁰⁷

The last form of cooperative research suggested by Johnson and van Densen (2007) is based on gear-selectivity studies. This approach aims to reduce the discards of unwanted fish that is accidentally caught and illegal to land while fishing for allowable stocks. Most often discards are composed of dead fish. Fishermen consider the catch of fish that cannot be sold as cumbersome and prefer not to catch it in the first place since removing it is both time consuming and perceived as an unnecessary waste of resources. Gear-selectivity research is based on collaboration between fishermen and scientists in testing the impact of gear on protected species with the aim of reducing the by-catch while targeting sustainable fish stocks. Such studies have proven to yield positive results for fishermen as in the case of the lifting of mesh size restrictions that had previously been imposed on the Gulf of Maine whiting fishery. In this case, studies demonstrated that the use of a Nordmore-style grate and a raised footrope procured negligible amounts of by-catch. The example from the Gulf of Maine shows that in this form of cooperative research, researchers work jointly with fishermen on board the latter’s vessels whereby they refer to the fishermen’s vast repertoire of knowledge.¹⁰⁸

The benefits associated with cooperative research are manifold. Direct benefits include the improved relevance and accuracy of scientific research. Attention is also given primarily to pressing problems. By involving themselves directly within the industry, scientists will understand what being a fisherman entails and experience what is going on in their world. Cooperative research may also cut costs in data collection, funding by governmental or private research. Indirect benefits include the paving of effective communication between fishermen and scientists. In turn this would facilitate the sharing of knowledge and data. Fishermen will also learn how science is applied and how to interpret data to which they have directly contributed.¹⁰⁹ All these aspects are envisaged to result in the desired sustainable fisheries.

A major attempt in involving fishermen in policy making was made back in the 2002 CFP reform in which was suggested the establishment of Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) with the aim of providing the Commission with expert advice from key stakeholders.¹¹⁰ The latter encompasses

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, 836.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, 837.

¹¹⁰ Symes and Hoefnagel, 271.

‘fishermen, vessel owners, processors, traders, fish farmers, women’s fisheries groups, environmental and consumer organisations and others.’¹¹¹ The idea was developed as a result of the failure in achieving sustainable fisheries through the previous CFPs.¹¹² The suggestion was accepted and seven RACs were established in 2004.

The European Commission’s fact sheet concerning the RACs explained the latter’s task as follows:

Their role is to submit opinions to the Commission and Member States on different aspects of fisheries management. They are not part of the formal decision-making process, but the quality of their advice, based on practical experience of the local waters and fisheries concerned, gives them influence. They also provide useful arenas for bringing together people from different backgrounds and helping to develop a better understanding between the scientific community and the fishing industry. The Commission is not under any legal obligation to consult them, but in practice it does so.¹¹³

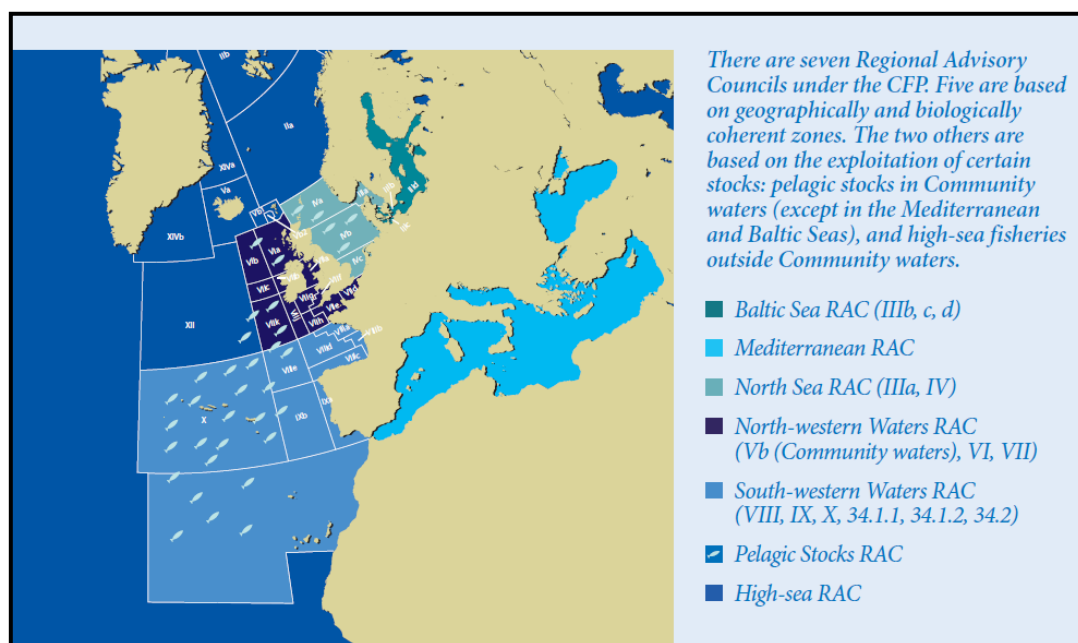


Diagram 4: The seven Regional Advisory Councils (RACs)

(Source: Fact Sheet: Regional Advisory Councils)¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ “Fact Sheet: Regional Advisory Councils.” European Commission. 15 August 2015 <http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/documentation/publications/cfp_factsheets/racs_en.pdf>.

¹¹² Sebastian Linke, Marion Deyer and Piet Sellke, ‘The Regional Advisory Councils: What is Their Potential to Incorporate Stakeholder Knowledge into Fisheries Governance?’, *AMBIO*, xl, 2 (2011), 133.

¹¹³ *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Diagram 4. Cf. “Fact Sheet: Regional Advisory Councils.” European Commission. 15 August 2015 <http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/documentation/publications/cfp_factsheets/racs_en.pdf>.

The ratio distribution of RACs is of 2:1 with two thirds of the members being fisheries' representatives and the remaining third pertaining to other interested groups effected by the CFP, with the most prominent being environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Fisheries scientists and policymakers are welcome as expert observers since they cannot participate directly as stakeholders. The advice and conclusions reached by the RACs must be presented to the European Commission and Member States in one, unanimous report for it to bear any influence in policy making.¹¹⁵ A study conducted with the aim of testing the RACs efficacy by analysing the Baltic Sea RAC demonstrated that a 'culture of not agreeing' has developed instead of finding consensus; a phenomenon which became common over the years. This has prevented the formulation of a common agreement to be successfully submitted to the Commission. Once again, the problem stems from the inaccuracy in scientific data with fisheries representatives questioning its reliability. NGOs use the same argument of unreliability to reinforce the precautionary approach to fisheries.¹¹⁶

A survey analysing the perceptions of meeting participants in RACs to draw comparisons between the challenges being faced by four RACs and their priorities highlighted the pros and cons of these institutions. It was revealed that the primary role of RACs is to act as intermediaries in facilitating information sharing and managing relationships. People who participate in these meetings are motivated to represent their organisations, better stakeholder input to the Commission and interact with other stakeholders. Of major importance, these meetings help to facilitate 'understanding across and within sectors and interest groups.' However, the same cannot be said of the Commission representatives. The survey revealed that both the catching and processing representatives as well as the conservation respondents being mainly NGO representatives demonstrated a decreased level of trust in the Commission which was not perceived to be responsive towards RACs. Low level of consensus was also acknowledged along with problems in identifying priorities. The resources available to the RACs was found to be lacking in terms of scientific advice and more profoundly in the economic and social science areas.¹¹⁷

From this study stems the positive outcomes of RACs, nonetheless, their stagnation is foreseen if stakeholders do not receive recognition for their efforts. Unless serious interest is bestowed on the

¹¹⁵ Linke, Deyer and Sellke, 134-5.

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*, 136-7.

¹¹⁷ Kristen Ounanian and Troels Jacob Hegland, 'The Regional Advisory Councils' Current Capacities and Unforeseen Benefits', *Maritime Studies*, xi, 1 (2012), 17.

meetings, participants will inevitably question to what extent is their advice being incorporated in policy making. The researchers point out that;

If the Commission assumes that engagement with stakeholders is fine as it is, making no effort to improve for instance the problem of availability of expertise, then they indeed risk alienating those giving their time and effort to RAC working groups and Executive Committees. Without support to these bodies the murmurs accusing the Commission of only paying lip service to stakeholder participation as a public relations exercise will likely grow louder with ramifications for conservation outcomes.¹¹⁸

1.2.3 Drawing Strength from Others: The Community

Fishermen derive their strength and perseverance against the odds from their community. The solidarity that abounds amongst fishermen is fuelled by their empathy towards one another; a sentiment which arises from their understanding of each other's precarious situation. This sentiment is so noteworthy that a significant amount of international research touched upon the subject to the extent that several studies have since focused specifically on the concept of 'the fishing community.'

The exact definition of what constitutes a community has been debated for ages with its conceptualisation long featuring in social theory and methodology. A renewed interest in its definition followed policymakers' shift to participatory development and the adoption of decentralisation in resource management.¹¹⁹ Traditionally, the most common and predominant feature of community definitions revolved around 'social interaction in a shared environment.'¹²⁰ The FAO construed the following definition in its attempt to conceptualise the term;

Generally speaking a community is a social group of any size whose members reside in a specific locality, interact with one another on an ongoing basis, and who have a shared sense of identity, interests, values, governmental institutions, and cultural and historical heritage. To qualify as a community it is not necessary to reside in a specific locality all the time, nor that all of them interact with all of the others on an ongoing basis.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*, 18.

¹¹⁹ Patricia M. Clay and Julia Olson, 'Defining Fishing Communities: Issues in Theory and Practice', *NAPA Bulletin*, xxviii, 1 (2007), 27.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, 28.

¹²¹ James R. McGoodwin, *Understanding the Cultures of Fishing Communities: A Key to Fisheries Management and Food Security* (Rome, FAO, 2001), 8. <<https://www.fao.org/3/Y1290E/y1290e00.htm>>.

Irrespective of the idea of place-based communities, it has become paramount to acknowledge that communities can exist well beyond physical boundaries.¹²² To this end, Brint (2001) defines communities as ‘aggregations of people who share common activities and/or beliefs and who are bound together *principally* by relations of affect, loyalty, common values, and/or personal concern.’¹²³ Brookfield, Gray and Hatchard (2005) explain how;

Communitarians see community as a carrier and embodiment of a group’s culture. To reduce community to a relationship between a population and a location would be seen as a disservice to the concept. For some community could even be understood in entirely non-specific terms. A community could be perceived as being a physiological state of ‘togetherness’ or identification. Therefore members of the ‘community’ could in fact be widely geographically dispersed.¹²⁴

Indeed, when trying to understand fishing communities, attention should be given ‘to the shared meanings and values amongst people living and working in coastal fishing areas.’¹²⁵ In Ross’ (2015) words;

Whilst emotional connection to and empathy with fishing would appear to inform a fundamental sense of ‘togetherness’ and source of mutual support amongst people, this is not always place-specific. An empathy for the industry also breaks through boundaries of place, where senses of ‘togetherness’ prevail amongst people involved in the fishing industry regardless of location. This shared connection is informed by a mutual respect and attachment to the fishing industry, a key feature being the perception that one can readily empathise with a group of people that one may have never met before.¹²⁶

The socio-cultural dependencies characteristic of fishing villages binds together fishermen through a shared sense of community.¹²⁷ Many studies have taken in consideration the sense of community existing in fishing villages either directly or indirectly. In her study of Scottish fishing communities, Ross (2013) revealed a distinction between the ‘occupational fishing community’ which is composed of the fishermen and those living with someone involved in the fishing industry, the ‘town’s community’ which includes people born in the town but are not in the industry themselves, and the ‘coastline’s community’ which includes the other fishing villages in the vicinity. With regards to the

¹²² Heather Douglas, ‘Types of Community’, in *International Encyclopaedia of Civil Society*, H. Anheier and S. Toepler (eds.) Springer, New York 2010, 539.

¹²³ Steven Brint, ‘Gemeinschaft Revisited: A Critique and Reconstruction of the Community Concept’, *Sociological Theory*, xix, 9 (2001), 8.

¹²⁴ Katherine Brookfield, Tim Gray and Jenny Hatchard, ‘The concept of fisheries-dependent communities – a comparative analysis of four UK case studies: Shetland, Peterhead, North Shields and Lowestoft’, *Fisheries Research*, lxxii, 1 (2005), 57.

¹²⁵ Nathalie Ross, ‘Understanding the Fishing Community: The Role of Communities of the Mind’, *Sociologia Ruralis*, lv, 3 (2015), 309.

¹²⁶ *ibid.*, 316.

¹²⁷ Natalie Ross, ‘Exploring Concepts of Fisheries ‘Dependency’ and ‘Community’ in Scotland’, *Marine Policy*, xxxvii, (2013), 59.

latter, fishermen feel linked to fishermen from other villages through the nature of their work. This bond is further strengthened when they share actual working experiences or are in touch with one another.¹²⁸

A sense of community and solidarity is bound to be strongly felt amongst members of the 'occupational fishing community'. Even though driven by a strong sense of commercial competition, solidarity between fishermen is always maintained at the forefront. A study conducted in six coastal fishing areas scattered throughout England revealed refusal in identifying or reporting fellow fishermen breaking the law to the authority, withholding arguments that could place other fishermen at a disadvantage, and providing for the crew when the need for a volunteer lifeboat arises.¹²⁹ Similar results were obtained in a study conducted in Uerhaven, a fishing community in decline in Norway. Following the closure of the saithe fishery, many fishermen were hardly hit, nonetheless decided to abide to the rules through a sense of moral obligation rather than from fear of being detected by the authorities. A further drive to conformity was what Gezelius (2002) termed as the 'norm of loyalty' which induced fishermen to do as their colleagues and not take advantage over others. However, a third norm, which the researcher referred to as the 'norm of securing a satisfactory life', allowed space for accepting rule breaking in certain special circumstances. Fishermen unanimously agreed that securing one's job and earning a living in face of adverse conditions is of utmost importance.¹³⁰ Fishermen who experienced good seasons by the time of the saithe closure were expected to abide to the rules since they were not economically threatened, however, those facing a difficult situation which could lead to loss of job and major financial cutbacks were allowed to continue fishing without fear of being talked against. The latter were still viewed uneasily but understanding prevailed. Gezelius (2002) remarked that losing your job as a fisherman is equivalent to losing your identity and way of life. In the long run, this could also jeopardise the existence of the fishing community itself. A fisherman in difficulties trusted the others and disclosed the intention of breaking the rule beforehand. Only cases of illegal fishing with the aim of maximising one's profit were frowned upon. These could in turn lead to social degradation and exclusion by the occupational fishing community. Fear of being excluded was a strong enough incentive to prevent law breaking for selfish reasons.¹³¹ Strong cohesiveness amongst the members of the occupational community was also perceived in Grey Rock Harbour, a small Anglican fishing village with circa 800 inhabitants in the southwest coast

¹²⁸ *ibid.*, 59-60.

¹²⁹ Matt Reed, Paul Courtney, Julie Urquhart and Natalie Ross, 'Beyond Fish as Commodities: Understanding the Socio-Cultural Role of Inshore Fisheries in England', *Marine Policy*, xxxvii, (2013), 65.

¹³⁰ Gezelius, 308-9.

¹³¹ *ibid.*, 309-311.

of Newfoundland. All the houses in the village are installed with short wave radios which are tuned to the men at sea. Common topics of conversation for all members are the catches and the weather. The community members share the ideology of ‘we all come up together or we don’t come up at all.’ Like Gezelius (2002), Davis (1986) had previously remarked on how gossip and exclusion keeps everyone in check and that everyone is equal to others. No leading individuals or hierarchical structures are allowed. In contrast with the Fraserburgh, Scotland (Ross, 2013), Grey Harbour fishermen don’t share a sense of community with the neighbouring outports. However, this is because all the other villages have lost their fishing identity except for Grey Rock Harbour which, so far, has preserved its cultural heritage. This makes them feel unique and detached.¹³²

The fishermen’s community in Hastings, south-east England, perceive the importance of their cultural heritage and the importance to know about one’s past which roots a community to a place. This provides the community with a sense of identity and uniqueness. Having been born and growing up in the village provide the fishermen with a sense of belonging and community. Apart from living close by and within the same neighbourhood, fishermen socialise amongst themselves in pubs and many volunteer in as lifeboat crew. They also come together on the fishing beach even when they are not engaged in fishing related activities. The perceived alienation of fishermen as being destructive of marine resources and the ever-impending regulations has created ‘an us against them’ ideology accompanied by strong ties amongst the community members.¹³³

Regardless this strong sense of community, many fishing villages are losing this essence due to several reasons. For example, over the past fifty years many fishing families have moved out of Hastings’ Old Town fishing village. The houses which had been left vacant started fetching high prices as the town started gaining in popularity as a holiday residence. The outgoing of fishermen and the influx of newcomers changed the community’s identity. Many of the fishermen interviewed expressed a sense of loss and sadness for how the community used to be.¹³⁴ A research with the aim of studying the recreational methods in a remote fishing village in Nova Scotia revealed that the fishing community there is in decline. The lack of job opportunities in the fishing arena motivated people from the younger generation to move out of the village and seek opportunities elsewhere. In

¹³² Dona Lee Davis, ‘Occupational Community and Fishermen’s Wives in a Newfoundland Fishing Village’, *Anthropological Quarterly*, lix, 3 (1986), 137-8.

¹³³ Julie Urquhart and Tim Acott, ‘Constructing ‘The Stade’: Fishers’ and non-Fishers’ Identity and Place Attachment in Hastings, south-east England’, *Marine Policy*, xxxvii, (2013), 51-2.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, 51.

turn this has negatively impacted the sense of community.¹³⁵ In Grey Rock Harbour modernisation is feared of breaking the next generation's commitment to the fishing way of life. Fishermen themselves are encountering major difficulties at keeping the industry alive due to the strife with the world markets that provide a larger quantity of fish.¹³⁶ As is to be expected, the dwindling number of fishermen is eroding the community cohesiveness which is in turn causing the remaining fishermen to lose heart in keeping up with the challenges from the lack of support traditionally provided and strengthened by their large number.

1.2.4 Overview of Women in European Fisheries

Relentless support is also provided closer to home by the fishermen's families with a fair share of the burden being taken on by the women. Their contribution can be diverse and range from direct assistance in the fisheries to providers of emotional and mental support. Irrespective of the nature of support provided, international studies have demonstrated time and again that their contribution is invaluable; the truth of which was also attested to by local small-scale fishing communities as revealed in chapter 3. To this end, it can be safely concluded that women's involvement is yet another font from which fishermen draw their strength to persevere in their resolve to stick to fishing against the odds.

To begin with, the role women play in the different EU countries share many characteristics regardless the cultural and economic diversity. Recognised employment of women in various sectors of the fishing enterprise include jobs offered in the aqua cultural sector, roles within the management and administrative domain, employment within the fish processing factories, and seagoing fishing in which women are involved in direct fishing. The female percentage distribution within each of the above-mentioned categories varies considerably.¹³⁷ Of all these categories, women are mostly found within the fish processing sector. According to the European Commission, women account for an average of 53% within a range of 11% to 75% of the workforce.¹³⁸ Moreover, the WorldFish Centre

¹³⁵ Jackie Oncescu and Brenda Robertson, 'Recreation in Remote Communities: A Case Study of a Nova Scotian Village', *Journal of Rural and Community Development*, v, 1 (2010), 229.

¹³⁶ Dona Lee Davis, 139.

¹³⁷ "Summary of the Report 'The Role of Women in the Fisheries.'" 31 October 2015. European Commission. 8 January 2020 <http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/documentation/studies/role_of_women/summary_en.pdf>.

¹³⁸ *ibid*.

estimates that the participation of women in the EU fisheries is 6% and 59% in direct fishing and in processing respectively which amounts to the grand total of 65,000 women.¹³⁹

Regardless the identification of activities in which women are involved, the extent of their participation is yet unknown especially when it comes to their role of supporting fishing operations. Much of the informal work which is put in supporting goes unrecognised. The only legal recognition given indirectly to women in fisheries dates to 1986 with the enactment of European Council Directive (816/613/EEC) which applies the equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity, including agriculture, in a self-employed capacity, and on the protection of self-employed women during pregnancy and motherhood.’ Another improvement was brought forth when women who assist their husbands in the fisheries started being legally recognised by which they became entitled to social security and maternity benefits, health care, and retirement pensions. However, this can only be described as a minor amelioration since it was only implemented in France and to a much lesser degree in Spain and Portugal. The latter legislation helped women who work behind the scenes by looking after book-keeping, auctioning fish, and the mending of nets just to mention a few. Unfortunately, this valuable contribution is underestimated by the women themselves since they do not consider it as work seeing as it is most often carried out at home amidst household and child caring chores. Harper et al.’s 2013 study on women’s participation in UK fisheries further confirms that women are indeed undervalued, under recognised and underpaid or even unpaid irrespective of their indispensable contribution.¹⁴⁰ The only activities for which women are recognised and paid are fishing by officially registered fisherwomen and women involved in the processing of fish in factories. This might also apply for women owning or employed in fish shops and those who are in possession of a fish selling permit.

1.2.4.1 Lack of Statistical Data

Quantifying the number of women in the fishing industry is impossible since the only women recorded in statistical data are /the ones whose employment has been declared and remunerated. There are many others whose work is ‘invisible’. The latter includes wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, and life partners who carry out a multitude of tasks in the family business.¹⁴¹ Such tasks include the

¹³⁹ Sarah Harper, Dirk Zeller, Melissa Hauzer, Daniel Pauly, Ussif Rashid Sumaila, ‘Women and Fisheries: Contribution to Food Security and Local Economies’, *Marine Policy*, xxxix (2013), 57.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 57-8.

¹⁴¹ Katia Frangoudes, “Women in Fisheries: A European Perspective.” July 2013. European Commission. 31 October 2015 <<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/cms/farnet/files/documents/Women-in-fisheries-EN.pdf>> 13.

administration, sales, and boat maintenance. Their contribution is further dependant on multiple variables including the fishing seasons and the length of time their husbands are away at sea. Women tend to take sole responsibility of the administrative tasks including full charge of the family and the enterprise's management when fishing trips are long sometimes extending into weeks on end. Women's involvement in onshore activities, which indeed forms the bulk of their workload, is rarely remunerated, and most often referred to as 'shore crew'. As mentioned earlier the fisheries' related work carried out by women is interspersed with the household chores thus making it even more difficult to identify the time allocated to the fisheries.¹⁴²

An activity which is most often the prerogative of women is the selling of the catch. This activity is very time consuming and adds up to a considerable number of hours per week especially when carried out either regularly or daily; aspects which are fundamental in establishing a clientele. Not being compatible with family life and carried out away from home, the selling of fish is one of the few activities to which a specific number of hours can be remunerated. Some other activities for which the same applies might include the construction and repair works of nets and boat maintenance tasks.¹⁴³

1.2.4.2 The Three Principal Roles of Women in Fisheries

All the activities undertaken by women born or married into the fisheries can be grouped in three categories with the first being the direct productive contribution of women's labour. The second and most basic category is directly linked with women's nature and is predominantly associated with women in all societies; that is the role of creating the next generation both physically and morally which is expressed in the bearing and rearing of children. Third, but not least, are the extra responsibilities which women must carry in the absence of men.

The following list of tasks undertaken by women, each of which befall in either one of the three categories of women's principal roles, was developed and elicited by the researcher's evaluation of various international studies on the subject.

¹⁴² Katia Frangoudes and Enora Keromnes, 'Women in Artisanal Fisheries in Brittany, France', *Society for International Development*, li, 2 (2008), 267-8.

¹⁴³ *ibid.*

1.	Direct fishing
2.	Selling the catches, organising sales, and auctioning fish
3.	Boat maintenance
4.	Constructing, repairing, and cleaning of nets
5.	Processing of fish in factories
6.	Financial management including handling accounts, dealing with banks, and preparing invoices for the bookkeeping office
7.	Corresponding and communicating with the fisheries administration
8.	Purchasing and preparing the crew's food
9.	Transporting and storing fish
10.	Housekeeping
11.	Childcare

Table 3: The tasks undertaken by women in fisheries as mentioned in international research

It must also be noted that a considerable number of women married into the fisheries have alternative employment which bears no affinity to fishing whatsoever.

1.2.4.3 Men at Sea, Women Ashore

Except for direct fishing, all the above-mentioned tasks are undertaken onshore. Since women's participation in direct fishing is minimal and the rest of the activities are the prerogative of women it can be concluded that women's contribution in small-scale fisheries is mainly carried ashore whereas work at sea is reserved for men. This is especially true for long distance fishing in which case the fishermen are nearly always either adolescent or adult males.

The main reason conjuring the distinction between the sexes is based on the principle that, being physically stronger and larger, men are potentially more productive. Just as men are deemed to be physically stronger, women's reproductive capabilities in sustaining populations makes it more practical for them to remain ashore, leaving the hazardous and life-threatening task of fishing to men.

Closely linked to the productive nature of women is the raising of infants and small children, which, irrespective of the push towards equality, is still very much associated with women. This makes it very difficult for women to participate in direct fishing as the task itself demands that women be removed from home for long stretches of time. Finally, it can be argued that the limited supplies of food and water double folded with severe space limitations argue against recruiting crew members who cannot devote their full energies to fishing.¹⁴⁴

1.2.5 Belief in the Supernatural

When everything else fails to provide reassurance and no rational explanation can be given for certain circumstances, fishermen revert to the supernatural which can be either of a religious or a superstitious nature. Apart when faced with next to hopeless situations, the supernatural is also reverted to prior a fishing expedition/season for additional protection against all eventualities and to increase their hope of a good catch and safe deliverance from danger. Indeed, Christianity, it being the religious belief predominant in Malta and amongst the international fisheries mentioned, holds hope as one of its three theological virtues. Superstition also holds that by performing certain rituals and observing certain rules, disaster can be kept at bay. To this end, belief in the supernatural is fundamentally important in providing the much-needed hope and additional reassurance in face of adversaries and, as with the communitarian and women's support, strengthen the fishermen's resilience to persevere with the fishing way of life.

Nowadays, people tend to hold superstition as characteristic of primitive cultures¹⁴⁵ and is believed to be the prerogative of certain subcultures.¹⁴⁶ It is also widely thought that the higher the level of education, which leads to higher order thinking, leads to greater scepticism and dismissal of superstition.¹⁴⁷ Many research works have been conducted to verify this phenomenon. A case in point would be Mocan and Pogorelova's (2017) whose results demonstrate that education reduces people's disposition to believe in lucky charms, the frequency at which people consult horoscopes to predict the future and also the frequency at which horoscopes are consulted in their daily lives.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ McGoodwin, 24.

¹⁴⁵ Stuart A. Vyse, *Believing in Magic: The Psychology of Superstition* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2014), 244.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 33.

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 49.

¹⁴⁸ Naci Mocan and Luiza Pogorelova, 'Compulsory Schooling Laws and Formation of Beliefs: Education, Religion and Superstition', *Journal of Economic Behaviour and Organization*, cxlii, (2017), 528.

Nonetheless, many works yielded divergent results with many demonstrating that college students are superstitious, therefore it cannot be definitely concluded that lower educational levels correlate with higher superstition adherence. Indeed ‘education does not make one immune to superstitious or paranormal beliefs’¹⁴⁹ as evidenced by the fact ‘that superstition is far from rare among people at both ends of the intellectual spectrum.’¹⁵⁰ Superstition is also independent of one’s social status.¹⁵¹ This explains why superstitious beliefs are still widespread¹⁵² irrespective of the modern and technologically sophisticated age we are living in dominated by the power of science that rationalises and improves our lives.¹⁵³

What has been proven to be true without any doubt whatsoever is peoples’ predisposition for superstition when faced with uncertainty, stress and low levels of control.¹⁵⁴ Many research results point in this direction to the extent that it can safely be concluded that a lack of control over one’s life leads to what Whitson and Galinsky (2012) refer to as the perception of ‘illusory patterns’.¹⁵⁵ Uncertainty is part and parcel of the human experience. Most often people avoid the risk of running into unpredictable and uncontrollable situations. When no alternative is available, they try to cope with the situation as best they can. Failure to do so will inevitably lead to psychological problems including phobia, substance abuse and depression.¹⁵⁶ Likewise, Whitson and Galinsky (2012) explain that uncertainty is a very important variable in determining the psychological and physical well-being of people.¹⁵⁷ They further argue that illusory patterns are most often perceived in one’s attempt to regain a control of the situation.¹⁵⁸ This has been proven true time again by many researchers who have similarly concluded that ‘engaging in superstitions regulates psychological tension and creates a feeling of control and a sense of predictability in otherwise chaotic environments.’¹⁵⁹

¹⁴⁹ Vyse, 49.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 245.

¹⁵¹ Elena Daprati, Angela Sirigu, Michel Desmurget and Daniele Nico, ‘Superstitious Beliefs and the Associative *Mind*’, *Consciousness and Cognition*, lxxv, (2019), 1.

¹⁵² *ibid.*

¹⁵³ Vyse, 252.

¹⁵⁴ Lysann, Damisch, Barbara Stoberock and Thomas Mussweiler, ‘Keep Your Fingers Crossed! How Superstition Improves Performance’, *Psychological Science*, xxi, 7 (2010), 1014.

¹⁵⁵ Jennifer A. Whitson and Adam D. Galinsky, ‘Lacking Control Increases Illusory Pattern Perception’, *Science*, cccxxii, 5898 (2008), 115.

¹⁵⁶ Vyse, 5.

¹⁵⁷ Whitson and Galinsky, 115.

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*, 117.

¹⁵⁹ Damisch, Stoberock and Mussweiler, 1014.

Reliance on magical thinking increases when the 'stakes are deemed to be high compared to the costs, such as when actions are performed in dangerous compared to safe settings.'¹⁶⁰ Consequently, people occupying dangerous jobs are prone to be more superstitious which explains why fishermen tend to be superstitious. Indeed, there's no denying that fishing is a hard and perilous job. This is evidenced by the fishermen's countless stories involving mishaps, everyday conversation and the songs sung in relation to fishing.¹⁶¹ Bjarnason and Thorlindsson (1993) explain that;

In fisheries throughout the world, the line dividing success and disaster is thin. The 'heroic' risk to life, boat, and gear posed by the forces of nature is continuously balanced against the more 'mundane' risk of not catching enough to provide for dependents. Consequently, fishing communities are known for their wealth of folk models on natural and mystical aspects of success and disaster.¹⁶²

Prominent researchers in fishermen's folklore and ritual; Poggie and Gersuny, claim that along with fishermen, coal miners, rodeo performers and gamblers adhere to ritual magic. All these different occupations and situations have one thing in common; a high amount of uncertainty. This theory was originally developed by Bronislaw Malinowski.¹⁶³ In his pioneering research first published in 1926, Malinowski discovered differences in adherence to superstition between two types of fishing among Trobriand Islanders. Those participating in inner lagoon fishing didn't believe in magic, whereas those involved in open-sea fishing had an extensive repertoire of rituals. Malinowski (1992) attributed this disparity to the different levels of risk involved in these two fishing methods. Whereas lagoon fishing is safe and guarantees a successful catch due to reliable fishing methods, open-sea fishing is dangerous, and the catch cannot be guaranteed beforehand.¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, in his study Malinowski (1992) identified two types of uncertainty; uncertainty of the catch and uncertainty in terms of fishermen's safety. Poggie and Gersuny (1972) set out to test Malinowski's theory by collecting data on ritual belief from two occupations in a New England community, namely, fishermen and textile mill workers.¹⁶⁵ These two occupations were chosen due to their similarity. People interviewed from both occupations were mostly Shoreville people and they also had similar levels of education and age. Furthermore, they were both manual labourers. The only difference concerned the level of risk with fishing involving a high percentage of risk whereas mill working is a low-risk occupation. In

¹⁶⁰ Daprati, Sirigu, Desmurget and Nico, 2.

¹⁶¹ John J. Poggie, Richard B. Pollnac and Carl Gersuny, 'Risk as a Basis for Taboos among Fishermen in Southern New England', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, xv, 3 (1976), 259.

¹⁶² Thoroddur Bjarnason and Thorolfur Thorlindsson, 'In Defence of a Folk Model: The 'Skipper Effect' on the Icelandic Cod Fishery', *American Anthropologist*, xcv, 2 (1993), 371.

¹⁶³ John J. Poggie and Carl Gersuny, 'Risk and Ritual: An Interpretation of Fishermen's Folklore in a New England Community', *American Folklore Society*, lxxxv, 335 (1972), 66.

¹⁶⁴ Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays* (Illinois, Waveland Press Inc, 1992), 30-1.

¹⁶⁵ Poggie and Gersuny, 67.

their study, Poggie and Gersuny (1972) further distinguished between three types of fishing activities in Shoreville; daytime pot lobster fishing, daytime dragging fishing, and draggers that fish for several days at a time, with the first fishing method being the less risky therefore hypothesised to hold few rituals, the second being intermediary, and the last carrying the highest risks and therefore believed to hold the highest level of rituals. As anticipated with regards to the first part of the research, millworkers didn't hold any superstitious beliefs except for one whose argument could be expressed as fear in getting his arms caught on something rather than an avoidance ritual. On the other hand, all the fishermen, apart from one, proved to hold many superstitions in relation to their work. Nonetheless, the hypotheses concerning the different fishing methods vis-à-vis superstitious rituals was not confirmed since all three fishing methods held the same proportion of ritual beliefs. In their effort to find a plausible explanation for the results they argued that the risk factors in each type of fishing must have been equalised. The researchers also identified a level of embarrassment from the fishermen's behalf when talking about superstitious beliefs. Most often they disclaimed believing in the superstitions but admitted adherence to the beliefs so as not to break the rules. Superstitious beliefs might also persist as a relic of the past, going back in time when fishing was far more dangerous than it is nowadays.¹⁶⁶ With regards to the former it is a well-known fact that irrespective of its popularity, believers tend to be reluctant in confessing their superstitions from fear of ridicule.¹⁶⁷ As to the latter, culture plays an important part in the handing down of superstitious beliefs. It is the previous generation pertaining to the same culture which taught the present-day community that 'black cats bring bad luck' just as it was taught to it by the previous generation.¹⁶⁸

Poggie and his colleagues have often emphasised that uncertainty in relation to personal safety is more important than uncertainty in terms of production. This was tested in their 1988 study which, this time, was conducted in three New England ports. In all, eighty-seven different taboos were mentioned with the larger part being proscriptive in nature¹⁶⁹ whereby a particular behaviour is avoided to avoid misfortune as opposed to prescriptive behaviours which prescribe certain behaviours to prevent misfortune.¹⁷⁰ Analysing the taboos mentioned, Poggie and Pollnac (1988) revealed that 74% of the specific taboo meanings given made reference to personal safety with only the remaining 17% being associated with production.¹⁷¹ It was assumed that skipper and boat owners have much

¹⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 69-72.

¹⁶⁷ Vyse, 16.

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.*, 26.

¹⁶⁹ John J. Poggie and Richard B. Pollnac, 'Danger and Rituals of Avoidance Among New England Fishermen', *Maritime Anthropological Studies*, i, 1 (1988), 69.

¹⁷⁰ Poggie and Gersuny, 70.

¹⁷¹ Poggie and Pollnac (1988), 71.

more to lose if the catch turns out to be poor resulting in more taboos, however, the number of taboos mentioned by these stakeholders was the same as those mentioned by crew members, therefore confirming the researchers' hypothesis that personal safety is considered more important than production.¹⁷²

Unlike Poggie and Gersuny's 1972 study, the latter study revealed that the safest form of fishing, in this case shore shell fishermen, held the least number of taboos, the trawler fishermen adhered to an intermediate number of taboos, and the offshore shell fishermen had the most. The difference between the last two fishing methods was negligible. This confirmed their second hypothesis concerning the positive relationship between trip length and number of taboos. The number of taboos increased steadily as trip length increased to two and three days. It remained steady and only demonstrated a slight drop if the trip took more than five days which the researchers attributed to habituation to the conditions and being closer to other ports.¹⁷³ Mullen (1969) was of the belief that superstitious beliefs are learnt at an early age from fisher family members and therefore internalised and used in stressful situations.¹⁷⁴ To this end, Poggie, Pollnac and Gersuny (1976) embarked on another study within the same three fishing ports in Southern New England to test Mullen's hypothesis. The results yielded disclaimed this allegation with a negative relationship between these two variables. The explanation provided by Poggie, Pollnac and Gersuny (1976) identified pre-adaptation to dangers. They claim that coming from a fishing family preadapts individuals to the risk factor and dangers associated with life at sea. They suggested that the use of taboos requires an ulterior motive other than mere exposure from family members and other fishermen.¹⁷⁵ This may seem to be somewhat opposed to the previously mentioned explanation provided for the 1972 research in which Poggie and Gersuny claimed that superstitious beliefs might be a relic of the past fishing tradition which could only have been handed down by fisher family members. Similarly, Brown (2021) reported on the age old Clavie-burning custom held by the small fishing community in Burghead, Scotland on the 11th of January which coincides with the previously adhered to Julian calendar's New Year's Day and celebrated 'as a saining ritual to purify the community from all potential supernatural threats for the year to come.'¹⁷⁶

¹⁷² *ibid.*, 75.

¹⁷³ *ibid.*, 73-4.

¹⁷⁴ Patrick B. Mullen, 'The Function of Magic Folk Belief among Texas Coastal Fishermen', *Journal of American Folklore*, lxxxii, 325 (1969), 219.

¹⁷⁵ Poggie, Pollnac and Gersuny, 261-2.

¹⁷⁶ Fiona J. Brown, 'The Fishermen's Luck: The Maritime's Clavie and its Variants', *Folklore (London)*, cxxxii, 3 (2021), 247.

As with superstition, religion is considered by several theorists to function as an anxiety reliever.¹⁷⁷ Indeed religion and superstition have been intermingled from almost their origins¹⁷⁸ to the extent that some behavioural scientists believe religion to be superstitious in itself; 'a misguided faith born of ignorance.' Still others hold that only 'pagan' religions notorious for their magical rites and rituals are superstitious.¹⁷⁹ Mocan and Pogorelova (2017) argue that;

Religion and superstition are related in that both involve believing in supernatural forces and there is overlap between the two. In many societies the practice of superstitious acts has religious connotations, and organized religions have ceremonies that are borrowed from superstitious rites (also called magic) of pagan cultures.¹⁸⁰

Malinowski (1992) recognises some fundamental features common to both forms of supernatural beliefs. Apart from serving as stress relievers by means of rituals and belief, he notes that 'both are based strictly on mythological tradition, and they also both exist in the atmosphere of the miraculous, in a constant revelation of their wonderworking power.'¹⁸¹ However, he recognises the fundamental difference to lie in their psychological function in that magical belief consists 'of acts which are only means to a definite end expected to follow later on [and] religion as a body of self-contained acts being themselves the fulfilment of their purpose.'¹⁸² In other words magic is directed at future events whereas religion helps a community to overcome current crises.¹⁸³

In his study of Gulf coast fishermen, Mullen (1969) links religion with superstition rather than classifying them as distinct institutions. He claims that superstition is reverted to when science does not provide a plausible solution as is the case of good and bad luck. The author gives examples of prescriptive forms of superstitions such as inserting coins in various parts of the boat for good luck and launching boats with champagne. He also recognises that superstitions prescribing not to do something, namely proscriptive superstitions, are more numerous amongst fishermen. In his study, Mullen (1969) provides a literature review of works carried out in this field of study. He identified the prominent anthropologist Alfred L. Kroeber who partially disagreed with the theory put forward by Malinowski stating that the more dangerous the situation, the higher the superstition.¹⁸⁴ Citing the

¹⁷⁷ Poggie, Pollnac and Gersuny, 257.

¹⁷⁸ Vyse, 7.

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.*, 25.

¹⁸⁰ Mocan and Pogorelova, 510.

¹⁸¹ Malinowski, 87-8.

¹⁸² *ibid.*, 88.

¹⁸³ Vyse, 12-3.

¹⁸⁴ Mullen, 217.

original source, Kroeber (1948) made use of Eskimos to support his argument. He claimed that even though Eskimos live in adverse conditions and thus have high levels of anxiety, they hold few magical rituals. When conditions are both immediate and acute, Eskimos revert to more realistic means.¹⁸⁵ However, Kroeber's argument was criticised by the fact that all fishermen use realistic means whenever possible. It is only in situations that offer no rational solution that fishermen revert to superstition. Mullen (1969) also mentioned Vogt (1955) who openly criticised Kroeber's (1948) claim.¹⁸⁶ In his criticism, Vogt (1955) claimed that even though Eskimos hold few magical beliefs, they are nonetheless focused on the greatest uncertainties characteristic of Eskimo life.¹⁸⁷

Just like Malinowski, Mullen (1969) found out that safe fishing by Texas Bays fishermen held little superstitious beliefs, whereas fishermen participating in dangerous and uncertain Gulf fishing held over twice as much superstitious beliefs. As with Poggie and Gersuny (1972), Mullen acknowledged embarrassment in acknowledging belief in superstitions and acknowledge such behaviour to others. The pattern reverted to most often is recognition that the beliefs are merely superstitions, moving on to admitting the practices and finally trying to give a plausible explanation for the practice.¹⁸⁸ According to Mullen (1969), rationalising superstitious beliefs is mainly shaped by the wider society which rejects superstition. Nonetheless, certain beliefs are shaped by the same society and therefore deemed appropriate as is the taboo against working on Sunday held by many fishermen. This is acceptable since society believes in the value that forbids working on a Sabbath.¹⁸⁹ Seeing as it is supported by the institutionalised Catholic Church which is in turn adhered to by the wider society, another custom which is positively looked upon is the annual blessing of the shrimp fleet in Texas ports which is also held in the Gulf coast in Louisiana, Florida, and Alabama. The psychological sense of security and assurance induces Protestant fishermen to have their boats blessed by the local priest who passed amongst the boats tied up at the docks on board a small motor launch as well.¹⁹⁰

Having analysed the major theoretical works on defining superstition and its relation vis-à-vis human psychology it can be concluded that the determinant factor in promoting superstitious adherence is

¹⁸⁵ Alfred L. Kroeber, *Anthropology: Race, Language, Culture, Psychology and Prehistory* (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company Inc, 1948), 603-4.

¹⁸⁶ Mullen, 217.

¹⁸⁷ Evon Z. Vogt, *Modern Homesteaders: The Life of a Twentieth-Century Frontier Community* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1955), 76 as in *ibid*.

¹⁸⁸ Mullen, 218-9.

¹⁸⁹ *ibid*.

¹⁹⁰ *ibid.*, 222-4.

none other than the human need for autonomy and control of the situations he finds himself in during his life¹⁹¹ which can also be said to hold true for religion.

1.2.6 Love Prevails Over Everything Else

There is no denying that fishing for a living, to all intents and purposes, is one of the worst occupations available to anyone trying to make a decent future for himself and his dependants. Having gleaned into all the imaginable obstacles, problems and setbacks afflicting fishermen, it is easy to conclude that no one in his right frame of mind would opt to live off fishing. The implicit need for communal support and women dependency coupled with pronounced religious fervour and the need to revert to superstitious beliefs to keep one's head above water is proof enough of the rickety nature of the job, and yet many fishermen remain unswerving in their resolve to keep fishing. Gersuny and Poggie (2008) themselves capture this sentiment and ask the inevitable question as follows;

Why are fishermen so attached to fishing that they are reluctant to change occupation? They must like their occupation – it must make them happy, but given the apparently negative aspects of their job, this seems hardly rational. Fishing is dangerous...the economic returns from fishing also vary greatly – a good trip can be followed by a series of bad trips and vice-versa...Even the development of modern technology...has not eliminated the risks. Such risks should lead to mental stress for participants, and stress should be an unpleasant state, so why do fishermen like their job?¹⁹²

By so doing it becomes evident that they do not limit themselves to fish for a living but markedly live to fish which reveals that there is more, *much* more, to monetary compensation. There is the *need* to pursue this life which can only be explained in terms of an innate dependency on fishing. Many might have heard of the allure of the sea and put it down to mere fantasy or, at the most, romanticism but multidisciplinary research has proved the myth to be, in part, factual. The dependency on a fishing way of life is indeed the major driving force which, in addition to communal and female support, and belief in the supernatural, strengthen the fishermen resolve to stick to their profession irrespective of the adversities.

Wellbeing, or indeed the happiness, of people has been measured in terms of income which, in turn, reflects on the countries' developmental progress. International organisations amongst which is the World Bank use income to categorise countries as low-income, middle-income, or high-income

¹⁹¹ Vyse, 242.

¹⁹² Richard B. Pollnac and John J. Poggie, 'Happiness, Well-being and Psychocultural Adaptation to the Stresses Associated with Marine Fishing', *Human Ecology Review*, xv, 2 (2008), 195.

countries. The Gross National Income by which income is measured tends to overlook other aspects which people value and consider important for their overall wellbeing.¹⁹³ To this end, in 1995 the concept of income as a measuring yardstick of people's wellbeing was challenged by a new frontier of research which recognised several other factors that equally contribute, or do so at a much grander scale, to people's happiness¹⁹⁴ thus proving true the saying that the best things in life are free.

Amongst others, this holds especially true for fishermen which explains why no other occupation is so popularly reflected in a recreational activity. Even though farming activities including woodworking and planting a garden amongst others offer compensations other than income, none appears to have the same effect on the participants as fishing. It fulfils several psychic needs as 'it takes one into a completely different environment, away from shore-based activities and allows the participant to become involved in the thrill of the hunt' whereby the participants pit their 'luck and skill against others as well as against an elusive prey that is hidden under water.'¹⁹⁵ As it happens participation in commercial fishing has been proved to be 'motivated by a mix of economical, psychological and social factors that extend well beyond the provisioning of income.'¹⁹⁶

In their study on fishermen in the Solomon Islands, Young, Foale and Bellwood (2016) found that the highest motivator in pursuing fishing is the love for outdoor pursuits in a natural environment. Their research reports that being thus immersed helps fishermen to escape the pressure and stresses of modern life and personal difficulties by allowing them to relax and unwind.¹⁹⁷ As touched upon in the previous paragraph, Young, Foale and Bellwood (2016) reported the challenge of the hunt and applying their skills in deceiving their prey as another motivator for fishermen to fish. Not only do the application of refined skills and knowledge translate in better catches but they also earn fishermen the admiration and respect from fellow fishermen and members of the wider community.¹⁹⁸ Similarly, in one of their numerous studies concerning fishermen, by applying a quantitative analysis on job satisfaction, Pollnac and Poggie (2008) identified the thrill of hunting fish and the challenge of facing

¹⁹³ Zuzy Anna, Arief A. Yusuf, Armida S. Alisjahbanaa, Aisyah A. Ghina and Rahma, 'Are fishermen happier? Evidence from a large-scale subjective well-being survey in a lower-middle-income country', *Marine Policy*, cvi, (2019), 2.

¹⁹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ Richard B. Pollnac and John J. Poggie, 'Job Satisfaction in the Fishery in Two Southeast Alaskan Towns', *Human Organization*, lxxv, 3 (2006), 329.

¹⁹⁶ Daniel S. Holland, Joshua K. Abbott and Karma E. Norman, 'Fishing to Live or Living to Fish: Job Satisfaction and Identity of West Coast Fishermen', *Ambio*, xlix, 2 (2019), 628.

¹⁹⁷ Matthew A.L. Young, Simon Foale and David R. Bellwood, 'Why do Fishers Fish? A Cross-Cultural Examination of the Motivations for Fishing', *Marine Policy*, lxxvi, (2016), 117.

¹⁹⁸ *ibid.*, 118.

the power and expanse of the sea as primary motivators for fishermen to pursue fishing.¹⁹⁹ As with Young, Foale and Bellwood (2016), Pollnac and Poggie (2008) discovered a correlation between being a fishermen and the influence of the community. Whereas the former found that skill and knowledge earns fishermen the respect of the community, the latter narrate how the fishing community values fearlessness and bravery.²⁰⁰ Moreover, they argue that the attractiveness to danger is also influenced by the fishermen's genetic makeup. In their words;

It is argued...that the relatively risky nature of the occupation of fishing attracts and holds individuals manifesting an active, adventurous, aggressive, and courageous personality; hence these risky components of the job has a *positive* influence on their level of happiness.²⁰¹

In Young, Foale and Bellwood (2016) study, fishermen also identified positive social aspects to fishing whereby they bond and built relationships with friends while undertaking fishing which, in turn, they believe helps to encourage 'social cohesion through which all social and cultural groups [can] interact on a level playing field'²⁰² to the extent that they expressed their concern that modern society is increasingly getting disconnected from a sense of community which is dually tragic seeing as 'such social interactions are well known to build social capital and provide benefits to the health, governance and functioning of communities.'²⁰³

An additional tell-tale to fishermen's need to fish is their refusal of taking up an alternative job should an opportunity arise. By presenting the fishermen with this hypothetical scenario, Young, Foale and Bellwood (2016) revealed the fishermen's eagerness to stick to fishing who provided a myriad of personal, cultural, and societal reasons for so doing. Fishermen who did not need to fish for a subsistence retained fishing out of interest and sheer joy the activity gives them.²⁰⁴ Trimble and Johnson (2013) observed that fishing is not the only work opportunity available to the fishing community they studied, nonetheless, they won't have it any other way.²⁰⁵ When the fishermen in the said study were asked if they intended to stick to fishing all answered in the affirmative with the exception of one due to the income instability characteristic of the job, however, a year later, one of the fishermen who had answered in the affirmative had abandoned fishing not from want of exit but

¹⁹⁹ Pollnac and Poggie (2008), 196.

²⁰⁰ *ibid.*, 195.

²⁰¹ *ibid.*, 197.

²⁰² Young, Foale and Bellwood, 118.

²⁰³ *ibid.*, 121.

²⁰⁴ *ibid.*, 120.

²⁰⁵ Micaela Trimble and Derek Johnson, 'Artisanal Fishing as an Undesirable Way of Life? The Implications for Governance of Fishers' Wellbeing Aspirations in Coastal Uruguay and Southeastern Brazil', *Marine Policy*, xxxvii, 2 (2013), 40.

from need of a stable job. Three more were unreluctantly in the process of looking for a land job due to monetary and familial reasons. Many of the fishermen were reported to have most unwillingly imagined themselves doing another job because their wives and/or children wanted them to, however, they could not bring themselves to satisfy their request. Indeed, one of the fishermen ended up getting a divorce since his wife could no longer cope with his absence. He was reported to have said that ‘for him the fishery is more important than anything and for no reason would he quit it.’ The passion for fishing was also attested to by the older generation who upon retiring continue fishing mostly out of love for the activity.²⁰⁶

These findings correspond with Pollnac and Poggie’s (2008) analysis which revealed that;

They [the fishermen] resist leaving the fishery, and when they do enter a new occupation, they frequently find that it fails to satisfy their basic need for adventure. They become unhappy and try to return to fishing; hence, in the face of a changing world where management is trying to reduce the sizes of fishing fleets, the fishermen cannot easily adapt—they lack the resilience to cope with the dull, boring alternatives available in most communities.²⁰⁷

A case in point which further proves the point is presented by the fishing vessel buy-back programs which were put in action by the authorities with the aim of reducing the fishing fleet while providing the fishermen with monetary compensations to find employment elsewhere; a scheme which, in many cases, fell short of achieving their aim.²⁰⁸ The National Marine Fisheries Service under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Department of Commerce was criticised for the way it managed the 1995 and 1998 buy-back programs following the General Accounting Office’s discovery that many of the fishermen who opted for the scheme did not leave the fishery as envisaged. On the contrary they used the monetary compensation given them to purchase new fishing vessels and permits.²⁰⁹

Literature on the subject has proven time and again that fishing is not just a job but a way of life; an identity in itself. Since they are not dealing with ‘just’ a job but the whole being of individuals, governmental bodies should move away from the traditional top-down approach and treat the matter accordingly.²¹⁰ Depriving fishermen from fishing is equivalent to depriving them of their life essence and consequently every hope of happiness. As Pollnac and Poggie (2008) explain, ‘fishing *is* like an

²⁰⁶ *ibid.*

²⁰⁷ Pollnac and Poggie (2008), 199.

²⁰⁸ *ibid.*, 194.

²⁰⁹ Dexter Van Zile, ‘Council Challenge: What to Buy Back for \$10 million’, *National Fishermen*, lxxxii, 5 (2001), 11.

²¹⁰ Young, Foale and Bellwood, 121.

addiction, and most fishermen would do anything to avoid the potentially painful withdrawal symptoms.’²¹¹

In view of the prevailing situation dominated by legislations that are crippling small-scale fisheries from operating efficiently, the greater part of fishermen are against their children following in their footsteps. From their sample of sixteen fishermen, Trimble and Johnson (2013) recorded only two who expressed their wish for their children to take up fishing for a living whereas three avoided answering the question. The rest were all against the idea ²¹²

1.3 Formulating the Study

By providing a clear picture of ‘why they did what they did when they did it’, researchers can overcome the anxiety about validity in what Madden (2010) terms as ‘data transparency’.²¹³ He further states that ‘a sound methodology is one way to help make the journey unfold in such a way as to produce a “social-scientific” valid outcome.’²¹⁴ Every research needs to be minutely planned for it to yield reliable results. The planning should in turn be composed of distinct steps starting off with the initial stages of investigation and finishing off with the publication of the results or the availability of the work in written form.²¹⁵

1.3.1 Literature Review/Research

Apart from studying the contemporary Maltese fishing community, this study also embarked on reconstructing the history of the local fishery which proved to be particularly challenging as the timeline decided upon span from prehistory to contemporary times. Moreover, the topic had never been investigated in its entirety with only a couple of books/papers specifically focusing on fishing in a particular era being available. The rest of the information gathered was fragmentary and scattered in a multitude of sources. Where information on local fishing history was completely lacking, thorough research was carried on the fishing methods implemented by countries/nations Malta formed part of during the said timeframe. Correlation between the countries was investigated to

²¹¹ Pollnac and Poggie (2008), 99.

²¹² Trimble and Johnson, 41.

²¹³ Raymond Madden, *Being Ethnographic: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Ethnography* (London, SAGE publications, 2010), 26.

²¹⁴ *ibid.*

²¹⁵ Anthony Giddens, *Sociology* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1997), 539.

provide a more accurate and wholesome picture as possible of the local scenario. The availability of material on the subject became more pronounced with the turn of the 20th century which saw the establishment of the Department of Fisheries in 1920 during the British governance. Yearly Government reports started being issued along with other statistical information, newspaper articles, notices, pamphlets, and other reports commissioned by experts on the subject all of which were consulted and referred to.

Intensive reading of papers and other research work focusing on contemporary European and/or Mediterranean small-scale fishing communities was also carried out and referred to for a thorough comparison with the Maltese scenario in the data analysis chapters. Apart from being small-scale and Mediterranean, the fishing communities focused upon also share the same jurisdiction via the EU and thus have many similarities in terms of social, culture and legislative validity. This made the identification of criteria needing exploration within the local fishing community possible hence giving rise to a whole new level of research on Maltese fishermen which encompasses all aspects of their complex and intricate lifestyle the like of which has never been conducted before.

1.3.2 Formulation of a Hypothesis

The theme which kept emerging from all the readings about fisheries and fishermen, was hardship. It became evident that hardship emanates from every aspect of their lives. Even though the concept of hardship was hardly ever addressed, it continuously surfaced from British official and governmental reports. The topic started being better addressed once the social sciences and the ad vocation of qualitative research became more pronounced. The increasing body of sociological/qualitative literature proved helpful in the research on contemporary European and Mediterranean small-scale fisheries which, as opposed to previous works, started exploring the topic from a humanitarian perspective. Unfortunately, little has been done vis-à-vis the Maltese fishery. This research, therefore, aims to understand what a Maltese small-scale fisherman's life entails with the hypothesis being that the hardships are the reason behind the decimated state of the Maltese fishing community with the greatest cause being the legislations currently in place. As from its conception, this research envisaged that their coping skills, survival, and resilience in face of adversary, which thus far have always seen them through and which have been duly studied and analysed, are no longer effective or, at best, are providing temporary relief before long term repercussions ensue.

1.3.3 Selecting a Research Design: Qualitative and Ethnographic Approaches

Silverman (2010) explains that the research methods must be chosen according to the subject of interest. In other words, they should not be predetermined but rather chosen for their appropriateness depending on what one is trying to find out.²¹⁶ Being concerned with the social aspect of a community, the use of qualitative research methods was the research design envisaged to lend itself best for this study.

As emphasised by Flick (2018), qualitative research methods ‘approach the world out there’ with the aim of understanding, describing and, where necessary, explain social phenomena ‘from the inside’.²¹⁷ This can only be achieved by analysing the experiences of individuals or groups made available from the people’s everyday knowledge, accounts and stories; by analysing practices of interactions and communications; and through the analyses of documents.²¹⁸ Unlike quantitative, qualitative data makes use of words to convey meaning.²¹⁹ As Richardson and Adams St. Pierre (2011) further elaborate, qualitative research does not carry its meaning in summaries and tables but does so through the entire text. In their words, ‘just as a piece of literature is not equivalent to “its plot summary”, qualitative research is not contained in its abstract.’ They further claim that ‘qualitative research has to be read, not scanned; its meaning is in the reading.’²²⁰ Qualitative research, with its long history of development, is an ‘umbrella term’ for several approaches reverted to in social science research. Sometimes the term ‘research’ is substituted with the term ‘enquiry’. On other occasions both terms are discarded in favour of the encompassing title; ‘ethnography’.²²¹

Capturing the fishermen’s perspective on what is contributing to their hardships and how they try to cope in face of all adversity rendered an ethnographic approach, with its emphasis on the ‘subjects’ frame of reference’ and its fundamental rule ‘to remain open to their understanding of their world’²²², ideal for this research. Indeed, ethnography, as with anthropology in general from which it derives, aims at achieving ‘intersubjectivity’, that is the ability to ‘think, emote and cognize with one’s informants and, thereby, to come close to their perceptions and understandings of their social

²¹⁶ David Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research* (London, Sage Publications, 2010), 9-10.

²¹⁷ Uwe Flick, *Designing Qualitative Research* (London, Sage Publications, 2018), x.

²¹⁸ *ibid.*

²¹⁹ Michael Haralambos and Martin Holborn, *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives* (London, HarperCollins Publishers, 1995), 814.

²²⁰ L. Richardson and E. Adams St. Pierre, ‘Writing: A Method of Inquiry’, in *The Sage Handbook Of Qualitative Research*, N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (eds.) Sage Publications, London 2011, 959-960.

²²¹ Flick, 3.

²²² Jane B. Singer, ‘Ethnography’, *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, lxxxvi, 1 (2009), 191.

realities.’²²³ As Madden (2010) puts it, ‘ethnographers value the idea of “walking a mile in the shoes” of others.’²²⁴ This is done with the purpose of understanding the lives of the people under study and is achieved with the implementation of multiple techniques characteristic of ethnography with the most common being interviews and observation which can in turn be accompanied by document analysis, visuals, and diaries amongst others.²²⁵ Importance with ethnography, as with all method approaches, is the quality level. The most important indicator of quality in applying this approach is extended participation in the community being studied. Researchers should be able to say that they have been ‘there’ and for a long enough period to cultivate a well-grounded comprehension of the said community. A second determinant of quality is the flexibility in using different techniques in information gathering. Thus, the researcher should exploit as many genera of methodological approaches as possible to obtain a complete picture. Finally, quality can be determined from the writing quality wherein researchers have to yield a description of what they examined and discovered. The latter should also be transparent in respect of how they found what they report.²²⁶ When ethnographic techniques are properly implemented and due attention is given to the quality indicators, ethnography provides in-depth studies. As artistically put by Gottlieb (2006) it ‘allows the reader to virtually taste the flavours of the local cuisine and smell the sea breezes.’²²⁷

As with any research method, ethnography has its own limitations foremost of which is the acceptance of the researcher by the community chosen for the study; a situation which holds especially true if the ethnographer carries the research in a foreign country or comes from a different social background. Fetterman (1998) claims that ideally, the researcher lives and works in the community chosen for at least six months. A long-term stay enables the researcher to ‘internalise the basic beliefs, fears, hopes, and expectations of the people under study.’²²⁸ Being from Marsaxlokk, a village embedded in local fishing traditions, and having family members with a fishing background, the researcher, who being myself will henceforth be referred to in the first person, was already endowed with basic knowledge and understanding of the archipelago’s fishing community. Having always lived amidst members of the said community enabled this research to be well grounded, a feature which would have been compromised if I had to establish myself in a fishing community for a

²²³ A.P. Cohen, ‘Producing Data – Involvement and Detachment’, in *Ethnographic Research: A Guide to General Conduct*, R. F. Ellen (ed.) Academic Press Limited, London 1984, 228.

²²⁴ Madden, 1.

²²⁵ Singer, 191.

²²⁶ Flick, 116.

²²⁷ A. Gottlieb, ‘Ethnography: Theory and Methods’, in *A Handbook for Social Science Field Research: Essays and Bibliographic Sources on Research Design and Methods*, E. Perecman and S. R. Curran (eds.) Sage Publications, California 2006, 51.

²²⁸ David M. Fetterman, *Ethnography: Step by Step* (London, Sage Publications, 1998), 35.

predetermined, and much shorter, period of time. Living locally also helped in being, more or less, accepted by fishermen. Seeing as the research was locally conducted, the language barrier was also nullified. Fetterman (1998) encapsulates all these points as follows;

Ethnographic research in one's own culture may not require as much time to reach this point as ethnographic work in a foreign culture: Language and customs are familiar, and the researcher is already an insider in many respects.²²⁹

Nonetheless, he also claims that sometimes, if a familiar setting is too familiar, the researcher might take actions for granted hence leaving out important information.²³⁰ As a counteraction to this possibility it can be argued that even though I hail from Marsaxlokk, and consequently am exposed to the Maltese Islands' predominant fishing community, not being a fisher created a partial detachment. This classified me as a local with familial fishing associations and deeply embedded roots in the village's life observing from the periphery; familiar but not *too* familiar.

For a more thorough acceptance, any researcher's 'best ticket' is an introduction by an affiliate of the community as 'walking into a community cold can have a chilling effect on ethnographic research....an intermediary or go-between can open doors otherwise locked to outsiders.'²³¹ Being a well-known retired fisherman from Marsaxlokk, my father acted as the intermediary in this study. The trust placed in the intermediary approximates the trust extended to the researcher especially at the beginning of the study.²³² Indeed the trust offered was not limited to Marsaxlokk but was extended by fishermen hailing from all fishing villages. Fishermen automatically offered their friendship upon learning that a fellow fisher was in their midst. On other occasions explaining my familial ties with fishing, sufficed. Once their trust was gained, fishermen recommended fellow fishermen to be included in the study. This accentuated the shared sense of community fisher folk share which extends beyond acquaintance and village boundaries.

1.3.4 Carrying out the Research

All research methods, no matter how diverse they may be, have only one purpose; to yield reliable results. As touched upon in section 1.3.3, several different research techniques are attributed to ethnographers and sociologists with the most reverted to being interviews and observations.

²²⁹ *ibid.*, 36.

²³⁰ *ibid.*

²³¹ *ibid.*, 33.

²³² *ibid.*

1.3.4.1 Interviews

‘Having a conversation with somebody is extremely common in human interaction.’²³³ According to Kemp and Ellen (1984), speech is ‘the basic tool any fieldworker uses to discover what is going on and the meaning it has for those studied.’²³⁴ Indeed;

From the social scientific perspective, interviews are a method of data collection that involves two or more people exchanging information through a series of questions and answers. The questions are designed by a researcher to elicit information from interview participant(s) on a specific topic or set of topics. Typically interviews involve an in-person meeting between two people, an interviewer and an interviewee.²³⁵

Interviews help researchers in explaining and putting in the wider context what interviewees experience and see²³⁶ as based on the principle of human nature. Interviews are also ideal when the topic being studied is somewhat complex, when lengthy explanations are required, and when the topic per se or the questions asked may not be straightforwardly clear in that the interviewees may require some time to answer what is asked of them. As with this research, interviews lend themselves best when the people concerned have a lot to say and need to provide explanations or descriptions to convey a proper answer.²³⁷

In this study, face-to-face interviews were used for their promotion of synchronous communication in both time and space which, in turn, had the added value of providing insight of the interviewee’s perception from the social cues including intonation, the voice and the body language which accompanied the verbal answers, this being an added advantage of qualitative interviews, whereby researchers can make observations beyond what is being verbally reported.²³⁸ Its real time nature also allowed the interviewee’s answers to be more spontaneous as there was no significant delay between questions and answers. A voice recorder, which was most conveniently used in this research, made the whole process more accurate than it could have ever been possible with note taking.²³⁹ Apart from being less accurate, writing during the interview can be disruptive with the interviewee becoming concerned with what is being written. It is also disruptive as note taking can draw the attention away

²³³ *ibid.*, 840.

²³⁴ J. H. Kemp and R.F. Ellen, ‘Producing Data – Informal Interviewing’, in *Ethnographic Research: A Guide to General Conduct*, R.F. Ellen (ed.) Academic Press Limited, London 1984, 229.

²³⁵ Amy Blackstone. *Principals of Sociological Inquiry: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods*. Saylor Foundation, 2012. Marshall Digital Scholar. 2012. 26 March 2023 <<https://mds.marshall.edu/oa-textbooks/113/>>.

²³⁶ Fetterman, 37.

²³⁷ Blackstone, 2012.

²³⁸ *ibid.*

²³⁹ Raymond Opdenakker, ‘Advantages and Disadvantages of Four Interview Techniques in Qualitative Research’, *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, vii, 4 (2006), Art 11.

from the conversation.²⁴⁰ As stressed by Silverman (2010), recording of interviews is a must since they have the added advantage of being played again making ‘the old days of pen and paper...long gone.’²⁴¹ The interviews were closed off by asking the interviewees whether they had further remarks to make. This led to the generation of information that would have otherwise been overlooked.²⁴² Compared to other data collecting procedures, such as questionnaires, interviews also helped in giving a more convincing explanation of the study’s purpose than a covering letter could possibly do²⁴³ and allow for direct interactions between researcher and researched.

The conversational nature of interviews is characteristic of more unstructured interviews in which the researcher has no list of predetermined questions as opposed to the completely structured interview which can be defined as a researcher administered questionnaire in which there is zero tolerance to deviation from the questions. The most common interview format used by researchers, including myself, is the semi-structured type which falls between the two extremities.²⁴⁴ In this case, the interviewer has a set of questions prepared beforehand to be used as a guide. Deviation from the subject is not problematical. On the contrary, it can prove to be an added advantage and thus encouraged.²⁴⁵ Semi-structured interviews are also known as qualitative interviews, intensive interviews or in-depth interviews. The aim of these type of interviews ‘is to hear from respondents about what they think is important about the topic at hand and to hear it in their own words.’²⁴⁶ Since this research sought to gain a thorough understanding of the fishermen’s way of life, hardships, coping mechanisms and resilience in face of adversity, all the guiding questions used were of an open-ended nature except for a few. The questions prepared beforehand helped in remembering to ask questions that would have otherwise been forgotten. They also helped in the interview’s smooth flow especially when a stand-still was reached.²⁴⁷ The pre-conceived interview guide characteristic of semi-structured interviews presents standard questions which make comparisons between interviews possible whilst maintaining data quality.²⁴⁸ At the same time the interviewee was given enough

²⁴⁰ Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (London, Tavistock Publications, 1983), 162.

²⁴¹ Silverman, 199-200.

²⁴² Opdenakker.

²⁴³ A.N. Oppenheim, *Questionnaire Design, Interviewing and Attitude Measurement* (London, Continuum, 2005), 81-2.

²⁴⁴ Haralambos and Holborn, 839.

²⁴⁵ Silverman, 194.

²⁴⁶ Blackstone, 2012.

²⁴⁷ Kemp and Ellen, 233.

²⁴⁸ Juliette C. Young, David C. Rose, Hannah S. Mumby, Francisco Benitez-Capistros, Christina J. Derrick, Tom Finch, Carolina Garcia, Chandrima Home, Esha Marwaha, Courtney Morgans, Stephen Parkinson, Jay Shah, Kerrie A. Wilson and Nibedita Mukherjee, ‘A Methodological Guide to Using and Reporting on Interviews in Conservation Science Research’, *Methods in Ecology and Evolution*, ix, 1 (2018), 12.

‘conversational space to explore the answer as an act of conversation.’ Madden (2010) explained how open-ended questions lend themselves better than closed-ended questions seeing as the latter require the interviewee to merely answer with a yes or a no, or opt between more or less.²⁴⁹ The pre-conceived interview guide characteristic of semi-structured interviews presents standard questions which make comparisons between interviews possible whilst maintaining data quality.

Both part-time and full-time fishermen from different Maltese and Gozitan localities were interviewed; these being the only two fisher categories who are officially registered to commercialise their catch. Being the ones who make a living from the enterprise also makes them more susceptible to suffer from the changes and/or problems afflicting the sector. As highlighted by Flick (2018);

Qualitative researchers are interested in people who are ‘really’ concerned and experienced with the issue under study...in this way, our sample should be representative – not in a statistical way or in representing the reality in a basic population. Rather our cases should be able to represent the relevance of the phenomenon.²⁵⁰

Being more accessible, the first few interviewees were held with familiar fishermen. Eventually, the pool of interviewees was extended to include fishermen suggested by fellow fishermen. Subsequently, the information elicited was more representative of the fishing community. Tracing and contacting different genera of small-scale fishermen from different localities was also facilitated by the cooperatives’ record of registered fishermen.

The age factor was somewhat more difficult to tackle due to the fishermen’s aging population with relatively few young people showing interest in taking up a fisherman’s life. The average age of the interviewees was fifty-four years with the youngest one being just twenty-three and the oldest eighty at the time of the interview. Circa one-eighth of the fishermen interviewed were retired. Retirement was not necessarily age related. Whereas the greater part of the 63+ fishermen were retired, other much younger fishermen retired from the need to find alternate employment because of injury. A few others kept fishing as a profession beyond their retirement age. The approach taken provided me with a variety of experiences. The danger of focusing exclusively on core cases was eliminated, a phenomenon which is more characteristic of research that has a predetermined sample of interviewees.

²⁴⁹ Madden, 69-70.

²⁵⁰ Flick, 51-2.

In all, forty-one formal interviews were conducted with fishermen across different localities with the greatest part being full-timers owning an MFA²⁵¹ registered fishing vessel. Several fishermen, who also happened to be in possession of an MFA fishing vessel, had a complementary job, usually land-based, to complement their fishing income. Associating MFA registered fishing vessels exclusively with full-time fishermen is a common misconception. MFA registered fishing vessels tend to be associated thus due to the larger amount of catch required to be declared in the vessel's name, nonetheless, an MFA registered fishing vessel can equally pertain to a part-time fisherman. In this case, the fisherman must work as hard as any full-timer to land as large a catch as dictated by his boat's registration while keeping up with another job. Failing to do so would result in the downgrade of the vessel's registration from MFA to MFB. Consequently, fishermen lose their claim to subsidised fuel, it being the prerogative of MFA registered vessels.

Even though forty-one formal interviews were carried out with fishermen, a considerably larger number of people were interviewed in the process. As it happens some interviews were conducted with pairs or groups of fishermen at one go. On several occasions this occurred when fishermen were approached while labouring away in their garages or whilst on shore. In most of these cases fishermen who happened to be in the proximity became intrigued by the research and joined in. Other information was elicited from informal conversations with fishermen while casually strolling along the quays. Several interviews were also carried out with women in the industry. These included full-time fisher wives, wives to part-timers, women who helped both their husbands and sons, women who came from fishing families themselves as opposed to others who married into the tradition, and old versus younger wives amongst other variations. These interviews helped to shed light on the fishermen's lives from a different perspective and to get a better understanding of one of the fishermen's strongest sources of resilience; the women's support. They also helped in sustaining the fishermen's arguments thus validating the data gathered. Interestingly, the older women interviewed who were born into the fishing tradition were fishers themselves when still at home and upon marrying a fisher husband. Other stakeholders who bear an impact on fishermen were also interviewed. These include retired traditional boat builders and others who reverted to the building of fibreglass boats. Flick (2018) also suggested that the researcher should carry out interviews with personnel in 'different positions, maybe from different hierarchies in the institution.'²⁵² The latter was considered when cooperative members and other personnel within the authoritative sector were

²⁵¹ As opposed to MFC, the MFA and MFB categories are composed of vessels of which the catch can be marketed. Moreover, vessels in the MFA category are required to register more catches in terms of fish value than MFB vessels.

²⁵² Flick, 53.

met and spoken to during meetings. The final interview collection encompassed information on all aspects of the Maltese small-scale fishery from different perspectives.

Interviews are also prone to disadvantages. Amongst these, one can mention the reluctance potential participants might have in accepting to be interviewed. As with any other research, this one was susceptible to this problem with a couple of fishermen refusing to participate out rightly from being either too shy of character or suspicious of the study. In the latter's case fishermen believed me to be a governmental representative set out to uncover information that could manifest itself in further restrictions on their already heavily regularised profession. The problem was immediately resolved once they were given an explanation on the nature of both the study and the questions. This tactic proved to be successful in all cases except for a few. It soon became evident that the best way to gain their consent was to approach them individually. In the presence of suspicious fishermen others became automatically prone to refuse participation. Nevertheless, it must also be admitted that a whole group approach worked favourably on several occasions as well whereby outgoing fishermen encouraged their colleagues to follow suit and participate. Attending cooperative meetings presented additional opportunities for meeting with potential interviewees. Sometimes, strolling along the shore gave rise to meetings with fishermen which developed into fully-fledged interviews there and then, however, in most cases, I was provided with a contact number to set up an appointment at a later date. When making acquaintances face-to-face was not possible, I reverted to making contact and set up appointments with potential informants via telephone. Contact numbers were provided by the local cooperatives upon gaining the fishermen's consent. To avoid rejection and set their mind at rest I took it upon myself to start off the conversation with an introduction and explanation. As Haralambos and Holborn (1995) state, 'at the initial point of contact it is important that the interviewers establish why they wish to carry out the interview and what the information is to be used for.'²⁵³

Although the above information gives account of how suspicion was overcome, it must be stressed that the number of refusals and reluctance at being interviewed was negligible. Most of the fishermen were more than happy to have someone listen to them and expressed their satisfaction at having had their vast experiences and opinions recorded and taken into account. They also offered further assistance should it be required and ended up being the ones doing the thanks when it should have been the other way round. These problems were inexistent when it came to interviewing other stakeholders including fishermen's wives and boat builders.

²⁵³ Haralambos and Holborn, 840.

Another potential problem with unstructured interviews is the increased ‘opportunity for the interviewer (usually without realising it) to direct the interviewee towards giving certain types of response.’ In other words, the respondents might be apt to give the answers they believe the interviewer wants to hear instead of voicing their true opinion. This was counteracted by the nature of the study itself. The fishermen interviewed felt very strongly about the subject being discussed and talked animatedly and passionately reducing the so called ‘interview bias’ to a minimum. The bias possibility was further thwarted by the familial fisherman’s presence during the interviewing process. Apart from providing them with reassurance as to the nature of the study, his presence helped them to relax knowing full well that they would not be judged for;

Once the interviewee feels that he or she is not going to be criticised or judged, that they can talk freely and can rely upon a sympathetic audience, it is hoped that they will talk with honesty and openness the researcher is seeking.²⁵⁴

A prerogative that was considered was the location and timing of the interviews seeing as where and when they are held are as important as to who is being interviewed.²⁵⁵ When possible, the interviews were conducted on the fishermen’s territory. These included interviews along the shore while they were undertaking boat maintenance works, summer residences next to quaysides where boats are moored, and even at their residences when invited. The latter also included garages in which much of the preparatory onshore work, including the mending of nets, trap making and long-line preparations, takes place. These occasions demanded that I visit the interviewee’s village of residence keeping in mind that ‘interviewing them on their own territory is the best strategy since it allows them to relax much more than they would in either a university office or a public place.’²⁵⁶

Another limitation of interviews is the large amount of time needed for transcribing them. In this study, transcribing was particularly time consuming since many people were interviewed. Furthermore, most of the interviews were very long with some exceeding two hours of talk time. Being a refined transcriber, each interview was transcribed in its entirety. Some interviews proved to be more difficult to transcribe than others as their comprehension was rendered more difficult with the presence of elements which affected the recording such as interference from third persons, the use of technical terms and the use of local dialects particularly in the Gozitan fishers’ case. A considerable amount of time was taken in double-checking the finished transcripts. Despite the time-consuming

²⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 840.

²⁵⁵ Hammersley and Atkinson, 122.

²⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 125.

nature of transcriptions, they allowed for better understanding²⁵⁷ which came in handy during the data analysis to the extent that;

The analysis of discourse is so much a part of the interpretation of culture and of people's modes of thought that the absence of texts, no matter how long transcription may take, would seem to be a major omission in anthropological fieldwork.²⁵⁸

1.3.4.2 Observation/Participant Observation

'Whatever other research techniques the anthropologist might employ during fieldwork, the main yielding procedure is observation.'²⁵⁹ Its importance is highlighted in its widespread use to the extent that all sociological research makes use of some sort of observation.²⁶⁰

Observation relies on the use of the senses. It perceives everything that is seen, felt and heard making the specific actions of individuals, be it either physical acts or speech acts, the 'only one kind of phenomena in whole realm of social life which is observable in this sense.'²⁶¹ Observation provides the researcher with the opportunity to elicit meaning of the culture under study that cannot be acquired through the use of standardised enquiries alone since there are things that people deliberately omit from saying or may lack the skill of expressing themselves but live them as part of their common experience. Were it not for observation, they would go unnoticed.²⁶² Apart from checking nonverbal expressions of feeling, observation reveals as to who interacts with whom, provides insight into how participants communicate with each other and helps in determining how much time is spent on the activities undertaken.²⁶³ DeWalt and DeWalt (2002) remark on the importance of including the practice of observation as it brings about the 'tacit understandings and insights' into research.²⁶⁴

In determining whether to use observation or not, one must take in consideration the types of questions that the researcher seeks to answer, the site to be studied, what can be observed within the site under discussion, the representativeness of the participants of the population at the said site, and

²⁵⁷ E. Tonkin, 'Preparation for Fieldwork - Language Learning', in *Ethnographic Research: A Guide to General Conduct*, R.F. Ellen (ed.) Academic Press Limited, London 1984, 186.

²⁵⁸ J. Blacking, 'Preparation for Fieldwork - Audio-Visual Equipment in General Ethnographic Studies', in *ibid.*, 202.

²⁵⁹ L. Holy, 'Theory, Methodology and the Research Process - Participant Observation and Positivism' in *ibid.*, 24.

²⁶⁰ Haralambos and Holborn, 843.

²⁶¹ Holy, 25.

²⁶² Tonkin, 220.

²⁶³ Barbara B. Kawulich, 'Participant Observation as a Data Collection Method', *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, vi, 2 (2005), 4.

²⁶⁴ Kathleen M. DeWalt and Billie R. DeWalt, *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers* (Lanham, AltaMira Press, 2011), 92.

the strategies to be used in both recording and data analysis.²⁶⁵ The feasibility of conducting observation for this study was assessed against these criteria all of which pointed in its favour. Since this research focused on multiple localities, observations were not limited to one site. All the sites were visited on numerous occasions in assessing various aspects, nonetheless, Marsaxlokk lent itself best to the majority of the observations since the largest number of fishermen reside here and hosts the major events related to fishing.

Shah (2017) recognises four basics to participant observation with the first being ‘intimacy and estrangement’ by which she claims that apart from foreign countries, participant observation can be carried out in the researcher’s own community as long as he/she has been sufficiently estranged from the people under study over the course of his/her life. A second characteristic of successful participant observation is ‘duration’. This aspect is relevant as it takes a long stretch of time to get to know and be a part of other people’s lives. Indeed, both these aspects have been automatically adopted for this study seeing as living in a fishing village with fisher family members provided for the duration asked of proper research. It also endowed me with an understanding of the fishing community while allowing space for sufficient estrangement by not being a fisher myself. The third aspect of importance to Shah (2017) in defining successful participant observation is referred to as the ‘holism of people’ by which she refers to the total understanding of the social context of the people being studied. Its importance lies in its recognition that no one aspect of social life can be understood independently from another. Finally, reference is made to the ‘revelation of social relations of a group of people’ which requires one to be intimately acquainted with the people along with those affecting them and who are in turn affected by them which leads to an understanding of people, places, and forces other than the immediate group of people being studied. This study adopted a holism approach since multiple aspects of the fishermen’s lives were taken in consideration in trying to construct as wholesome a picture as possible. As to the last point, people other than fishermen were observed and consulted in this study; people who both affect fishers and are affected by them. These include stakeholders who bear affinity with fishing policies, boat builders, fish marketing and fisher wives. Shah (2017) encapsulates all these aspects in one sentence, namely;

Participant observation centres a *long-term* intimate engagement with a *group of people* that were once *strangers* to us in order to know and experience the world through their perspectives and actions in as *holistic* way as possible.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁵ Kawulich, 5.

²⁶⁶ Alpa Shah, ‘Ethnography? Participant Observation, A Potentially Revolutionary Praxis’, *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, vii, 1 (2017), 51-2.

Bernard (1994) explained that the key to successful participant observation is the establishment of rapport and gaining the group's trust; a process which is facilitated through 'hanging out.'²⁶⁷ Hanging around in the respective sites was greatly beneficial for this study. Kawulich (2005) captures this sentiment of hanging out and rapport building as follows;

This process of hanging out involves meeting and conversing with people to develop relationships over an extended period...Rapport-building involves active listening, showing respect and empathy, being truthful, and showing a commitment to the well-being of the community or individual.²⁶⁸

Assuming the attitude of a novice, helped Kawulich (2005) in getting the informants to teach her what she needed to know about the culture of the Muscogee (Creek) women of Oklohama she was studying. This attitude proved to be very helpful in establishing rapport with fishermen. As with Kawulich (2005) it also encouraged community members in explaining things they deemed important for me to know by which invitations were extended for the observation of activities which further facilitated the understanding of their culture.²⁶⁹

Intensive observations were carried in many fishing villages. They provided invaluable information on the fishermen's sense of community, the importance of women's participation in their husband's/son's enterprises, the labour required of maintenance works, the manifold preparations indispensable for successful fishing expeditions and the fishermen's adherence to faith and superstition; information which complemented the data collected from interviews and helped in constructing as wholesome picture as possible of the Maltese fishing community.

Apart from visiting sites, numerous meetings held for the fishermen were also attended. These included meetings held by both cooperatives to discuss topics of interest, meetings held by the department of fisheries and others by the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries, Food & Animal Rights, mass celebrations interlinked with fishing, the blessing of the boats prior the *lampuki* fishing season, annual *Festa Ħut* (Fishfest) celebrations, and the official launching of a documentary on *lampuki* fishing.

²⁶⁷ H. Russell Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (Lanham, AltaMira Press, 2006), 364.

²⁶⁸ Kawulich, 13.

²⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 15-6.

1.3.4.3 Photography

Photography is categorised as visual data, nonetheless, this term encompasses more than the obvious use of photographs and films. It includes ‘naturally occurring observational data’ and other aspects that can be observed in the environment such as advertisements and street signs²⁷⁰. Even though ethnographers derive a lot of meaning when conversing with people, insight into social life can be gained through photography. With time, ethnographers started including photos in their work by abiding to the principle that ‘a picture can tell a thousand words.’²⁷¹ Photos help in analysing ceremonies and rites. They also help to render their work more attractive and to bring the lifestyles of the people studied closer to the readers.²⁷² Due to these undisputed advantages, photography was extensively used in this research as well, with most of the photos being included in the data analysis chapters to better facilitate the readers’ understanding and help them conjure an accurate picture as possible of the community this research represents.

1.3.4.4 Official Statistics

Apart from primary sources which are produced first handed by the researchers themselves during their study, reference should also be made to secondary sources which consist of information that has already been produced by other people. Secondary sources are also practical to use as they provide data that would otherwise be impossible to produce. The holds especially true of data that is historical in nature.²⁷³

Apart from the customary reference to books, journals and dissertations, secondary sources of great relevance are national statistics which are government produced.²⁷⁴ During the course of my research, a number of national statistic documents were consulted most of which were accessed by means of the National Statistics Office (NSO)’s website, censuses of agriculture and fisheries, particularly the census on fisheries, were of great relevance. With regards to the former, information of a quantitative nature shed light on aspects relevant for this study including information on the types of vessels and licences. Unfortunately, as opposed to the agricultural sector to which whole chapters are dedicated, little information is provided on the Maltese fisheries; information which is always restricted to a few

²⁷⁰ Silverman, 243.

²⁷¹ Gottlieb, 47.

²⁷² Blacking, 199 - 200.

²⁷³ Haralambos and Holborn, 849.

²⁷⁴ *ibid.*, 850.

pages in the last chapter. This lack of information was somewhat made good for by the 2006 census of fisheries in which information on the structure of fishing vessels, open sea fisheries employment, aquaculture and tuna farming, and the economic aspect of the fisheries were made available. Previous to this, another census of fisheries was carried out in 1997. Considering the apparent changes that have taken place in the fisheries sector since then, a more updated and recent census of fisheries is called for. Other statistical information made reference to, include EU and FAO publishings.

1.3.4.5 Government Reports, Gazettes and Pamphlets

Government reports aim at providing the government of the day with the necessary information on the then contemporary issues and events.²⁷⁵ The government reports and gazettes consulted in this research were of a historical nature accentuating the importance of secondary sources considering the 'limits to the period over which a sociological study using primary sources can extend.' Furthermore, historical sources are vital 'in understanding how contemporary patterns of social life came about.'²⁷⁶ These reports started being issued on a yearly basis with the establishment of the Department of Fisheries in 1920 (see section 2.8.1). The first reports were written by Giuseppe Despott who was the superintendent of the time. Despott's reports included information of a qualitative nature. He provided insight into the dire situation of fishermen at the time which helped in the construction of the history chapter. Unfortunately, not all the reports were available even though multiple libraries and archives, including the University of Malta's Melitensia, Santo Spirtu at Rabat and Malta's National Library at Valletta, were consulted. Later, an amalgamated report on the agricultural and fisheries sectors started being issued. Once again, not all the reports were available.

Other reports which were invaluable for this research were the ones produced by James Hornell and T.W. Burdon respectively. James Hornell arrived in Malta on the 17th of April 1931 at the request of the Government of Malta to carry out a rapid survey of the fisheries conditions, whereas Burdon, who arrived in the early 1950s, was entrusted with the task of identifying the issues which were detrimental to the Maltese fishing industry at the time. Closely related to the government, Hornell's and Burdon's reports were the subsequent publications of fishing regulations and amendments published in government gazettes. A gazette, which could also be referred to as a pamphlet and which was consulted repeatedly in this research, was '*Is-Sajd*'. As with the department, this gazette/pamphlet,

²⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 853.

²⁷⁶ *ibid.*, 852.

which originally focused exclusively on fishing, started to focus on the agricultural sector as well and was subsequently renamed '*L-Agrikoltura*'. The monthly publications available span from the early 1950s up to the early 1970s, however, several issues were missing. As with the government reports and gazettes, this publication helped in constructing the history of local fishing.

1.3.5 Result Interpretation and the Reporting of the Findings

The next step in any research process requires the researcher to go through all the information gathered to conceptualise and elicit results. Different strategies for information interpretation must be implemented since the vast range of data the researcher has to deal with results from different data collecting techniques. In this study's case interviews were designed to be the main font of information. With most of the interviews being lengthy, proper data deciphering could only be achieved through the transcripts' analysis. Being semi-structured, the interviews did not follow a strict format and the interviewees had the freedom to elaborate at will with various topics being revisited during the interview. This rendered the information categorisation a necessity. The transcripts had to be read multiple times to elicit any data related to a given topic. The data thus collected was further categorised into subsections. All the answers and explanations provided were compared and cross-examined with information gathered from other sources including observations, notes, photographs, and published works which, as with the interviews, were also categorised.

1.3.6 Ethics

Having delineated the entire research process, it is sensible to spare a thought to the observance of ethics. Since anthropological work aims at capturing the lives of people, researchers in this field are morally obliged to keep their subjects' best interest at heart ensuring that they come to no harm as a result of their intrusion. Common to every protocol involving research of this nature is respect for the culture of the community being studied. One must be sensitive to the norms they embrace. The opportunity to interview people pertaining to different cultures should be considered as both a privilege and an opportunity to learn.²⁷⁷ Indeed, the fishermen's vast knowledge and expertise in all the areas of their multifaceted work was overwhelming with this research giving the opportunity for

²⁷⁷ R. F. Ellen, 'Producing Data - Introduction' in *Ethnographic Research: A Guide to General Conduct*, R.F. Ellen (ed.) Academic Press Limited, London 1984, 45.

a better appreciation of an underrated profession and a whole new dimension to a unique Maltese community the like of which is fading into oblivion.

Blackstone (2012), remarks on the power differentiation between the interviewer and the interviewees in that the former is the one to set the agenda and in control of the interview in general whilst the latter are encouraged to give information about themselves; factors that ‘shape the power dynamics of an interview.’ One way to balance the odds is for the researcher to make clear the intent of the research as from the start and how the information gathered will be used and stored.²⁷⁸ Being also the means by which to secure their trust and elicit reliable information, this was the approach adopted in this research study. The power played between both parties was further balanced by conducting the interview in the locations of the interviewees’ choice. Being either at the quay, their garages, their homes or otherwise, the place set upon was chosen and consented to by the participants which guaranteed maximum comfort for successful interviewing.

Since interviewing is a form of social interaction, a rapport is automatically formed between those involved which, in turn, demands the most important of elements; respect, which should be manifested in multiple ways.²⁷⁹ Apart from adequate attire that reflected their surroundings, in this research respect was also manifested in scheduling interviews according to the work obligations of the interviewees.²⁸⁰ With the fishermen’s job relying heavily on weather fluctuations, several calls had to be made in attendance of a day unfit for fishing for the interview to take place. Another consideration was respecting the fishermen’s fishing seasons. This induced me to refrain carrying out interviews with fishermen during the high seasons and agreeing to any time they had at their disposition.

Listening to what the interviewees had to say was another sign of respect. Blackstone (2012), remarks on the active nature of listening which, as opposed to a passive practice, requires the researcher to participate in the conversation that ensues.²⁸¹ Being semi-structured in nature, the questions asked were not rigidly adhered to. In turn, spontaneous, previously unthought of questions were asked following an interesting point remarked upon by the interviews, which apart from eliciting interesting information, demonstrated that they were being listened to.

²⁷⁸ Blackstone, 2012.

²⁷⁹ *ibid.*

²⁸⁰ Ellen, 45.

²⁸¹ Blackstone, 2012.

Ethics play a major role in the writing process as well. The interviewees' consent in using the information and giving them reassurance as to their identity remaining anonymous was of paramount importance. To this end, the researcher was cautious and refrained from giving away any cues that would give away the fishermen's identity. Extra consideration to the latter was given to sections in which reference was made to their concerns of, and opinion on, legislation. Ethical observance in writing was also manifested during the reproduction of the information. This was achieved by reporting their views as accurately as possible without trying to modify them in any way to meet the expectations of the readers.²⁸²

Researchers should always reflect on the impact they might have on the daily lives of the participants and try to limit it as much as possible²⁸³. In short it has to be kept in mind that;

We intrude upon people and require them to bear the burden of our presence. Our intellectual task is to represent them fairly. Our moral responsibility is to approach them with humility and integrity. Our use of interviews and informants is not, therefore, merely a matter of procedural and methodological principals. It should also be informed by these essentially humane values, for it is in their proper application that their lies the special competence of anthropology to discover and describe their cultures.²⁸⁴

1.4 The Chapters

Following a clear delineation of the topic of interest and the process by which all the related information was gathered and deciphered, it is worth the while to spare some thought on the research's presentation to let readers know what to expect from the subsequent chapters.

Recognising the importance of giving due consideration to the history of any topic intended to be researched, the chapter immediately following this one is exclusively dedicated to the history of local fishing. The timeline chosen reaches far back to its earliest conception back in prehistoric times up to the present day and age with the intention of presenting as wholesome a picture as possible of the history of Maltese fishing as never done before. As with elsewhere, the long history of fishing of the Maltese people attest to the fishermen's resilience; the predominant characteristic which has seen them through the millennia.

²⁸² Flick, 92.

²⁸³ *ibid.*, 90.

²⁸⁴ A. P. Cohen, 'Producing Data – Informants' in *Ethnographic Research: A guide to general conduct*, R.F. Ellen (ed.) Academic Press Limited, London 1984, 228-9.

The next chapter focuses exclusively on the three main supporting mechanisms recognised to sustain and promote the fishermen's resilience with the first being the strong sense of community shared amongst the fishermen who are bound to each other through solidarity and empathy, a shared sense of identity, and the creation of an 'us' against 'them' approach. The Maltese fishermen's sense of community is strong enough to defy all boundaries and extend beyond the individual fishing villages to create one, unified fishing community.

Fishing has always been strongly associated with men, but the truth reveals that women play an equally important role in sustaining fishing communities with the greater part of their work going unrecognised until recently. Women have multiple roles to play both directly and indirectly though time is seeing a shift in the assisting approaches taken. Traditionally women accompanied their fathers, husbands and/or sons on their fishing expeditions and were equally capable of carrying out solo fishing giving rise to fully fledged fisherwomen the like of which has never been seen again. Selling the catch was, and still is, the prerogative of women double folded with other fishing related activities. As ever before, their support is crucial in child rearing, the responsibility of which befalls entirely on the women seeing as the men spent long hours and days at sea. The role of present-day fisher wives has shifted considerably in relation to fishing related tasks. Nowadays, women seek direct employment elsewhere to complement the men's income which, even though healthy for the family's sustainability, may be contributing to the fishing community's demise; further confirming that women's direct participation in fishing and fish related activities boost the fishermen's resilience. The third contributing element to the fishermen's resilience is their belief in the supernatural being either religious or of a more secular nature. Both categories are closely linked to precarious jobs of which fishing ranks at the top. Innovative technological inventions have both reduced failed fishing expeditions and life-threatening situations which would have automatically diminished the fishermen's reliance on supernatural powers had it not been for the resurgence of new problems. The ensuing insecurity asks for the additional reassurance both religion and superstition provide in seeing them through difficult situations.

The chapter that follows encapsulates all the challenges the Maltese small-scale fishing community faces. The most obvious are those that have always characterised fishermen's lives these being weather fluctuations and the unpredictability of catches and income. Others include long hours of work, the strenuous nature of the job and incidents which have adverse effects on their mental and physical well-being. This situation is rendered even more cumbersome with the introduction of human imposed challenges most often taking the shape of regulations imposed by a top-down

hierarchy system in the name of the environment and the economy but no space for the social aspect reducing fishermen to powerless spectators. Other human induced problems include the introduction of marine alien species, the privatisation of fishing grounds for recreational purposes, fish farming, power generating plants and ship trafficking amongst others all of which jeopardise the fishermen's livelihood. Whereas fishermen have learnt to cope and deal with the natural elements as best they could, the new influx of overpowering problems are having a toll on their resilience. The only means by which to survive is to come up with desperate solutions, which, even though short term, help them to make it through another day before it becomes too much for even the strongest of fishermen.

1.5 Conclusion

Fishing has always been looked down upon as a menial job. The complexities of the profession and the vast knowledge and understanding that go into fishing may be invisible to the outsider. The availability of the best fish on the market deemed an everyday commodity is only made possible by the fishermen's work characterised by long hours, little rest, hardships, and the braving of elements and insecurities. The perceived lack of appreciation by the public, especially stakeholders, translates in relentless regulations which put further strain on the already exhausted fishing communities. Their multiple advantages coupled with their potential in promoting environmental and economic well-being ask for prompt action to be taken to safeguard the Maltese small-scale fishery whose resilience, no matter how hardy, is burning low.

Their fiery spirit is still being fuelled by the strength drawn from their communities, family members especially women, the strong faith they harbour in the benevolence of God and other supernatural beliefs and, most importantly, by their passion for fishing which is indisputably the main driving force that enables them to brave the storm in face of irrationality; aspects which will be divulged and explored in the discussion that follows.

An in-depth look into the making of this work has been provided in the latter part of this chapter. A detailed explanation of the data gathering techniques used and why they were trusted to yield satisfactory results has been given. Recognising that no strategy is without fault, their possible limitations were also investigated followed by how they were best counteracted to minimise their impacts. As with any study, intensive research has but one purpose; to yield sound results. In this

study, this manifests itself in an in-depth understanding of the Maltese small-scale fishing community in its entirety the like of which has never been done before.

Chapter 2

The History of Fishing



Chapter 2

The History of Fishing

2.1 Introduction

Eating a wide variety of fish and other sea foods, being either fresh, frozen, salted or even canned, has become an everyday commodity. However, this hasn't always been the case. Though fishing has always played an important role in the history of mankind, the role fish played in gastronomy varied considerably throughout the ages. This depended heavily upon the availability of fish which was in turn influenced by the fishing techniques used, fishing crafts and preservation methods. Its availability has shaped the role it played in everyday life. Other influences, such as religion, further controlled its intake.

Being such an old trade, fishing is expected to feature prominently in many historical writings which would in turn facilitate its historical reconstruction. However, this is not the case. Robinson (2011) stated that;

...it would have certainly been fair to classify fishing history as a neglected area of academic study. While this may have been in part surprising, given the contribution that the fisheries and fishermen have played in European economic and social development, particularly in the late medieval and early modern period as well as in times of colonial expansion, there were a number of evident reasons for this state of affairs.²⁸⁵

In his paper, Robinson (2011) continues to highlight the reasons why the reconstruction of the history of fishing has been neglected with the first being that fishing is very difficult to define being a unique activity that 'is neither industry, agriculture nor transport but contains facets of all three' along with the fact that it is very ancient and elemental since 'fishermen are among the last people who still hunt for a living in the western world.'²⁸⁶

Secondly, fishing does not deal with 'landed definitions of property' since the sea is not privately appropriated as land can be. Another reason that Robinson gives for the lack of documentation on fishing history, is the fact that fishing is heavily based on variables both in terms of 'economic, social, technological and political dimensions' as well as 'environmental, climatic, and marine biological

²⁸⁵ Robb Robinson, 'Hook, Line and Sinkers: Fishing History – Where we have been, where we are now and where we are going?' *The Mariner's Mirror*, xcvi, 1 (2011), 167.

²⁸⁶ *ibid.*

factors' all of which influence the outcome of the fishing enterprise. Additionally, fish is a highly perishable product which, coupled with the lack of efficient transportation and effective methods of preservation, limited its full exploitation.²⁸⁷

A final problem identified by Robinson is the multifaceted nature of fishing. Fishing has evolved considerably both through the ages as well as with people. Different nations have developed their own fishing repertoires making it next to impossible 'to generalise about the fisheries on one stretch of coast let alone across the British Isles or Europe.'²⁸⁸ Unfortunately, this situation prevails in Malta as well. As Chircop (2010) explains;

The absence of the fishing folk, of their daily livelihood, communal ways of life and culture, characterizes modern Maltese historiography. This conspicuous neglect must be treated as a serious omission indeed, particularly when one considers the fact that we are dealing with the history of a small archipelago. Certainly, the lack of early official quantitative and qualitative sources on Maltese fishing culture...has definitely not assisted the generation of research interest in this field of inquiry. More disturbingly still, conventional authors have interpreted this scarcity of official records on the fishing people as proof of their irrelevance to Maltese history.²⁸⁹

Having highlighted the shortcomings that impeded the construction of a proper fishing historiography, in this chapter, the researcher will endeavour to reconstruct an overview of the European fishing history from prehistory up to contemporary times by deriving information from important works and other fragmentary data. As Robinson (2011) pointed out, it is very difficult to generalise about the fisheries, therefore, the researcher will focus on the major fishing developments which occurred through time and through the dominion of different nations which left their mark on European fisheries. It is assumed that the repercussions of the great tidings which shook Europe at the time, reached the Maltese shores being as it is in the centre of the Mediterranean and part of Europe.

2.2 Fishing in Prehistory

Being a form of primary production, just like agriculture, everyone has a general idea of what fishing is. Since it is a land endeavour, and therefore more immediate to the early human's outreach, it is usually assumed that agriculture was mastered before fishing, so it may come as a surprise for many

²⁸⁷ *ibid.*, 167-168.

²⁸⁸ *ibid.*, 168.

²⁸⁹ John Chircop, 'Living on Fishing, Caught in the Market: The Maltese Fishing Communities, 1860s-1920', *Journal of Maltese History*, ii, 1 (2010), 21.

to learn that fishing is even older than agriculture itself.²⁹⁰ This is even more astonishing considering that agriculture is very old indeed and dates back to prehistoric times, specifically to the Neolithic era, the age when *Homo sapiens*, that is the modern human, shifted from a life of hunting and gathering to the domestication of animals and crops. The Neolithic began and ended at different times in different countries. The earliest it started was in the Middle East circa 10,000 years ago.²⁹¹

Homo sapiens emerged from Africa circa 50,000 to 60,000 years ago.²⁹² This means that agriculture only came into being about 40,000 to 50,000 years after the dispersal of *Homo sapiens*. Another type of hominid that made its appearance even earlier than *Homo sapiens* was the Neanderthal who is believed to have roamed throughout Europe and Western Asia for about 200,000 years and believed to have disappeared about 27,000 years ago. This species has been attributed to the archaeological period Middle Palaeolithic, an era which precedes both the Mesolithic and the Neolithic periods.²⁹³ As revealed through the analysis of the dates one can easily understand that *Homo sapiens* and the Neanderthal shared a contemporary space of time, but the latter were long extinct before the dawn of the Neolithic, which is when agriculture came into being. There is considerable evidence that the Neanderthal practiced early forms of fishing along Europe's Mediterranean.²⁹⁴ While the Neanderthals were exploiting marine resources in the Mediterranean, early modern humans were busy doing likewise in southern Africa. Sites which bear witness to both these phenomena include Moscerini Cave (Italy), Vanguard Cave (Gibraltar), and Klasies and Herold's Bay Caves in South Africa, respectively.²⁹⁵ This clearly shows that fishing is older than agriculture/Neolithic as it was reverted to by both the Neanderthal, which was long extinct before the Neolithic era, and by *homo sapiens* before they came up with the concept of agriculture. To further highlight the venerable age of fishing, remains of prehistoric fish have been found with the remains of pre-hominids in Olduvai Gorge, Northern Tanzania. Pebbles purposely shaped and believed to have been used for killing fish have also been found along with the other remains.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁰ Andres Von Brandt, *Fishing Catching Methods of the World* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2005), 1.

²⁹¹ Anthony Bonanno, *Il-Preistorja* (Malta, Pubblikazzjonijiet Indipendenza, 2001), 3.

²⁹² Paul Mellars, 'The Earliest Modern Humans in Europe: The Reanalysis of Findings from Two Archaeological Sites Calls for a Reassessment of when Modern Humans Settled in Europe, and of Neanderthal Cultural Achievement', *Nature*, cdlxxix, 7374 (2011), 483.

²⁹³ Gilliane Monnier. "Neanderthal Behavior." 2012. *The Nature Education: Knowledge Project*. 14 November 2013 <<http://www.nature.com/scitable/knowledge/library/neanderthal-behavior-59267999>>.

²⁹⁴ Jon M. Erlandson and Scott M. Fitzpatrick, 'Oceans, Islands, and Coasts: Current Perspectives on the Role of the Sea in Human Prehistory', *Journal of Island & Coastal Archaeology*, i, 1 (2006), 8.

²⁹⁵ Chris Stringer, 'Coasting Out of Africa', *Nature*, cdv, 6782 (2000), 24.

²⁹⁶ Von Brandt, 1.

It is believed that early hominids were able to cross small expanses of water such as lakes and rivers maybe even short-distance marine crossings. This is the only plausible solution to explain the spread of yet another extinct hominid, the *Homo erectus*, through Eurasia and Africa. Other fishing capabilities might have included the collection of marine organisms such as shellfish, fish and seaweed which could have been left stranded on shore in intertidal zones.²⁹⁷

The early exploitation of the sea in terms of fish is believed to have been limited, however, with time, simple tools were invented.²⁹⁸ This included the development of nets which can be dated back to the Mesolithic period at the very least.²⁹⁹ Some of the earliest artefacts date back to the African Middle Stone Age. The latter include barbed-bone harpoons found in Katanda which are believed to be as old as 80,000 to 90,000 years. Other findings include bone points.³⁰⁰

There is common agreement that *Homo sapiens* originated from Africa, however, there is controversy as to when their dispersal from Africa started and which routes were taken in the process.³⁰¹ Nonetheless, one thing is obvious, namely that these early modern humans took their insights along with them including their maritime and aquatic knowledge.³⁰² In spite of the fact that travelling outwards required the use of boats, their origin is hard to trace as 'boats are rarely preserved in terrestrial archaeological records.' Strong evidence of the use of boats is provided by the occupation of islands which were 'not connected to adjacent mainland masses during the Pleistocene.'³⁰³ The Pleistocene was marked with multiple ice ages and lasted from 1,640,000 to about 10,000 years ago. It was characterised by glacial periods, followed by interglacial periods. It is of interest to note that the modern human made his appearance during this epoch.³⁰⁴ On the island of Flores, Southeast Asia, evidence was found that the hominid *Homo erectus* 'was capable of some sea crossings.'³⁰⁵

²⁹⁷ Erlandson and Fitzpatrick, 11.

²⁹⁸ Von Brandt, 1.

²⁹⁹ *ibid.*, 181.

³⁰⁰ Erlandson and Fitzpatrick, 11.

³⁰¹ Stringer, 24.

³⁰² Erlandson and Fitzpatrick, 11-2.

³⁰³ *ibid.*, 12.

³⁰⁴ "Pleistocene." 2013. *Lexico*. 16 November 2013 <<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/Pleistocene>>.

³⁰⁵ Erlandson and Fitzpatrick, 12.

2.2.1 Prehistoric Malta

But how does this relate to the Maltese context? During glaciations in the Pleistocene era, much of the oceanic waters gathered and froze at the poles, the consequence being a much lower sea level. During the glaciations Mindel and Würm, the sea level lowered by more than 200m exposing the bridge of land connecting Sicily with the Maltese Islands. However, in the inter-glaciation spell which followed about 15,000 – 10,000 years ago, and in which we are presently living, this natural bridge has been submerged once again severing this land connection. The first evidence that we have of human presence in Malta dates back to 7,000 years during the Neolithic epoch, therefore, the first people to set foot on here must have travelled by sea.³⁰⁶ Evidence supports the idea that these people came from Sicily.³⁰⁷

The main stratifications for Maltese prehistory are the Neolithic Age, the Copper Age, and the Bronze Age. Copper Age was thus called since at the time copper was being used elsewhere in the Mediterranean. Since no evidence was found of its use locally it was deemed more appropriate to locally name the period Temple Age as it was the time during which the local worldwide renowned temples were built.³⁰⁸ The culture of the people who lived in the Neolithic phase differed considerably from that of the Temple Age as evidenced by the pottery. The pottery attributed to the Neolithic phase differs in shape, style, colour and even in decoration from the one characteristic of the Temple Age. Since no transition was observed between the two cultures it is believed that there was a complete change in population. Many hypotheses were put forwards as to the cause for the disappearance of an entire population however none have been confirmed. As based on readings by other authors, Bonanno (2001) suggests that the second wave of people to settle in Malta came from Sicily as well.³⁰⁹ These people gave rise to the Temple Age to whom ‘the oldest free-standing stone structures in the world’ are attributed. Over thirty temples can be found throughout Malta and Gozo, all of which were built during their 1100-year stay.³¹⁰ Another change in population occurred at the end of the Temple Age and the beginning of the Bronze Age. A radical change could be observed not only in the pottery but also in the religious cult since no more grand temples were built. The accompanying artistic expression vanished as well.³¹¹ Findings attributed to the subsequent phases of the Bronze Age reveal that new civilisations colonised Malta time and again.³¹² Once again many potential scenarios as to

³⁰⁶ Bonanno, 11-3.

³⁰⁷ *ibid.*, 30.

³⁰⁸ *ibid.*, 24.

³⁰⁹ *ibid.*, 47-48.

³¹⁰ Edward Duca, ‘The Death of the Temple People’, *Think Magazine*, 10 (2014), 35.

³¹¹ Bonanno, 105.

³¹² *ibid.*, 110 and 113.

their disappearance were put forth but none have been proved thus the disappearance of the temple builder populations is still shrouded in mystery.³¹³

When the early modern human started dispersing from Africa, he paved his way to other countries including Sicily before venturing further to our islands. Considering that Malta is an island, hence surrounded by sea, it is natural to contemplate on the marine exploitation of these people. It is also natural to assume that the sea was far richer in its natural resources than it is nowadays. Many artefacts lead to this assumption.³¹⁴ Citing the original sources, one can mention the marine mollusc found at Skorba temple³¹⁵ and a fish made of clay found at Hal Saflieni Hypogeum which has been identified as such from the scales, and dorsal and lateral fins.³¹⁶ A block decorated with three highly recognisable fish on the front side and another on one of the sides was found at Bugibba.³¹⁷ Numerous types of shells were also found in the Neolithic level of the Tarxien Temples.³¹⁸ However, isotope analyses of bones revealed that the temple people's diet was mostly based on meat and vegetables. Trace elements that might have suggested the consumption of fish were absent, therefore, it has been suggested that these people were not fishermen. Even though fish was not favoured by these people, marine molluscs must have been consumed.³¹⁹

It is very hard to figure out what fishing entailed in those remote times, however, it has been ascertained that our ancestors had their eye set on marine resources even though they were limited in exploiting it to their advantage. A keen eye for observation and a strong will to better oneself enabled man to come up with innovative ideas. Discoveries in all spheres of life gave rise to more sophisticated civilisations that ousted the previous. The prehistoric man faded away into oblivion as the Phoenicians came into the picture and marked the beginning of the Maltese history at the end of the 8th century BC.³²⁰

³¹³ Duca, 35.

³¹⁴ Bonanno, 84.

³¹⁵ D.H. Trump, *Skorba* (Oxford, University Press, 1966), Appendix III.

³¹⁶ J. D. Evans, *The Prehistoric Antiquities of the Maltese Islands* (London, University of London, 1971), 63.

³¹⁷ *ibid.*, 112.

³¹⁸ *ibid.*, 149.

³¹⁹ Duca, 37 and 39.

³²⁰ Bonanno, 122.

2.3 The Punic Imprint

The Phoenicians were great navigators of Semitic origins from Syria. They were primarily merchants and their drive to expand their enterprise made them seek countries where they could exchange their ware for other locally produced goods. Malta was an ideal outpost in their expeditions between Africa and Western Sicily.³²¹ They were the first of a series of colonisers who took over Malta because of her ideal position in the centre of the Mediterranean; a feature which secured her a prominent place in history. This was also the time of ancient Greece's grandeur. The Greeks must have refrained from taking over Malta for themselves because the Phoenicians had claimed her before them.³²² Nonetheless, Greek transcriptions reveal that Malta housed a Greek community after the eighth century BC when already under Phoenician rule.³²³ Both these nations had one priority; commerce, which they aimed to expand by sending their people to different outposts to carry out negotiations with fellow Greek and Phoenician people as well as with indigenous locals. Local products which might have attracted their attention include wool, cotton, honey, fruit, fish, and other marine products.³²⁴

The Phoenicians must have been skilled fishermen as evidenced by the Phoenician trap fisheries in the catch of tuna which date back to 2000 BC.³²⁵ However, it goes without saying, that the Phoenicians are intricately linked with their skill of dyeing cloth purple using *Murex* marine snails.³²⁶ The procedure applied by the Phoenicians in dyeing cloth is still not fully understood and many debate as to how it was done. Jensen (1963) describes how the *Murex* snail was harvested in early spring using traps made of baited wicker baskets to attract the carnivorous snail. When a good number of snails entered the trap, the baskets were hauled. The extraction of the dye started soon after as it was easier to do while the animal lived. The smaller specimen was crushed, and the larger ones were cracked open for easier removal of the dyeing tissue by hand. Jensen (1963) continues to describe that Pliny³²⁷, in his encyclopaedia entitled 'Natural History', states that the tissue and juice were salted with solar sea salt. After three days, the pulp was placed in vats to which hot water was added to keep it simmering. The protein residue, which accumulated at the surface, was removed and at the end of the process, which took approximately ten days, about 500 pounds of liquid remained out of

³²¹ *ibid.*, 121-2.

³²² Bonanno, 122.

³²³ Horatio R.C. Vella, *Malta u Ghawdex fl-Era Klassika* (Malta, Pubblikazzjonijiet Indipendenza, 2002), 5.

³²⁴ *ibid.*, 9.

³²⁵ Jacek Majkowski, Global Fishery Resources of Tuna and Tuna-Like Species. FAO Fisheries Technical Paper, 483 (Rome: FAO, 2007), 7. <<https://www.fao.org/3/a1291e/a1291e00.htm>>.

³²⁶ Lloyd B. Jensen, 'Royal Purple of Tyre', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, xxii, 2 (1963), 104.

³²⁷ Pliny, also known as Pliny the Elder, was a Roman officer and an encyclopaedist born in the year 23 or 24AD. Cf. "Pliny the Elder." *Livius: Cultuur, geschiedenis en literatuur*. 19 February 2015 <http://www.livius.org/pi-pm/pliny/pliny_e.html>.

the original 8,000 pounds of material. This procedure produced a reddish dark fluid in which washed wool was dipped to test it after being exposed to strong sunlight.³²⁸

2.3.1 Phoenician Influence in Malta

Having formed part of the Phoenician domain, Malta must also have borne significant importance in the above-mentioned industry as evidenced by a good number of pits found scattered throughout Malta and Gozo. Even though these pits date back to the Bronze Age, it is believed that they could have been reused for dying by the Phoenicians later in history.³²⁹ Sagona (1999) refers to Ashby's paper published back in 1915 in which he describes investigations carried out at Borġ in-Nadur which revealed the plan of a Roman era villa. Citing the original source, this villa is found opposite Għar Dalam. Here, a bell-shaped pit older than the rest of the house, has been discovered in the courtyard.³³⁰ Its function is shrouded in mystery, yet it is not excluded that it might have been used as a dying vat.³³¹

Close by, at St. George's Bay which lies at the foot of Borġ in-Nadur, numerous pits have also been discovered. Sagona (1999) compares this local site with Dar Essafi, Cape Bon, in Tunisia in which similar pits have been found. Dar Essafi's pits' link with the dyeing industry has been confirmed by the remains of shell middens.³³² In this case, the pits were found by the sea and close to a wadi. Even though no shell middens were found at St. George's Bay, it is believed that the pits here served the same function. In this case, the middens might have been washed away or even used for other purposes. Another inkling which points in this direction is the discolouration of the rock of some of the vats which might have occurred from the heating of the pulp.³³³ Strong evidence of dyeing has also been found in the *Tas-Silġ* area, about 2km from St. George's Bay. In this case, large amounts of *Murex* shells were discovered.³³⁴

³²⁸ Jensen, 108.

³²⁹ Claudia Sagona, 'Silo or Vat? Observations on the Ancient Textile Industry in Malta and Early Phoenician Interests in the Island', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, xviii, 1 (1999), 26.

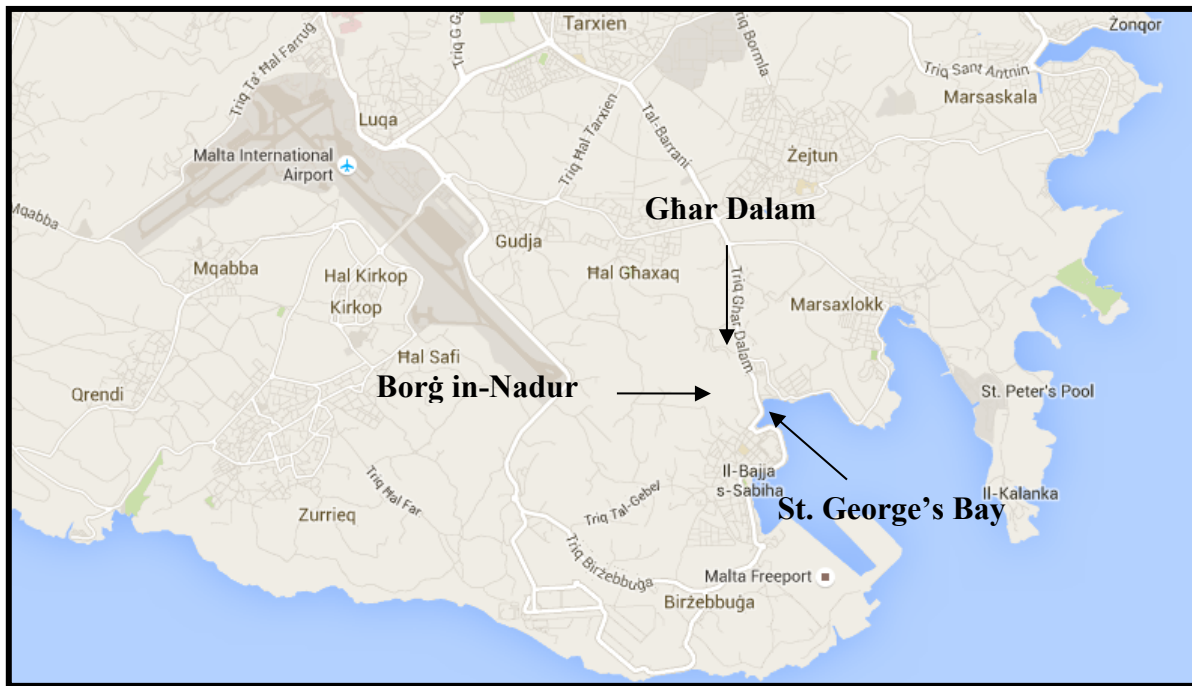
³³⁰ Thomas Ashby, 'Roman Malta', *The Journal of Roman Studies*, v (1915), 52 and 56.

³³¹ Sagona, 35.

³³² *ibid.*

³³³ *ibid.*, 37.

³³⁴ *ibid.*, 35.



Map 1: The locations of Borġ in-Nadur, Għar Dalam and St. George's Bay

(Source: Google Maps)

Following the Phoenician tradition were the Carthaginians. Both nationalities are collectively known as the Punics since the latter were the direct descendants of the former. As the Phoenician stronghold diminished in importance, the Carthaginians took possession of their colonies in the western Mediterranean of which the Maltese Islands formed part. It is not precisely known when this transition occurred but estimates date this event back to the mid-6th century BC.³³⁵ Even though great in their prestige, the Carthaginians were eventually defeated by the new emerging power in the Mediterranean at the time; the Romans. These two nations fought each other in what became known as the Punic Wars of which there were three. The first Punic War saw the beginning of the Roman territory expansion with the acquisition of their first province; Sicily.³³⁶ Eventually Malta was also fought over and won by the Romans in 218 BC which coincided with the beginning of the second Punic War.³³⁷

³³⁵ Tancred C. Gouder, *Malta and the Phoenicians* (Malta, Lombard Bank Malta Ltd., 1991), 17-8.

³³⁶ Vella, 21.

³³⁷ *ibid.*, 47.

2.4 Evidence from the time and Oppian's *Halieutika*

Around the time Malta was concurred by the Romans, interesting information started emerging regarding fishing and fish processing. In general, however, difficulties are encountered when trying to reconstruct the scale on which ancient fisheries operated.³³⁸ Information on fishing and fish processing at the time can be obtained from three sources, 'literary references, archaeological remains of salting installations, and comparative data from production methods of similar modern products.'³³⁹ Literary references to fish products are found in many sources, however, they are most often misleading since they were highly 'influenced by strong literary and philosophical traditions which value morality over health and nutrition, and the care of the soul over care of the body.'³⁴⁰ In addition, the amount of ancient literature about saltwater fishing is limited. One major work on the subject is called *Halieutika* by Oppian and composed between 177 and 180. This is a Greek poem with 'more than 3500 hexameters and preserved in its entirety.' Oppian was not a fisherman himself and the literary work is dedicated to the emperor Marcus Aurelius. Being thus dedicated, it supports the idea that the right for fishing could only be obtained from the emperor himself. However, as with other writings of the time, the information provided in Oppian's poem can be misleading.³⁴¹

Archaeological remains also shed light on the importance of fish especially those directly linked with salting installations. The best documented are those found in Spain and Portugal.³⁴² Otherwise, archaeological findings related to sea fishing are scarce. Amongst these are remains of fishing nets found in Egypt and Herculaneum. Others include net sinkers and hooks. There is also the possibility of finding fishing boats in areas including seabeds which, thus far, have been left unexplored. It goes without saying that the largest amount of evidence is to be found on land. These include remains of tanks which were used for the processing of fish and containers utilised for the product shipment. Pictorial representations of these fishing practices and boats have been found. Such depictions from the Classical and Hellenistic periods are rare. It was only with the invention of polychrome mosaic in the 1st and 2nd century AD that fishing scenes became more common.³⁴³ As fishing gear, the ancients used tridents as mentioned in Oppian's work, spears as well as hook and line. Nets were also

³³⁸ Carolyn Searce. "European Fisheries History: Pre-industrial Origins of Overfishing." August 2009. [Proquest](http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.569.831&rep=rep1&type=pdf). 15 October 2016 <<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.569.831&rep=rep1&type=pdf>>. Pg. 2.

³³⁹ Robert I. Curtis, 'Sources for Production and Trade of Greek and Roman Processed Fish', in *Ancient Fishing and Fish Processing in the Black Sea Region*, Tønnes Bekker-Nielsen (ed.) Aarhus University Press, Oxford 2005, 34.

³⁴⁰ John Wilkins, 'Fish as a Source of Food in Antiquity', in *Ancient Fishing and Fish Processing in the Black Sea Region*, Tønnes Bekker-Nielsen (ed.) Aarhus University Press, Oxford 2005, 21.

³⁴¹ Tønnes Bekker-Nielsen, 'The Technology and Productivity of Ancient Sea Fishing', in *Ancient Fishing and Fish Processing in the Black Sea Region*, Tønnes Bekker-Nielsen (ed.) Aarhus University Press, Oxford 2005, 83-4.

³⁴² Curtis (2005), 37.

³⁴³ Bekker-Nielsen, 84.

used as evidenced by the extensive vocabulary used to differentiate between types. What is most interesting in the context of this research is the fishermen's lifestyle. Greek fishermen were limited in their exploitation of the sea because of their small boats. Another restriction was the freshness of the product. Being delicate and quick to deteriorate, fishermen could only sail short distances for the product to be taken to the market in good condition. This limitation could have been slightly elevated by gutting the fish, keeping them alive in containers, and avoiding fishing during the hottest hours.³⁴⁴ Being a hard job, fishermen also reverted to prayer, a phenomenon remarked upon by Oppian himself. In his *Halieutika*, he narrates how the fisher prayed to the gods of hunting to help him in keeping the catch and that nothing should leap out to leave the fishermen empty handed.³⁴⁵

2.5 The Roman Tradition

The Romans built a strong economy over the centuries. They were the founders of many great cities and harbours throughout the Mediterranean. They relied heavily on agriculture, especially the production of wheat.³⁴⁶ Fishing must also have played an important role. Amongst their fish products one can mention the fish soup which was produced in large open-air boilers and consumed on a grand scale to the extent that researchers believe the Mediterranean fish stocks of the time were severely reduced.³⁴⁷

Different types of fishing techniques were used by the Romans, however, most of the fishing was carried out in proximity of the shore. Amongst others this holds true of tuna fishing.³⁴⁸ The *tonnara* tuna fishing method reaches way back in history with many attributing its invention to the Arabs. Still others believe that it may date back to the ancient world.³⁴⁹ Brandt (1984) further speculates that the Sicilian *tonnara* may be 'the oldest existing forerunner of modern pound nets, specially invented in prehistoric times for the capture of tuna and other migratory fish in the Mediterranean.'³⁵⁰ Mercieca

³⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 87-90.

³⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 93.

³⁴⁶ Charles Dalli, *Iż-Żmien Nofsani Malti* (Malta, Pubblikazzjonijiet Indipendenza, 2002), 10.

³⁴⁷ Nigel Williams, 'Fishing History à la Carte', *Current Biology*, xv, 23 (2005), 940.

³⁴⁸ Annalisa Marzano, *Harvesting the Sea: The Exploitation of Marine Resources in the Roman Mediterranean* (United Kingdom, Oxford University Press, 2013), 66.

³⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 70.

³⁵⁰ Andres Von Brandt, *Fishing Catching Methods of the World* (Surrey, Fishing News Books Ltd., 1984), 161.

(2007) claims that the oldest reference made to the use of the *tonnara* in Sicily dates to 1176. Apart from these large structures, smaller units called *tonnarelle* were also used.³⁵¹

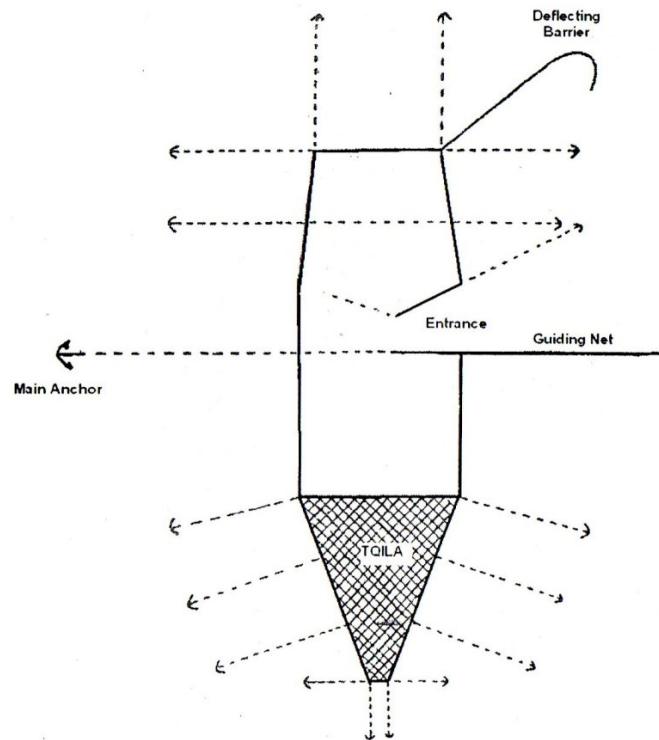
The *tonnara*, which is still used nowadays, though diminishing in popularity, is a long net linked to the shore and reaching out in the sea at right angles leading to several chambers. These chambers are in turn made up of vertical nets held in place by stone slabs at the bottom and floats at the top to keep them upright in the water.³⁵² Marzano (2013) describes how this net exploits the fishermen's knowledge of the tuna's behaviour as described by García Vargas and Florido del Corral (2010). Citing the original source, tuna has an affinity for salty and warm waters as they have a low tolerance to temperature fluctuations which induces them to migrate to the Mediterranean to reproduce. Furthermore, being visual predators, a school of tuna must travel by the coast where the water is much clearer allowing for better vision. The availability of prey depends on various variables including the wind which explains why fishermen talk in terms of 'tuna winds' when the fish are 'blown' in proximity to the coast.³⁵³ During its course of swimming along the coast, the school of fish comes across the *tonnara* (m. *tunnara*). The tuna's automatic reaction is to swim outwards from the shore to overcome the obstacle and resume its route along the shore. Once the long net line reaching out from the shore comes to an end, the fish resume their original direction, but in so doing, they enter a series of net chambers. As the fish progress from one chamber to another, the compartments are closed off. Should the fish take the opposite direction it will still find itself trapped as the net is closed off from both sides. The final chamber is referred to as the death chamber (m. *tqila*). Once the fish reaches this chamber, which is also closed off, fishermen surround it with their boat. The *tqila* differs to the other chambers in that the bottom netting, known as the cradle, can be freed and lifted thus confining the fish to a small space. It is only then that fishermen stun the fish and start pulling them on board with long-poled hooks.³⁵⁴

³⁵¹ Simon Mercieca, 'La Pesca a Malta: Usi, Tecniche e Mercati tra Età Moderna e Contemporanea', in *Pesca e Partimonio Industriale: Tecniche Strutture e Organizzazione (Sicilia, Puglia, Malta e Dalmazia tra XIX e XX Secolo)*, Maurizio Gangemi (ed.) Cacucci Editore, Bari 2007, 438.

³⁵² Stanley Farrugia Randon, *Fishing in Malta* (Malta, Stanley Farrugia Randon, 2007), 27-28.

³⁵³ Enrique García Vargas and David Florido del Corral, 'The Origin and Development of Tuna Fishing Nets (*Almadrabas*)', in *Ancient Nets and Fishing Gear: Proceedings of the International Workshop on "Nets and Fishing Gear in Classical Antiquity: A First Approach"*, Tønnes Bekker-Nilesen and Darío Bernal Casasola (eds.) Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Cádiz and Aarhus University Press, Cádiz 2010, 206-7.

³⁵⁴ Farrugia Randon (2007), 28.

Diagram 5: The *tonnara*(Source: Fishing in Malta)³⁵⁵

The possibility of having been used in antiquity may also be highlighted by ancient literary sources amongst which is Oppian's *Halieutica* (see section 2.4). In his poem, Oppian narrates how the fishing method used 'recalls the image of a city with its gates and guards.' This remark led many to believe that he was referring to the *tonnara*, however, these ancient authors also insist that the fish were encircled with additional nets thrown there and then from the boats. In this case, they could have been referring to another similar system known in Italian as *a vista*³⁵⁶, a technique which does not necessarily comprise the 'death chamber' but surrounds the fish by a net released from the boats upon its sighting and dragged to the shore.³⁵⁷ Whether the Romans used the *tonnara* or a similar version with the 'death chamber' is still open to dispute.³⁵⁸ What is certain is that the *a vista* tuna fishing method was widely used in the Roman period, nonetheless, this technique was not a Roman innovation but is attributed to the Greeks as the *Halieutica*, amongst many other sources, imply.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁵ Diagram 5. Cf. *ibid.*, 26.

³⁵⁶ García Vargas and Florido del Corral, 211-2.

³⁵⁷ Marzano, 69.

³⁵⁸ *ibid.*, 68.

³⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 87.

Amongst others, Romans consumed mackerel, sardines, oysters and prawns.³⁶⁰ In Roman times, fish sauces were widely used as a condiment and as medicine.³⁶¹ Apart from referring to the consumption of salted or fresh blue fish by all social classes, many Roman authors also remarked on fish products made in pastes, brine and sauces referred to by different names such as ‘*garum*, *liquamen*, *muria*, and *hallex*.’³⁶² Waste, especially amongst the poor fishermen, wasn’t tolerated and the use of fish parts such as the head and guts along with fish too small or damaged to be used on its own was probably utilised otherwise and might have given rise to *garum*. Despite years of research, many aspects in the production of *garum* remain unknown.³⁶³ It was widely used by both the upper and lower classes in Roman Egypt.³⁶⁴

Due to its widespread consumption, *garum* was manufactured throughout the Roman Empire. It could have been produced in small quantities by families themselves, but it was obviously produced on an industrial level in places stationed throughout the Mediterranean.³⁶⁵ Amongst others, factories for its production were stationed at Morocco, Libya, Asia Minor and Pompeii. These sites had three features in common, ‘a constant supply of blue fish, very salty water (and therefore plenty of sea salt), and scorching heat for months at a time.’³⁶⁶ The properties of *garum* were ideal for shipping throughout the empire since it didn’t spoil.³⁶⁷ Its transportation was made possible using amphorae; two-handled terracotta vessels. These proved to be the most important artefacts ‘in providing information about commerce in salted fish products’ and only started being properly studied at the end of the 19th century.³⁶⁸

2.5.1 Roman Malta

Many Roman archaeological remains have been discovered in Malta but little has been found on the fishing practices of both the Romans and the Byzantines.³⁶⁹ Some discoveries include traces of

³⁶⁰ Robert I. Curtis, ‘Umami and the Foods of Classical Antiquity’, *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, xc, 3 (2009), 712.

³⁶¹ Robert I. Curtis, ‘In Defence of Garum’, *The Classical Journal*, lxxviii, 3 (1983), 232.

³⁶² David Downie, ‘A Roman Anchovy’s Tale’, *Gastronomica*, iii, 2 (2003), 25.

³⁶³ *ibid.*, 26.

³⁶⁴ Curtis (1983), 237.

³⁶⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶⁶ Downie, 26.

³⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 26-7.

³⁶⁸ Curtis (2005), 40.

³⁶⁹ Byzantines was name by which the Western Romans became known after the split of the Roman Empire in the Eastern and Western domains.

fishponds in Marsa and the rock-cut pans used for salt production³⁷⁰ which must have been used in the production of fish sauces. These were found in many areas along the Maltese coast including at Mellieħa, Salina and Marsascala as well as in Gozo. These pans are shallow, rectangular structures cut in stone and sloping towards the sea. Although they vary in dimensions, they are all flat-bottomed, nonetheless, it is very difficult to date these pans with any precision since archaeological remains are nonexistent due to centuries of exposure to all elements. Other misleading interpretations in relation to the age of these structures derive from the fact that they continued to be constructed up to the end of the 18th century.³⁷¹

Further confirmation of fishing being practiced in Malta at the time is evidenced by the discovery of net weights and the remains of molluscs and fish. These discoveries demonstrate that fish was a common source of nutrition.³⁷² According to Bruno (2009),

In spite of this uncertain and contrasting information, and also in the absence of evidence regarding the Roman and Byzantine periods, the logical hypothesis would be that the activity [fishing], perfectly compatible with the natural environment of the archipelago, was actually very prominent and represented one of the most important sources of sustenance.³⁷³

Many literary sources remark on the large amount of fish in the sea surrounding Sicily. Tuna fishing is also mentioned. In fact, an area which is highly renowned for the salting fish tradition and tuna fishing is in the vicinity of the Cape of Pachino which is only a short distance from Gozo. Another indication towards the Maltese participation in tuna fishing is the islands' position being enroute of the tuna fish's journey from Southern Italy to Tunisia. Maltese maritime activity at the time is also mentioned by Grattius Faliscus, an Augustan writer, who referred to *curalia melitensia*. This might indicate the possibility of coral fishing in the local waters, nonetheless, the only coral remains were found at the sanctuary of *Tas-Silġ* which might have been offerings to the goddess Hera.³⁷⁴ The production of garum might also be evidenced by the documentation of the local production of amphorae 'between the Archaic age and the Roman period.'³⁷⁵

³⁷⁰ Elaine Azzopardi and Timmy Gambin, *Archaeology and the Sea in the Maltese Islands* (Malta, Aurora Trust and Midsea Books Ltd., 2012), 6.

³⁷¹ Bruno, 74.

³⁷² *ibid.*, 72.

³⁷³ *ibid.*, 73.

³⁷⁴ *ibid.*

³⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 74.

2.6 Fishing in the Medieval World

The fall of the Roman Empire and the Byzantines marks the end of the classical era and the start of the medieval world. In more technical terms;

The Middle Ages are traditionally defined as the “period in-between” the fall of the Roman Empire in the late 5th century AD and the beginning of the Early Modern Period around 1500 AD.³⁷⁶

This time span coincides with the end of the Roman/ Byzantine rule in our islands and the arrival of the Order of the Knights of Saint John in 1530. But before taking a closer look at the local scenario, it is opportune to cast a wider net and highlight what was happening elsewhere in Europe in relation to the fishing tradition.

Without doubt, the Middle Ages saw a gradual but consistent development in fishing. Amongst these, one can mention the continuation in the use of hook and line.³⁷⁷ The hook’s popularity is attested to by many medieval literary sources and visual representations, however, the technicalities of hooking weren’t given regardless the fact that many hook adaptations ready existed at the time.³⁷⁸ Apart from baits, fishermen also used artificial lures,³⁷⁹ pot gear and small traps. The latter lured the fish inside without the possibility of getting out and had the advantage of fish selectivity which could be regulated based on the traps’ design, the type of bait used, and when and where they were set. They could be used either alone or as parts of larger structures such as barrier traps and weirs.³⁸⁰

Actual fragments of nets and tools used in the art of net making have been found in many ‘northern continental sites.’ Amongst the different types of nets used in the Middle Ages, one can mention the trammel net (m. *parit*).³⁸¹ Most probably the vernacular name is derived from the Italian term *parete* which literally means ‘wall’. This net consists of three nets joined to a head rope and a footrope. Floats are attached to the former and weights to the latter to keep the net vertically upright. The middle net, known as the *spissa*, hangs loosely and has a medium-sized mesh of circa one inch knot to knot. The two outer nets, known as the *çari* (s. *çara*), are identical and have a much larger mesh. Being largely meshed, fish pass effortlessly through one of the *çari* on either side of the netting system and

³⁷⁶ Gundula Müldner and Michael P. Richards, ‘Fast or Feast: Reconstructing Diet in Later Medieval England by Stable Isotope Analysis’, *Journal of Archaeological Science*, xxxii, 1 (2005), 40.

³⁷⁷ Scarce, 4.

³⁷⁸ Richard Hoffman, ‘Medieval Fishing’, in *Working with Water in Medieval Europe: Technology and Resource-Use*, Paolo Squatriti (ed.) Brill, Leiden 2000, 346.

³⁷⁹ *ibid.*, 352.

³⁸⁰ *ibid.*, 352-4.

³⁸¹ *ibid.*, 355 and 357.

progress to the *spissa*. Being finely meshed fish cannot bypass the *spissa* without dragging it along into the *cara* at the other end. As a result, fish end up being pocketed.³⁸² Yet another type of net which was essential to the late medieval large-scale herring fishery in the North Sea was the gill net. This was also used in the Alpine lakes for whitefish catches.³⁸³

As opposed to the above-mentioned nets which are passive, medieval fishermen also used active nets, which as the name implies, need to be actively moved to catch fish. The two main types of active nets were seines and trawls.³⁸⁴ Seines were already known to the ancient civilisations and date to the third millennium BC at the very least. The Romans made widespread use of the seine and it was introduced in the other countries in their domain. All varieties of seine nets consist of a net wall with two wings. A bag or bunt can also be present and positioned centrally along the net. Irrespective of varieties, all seine nets are operated on the same principle of being set in a circle round an area believed to contain fish and hauled.³⁸⁵ In association with medieval fishing, one can mention the *lampara*, a unique seine net of Mediterranean origin which circles fish gathered at the water's surface by lights on boats while preventing their underwater escape.³⁸⁶

On the other hand, trawls are specialised fishing gears that need to be implemented in large expanses of water. They can be used both for bottom fish and near bottom-water fish.³⁸⁷ The main difference between the seine and the trawl lies in the fact that the former's implementation area is predetermined, and the fish caught are the ones encircled prior to hauling, whereas the latter's area of implementation is not pre-determined. It is dragged in the boat's wake, resulting in an unlimited catching area with a continuation in fishing as long as dragging is possible.³⁸⁸

The *tonnara*, which is generally believed to be of Arabic and Greek origin, or even of prehistoric origin (see section 2.5), gained economic importance in the 13th century in northern Sicily. By the 15th century it spread to areas in the Maghreb, southern Spain, and Provence. The *tonnara* fishing system was financed by Sicilian merchants. The workers commissioned to work it were recruited by a leader who bore the Arabic title of *rais*. In late medieval Sicily about forty different sites were used

³⁸² Stanley Farrugia Randon, *The Fishing Industry in Malta: Past, Present, Future* (Malta, Pubblikazzjonijiet Indipendenza, 1995), 41 and 43.

³⁸³ Hoffman (2000), 357.

³⁸⁴ Hoffman (2000), 359.

³⁸⁵ Andres Von Brandt, *Fishing Catching Methods of the World* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 431-2.

³⁸⁶ Hoffman (2000), 363.

³⁸⁷ Von Brandt (2005), 392.

³⁸⁸ *ibid.*, 433.

to set up thirty *tonnara*. One *tonnara* could capture an average of one thousand tuna each spring. The two-to-three-month tuna season used to supply the western Mediterranean markets with some forty tonnes worth of brined tuna.³⁸⁹ Apart from these diverse fishing methods of the time, fishermen also used poison and explosives.³⁹⁰ Both spearing and angling have been well documented in medieval records. Spearing or shooting was used for the capture of individual specimen of a substantial size in clear waters or to catch fish which seek refuge in holes or mud. Spears were often multi-pronged and barbed.³⁹¹

An obvious source to consult in trying to understand what people ate in the past is cookbooks. Unfortunately, relatively few cookbooks from the early and high Middle Ages have survived. The ones dating back to the 14th and 15th centuries, hence correlating with the late Middle Ages, make little or no reference about the preceding centuries. Another major drawback is the restricted spectrum these recipes represent. Many of these cookbooks were written by the elite for people of their own social standing. They shed no light on the commoners of the time which formed the bulk of society. Because of these shortcomings, other literary sources must be consulted such as religious texts and restricting regulations. Other plausible references include chronicles, household, municipal and hospital accounts as well as texts relating to nutrition and medicine. Yet, once again, precaution needs to be taken when referring to these texts due to imprecise or incomplete content. Another source of reference is the material and remains dug up by archaeologists along with visual representations including paintings and tapestries. Further insight is provided by the furniture, dinnerware, and kitchen equipment.³⁹²

Archaeological evidence demonstrates that large quantities of fish started being consumed in medieval northern Europe ‘from the year 1000 onwards.’ Many suggestions were put forward to try and explain this trend foremost of which is the link of fish consumption to Christianity which forbade meat on fasting days.³⁹³ These mounted up to 150 days a year including Fridays, Lent (which on its own is accountable for forty days) and other periods of penitence preceding other important religious feast days.³⁹⁴ Nonetheless, this Christian tradition was initially practiced only by the clergy. It was not until the 13th and 14th centuries that the custom of eating fish on meat forbidden days spread

³⁸⁹ Hoffman (2000), 372.

³⁹⁰ Hoffman (2000), 344 and 346.

³⁹¹ *ibid.*, 346.

³⁹² Melitta Weiss Adamson, *Food in Medieval Times* (London, Greenwood Press, 2004), xvii-xix.

³⁹³ C.M. Woolgar, ‘Food and the Middle Ages’, *Journal of Medieval History*, xxxvi, 1 (2010), 7.

³⁹⁴ Richard C. Hoffman, ‘Economic Development and Aquatic Ecosystems in Medieval Europe’, *The American Historical Review*, ci, 3 (1996), 646.

beyond the houses of religion to be practiced by the wider community.³⁹⁵ Therefore, it is assumed that fish intake increased by the turn of the millennium as a source of food in its own sake to meet the demands of the growing population. Even though the demand for fish increased, the largest amount of food consumption by Medieval Europeans consisted of different types of cereals. Fish was nonetheless highly sought. Amongst others it was consumed for some of its properties.³⁹⁶

Cold-water and anadromous fish species suffered greatly from over-fishing in numerous areas in Western Europe during both the high and late Middle Ages.³⁹⁷ The most consumed fish species throughout the Middle Ages were herring, cod, salmon, sturgeon, bream, carp, perch, pike, trout, crayfish, eel, and lamprey. Caviar also started being imported to Constantinople from the Black Sea as an innovative delicacy by the 12th century. Porpoise, oysters, mussels, cockles, scallops, frogs, and aquatic snails were also consumed.³⁹⁸ At this point it is worthwhile to note that in the Middle Ages all water inhabiting living organisms were classified as fish.³⁹⁹

As with anything else, fishing saw a gradual development during this long-time span. Subsistence fishing was one of the fishing stratagems in the Middle Ages. In direct subsistence, the fish caught by the fisherman's household was consumed directly by the family, whereas in indirect subsistence, the fisherman supplied the fish he caught to his lord or employer. In the former, fishing was seasonal and on a part-time basis carried out by cereal producing peasants.⁴⁰⁰ On the other hand, in indirect subsistence, fishing was carried out in private waters to feed its lord through the labour of employed full-time and/or part-time fishermen.⁴⁰¹

As expected, rising demands for fish created pressure on fish stocks. The natural outcome was for regulations to be enacted amongst which was the tendency of privatising public waters to the extent that, by circa 1200, all the fisheries in England had been granted to landowners except for large rivers. In turn, these started employing fishermen to supply them with fish. These 'indirect subsistence fisheries ranged from skilled part-timers to expert, full-time specialized employees and servants.' In due course, fishing rights started being granted 'to sustain production for commercial sale'. This was

³⁹⁵ Woolgar, 7.

³⁹⁶ Richard C. Hoffman, 'A Brief History of Aquatic Resource Use in Medieval Europe', *Helgoland Marine Research*, lix, 1 (2005), 23.

³⁹⁷ Hoffman (1996), 649.

³⁹⁸ Adamson, 40-44.

³⁹⁹ Hoffman (2005), 23.

⁴⁰⁰ Hoffman (2000), 340 and 342.

⁴⁰¹ Hoffman (2005), 23.

done against payment either on a hereditary, lifelong, or terminable basis.⁴⁰² In other words, fishermen employed by lords sold the surplus fish caught to other people who were prepared to pay handsomely.⁴⁰³ Sometime after 1351, these leases to fish in private ponds gave rise to artisanal fishermen who started making a living by selling to nearby markets. Being artisanal in nature, they worked with ‘small-scale technologies’, but were still able to provide local fresh fish throughout the year.⁴⁰⁴

Other measures had to be taken to control overfishing. These included seasonal closures, stipulating size limits for the fish caught and restricting certain fishing gear according to exigencies.⁴⁰⁵ The Middle Ages also saw the emergence of fish farming. Medieval Europeans created artificial aquatic habitats to ‘equilibrate seasonal irregularities, supplement insufficient wild catches, or even entirely replace wild varieties with preferred domesticates.’⁴⁰⁶ By the end of the Middle Ages, the most popular species reared in fish farms was ‘common carp, with a side-crop of pike and sometimes a few bream or crucian carp.’⁴⁰⁷ The idea of fish farming is usually reserved exclusively to the modern era as ‘few are aware of the impact of medieval aquaculture because it barely lasted into modern times.’⁴⁰⁸

2.6.1 Medieval Malta

Malta lacks any sort of information for the period following its Muslim conquest in 870 AD, which marks the beginning of the local medieval era, up to the 11th century.⁴⁰⁹ This holds true for every aspect related to the archipelago including its surrounding waters. Citing the original source mentioned in Dalli (2006);

It will be difficult to denote with precision the role played by the ill-defined sea between Africa and Sicily, with its deep waters full of fish, its reefs of coral and sponges, and its islands, often uninhabited because they are so small: La Favignana, Marettimo, and Levanzo at the western tip of Sicily; Malta, Gozo, and Pantelleria in the middle of the sea; and Tabarka, La Galite, Zembra, Djerba, and the Kerkenna Islands near the Tunisian coast.⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰² Hoffman (1996), 652 - 5.

⁴⁰³ Hoffman (2005), 24.

⁴⁰⁴ Hoffman (1996), 655.

⁴⁰⁵ Hoffman (2005), 24.

⁴⁰⁶ Hoffman (1996), 658 - 9.

⁴⁰⁷ Hoffman (2000), 377.

⁴⁰⁸ *ibid.*, 392.

⁴⁰⁹ Charles Dalli, *Malta: The Medieval Millennium* (Malta, Midsea Books Ltd., 2006), 14.

⁴¹⁰ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II: Volume I* (London, University of California Press, 1995), 116.

The only text found that refers to the Maltese Islands during this period was written by Abd al-Mun‘im al-Himyarî but even so his work was heavily based on previous writings. Nonetheless, the most interesting remark in his writing which did not appear in any other is his claim that after 440 A.H. Muslims resided in Malta, built its city, and transformed it into a more beautiful place than it was before. The year 440 of the Muslim calendar corresponds with the year 1048-49 of the Gregorian calendar. In the previous paragraph, Al-Himyarî gives an account of the siege between the Byzantines and the Muslims which saw the transition of the Maltese Islands from the former to the latter. He further added that after the siege, Malta was left in a mess and uninhabited. It was only visited by vessel builders due to Malta’s robust wood, by fishermen due to her abundant and tasty fish and by the honey collectors since it was the most common item to be found on the island.⁴¹¹ This is the only reference made to fishing in Malta by an Arab writer.⁴¹²

His writing has two implications of relevance for this study, namely that Malta was probably uninhabited between 870 AD to 1048-49 AD explaining why there is no documentation from the time, and that Malta was visited by Muslim fishermen during this period for its abundance of fish. Regardless this singular remark on fishing in local waters, we know that Arab vessels visited our harbours on a frequently basis just as Al-Himyarî pointed out and as made evident from the Semitic place names which bear a direct link with seafaring, including Marsa which literally means harbour. Another example is Mġarr which in turn means a loading place.⁴¹³

The Muslims’ invasion of 1048-49 was short lived as the year 1091 marked the arrival of the Normans. Even so, the Muslims’ influence over religion, culture and customs continued to predominate for the following century and a half.⁴¹⁴ Being Christians, the Normans brought the customs this faith demands just as previous powers had brought theirs before them. One of these customs in relation to seafaring and fishing was the erecting of coastal chapels which were mainly used for the recognition of fresh water sources and bays used for anchoring areas. Most of these chapels were dedicated to the Virgin Mary.⁴¹⁵

Following the Norman domain were the Angevin and the Aragonese. A large battle took place between these two empires in 1283 in Malta’s main harbour. During this period, many visits were

⁴¹¹ Joseph M. Brincat, *Il-Malti Elf Sena ta’ Storja* (Malta, Pubblikazzjonijiet Indipendenza, 2006), 28.

⁴¹² Bruno, 72.

⁴¹³ Azzopardi and Gambin, 20.

⁴¹⁴ Dalli (2002), 37.

⁴¹⁵ Azzopardi and Gambin, 8.

paid to Malta by numerous ships to collect the cotton grown locally and to deposit supplies amongst which was grain.⁴¹⁶

Due to lack of documentation one can only speculate as to what was happening locally in terms of fishing. One of the references includes the fragmentary information of the University acts especially volume Univ. 11 which departs information on the sale of fish at the end of the 1400's.⁴¹⁷ Others provide some information on the fishing methods of the time amongst which one can mention the use of fishing rods. Fishing with a variety of nets was also practiced. An example would be the use of the cast net (m. *terrieħa*).⁴¹⁸ The latter 'consists of a circular wiring of about 1.5m diameter to which a dome-shaped netting is attached.' The net sinks once cast in the water and entraps the fish that happen to be within the ring. The net with the catch inside is pulled back by means of a string.⁴¹⁹

It is interesting to note that many of the fishing techniques which saw their emergence in Medieval Europe eventually filtered to the Maltese Islands and are still being used by our small-scale fishermen. Amongst these, one can mention the use of the trammel net (m. *parit*) which is still widely used in local waters. Another would be the gill net which was used for large-scale fishing in the North Sea. In the Maltese Islands, a special version of the gill net, known locally as *palamitar*, is used to this day to catch the belted bonito (m. *plamtu*) and the plain bonito (m. *tumbrell*).⁴²⁰

The different varieties of seine nets which, along with trawls, formed the bulk of active net fishing in the Middle Ages, featured prominently in the Maltese fishing repertoire as well. These were the shore seine net and the ring seine net.⁴²¹ However, according to research carried out by Giuseppe Despott, the use of the seine net was introduced centuries later in the Maltese Islands (see section 2.8.1.3). As mentioned previously, along with seine nets, trawl nets were the most popular active fishing nets used abroad in medieval times in catching fish *en masse*. These gained popularity in the Maltese Islands as well though it is not certain as to when. One can still find a variety of trawls, nonetheless, all of them are composed of a rigid frame or floats and weights with a net attached to them. Their purpose is to be dragged in the open water, either in mid-sea or dredged along the bottom to capture the fish that lie in their path. The concept of trawling is 'said to be reflected in medieval terms as "ganguì" in

⁴¹⁶ *ibid.*, 20.

⁴¹⁷ Mercieca, 397-8.

⁴¹⁸ *ibid.*, 403-404.

⁴¹⁹ Farrugia Randon (2007), 23.

⁴²⁰ *ibid.*, 19.

⁴²¹ *ibid.*, 16-19.

the Mediterranean and “tractus”, “Tracht,” or “Gänge” in the north.’⁴²² One cannot help but speculate whether the first and last terms are in any way related to the Maltese shrimp-dredge which, in the vernacular, is known as *gangmu tal-gambli*. Further correlation between the terms lie in the fact that the *gangmu* happens to be a type of trawl net as it correlates with the above trawl description. Indeed, the *gangmu* is made up of two iron semi-circles welded together at right angles. A fine-meshed net in the shape of a bag is attached to this frame and is used mainly to catch shrimps as it is dredged along the sea-bottom.⁴²³ Regardless its long history dating back to the Middle Ages, the Maltese *gangmu*’s legacy came to an end in 2013 since EU regulations put an end to its use.



Picture 1: The iron semi-circles frames of the shrimp-dredge
(m. *gangmu tal-gambli*)
(Source: my own)



Picture 2: Front view of the shrimp-dredge
(m. *gangmu tal-gambli*)
(Source: my own)

The *tonnara* with its ancient history is also recorded to have been used in Malta, however, regardless its economic value and widespread use in Medieval Europe, especially in neighbouring Sicily as from the 13th century, it was only introduced in Malta in 1748 during the reign of the Order of the Hospitaller Knights of St. John as will be discussed in the subsequent section.⁴²⁴ The *tonnara* may not have been introduced locally during the medieval epoch due to the high insecurity rate attributed

⁴²² Hoffman (2000), 364.

⁴²³ Farrugia Randon (2007), 22.

⁴²⁴ *ibid.*, 27.

to pirate attacks. Consequently, the Maltese consumption of the fish depended heavily on Sicilian imports.⁴²⁵

As was the rule of the day, the catch had to be taken to the fish market at Mdina, the Maltese capital city at the time, with the result that, most often than not, the catch was not fresh by the time it reached its destination as it lay at a distance of 7 kilometres from the fishing grounds of St. Paul's Bay.⁴²⁶ This distance suggests the presence of rippers whose task was to transport the fish from the harbour to the city, a role which was very common during the High Middle Ages.⁴²⁷ Unsold fish used to be preserved in salt or desiccated, nonetheless, at the time, fish conservation through salting was not an industrial activity. Many seaside villages experienced depopulation by the end of the Middle Ages as villagers sought refuge from pirate attacks in central areas which were more secure.⁴²⁸ Preference for freshwater fish along with limited availability of seawater fish might have given rise to the first local aquaculture tentative.⁴²⁹

Researchers agree that fish consumption, as a substitution for meat on fasting days, saw its gradual development during the High Middle Ages. The diffusion of this custom reached the Maltese shores as well⁴³⁰ during the said time which continued to be adhered to during the subsequent period.

2.7 Early Modern Period

The beginning and end of the time frame referred to as the early modern period is open to different interpretations. Fifteen late 20th century authors variously attribute the beginning of 'early modern Europe' between 1350 and 1650, with the year 1500 being the most popular. On the other hand, the end of this era is dated between 1559 and 1800.⁴³¹ For this research, the time frame 1500 – 1800 will be used.

⁴²⁵ Mercieca, 439.

⁴²⁶ Mercieca, 402-3.

⁴²⁷ *ibid.*, 407.

⁴²⁸ *ibid.*, 403.

⁴²⁹ *ibid.*, 404.

⁴³⁰ *ibid.*, 402.

⁴³¹ Jonathan Dewald. "The Early Modern Period." Encyclopaedia of European Social History. 13 December 2014 <<http://www.encyclopedia.com/international/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/early-modern-period>>.

During this time, fishing is better described in terms of adaptability rather than invention as ‘almost all the fishing techniques employed before 1900 were known to Medieval Europeans.’⁴³² The continual scarcity of meat, which started to be experienced since the late Middle Ages, was a direct result of yet another major increase in population. In order to compensate, more land was reclaimed for wheat cultivation; land which was previously reserved exclusively for grazing animals.⁴³³ Many historians argue that the Middle Ages and early modern Europe can be subdivided in two, namely ‘a Roman and Mediterranean culture and a northern and Germanic culture’ with the former depending heavily on wheat production and the cultivation of yielding trees especially olive trees and grape vines, cheese and a little meat, and the latter’s food consumption being principally ‘based on hunting, fishing, the gathering of wild fruit, and the extensive raising of animals (particularly pigs) that grazed on the fallow lands and forests of continental Europe.’⁴³⁴ Regardless the limitation of meat availability, fish was never in abundance in central Europe and was almost exclusively reverted to in case of emergency. This may be attributed to the fact that the Mediterranean basin was far less rich in fish than northern European waters which were the main providers of a wide variety of dried and preserved fish, especially herring, sardines, mackerel, and cod to continental Europe especially during Lent.⁴³⁵

The last sentence sheds light on the power of the Catholic Church. Interestingly, religion played a further role in the early modern age. The culinary regulations as dictated by different religions distinguished between people. This was the time when Protestantism flourished with its new ideologies amongst which was the abolishment of many restrictions imposed by the Roman Catholic Church in controlling food consumption. As a rebuke to this outrageous behaviour, southern European Catholic countries further reinforced their age-old food restrictions.⁴³⁶ Regulation reinforcement might also have been a direct result of an increase in what was then considered as loose morality. It has been recorded that the highest number of fish days throughout the early modern period for Spain ranged between 120 and 130. 16th and 17th century Inquisition records confirm that the Roman Catholic Church considered infringement of these rules as very serious omissions, however, by the late 18th century the number of fish days had decreased considerably.⁴³⁷

⁴³² Hoffman (2000), 343.

⁴³³ Kenneth Gambin and Noel Buttigieg, *Storja tal-Kultura tal-Ikel f’Malta* (Malta, Pubblikazzjonijiet Indipendenza, 2003), 107.

⁴³⁴ Allen J. Grieco, ‘Food Production’, in *A Cultural History of Food: In the Renaissance, Volume 3*, Ken Albala (ed.) Berg, London & New York 2012, 30-1.

⁴³⁵ Gambin and Buttigieg, 138.

⁴³⁶ *ibid.*, 110.

⁴³⁷ Regina Grafe, ‘Popish Habits vs. Nutritional Need: Fasting and Fish Consumption in Iberia in the Early Modern Period’, *University of Oxford Discussion Papers in Economic and Social History*, 55 (2004), 17-8.

2.7.1 Malta's Fishing Repertoire during the Order's Domain

Most of the information as to what was happening locally in terms of fishing can be traced from petitions submitted to the Grand Master by fishermen themselves through official notices known as *bandi* concerning fish sales and selling procedures, the Knights' documents, and the police's logbooks. Other unofficial sources of information include voyagers' notebooks, manuscripts, and images.⁴³⁸

Upon their arrival in Malta, the Order of Saint John settled in Birgu in which a medieval fishing community resided. At this point, the Knights did not oblige the fishermen to take their catch to Mdina's fish market but gave them permission to sell it directly from their boats or pier to the city's inhabitants. As expected, the best fish was the first to sell. Poor people had to content with less desirable fish or unsold specimen. Interestingly, throughout the Order's reign (1530-1798), especially during the 1500s and 1600s, most fishermen did not rely solely on fishing for their income and many reverted to fishing as a secondary activity performed in conjunction with agriculture or other humble jobs.⁴³⁹ Many of them fished only when the opportunity presented itself or during Lent when fish was in great demand and fetched a good price. Fishing was not profitable and did not make good for all the hard work and sacrifice throughout the rest of the year.⁴⁴⁰

Being a Roman Catholic order, fish consumption on prescribed days was adhered to by the knights. This was further reinforced by the Council of Trent. Historians agree that the Northern European religious break from Southern Europe, which continued to adhere to Catholicism, has influenced the fish market since Northern Europe, now being Protestant, no longer obliged people to consume fish on prescribed days. The importance of fish importation from Northern countries to the Mediterranean increased. In Malta fresh fish was caught locally whereas conserved fish, especially salted cod, started being imported. On the other hand, the preservation of cod increased the demand for salt which was scarce in Northern European countries. To this avail, salt started being exported from the Mediterranean. The Order of Saint John rose to the occasion with the local production of salt which was a great success. The Maltese saline became renowned for the high quality of the product. Other salted fish that reached our shores included herring. Sardines, mackerel, and anchovies were consumed both fresh and salted. Since this fish was found in local waters, it can be assumed that it

⁴³⁸ Mercieca, 398.

⁴³⁹ *ibid.*, 407-9.

⁴⁴⁰ Gambin and Buttigieg, 137.

was locally caught for salting.⁴⁴¹ Apart from Lent, meat couldn't be consumed on four days of the week, namely Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday. With fish being the substitute of meat, these days were more commonly referred to as fish days. On the other hand, the remaining days were referred to as meat days. The knights had to abide by these rules even when in-service on board galleys. Apart from religious observation, fish was also more economically viable with three meat days accounting for almost three times as much as four fish days in terms of expenses. As expected, fish consumed on galleys was most often preserved since it had to last for the entire voyage. Incidents in which the knights and the crew fished while on board have also been recorded.⁴⁴² Meat products could only be consumed on fish days if permission to do so was granted by a doctor, the chaplain or the *barbaretto*.⁴⁴³

During the Order's reign, fishing was exclusive to certain places scattered around the islands, namely, in the Grand Harbour, at Marsamxett and at St. Paul's Bay. Small fishing communities started aggregating at St. Julian's and Marsaxlokk in the 1700s. Fear of attacks from pirates prevented fishermen from fishing in open waters. Fishermen who worked aboard boats used small fishing crafts and remained close to the shore as a safety precaution. Few references were made to the boat typology of the time. Amongst others, reference is made to the boat type locally known as *tal-pass* which was mainly used for the transportation of people, however, it cannot be excluded that a variant of the said boat was used by fishermen. The *firilla* was used by fishermen and was approximately five metres long. The same can be said of the early versions of the *luzzu* and *kajjik*.⁴⁴⁴ Law infringements were frequent and many *bandi* issued at the end of the 1700s obliged fishermen to take their fish to authorised selling areas only and deposit their catch at the piers without concealing anything. These were enacted since many merchants tried to purchase the fish before it arrived at the fish market by intercepting the fishermen on their way or even while at sea which was considered insidious as it disadvantaged the citizens. Contrary to what was granted at the beginning of the Order's reign, fishermen were no longer permitted to sell directly from their boats or in the streets with few exceptions.⁴⁴⁵ From 1530 up till 1630, fish prices remained stable throughout the year with the exceptional fluctuations for certain fish species. Fish market regulations were less rigid than those for other products including meat. This might have been an effort to increase fish consumption. As from

⁴⁴¹ Mercieca, 410-2.

⁴⁴² Joseph Muscat, *Food and Drink on Maltese Galleys* (Malta, Pubblikazzjonijiet Indipendenza, 2002), 21-2.

⁴⁴³ The *barbaretto* could be considered as the doctor's assistant who was also expected to carry out minor operations like bleeding the sick. A *barbaretto* on French ships was recruited from the lower ranks of society such as slaves. He could also go ashore to purchase the medicine and food required for sick and wounded people. Cf. *ibid.*, 32.

⁴⁴⁴ Mercieca, 412-4.

⁴⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 428.

1621, the lists became more detailed. Sometimes more than forty different fish species were listed.⁴⁴⁶ According to Mercieca (2007) the documentation for the 1500s and the 1600s is poor with regards to the type of fish sold in Malta. Nonetheless, octopus, cuttlefish, squid, and sea-urchins were common and could be caught inside harbours. More information was made available for the 1700s.⁴⁴⁷ In the *bando* of the 12th of February 1740, one can find an extensive list of the fish caught and sold in the local market.⁴⁴⁸

As with other countries, the fishing techniques used in Malta during the early modern period could have been introduced during the Middle Ages. What is certain is that the use of fishing rods was the most popular fishing method during this time.⁴⁴⁹ Reference was also made to fishing with nets amongst of which is the trammel net. Even though this net has medieval origins (see section 2.6) and could have been used locally at the time, reference to its local use has been made during the early modern period. The same can be said of the *xkaltar*⁴⁵⁰ which is a type of gill net used for the catching of the angel shark (m. *xkatlu*) and the smooth hound (m. *mazzola*).⁴⁵¹ No reference was made to trawling for herring in the local waters, a fishing method which was invented in Northern Europe during the Middle Ages. The cast net (m. *terrieħa*) continued to be used during the Order's reign as well.⁴⁵² Most often, the fishing equipment was fabricated by the fisherman or his family.⁴⁵³ The shrimp-dredge (m. *gangmu tal-gambli*) (see section 2.6.1) was also made reference to locally in the early modern period in the 5th of October 1772 *bando* which forbade fishermen from using this implement as it was believed to cause environmental damage. The shrimp thus caught was used as fishing bait.⁴⁵⁴ Fishing for the seasonal dolphinfish (m. *lampuki*) and pilot fish (m. *fanfri*) used to be carried out with fish traps⁴⁵⁵ as opposed to today's method known in the vernacular as *kannizzati* or *ċimi* (see section 4.5.6) which was in turn introduced in the 1900s.⁴⁵⁶ Those who were not in possession of fish traps used to participate in this venture using the trammel net or *xkaltar*. The latter used to fish in proximity of the fish traps set by the other fishermen which sometimes resulted in violent quarrels. A petition submitted by two fishermen to the Grand Master in this regard resulted in

⁴⁴⁶ Gambin and Buttigieg, 138.

⁴⁴⁷ Mercieca, 431-2.

⁴⁴⁸ Gambin and Buttigieg, 431-3.

⁴⁴⁹ Mercieca, 413.

⁴⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 417.

⁴⁵¹ Farrugia Randon (2007), 20.

⁴⁵² Mercieca, 417.

⁴⁵³ *ibid.*, 419

⁴⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 435.

⁴⁵⁵ *ibid.*, 417.

⁴⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 445.

several prohibitions one of which stipulated that fishermen could not use trammel nets or the *xkaltar* next to fish traps.⁴⁵⁷

What is known for certain is the introduction of the *tonnara* at the time. Even though this fishing technique was extensively used in 13th century northern Sicily, it was not introduced in Malta till 1748. By the 15th century it spread from Sicily to areas in the Maghreb, Southern Spain and to Provence, therefore, the *tonnara* spread to other, more distant countries, three centuries before it was finally introduced in Malta. The date of its introduction coincides with the sovereignty of Grand Master Pinto. It was set up at Mellicha, on the third of April. All the expenses incurred were made good for by the Grand Master himself. The net was hauled two months later and a large number of fish such as amberjack (m. *červjol*) was caught along with the tuna. This was given to charitable institutions, monasteries, and convents. Since then, the *tonnara* used to be laid at Mellicha Bay, id-Delli and Ġnejna. As with the first experiment, other fish continued to be caught in large amounts including the plain bonito (m. *tumbrell*), the little tunny (m. *kubrit*) and amberjack. This very fact, however, brought about ‘a rapid depreciation of market prices’ to the extent that fishermen became prejudiced against its use and did their best to disturb the fish from entering the net.⁴⁵⁸ According to Mercieca (2007) the structure set at Mellicha by Pinto was not a true *tonnara* but a smaller system referred to as *tonnarella*. This activity did not develop substantially and, according to the 1700s Maltese historian Count Ciantar, the local tuna industry did not develop on a grand scale from lack of profit.⁴⁵⁹

Unfortunately, we lack information on the culinary preparation of fish and by whom it was mostly consumed. As with other countries, it is generally believed that fresh fish was the prerogative of the rich whereas the poor had to content with salted, imported fish.⁴⁶⁰ The Order of Saint John was made up of members of noble families from the provinces of Aragon, Castille, Auvergne, England, France, Germany, Italy, and Provence. Their arrival in Malta and their stay extends from the beginning of the early modern age up till its end, therefore, the culinary traditions which they brought must have reflected the nobility’s gusto of other Catholic countries of the time.

⁴⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 436-7.

⁴⁵⁸ Farrugia Randon (2007), 26-7.

⁴⁵⁹ Mercieca, 439.

⁴⁶⁰ Gambin and Buttigieg, 139.

During the said time frame, religion and the church in general provided fishermen with moral support and organisation in the form of confraternities. One of these confraternities was established at Bormla.⁴⁶¹ Another was established in Birkirkara. Even though the latter is situated in central Malta, its parochial terrain comprised several creeks including those of St. Julian's and Msida. Both the confraternities at Żurrieq and Żejtun were dedicated to St. Andrew. This situation experienced change in the 1800s. Bormla lost its superior importance in terms of fishermen since the development of Marsaxlokk in Żejtun's proximity. The same can be said of Msida and St. Julian's as both developed into independent parishes. By the end of the century, a statue in honour of the fishermen's patron saint was erected in Marsaxlokk's square (see section 3.4.1.2), since this had been transformed into the most important fishing village on the island, a title which it still holds. At the beginning of the 1900s, the wooden statue of St. Joseph was substituted with one depicting St. Andrew. The same can be said of Xlendi at Gozo. A fishing community established itself in this village during the 1800s with the result that a St. Andrew's statue was erected here as well (see section 3.4.1.2).⁴⁶²

2.8 From the Industrial Revolution Onwards

The Early Modern period came to an end with the dawn of the 19th century. The years spanning between 1780 and 1830 saw a breakthrough from the past with the advancement in technology; a phenomenon known as the Industrial Revolution⁴⁶³ which impacted all spheres of life. Its influence however, reached the fishing sector at a much slower pace. The Industrial Revolution's reverberations reached the major European countries and the North American fisheries by the second half of the 19th century. All the technological changes experienced in the fishing domain resulted in more efficient fishing.⁴⁶⁴ The main driving force for the betterment of fishing was another spurt in population growth with an increase in urbanisation as a direct consequence.⁴⁶⁵ The population also experienced a better standard of living which enabled the majority to afford purchasing fish more frequently.⁴⁶⁶ In the UK, during the Industrial Revolution, the population of fishing communities increased. Coastal and inshore fishing expanded, however, both the boats and the gear implemented experienced little

⁴⁶¹ Mercieca, 413.

⁴⁶² *ibid.*, 413-4

⁴⁶³ Hance D. Smith, 'The Regional Development and Management of Fisheries: The UK Case', *Marine Policy*, xxxvii, (2013), 12.

⁴⁶⁴ Bo Poulsen, 'The Variability of Fisheries and Fish Populations Prior to the Industrialized Fishing: An Appraisal of the Historical Evidence', *Journal of Marine Systems*, lxxix, 3 (2010), 327.

⁴⁶⁵ Smith, 12.

⁴⁶⁶ John M. Knauss, 'The Growth of British Fisheries during the Industrial Revolution', *Ocean Development and International Law*, xxxvi, 1 (2005), 2.

change.⁴⁶⁷ Even though the direct impact of the Industrial Revolution was not initially felt by the fishing sector, it contributed to the latter indirectly through the railway. Fish could be transported more efficiently and over longer distances. This was in turn further facilitated by the introduction of other technologies such as the telegraph which helped in stipulating the amount in demand for fish and its price more quickly. By 1850, the railway had paved its way to most of England. This included the connection between London and the major fishing ports by rail.⁴⁶⁸ Nonetheless, open boats continued to be used in fishing with the same, unchanged gears⁴⁶⁹ even though steam-driven boats had already been in existence from the early 19th century.⁴⁷⁰ It was only in 1882 that the first steam trawler was introduced in the UK and eventually became synonymous with larger vessels. With their introduction, fishermen took a much shorter time to reach their fishing grounds and back again.⁴⁷¹ Further developments in the fishing industry were experienced from the 1940s up to the 1990s. ‘The main technological feature was the replacement of steam by diesel engines in distant water vessels, and petrol-paraffin by diesel engines in the inshore fleet.’⁴⁷²

A study carried out with the aim of analysing the decline in fish stocks in the UK over 118 years revealed a correlation between fish landings and the fishing vessels used. The data collected focused on landings of demersal fish including plaice, haddock, and cod between 1889 and 2007. An increase in landings was noted between the late 19th century up till the mid-20th century which corresponds to the technological innovations in the fleets. Steam trawlers overshadowed sail trawlers by the beginning of the 20th century which were in turn replaced with motor trawlers as from the end of World War II.⁴⁷³ The study revealed that fish landings largely increased with the introduction of steam trawlers, however, landings started to decrease with the advent of motorised trawlers up till the end of the study period due to the latter’s efficiency which led to overfishing.⁴⁷⁴ ‘Fish landings were only maintained throughout the 1960s because of an increase in fishing power.’⁴⁷⁵ Fishermen themselves realised that more efficient fishing vessels, such as the steam trawler over the sail trawlers, yielded better catches.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁶⁷ Smith, 12.

⁴⁶⁸ Knauss, 2.

⁴⁶⁹ Smith, 12.

⁴⁷⁰ Knauss, 3.

⁴⁷¹ Smith, 12-3.

⁴⁷² *ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁷³ *ibid.*, 2-3.

⁴⁷⁴ Ruth H. Thurstan, Simon Brockington and Callum M. Roberts, ‘The Effects of 118 Years of Industrial Fishing on UK Bottom Trawl Fisheries’, *Nature Communications*, i, (2010), 2.

⁴⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁷⁶ Knauss, 4.

An interesting study carried out in 2014 assessed the changes in the Spanish Mediterranean and Gulf of Cadiz as based on the fishermen's perceptions. The interviewed fishermen's ages varied from 20 to 70+ years. It was revealed that both the depth and distance at which fishing was carried out at the time of the study were much larger than they used to be. The average depth at which fishing was carried out increased from 100m to 200m. The average distance had also increased from an average of 19km to 36km.⁴⁷⁷ Furthermore, fishermen who started their fishing career in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s claimed at having caught specimen weighing half a ton. Younger fishermen attributed the weight of 200kg to their largest ever caught fish.⁴⁷⁸ 94% of the interviewed fishermen mentioned one or more depleted fish species and 61% also mentioned one or more species or groups that became locally extinct. On the other hand, 53% of the fishermen acknowledged the proliferation of certain species or groups of fish.⁴⁷⁹

2.8.1 The Local Situation: 1800 - 1931

The year 1800 marked the beginning of the British colonialism of the Maltese Islands. During most of the 19th century, little attention to the fishing domain was given since the Empire's concern with Malta was mainly of a naval-military nature.⁴⁸⁰ This role was further developed in the 1840's and intensified after the Crimean War (1854-56). To this end, the expenditures were concentrated on the building and maintenance of the island's defensive system. More capital was invested in trade and shipping amongst other services. As a result, 'capital allocations intended to stimulate local production, were thin and far in between, and indeed almost non-existent when it came to the fishing sector.'⁴⁸¹ Lack of investment induced the fishermen to continue operating in an unorganised and primitive manner. Furthermore, competition was on the increase with the importation of tinned, frozen, fresh, and salted fish whereas foreign fishing vessels, especially South Italian registered boats, fished in fishing grounds traditionally used by the Maltese and landed their catches in Malta.⁴⁸²

⁴⁷⁷ Marta Coll, Marta Carreras, Cristina Ciercoles, Maria-José Cornax, Giulia Gorelli, Elvira Morote, Raquel Stergiou Sáez and I. Costantinos, 'Assessing Fishing and Marine Biodiversity Changes Using Fisher's Perceptions: The Spanish Mediterranean and Gulf of Cadiz Case Study', *PloS ONE*, ix, 1 (2014), 4.

⁴⁷⁸ *ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁷⁹ *ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁸⁰ Chircop, 21 and 23.

⁴⁸¹ *ibid.*, 23.

⁴⁸² *ibid.*, 24.

Even though some regulations concerning this industry had been enacted, it was only during the first decade of the twentieth century that more strict regulations came into being.⁴⁸³ Hornell (1931), claimed that ‘the modern era of restrictive Regulation did not begin until 1909 when a lengthy series of fishery regulations was promulgated.’⁴⁸⁴ In his report, Hornell (1931), continued by representing the below list of regulations, which, according to him, marked this transition.

1	The use of the following fishing instruments is permitted at all times and in all places:- the line; the eel-noose (kanniċċ); the shrimp-net (kopp tal gambli); the surface-net (kopp tal-wiċċ); the floating-net (kopp tal-laċċi); the fish-spear (foxxna); the cuttle-catcher (kulpara); the trap called draina.
2	It shall not be lawful at any time to use any of the following instruments in any harbour or bay:- the casting-net (terrieħa) the trammel-net (parit) the basket-traps called nassa tal ġhalf, nassa ta disa, nassa tal mulett and nassa tal vopi.
3	It shall not be lawful to use any fishing instruments, other than those mentioned in article 1, without a licence from the Collector of Customs. Such license shall specify the place in which, and the time during which the instrument may be used. All licenses under this article shall be valid for twelve months, and should be renewable from the 1st January of each year. The number of licenses to be used for each kind of instrument for which a license is required, is left to the discretion of the Collector of Customs. It shall be lawful for the Collector of Customs to withdraw, at any time, and without compensation, any of the licenses referred to in theses regulations.
4	It shall not be lawful to use fishing instruments which drag along the bottom of the sea, such as the drag-net (gangmu) and the small seine-net (volgini) except between the 1st November and the 31st January in each year, and in those parts of the harbours and bays in which the use of the seine-net (tartarun) is permitted. The use of the seine-net is not permitted:- (a) in Rinella, Calcara, Dockyard or French Creeks, or in the part of Grand Harbour which lies to the westward of a line drawn between the Custom House and Isola Point; (b) in Sliema Creek, or in that part of the Marsamuscetto Harbout which lies to the westward of a line drawn between the Eastern Gate of the Lazzaretto and St. Rocco Jetty.

⁴⁸³ Chircop, 30.

⁴⁸⁴ James Hornell, *The Fishing Industry in Malta with Suggestions for its Further Development* (Malta, Govt. Printing Office, 1931), 8.

	(c) In other bays or creeks, the limit of the area within which it shall not be lawful to use seine-nets shall be a line drawn between two stone pillars, painted red and placed on opposite sides of such bays or creeks.
5	It shall be lawful for the Head of the Government to grant permission for the use of tunny-nets (tonnara) on such conditions as he may see fit to impose. On such permission being granted, it shall be lawful for the Collector of Customs to direct that no kind of fishing, other than tunny fishing, shall be carried on at any place in which a tunny-net is fixed.
6	It shall not be lawful, at any time or in any place, to use explosive substances for fishing purposes.
7	Licenses for fishing grounds (“ormeggi”) will be granted according to the extent of the harbours, bays or creeks, and on condition that the floats shall not be less than two hundred feet apart, and not less than three hundred feet distant from the mouth of any sewer or drainage outlet. No kind of fishing, except fishing with the seine-net, will be permitted within 60 feet from the float of any such fishing ground.
8	The fishing grounds in deep water, used for “Cannizzati”, shall be granted by lot, and licensed for one season. Each site shall be 3 miles in width, and shall contain not more than 20 floats.

Table 4: The fishing regulations issued in 1909

(Source: Government Gazette, 5 March 1909, Government Notice 49)⁴⁸⁵

It was only after the First World War, that an interest started being expressed in local industries. A Research Committee was thus appointed to analyse which local industries had the best potential at being exploited profitably. The fishing industry was considered one of them.⁴⁸⁶ The Government decided to appoint Giuseppe Despott who, at the time, was Curator of the Natural History section of the National Museum to devise strategies by which to develop this industry.⁴⁸⁷ He was assigned this task on the 22nd of July 1919 and submitted the finished report with the suggested regulations on the 28th of October of the same year. On the 4th of June 1920, Despott was appointed as Superintendent of Fisheries of the newly established Department of Fisheries. The regulations Despott had submitted underwent thorough consideration by the Government and were in turn studied by the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries before being approved with slight amendments and published as Government Notice no. 428 in the Government Gazette’s issue of 6th December 1920 as follows;⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁵ Table 4. Cf. *The Government Gazette*, 5 March 1909, Government Notice 49, 234-5.⁴⁸⁶ *Government Departments Report*, 1920-1921, S¹ 1.⁴⁸⁷ Farrugia Randon (1995), 1-2.⁴⁸⁸ *Government Departments Report*, 1920-1921, S¹ 1.

1	Subject to the provisions of articles 7 and 13 the use of the following implements is permitted at all times and in all localities:- i. The line (xlief and kons) ii. The eel-noose (Kannic); iii. The shrimp-net (copp tal gambli); iv. The basket traps (nassi) of not less than 1 inch mesh. v. The basket trap (drajna) vi. The fish spear (foxxna) vii. The cuttle catcher (gulpara and hiel).
2	It shall not be lawful to use in bays and harbours any fishing implements, other than those mentioned in article 1, without a license from the Department of Fisheries. A separate license is needed for the use of each implement subject to any restriction. Such license shall specify the locality in which and the period during which the implement may be used, and shall contain any other condition that the Department of Fisheries may deem it expedient to impose for the protection of either spawning or immature fish. All licenses under this article shall be valid for one year and shall be renewable on the first January of each year. The number of licenses to be issued for each kind of implement for which a license is required is left to the discretion of the Department of Fisheries.
3	The use of the seine-net (Tartarun) is not permitted in any locality when the waters are turbid. The use of the seine-net shall not be permitted at any time if any of its meshes are less than $\frac{1}{3}$ inch in diameter or if its weights are so heavy as to cause sinking of the floats. The use of the shrimp dredge (Gangmu) in localities which will be indicated in the license referred to in Article 2 shall only be permitted from the 1st November to the 1st February and the meshes of this implement are not to be less than $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in diameter. The use of the net known by the name Terrieħa shall not be permitted at any time inside bays and harbours. The use of all fixed nets shall not be permitted from the 15th February to the 15th July in those localities where the use of the seine-net is prohibited. The use of any basket trap whose meshes are less than 1 inch wide shall not be permitted from the 1st May to the 1st of December in those localities where the use of the seine-net is prohibited.
4	In all bays and creeks the limit of the area within which the use of the seine-net shall not be lawful will be a line drawn between two stone pillars placed on opposite side of such bays or creeks.
5	It shall be lawful to trawl or cast a trail net within a limit of 3 miles from the shores of these Islands.
6	The fishing grounds in deep waters used for the cannizzati shall be granted by lot and licensed for one season; each site shall be 3 miles in width and shall contain not more than 20 floats.
7	It shall not be lawful to fish within a radius of 600 feet from the floats of any cannizzati without the owner's written consent.
8	Permission may be granted for the use of tunny nets (tunnara) on such conditions as the Department of Fisheries may see fit to impose. The Department of Fisheries may also direct that no other kind of fishing shall be carried on at any locality in which the tunny net is set.

	There shall be two nun bouys three feet in diameter and five feet in height, moored at each end of the seaward extremity of every tunny net, surmounted by a staff and a ball 12 inches in diameter, the top of the ball to be six feet from the water level. There shall be moored by night at the seaward shoot of every such net a boat showing two vertical lights, 3 feet apart, the upper light being not less than 10 feet from the water line, and both lights being visible on a dark night, with a clear atmosphere at a distance of not less than 2 miles.
9.	It shall not be lawful to deposit any sort of rubbish within any bay or harbour.
10.	It shall not be lawful for any person to use or have in his possession a "Sponge glass" locally known as Lenti or Hgiegia or the implement locally known as Hanzir without a special permit from the Department of Fisheries. It shall not be lawful to use for fishing purposes poisons or any other substance which acts as poison on fish; and it shall not be lawful to collect from the sea or to expose for sale, or otherwise to be in possession of a fish killed or caught by means of explosives or poisons or by any substance which acts as poison on fish. Any person who, not being guilty of a more serious offense, contravenes the prohibition laid down in the preceding paragraphs shall be liable to the punishments established by the Criminal Laws for contraventions, but no fine under 10/- may be awarded. In addition to such punishments, he shall be liable to the forfeiture of the fish unless he proves that he had no knowledge or suspicion that the fish had been caught by illicit means. If the offender holds a license under article 150 of the Police Laws or under article 156 of the Third Sanitary Law or under these Regulations, he shall be liable on conviction to forfeiture of his license, and shall always forfeit it on a second conviction.
11.	It shall not be lawful to expose for sale i. red mullets and breams of a length less than 5 inches; ii. any immature fish known as Maccu, Mirgha or Trilietta iii. sardines and anchovies of a length less than 3 inches when they are known under the name of Nemusa.
12.	The Department of Fisheries may grant for scientific purposes a license for the use of any implement at any time and in any locality (excepted the localities indicated in Articles 7 and 13). It shall be lawful for the Department of Fisheries to grant or withdraw without compensation any license, to order modifications in any implement or to prohibit its use, and to make any change in the demarcation of closed areas and in the periods established for the use of any implements.
13.	Whenever a blue pierced white flag is hoisted on the Custom House or on the Police Station at Marsamuscetto Harbour no one shall shoot any seine-net in the harbour where such flag is hoisted, or near the entrance of the same, and any net which has been shot shall be at once removed as soon as the flag is hoisted.
14.	No fishing shall be permitted in Dockyard Creek or in French Creek, i.e. in those parts of the Grand Harbour to the South-East of a line drawn from St. Angelo Point to Isola Point and thence to the Northern end of Parlatorio Wharf and Corradino Hill, or in the proximity of the sewage outfall at Wied Ghammiek, within an area demarcated, on the land side by two stone pillars painted red (situated on the sides of the drainage outlet, one at Xghaira shore in the vicinity of Ras il Gebel, and the other under the Ricasoli Bastions), and on the seaside by the two range bouys.

15.	It shall not be lawful to dredge for molluscs without a license from the Department of Fisheries. It shall not be lawful to dredge for molluscs except in such sections of the harbours as will be indicated for specific periods by the Department of Fisheries, nor to use for the dredging of molluscs any implements except those of a type established by the Department of Fisheries. It shall not be lawful to land or expose for sale any bivalves so dredged, excepting stone borers (tamar), which are less than the gauge established by the Department of Fisheries for each species. All fishers and sellers of molluscs shall be provided with the necessary gauges bearing the Government mark.
16.	Any person who acts in contravention to the foregoing regulations becomes liable, unless it is otherwise provided, to the punishments laid down in the Criminal Laws for contraventions, and the provisions of articles 319, 320 and 321 of the Police Laws may also be applied.

Table 5: The fishing regulations issued in 1920

N.B. All the names and words in Maltese are being represented as in the original document

(Source: Government Gazette, 6 December 1920, Government Notice 428)⁴⁸⁹

In the preliminary writing accompanying the first report by the Department of Fisheries as part of the Government Departments Report for the year 1920-1921, after a brief introduction stating how the Department came into being, Despott's stated that the local industry was not meeting local demand with the main problem being the dire situation of the fisher folk. Despott argued that according to the Customs' Department report for 1919-1920, the number of fishermen at the time was 3,500 all of which were facing unemployment if the industry's then contemporary situation did not improve. According to Despott, the fishermen would have become a burden to the islands as it was quite impossible to find them employment elsewhere them being mostly illiterate and unfit for any other job as well as 'unquestionably unfit for emigration.'⁴⁹⁰ Other than becoming merely a burden, Despott credited the fishermen's need to remain in the industry for their own merits by stating;

Besides this, a fact that should not be overlooked is that it would be a very short-sighted policy to do away with our fishermen, for should this useful class of people be allowed to die out, it would be impossible at any future date to revive the fishing industry.⁴⁹¹ Nonetheless, uncertainty lies in the number of fishermen then present in the Maltese Islands. The figure of 3,500 fishermen reported by Despott was based on the Customs Department statistics, however, he claims that the previous year's census gave the figure of 1,480 whereas the Representatives of the Fishermen on the Board of Fisheries stated that the total number of fishermen

⁴⁸⁹ Table 5. Cf. *The Government Gazette*, 6 December 1920, Government Notice 428, 825-8.

⁴⁹⁰ *Government Departments Report*, 1920-1921, S¹ 1.

⁴⁹¹ *ibid.*

amounted to about 7,000. Notwithstanding these variations, the superintendent claimed that even if there were a mere 1,480 fishermen on the islands, their number was still considerable when considering the Maltese population which amounted to a quarter of a million. He believed that this figure included the full-time fishermen only and did not refer to the numerous men who turned to fishing only when no other occupation was available. The latter point clearly highlights the unattractiveness of the trade which resulted in the consistent dwindling in the number of fishermen throughout the preceding twenty years from the writing of the report.⁴⁹² Notwithstanding his argument, the meagre figure was not considerable even if it included full-time fishermen only since large amounts of fish were being imported from foreign countries; a topic which will be touched upon in subsequent sections.

2.8.1.1 Poverty Induced by the Fish Market and the Middlemen

One of the main hardships faced by the fishermen at the time and which added to the unattractiveness of the occupation was the meagre income. Despott himself was astonished as to how these people ‘managed to eke out an existence’ considering that the fish caught during the preceding years was small whilst the cost of living was on the increase. Even though the little fish caught was being sold off at high prices, ‘more often than not less than half the price at which the catch [was] sold by retailers at the market reach[ed] the pockets of the poor fisherman.’⁴⁹³ This was also mentioned in the 1922-1923 report, in which it was reported that after careful enquiries and visits to the fishing centres it was confirmed ‘that the proceeds in great part [went] to the benefit of the retailers who [were] making an exaggerated profit in the sale of this commodity.’⁴⁹⁴ Investigation also revealed that the fishermen barely got ‘from one fourth to one third of the price at which the fish’ was being retailed, a situation which was mostly true of the fish market.⁴⁹⁵ Therefore, instead of generating money which would have helped them to invest in their enterprise, the wholesale market was taking all the surplus profit from the fishermen and further depressing the fishing industry.⁴⁹⁶ Middlemen, these being the ‘official mediators between fishers and retailers’, were involved in the process. Fishermen had no choice but to rely on middlemen or brokers for selling their catch since the latter were in control of the wholesale fish market. Having cash at the ready they bought the fishermen’s catch upon landing at the fish market. Throughout the 19th century and up till 1906 middlemen were also in charge ‘for the physical

⁴⁹² *Government Departments Report, 1921-1922, U 1.*

⁴⁹³ *Government Departments Report, 1920-1921, S¹ 1.*

⁴⁹⁴ *Government Departments Report, 1922-1923, T 1.*

⁴⁹⁵ *Government Departments Report, 1923-1924, T 2.*

⁴⁹⁶ Chircop, 25.

control and supervision of the fish-market'. This gave them a lot of power to manipulate the fishermen. The middlemen also employed paid agents to keep them informed as to the movements and happenings at the fish market.⁴⁹⁷ After making face-to-face negotiations with fishermen, middlemen sold the catch by auctioning which was carried out *sotto voce* leaving fishermen unaware of the real prices at which their hard-earned fish was sold and had to content with the meagre pay they received. Fishermen were thus left with no money to pay for the necessary boat and equipment repairs on which their livelihood depended. Having no other recourse their situation continued to deteriorate as they became indebted to the middlemen who forwarded the necessary money and thus secured their manipulation over the poor fishermen.⁴⁹⁸ Borg (1985), explained that just as 'the agriculturist has to put up with the objectionable methods of the middleman', so does the fisherman who is in turn 'often victimised by another class of middlemen and wholesale dealers.'⁴⁹⁹

Poverty prevented fishermen from investing in the trade such as the fitting of motors on fishing boats. In Despott's words;

The fitting of some of our fishing craft with motors would undoubtedly be very advantageous and an excellent means of developing the industry, but notwithstanding the fact that motors have been and are still offered on payment by easy instalments, very few, if any, are in a position to avail themselves of the opportunity thus afforded.'⁵⁰⁰

In 1922, Despott reported that fishermen were reduced to such poverty that they had to sell their equipment;

'...even before the promulgation of the present Regulations, fishermen have frequently had recourse to the pledging and selling of their fishing implements. The implements so disposed of consisted chiefly of trammel nets, these nets having become practically useless owing to the scarcity of mature fish in our waters brought about by the indiscriminate use of seines and drag nets in general.'⁵⁰¹

2.8.1.2 The Family and the Community

Back then, the fishermen's only sources of hope were the family and the fishing community. Family helped in providing additional income with the hope of reducing their dependence on middlemen and

⁴⁹⁷ *ibid.*, 26.

⁴⁹⁸ *ibid.*, 26-7.

⁴⁹⁹ John Borg, 'Fisheries of Malta', in *Malta and Gibraltar Illustrated: Historical and Descriptive Commercial and Industrial Facts, Figures and Resources*, Allister Macmillan (ed.) Midsea Books Ltd., Malta 1985, 243.

⁵⁰⁰ *Government Departments Report, 1920-1921*, S¹ 3.

⁵⁰¹ *Government Departments Report, 1921-1922*, U 1.

for personal provision. This included the production of tackle and fishing lines, mending of nets, repairing and maintenance of boats, equipment, traps, and sails; activities which were carried out ‘particularly outside the main fishing seasons’ and which required the participation of all including women and children. Help wasn’t only provided in times of need but was also done habitually by the different stakeholders including the extended family, neighbours, as well as between different households. The family and community involvement extended to the fishing ventures themselves which could be considered ‘a shared economy, characterized by its own particular internal social structure and customs.’ Indeed, most often the crew was composed of family members on board a fishing vessel owned by the *padrun*. Subsequently, the catch was divided into quotas with the *padrun* getting a larger portion. When the boat and the fishing equipment were jointly owned by members of the same family, the catch was divided in equal quotas with a larger portion reserved for the boat and equipment’s maintenance.⁵⁰²

2.8.1.3 The Depletion of Fish Stocks

Throughout the years he acted as Superintendent, Despott gave details as to why, in his opinion, the local waters were yielding poor supplies of fish attributing the main cause to the use of the seine nets. Despott found out that, at the time (1927), the use of the seine net on a large scale was a recent innovation with the first one ever to be used in Marsaxlokk, which might have also been the first in the Maltese Islands, introduced circa 60 to 70 years prior the presentation of the 1926-1927 report. In the beginning, seine nets were limited in number and the larger part of the licenses were issued between 1890 and 1920. Since then, no other licenses had been issued.⁵⁰³ In this report, Despott claimed that the seine net fishermen were not catching enough fish ‘to eke out a miserable living’ and were willing to look for employment elsewhere on land. He urged the Government to provide employment elsewhere ‘to seine net fishermen to bring down their numbers as far as practicable and at the same time afford these people a means of subsistence.’⁵⁰⁴

In his words, the seine is particularly destructive in terms of immature fish and elder fishermen recalled a time, circa 50 to 60 years prior the 1920-1921 report, when only four or five seine nets were deployed in the local waters, whereas in 1920, 104 permits for the use of the seine were issued. At the time, the locally constructed seine was made up of a large bag ‘having practically no meshes’

⁵⁰² Chircop, 28-9.

⁵⁰³ *Government Departments Report, 1926-1927*, U 3.

⁵⁰⁴ *ibid.*

which left no means of escape for immature fish. However, as from the 1st of January 1921, restrictions were imposed as to the minimum size of the meshes which was set at one third of an inch square. Furthermore, the sale of immature fish was prohibited. During the year under discussion, only 52 fishermen applied for permits to use this fishing implement. Through the enactment of these regulations, Despott envisaged a future in which both the sardines and the young anchovies would abound in number as they must have had 35 to 40 years prior. This would have enabled the establishment of a preservation factory which would in turn have provided work for some of the local unemployed. Other species which populated the Maltese waters were the shad and red mullets. Despott claimed that the former used to be so abundant that they were caught in large shoals which required 'several hours to be shaken off the nets.'⁵⁰⁵

Despott based his assumption that the seine nets caused havoc on repeated experiments carried out in waters where the seine nets had not been implemented during the previous six months. According to the 1920-1921 report, the areas tested were the Grand and Marsamxett Harbours which he found to be 'simply swarming with young fish'.⁵⁰⁶ Similar experimentations were carried out in subsequent years. In the 1922-1923 report, a comparison was drawn, this time *between* the Grand and Marsamxett Harbours. He found that Marsamxett yielded less fish than the Grand Harbour since, in the former, the implementation of seine and drag nets was still being practiced clandestinely. The Grand Harbour yielded substantial amounts of fish 'in spite of the greater traffic and the highly polluted state of the waters through fuel oil'.⁵⁰⁷ Nonetheless, the experimentations carried out by Despott weren't scientifically reliable as remarked by Hornell and as discussed later. Most probably, closing off these traditional fishing grounds was a manoeuvre to safeguard the Empire's interest rather than for the protection of immature fish since, contrary to what Despott claimed, the latter were being destructed by the high level of contamination of the waters through pollution, waste products and toxins dumped by the naval vessels, dockyards, power station and drainage.⁵⁰⁸

Regardless the wish to remove or, at the least, restrict the use of the seine net, Despott claimed as to the impossibility of introducing new fishing methods and implements as the fishermen at the time could barely live on their earnings let alone put apart a sum of money, no matter how small, 'to purchase the necessary gear.'⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁵ *Government Departments Report, 1920-1921, S¹ 2.*

⁵⁰⁶ *ibid.*, S¹ 3.

⁵⁰⁷ *Government Departments Report, 1922-1923, T 2.*

⁵⁰⁸ Chircop, 31.

⁵⁰⁹ *Government Departments Report, 1920-1921, S¹ 3.*

Many years later, the 28th issue of the monthly pamphlet 'Is-Sajd' reported the results of the experimentations carried out by the Aberdeen Marine Laboratory vis-à-vis the use of the seine net off the Scottish eastern coast at Moray Firth. Filming this net in action was paramount to understanding how the net operates and how the fish behave when confronted by the net. Upon being thrown overboard, the seine net forms a vertical wall in the sea suspended upwards by floats. The net's bag (m. *manka/ l-ispiss tax-xibka*) rests at the bottom. Upon hauling, the net stretches forward and is dragged along the seabed until it detaches completely and floats mid-sea. The divers involved in the study observed that the net's meshes remained wide open. The wide variety of fish trapped inside the net swam forward at a steady rhythm and kept abreast with its movement. Eventually they fell back into the net's bag to the extent that fish smaller than the meshes escaped easily. As highlighted in the concluding paragraph of this article, these experiments demonstrated that the seine net is not destructive in terms of immature fish as it had been alleged for years.⁵¹⁰

2.8.1.4 The Regulations

Throughout the years as Superintendent of the Fisheries, Despott repeatedly claimed that the ultimate objective of the department was to protect immature fish as made evident from his statement; 'the measures suggested consisted mainly in enforcing adequate regulations for the protection of fish in their immature stages.'⁵¹¹ When taking in consideration the state of deprivation in which the fishermen lived, it comes as no surprise that many resisted the regulations which impeded their already meagre income. Despott himself claimed that the regulations were undoubtedly directly hitting several fishermen with a few of them undoubtedly suffering hardships, to which he added, 'to a limited extent'. Despott also claimed that considering the situation it was to be expected that the fishermen who were receiving the blow would not oblige compliantly. In his words;

It is not surprising that this section of fishermen have repeatedly been bringing forward the most absurd arguments to rebut the Regulations. For instance, it has even been adduced that our bays and harbours will be deprived of fish unless the restrictions be removed and that in order to replenish our waters with fish, the use of the seine nets and drag nets in general with no fixed minimum size for the meshes should be allowed throughout all periods and in all localities for the purpose of taking undersized fish, which is obviously contradictory.⁵¹²

⁵¹⁰ 'Ix-Xjenza u s-Sajd bit-Tkarkir', *Is-Sajd*, April 1954, 1 and 3.

⁵¹¹ *Government Departments Report, 1929-1930*, U 1.

⁵¹² *Government Departments Report, 1921-1922*, U1-2.

Regardless the poor living standards of fishermen, Despott urged the authorities not to relent in face of these protestations as follows;

As far as I am aware, there is not a single place where the Regulations have been framed in accordance with the wishes and advice of the fishermen, who necessarily plead their own cause. It should be borne in mind that as in other countries, those fishermen who are either directly or indirectly affected by the Regulations, will adopt all means in their power to oppose them but this should not serve as a deterrent to the Authorities concerned to enforce such measures which in their opinion will be conducive to the welfare of the community at large.⁵¹⁵

The Department of Fisheries also embarked on a project aimed at educating the fisher folk on the characteristics and life histories of the fish species on which their livelihood depended by giving lectures on the subject to 'the more intelligent and unprejudiced fishermen'. However, this project was often being hampered by certain persons who, in Despott's opinion, acted 'either through sheer ignorance or, more often than not, for the sake of creating a revolting feeling against this department and the Government and its aims.'⁵¹⁶ Even though these courses were being delivered to fishermen, the content must have been somewhat limited since Despott himself, a couple of paragraphs on, stated that 'owing to local circumstances and the lack of an adequate reference library', help was required from abroad in the identification of certain fish species and other important knowledge related to this subject, a project which was still undergoing and which hadn't been submitted by the time the lectures started being delivered.⁵¹⁷ He also suggested that the fishermen's children, who were bound to become fishermen themselves, should be given adequate instruction to understand the importance of the regulations for the development of the industry 'and thus enable this department to introduce even drastic measures without encountering the fierce opposition and insubordination of the present day.'⁵¹⁸ These statements clearly highlight the fact that Despott miserably failed to recognise that the infringement of the laws and the absurdness of the claims put forward by the fishermen were nothing else but a clear indication of the extent of hardships these fishermen must have been suffering. Notwithstanding the conditions, a number of fishermen reverted to clandestine fishing, this being the only means by which to secure a living. Chircop (2010) perfectly captures this sentiment as follows:

The continuous use of these non-customary fishing methods indicates these peoples' narrowing options to make a decent living, particularly during hard times which the last years of the nineteenth and the early ones of the twentieth centuries proved to be.⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁵ *Government Departments Report, 1921-1922*, U 2.

⁵¹⁶ *ibid.*, U 3.

⁵¹⁷ *ibid.*

⁵¹⁸ *ibid.*

⁵¹⁹ Chircop, 30.

In the 1924-1925 annual report, the Superintendent of Fisheries moved on to point out that the regulations adhered to at the time (see table 5) were inadequate since they were only intended as a first step till more rigorous legislation was gradually introduced.⁵²⁰ He voiced the same opinion a year later. In 1923, new draft regulations had been drawn up and eventually submitted to the Board of Fisheries for its approval. This came about in June 1926 with several small amendments, however, they still awaited the government's approval. Amongst others, the new regulations would have extended the prohibition of the sale of certain fish in their immature stages to other species.⁵²¹ These regulations were 'laid on the table of the Legislative Assembly on the 15th of June 1927.' However, due to the accession of the new government at the time, the Board of Fisheries was in turn reconstituted with the result that the regulations had to be resubmitted. The new Board decided upon the implementation of the regulations in gradual stages to safeguard the interests of all stakeholders. In February 1928, draft regulations concerning the section dealing with immature fish were in turn submitted for the government to approve and publish.⁵²²

On a more positive note, in 1922, the Board of Fisheries agreed upon giving the fisher folk the opportunity to choose representatives whose task would be to voice the fishermen's grievances 'with a view of having their complaints thoroughly investigated.'⁵²³ Furthermore, facilities in providing fishermen with adequate landing places, along with boat slips and adequate shelter of the fishing craft, were constructed.⁵²⁴

2.8.1.5 Motorised Fishing Boats

In the 1924-1925 report, it was mentioned that the installations of motor engines started receiving more impetus, even though, at first, the number of boats was as small as four or five at various fishing stations.⁵²⁵ To the Department's satisfaction, by the time the 1925-1926 report was issued, the number of motor boats 'for fishing purposes', had 'been availed of by a fair number of fishermen' which enabled them to exploit fishing grounds further away.⁵²⁶ In 1928-1929, the number of motorised fishing boats was reported to have increased considerably and all the fishing with *kannizzati* was done

⁵²⁰ *Government Departments Report, 1924-1925, U 2.*

⁵²¹ *Government Departments Report, 1926-1927, U 1.*

⁵²² *Government Departments Report, 1927-1928, U 1.*

⁵²³ *Government Departments Report, 1921-1922, U 4.*

⁵²⁴ *Government Departments Report, 1924-1925, U 3.*

⁵²⁵ *ibid.*

⁵²⁶ *Government Departments Report, 1925-1926, U 2.*

using motorised boats.⁵²⁷ In 1945, the industry boasted of 130 motorised boats (22% of the total fleet) which increased to 439 (41%) in 1953.⁵²⁸

2.8.1.6 Poor Yields

In the reports submitted during the years he acted as Superintendent, Despott gave information on the tuna and *lampuki* seasons for each year. In the report for 1922-1923, he stated that two tunny nets were set during the tuna season, one at Mellieħa Bay and the other at id-Delli. It was mentioned that although the catch was not satisfactory, it was larger than the previous year's catch. On the other hand, the *lampuki* season was exceptionally good for the year under discussion with the fish being plentiful throughout the season to the extent that 'in one case a single catch realised over £100, whilst normal catches ordinarily yielded between £30 and £40.' Abundance was also experienced in terms of bogues and smares, the increase of which Despott attributed to efficiency of the regulations.⁵²⁹ In the following year, 25 *kannizzati* fishing licenses were issued and the *lampuki* season proved to be so good that it was extended for a much longer time than it was for the previous year. This year (1923) also saw the laying of three tunny nets, one at Mellieħa, another at id-Delli and the third at Ġnejna. The former two gave satisfactory results, however the last was a complete failure. Once again, bogues were plentiful.⁵³⁰ Unsatisfactory results in the tuna catch were experienced the year after with the net set at id-Delli yielding poor results and the Ġnejna net being 'almost a complete failure'. As opposed to the previous year, the year under discussion yielded a small *lampuki* catch even though 26 *kannizzati* were laid in local waters.⁵³¹ Poor tuna and *lampuki* catches were recorded for the 1925-1926 period with the latter being more disastrous than in previous years.⁵³² The same results occurred for both the tuna and *lampuki* catch for the year 1926-1927 regardless the fact that the number of *kannizzati* increased to 30.⁵³³ This situation prevailed for the period covering 1927-1928. Poor catches were once again recorded for both fishing seasons. The *lampuki* season was deemed so poor that it compared 'very unfavourably' with former years which were disastrous in their own right even though the number of *kannizzati* used this year was extended to 32.⁵³⁴ A slight amelioration was experienced the year after. Even though the tunny catch was poor yet again, the *lampuki* catch, which

⁵²⁷ *Government Departments Report, 1928-1929, U 2.*

⁵²⁸ T.W. Burdon, *A Report on the Fishing Industry of Malta* (Malta, Government Printing Office, 1954), 24.

⁵²⁹ *Government Departments Report, 1922-1923, T 4-5.*

⁵³⁰ *Government Departments Report, 1923-1924, T 2.*

⁵³¹ *Government Departments Report, 1924-1925, U 2-3.*

⁵³² *Government Departments Report, 1925-1926, U 1.*

⁵³³ *Government Departments Report, 1926-1927, U 4.*

⁵³⁴ *Government Departments Report, 1927-1928, U 3.*

was accounted for by 33 *kanizzati*, compared favourably with the previous year's. Despott claims that the tuna season was failing time and again because the Maltese waters were being depleted of fish leaving nothing by which to attract tuna,⁵³⁵ a statement which was contradicted by Hornell (1931) as will be seen below. The poor catch characteristic of the previous years prevailed for the 1929-1930 period. The slight improvement experienced in the last *lampuki* catch, was short lived since only 445 cantars were caught 'as compared with 1,120 cantars taken during the previous year.'⁵³⁶ Even though no change for the better was recorded for tuna the following year, the *lampuki* season yielded better results with 948 cantars worth of fish being caught.⁵³⁷

2.8.1.7 James Hornell's Evaluation of the Local Fisheries in 1931

The following year was marked by the arrival of James Hornell who served as Director of Fisheries for the Madras' Government in India. His presence was sought by the Government of Malta to carry out a quick survey of the local fisheries and to propose modifications for proper development.⁵³⁸ In order to obtain a clear picture of what was happening locally, Hornell made an analysis of the regulations, statistics collected, and the results yielded since the establishment of the Department of Fisheries. He stipulated that one major drawback was that the conclusions drawn were not scientifically justified. To begin with, the statistics collected thus far were unreliable since the method adopted required a wholesale fish salesman at the Gigant market to collect estimates of each kind of fish brought ashore in Valletta daily. However, these estimates also included a percentage the salesman believed to be 'adequate as an allowance for fish landed and sold elsewhere than at Valletta.' This left statistical information to the discretion of the individual's interpretation and to pure chance especially when attributing a percentage to the fish landed at different spots other than Valletta 'and may indeed be so inaccurate as to invalidate all conclusions based upon the resulting statistics.' Moreover, the figures didn't distinguish between the fish caught inshore and that caught in the outer zones.⁵³⁹ Hornell claimed that different reasons, other than the destruction of immature fish by seine nets and dragging as claimed by Despott, might have been responsible for the fluctuations in the number of fish. For example, in the period 1921-1924, a large number of fish of both demersal and pelagic nature were recorded, however no distinction was made as to whether these fish were caught due to more intensified fishing or because there was a natural bounty of these fish in our waters.

⁵³⁵ *Government Departments Report, 1928-1929, U 2.*

⁵³⁶ *Government Departments Report, 1929-1930, U 1.*

⁵³⁷ *Government Departments Report, 1930-1931, U 1.*

⁵³⁸ Farrugia Randon (1995), 5.

⁵³⁹ Hornell, 22.

Similarly, a decrease in fish was experienced in the 1925-1929 period. Since no scientific research was carried out to investigate this phenomenon, no decisive conclusion could be reached.⁵⁴⁰ Hornell (1931) stated that the only published particulars regarding this problem were some counts made in 1921 and 1922 by the superintendent in which he claimed that the number of fish decreased due to the tremendous destruction of immature fish. This destruction of young specimen should undoubtedly have resulted in even less fish the year after. On the other hand, Hornell (1931) claimed that the number of fish which were investigated, especially the *vopa*, experienced an enormous outburst in number the following year, thus discrediting the claim made by Despott. Another increase in the catch of this fish was experienced in 1929/1930, the number of which exceeded 'any one of the four preceding years.' Hornell (1931) also observed that the decrease in fish alleged to in the annual statistics subsequent to 1924 was also experienced in fish that fed on worms and crustaceans and thus independent of immature fish as a source of food.⁵⁴¹ According to him;

It results from these considerations that the causes of the apparent decrease in the local fish-supply are probably due to other factors than the commonly alleged; as with the scarcity of herrings some years ago, one important factor is probably a climatic oscillation, entailing changes in salinity and temperature of the sea in the Mediterranean; these changes in turn are found to affect profoundly the plankton content of the sea, and this in turn reacts upon the food supply of all fishes, and markedly reduces their reproductive capacity.⁵⁴²

Hornell (1931) also stated tuna catches might increase since, 'this fish, like the sardine, is noted for the uncertainty of its appearance in quantity from year to year.'⁵⁴³ He stipulated that the Department's defect was the lack of systematic research 'due probably to over-confidence in the validity of the theory that the inshore fisheries are capable of extensive development provided severe regulations restrain the fishermen from capturing immature fishes' which, if not caught, was believed to remain in local waters to provide larger supplies in the future. At this point, in his report Hornell (1931) quotes Jenkins (1920).⁵⁴⁴ In his book, the latter was discussing the English and Welsh inshore fishermen whose situation, according to Hornell (1931), was comparable with that of the Maltese fishermen. Hereunder is the quotation as provided by Hornell but as cited from the original source;

Much of this legislation is of an amateurish description framed by bodies which knew little of the manifold and intricate problems concerning the sea fisheries. Fortunately, there is a marked tendency to relax or abolish much of the ill-considered and hasty legislation. It would be a matter of regret if

⁵⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 23.

⁵⁴¹ *ibid.*, 23-4.

⁵⁴² *ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁴³ *ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 27-8.

further burdens were placed on the inshore fishermen, especially when it cannot be proved clearly that such burdens would be to the public advantage.⁵⁴⁵

With regards to the previous remark, Hornell suggested for the professional training of a Marine Biologist at the University of Liverpool, upon the retirement of Despott. The candidate to be chosen had to be a graduate from university and preferably to hold courses in both Chemistry and Zoology. The course to be undertaken consisted of three years study in Oceanography, at the end of which the degree of Ph.D. in the said subject was to be awarded. Nonetheless, the student had to undergo an extra year in advanced zoology before progressing on to the main course of study.⁵⁴⁶ Other suggestions included the appointment of an Inspector of Fisheries, as Despott has requested time and again, but who should be an intelligent member of the fishing community. Furthermore, Hornell (1931) also proposed the establishment of local bodies to represent the fishermen of every district. The elected members had to be experienced and respected by the rest of the community whose tasks would include the solving of minor disputes and to represent the fishermen to the department in terms of regulation amendments and the fishermen's rights in general.⁵⁴⁷ Since the scientific basis for the regulations was lacking at the time, Hornell (1931) suggested that the regulations put in action shouldn't be permanent. He claimed that the amount of immature fish caught by the seine net couldn't be denied, but that no material damage would result if the net was used for its legitimate purpose; that of procuring bait especially during the cold season when no bait alternatives are available. Furthermore, he was also sceptical to the idea that the limited number of seine nets then operating was causing any real damage.⁵⁴⁸

Where hardship should befall the family, Hornell recommended relaxation of the rule which prohibited a son or even a relative from inheriting the seine net fishing license. Relaxation of regulations was also suggested for the shrimp-dredge. Despott himself, as seen previously, had acknowledged the fact that the use of this dredge was not destructive in terms of immature fish but to the marine vegetation. To counteract this problem, Hornell suggested that 'no dredges over three feet wide at the mouth should be permitted' and that 'the weight of the iron frame should also be kept down and should not exceed that of a sample dredge kept at the Port Office.' To this extent, Hornell suggested that the three months during which dredge fishing was allowed should be extended to

⁵⁴⁵ James Travis Jenkins, *The Sea Fisheries* (London, Constable and Co. Ltd., 1920), 75.

⁵⁴⁶ Hornell, 30-1.

⁵⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 29-30.

⁵⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 31.

four.⁵⁴⁹ Another innovation suggested by Hornell (1931) to be introduced locally was the *lampara* fishing method. This required the abolishment of an existing regulation which prohibited the use of lights in conjunction with fishing.⁵⁵⁰

2.8.2 The Local Situation: 1932 - 1950

Upon giving these suggestions, in his report Hornell (1931) moved on to list his proposed fishing regulations. Many of these suggestions were put into action and included in the 1932 and subsequently in the 1934 fishing regulations. The 1932 and 1934 regulations are almost identical, the only difference being the substitution of the term ‘department’ and ‘superintendent’ in the former with ‘controller’ in the latter. Furthermore, the 1934 regulations were extended to include Articles 48 and 49.

2.8.2.1 Comparison between the Suggested and the Implemented Regulations

Being listed side by side, facilitates the comparison between Hornell’s 1931 suggested regulations and the actual regulations published as Notice No. 206, in the Government Gazette dated 25th May 1934.

	<u>Hornell’s Suggested Regulations (1931)</u>		<u>Officially Published Fishing Regulations (1934)</u>
1.	Subject to the provisions of articles 10 and 11 of these regulations, the use of the following fishing implements and methods is permitted without licenses at all times and places:- i. All methods of hook and line fishing including jigging with <i>culpara</i> and <i>hiel</i>. ii. The fish-spear or grains (<i>foxxna</i>) iii. Basket traps (<i>nassi</i>) having meshes not less than one inch along each side. iv. The basket trap called <i>draina</i>. v. The small hand-nets called <i>copp tal gambli</i>, <i>copp tal wicc</i>, <i>copp tal lacci</i>, and <i>mindila</i>. vi. All other minor and recognised fishing implements not otherwise specified in these regulations, such as the <i>delfinara</i>, <i>ganc</i>, <i>gaffa</i> and water-glass (<i>lenti</i> or <i>hgiega</i>).	1.	Subject to the provisions of Articles 9 and 10 of these Regulations, the use of the following fishing implements and methods is permitted without any license at all times and in all localities:- i) All methods of hook and line fishing , including jigging with “<i>culpara</i>” and “<i>hiel</i>”; ii) The fish spear or grains; iii) The basket traps called “<i>drajna</i>”, “<i>nassi tal-granč</i>”, “<i>nassi tal-qarnit</i>”, “<i>nassi tal-imrejjen</i>”; iv) The small hand nets called “<i>kopp tal-gambli</i>”, “<i>kopp tal-wičč</i>”, “<i>kopp tal-lačči</i>”, “<i>kopp tal-lhud</i>”; v) All other minor and recognised fishing implements not otherwise specified in these Regulations, such as “<i>delfinara</i>”, “<i>ganc</i>”, “<i>gaffa</i>”.

⁵⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 32.

⁵⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 33.

2.	It shall not be lawful to use any fishing implements other than those permitted by article 1 without a license from the Department of Fisheries – hereinafter referred to as “the Department”. A separate license is needed for the use of each type of implement not indicated in Article 1.	2.	It shall not be lawful to use any fishing implements other than those permitted in Article 1 without a license from the Controller of Fisheries, hereinafter referred to as “the Controller”. A separate license is required for the use of each type of implement not mentioned in Article 1.
3.	Unless provided for in these Regulations, the locality in which, and the period during which, the implement may be used shall be specified on the license.	3.	Unless provided for in these Regulations, the locality in which, and the period under which, the implement may be used shall be specified on the license.
4.	The Department may grant for scientific purposes a license for the use of any implement in any locality excepting those localities indicated in articles 10 and 11.	4.	The Controller may grant for scientific purposes a license for the use of any implement in any locality except those localities indicated in Article 10.
5.	The Department may grant, for the purposes of restocking fishponds, special permits to the owners of fishponds to fish within the prohibited areas other than those indicated in articles 10 and 11 for a specified number of times in a year under such conditions as may from time to time be imposed.	5.	The Controller may grant for the purposes of restocking fishponds special permits to owners of fishponds to fish within prohibited areas other than those indicated in Articles 9 and 10 for a specified number of times in a year under such conditions as may from time to time be imposed.
6.	It shall be lawful for the Department to grant or withdraw without compensation any license issued under these regulations.	6.	It shall be lawful for the Controller to grant or withdraw without compensation any license, to order modifications in any implement or to prohibit its use, and to make any change in the demarcations of closed areas and in the periods established for the use of any implement.
7.	Licenses under these Regulations shall be valid up to the 31 st December and shall be renewable on the 1 st January.	7.	Licenses under these Regulations shall be personal and shall be valid up to the 31 st December and renewable on the 1 st January.
8.	The number of licenses to be issued for each kind of implement shall be left to the discretion of the Department.	8.	The number of licenses to be issued for each kind of implement shall be left to the discretion of the Controller.
9.	Whenever a blue pierced flag is hoisted on the Custom House at Valletta or the Police Station at Marsamuscetto Harbour no one shall shoot any seine net in the harbour where such flag is hoisted, or near the entrance of the same harbour and any net which may have been shot shall be at once removed as soon as the flag is hoisted.		<i>No correlation was found to Article 9 as suggested by Hornell in the 1934 Fishing Regulations.</i>

10.	Fishing is strictly prohibited in the proximity of the sewage outfall at Wied Ghammiek within the area demarcated on the land side by two stone pillars painted red situated on the sides of the drainage outlet, one at Xghaira shore in the vicinity of Ras il Gebel and the other under the Ricasoli Bastions, and on the seaside by two range buoys. It is also prohibited to collect by any means from the same area any edible marine products.	9.	Fishing is strictly prohibited in the proximity of the sewage outfall at Wied Ghammiek within the area demarcated on the land side by two stone pillars painted red situated on the sides of the drainage outlet, one on Xghajra shore in the vicinity of Ras il-Gebel and the other under the Ricasoli Bastion and on the seaside by two range bouys. It is also prohibited to collect by any means from the same area any edible marine products.
11.	No fishing shall be permitted in the Dockyard Creek, or in the French Creek, that is, in those parts of the Grand Harbour to the southeast of a line drawn from St. Angelo point to Isola point and thence to the Northern end of Parlatorio Wharf and Corradino Hill without a special permit issued by the Department with the approval of the Governor.	10.	No fishing shall be permitted in the Dockyard Creek or in the French Creek, that is in those parts of the Grand Harbour to the southeast of a line drawn from St. Angelo Point to Isola Point and thence to the Northern end of Parlatorio Wharf and Corradino Hill without a special license issued by the Controller with the approval of the Governor.
	<i>No correlation was found to Article 11 of the 1932 Fishing Regulations in Hornell's suggestions.</i>	11.	Persons carrying in their boat any fishing implement shall be deemed for the purposes of these Regulations to have used such implements.
	<u>Trawling.</u>		<u>Trawling.</u>
12.	It shall be unlawful for any steam or motor propelled trawler to shoot or tow any kind of nets within the territorial waters of these islands, neither may the method of towing a trawl between two power-driven vessels (<i>paranze</i>) be practised within the said territorial limits.	12.	It shall not be lawful for any steam or motor propelled vessel or trawler as well as for sailing vessels to shoot or tow any kind of nets within the territorial waters of these Islands neither may the method of towing a trawl between two power driven vessels (<i>parenze</i>) be practised within the said territorial waters.
13.	<i>Sailing trawlers.</i> Vessels under sail whether working singly or in pairs (<i>parenze</i>), may shoot and tow trawl nets within territorial limits provided they keep outside of a line drawn one mile seaward of and parallel with the shore, except during the licensed Cannizzati season which lasts from 15th August to 31st October in each year, when all trawling of whatsoever kind is forbidden within territorial limits under penalty of the confiscation of the vessel and her gear.		

	<u>The Seine Net (<i>Tartarun</i>).</u>		<u>The Seine Net (<i>Tartarun</i>).</u>
14.	It shall not be lawful to keep or use a seine net without a license for its use, issued by this Department. This license shall cover both the owner and the net. For the purpose of identification each net shall have a lead seal affixed to it by an officer of the Department. This seal shall be renewed on each occasion of the renewal of the license. Should the seal be lost or broken at any time, this shall be reported to an officer of the Department before the net is again used.	13.	It shall not be lawful to keep or use a seine net without a license for its use. No mesh of this implement shall be less than one third of an inch along each side knot to knot even when the net is wet and its weights shall not be so heavy as to cause the sinking of the floats.
15.	There shall be two categories of this net, A and B. A shall apply to the seines used solely in Grand Harbour and in Marsamuscetto Harbour; category B shall apply to seines used elsewhere.	14.	In all bays and creeks, the limit of the area within which the use of this net shall be lawful will be outwards of a line drawn between two stone pillars placed on opposite sides of such Bays and Creeks.
16.	Category A of seine nets. The nets in this category shall have meshes not less than one quarter of an inch along each side, knot to knot. They shall be permitted only within the limits set out in Schedule A, always provided that the seining places do not interfere with any Naval, Military or Civil requirements or restrictions. It shall not be lawful for seine nets to be operated in the creeks and bays named in the said Schedule.	15.	The use of this net shall not be permitted in any locality when the waters are turbid.
17.	Category B of seine nets. The mesh of these nets shall not be less than $\frac{1}{2}$ inch along each side, knot to knot. They may be used in the same places as nets in category A, and also in every other bay and harbour in the islands, except in reserved areas whereof the seaward limit shall be a line joining two stone pillars placed on opposite sides of the aforesaid bays and harbours.		
18.	Licenses for the use of this net shall only be granted to present owners of seine nets who have obtained similar licenses under the Fishing Regulations published by Government Notice No. 428 of the 6 th December 1920, except in the event of the death of the licensee subsequent to the 1 st January, 1931, when, at the discretion of the Head of Department, a near relative may be permitted to take over the license and the net of the deceased.		

19.	Such license shall be forfeited upon a second conviction for contravention of the provisions governing the use of this implement and shall not be renewable in the name of the relative or any other person.	16.	Licenses for the use of this implement shall be forfeited upon a second conviction for contraventions of the provisions governing the use of the seine net.
20.	The Department may grant special permits for stated periods for the use of the seine net within prohibited areas, for the purpose of catching migratory fish provided that no mesh of this implement be less than one inch square.	17.	The Controller may grant special permits for stated periods for the use of this implement within the prohibited areas for the purpose of catching migratory fish provided no mesh of the net is less than one inch square.
	<u>Prawn Dredge (Gangmu).</u>		<u>Shrimp Dredge.</u>
21.	It shall not be lawful to keep a prawn dredge without a license for its use from the Department. The meshes of this net shall not be less than one quarter of an inch square and the net shall in no case be longer than 10 feet, whilst the iron bar at the mouth shall not exceed three feet in length, and its weight shall not be greater than that of the sample dredge kept at the Port Office, Valletta.	18.	It shall not be lawful to keep or use a shrimp dredge without a license for its use. The net of this implement shall have no meshes less than one quarter of an inch square, even when wet, and shall in no case be longer than ten feet whilst the iron bar at its mouth shall not exceed five feet in length and the weight of the implement shall not be greater than that of a sample dredge kept at the Office of the Controller.
22.	Its use shall only be permitted:- a. from 1st November to the 1st of March. b. outside those localities where the use of the seine net is prohibited.	19.	The use of this implement shall only be permitted (a) From the 1 st November to the 31 st January; and (b) Outside those localities where the use of the seine net is prohibited.
23.	Licenses for the use of this implement shall only be granted to persons who had obtained similar licenses under the Fishing Regulations published by Government Notice No. 428 of the 6 th December 1920, but on the death of the licensee, the license may be renewed in the name of the near relative.		
	<u>Long Pole Net (Copp tal Lasta).</u>		<u>Long Pole Net.</u>
24.	It shall not be lawful to keep a long pole net without a license for its use from the Department. The meshes of this net shall not be less than one quarter of an inch square. This implement shall be subject generally to the conditions laid down for the use of the prawn dredge (gangmu).	20.	It shall not be lawful to keep or use a long pole net without a license for its use. The net of this implement shall have no meshes less than one quarter of an inch square. This implement shall be subject generally to the conditions laid down for the shrimp dredge.

	<u>Trammels, Gilling Nets and Cast Nets.</u>		<u>Trammels, Gilling Nets and Cast Nets.</u>
		21.	The use of the cast net shall not be permitted inside bays and harbours and none of its meshes shall be less than one inch square.
25.	Trammels (<i>parit</i>), gilling nets (<i>ghazel</i>) and cast nets (<i>terriea</i>) are permitted in all localities except those where the use of the seine net is prohibited. The meshes of the <i>terriea</i> may not be less than one inch along each side, knot to knot.	22.	Trammel and gilling nets are not allowed to be used from the 15 th February to the 15 th July in those localities where the use of the seine net is prohibited. In the Grand and Marsamussetto Harbours the use of these implements is prohibited at all times within the prohibited areas above mentioned.
	<u>The Cannizzati Fishery.</u>		<u>The “Kannizzati” Fishery.</u>
27.	The fishing positions used in the Cannizzati fishery shall be allocated each year by lot and shall be effective only for the period beginning on the 15 th August and ending on the 31 st October.	24.	The fishing positions used in the “kannizzati” fishery shall be allocated each year by lot under such conditions as the Controller may deem fit to impose and it shall not be lawful to lay any floats for this method of fishing without a license.
28.	During the period named it shall not be lawful for other persons to fish within a radius of six hundred feet from the floats of any cannizzati.	25.	Such license shall be effective for the period beginning on the 15 th August and ending on the 31 st October during which period no person other than the licensee shall be allowed to fish within a radius of six hundred feet from the floats of his own “kannizzati”.
		26.	It shall be lawful for the Controller to limit the issue of these licenses to bonafide fishermen only.
	<u>Tunny Nets (<i>Tonnara</i>).</u>		<u>Tunny Nets.</u>
29.	Permission may be granted for the laying of tunny nets round the coasts of these Islands under such conditions as the Department may deem fit to impose. The Department may also direct that no other kind of fishing shall be allowed in the locality where a tunny net is set.	27.	Permission may be granted for laying tunny nets round the coasts of these Islands under such conditions as the Controller may deem fit to impose. The Controller might also direct that no other kind of fishing shall be allowed in the locality where a tunny net is set.
30.	At each end of the seaward extremity of any tunny net there shall be moored a nun buoy of such a size that its diameter at the water line is not less than three feet and the vertical height from its apex to the water line five feet. Such buoy to be surmounted by a cage or ball twelve inches in diameter fitted on a staff, the vertical height from the top of the cage or ball to the water line to be not less than nine feet.	28.	At each end of the seaward extremity of any tunny net there shall be moored a nun buoy of such size that its diameter at the water line is not less than three feet and the vertical height from its apex to the water line five feet. Such buoy to be surmounted by a cage or ball twelve inches in diameter fitted on a staff, the vertical height from the top of the cage or ball to the water line to be not less than nine feet.

31.	By night there shall be moored at the seaward shoot of every such net a boat showing in a vertical line one over the other three feet apart two bright lights so fixed that the upper light shall not be less than ten feet from the water line and of such a character as to be visible on a dark night with a clear atmosphere all around the horizon at a distance of not less than two miles.	29.	By night there shall be moored at the seaward shoot of every such net a boat showing in a vertical line one over the other three feet apart two bright lights so fixed that the upper light shall be not less than ten feet from the water line and of such a character as to be visible on a dark night with a clear atmosphere all around the horizon at a distance of not less than two miles.
32.	Subject to a license from the Department, the following sites are available for the laying of tunny nets:- Melleha, Circheuua and Id-Delli, Ghajn Tuffieha and Gneina. If anyone proposes to lay a tunny net in any other locality, an application to this effect should be made to the Superintendent of Fisheries who will decide as to whether the site may be conveniently leased for the purpose.	30.	Subject to a license from the Controller, the following sites are available for the laying of tunny nets:- Mellicha Circkewwa and Id-Delli, Ghajn Tuffieha and Gnejna. Should anyone propose to lay a tunny net in any other locality, an application to that effect should be made to the Controller who will decide as to whether the site may be conveniently leased for the purpose.
	<u>Ormeggios (Irmiggi).</u>		<u>Ormeggios.</u>
33.	The Department is empowered to grant licenses to fish on reserved sites (<i>Irmiggi</i>). Such licenses may only be granted for sites within areas where the use of the seine net is prohibited and shall be valid up to the end of the year during which they are issued.	31.	The Controller is empowered to grant licenses to fish on reserved sites (<i>Irmiggi</i>). Such licenses may only be granted for sites within areas where the use of the seine net is prohibited and shall be valid up to the end of the year during which they are issued.
34.	Applications for such licenses shall be accompanied by a plan showing the site applied for and forwarded to the Superintendent of Fisheries who will decide as to whether the site applied for may conveniently be leased for the purpose.	32.	Applications for such licenses shall be accompanied by a plan showing the site applied for and forwarded to the Controller who will decide as to whether the site applied for may conveniently be leased for the purpose.
35.	It shall not be lawful for other persons than the licensee to fish within a radius of 60 feet from the floats of any authorised Ormeggio.	33.	It shall not be lawful for persons other than the relative licensee to fish within a radius of sixty feet from the floats of any licensed "ormeggio".
	<u>Basket Traps (Nassi)</u>		<u>Basket Traps.</u>
36.	The placing of these traps other than those named in Article 1, is forbidden in those areas where seining is prohibited. Permission may however be granted for the use of the traps known locally as <i>nassi tal ganc</i> , <i>nassi tal karnit</i> and <i>nassi tal imrejjen</i> , within such areas.	34.	The use of basket traps other than those mentioned in Article 1 shall not be permitted within bays and harbours if the size of any of the meshes is less than one inch wide.

37.	It shall be illegal to expose for sale any fishes or cephalopods of a size less than is prescribed in the following schedule, with the exception of the transparent goby (maccu) and of whitebait (<i>sraidna</i> and <i>nemusa</i>) for which no size limit is prescribed for the present:-	35.	It shall not be lawful to sell or buy or be on land in possession of any fishes or cephalopods of a size less than is prescribed in the following schedule with the exception of transparent goby (makku) and of whitebait (<i>srajdna</i> and <i>nemusa</i>) for which no size limit is prescribed for the present.
38.	Schedule of Minimum Sizes. <i>Of Fishes</i>, measured overall:- Minimum size Voparella and vopa (Box boops) 3½ inches Arznella and munkara (<i>Smaris</i> spp.) 3½ " Trilia or Red Mulletts (<i>Mullus barbatus</i> and <i>Mullus surmuletus</i>) including <i>Trilietta</i> 4 " All other fishes except those named in Art. 37 4 ¼ " <i>Of Cephalopods</i>, measured from the anterior side of the eye to the posterior end of the body:- Cuttlefish (<i>Sicc</i>) 3 " Squid (<i>Calamari</i>) 4 "	36.	Schedule of Minimum Sizes. <i>Of Fishes</i>, measured overall:- Minimum size Voparella and vopa (Box boops) 3½ inches Arznella and Munkara (<i>smaris vulgaris</i>) 3½ " Trilia or Red Mulletts (<i>Mullus barbatus</i> and <i>Mullus surmuletus</i>) including <i>Trilietta</i> 4 " All other fishes except those named in Article 35 4½ " <i>Of Cephalopods</i>, measured from the anterior side of the eye to the posterior end of the body:- Cuttlefish (<i>sicc</i>) 3 " Squid (<i>klamari</i>) 4 "
<u>Explosives and Poisons.</u>		<u>Poisons and Explosives</u>	
39.	It shall be unlawful to use for fishing purposes any explosive substances or any form of poison, or any electrical device. Offenders convicted of any one of these offences shall be dealt with under the provisions of the Criminal Law.	48.	It shall not be lawful to use for fishing purposes poisons or any other substance which acts as poison on fish; and it shall not be lawful knowingly to collect from the sea or to expose for sale, or otherwise be in possession of any fish killed or caught by means of explosives or poisons or any other substance which acts as poison on fish.
40.		49.	Besides the punishments established by the Criminal Laws for contraventions, any person who, not being guilty of a more serious offence, contravenes the prohibition laid down in the preceding paragraph, shall on conviction be liable to the forfeiture of the fish.

	It shall be not be lawful to use of keep the implement locally known as <i>hanzir</i> without a license for its use from the Department. Persons carrying in their boats this fishing implement shall be deemed, for the purposes of these Regulations, to have used such implement.	37.	It shall not be lawful to keep or use the implement locally known as “hanzir” without a license for its use.
		38.	It shall not be lawful to keep or use the implement locally known as “Hgiegia” without a license for its use.
	<u>Dredge for Molluscs (<i>Gangmu tal frott</i>)</u>		<u>Dredge for Molluscs</u>
41.	It shall not be lawful to dredge for molluscs except in such sections of the Valletta harbours as will be indicated for specified periods by the Department nor to use for such dredging any implements except those of a type as established by the same Department.	39.	It shall not be lawful to dredge for molluscs except in such sections of Valletta Harbours as will be indicated for specific periods by the Controller nor to use for such dredging any implements except those of a type as established by the same Controller.
42.	It shall not be lawful to land or expose for sale or otherwise be in possession on land of any bivalves excepting stone borers (<i>tamar</i>) which shall be less than the gauge established for each species by the Department.	40.	It shall not be lawful to land or expose for sale or otherwise be on land in possession of any bivalves, excepting stone borers (<i>tamar</i>), which shall be less than the gauge established for each species by the Controller.
43.	All fishers and sellers of molluscs shall be provided with the necessary gauges bearing the Government mark.	41.	All fishers and sellers of molluscs shall be provided with the necessary gauges bearing the Government mark.
44.	The type of gauges mentioned in the preceding two articles shall be in accordance with the specimen kept at the Office of the Water Police, Custom House, Valletta, and each species of bivalves landed or exposed for sale shall not be less than the size limit shown on the gauge and marked respectively 1, 2, 3 and 4, as hereunder specifies, namely:- Ostrea lamellosa (<i>coccli</i>) No. 4 Venus verrucosa (<i>gandoffli</i>) 3 Dosinia exoleta (<i>daini</i>) 3 Tapes decussates (<i>arzelli nigri</i>) 2 Cardium rusticum (<i>arzelli tal Marsa</i>) 1 Tapes aureus (<i>arzelli trapanis</i>) 1 Cardita sulcata (<i>leus</i>) 2 Cardium paucicostatum (<i>leus tal koxra irkieka</i>) 2 Psammobia vespertina (<i>imxiat</i>) 1 Mytilus galloprovincialis (<i>mascli</i>) 3	42.	The type of gauges mentioned in the preceding two Articles shall be in accordance with the specimen kept at the Office of the Water Police, Custom House, Valletta, and such species of bivalves landed or exposed for sale shall not be less than the size limit shown on the gauge and marked respectively 1, 2, 3 and 4, as hereunder specified, namely:- Ostrea lamellosa (<i>Coccli</i>) No. 4 Venus verrucosa (<i>Gandoffli</i>) 3 Dosinia exoleta (<i>daini</i>) 3 Tapes decussates (<i>Arzelli nigri</i>) 2 Cardium rusticum (<i>Arzell tal Marsa</i>) 1 Tapes aureus (<i>arzelli trapanis</i>) 1 Cardita sulcata (leus) (leus) 2 Cardium paucicostatum (<i>leus tal koxra irkieka</i>) 2 Psammobia vespertina (<i>imxiat</i>) 1 Mytilus galloprovincialis (<i>mascli</i>) 3

	<u>Grappler (Imkass)</u>		<u>Grappler.</u>
45.	The use of the grappler (imkass) for the purpose of raising bivalves will only be permitted under the same conditions as are imposed for the use of the dredge for molluscs.	43.	The use of the grappler (imqass) for the use of raising bivalves will only be permitted under the same conditions as are imposed for the use of the dredge for molluscs.
	<u>Cultivation of Shellfish</u>		<u>Cultivation of Shellfish</u>
46.	The Department may serve specified areas in certain creeks and bays for the cultivation of mussels and oysters and may grant a concession for this purpose for a specified period on such terms as may be approved by the Government.	44.	The Department may reserve specific areas in certain Creeks and Bays for the cultivation of mussels and oysters and may grant a concession for this purpose for a specific period on such terms as may be approved by the Government.
	<u>Sponge Fishing</u>		<u>Sponge Fishing</u>
47.	Fishing for sponges shall be allowed under such conditions as the Government may deem fit to impose. No operations may be conducted without a license from the Department.	45.	Fishing for sponges shall only be allowed under such conditions as the Controller might deem fit to impose and no operations may be conducted without a license.
	<u>Lights for Fishing</u>		<u>Lights for Fishing</u>
48.	Lights may be employed in fishing by night, but in all cases the form of the lighting apparatus must be approved previously by the Department.	46.	The use of lights for fishing purposes shall not be permitted within Bays and Harbours.
	<u>Landing Places</u>		<u>Landing Places</u>
49.	No fish may be brought ashore except at specified "Landing Places" notified as such by the Department.	47.	No fish may be brought ashore except at specified landing places notified as such by the Controller.
	<u>The Wholesale Fishmarket</u>		
50.	The Wholesale Fish Market in Valletta shall be closed for the purchase and sale of fish from 10 o'clock each evening until four o'clock the following morning.		
	SCHEDULE A.		
	<u>Seine Nets.</u>		
	Seine-net fishing is permitted in the Grand Harbour in the following localities provided this does not interfere with Naval, Military or Civil requirements, namely:- 1). Along the Valletta or northern side from Gun Wharf to L'Imgherbeb point. 2). On the southern side:- (a) from Ricasoli Point to the point on the chart marked "steps" under Fort Ricasoli.		

(b) From Hospital point to Bighi point landing. (c) On the eastern and northern sides of Fort S. Angelo. (d) At Isola point. Seining is forbidden in Rinella Bay, Calcara creek, Dockyard creek, French creek, the Marsa and its S. W. extension. Seining is also permitted in Marsamuscetto Harbour:- 1). From E. end of the Fossa to the P. & O. coal store opposite Msida point. 2). From Msida point to the Police Station at the N. E. corner. Taxbiex. 3). From the east end of the Lazaretto round to the Old Torpedo Depot (now the Gunnery school). 4). From Gesù Nazareno to Dragut point. Seining is forbidden in Pietà creek, Misida creek, Lazaretto creek and in Sliema creek except to extent allowed in 3) and 4) as above.		
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Table 6: The fishing regulations suggested by James Hornell in 1931 vs. the 1934 fishing regulations
N.B. All the names and words in Maltese are being represented as in the original document

(Sources: The Fishing Industry in Malta with Suggestions for its Further Development & The Government Gazette, 25 May 1934, Government Notice 206)⁵⁵¹

Randon (1995) stated that ‘Hornell’s recommendations were all put into practice.’⁵⁵² Nonetheless, comparison between Hornell’s recommended regulations and the actual regulations implemented in both 1932 and 1934, show otherwise. Amongst others, Hornell suggested that the fishing implement known locally as *lenti* or *ħġieġa* could be used without a license. Contrarily, the regulations demanded a license for its use. Furthermore, Hornell came up with the idea of differentiating between seine nets to be used in the Grand Harbour and Marsamxett Harbour with those used elsewhere, with the former having meshes of not less than one quarter of an inch and the latter with meshes of not less than half an inch. The actual regulations implemented stipulated that the meshes shouldn’t be less than one third of an inch without differentiating between the localities. On a positive note, from the fishermen’s point of view, Hornell’s recommendation that the shrimp-dredge’s iron bar at the mouth should not exceed three feet in length was not adhered to since the regulation’s permitted its length to be up to five feet. However, this leniency was counteracted with a reduction in time span during

⁵⁵¹ Table 6. Cf. Hornell, 33-40 and Cf. *The Government Gazette*, 25 May 1934, Government Notice 206, 398-400.

⁵⁵² Farrugia Randon (1995), 5.

which this implement could be used. Hornell's suggestion that the shrimp-dredge should be used between 1st November up till 1st March was ignored and remained as originally proposed by Despott, that is from the 1st of November till the end of January. Hornell also suggested that trammel, gilling and cast nets should be used in all localities except those where the seine net was prohibited. The regulations stipulated that the trammel and gilling nets shouldn't be used in the latter areas only between 15th February and 15th July. The regulations also prohibited the use of lights for fishing purposes to be used within bays and harbours.

2.8.2.2 General Improvements

After Hornell's visit, the Department stopped functioning only to be re-established on the 16th of January 1934, the year the above quoted regulations were issued. One of Hornell's suggestions, that is the introduction of a medieval fishing practice known as *lampara* (see section 2.6), was immediately investigated upon the re-establishment of the department. For this purpose, Maltese fishermen were provided with the opportunity to learn directly from Italian fishermen, at the end of which, many of them, especially those hailing from Marsaxlokk, started making use of the device themselves. Another positive outcome of Hornell's visit manifested itself in the establishment of Fishermen's Councils in the main centres with the aim of voicing the fishermen's concerns.⁵⁵³ Many positive outcomes were experienced from this initiative, but they weren't destined to last for long and were absolved by 1938.⁵⁵⁴ Courses in Navigation and Motor Engineering for fishermen started being held at the various fishing centres. Steps were also taken for the selection of a suitable person to take on the training in marine biology. Eventually, Mr. Oscar Zammit, B.Sc., was chosen and started attending the compulsory three-year course at the University of Liverpool.⁵⁵⁵ After completing the course and obtaining his M.Sc. in Biology, however, his services were required by the Medical and Health Department on the outbreak of WWII in 1940. Eventually, he received his M.D. and moved on to be appointed as a Professor in Obstetrics and Gynaecology.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵³ *Government Departments Report*, 1934-1935, 177.

⁵⁵⁴ Farrugia Randon (1995), 6.

⁵⁵⁵ *Government Departments Report*, 1936-1937, 89-90.

⁵⁵⁶ Farrugia Randon (1995), 6.

2.8.2.3 Improvements Experienced in the Selling Procedure

Another improvement was experienced with the appointment of two members of a committee with the purpose of investigating the middlemen's position with regards to the sale of fish and eventually to come up with recommendations to ameliorate the then present situation. The finished report was published in the 19th of February, 1937 Government Gazzette as Supplement No. X.⁵⁵⁷ In the latter, the selling procedure was minutely explained whereby upon arriving at the fish market, the fisherman handed his catch to his acting middleman and put up for auction if potential buyers were about. The middleman initiated the auction by naming a high price. The offers made by potential buyers were whispered to the middleman leaving the fisherman unaware of the offers that were being made. At the end of the auction, the fish was sold to one of the bidders. It is of interest to note that the buyer wasn't necessarily the highest bidder since it was deemed safer to sell the catch to a trustworthy buyer rather than to an indebted one. Once decided, the middleman called the price to his clerk in a way to be heard by everyone. The fisherman was paid his due immediately upon the conclusion of the auction. The buyer paid either instantly or had his amount credited to be paid in the future. One of the fishermen interviewed claimed that one of the advantages of bidding *sotto-voce* was that it prevented 'buyers from forming a ring and of keeping potential buyers in doubt of the prices being offered by their competitors and the lesser buyers.' However, this statement was immediately followed with the following observation;

It is to be observed, however, that this particular fisherman, like many others, is in the habit of burrowing money from "pitkali" and is in consequence likely to be diffident in stating anything which he may think would re-act to the prejudice of the middlemen.⁵⁵⁸

The weighing system was also found to be wanting. From their investigation, the committee members learned of the custom of giving the buyer an extra $\frac{1}{4}$ rotolo with every 5 rotoli (m. *wizna*) if superior fish is sold, and between $\frac{1}{2}$ and 1 rotolo extra in the other cases, a custom which they deemed deplorable to the fishermen. Furthermore, at the time, no official control was practiced over the middlemen, their only requirement being a license issued by the police which was valid for life without the need of it being renewed on a yearly basis. The fish market itself was also found to be inadequate. At the end of the report, suggestions were made for the amelioration of the fish sale. To begin with, it was suggested that the sale had to start being done via public auction, the custom of giving extra fish had to stop and only inspected weights used. It was also suggested that the middlemen had to be officially licensed by the Controller of Fisheries and payment done at the

⁵⁵⁷ *Government Departments Report*, 1936-1937, 90.

⁵⁵⁸ *The Government Gazette*, 19 February 1937, Supplement No. X, 53.

moment of purchase. For all these suggestions to be possible, the committee members urged the administration to speed up the works on the new fish market. Action had to be taken in the appointment of an overseer with the task of making sure that all the regulations were adhered to.⁵⁵⁹ The official regulations were in turn published in the 7th of February, 1938 issue of the Government Gazette as follows;

1.	No man shall act as <i>pitkal</i> for the sale of fish without a license from the Controller of Fisheries. The license shall be valid until the 31 st December of the year of issue and may be renewed thereafter from year to year.
2.	No licensed <i>pitkali</i> shall, without the permission in writing of the Controller of Fisheries – (a) exercise his trade outside the limits of the Wholesale Fish Market; (b) keep, or have a share in more than one stall for the exercise of his trade.
3.	<i>Pitkali</i> shall not sell fish except by auction. In such auctions the following requirements shall be complied with :- (a) Auction sales of fish shall not be held between one hour after sunset and 3 a.m. during the months of May, June, July, August, September and October, not between one hour after sunset and 4 a.m. during the other months; (b) before offering fish for sale the <i>pitkal</i> shall show his intention of so doing by means of such sound signal as shall be approved by the Controller of Fisheries; (c) bidding shall be made <i>viva voce</i> and in such a manner as to be clearly understood by other persons present. No offer of purchase shall be considered to be valid unless it is so made; (d) only officially recognised weights shall be used; (e) sales shall be made against cash payment.
4.	Every licensed <i>pitkal</i> shall record all transactions made by him on a form to be prescribed by the Controller of Fisheries. A copy of the record of such transactions shall be delivered to the Controller of Fisheries within twenty-four hours of being concluded.
5.	No <i>pitkal</i> shall sell any fish, either by wholesale or retail, on his own account.
6.	It shall not be lawful to sell fish by retail in the Wholesale Fish Market.
7.	The court may, on a conviction for the breach of any of these regulations, in addition to inflicting punishment under the Police Laws, suspend or withdraw, at the request of the prosecution, the license held by the defendant.
8.	In these Regulations, the words “ <i>pitkal</i> ” or “ <i>pitkali</i> ” mean a person or persons who undertakes or undertake to sell fish wholesale to third parties on account of the owners.

Table 7: The regulations enacted in 1938 to control the position of middlemen
(Source: The Government Gazette, 7 Feb. 1938, Government Notice No. 58, 148.)⁵⁶⁰

⁵⁵⁹ *The Government Gazette*, 19 Feb. 1937, Supplement No. X, 53-4.

⁵⁶⁰ Table 7. Cf. *The Government Gazette*, 7 February 1938, Government Notice 58, 148.

2.8.2.4 The Outbreak of War and its Aftermath

This was the time of the outbreak of the Second World War, which put a stop to normal, everyday life. The local fishing industry also suffered considerable repercussions. To begin with, the Advisory Fisheries Committee stopped meeting altogether.⁵⁶¹ There was also a drastic decrease in the catches during the years 1940-43 since there was a shortage of fishing material, a decrease in the number of fishermen due to the danger of enemy attack and alternative work on shore, and due to wartime restrictions, that controlled the movement of fishing boats and prohibited night fishing. In September 1942, a committee was appointed with the aim of helping fishermen stick to their trade. Amongst others, *bona-fide* fishermen were exempted from conscription in the forces. Those fishermen who had already been employed at the dockyard and in the services could apply for long leave during the fishing seasons. Arrangements were also made in helping fishermen procure the necessary material.⁵⁶² It was only in 1946 that the Advisory Fisheries Committee resumed its duties. The restrictions imposed were also lifted and life resumed its normal pace.

The two most important fisheries in Malta undoubtedly became the *kannizzati* fishery and the *lampara* fishery. Between them they were accountable for approximately 70% of the total landings. In 1947, the number of *kannizzati* licenses issued ‘reached the pre-war figure of 69 sites.’ The *lampara* net was gaining popularity amongst fishermen and during the year under discussion. The number increased to 21 nets. As expected, the number of motor propelled boats was also bound to increase to the extent that in 1946 their number approximately doubled the pre-war number⁵⁶³ and further increased by 36 the following year.⁵⁶⁴ Conversion of existing craft was accountable for most of the numbers.⁵⁶⁵ Another breakthrough was the inclusion of six professional fishermen in the Fisheries Advisory Board in January 1948.⁵⁶⁶

2.8.3 The Local Situation: 1950 Onwards

The Department of Fisheries was officially re-established in 1950 since ‘during the years 1935 to 1949 a Fisheries Office was maintained as a Section of the Customs and Port Department.’ The latter arrangement was found to be wanting since ‘the Fisheries requirements were unavoidably

⁵⁶¹ Farrugia Randon (1995), 6.

⁵⁶² *Government Departments Report, 1945-1946*, 104.

⁵⁶³ *Government Departments Report, 1946-1947*, 337-8.

⁵⁶⁴ *Government Departments Report, 1947-1948*, 195.

⁵⁶⁵ *Government Departments Report, 1946-1947*, 338.

⁵⁶⁶ *Government Departments Report, 1947-1948*, 194.

subordinated to the exigencies of a major department like the Customs Department.’⁵⁶⁷ This decade also marked the arrival of Mr. T. W. Burdon, then Deputy Director of Fisheries in Singapore, to evaluate the local fishing industry.⁵⁶⁸

2.8.3.1 Burdon’s Assessment

Burdon (1954) identified many issues which were detrimental to the Maltese fishing industry. These included the hindering of the inshore fisheries by the activities of the armed forces that carried out their practices in the waters adjacent to Malta. As Burdon claims,

Apart from a narrow corridor of aircraft, there is no sea area within twelve thousand yards of the coast which is not utilised at one time or another for bombing, firing or similar activities. In some localities, particularly around Filfla, these practices are often daily and if the fishermen observed the consequent restrictions they would be forced out of the industry.⁵⁶⁹

Apart from limiting the fishing space, the armed forced activities had other repercussions on the fishing enterprise. Burdon claimed that on two occasions following bombing of Filfla, over one hundred and fifty pounds of fish were recovered by a local fisherman. He correctly presumed that a much greater quantity of fish must have sunk or been carried away by the current.⁵⁷⁰ Burdon recommended the appointment of Liaison Officers to work collaboratively with the Controller of Fisheries in safeguarding their respective interests. He also suggested that the regulations at the time had to be revised and should preferably be based on scientific investigations as had been suggested by Hornell. Considering the lack of information, Burdon suggested some amendments to be implemented during the time being. This included the exemption from licensing of all minor gears used in conjunction with principal gear whereas fishing gears capable of producing marketable quantities should be subject to licensing. At this point, he moved on to make a list of licensing fees in his report. Burdon also recommended that no nets with a mesh of less than 2½ inch should be used in harbours and creeks ‘save in accordance with a special endorsement on the license showing the areas and the period in which it might be so employed.’⁵⁷¹

⁵⁶⁷ *Government Departments Report, 1950-1951*, 573.

⁵⁶⁸ Farrugia Randon (1995), 8.

⁵⁶⁹ Burdon, 10.

⁵⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁵⁷¹ *ibid.*, 53-5.

For the better functioning of the department, Burdon claimed that the personnel should be substantially increased with the result that the number was raised from 7 to 28.⁵⁷² He stressed upon the importance of biological investigations, as others had done before him.⁵⁷³ Yet another recommendation focused exclusively on the development of Marsaxlokk with the aim of providing adequate facilities for the fishing industry. The following are the suggestions he proposed as Recommendations 5 and 16;

1.	The acquisition of the existing mullet ponds which are not at present in use. This area, together with the inner arm of the bay, should be reclaimed to provide (a) A net drying space, (b) Sites for three boat slips capable of accepting vessels of seventy-five feet in length and (c) A site for the Fisheries Station.
2.	The existing quay on the western side of the bay should be increased in width between the Customs Pier and Marsaxlokk Street.
3.	The bay should be dredged to a depth of nine feet with a channel of similar depth leading to the sea.
4.	The eastern edge of the bay should be enclosed from the end of the proposed reclamation to Taht it-Turnciera to provide a series of mullet pond and to eliminate the deposit of silt in the bay.
5.	Sites should be acquired for the construction of thirty-six net-stores (preferably with harbour frontage) and twenty-four houses for fishermen transferred from other areas. In some cases only net stores will be required as the Wied-iz-Zurrieq fishermen may prefer to continue living in Zurrieq. The construction of a block of twelve net stores should, however, be included in the initial proposal, the remainder being constructed as required.
6.	The boat-slips should be similar to that maintained by the Royal Air Force nearby.
7.	The Fisheries Station should include (a) A District Fisheries Office, (b) A block accommodating a small biological laboratory, a gear store with preservation tanks, a processing establishment with concrete tanks for the salting of fish and possibly a small chilling store. A separate class-room with an attached working room should also be provided in conjunction with the proposals for vocational training. The attendant should live on the Station and a small house should be provided.

Table 8: The development of Marsaxlokk as recommended by Mr. T. W. Burdon

(Source: A Report on the Fishing Industry of Malta, 60-1)⁵⁷⁴

Many of the above-mentioned alterations envisaged to ameliorate Marsaxlokk's fishermen's facilities were put into action. This included the construction of a large enough slipway for larger vessels and

⁵⁷² Farrugia Randon (1995), 11.

⁵⁷³ Burdon, 56-7.

⁵⁷⁴ Table 8. Cf. *ibid.*, 60-1.

the allocation of an area for the drying of nets, the dredging of the bay to provide safer anchorage of fishing craft as well as the opening of the District's Fisheries Office.⁵⁷⁵

As a continuation of the previous, Burdon suggested Recommendation 6, namely the transfer of fishermen from other localities to Marsaxlokk which was the reason why it was suggested that net stores and houses had to be made available.⁵⁷⁶ This recommendation was embraced as well and, in subsequent years, the Government built numerous flats and store houses to rent to fishermen.⁵⁷⁷ Burdon suggested that priority in the transferring to Marsaxlokk had to be given to fishermen who had purchased, or planning to purchase, large fishing vessels which were impossible to use in their respective villages, fishermen whose work was being fraught by the Armed Forces' activities, and fishermen with children who wished to take on vocational training, that is, training for fishermen in the navigation of larger vessels. At the time, Marsaxlokk's school provided education up to the 4th class after which the children, aged twelve to thirteen, progressed to the school at Żejtun. Burdon suggested that a special class should be established in the Fisheries Station for fishermen's children who complete their 4th class. The syllabus would include reading and writing in English along with elementary mathematics, navigation, and fisheries technology. Amongst others, instructions also had to be provided in first aid and the use of the morse code.⁵⁷⁸ This recommendation was put into action and classes consisted of an average of twenty children from Marsaxlokk's Government school. Nowadays, no such scheme is in operation.⁵⁷⁹

Even though Burdon (1954) complemented the standards of accuracy of the statistical data, he recognised deficiencies in data dealing with manpower in the industry, fishing intensity and fishing boats which he deemed misleading. Upon highlighting these shortcomings, Burdon moved on to mention how this should be appropriately done in Recommendation 9. Recommendation 10 dealt with the fish storage. As fish forms ice marks and deteriorates when frozen, it was suggested that chilling should be used for short-term storage. The establishment of a library dealing with fisheries sciences was suggested as Recommendation 12. The processing of fish offal and unsalable fish in the production of fish-oils and fish-meals was suggested as well. Nonetheless, economic experiments had to be undertaken on a small scale to ascertain its reliability.⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁷⁵ Farrugia Randon (1995), 10.

⁵⁷⁶ Burdon, 61.

⁵⁷⁷ Farrugia Randon (1995), 10.

⁵⁷⁸ Burdon, 61-2.

⁵⁷⁹ Farrugia Randon (1995), 10.

⁵⁸⁰ Burdon, 63-4.

Throughout his report, Burdon stressed that larger vessels had to be employed for the development of the local fishery. However, having recognised the financial limitations of the fishermen he suggested the establishment of a fisheries loan fund which would advance money against a small rate of interest. Preference was to 'be given to operators proposing to alternate winter fishing with the off-shore summer fisheries' as well as to those who wanted to start operating trawling-units. Preference was also to be given to fishermen whose sons showed a disposition to work on their father's vessels thus ascertaining their future in the industry.⁵⁸¹

Burdon also recommended the introduction of new fishing practices and the alteration of existing ones as well as improved net preservation methods. Closely linked to the latter was Recommendation 20 which suggested the establishment of a fishing material supply service whereby fishermen could obtain the material needed for boat maintenance and gear construction at lower prices. This scheme was also envisaged to enable fishermen to purchase fire and life-saving equipment.⁵⁸² This service was eventually introduced in 1955-56 and continued up to 1992. From then onwards, fishermen acquired the same service via the two cooperatives and from other private companies.⁵⁸³ The Fisheries had also started subsidizing fuel, a service which greatly helped fishermen and encouraged them to stick to their trade as will be discussed in the subsequent section.⁵⁸⁴

2.8.3.2 Hardships and Improvements Experienced by Fishermen

The year 1951 saw the beginning of 'Is-Sajd', a monthly publication which was distributed to the fishermen for free and provided information on the fishing industry both local and international. As from 1966 this pamphlet became part of the department's monthly publication 'L-Agrikoltura'.⁵⁸⁵ From this folio one could glean interesting information about the fishermen's lifestyle, hardships at the time and the help provided most of which was proposed by Burdon himself.

It goes without saying that technology ameliorated the fishermen's life in terms of work and safety, nonetheless, certain aspects which hinder the fishermen's work remain uncontrollable. Such is true of the seasons and weather fluctuations. Bad weather, characteristic of winter, hinders fishing

⁵⁸¹ *ibid.*, 65.

⁵⁸² *ibid.*

⁵⁸³ Farrugia Randon (1995), 10.

⁵⁸⁴ *ibid.*, 12.

⁵⁸⁵ *Report on the Working of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for the year 1966*, (Malta, Department of Information, 1968), 72.

expeditions thus reducing the catch. The smaller the catch, the higher the price it fetches. Nonetheless, this does not secure the fisherman a higher income. Apart from the incumbents of the fish market and the middlemen in general, people revert to purchasing alternative products rather than acquiring exuberantly priced fish. This manifests itself in a much lower income for the fishermen than might be expected. Back then, lack of profit was discouraging the fishermen with many emigrating or seeking alternative jobs which secured them the weekly £5 earnings doing easier tasks and working shorter hours.⁵⁸⁶ A 1960 issue of 'Is-Sajd' remarked that the fishermen's earnings were considerably smaller than the minimum wage that could be earned on land.⁵⁸⁷ In turn lack of fishermen manifested itself in further reduction in fish on the market and higher prices being asked for. The only means by which a better income could be secured was for the catch to be substantially large which results in lower prices, more purchases, and better wages.

Burdon's recommendation of purchasing larger boats was put into action to the extent that by 1958/59, seven boats with dimensions varying from 50 to 93 feet were purchased through this initiative. However, some of the boats thus acquired were transferred to other owners some of whom proved to be equally unsuccessful in managing them. Three out of the seven boats were not making sufficient fish landings but the remaining four proved otherwise.⁵⁸⁸

The need to invest in larger fishing vessels had been expressed time and again. The above-mentioned trawling venture was neither the first nor the last attempt within the Maltese waters, but all were short lived with the reasons given for the failures being varied. In one of these attempts, back in 1975, Malta asked for FAO's assistance. The project was embarked upon, and the following year five trawlers started working locally. Even though the availability of fish increased through this enterprise, with 16% of the total fish on sale being accounted to trawling, the feat was deemed unsuccessful due to the expenses incurred. Two of the trawlers met only half of the costs to the government. The situation was even direr for the other three in which case only one-third of the expenses were met. Reasons for the failure were sought amongst which one can mention the time lost by the trawlers at sea. Another shortcoming was the unavailability of crew members skilled in net mending. The crew was also inadequate to stay for long stretches of time at sea and unscheduled shore time was unaccounted for. Customers were also sceptical into purchasing trawled fish especially scad. This was especially problematic since 66% of the catch of one of the trawlers was of the said species.

⁵⁸⁶ 'L-Għajnuna lis-Sajjieda hija Ġid għall-Popolazzjoni Kollha', *Is-Sajd*, October 1957, 2.

⁵⁸⁷ 'Is-Sajd f'Malta', *Is-Sajd*, October 1960, 2.

⁵⁸⁸ Farrugia Randon (1995), 9.

Furthermore, the said trawler made longer trips resulting in fish not being as fresh upon landing. Before this project was set little was known about the topography of the Maltese seabed which induced studies to make good for this lack of information. Fishing gear was also adapted accordingly. Once done, negotiations with Libya were sought to set up a joint trawling venture with the aim of increasing the fish supply of both countries. As a result, the Maltese Libyan Arab Fishing Co. Ltd. was set up in September 1978, but the project collapsed in 1988.⁵⁸⁹

Before this, the Government also took numerous initiatives by which to encourage the fishing folk in purchasing larger fishing vessels. Amongst others, one should mention the yearly grants of £50,000 with the aim of aiding fishermen in purchasing or commissioning larger boats that could be used during the winter season as well, thus securing a larger catch and better earnings throughout the year as had been originally proposed by Burdon.⁵⁹⁰ As described in a 1958 issue, if a new boat was jointly purchased by six fishermen or more the government made good for half the expenses and if it was purchased by less than six members the government paid 40% of the expenses. If a second-hand boat was purchased by six fishermen or more the government made good for 40% of the expenses whereas 30% was donated by the government if the second-hand boat was bought by less than six fishermen. The mortgage incurred by the fishermen for the expenses not covered by the government was being provided at the low interest rate of 1%.⁵⁹¹ The money loaning and granting scheme was originally introduced back in 1956 following Burdon's suggestion and was exclusively reserved to those who wanted to purchase a trawler. However, as described in a 1963 issue of 'Is-Sajd', due to the low productivity of the trawlers, the sum was being reissued to help fishermen purchase a *luzzu* which, even though primitive when compared to modern boats, is ideal for local fishing and contributes considerably to Malta's leading fishing seasons. Statistically wise, they render more fish than the trawlers. Another advantage for local fishermen lies in the fact that the crew employed on board *luzzijiet* are 100% Maltese as opposed to trawlers who depended heavily on the recruitment of foreigners.⁵⁹² In June of 1963, the money loaning and granting scheme made good for £55,000 which was used by sixty-five fishermen for the construction of ten boats larger than thirty feet, the substitution of twenty-two petrol operating engines with diesel engines and the purchasing of improved fishing material by twenty-three fishermen.⁵⁹³

⁵⁸⁹ Farrugia Randon (1995), 14-6.

⁵⁹⁰ 'L-Ghajjnuna lis-Sajjieda hija Ġid għall-Popolazzjoni Kollha', *Is-Sajd*, October 1957, 2-3.

⁵⁹¹ 'L-Ghajjnuna tal-Gvern għax-Xiri ta' Bastimenti għas-Sajd', *Is-Sajd*, January 1958, 1.

⁵⁹² 'Self u Għoti ta' Flus lis-Sajjied', *Is-Sajd*, June 1963, 2.

⁵⁹³ 'Il-Kontribuzzjoni ta' l-Industrija tas-Sajd Maltija għall-Ekonomija Nazzjonali', *Is-Sajd*, September 1964, 3.

At the time of the 61st issue of the pamphlet under discussion, the government was helping the fishermen by offering them the possibility of purchasing fuel, petrol and diesel duty free.⁵⁹⁴ A scheme whereby fuel started being subsidized was introduced in 1963.⁵⁹⁵ Furthermore, better quality fishing tackle was being made available through the gross purchase of this equipment by the government which was in turn sold to the fishermen at a lower price and without extra charges as had also been suggested by Burdon. Other subsidies were also being provided. All these benefits made sense when one takes in consideration the expenses incurred by fishermen in securing for themselves a living. At the time, certain nets cost £1,000 each and had to be mended and eventually replaced. Other nets priced at £150 each, could only be used for a short term, say a few months, before having to be replaced as well. Other expenses included the purchasing of material. This included £300 worth of material necessary for the *lampuki* season at the end of which little, if any, could be used in subsequent *lampuki* seasons. Additional expenses included the large amounts of fuel used and the expenses needed for the maintenance of the fishing crafts. Half the money fetched from the fish sales was used to cover the expenses mentioned. In turn, the remaining profit had to be subdivided amongst the fishing crew. In other words, for every £100 made off fishing, a fisherman was envisaged to earn less than £5.

These strategic manoeuvres from the government's behalf induced migrated fishermen to return to Malta and others who sought work on land to resume fishing. This manifested itself in an increase in *kannizzati* fishing licenses which rose from forty-eight in 1956 to fifty-six in 1957.⁵⁹⁶ Amelioration is evident when comparison is made between the figures of fish caught in 1953, which amounted to 1,258,829 rotoli, and in 1963, which amounted to 1,908,146 rotoli; an overall increase of 649,344 rotoli in the ten-year gap.⁵⁹⁷ Amongst other works in many fishing areas around Malta and Gozo, a project of major importance initiated in 1964 with the aim of improving the fishing enterprise was the widening of the quay at Marsaxlokk, the latter being the main fishing village in Malta, to enlarge the shore with the aim of providing the fishermen with ample space to dry the nets and pull the boats on shore as had been envisaged by Burdon.

⁵⁹⁴ 'L-Għajnuna lis-Sajjieda hija Ġid għall-Popolazzjoni Kollha', *Is-Sajd*, October 1957, 3.

⁵⁹⁵ 'Il-Kontribuzzjoni ta' l-Industrija tas-Sajd Maltija għall-Ekonomija Nazzjonali', *Is-Sajd*, September 1964, 3.

⁵⁹⁶ 'L-Għajnuna lis-Sajjieda hija Ġid għall-Popolazzjoni Kollha', *Is-Sajd*, October 1957, 3.

⁵⁹⁷ 'Il-Kontribuzzjoni ta' l-Industrija tas-Sajd Maltija għall-Ekonomija Nazzjonali', *Is-Sajd*, September 1964, 3.



Picture 3: Works in progress at Marsaxlokk

(Source: *Is-Sajd*)⁵⁹⁸



Picture 4: Another picture depicting the works at Marsaxlokk

(Source: *Is-Sajd*)⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁸ Picture 3. Cf. *ibid.*, 1.

⁵⁹⁹ Picture 4. Cf. *Is-Sajd*, April 1965, 3.



Picture 5: Marsaxlokk's 1,200 feet quay widened by circa 60 to 80 feet

(Source: *Is-Sajd*)⁶⁰⁰

Saturday, 22nd January 1966 saw the beginning of another project in the same locality; the building of storages and houses for the fishermen at Marsaxlokk. The sum of £65,000 was allotted to this project.⁶⁰¹ Nonetheless, it can't be denied that a fishermen's life is characterised by hardship. Hardship was attested to by the numerous claims of people who reverted to fishing only when work on land was unavailable. In August's issue of '*Is-Sajd*', 1962, a record of seventy-five fishing leases were granted for the *kannizzatti* fishing with many of the people recruited on board being left with no alternative other than to seek work at sea. However, prior to being recruited, these men had to be well trained in local fishing considering that the Maltese fishing enterprise requires more skill than it does elsewhere, the determining factor being the wide range of fishing methods adopted by fishermen. Whereas foreign fishermen fishing in their countries specialise in one fishing method, the Maltese alternate between different fishing methods as based on the seasons.⁶⁰² Being an island and thus exposed to strong currents and winds, Malta does not provide a haven for fish which is the reason why stocks don't stay long in the territorial waters making expertise in different fishing methods a must.⁶⁰³

Apart from the dispersal of fish, strong weather may also result in the loss of fishing gear, damaged boats and occasionally in life threatening situations. Loss of catch and fishing gear is attested to in the following paragraph as it appeared in the report prepared by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for the year 1965;

⁶⁰⁰ Picture 5. Cf. *ibid*.

⁶⁰¹ 'Djar u Mhażen għas-Sajjieda', *Is-Sajd*, January 1966, 1.

⁶⁰² 'L-Istaġun tal-Kannizzati: Madwar Mitt Ruħ Isibu Xogħol fuq il-Baħar', *Is-Sajd*, August 1962, 2.

⁶⁰³ 'Is-Sajd f'Malta', *Is-Sajd*, October 1960, 2 and 4.

It is unfortunate that the catches in December were mostly made by trolling and surface lines, as the weather was rarely suitable for net encircling during that month. Had this been possible, expert fishermen maintain that the landings would have been a record. Indeed, due to the heavy concentrations of fish under the floats, in the hope that there would be a lull in the weather, allowing for net operations, the majority of the fishermen did not, as customary, take in their floats and attachments. This resulted in heavy losses and practically everything was swept away by the heavy seas, without any catch being made.⁶⁰⁴

As for the damage incurred on fishing craft, on one occasion, on the 23rd of January 1957, a storm caused the loss of thirteen fishing boats from Wied iż-Żurrieq. Since this was deemed disastrous, the government forwarded the money necessary for the purchasing of a new fishing boat to the fishermen directly hit, made good for the expenses incurred by others in the mending of their craft and provided fishermen who formed part of the lost boats' crew with a compensation equivalent to three weeks of wages.⁶⁰⁵ Damage to fishing boats also used to be incurred by British and United Nations' warships in the local waters⁶⁰⁶ and extensive damage to fishing nets resulting from the Navy's movements through the fishing equipment setup was not uncommon.⁶⁰⁷

Another hardship which characterises the fisherman's everyday life is the unpredictability of the catch. Long hours of hard work don't guarantee a substantial income. On the other hand, the expenses made for the preparation of the fishing season can by far oust the meagre income incurred from a poor fishing season.⁶⁰⁸ A particularly bad season can only be hoped to be redeemed in the subsequent fishing season.⁶⁰⁹ This concern was expressed time and again in the pamphlet '*Is-Sajd*'. In one publication the hope for a substantial catch during the upcoming *kannizzatti* fishing season was expressed to make good for the preceding poor fishing seasons.⁶¹⁰

Hot weather also proved detrimental since fish spoilt quickly. The meteorological station provided the weather forecast both to the customs office and to the local newspapers. Nonetheless, fishermen had to continue relying on their own expertise in predicting weather fluctuations during the fishing expeditions themselves.⁶¹¹ Apart from their vast knowledge of the weather and natural surroundings,

⁶⁰⁴ *Report on the Working of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for the year 1965*, (Malta, Department of Information, 1968), 79.

⁶⁰⁵ 'Għajnuna lis-Sajjieda ta' Wied Iż-Żurrieq', *Is-Sajd*, July 1957, 1.

⁶⁰⁶ 'Hsara fl-Inġenji tas-Sajd', *Is-Sajd*, October 1954, 2.

⁶⁰⁷ 'Is-Sajd fl-Assemblea', *Is-Sajd*, October 1954, 3.

⁶⁰⁸ 'Is-Sajd bir-Rixa', *Is-Sajd*, August 1954, 2.

⁶⁰⁹ 'Il-Qbid tas-Sena 1962', *Is-Sajd*, March 1963, 2.

⁶¹⁰ 'L-Istaġun tal-Lampuki', *Is-Sajd*, July 1954, 2.

⁶¹¹ 'Is-Sajd u t-Temp', *Is-Sajd*, July 1954, 1.

fishermen had little aid in terms of technology except for the compass, the sextant and a telescope or binoculars. The sea's depth was calculated with a piece of lead attached to a rope and lowered accordingly. With time, new technological inventions were introduced. Depth started being accurately read with the use of automatic echosounders⁶¹² which could also provide information as to the fish whereabouts.⁶¹³ Compasses became more precise. The marine radiotelephone service, which allowed fishermen to connect with one another and with land stations, was installed on board. Radars and the Decca Navigator paved their way into the local fishing industry as well. These new inventions enabled the fisherman to arrive to and fro without incurring damage to his fishing craft.⁶¹⁴ Another improvement was the conversion from the use of conventional fibre equipment to the use of synthetic material which has the advantage of being cheaper to purchase, easier to handle, stronger and doesn't require neither dyeing nor drying.⁶¹⁵

Hardship was also manifested when fishermen got seriously hurt while at sea and to a larger extent when a fishing boat, along with its crew, got lost. The 61st issue of '*Is-Sajd*' reported on two incidents of this nature with the first concerning the boat '*Giovanna Madre*', which was lost along with its crew while on duty, and the second being '*Raffaele Padre*'. In the latter's case, Michael Errera, a 59-year-old fisherman on board the said boat was heavily injured with his right leg being amputated.⁶¹⁶ Injuries and death at sea were common occurrences especially when technology on board was still in its infancy. An extensive account of these incidents in story form was written and published by Lino Psaila in his book '*Il-Baħar Rasu Iebsa*.'

Cause for concern could also result following a particularly benevolent fishing season. In the latter's case, the amount of fish caught may exceed the market's demand the consequence of which is the discarding of the surplus fish. This problem was temporarily elevated with the establishment of two local factories who bought the extra fish to process which was advantageous to all stakeholders. Nonetheless, these factories were short-lived and had to close due to lack of protection from foreign competition. It was only later that a regulation was enacted to safeguard the local factories' interest should they be re-established.⁶¹⁷

⁶¹² 'Navigazzjoni', *Is-Sajd*, February 1958, 2.

⁶¹³ 'X'Hemm Ġdid', *Is-Sajd*, February 1962, 2.

⁶¹⁴ 'Navigazzjoni', *Is-Sajd*, February 1958, 2.

⁶¹⁵ *Report on the Working of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for the year 1966*, (Malta, Department of Information, 1968), 72.

⁶¹⁶ 'Ir-Radju Telefon Igħib Għajnuna Malajr f'Diżgrazzji tal-Baħar', *Is-Sajd*, October 1957, 2.

⁶¹⁷ 'Il-Lampara', *Is-Sajd*, May 1954, 2.

Along the years, different fishing practices came into being whilst others faded into oblivion. As mentioned earlier, the fishing method known as *lampara* was introduced locally during the first half of the 20th century. Another fishing technique which paved its way in the Maltese fishing repertoire in the same century was surface long-line fishing. The latter was introduced in the early 1960s after experimentation by foreigners. In the beginning, swordfish meat was not highly sought as it was a new product with which the Maltese were not familiar.⁶¹⁸ The 143rd issue of '*Is-Sajd*' remarks that tuna long-line fishing was specifically introduced in May 1964 and was accountable for 14 tonnes equivalent of prime fish locally caught in a few months most of which was swordfish.⁶¹⁹ However, other fishing methods saw their decline and eventually their demise. This is true of a fishing method which required the use of a net to strand fish in the inshore area or a corner upon which fishermen used to beat their ores in the water to frighten the fish and induce them to swim outward thus entangling themselves in the net while trying to escape. This fishing method was used at Imsida to catch saupe (m. *xilep*), at Marsaxlokk to catch the amberjack (m. *aċċola*) and at Mellicha as a means of catching tuna. The *tonnara*, which was discussed extensively in previous sections, was another fishing method which was used in local waters but was on the verge of extermination in 1967.⁶²⁰

Another turning point occurred in 1964 with Malta's admittance into the United Nations which resulted in its integration with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). The latter developed a specialised branch known as the General Fisheries Council of the Mediterranean (GFCM) whose primary concern lies with the fishing industries. As with the previous decades, international experts visited Malta to make recommendations with the aim of meliorating the local fishing industry. Amongst others, fish culturing was suggested with attempts to single out fish species that could withstand living in restricted spaces starting way back in 1966. Malta was further accepted as a member of the Inter-Governmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in March 1970. In the following years the department continued offering various services and help for fishermen.⁶²¹ Another major change came about with Malta's membership within the European Union (EU) in 2004. As expected, major changes within the Maltese fishing sector have since been experienced as will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

⁶¹⁸ 'Qbid ta' Pixxispad', *Is-Sajd*, May 1964, 1.

⁶¹⁹ 'Il-Kontribuzzjoni ta' l-Industrija tas-Sajd Maltija għall-Ekonomija Nazzjonali', *Is-Sajd*, September 1964, 3.

⁶²⁰ 'Barriera għall-Dejjem jew għall-Istaġun', *L-Agrikultura*, August 1967, 2.

⁶²¹ Farrugia Randon (1995), 12-6.

2.9 Conclusion

Information on the Maltese history of fishing is distributed in a wide range of sources. The aim of this chapter was to find this information and present as wholesome a picture as possible of the development of the Maltese fishing enterprise from prehistory up to the present day. Where information was particularly lacking, especially in the pre-British period, information as to what was happening elsewhere was sought. The countries looked into are European with many nestled in the Mediterranean basin. Furthermore, they also happened to be countries and/or empires which had a direct impact on the Maltese Islands. It has been reckoned that the fishing repertoire implemented elsewhere must have been brought locally as part of the cultural luggage of the ruling nations that took over the Maltese Islands.

Since the concept of fishing was conceived at the dawn of humanity, many changes have occurred during the millennia. Whereas prehistoric men used simple artefacts to catch the elusive fish, more sophisticated tools and the development of more efficient boats enabled subsequent civilisations to better exploit water resources. A huge surge forward resulting from the consistent development in fishing, was experienced during the Middle Ages to which many fishing devices and strategies can be attributed. This expansion was mostly called for to meet the needs of an ever-growing population and later further fuelled by the spread of Christianity. Rising demands for fish resulted in over-fishing which translated in stricter regulations. The Middle Ages also witnessed the innovative concept of fish farming. It is difficult to denote with any precision what constituted the Maltese fishing repertoire at the time from lack of documentation, nonetheless, all the fishing methods deployed and used in the Middle Ages were gradually introduced locally as well even though some fishing methods took centuries to pave their way to the Maltese Islands. Subsequent eras further developed the Middle Ages' fishing techniques but did not necessarily contribute to the invention of new fishing methods. Indeed, the term 'adaptability' is better suited than 'innovative' to describe the changes experienced henceforth. Another surge in population and the widespread of Christianity which established itself in most European countries further increased the demand for fish. Irrespective of its widespread use during the 13th century, the popular fishing method *tonnara* was only introduced locally during the 18th century. A breakthrough in terms of technology was experienced during the 18th century in what became known as the Industrial Revolution, its driving force being yet another growth in population which led to the urbanisation of vast areas. Technological advancements resulted in better, more efficient, and larger fishing boats. Sails were replaced by steam engines which were in turn substituted by motorised engines. The Maltese fishing sector gained the British Empire's attention during the

early part of the 20th century which saw the establishment of the Fisheries Department. This century saw the emergence of stricter regulations the like of which had never been experienced before. More information on the local sector started being made available following the department's establishment because of better documentation; documentation which, amongst others, revealed the dire situation of the fishermen at the time who were reduced to poverty by the fish market and acting middlemen, and the poor yields. In 1931, Hornell was asked to evaluate the local scenario who, upon a thorough inspection, put forward suggestions for the wellbeing of the fishing community. Likewise, benefits were experienced following the inspection of the middlemen's position by two members of the committee and T.W. Burdon's evaluation of the local fisheries in 1954. Numerous innovative measures as suggested by Burdon were implemented during subsequent years including the government scheme whereby fishermen were subsidised to acquire a larger boat which was later modified to help fishermen into purchasing a traditional *luzzu*, it being the main contributor to Malta's most important fisheries and by which Maltese recruitment could be guaranteed. Amongst others, the government at the time also started making good for improved fishing material, the subsidisation of fuel, and the building of storages and houses to accommodate fishermen. In subsequent years Malta was admitted in various institutions including the UN, FAO and, most importantly in terms of change, became a member state of the EU in 2004, which membership brought forth the largest changes in terms of legislation ever experienced by the local fishery as will be revealed in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3

The Fishermen's Resilience Supporting Mechanisms



Chapter 3

The Fishermen's Resilience Supporting Mechanisms

3.1 Introduction

The first chapter introduced the research topic by highlighting the characteristics of small-scale fisheries and why it is important to preserve them. To achieve the latter a thorough understanding of what is ailing the sector's fishermen is needed. This research also calls for an exploration of what, thus far, has kept fishermen abreast with the changes with the hope of powering these sustaining mechanisms to safeguard the small-scale sector's existence. International research revealed that one of the components that nurture and fortify the fishermen's resilience is the fishing community. Indeed, the notion of community alludes to the positive aspects of society that contribute to the individual's wellbeing, to the extent that 'community has emotional overtones, implying familiarity, social and emotional cohesion, and commitment.'⁶²² All these positive characteristics are pronounced in fishing communities with their strong bonds that provide its members with the psychological resilience needed to keep fishing in the face of adverse conditions as will be explored hereunder.

A cultural characteristic highlighted by the FAO's definition of traditional/small-scale fisheries as seen in this research's introduction, is the household involvement. As opposed to industrial fisheries, 'small-scale fisheries have long been quintessentially family enterprises, owned and operated by members of the family household with crews formed from within the household', with the most common being father-son(s) and brother-brother combinations.⁶²³ These crew formations underscore the relative importance of male active participation in the fisheries which, at *prima facie*, might strike the onlooker as being a thoroughly masculine enterprise. The reality, however, proves otherwise. Indeed, the proverb 'behind a successful man there stands a woman' is most befitting to the context. Since women's support constitute another supporting mechanism in sustaining the fishermen's resilience to continue pursuing a life at sea, the active role Maltese women play behind the scenes in shifting these enterprises from thriving to successful will also be looked into.

⁶²² Heather Douglas, 'Types of Community', in *International Encyclopaedia of Civil Society*, Helmut K. Anheier and Stefan Toepler (eds.) Springer, New York 2010, 539.

⁶²³ David Symes, Emma Cardwell and Jeremy Phillipson, 'UK Small-Scale Fisheries: Status, Developed Responsibility and the Challenges of Sustainability', in *Small-Scale Fisheries in Europe: Status, Resilience and Governance*, J. J. Pascual-Fernández, C. Pita and M. Bavinck (eds.) Springer, Switzerland 2020, 358.

As opposed to the above entities, the third supporting mechanism revealed to play an equally important role in sustaining fishermen's resilience is belief in the supernatural which can be classified in two broad categories, the positively looked upon religious aspect and the frowned upon superstitious beliefs. Irrespective of the categorisation, both aspects share the same purpose; of providing comfort and hope in face of adversity. This chapter will also be exploring the contribution supernatural beliefs play in elevating the apprehension ensuing from the precarious situations fishermen face during their endeavours and which are beyond human control and which, as with the support provided by their community and women, consolidate their resolve to keep fishing.

3.2 Fishing Communities

The similarities between the Maltese and international small-scale fishing communities, irrelevant as to whether they are European or not, are uncanny. All the social studies that tackled the subject can easily relate to one another. This holds true since all the fishing communities developed from a common reality; the dangerous sea.

Pulè (2000) explains that the nature of their work distinguishes seafaring people from all others. He attributes the differences to the reclusive mode of living fisher people had to subject themselves to be in proximity to the sea which demanded of them the need to live at the very edge of the countries and, as a result, of societies. The need to dwell in the vicinity of their main, if not exclusive, source of livelihood resulted in Maltese Cottonera⁶²⁴ fishermen to live dangerously outside the sheltered fortifications of their cities which, up to 500 years ago, provided refuge from dreaded corsair attacks.⁶²⁵

Fishing people have always been looked down upon by the rest of the established hierarchy. The very nature of their work required fishermen to be able bodied and witty as their survival relied heavily on both physical strength and astuteness in solving life-threatening problems. Their stamina and knowledge required for surviving at sea were achieved at the expense of eloquence of speech. Pretty much the opposite was happening to the 'better' cultured city dwellers whose success was attributed to education, charisma, and fluency in discourse. Pulè (2000) asserts that their work, which forced

⁶²⁴ Cottonera encompass the three Maltese fortified cities of Birgu, Isla, and Bormla, also known as Vittoriosa, Senglea, and Cospicua respectively, which overlook the Grand Harbour. In the past they hosted large fishing communities.

⁶²⁵ Carmel Pulè, *Qxur, Biċċiet u Opri tal-Baħar* (Malta, Pubblikazzjonijiet Indipendenza, 2000), 9.

them to live on the outskirts of towns and which subsequently resulted in their estrangement from the rest of the world, is the reason why, with few exceptions, the topic of fishing including its vast history, as opposed to many other Maltese historical and cultural aspects, has long been overlooked and not deemed important enough to be included in Maltese educational syllabi.⁶²⁶ Being emarginated and little understood fuelled fishermen's solidarity towards each other which, in turn, gave rise to strong fishing communities.

3.2.1 The Constituents of Resilience in Fishing Communities

An important study conducted in three Scottish locations to better understand the fundamentals of fishing communities was carried out by Natalie Ross (2015). In her study, she pinpointed three determining constituents and sources of resilience provided by fishing communities; connection to and empathy with those involved in fishing, freedom and autonomy associated with a positive fishing identity, and a closing of ranks against external threats.⁶²⁷ A close look at the results yielded from an in-depth analysis of the interviews and observations related to the community aspect carried out for this study reveal that the same criteria could be observed locally as well.

3.2.1.1 Resilience Ensuing from Solidarity and Empathy

The most important contributing factor to resilience provided by the community is the overall sense of empathy and compassion fishermen share because of their way of life; one characterised by uncertainty, risk, and hardship. As Ross (2015) puts it;

Fishing is not only one of the most physically dangerous occupations but it is also one where the outcomes of an individual fishing trip or fishing season are uncertain. Weather conditions, the abundance or mix of species on the grounds, and market prices on landing are all constantly changing and unpredictable factors that people in the fishing industry deal with on a daily basis.⁶²⁸

Since all fishermen share these factors, empathy for each other is strong which automatically leads to solidarity. This strong sense of community enables them to cope with their way of life.⁶²⁹

⁶²⁶ *ibid.*

⁶²⁷ Natalie Ross, 'Understanding the Fishing 'Community': The Role of Communities of the Mind', *Sociologia Ruralis*, Iv, 3 (2015), 309.

⁶²⁸ *ibid.*, 314-5.

⁶²⁹ *ibid.*, 315.

The most basic and fundamental question the Maltese fishermen who partook in this study were asked in relation to the topic of fishing communities was whether they show solidarity towards one other. The greatest part of the fishermen answered in the affirmative without any hesitation. The answers provided to the question as to how they offer their solidarity were manifold and are presented in the following table.

1.	They help one another when hauling a boat onshore and when launching it back to sea.
2.	When fishermen are a long distance out at sea, they continuously check on each other via VHF radio transmission to make sure everyone is ok.
3.	During stormy weather fishermen take it in turns to be on the lookout of the moored boats and to check that none gets loose.
4.	Some fishermen go out fishing in groups, so nobody needs to go out at sea on his own.
5.	When a boat stops at sea others quickly succour to tow the boat back to port.
6.	Veteran fishermen are more than happy to show younger fishermen how to mend nets and give them practical tips on successful fishing.
7.	Before heading back to port fishermen ask others who are to prolong their stay whether they need anything, especially in foul weather and choppy seas.
8.	If fishermen spot something amiss with another fisherman's boat including accumulation of water, slackening of knots, and loosening of the awning they quickly inform the respective owner.
9.	They inform each other about an important upcoming meeting and letters that require attention. They also tell each other about new regulations to make sure that everyone is updated.
10.	Fishermen tend to lend each other mechanical spare parts required for immediate operation not to lose time waiting for the shipment and delivery of an order which could take days on end.
11.	They help each other loosen or cut off nets that get tangled in the boats' propellers while out at sea.
12.	Fishermen who find lost nettings, longlines or traps at sea pick them up and return them to their respective owners.

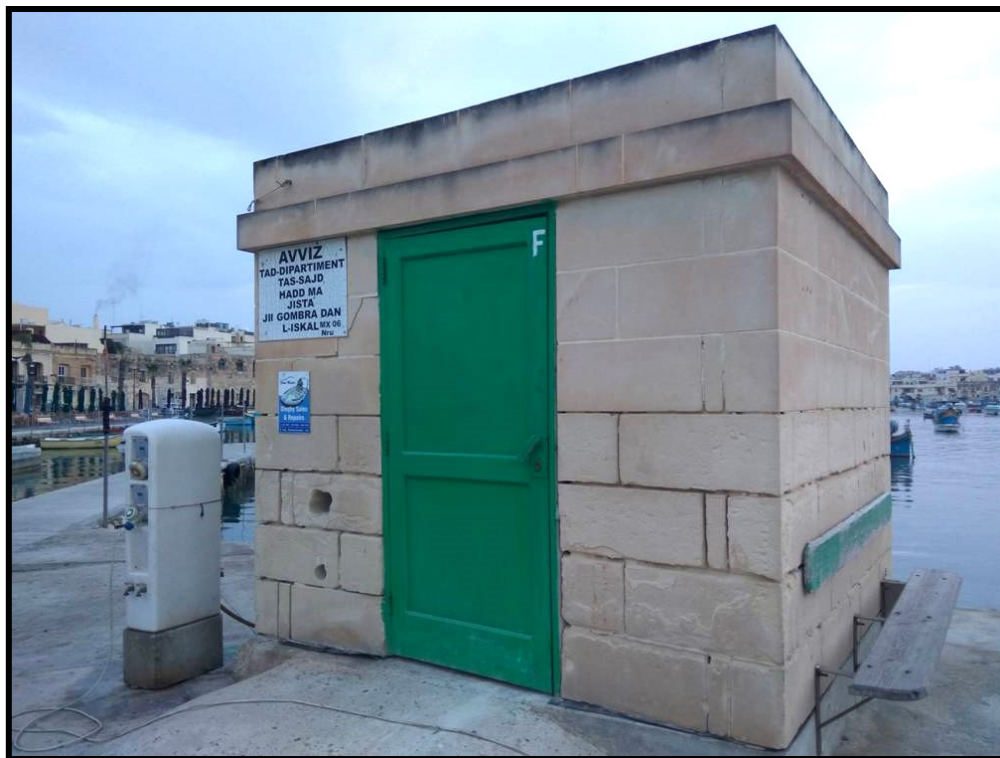
Table 9: The support Maltese fishermen provide each other with

Of the above, the help provided in the hauling and launching of boats is the easiest to witness, it being a frequent onshore activity that requires both group effort and coordination. It arises from the need to take good care of the fishing boats which, if left unattended, sustain damage that can become extensive or beyond repair. Being statically positioned in the sea for long periods of time results in

adverse effects caused by both chemical reactions and the biological life that seeks shelter by attaching itself to the boat's hull.⁶³⁰ The process by which a wooden boat is taken onshore for its routine cleaning and maintenance every three months or so is both time consuming and labour intensive. Help is provided without being asked as explained by a fisherman;

*Ilbiereh qieghed fejn wiehed jien u kunna bilqieghde fejn il-każin u għamel hekk. Ghidtlu x'int tura? Qalli ha mmur għax ha jvura Toni. Għax l-użanza hekk hi. Għax ha tvura int, jiġu jgħinuk.*⁶³¹

If the heavy-duty winch needed for the operation is electrically operated and kept under lock and key, the keeper must be called beforehand to provide access to the machine. This is not necessary with manually operated winches. Irrespective of the type of winch, the hauling process requires the collaboration of other fishermen that happen to be around to give a helping hand in whatever is required. The larger the boat, the more people needed. At the outset, fishermen need to ascertain that the slipway (m. *skal*) intended for use is free of any obstacles and that the landing space required for maintenance works will be available for several consecutive days so not to obstruct fellow fishermen.



Picture 6: A winch room at Marsaxlokk

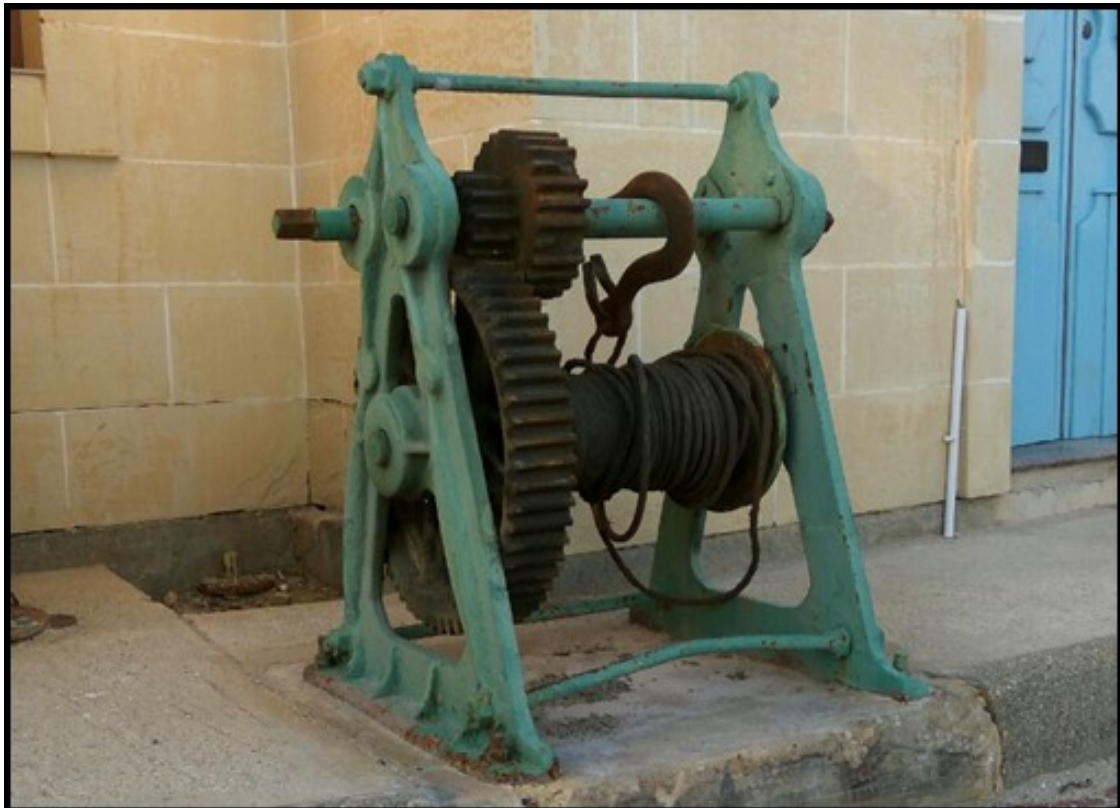
(Source: my own)

⁶³⁰ Pulè, 34.

⁶³¹ Yesterday I was sitting next to a fellow and we were sitting at a club and he did like this. I asked him what he was looking at. He told me that he had to leave because Toni was launching his boat. Because that is the custom. When you are launching, they come forward to help you.



Picture 7: The mechanical winch inside the room
(Source: my own)



Picture 8: A manual winch at Marsascale
(Source: my own)



Picture 9: A twenty-one-foot *luzzu* brought inside the slipway in preparation for hauling

(Source: my own)

The operation commences once enough fishermen gather at the site, upon which the thick rope extending from the winch is tied to a rope affixed to loops on either side of the boat's prow (m. *msielet/widnejn*). The mast (m. *ansalun/arblu*) usually used for the boat's awning (m. *kabuž*) is fastened to the washboards halfway along the boat's length with both ends extending from the sides. Fishermen position themselves on either side of the extended mast to keep the boat steady and prevent any inclinations whilst another positions himself at the front to keep the hauling ropes in place throughout the process. Once all the preparations are seen to and everyone is in place, the boat is pulled on the fixed wooden beams along the slipway and moved unto skids (m. *parati*) further up. The skids that emerge from underneath the boat as it is being pulled onshore are quickly positioned at the fore. Once the landing site is reached, the boat is kept steady on the skids by propelling it against boat chocks (m. *posti*). The same procedure is adhered to whilst launching the boat back to sea. In this case, however, the winch is not needed. Fishermen coordinate and work as a team throughout the process which could be discerned from the ongoing communication amongst them to ascertain a smooth operation. Lack of harmony would result in casualties and extensive damage to the boat. The help thus received is reciprocated amongst the fishermen when their respective boats need to be hauled and launched; a mutual understanding that has been in place for generations.



Picture 10: Fishermen getting everything ready for the operation
(Source: my own)



Picture 11: Fishermen pushing the boat along the slipway
(Source: my own)



Picture 12: Fishermen keeping the *luzzu* steady whilst another propels it against boat chocks
(Source: my own)



Picture 13: The re-launching of another *luzzu* on which maintenance work has been completed
(Source: my own)



Picture 14: An old photo taken at Xlendi showing fishermen helping each other haul a boat

(Source: Pinterest)⁶³²

Apart from the examples provided in table 9, which outline common occurrences, all fishermen claimed that they would not hesitate to provide help in any sort of accident. A case in point would be the story of a fisherman who saved a fellow fisherman from certain death. As with many fisher incidents, it took place during a spell of foul weather. With the situation being more precarious than usual, the fisherman was constantly on the lookout of his surroundings while going about his work. Others were already heading back to port but he and another fellow fisherman working in the vicinity decided to prolong their stay. On one of his regular glances in the other boat's direction, the fisherman could not glimpse the other fisher. It occurred to him that he might have descended below deck, nonetheless, he decided to make sure everything was in order and approached the boat only to discover that it was unoccupied. He quickly scanned the surroundings and saw the fisherman overboard. After only a few minutes in the water he was already struggling to keep afloat considering it was a cold February day and the water's temperature was very low. With a lot of struggling the fisherman managed to bring the other on board. In the meantime, the unattended boat, whose engine was still running, was heading towards land. To this end, the fisherman quickly turned his own boat to pursue the other. When he came abreast the unattended boat, the latter's owner jumped over and

⁶³² Picture 14. An old photo of Xlendi showing a group of fellow fishermen helping each other hauling a boat. Cf. Pinterest.

took control of his vessel. Without the rescuer's intervention both boat and owner would have perished.

A few fishermen were hesitant when the topic of solidarity was broached. Their initial reluctance turned out to reflect the fishermen's reserve at disclosing the location of yielding fishing grounds and/or the abundance of their catch. It is a known fact that fishermen are secretive about their success. Some put it down to unfriendliness and lack of solidarity, but it would seem to be more of a survival strategy. In a fisherman's words 'it cannot be otherwise' and went on to recall the Maltese saying '*ghal kull ghadma hawn mitt kelb*' (there are a hundred dogs for every bone) which perfectly describes the rife fishing competition. When the question was rephrased to better reflect what was being asked, all the fishermen answered that help is always readily offered to fellow fishermen irrespective of the circumstances or any reservations they might have for each other. In the words of a fisherman, 'in times of need even the worst of enemies forget their differences and go out of their way to help each other.'

One particular fisherman stood out from the rest in his assertion of the animosity fishermen display towards each other. He told the story of the occasion when he and a friend of his were unloading several empty storage boxes from their boat. Unaware of his presence, another fisherman approached his friend and asked him how many boxes of fish they had made. The friend replied that they had only managed to fill in twelve boxes worth of fish to which the fisherman making the inquiry seemed disgruntled and retaliated that he did not believe him considering they had just unloaded a considerable larger number of boxes. Upon explaining that the vast majority were empty, and intended to return them to the proprietor, the fisherman seemed satisfied and left. Upon telling the story, the fisherman explained that the hatred is rife, and jealousy predominates in fishing communities thus the need to distinguish himself from the others.

The reasons for his assertions and detachment from the rest of the fishermen demanded an explanation. Multiple factors could have attributed to his perception of fishing communities. To begin with, it could be argued that, unlike the rest, he did not come from a family entrenched in fishing. By not pertaining to a fishing family, he was not brought up in an environment characterised by robustness. Being better educated than his counterparts, as evidenced by his eloquence of speech, made him stand out even more. Having dealt with a rough life from the very beginning, the rest of the fishermen appear brusque by comparison. The inability to express themselves in restrained tones does not make fishermen any less friendly but it can set them out as unsociable. Finally, even though

he has an affinity to life at sea, he is more preoccupied with expanding his fishing venture into a commercial business. This much could be deduced from his claims of not being interested in pursuing a life at sea per se but aims at achieving something grander from the enterprise whilst running a parallel business on land. The last characteristic could be the most telling of his assertions. The fishing community is strongly bound to its commitment to fishing and to life at sea. Indeed, fishing goes beyond being a mere occupation and can be better described as a way of life, a phenomenon outsiders encounter difficulties to comprehend. To this end, it could be argued that the fisherman in question cannot completely empathise with a fishermen's way of life.

A veteran professional fisherman from Marsaxlokk who touched upon the topic of secrecy and curiosity as to others' catches, fishing grounds and fishing techniques during his interview explained that fishermen are not envious on a personal level but are envious in terms of work as they want to learn more and continuously better themselves to be as successful and as skilful as the best amongst them.

Another aspect that is characterised by both risk and uncertainty and which mitigates solidarity is the income. Fishermen are not paid against the number of hours worked nor do bountiful catches guarantee a substantial income.⁶³³ A strong sense of community prevails in trying to minimise the risk of failure through the adoption of a share-based payment system. Several Maltese fishermen still abide to this system whereby the expenses incurred by the fishing trip in terms of fuel, oil and ice for fish preservation need to be deducted from the income. The remaining sum is subsequently divided in two equal parts. One part is intended to cover all the boat's expenses including the costs needed for machine and netting maintenance amongst others. Any money which may be left from this sum becomes the prerogative of the captain. The second half constitutes the crew's wages and is equally divided amongst them. As explained by McGoodwin (2001);

Share-payment compensation systems promote cooperative behaviour, making fishers co-participants in a common endeavour, at the same time spreading among them the risks and uncertainties of that endeavour. And because they are jointly involved in a common endeavour, important decisions aboard fishing vessels are usually arrived at in a consensual manner.⁶³⁴

The share-payment compensation system is one of the surviving strategies adopted by fishermen on a community level which further promotes resilience through adaptability. Other than working

⁶³³ James R. McGoodwin, *Understanding the Cultures of Fishing Communities: A Key to Fisheries Management and Food Security* (Rome, FAO, 2001), 29. <<https://www.fao.org/3/Y1290E/y1290e00.htm>>.

⁶³⁴ *ibid.*

together and sharing all the risks and uncertainties, fishermen also enjoy spending time together. A stroll along any fishing village's coastline attests to this reality. Retired fishermen can be seen seated in groups on waterfront benches while others can be spotted talking to one another while going about their work. Whatever the situation all fishermen talk animatedly about their catches and experiences at sea or else talk about the day's events. Still others talk about the problems they encounter daily or share some tips and knowledge with others. A deep analysis of the weather forecast is to be expected on all occasions whilst veteran fishermen love to reminisce and tell stories of long-gone days.

Apart from observing these interactions, the fishermen who participated in this study were explicitly asked whether they meet up for a chat. Practically all the fishermen, irrelevant of the village they hail from, answered in the affirmative with some also specifying their meeting place which, as mentioned above, is usually either a garage or along the coastline. Still others decide on a place where they could chat over a beer. Only three fishermen claimed that they rarely meet with others due to their busy schedule thus ruling out antagonism as the reason for not doing so. A Marsalforn fisherman explained that meeting up with others is becoming increasingly difficult since the number of fishermen in the said locality is continuously dwindling. A strong sense of community and the positivism it emanates could be especially detected in St. Paul's Bay. Apart from meeting at customary places they also get together for Christmas lunch. As one from the locality explained, '*Aħna kollha magħqudin. Vera magħqudin hawnhekk. Anki jkun maltemp u hekk ħsiebna f'ħaddieħor u nċemplulu u hekk.*'⁶³⁵

As discussed in the introduction, communities extend beyond localities. Fishermen empathise with others hailing from other fishing places 'through shared occupational bonds and a mutual understanding of, or empathy with, risk and uncertainty.' In other words, communities are formed through feeling togetherness;⁶³⁶ a deep feeling which prevails amongst Maltese fishermen. This study revealed how friendships span across all the fishing villages and is also pronounced between those that are located furthest apart. Indeed, fishermen hailing from Marsaxlokk, a village situated at the southern-most tip of Malta, have friends from the sister island Gozo which lies off the northern coast of Malta. A retired *Xlukkajr*⁶³⁷ fisherman undertakes regular trips to Gozo to spend time with his Gozitan fishermen friends. Likewise, another *Xlukkajr* fisherman thinks of Gozo as a second home. Similarly, a Marsascala fisherman and his son take a week off work in December to spend in Gozo

⁶³⁵ We are united. We are very united here. Even when stormy, we think of the others and call them amongst others.

⁶³⁶ Ross, 315-6.

⁶³⁷ *Xlukkajr* (p. *Xlukkajri*) is the name by which a person from Marsaxlokk is known.

and catch up with their *Mġarrin*⁶³⁸ fisher friends. A strong bond also exists between St. Paul's Bay and *Mġarrin* fishermen. A fisherman from the former explained that St. Paul's Bay is prone to north-eastern winds which can cause extensive damage to the boats moored within its harbour. To this end, fishermen from the area are left with no option other than to take their boats to Mġarr, Gozo for shelter. He explained that *Mġarrin* fishermen are always ready to offer him and other St. Paul's Bay fishermen their mooring space whenever possible. He reciprocates by purchasing any material they might need from Malta and delivering it himself whenever visiting Gozo. Fishermen from both localities have thus formed a strong alliance and sense of solidarity which is expressed in help whenever needed. The sentiment of the natural bond formed between fishermen, irrespective of their village of origin, was perfectly captured by a St. Paul's Bay fisherman saying '*Fejn hemm il-baħar għandi l-ħbieb*' (I have friends wherever there is the sea).

Pulè (2000) notes that coastal people are emotionally much closer to one another than those living in cities to the extent that a person hailing from a coastal community will be at ease when mingling with other countries' coastal people even if they have never met before since they share the same lifestyle, face the same problems, and most importantly derive their living from a common element; the sea. Even the attire seems to conform as it has developed with one purpose in mind common to all these communities; to resist the cold.⁶³⁹ A veteran fisherman put this sentiment into words simply as '*In-nies qisha hekk; tigbed lejn xulxin*' (it seems that people are just like that; they are pulled to each other). This holds true for all the fishermen interviewed to the extent that a good number of them who have been abroad have formed friendships with foreign fishermen. A Gozitan fisherman learned the technique required to catch scabbard fish (m. *xabli*) from his Italian fisher friends. He also learned how to catch shrimps using specially designed traps the like of which had never been utilised in Malta from friendships formed with Spanish fishermen. He claims to be the only Maltese fisherman who catches them thus with the bounty being served as a delicacy at his own restaurant. Another interviewee admitted to having Sicilian fisher friends, specifically from Syracuse, with whom he also had the opportunity to work. A fisherman from St. Paul's Bay explained that Maltese and Italian fishermen cooperate smoothly and understand each other perfectly. Indeed, Italian fishermen refrain from fishing in the vicinity of the Maltese so as not to disrupt them. An *Mġarri* fisherman explained that Italian fishermen are just like them and moved on to tell the story of the occasion when a Gozitan boat owner reported an Italian fisherman which got him arrested for what was thought to be a

⁶³⁸ *Mġarrin* (s. *Mġarri*) is the name by which people from Mġarr, Gozo, are known.

⁶³⁹ Pulè, 9.

transgression. Knowing full well that he did not commit any infringement, all the Maltese and Gozitan fishermen petitioned for his liberation which was granted shortly after.

3.2.1.2 Resilience Ensuing from a Shared Fishing Identity

The alluring power of the sea is overwhelming with fishing communities forming strong bonds with the sea that cannot be easily broken. Fishing is not only about the job. It provides fishermen with their identity. It makes them who they are. Indeed, 'fishing can be best understood as a way of life rather than a means of economic income and it defines fishers' identity as individuals, households and communities.'⁶⁴⁰ A number of marine archaeologists maintain that the sea not only provides fishermen with a livelihood but it also provides them with a sense of identity and belonging that goes back centuries.⁶⁴¹ The mutual understanding of this magnetism binds fishermen even closer to one another and further defines their strong sense of community.

Fishing per se requires fishermen to be self-reliant, resilient, and independent since they are left to their own devices in the deployment of knowledge, experience, and skills while out at sea. As one fisherman put it, it requires a certain amount of stamina. Self-reliance and self-responsibility are part and parcel of being a fisherman which manifests itself in freedom and autonomy. This 'explains why some fishermen continue to fish to this day without being able to secure a viable income.'⁶⁴²

Ross (2015) observed that the changing fabric of coastal communities has led households to secure an income from several other sources. This sort of diversification is another proof of the communities' resilience. Fishing communities have stood the test of time thanks to their ability of adapting, however, diversifying away from fishing comes at both a personal and emotional cost. The strong level of autonomy is something that fishermen do not want to lose and are not ready to compromise. Independence and self-employment are valued over being employed by others.⁶⁴³ By forcing fishermen to renounce their ability to deploy their skills and knowledge as well as to forsake their autonomy is equivalent to robbing them of their identity. This explains why the need for job diversification to secure an income for themselves and their families has induced many Maltese

⁶⁴⁰ Elaine O'Driscoll-Adam. "Fishing for a Sense of Cultural Identity and Place." 2014. The Boolean: Snapshots of Doctoral Research at University College Cork. 31 October 2015
<<http://publish.ucc.ie/boolean/pdf/2014/00/25-odriscolladam-2014-00-en.pdf>> 129.

⁶⁴¹ *ibid.*, page 128.

⁶⁴² Ross, 317.

⁶⁴³ *ibid.*, 318.

fishermen to seek jobs elsewhere whilst retaining fishing on a part-time basis. They could never bring themselves to give up fishing completely.

All the interviewees asserted to their love of the sea, and many tried putting into words the incomprehensible spellbinding effect it holds over them. A fisherman explained that fishing is not a job but a passion which commands your whole being. Many put it down to something intrinsic which flows through their whole being, is impossible to resist, and works on the same principals of an addiction. The latter was also remarked upon by Pollnac and Poggie (2008) and as mentioned in section 2.6.1. As an interviewee for this study explained;

*Jiena għalija l-baħar qisu druga. Meta ma mmurx fuq il-baħar ma nkunx nof fejn jiene. Eżempju bħalissa m'ahniex qegħdin immorru fuq il-baħar għax qegħdin nirrangaw id-dghajsa. Għadna xohrej n-fl-ort. Xahar u nofs, xohrej n-fl-ort. Jiena ma nħossnix sewwa. Ara l-aħħar darba kien hemm wiehed habib tiegħi qalli imxi ha mmorru kellu giex nassiet qgħadna nerfghuhom. Qisni kint il-ġenna tal-ort. Halli mbagħad nagħmel ħmistox oħra ma mmurx fuq il-baħar, imma dik il-kwarta li mort qisni ħadt id-druga u qtajtha u terġa' tihodha x'hin tmur fuq il-baħar.*⁶⁴⁴

A veteran fisherman who has lived his whole life at sea explained that if given the chance to start afresh he would not have it any other way and would relive his life as a fisherman irrespective of the hard work it entails with another asserting that he loves the sea even though it tried to claim his life on numerous occasions. Even when not at work, fishermen find themselves heading towards the sea. A part-timer explained that when driving back home from his land-based job, he always takes a much longer route just to catch a glimpse of the sea. Another part-timer claimed that he always spends some time by the sea before heading to his land-based job. Yet another declared that he would readily give up his car but could never do without a boat. Regardless it being one of the most dangerous and strenuous of jobs, many of them consider fishing to be at par with a hobby. One fisherman remarked; *'Jekk ixxarrab saqajk fil-baħar ma tnixxifhomx.'*⁶⁴⁵

Their fascination with the sea is also attested to by their start out as fishermen. One of the oldest fishermen approached for this study, being eighty at the time of the interview, recalled his childhood days when he used to secretly follow his father to the shore and make his presence known only when

⁶⁴⁴ For me the sea is like a drug. I am not myself when I am not at sea. Now we are not going out since we are repairing the boat. We are stranded ashore for two months. A month and a half to two months. I am not feeling well. Last time, a friend of mine asked me to accompany him to haul on board a few traps. I was in cloud nine. I could face another fifteen days ashore, but that quarter of an hour had the same effect on me as a drug and I quit it and will take again when I am at sea.

⁶⁴⁵ Once you soak your feet in seawater it is impossible to ever get them dry again.

it was too late for his father to take him all the way back home thus leaving him with no choice other than to take him out with him. Another interesting start to a life at sea was provided by a fifty-five-year-old fisherman whose mother ran a bar at Marsalforn's seafront. He used to spend hours on end fishing with his father's small old boat after school hours while his mother was at work. Two other fishermen explained that the mesmerising power the sea held over them strengthened their resolve to pursue a life at sea irrespective of being seasick during the first few fishing expeditions. Still others either neglected or skipped school altogether for the sake of fishing.

An array of different answers was given when asked what they love most about their job with the most popular being the sense of independence and autonomy it offers. As a fisherman put it, '*L-imghallem int u l-lavrant int*', (you are both the master and the worker). This corresponds perfectly with the results yielded by Ross' (2015) study as outlined above.

A fisherman who was left with no choice other than to seek work on land due to physical ailments found it difficult to adapt to his new working conditions including the need to take orders from his superiors. Another interviewee happened to be one of the myriads of Maltese who, back in the seventies, sought work in Libya. His working experience abroad lasted for two years and five months during which he happily worked on board a foreign fishing vessel. His working attributes were highly recommended to the extent that he was offered an alternate job by a divers' coordinator at the termination of his previous contract. Seeing as the new job imposed greater restrictions, he immediately handed his notice and headed back to Malta.

Other fishermen value autonomy above anything else to the extent that they appreciate working on their own even within the fishing sector itself. They prefer to operate from a small-sized fishing vessel and deploy fishing techniques that can be managed single-handed rather than work as part of a crew. This preference holds true even for some fishermen who have the luxury of acting as captains by recruiting others on board their boats. They explained that by so doing, they automatically open themselves to a myriad of opinions as to where the best fishing spots are. Comparison of catches with those made on board other boats is also common. They further explained that fishermen who depend on others cannot go out fishing at their leisure. Autonomy also enables fishermen to carry out tasks that meet their personal working schedule rather than having to adapt to other people's exigencies. They are free to extend a successful fishing expedition or return to port in face of potential foul weather without being opposed.

The second most common answer given when asked what they like best about their job was the sense of achievement experienced following a bountiful catch or landing a beautiful specimen. The thrill of the catch is even more exciting than the money it fetches. In their research Pollnac and Poggie (2008) report that fishermen;

Like the thrill of the hunt, the challenge of facing the power and expanse of the sea, and the overall adventure of pitting oneself against the elements and finding fish...a dimension of job satisfaction that is not usually found in other occupations—a self-actualization component including "adventure" and "challenge" that has repeatedly emerged in such studies.⁶⁴⁶

Three other reasons given by an equal number of fishermen are the peace of mind and relaxing sensation while out at sea, the lack of routine characterised by the element of surprise, and the love of the sea per se. With regards the first, a fisherman explained that the relaxing factor is especially experienced when he loses sight of land and detaches from the rest of the world. According to another, the utter sense of peace makes him loose the concept of time. The second reason given in equal measure is the non-repetitive nature of the job. A fisherman with a long career at sea explained that even when he was required to spend two weeks at sea at one go he was always content with the knowledge that a respite from fishing would follow during which he would undertake altogether different tasks. Furthermore, the routine is automatically disrupted by the seasonal changes with winter restricting work to land and summer characterised by more days at sea. This working schedule differs from the ones imposed by the greater part of other jobs which require employees to stick to a fixed timetable day in, day out. The lack of conformity is also characterised by the element of surprise which keep fishermen on edge. It enables them to live the experience with anticipation. The third reason provided was the love of the sea with fishermen explaining that being out at sea is enough to make them happy.

As mentioned earlier, some fishermen consider fishing to be at par with a hobby irrespective of the hard work involved. Other reasons given for being passionate about their job include the fascination with nature, the sense of adventure and the love they harbour for boats. Any remaining doubts as to whether fishermen truly love what they do were eliminated upon being asked if they would give up fishing should they be offered an alternate job. All the fishermen answered in the negative with a part-timer claiming that he would rather stop working altogether than taking up an alternate part-time; all that is except for four. Even though the latter claimed that they would change their job, the reasons

⁶⁴⁶ Richard B. Pollnac and John J. Poggie, 'Happiness, Well-being and Psychocultural Adaptation to the Stresses Associated with Marine Fishing', *Human Ecology Review*, xv, 2 (2008), 196.

given for so doing reveal ulterior motives other than a lack of passion for fishing. The first of the four happened to be one of the fishermen who attributed his love for fishing to the peace of mind and tranquillity it offers. Unfortunately, he is no longer able to be at ease due to the frequent patrol boats visits that are continuously approaching fishermen at work to check if they are abiding to regulations. As a result, fishermen are apprehensive and in constant fear of committing transgressions the least of which would result in heavy penalties and fines that would more than likely ruin them.

If given the option, the second fisherman would have preferred to keep fishing as a hobby rather than a part-time job on whose subsidiary income depended. Working with the shrimp-dredge and available to sell his catch on weekends only, imposed great pressure to work every other night following a day toiling at his full-time land-based job to secure a substantial catch to sell on Sundays. Being retired, nowadays he enjoys the occasional fishing expedition with fellow fishermen for the sheer joy of the experience. The third fisherman, who also happens to be a part-timer, explained that he would give up fishing only if offered another sea related job, the reason being that fishing involves very hard work. The fourth and last fisherman to declare that he would drop fishing instantly retracted his comment by declaring that he *might* consider dropping it. His reluctance resulted from his love of autonomy emphasising the point by telling the story of the time he refused a job due to not wanting to take orders from others.

As with the above, many fishermen had stories of alternate work opportunities to tell, with all declining in favour of fishing. The youngest fisherman, being only twenty-three at the time of the interview and fishing on a part-time basis, explained that he had already tried his luck twice at an alternate employment but failed to stick to both jobs for longer than a month. A full-timer close to his retirement age had also tried his luck at a land-based job back in his heyday but ended up returning to full-time fishing and since then has never looked back. The same can be said of a full-time forty-four-year-old fisherman who could not stick to working on land and returned to fishing. A fifty-year-old part-timer talked about his ability in undertaking all types of hands-on jobs which could procure him an interminable possibility of alternate part-time jobs. Nevertheless, he always declined offers which could have seen him better off for the sake of fishing.

The story a fifty-seven-year-old Gozitan full-timer had to tell demonstrates clearly that the love for fishing never fades. When young he enjoyed occasional fishing trips with his uncles but at the age of nineteen decided to migrate to Australia and make a life for himself. The great desire to take up fishing compelled him to return to Malta after seventeen years, this time, with a family of his own.

Upon his return he took up professional fishing on a full-time basis and has remained in the picture ever since. Yet another full-time Gozitan fisherman older by just a year had no choice but to sell the fishing boat he owned in partnership with his brother because of the disputes that ensued following their father's demise. To this end, he sought alternate employment. Eventually, he was offered a job as a mooring man with the Gozo Channel which he accepted. Shortly after he was approached by the person who had purchased the fishing boat he had conjointly owned with his brother and offered him the opportunity to work for him on board the boat. He accepted the offer in a heartbeat. During the interview, he owned up to the folly but moved on to proudly state that he never lived to regret his decision. In his words, '*Mohhi hawn jahdem*' (my mind works here). Since then, he took up solo fishing. A *Xlukkajr* full-timer in his early sixties has undertaken many sea related jobs including working on board a dredger and sailing yachts while keeping fishing on a part-time basis. Eventually, he decided to take up fishing as a full-time profession. At one point his brother suggested working in a hospital and instructed him to procure a conduct certificate which would have secured him the job, however, he shrugged off the idea of ever giving up fishing. A fifty-two-year-old full-time fisherman hailing from Birżebbuġa bought himself a *luzzu* with the intention of following in his father's footsteps by becoming a fisherman himself. A mere week after purchasing his boat he decided to leave for Switzerland to work in a hotel at the age of just seventeen but soon found himself regretting the decision. He admitted to finding the country fascinating, but he could not get accustomed to the idea of not being able to glimpse the sea. To this end, he returned to Malta at the first opportunity. By so doing he cut down the supposedly six-month working experience to just three days.

Even though not offered an alternate job, the love borne by fishermen towards their job is reflected by a fisherman's refusal to be boarded out by health professionals following a long-term sickness from fear of not being allowed to ever fish again. Another elderly fisherman who similarly experienced health issues could not go fishing for a long spell of time. His ailing kidney caused him dizziness and an upset stomach whenever he tried venturing out at sea. Nevertheless, he kept his boat at sea with the hope that he would feel better and be able to take up what he loved doing most. In the end, he had to give up on the idea and was left with no choice other than to haul the boat ashore after three months of waiting in vain. Luckily, at the time of writing, he was faring much better and was able to resume his job. The love for the sea led a thirty-year-old fisherman to impede his father from selling the family *luzzu* which he had always fancied himself working from. Recently, he bought yet another *luzzu* to expand his ventures. Similarly, Pollnac and Poggie (2008) noticed that;

Successful fishermen have low fungibility. They are strongly attached to their occupation and it makes them happy. They resist leaving the fishery, and when they do enter a new occupation, they frequently find that it fails to satisfy their basic need for adventure. They become unhappy and try to return to fishing; hence, in the face of a changing world where management is trying to reduce the sizes of fishing fleets, the fishermen cannot easily adapt—they lack the resilience to cope with the dull, boring alternatives available in most communities.⁶⁴⁷

From the narratives of both the full-time and part-time fishermen who participated in this research, one can sense a profound pride in what they do. Fishermen are highly devoted to fishing. Indeed;

Among many of its practitioners the fishing occupation often confers not only important markers of self-identity and individual pride, but a “satisfaction bonus” as well, which cannot be measured on economic ground alone. Hence, among small-scale fishers who choose to work at sea year after year, fishing is regarded not merely as a means of ensuring their livelihoods, but as an intrinsically rewarding activity in its own right - as a desirable and meaningful way of spending one's life. And this occupational pride and satisfaction is often seen even among people who fish for only a small part of the year, while otherwise spending most of their time in other, non-fishing activities.⁶⁴⁸

The revelation of the intense passion harboured for fishing should enable outsiders including policymakers to better understand fishermen's resilience in sticking to their job in face of adversities which most often come with a considerable loss in income. As an interviewee put it, *‘ghax tkun minnek li trid tmur fuq il-baħar ghax il-bqija x'hin tagħmel plus u minus jibqagħlek daqs wiehed jahdem l-art jew inqas bl-ispejjeż u hekk.*⁶⁴⁹ As McGoodwin (2001), explains,

The foregoing factors prompt many fishers to tenaciously adhere to the occupation and to continue fishing even after it has become economically unrewarding - which has perplexed economists and fisheries officials alike. Thus, while economic rationality as it is commonly understood may not explain small-scale fishers' tenacity in the face of diminishing returns, existential rationality perhaps does.⁶⁵⁰

Fishing provides fishermen with a positive identity on which they depend to define who they are. It takes a fisherman to thoroughly understand the innate sense of wholesomeness that fishing provides which is the reason why they comprehend one another and form a strong sense of community.

⁶⁴⁷ Pollnac and Poggie, 199.

⁶⁴⁸ McGoodwin, 14.

⁶⁴⁹ You are propelled to maintain a life at sea only because it is part of your being considering you are left with the same amount of income, or even less, as earned by a land-based job once the costs incurred by the fishing expeditions are deducted.

⁶⁵⁰ *ibid.*

A shared sense of identity also emanates from their understanding of each other's strong attachment to the boats as attested by the interviews; their boats being how they can pursue a life at sea and exercise their autonomy. One of them undergoes the painstaking task of bringing his *frejgatina* on shore at the end of each fishing day to garage it for the night. Some fishermen compared the bond they have with their boat to the one developed by car enthusiasts whereas others think of their boat as a family member. Apart from being an important tool in executing their work, the love fishermen harbour for their boat is an added incentive to keep them in pristine condition with an interviewee claiming, '*il-mara tiegħi tgħidli li kieku d-dar inżommha bħal-luzzu, kieku d-dar tagħna hekk! Jigifieri d-dar ma nagħmel xejn. Veru ta! U x'hin tiġi tara l-luzzu, għax anki niżbghu daww il-kuluri, kollox eżatt.*'⁶⁵¹

Most often, fishermen sell their boat only because they either reach their retirement age and have no one to pass it unto, or because they need to upgrade or downgrade in terms of dimensions. In both cases, fishermen feel saddened by the prospect of departing paths with their boat. In one case, a fisherman had to sell the boat only because it was inherited conjointly with his brother. Since their partnership fell through, he had no option other than to let it go. Others retain their boat beyond their retirement from lack of want to sell it. As a fisherman put it, the boats are the only family he has left and are his apple's eye. Many of the retired fishermen transferred their boat unto their fisher sons whilst retaining the capacity to use it whenever they feel like it. In one case, it was the younger fisherman who refrained his father from selling the family's *luzzu*. The need for better working facilities compelled him to purchase a much larger *luzzu* while still retaining the former. He answered in the negative when asked whether he will ever be interested in selling claiming that both *luzzijiet* are his pride and joy and he could not bear the idea of them pertaining to anybody else other than himself.

A fisherman who has had his *luzzu* for fifty-two years sentimentally claimed that he would rather change its every hook and nook than sell it off as it holds a special place in his heart. Some consider their boat as the key to freedom enabling them go to sea whenever they feel like it. Many develop a genuine interest in boats to the extent that they can see to their mechanical needs and infrastructure themselves. A fisherman whose passion for boats runs deep tries to avoid going on holiday abroad with his family unless the country to be visited has a boat related place. Apart from being a fisherman,

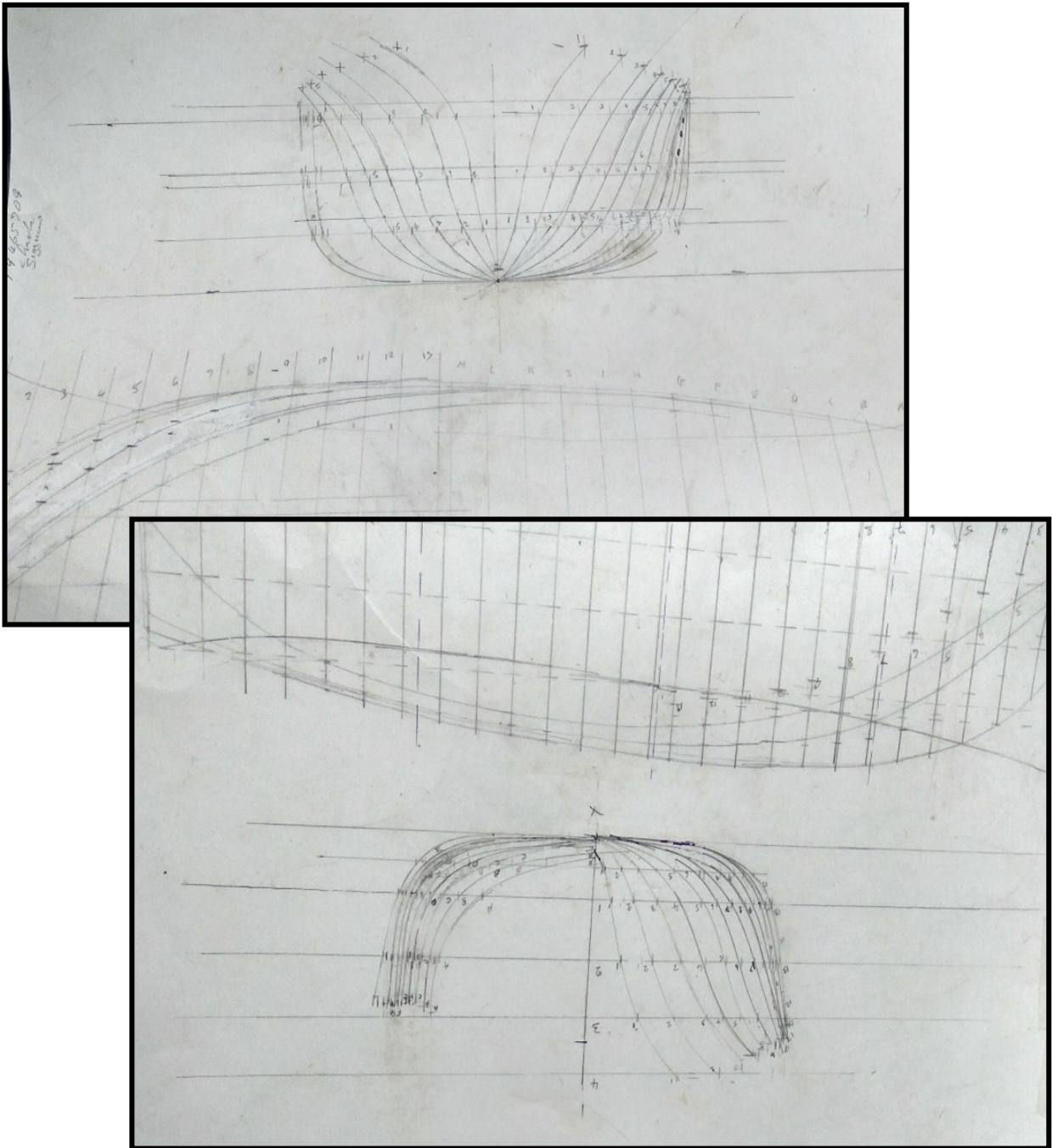
⁶⁵¹ My wife tells me that if I maintained the house as the *luzzu*, it would be perfect. I do nothing at home. Its true! But the *luzzu*, I also paint it in those colours, everything executed perfectly.

he also happens to be a carpenter, thus adding extra weight to his appreciation of boats. Amongst others, he has been to Sicily on numerous occasions and visited Licati and Mazara in Italy both of which have boat building facilities.

The fishermen's enthusiasm was evident from their willingness to show off their boat/s on the spot and from the numerous photographs they had on their mobile phones. The love borne by fishermen was also attested to by their opinion on the demolition scheme which was in place a few years back whereby fishermen were monetarily compensated for having their boat demolished to decrease the number of tuna fishing permits. Of all the fishermen interviewed, only four applied for the scheme, however, it must also be noted that few of the interviewees were in possession of a tuna fishing permit to begin with.

One of them felt sorry for having subjected his boat to demolition and witnessed the event with tears in his eyes. He still has several photos of the boat on his mobile phone and went through them while recounting its story. A fisherman who needed to downsize refrained from having his schooner demolished. Alternatively, he sold it even though the scheme would have compensated him with a much larger monetary sum. His love of the boat was the reason for his decision. He could not bear to see a seaworthy boat he had seen through from its conception being brought to a premature end. Another fisherman claimed that he always avoided going anywhere near the demolition site when a boat was being demolished. Apart from not bearing the sight, the reasons given for staying away are the boats' contribution to the local economy and their centrality in the Maltese historical and cultural heritage.

Of equal interest was the boatbuilders' perception of the demolition scheme. The late Ġużù, one of the boatbuilders interviewed, thought of it as a mortal sin seeing as many of the boats thus demolished were only fifteen to twenty years old. He always kept himself updated as to which boats were scheduled for demolition. One of the boats thus enlisted was his father's work which, even though old, had been restored to its original glory twenty years back by himself. He could not bring himself to seeing it being destroyed. The hurt he felt was not limited to his and his father's work. He felt bad about other boat builders' work as well. The love borne for their phased-out job and the boats induces the few remaining elderly retired traditional boatbuilders to construct precise and to scale boat models reminiscent of their glorious past by applying the same building techniques used in the heyday of wood boat commissioning.



Picture 15: The *blataforma* of a model *freigatina* drawn on paper by Peter Aquilina ‘*ir-Ratal*’

(Source: my own)



Picture 16: The finished model of the *freigatina* by Peter Aquilina 'ir-Ratal'
(Source: my own)



Picture 17: A model of a *freigatina* which was still in the process of being built by Peter Aquilina 'ir-Ratal'
(Source: my own)



Picture 18: Retired boat builder Peter Caruana with a project still underway
(Source: my own)



Picture 19: A Gozo boat (*dghajsa tal-Latini*) model by the Gozitan Caruana brothers
(Source: my own)



Picture 20: The boat frame templates (m. *galvijiet*) still hanging at the Caruana's family workshop even though long retired.
(Source: my own)



Picture 21: Another retired boat builder with a *frejgatina* model equipped with sails following a talk on traditional boats and fishing at the Malta Maritime Museum
(Source: my own)



Picture 22: Boat models exhibited at the annual Fish Festival (*Festa Hut*) at Marsaxlokk

(Source: my own)

3.2.1.3 Prompting Resilience by Adopting an ‘Us’ Against ‘Them’ Stance

It is clear that a strong sense of community emerges from the desire to help one another in daily chores and at times of need, and especially from a thorough comprehension of one another's passion. A shared and common understanding also helps in sticking up for each other in face of adversity. Understanding each other's dependence on and the need for a life at sea induces fishermen to cooperate when their livelihood is threatened by an array of restrictions imposed by people outside their niche who fail to fully grasp the situation. This has created ‘an us against them’ ideology.⁶⁵² In Ross' (2015) words;

This sense of marginalisation or victimisation helps to reinforce the community's sense of itself, acting as an important source of resilience through serving to strengthen community solidarity and mobilise resistance. As such, whereas empathy and compassion have emerged as key features that bring people together in fishing communities, the evidence also suggests that a perceived lack of empathy and compassion from the ‘outside world’ also reinforces a sense of community. On the one hand threats from ‘policy’, ‘science’ and the ‘public’ challenge the accumulated knowledge, experience and traditional skills that fishers customarily use as part of their business and operational strategies, undermining the very values that define the identity of a successful fisher. On the other

⁶⁵² Julie Urquhart and Tim Acott, ‘Constructing ‘The Stade’: Fishers’ and non-Fishers’ Identity and Place Attachment in Hastings, south-east England’, *Marine Policy*, xxxvii, (2013), 51-2.

hand they also create a collective feeling of defensiveness against the outside world, reinforcing a sense of togetherness.⁶⁵³

A strong sense of community shared amongst fishermen and antagonism towards outsiders is best captured by the tuna incident that occurred on Thursday, 18th June 2001 upon the sighting of a shoal of tuna in Maltese waters by fisherman Joe Bugeja. The tuna was likewise sighted by an Italian boat which did not hesitate to circle the fish, almost ramming into the Maltese fisherman in so doing. The fish was subsequently moved into international waters and enclosed in a Spanish-owned cage. Bugeja asked for the assistance of fellow fishermen via the VHF radio to which thirty or so Maltese boats jumped into action. They immediately cut their longlines and rushed over to succour Bugeja, consequently losing both their equipment and catch. The Maltese seized the cage which contained some 400 tuna and towed it back to Maltese waters. However, an Armed Forces of Malta (AFM) patrol boat, which had intercepted the call for help, ordered the Maltese to return the fish to the Italians upon arriving on the scene. The Maltese refused and blocked masked soldiers from approaching the cage. Subsequently, the soldiers fired warning shots. At least one boat was thus hit. Following heated discussions, it was finally agreed for discussion to ensue on land. The cage was subsequently towed to Malta, anchored at sea, and guarded by the AFM. The next few days saw meetings held between the Maltese Minister for Fisheries and his officials, the Italian Ambassador, the Maltese National Fishermen Cooperative and lawyers representing Italian and Maltese fishermen. In the meantime, Maltese fishermen and their families demonstrated in Valletta proclaiming they were shot at, and that the government was favouring the Italians since, at the time, it was eager to placate member states in a bid to join the EU. Surprisingly, the fishermen's cooperative told the minister to dispose of the tuna as he deemed fit from want of peace at which the Minister immediately gave the fish to the Italians. Thirty-six cooperative members declared under oath that the AFM opened fire at the Maltese at which it retaliated and claiming that the bullets found on board the hit boat did not match theirs. The disgruntled fishermen unanimously agreed to boycott the governing party's annual fish festival to which they normally donated €23,000 worth of fish leaving the government with no option other than to cancel the festival. Two weeks later, the Maltese fishermen organised their own fish barbeque at Marsaxlokk during which they staged a skit and used placards to lampoon the AFM attack and denounce the government for its betrayal.⁶⁵⁴

⁶⁵³ Ross, 320.

⁶⁵⁴ Jeremy Boissevain, 'Hotels, Tuna Pens, and Civil Society: Contesting the Foreshore in Malta', in *Contesting the Foreshore: Tourism, Society and Politics on the Coast*, Jeremy Boissevain and Tom Selwyn (eds.) Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2004, 250-1.

Several international studies revealed fishermen's refusal in identifying or reporting fellow fishermen breaking the law to the authorities (see section 1.2.3). This phenomenon was also attested to by the Maltese fishing community. A strong sense of solidarity prevailed when asked what their reaction would be if they happened to witness a fellow fisherman breaking the rules. A couple of fishermen claimed to never having found themselves in the situation thus side tracking the question. The rest of the fishermen replied that they could never bring themselves to reporting a fellow fisherman caught in the act of rule breaking to the authorities. The most they could ever come to is talk amongst themselves about what they had witnessed. The most common reason given to when asked 'why?' was their inability to report a fellow fisherman with some claiming that, seeing the circumstances, it could have easily been them. They refrain from doing unto others what they do not want to be done unto them. A fisherman explained that it is not fair to report a person who is trying to make ends meet to feed his family. They are all in the same boat and are all in the game to make a living. Another explained that it takes a fisherman to understand what induced another to break the rules (*u inti tifhmu ghax inti sajjied bħalu*). One of the reasons given for resorting to such extremes includes the need to fish following a long spell of foul weather to just earn something for the family and to meet part of the expenses incurred. Others explained that sometimes fishermen are left with no choice other than to break the rules considering they are irrelevant to the local context. To this end, one of them explained that fishermen do not break any rules seeing as many of them are ridiculous to begin with. One such rule deprives fishermen from setting their trammel nets within the inshore zones demarcated by poles set on either side of an area between the 14th of July and the 14th of February. A fisherman explained that part of the timeframe at their disposition overlaps with the swimming season. To this end fishermen refrain from setting up their nets from fear of someone getting caught in the netting. The remaining part of the timeframe is characterised by foul weather making it dangerous and unprofitable to fish further out at sea at a time when fishermen could only eek a living from the prohibited sheltered waters.

The stand fishing communities take against outside intrusion is a means of survival not just for the self but for the whole structure on which their whole existence depends. By looking at each other's back they are automatically safeguarding the community's integral cohesion. Should the sense of community disintegrate over-fishing is sure to follow. Jentoft (2000) claims that 'overfishing results when the norms of self-restraints, prudence and community solidarity have eroded...[when] their ability to communicate among themselves, to agree and to cooperate is lost.'⁶⁵⁵ Following his

⁶⁵⁵ Svein Jentoft, 'The Community: A Missing Link to Fisheries Management', *Marine Policy*, xxiv, 1 (2000), 54.

revelations, Jentoft (2000) urges fisheries' managers to incorporate the communal wellbeing into the management systems. Consequently, 'they should adopt designs that would potentially restore and reinforce the solidarity and cultural qualities of fishing communities.'⁶⁵⁶ He moves on to explain that presently the opposite is happening whereby existing management practices are disintegrating the cohesion of communities with the most detrimental being the practice of selling and purchasing of quotas.⁶⁵⁷

Being the EU's main strategy to reduce the fleet's capacity, the quota system has also been implemented by the Maltese fisheries' management system. Established with the intent of reducing the fleet targeting certain species, fishermen who had no record of their fishing history were denied a share which induced age old members to quit fishing altogether. Others managed to put off quitting by diverging their fishing effort to other species. As a result, competition ensued with fishermen already established in the alternative fisheries. Those who were given a small share which made it unworthy to fish it were left with no option other than to lease it to the big companies who were not automatically assigned a quota but had the economic means to purchase exponential quota shares from small-scale fishermen. Further havoc was caused when quota leasers started shifting to alternative fisheries as well. Consequently, the founding principles of the community and its age-old equilibrium were further shaken when the fishermen making money off their leased quota started to procure for themselves an additional income by targeting other fisheries on which other fishermen's livelihoods solely depended.

The ever-dwindling number of fishermen has also made it difficult for Maltese boat owners to recruit seasoned crew members. To make good for the serious lack of crew, foreigners started being recruited who, unlike the local fishermen steeped in tradition, lack the passion for the job and need to undertake the task out of sheer necessity. Unlike traditional small-scale fishermen, foreign recruits are paid against a monthly wage as opposed to the shared-based payment system which is founded on strong communal sentiments whereby the risks are mitigated amongst the crew members.

Jentoft (2000) explains that the fishermen that remain in the picture are left worse off since 'the downfall of one fisherman leads to the downfall of another' as they 'suffer as a group, and since they

⁶⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁵⁷ *ibid.*

also have multiplex roles in the community, the fabric of the community dissolves.' He calls the phenomenon as the 'domino theory' of fisheries management.⁶⁵⁸

3.3 The Role Played by Women

Fishing is commonly thought of as a man's business. Yet fishing has a special interest for understanding the position of women, both past and present. There is a double reason for this: for the masculine image of the industry conceals the reality of an occupation which, by removing men to sea, makes them peculiarly dependent on the work of women ashore. And this independence gives women not only more responsibility, but also the possibility of more power, both in the home and in the community.⁶⁵⁹

The idea conveyed that fishing is an exclusively male occupation underestimates the women's involvement in the enterprise which, apart from being demeaning per se, further restricts their potential. Women have made a central contribution in all spheres of fishing in almost all fisheries worldwide. Their imprint is largely felt in the processing, distribution, and preparatory work. In a few other districts women have also actively participated in the forefront activity of the enterprise; direct fishing.⁶⁶⁰

The high dependence of fishermen on their wives in all spheres of line-fishing in Scottish northeast communities has given rise to the local saying, 'No man can be a fisher and want a wife.' If a fisherman happened to be unmarried, he had no choice other than to hire a servant. The women's multifaceted tasks and contribution resulted in the said communities to be described as matriarchal.⁶⁶¹ Indeed, this holds true for a great part, if not all, fishing communities worldwide.

3.3.1 The Interviewed Women

For this study, ten women involved to different extents in the fisheries were interviewed. Even though all reside in Marsaxlokk not all originally hail from the village. Restriction to this locality resulted from the almost exclusive limitation of female involvement to the area. Indeed, it seems to be a prerogative of the village to the extent that off all the fishermen interviewed only the ones residing in

⁶⁵⁸ *ibid.*, 56.

⁶⁵⁹ Paul Thompson, 'Women in the Fishing: The Roots of Power between the Sexes', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, xxvii, 1 (1985), 3.

⁶⁶⁰ *ibid.*, 13.

⁶⁶¹ *ibid.*, 15.

Marsaxlokk happened to have wives who give/gave support in the fishing enterprise. This should not come as a surprise since the largest community of fishermen reside here with many of their wives being bred and born into fishing themselves. Of all the women interviewed, eight were *Xlukkajri*. The remaining two hailed from Marsa and Ħal Ghaxaq. The ages ranged from forty-two to eighty-seven years. It was difficult to come across younger wives since the average age of fishermen is over fifty. Additionally, the replacement rate by young fishermen is falling short of those retiring.⁶⁶² It is of interest to note that one of the interviewee's fisher husband was from Żurrieq who transferred to Marsaxlokk, whereas another played her part in the fisheries even though her husband was never a fisher himself. Similarly, some of the wives' mothers were involved in selling fish even though their husbands were not fishermen. All the women provided insight into the lives of others during their interviews, thus, even though ten formal interviews were officially conducted, a much larger group was brought into the picture. It is also worth noting that only two of the women interviewed happened to be related to fishermen who participated in this study.

Apart from the direct interviews with women involved in fisheries, all interviewed fishermen were asked about their spouse's support in the endeavour. They were also asked about the potential support provided by other women in their family. The information about the interviewed women is summarised in the following table and is being presented according to their order of appearance in the text.

⁶⁶² Victor Paul Borg, 'Fishermen on the Brink: Small-Scale Fishing is on the Way to Extinction', *Times of Malta*, 1 October 2017.

Name	Age	From	Fisher father/mother	Married to	Husband from	Fished before and/or after marrying	Sold fish before and/or after marrying	Other fisheries related tasks undertaken	Sisters who fish/ed	Daughter/s who fish/ed
Catherine	84	Marsaxlokk	Yes	FT fisherman	Marsaxlokk	Both	Both	Worked in a fish processing factory Kept record of fuel purchases and effected their payment	Yes	Yes, till her late teens
Karmena	79	Marsaxlokk	Yes	FT fisherman	Żurrieq	Both before and after	Yes	Baited longlines	Yes	Yes, when young
Rosaria	87	Marsaxlokk	Yes	Non-Fisherman	Marsaxlokk	Before	After	-----	She was an only daughter	No
Martha	73	Marsaxlokk	Yes	PT fisherman	Marsaxlokk	Neither	After	Took her father's catch for auctioning Stacking fish in boxes	Sister	Doesn't have daughters
Kitty	74	Marsaxlokk	Yes	PT fisherman	Marsaxlokk	Neither	After	Cleaned trammel nets	No	Doesn't have daughters
Ċetta	77	Marsaxlokk	Yes	FT fisherman	Marsaxlokk	After	Both	Cleaned trammel nets		No
Jennifer	52	Hal Ghaxaq	No	PT fisherman	Marsaxlokk	Neither	After	Also sold fish purchased at fish market	No	No
Sharon	42	Marsaxlokk	Yes	FT fisherman	Marsaxlokk	Neither	Both	Also sold fish purchased at fish market Worked in a family run fish shop	No	No
Rose	63	Marsaxlokk	No	FT fisherman	Marsaxlokk	Neither	After by calling potential buyers	Takes her husband's catch for auctioning Filing husband's tax forms	No	Doesn't have daughters
Maria	62	Marsa	No	PT fisherman	Marsaxlokk	Neither	Neither	Drives and accompanies husband to spelling point	No	No

Table 10: Information on the women interviewed

3.3.2 Women's Direct Productive Contribution

Both the women's and the fishermen's interviews revealed multiple tasks undertaken by women in the Maltese fisheries all of which are being presented in the below table.

1.	Direct fishing
2.	Washing the fishermen's attire
3.	Bookkeeping including keeping record of the catches, profits, and accounting
4.	Sorting the catch/Stacking the fish
5.	Selling the catches and organising sales
6.	Morally supporting husbands following unsuccessful fishing expeditions
7.	Processing of fish in factories
8.	Preparing the crew's food, clothes, and other necessities
9.	Transporting fish to the fish market, fish shops etc.
10.	Cleaning and storing fishing nets/longlines
11.	Financial management including bank transactions
12.	Painting the fishing boat
13.	Removing water collected in the boat's bilge
14.	Baiting longlines

Table 11: The tasks undertaken by Maltese women as mentioned in the interviews

3.3.2.1 Direct Fishing: Past Fisherwomen

As mentioned in section 1.2.4, the participation of women in direct fishing in the EU amounts to merely 6%. A closer look at home reveals that Malta has only one officially registered fisherwoman. Notwithstanding official registrations, it can be safely deduced that nowadays no other woman is involved in direct fishing. The prevalent situation provides a distorted picture in which one is led to believe that women have always been restricted to onshore duties. This perception is far from true since Maltese women have embarked boats, ridden waves, braved storms and brought home bountiful catches just like their male counterparts; a reality which is forgotten by all except by the few

remaining older generation women who have lived the life themselves, and their relatives. Many of them did not start fishing merely upon marrying a fisherman. Indeed, they were already expert fishers by the time they tied the knot.

Being eighty-four at the time of the interview, Catherine is living testimony to this phenomenon. Coming from a fishing family herself, she spent her childhood fishing alongside her father. Her late sister, who was older by a year and the oldest of four siblings, also fished with their father and moved on to marry a fisherman with whom she spent many years fishing. Catherine started accompanying her father on fishing trips at the tender age of nine up till she married at the age of twenty-two, however, this did not put an end to her fishing days. Apart from a shift in partnership, Catherine had to apply herself even more to support her growing family. Expeditions included fishing with bottom longlines and/or fishing lines, surface longlines and the seine-net. She also participated in the exhausting *lampuki* season in which both her son and eldest daughter joined when old enough to give a helping hand. Catherine also took up solo fishing expeditions to troll for mackerel. As with many fisherwomen her age, she also fished at night for shrimps with the use of shrimp hoops (m. *koppijiet tal-gambli*) which she constructed and weaved herself. This device consisted of a circular metal frame about 30cm in diameter to which a small-meshed netting was tied. The netting was in turn baited with bread. Upon being kept afloat horizontally shrimps gathered to nibble away at the bread. Many hoops used to be laid in a line with women going to and fro to check them one at a time all night long. The shrimps thus caught were transferred to perforated containers (m. *barradi*) which were kept in the sea to keep them alive and sold as bait.

When her eldest son came of age he took her place and started fishing with his father. Her daughter, being just three years younger than her brother, joined the crew as well. The latter continued fishing into her late teens at which point she sought to make a better living for herself by seeking work on land. Even though Catherine no longer accompanied her husband on fishing trips, she continued to undertake solo fishing with shrimp hoops which required her to set out on board her oar propelled *frejgatina* in the evening, only to return in the morning. She fished for shrimps at St. George's Bay, Birżebbuġa. Another fisherwoman used to accompany her on board her own *frejgatina*. For their return journey home, Catherine's son used to tow both *frejgatini* following a night out catching shrimps himself with the use of a shrimp-dredge on board his motorised *frejgatina*. Interestingly, Catherine also worked in a local fish processing establishment, which unfortunately, did not last long.



Picture 23: Shrimp hoops hung and left to dry
(Source: Marthese Degabriele)



Picture 24: An old photo of a fisherwoman tending to her shrimp hoops
(Source: Marthese Degabriele)



Picture 25: Two fisherwomen tending to shrimp hoops
(Source: Marthese Degabriele)



Picture 26: A fisherwoman catching shrimps with shrimp hoops
(Source: Marthese Degabriele)



Picture 27: The fisherwoman in the previous photos lifting a *barrada* from the sea to sell shrimps to a customer

(Source: Mathese Degabriele)

Another older fisherwoman who lived a similarly harsh life was seventy-nine-year-old Karmena. As with the former, she fished with her parents as from a very young age. Being just a child, her mother had no option other than to take her fishing with them. She recalls having her face splattered with water to shake her out of her slumber at eleven to go fishing for the rest of the night. Her life at sea intensified upon marrying a fisherman from Żurrieq who had settled at Marsaxlokk. Being a fulltime fisherman, she dedicated her life to supporting him which, amongst others, included accompanying him on fishing trips. She deployed many different fishing gears such as the shrimp-dredge, trammel net, long-lines, and traps and pots. One of her daughters followed in her footsteps and started working with the shrimp-dredge with her grandmother at just six years of age. Just as with her mother and grandmother before her, Karmena's daughter married a fisherman, however, as opposed to her forerunners, she did not accompany him on fishing trips but limited herself to selling the catch. In time, she gave up selling fish altogether to open and run a local restaurant in partnership with her sisters.

The oldest fisherwoman interviewed was the late eighty-seven-year-old Rosaria. As with the above cases, she was born to *Xlukkajri* fisher parents. Her mother before her was also born to fisher parents and used to go fishing with her father, a task which was further intensified upon marrying a fisherman

at which point she dedicated her whole being to fish with him. As with the *Xlukkajri* women of the olden times, Rosaria's mother also fished for shrimps with shrimp hoops. Being bred and born into fishing, Rosaria started going out at sea with her father once done with schooling which, at the time, was not provided for girls beyond the age of ten. As expected, she stopped fishing with her father upon marrying at the age of twenty-two. Unlike the women mentioned thus far, Rosaria did not marry a fisherman, however, being seeped in and enamoured of the fishing life she brushed off her husband's disapproval and took up fish mongering, a task which she undertook till her retirement at the age of sixty-one. As Gustavsson (2020) explains;

Women's entry onto boats can be seen as a household strategy during harsh times...Partners and wives of fishers worked as crew alongside their husband/partner skippers enabling them to keep incomes within the family as opposed to employing (more expensive) non-kin crew.⁶⁶³

This quote is very much applicable to the past local situation. As seen from the above-mentioned examples, women accompanied the men of the family out of necessity to avoid recruiting a non-related fisher who would have required payment. Taking the wife meant that all the money and profits made could be kept by the family. Furthermore, many fishermen took their wives and daughters in face of lack of sons or when the latter were still young. Most often the sons replaced their mothers/sisters once they were old enough to start working at sea sparing women to take up or dedicate more time to equally important onshore fisheries related activities that could better accommodate family life. Incidentally, Martha, another interviewee, explained that she never accompanied her father because she was frightened of the sea. Nonetheless, her absence was made good for by one of her sisters who was in turn substituted by her brothers once they came of age.

Presently, fishermen's wives no longer go out at sea except for the occasional trip or short season in particular fishing for transparent goby with seine nets (m. *tartarun*). Amongst others, this shift has been triggered by the ever-growing drive for women to seek paid jobs for themselves coupled with a growth in job opportunities which, rather than keeping the profits within the family circle, meant that women could bring home another full wage in support of the family. However, it must also be noted that women who did not seek employment elsewhere have also refrained from fishing. In the latter cases, most often than not, they have taken up selling fish on a full-time basis to make better profits off their husband's catches; a topic which will be explored hereunder.

⁶⁶³ Madeleine Gustavsson, 'Women's Changing Productive Practices, Gender Relations and Identities in Fishing through a Critical Feminisation Perspective', *Journal of Rural Studies*, lxxviii (2020), 40.

3.3.2.2 Selling the Catches and Organising Sales

The reclusive nature of the job has prompted fishermen into forming strong attachments with one another which was further strengthened by their passion for the sea and empathy for all it entails. However, this came at the expense of socialising with people beyond their inner circle. On the other hand, women made up for their shortcoming. As explained by the FAO;

...because the women in small-scale fishing communities generally spend more of their time in the community than do their male counterparts who work at sea, they often form more richly ramified local socioeconomic networks. These networks help them to facilitate seafood marketing and distribution, and in larger communities may entail working relationships with people with whom their husbands and other male kinsmen are not acquainted.⁶⁶⁴

Even though local old women who participated in active fishing spent considerable hours at sea, they were nonetheless more centrally immersed in the life of the community through their housekeeping and child-minding duties. Furthermore, they spent more time on shore than their men as demanded by their need to sell the catch, a task which is still the prerogative of women. Women's better eloquence and suitability for selling the fish was also remarked upon by fishermen during interviews with one of them explaining that women are more persuasive and caressing in their approach. Another fisherman remarked on his inability to sell. He stammers through the ordeal and always ends up selling his own catch at a meagre price. He moved on to explain that, on one occasion his niece, who is a fishmonger, managed to make considerable profits off an Atlantic bonito (m. *plamtu*) he had caught and was ready to dispose of as bait.

Though women have been involved in fish sales for many generations, the procedure by which they go about the task has changed considerably. Variation also existed between those who sold their men's catch and those who resold fish purchased at the fish market. Even though seventy-four-year-old Kitty's family had never been involved with fishing, her mother took up selling fish to contribute to the family's income since her husband was poorly paid for his job with the Air Force. Having no catches to sell, she had to buy the merchandise from the fish market. To this end, she used to wake up at three in the morning to catch the truck in charge of transporting *Xlukkajri* women hawkers to the fish market. Once the fish was auctioned and purchased by the hawkers, the truck's driver assigned with the task drove each woman to her selling point. Kitty's mother used to stop and sell her fish at Paola and head back to Marsaxlokk by bus once done. Unlike her mother, Kitty married a fisherman,

⁶⁶⁴ James R. McGoodwin, *Understanding the Cultures of Fishing Communities: A Key to Fisheries Management and Food Security* (Rome, FAO, 2001), 25. <<https://www.fao.org/3/Y1290E/y1290e00.htm>>.

nonetheless, she did not take up selling upon marrying since her husband was recruited on board his father's boat. He took it upon himself to buy a *luzzu* to use in his spare time two years into the marriage. The little fish he made thus was sold by Kitty's mother. It was only twelve years into their marriage that her husband decided to take up fishing on his own which left her with no choice other than to take up fish mongering herself, however, unlike her mother before her, she did not need to make the daily trips to the fish market as her husband's catch sufficed. Just like her mother, Kitty sold the catch at Paola. She used to catch the 6:00am bus to take her to her destination and made her way back home by the same means at 11:30am; a task which she undertook daily for fourteen years. Fish mongering entailed more than just selling and required her to gut the fish for her customers as well. Refraining from doing so would have meant a loss of clientele. She recalls the sheering pain experienced whenever stung by the venomous scorpion fish (m. *skorfna*) while gutting it for her customers.

Being born into a family steeped into fishing from both the mother's and father's side, Rosaria was passionate about fishing and selling. As mentioned in the previous section, Rosaria fished with her father until she married. However, unlike her forerunners, she did not marry a fisherman herself. That being the case, she decided to take up selling fish purchased from the fish market. Just like Kitty's mother, she used to catch the morning truck to the fish market and purchase whatever she deemed fit to resell. The journey back took her to her selling destination. In Rosaria's case it was Żejtun. Whenever she did not manage to sell all her wares, Rosaria headed to Hal Għaxaq on foot to sell off the remaining fish. Once done, she headed back home at Marsaxlokk, once again, on foot. Rosaria's selling career spun for little less than forty years.

Catherine had the double task of both fishing, the technicalities of which were mentioned in the previous section, and selling the fish of her kinsmen. Apart from fishing with her father, Catherine took over selling his catch from her mother to elevate some of her workload. The routine was relived and intensified upon marrying at which point she did not limit herself to selling her husband's catch but complimented it with fish purchased from the fish market, a task which was mostly undertaken during the *lampuki* season especially when they did not manage to land the highly requested fish themselves. As with the other old hawkers mentioned above, Catherine travelled to and fro by means of the truck assigned for the purpose and just like Rosaria, her selling destination was Żejtun. When her family's *lampuki* catches sufficed, her husband drove her to Żejtun himself after which she undertook the return journey home either by bus or on foot.

As opposed to the examples above, when young neither Martha nor her sisters sold their father's catch. Their mother refrained from doing so as well. In this case the latter was entrusted with the task of taking her husband's catch and deposit it at the fish market where it was auctioned off to the fish hawkers. In time, this duty was transferred unto Martha and her sisters. Fish mongering became Martha's prerogative when her son took on fulltime fishing with sales taking place every Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday. On the said days she used to wake up at about four in the morning to stack the fish and be on her way to sell the fish by half past six. The selling process took her about four hours. On Sundays she sold the fish elsewhere and concluded the task by either eleven in the morning or midday. She gave up selling at the age of sixty-one following a traffic accident. Both Martha and Ċetta remarked on the bus drivers' endless objections to letting fish hawkers on board due to the fish stench. This was the reason why many women were left with no choice other than to walk all the way home which was rendered slightly easier if the selling localities happened to be closer to home. The option was not available to hawkers who sold further away, a case in point being Karmena whose selling localities were Mosta, Birkirkara and Haż-Żabbar.

As with Martha, Ċetta did not take up fishing with her father. The task befell her brothers, nonetheless, as opposed to her sisters; she was very much involved with selling their catch with her mother. Her selling abilities were further put to practice when required to sell her husband's catch which she took up once her children were slightly older. At this point she also started to accompany him on fishing trips. On the return journey home following a night fishing he used to drop her off at Birżebbuġa at about seven in the morning to sell the fresh fish while he kept himself busy cleaning the nets. When his wife was busy selling *lampuki* during the high season, he spent his time catching octopuses in the vicinity. Selling *lampuki* commenced at midday and finished at five in the afternoon. When not in a position to wait for her, Ċetta made her way back home on foot. Ċetta had no fish to sell whenever her husband was recruited on board someone else's boat. To this end, she undertook the journey to the fish market and purchase a day's worth of fish to sell at Birżebbuġa. This move was necessary to keep the hard-earned clientele.

Ċetta started out selling fish at the age of fourteen by accompanying her grandmother who was left with no option other than to take up selling fish following a stroke her husband had suffered at the age of forty-five which left him paralysed and thus unfit for work. The fish she sold was purchased from the fish market. She recalls the hardships her grandmother had to endure especially at the time the local dockyard, which was the main source of income for most Maltese families during the British rule, was suffering huge losses. Losses in income induced people to economise as much as possible

with people limiting themselves to purchasing only small portions of octopus rather than the customary whole specimen even though at the time it was very cheap. The small amounts of octopus were in turn mixed and cooked with snails which people picked themselves.

Ĉetta had stories of hardships of her own to tell with one dating back to the time when people were far more religious and abstained from consuming meat as penitence during Lent. It was customary for fishermen and fishmongers alike to make considerable profits during this period since people substituted the customary meat dishes with fish. This held especially true for specific dates during this time of the year including the holy days of Ash Wednesday, Our Lady of Sorrows, and Good Friday. She recalls the time when, on one occasion, she headed back home with the entire catch on the second of holy days. The same fate befell her mother, grandmother, and herself on a Maundy Thursday. Being Good Friday's eve, they had anticipated a good sale but were in for a disappointment when nobody showed interest in buying fish. It was the time people began substituting fish with other ready-made foods that started making their way in the market such as ricotta cheese filled ravioli which is both less messy and less time consuming to prepare.

Hardship manifested itself in all aspects including the weighing scales. Before the advent of digital scales which are accurate to a fault, fishmongers used beam balance scales and the accompanying weights. When the desired fish weighed slightly over the amount asked for, people desisted from paying for the extra weight. With the introduction of new technologies things changed for the better. Electronic scales, freezers and better means of transportation facilitated the fishmonger's life. The latter opened new opportunities for women who started obtaining a driving licence. The new commodities which the older generation fishmongers never got to experience were adopted by the younger ones. A case in point is fifty-two-year-old Jennifer. Hailing from Ĥal Ghaxaq, an inland village, she had no previous links with the fishing world and was only introduced to the scene upon marrying her *Xlukkajr* fisherman husband. His catch was initially sold by his mother but, following a heart attack she suffered four years into their marriage, Jennifer had to take over the task herself. During her first years, selling her husband's catch was carried out pretty much the same way as the older generation used to sell theirs, whereby she walked all the way to her selling destination. Jennifer started selling fish at the location previously occupied by her mother-in-law to maintain the already well-established clientele at Ĥal Ghaxaq. In time, she obtained a driving license and invested in a van equipped with all the necessities to meet the sanitary standards established by law. Apart from easing her burden, driving gave her access to all the village's areas and enabled her to make multiple stops

during her venture. The only initial setback was the high cost required in purchasing the van on which no subsidies are offered.

The fish caught by her husband consists mainly of octopus caught by means of traps and a variety of fish caught with trammel nets. She is only required to deviate from the norm during the *lampuki* season for which her husband, being a part-timer, does not work. During its season, *lampuki* takes precedence over any other fish rendering all other sales unworthy of the hassle. To meet the clientele's demand for the much-loved fish, Jennifer purchases her share of *lampuki* from the fish market. This demands additional hardship since Jennifer must wake up as early as quarter to three in the morning to be at the fish market by half past three to be ready for when auctioning kicks off at four o'clock.

Being just forty-two years old, Sharon pertains to a much younger generation than the fisherwomen of the olden times. As customary with fishermen daughters of subsequent generations, neither Sharon nor her sister were ever taken out fishing with their father. Their entry into fishing was further obstructed by their own mother's lack of participation in her husband's enterprise. In consequence, he had to take and have his catch auctioned at the fish market. This did not deter Sharon's determination to sell fish which induced her to join her uncles in the endeavour at the age of sixteen. Her first experience at selling fish had presented itself on a Sunday upon her father's return from a successful fishing expedition at which point people started gathering at the quay to buy the fish there and then. Sharon, who happened to be in the right place at the right time, took the opportunity she had been waiting for and helped her father in the selling. The skills learnt from selling fish with her uncles were further put to practice upon marrying her full-time fisher husband. Apart from selling his catch, Sharon purchased additional fish varieties from the fish market to meet all her clientele's needs. She moved on to selling fish at their own shop followed by three years working in the fish section at a popular supermarket.

Even though coming from a fishing family from the paternal side, Rose's father never took up any sort of fishing. It was her mother who kept the bond with the fishing tradition alive by assuming the task of selling fish daily except on Sundays. That being the case, she had to wake up at two in the morning to catch the truck for the trip to the fish market. Rose, being sixty-three at the time of the interview, comes from a large family consisting of nine siblings; six sisters and three brothers. Since their father was not a fisherman, none of the siblings was induced into fishing. Even though they were six sisters in all, only one followed in their mother's footsteps and got to grips with selling fish.

Rose relied on her sister for selling her husband's catch when they married. Upon her demise, Rose took it upon herself to help her husband. Never coming to terms with selling the fish herself, Rose sought alternative ways to go about the task. Fishermen who have no one to sell on their behalf are left with no choice other than to take their catch to the fish market to have it auctioned. This results in fishermen suffering considerable loss of income since the catch must be sold at a much lower price so the fish hawkers can make profits when reselling the fish. Not being able to sell it herself, Rose elevates her husband's workload by waking up at two in the morning to take his catch to the fish market daily except on Mondays when the fish market does not open. At the start of her endeavour, Rose used to leave the premises upon delivering the fish. She soon realised that further losses were suffered upon leaving the fish unattended. Henceforth, she never took her leave before her husband's catch was auctioned. She offers her husband further help by establishing a list of clientele from whom she takes fish orders. Upon entering with the catch, Rose takes it upon herself to contact potential buyers in the hope of selling the fish directly to them.

Being from Marsa and coming from a non-fishing family, sixty-two-year-old Maria was completely alien to anything related to fishing. Upon marrying a part-time fisherman, she was introduced to the hardships a fisherman's wife is subjected. Being a part-time shrimp-dredge fisherman meant that her husband had to spend many nights at sea. The task of selling shrimps as baits from perforated containers attached to the moored boat was initially undertaken by his mother. Nonetheless, being a fisherwoman herself, his mother was not always available to do so. While at sea, the task was handed over to Maria, who took her place by the shore and waited for potential customers from four in the morning onwards. Once she obtained a driving licence, Maria started taking her husband's shrimp catch to sell at Bir id-Deheb on Sundays. Being more central than Marsaxlokk she hoped to attract more customers by establishing herself at the new designated spot. Sunday was chosen as the preferred day knowing full well that amateur fishermen had more time to spare for their hobby and thus more apt to purchase shrimps as bait.

As can be gleaned from the above narrations, fishmongers must deal with a variety of hardships which are more evident from the older generation stories. Notwithstanding the deprivation levels they suffered, contemporary fishmongers must face new and equally challenging situations. Apart from the substitution of meat with products other than fish on specific days as stipulated by the church or the altogether non-adherence to religious dogmas, another difficulty sustained by contemporary fishmongers was the shift in people's demand for fish species. Whereas in the past all sort of fish was successfully sold irrelevant of the species, nowadays people tend to go for 'trending' fish. Much of

the fish species caught by means of trammel nets are no longer in demand. The fish thus caught is excellent to make the traditional fish soup (m. *aljotta*) which was a great favourite of the Maltese folk but is no longer considered 'fashionable'. Paradoxically, it is served in fine dining, luxurious restaurants at very expensive prices. Many fishermen claim that it is impossible to sell trammel net fish at the fish market since little to no profit is made to the extent that the majority of the remaining trammel net fishermen are the ones who either have a fishmonger wife or who take it upon themselves to sell the fish directly to their customers and/or restaurants. Jennifer explained how younger generation women have never heard of the dish and takes it upon herself to instruct them on how to prepare it irrespective of its relative simplicity. Another drawback of small fish is the time required in picking the flesh from the bone. Being time consuming to prepare, many women, the majority of whom are no longer stay-at-home wives/mothers, tend to overlook small fish in preference to fillet and steak fish such as tuna and swordfish which do not require any preparation prior to cooking. When customers do opt for small fish, the fishmongers must take it upon themselves to clean and gut it for them.

Selling hours have also shifted to better accommodate working women. Initially Jennifer used to start selling fish between seven and half past seven in the morning. Nowadays she is required to do so at six in the morning. Irrespective of the earlier start, Jennifer takes much longer to sell her products than she did a few years back since nowadays she has to do the cleaning and gutting herself as mentioned in the previous paragraph. Whereas previously her selling schedule was concluded by eight or nine o'clock in the morning at the most, nowadays Jennifer never finishes earlier than ten or eleven o'clock.

Locally caught fish is competing with imported fish with the most popular trend at present being salmon. To accommodate their customers, many fishmongers must go out of their way and include salmon amongst their goods. Since the fish market focuses exclusively on locally caught fish except for a few catches brought in by Italian trawlers, imported fish must be purchased from stores. Many fishmongers also include salmon amongst their goods with the hope of tempting people in buying other fish while at it considering that, being purchased from elsewhere, salmon is not as profitable as the local fishermen's catch.

Loss in sales and profits have also been brought about by farmed fish species. Being cheaper and readily available from all supermarkets and outlets many people opt for purchasing fish thus produced. This phenomenon tends to repeat itself at numerous restaurants whereby people order

farmed fish due to its cheaper price. To make matters worse, customers are deceived into believing that they are ordering and consuming a naturally caught wild fish. Deception of this nature brings about further losses in sales for fishermen and fishmongers alike. Contrary, well renowned restaurants are recognised and held in high esteem for limiting themselves to selling the fishermen's catch. Luckily for fishermen, the only fish species bred and raised in fish farms are limited to gilthead bream (*m. awrat*) and seabass (*m. spnott*). Fishermen, fishmongers, and connoisseurs of food stress upon the superior quality of wildy caught fish for its natural bounty as opposed to the high levels of fatty oils and artificial chemicals characteristic of farmed fish products. As Rose explained, a knowledgeable and avid fish consumer never brings himself to eating fish artificially reared with many fishermen remarking on the lack of its taste.

Both farmed and imported fish are sold at supermarkets which further add to the already rife competition. Their long opening hours and availability render them even more accessible to the working population. Furthermore, the large amounts of money supermarkets pump into advertisements add to both their popularity and attractiveness. Amongst others this is achieved by sponsoring popular television programmes which host cooking sessions by providing them with their products for further publicity, a challenge which fishermen do not have the means nor the power to meet.

3.3.2.3 Other Forms of Direct Contribution

Apart from the tasks and burdens already mentioned, fisheries related women provide further direct support to their male kin, one of them being fishing equipment maintenance especially by those whose husband uses the trammel net as his main fishing practice. Consisting of three layers of netting and being of considerable length, fishermen appreciate all the help they can get in its up keeping. Being deployed in the afternoon and left overnight many items other than the desired fish gets caught in the net. Upon clearing the entangled fish fit for consumption, fishermen need to remove the unwanted debris, a process which is very time consuming. The removal of the sea urchin locally known as *raddiena* or more befittingly *rizza tal-parit* (trammel net sea urchin) thus called since it is commonly caught in this type of netting, requires both patience and time. As opposed to the consumable sea urchin, the *raddiena* has a small body with elongated spikes. The only means to get rid of them is crushing them with hammers. The same needs to be done with pebbles. Other debris that needs to be removed include whole bodies or parts of dead algae that get entangled while floating in the vicinity

of the net. Kitty used to help her husband clean the trammel net as described above whenever required. Selling her husband's catch was followed by a quick meal after which they set upon the daunting task of cleaning the net; a task which took them up to five or six in the afternoon. Ċetta and Jennifer follow the same process, to help their respective husbands.



Picture 28: A woman cleaning her fisher son's trammel nets

(Source: my own)

Long-line fishing has its own fair share of preparatory work the burden of which is elevated by women's contribution. Being very long and thus prone to getting entangled, tuna and swordfish longlines are wound up in a circular basket or a large square container. The hooks are attached to strips of cork at the rim of the container ready to be used during the next fishing expedition.⁶⁶⁵ Rosaria's mother helped her fisher husband in the time-consuming task of thus coiling long-lines in containers. Long-lines also require baiting in preparation for fishing; a task which Karmena undertook in the afternoon following a morning of selling the catch.

⁶⁶⁵ Stanley Farrugia Randon, *The Fishing Industry in Malta: Past, Present, Future* (Malta, Pubblikazzjonijiet Indipendenza, 1995), 57.



Picture 29: A swordfish longline in its container

(Source: my own)

Rosaria's mother also helped in removing the water that collected in the boat's bilge from rainwater and hauled fishing gear, whereas Martha recalls stacking the fish in boxes in preparation for the fish market. She also recalls the toil involved in washing the fisher gear while still living under her parents' roof at a time when washing appliances were still unheard of. Other tasks which go unnoticed include the preparation of the fishermen's food. Maria used to prepare her husband's evening meal and coffee flask which he consumed on the way out to his fishing spot.

Tasks that contribute directly to the fisheries do not necessarily entail fishing, boat maintenance, the selling of catches and preparatory work. It also includes tasks such as accounting, filing and the filling in of fishing logbooks amongst other things. Rose oversees filing the tax forms for her full-time fisher husband. In the old days, the purchasing of diesel did not require immediate payment but was done every three weeks or so. Catherine kept record of the amounts of diesel thus purchased and made the necessary payments at the end of the stipulated time. On the other hand, Sharon acts as her husband's accountant the task of which includes keeping record of his profits and losses. She also assumes the responsibility of filling in his VAT declaration forms since he does not sell his catch at the fish market

and is thus required to fill in a logbook with the necessary information for record keeping by the Fisheries Department. Maria was also in charge of filling in her husband's shrimp-dredge logbook which included information such as the time spent at sea, fishing zone, species and amounts of shrimps caught which were in turn sent to the department at the end of each month. The next section discusses less obvious assistance that women provide men with.

3.3.3 Women's Indirect Contribution to the Fisheries

As is the case worldwide irrespective of nationality, culture and social strata, women tend to assume multiple roles. Information provided clearly shows that women who are born and/or wed into the fisheries fit into this reality. The previous section provided information on women's direct contribution to fishermen and, by so doing, to the fisheries in general which is both indispensable and time consuming. Notwithstanding the burdens outlined above, women in the fishing industry have additional taxing duties which force them into taking on more responsibilities than other women.

The most obvious and natural of roles linked with womanhood is the responsibility of the family. Although this task is not exclusive to women in fisheries, in their case it is rendered more cumbersome since, in the larger part, they must shoulder the burden without the support of men. Women in fisheries can be compared to single mothers seeing as fishermen are largely absent from family life due to the nature of their work. Thompson (1985) asserts that 'this additional burden should not be underestimated.' As he points out the fishing economy forces the family to move away from the conventional idea of family life which focuses on home-centred togetherness with women taking most of the responsibility of the children, home, and finances.⁶⁶⁶ The hardships involved in the latter surfaced in Alaska's fish radio programme during which women in fisheries were asked to share their thoughts on being married into the industry. One in particular outlined the difficulties by stating;

We had four children and even though I knew my husband was there for me in mind and spirit and also in the support although he was on the ocean, I knew he was there and he would be there if I needed him. But the most difficult thing was to make those critical decisions and also just the physical part of raising a family all by yourself. Just the basic everyday things. I would have to say that was the hardest part raising a family.⁶⁶⁷

⁶⁶⁶ Thompson, 13-5.

⁶⁶⁷ Laine Welch. "Kodiak Women Share Thoughts on the Fishing Lifestyle." 3 September 2020. Alaska Fish Radio. 22 May 2021 <<http://www.alaskafishradio.com/kodiak-women-share-thoughts-on-the-fishing-lifestyle/>>.

This was the story of a woman in Alaska but echoes well with local fisher wives' life. Even though Maltese full-time fishermen do not spend weeks and months on end away from home, it must be noted that they are still absent for the greater part of the day and night. The few hours off work are mostly spent resting. Likewise, part-time fishermen juggle time between their land-based job and fishing whilst sparing the few remaining hours for the much-needed rest. The unpredictable nature of the job which relies heavily on weather fluctuations is another major setback for family life. Apart from being unable to plan, women must be prepared for all eventualities and be at the ready to assume full responsibility of the family at any given time.

The interviewed women who happened to be mothers remarked on having raised the children single-handed. Apart from looking after the children's basic needs, they took it upon themselves to take important decisions concerning their welfare. Jennifer explained that such decisions included educational related matters which she settled herself rather than wait for her husband's return. The hardest decisions that needed to be taken in their husbands' absence were health related. Sharon remarked on the extra effort she had to apply when both her daughter and herself were sick with the situation aggravating even further when her husband was away for five consecutive days. Being responsible for selling her husband's catch, Jennifer had no option other than to leave her children with her mother-in-law even when sick. Cetta recalls the occasion on which her then young son developed hernia for which the family doctor recommended immediate treatment at a private hospital. Nonetheless, she refused to take the decision on her own. Luckily for all involved, the boy's condition turned out to be mild and he was successfully operated a few days later at a public hospital.

Fishermen are also absent from many child-centred activities to which fathers are generally expected to attend. In her study of Northern Ireland's fishing households, Britton (2012) explains;

...how the needs and priorities of one family member, in this case the husband and the skipper, can fail to match the needs and the values of their wife and that in order to meet needs in one area of life (provide income security for his family and employees) another area may be impacted (family life).⁶⁶⁸

Jennifer had no option other than to attend all her three children's Parents' Days on her own. The same applied for school organised concerts. During the interview, Sharon recalled the occasion on which her then young daughter reproached her father for not attending the school organised Christmas activities she participated in for which he replied that her mother attended in his stead. The incident

⁶⁶⁸ Easkey Britton, 'Women as Agents of Wellbeing in Northern Ireland's Fishing Households', *Maritime Studies*, xi, 1 (2012), 11.

revealed how their daughter's needs went beyond the material comforts he worked so hard to provide her with. Henceforth, her father made his best to accompany his wife on similar occasions. The sad reality was further attested to by seventy-three-year-old Martha who recalls herself as a young child saying that she does not know her own father.

Since many of the older women interviewed also happened to be fisherwomen they had to juggle between parenting and fishing pretty much as their husbands did. On several occasions they had no option other than to leave their children with family kin. Rosaria's mother used to braid her daughter's hair and secure it with a cap before getting her in bed to be at the ready for school on the morrow. Karmena further represents the extreme hardships a fisher mother had to face. Having no one to entrust them with, she used to take all her three children, with the youngest being just a month old, at sea with her and her husband. She recalls wrapping them up in blankets and setting them on pillows to sleep as comfortably as possible next to each other while they went about their work.

Looking after and worrying about one's children does not cease with their coming of age. Catherine recalls nights on end spent sitting by the bedroom window which overlooked the sea waiting for her fisher son to return home. Venturing out at sea in fine weather does not guarantee an equally tranquil journey back home. Kitty worried every time her husband was caught in storms. Apprehension was more acute at the time when no means of communication was available to small fishing crafts. Martha expressed her concern on the subject as well. As with Kitty, she explained that communication via VHF radio transmission was limited to the larger boats. She recalls the time women waited and hoped against all odds for their sons' and husbands' return home whenever they took longer than expected. Anxious anticipation was more intense during the *lampuki* season which requires further outward travelling and longer hours at sea. Acute fear gripped the women and other familial members when storms broke out during the night. Kitty also recalls her father fearing waterspouts the most since they can be neither detected nor seen in the dark.

Worrying about one's husband's return was not limited to past generations. Weather fluctuations and accidents at sea are as real today as ever before. On one occasion, Maria, who had no means by which to communicate with her husband, became apprehensive on the occasion he did not return home by nine o'clock as was customary of him. The weather had taken a turn for the worse. A strong wind had risen, and rain lashed relentlessly. She was not aware that, having detected the fast-approaching harsh weather, her husband had already moored his boat and sought refuge in a land sheltering alcove. Maria's fears were further accentuated by her awareness of the sharp jutting rocks on the outskirts of

Delimara that could have easily wrecked a small *frejgatina* if pushed unto them by the heaving waves. Rose admitted to still getting worried whenever her husband is later than usual even though he is adequately equipped for all eventualities and has the means by which to contact her should the need arise.

Harsh weather can also spell disaster financially by keeping fishermen ashore. To this end, the fisherman and his wife must make good for non-fishing days mostly characteristic of winter with the savings made during fishing days. As a result of the unpredictable nature of the job, women must manage their husbands' finances. Following long spells onshore and with no other means of making money, Kitty and her husband used to make recourse to their savings for purchasing daily necessities. To balance the odds, Karmena also used to work as a cleaner at other people's houses. She also undertook washing clothes to make a little extra money. Nevertheless, fine weather does not necessarily guarantee a profitable catch and fishermen can still head back home with little to no fish. To make matters worse on these occasions fishermen must cover the expenses incurred including the diesel consumption, baiting, and repairs needed to both boat and equipment. As Rose explained, both the taxes and the social security scheme need to be seen to even when no profits are made, and expenses made. As Britton (2012) explained;

Families had to cope with the unpredictable nature of fishing and women had to plan and prepare for the 'lean' months with frequent comments about the need to become 'good managers'.⁶⁶⁹

Similarly, in their study of fishers' wives in Brittany, France, Franfoudes and Keromnes (2008) found that;

All the women interviewed indicated that they are involved in the administrative part of the family enterprise, at the very least, when their husband had back-to-back expeditions. Banking and accounting are also women's business.⁶⁷⁰

Both quotations, which are elicited from studies conducted in Northern Ireland and France respectively, are very much applicable to the local scenario. With regards to banking, Jennifer explained that she acts as proxy in her husband's absence to cash the cheques issued in his name.

As expected, lack or loss of income irrespective of the sacrifices and hardships endured, have a psychological and demoralising effect on fishermen. This highlights yet another responsibility that

⁶⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁷⁰ Katia Frangoudes and Enora Keromnes, 'Women in Artisanal Fisheries in Brittany, France', *Society for International Development*, li, 2 (2008), 267.

women must shoulder. As soon as her husband returns home, Rose can tell whether he had a successful expedition or not from the tone of his voice. When the latter is the case, she takes it upon herself to calm, placate and offer him words of encouragement. Martha also commented on her role as a consoling wife whenever her husband had a disappointing fishing trip. All this must be taken in consideration against the backdrop that, as specified by themselves, women oversee all the other tasks associated with proper housekeeping.

Apart from the endless list of tasks they must perform to support their husbands, women married into the fisheries have to spend endless hours on their own and deprive themselves from attending special occasions and events. Apart from having had a full-time job during normal working hours, Maria's husband worked the nights away at sea whenever the weather permitted. He worked for much longer hours on Friday and Saturday nights with the weekend being the selling peak of shrimps used as bait in leisure fishing. Loneliness was also remarked upon by Rose. She refrains from expressing her wish to go out whenever her husband looks tired and in need of sleep. During her career as a fisherwoman, Karmena gave up all the local feast's celebrations for many consecutive years to secure for herself and her family a modest living by making the most of a spell of fine weather. Economising also means that fishermen families must be prudent in their expenditures. They never give in to squandering money on objects which are not necessary. To this end, Sharon's family never went abroad on holiday. She always reconsiders the purchases needed and sets her priorities for the overall wellbeing of the family.

The importance of women's direct role in supporting the fisheries was confirmed by the fishermen who have or had at least one female family member who gave a helping hand in one or more tasks related to their job.

3.3.4 The Fishermen's Discussion on the Women's Contribution

Further insight into women's contribution was gleaned from the interviews conducted with fishermen. The latter's perspective provided an invaluable contribution in creating a wholesome picture as possible of men's dependence on women.

Seeing as fishermen discussed and talked about the nature of their job, the women's direct contribution to the fishing enterprise was touched upon vis-à-vis their family relations. As

encapsulated in table 11, women's direct contribution to fisheries is extended to many activities other than direct fishing with the most prominent being the selling of the catch.

Direct female contribution also happens to be the sole aspect of a fisherman's life in which differences were detected amongst fishing communities with the most striking variance being between the Maltese and the Gozitans. The largest number of women involved coupled with the most wholesome contribution and head-on immersion into the fisheries is without doubt provided by the *Xlukkajri* women. All the *Xlukkajri* fishermen interviewed for this study had, or still have, a female relation involved in the fishing enterprise, nonetheless, fisherwomen mothers and/or wives are mostly characteristic of the older generation. A case in point would be the oldest⁶⁷¹ *Xlukkajr* fisherman interviewed whose aunt was the epitome of the older generation *Xlukkajri* women who used to both fish with her husband and sell the catch at Żabbar which trip she undertook on foot. Being seventy-one at the time of the interview, the said fisherman was old enough to have fisherwomen grandmothers, aunts and/or mother. Nonetheless, he was not old enough to have a fisher wife,⁶⁷² an aspect which was mostly characteristic of the then eighty plus fishermen. To this end, his wife was not involved in fishing. As it happens, she is neither responsible for selling his catch, nonetheless, she helps him coiling up the trammel net; a task which requires two people to go about. Interestingly, selling fish was taken up by one of their daughters who learnt the tricks of the trade from her aunts and put them to their best use upon marrying her fisher husband.

As opposed to the above, another similarly aged fisherman's mother was a fisherwoman. She was also in charge of selling fish, a task which was eventually taken up by his sister as well. Having kin involved in selling the catch is a blessing to any fisherman since all the profits can be kept by the family. The only alternative available is for the fisherman to sell the catch himself, however, in so doing, they are kept ashore which translates in a substantial loss of income. Hence, this particular fisherman had the double blessing of having two women who could sell both his and his father's hard-earned catch. The same can be said of yet another similarly aged fisherman. Being seventy and descended from fisher folk from both sides of the family, it was both natural and expected of his mother to be both a fisherwoman and a fishmonger. Being his senior by seven years, his sister took up the same role upon marrying her fisher husband. When still unmarried she used to sell her father's

⁶⁷¹ For this study, the ages referred to are the ones provided at the time of the interview thus the terms older, younger, oldest, youngest are based on these ages since their experience was recorded at the said age.

⁶⁷² It must be noted that not all the fishermen interviewed had wives to speak of, which is the reason why not all the fishermen's interview analysis on women includes the mentioning of a wife.

catch as well. His wife's direct contribution consists of selling both his and their part-time sons' octopus catches during the local Sunday market or taking the catch to one of the locality's fish shops.

Being descended from fisher families on both sides, a sixty-eight-year-old fisherman was naturally surrounded by women whose direct contribution was indispensable. The older generation women of his family oversaw catching shrimps with shrimp hoops. His mother was also in charge of the sales with the task being taken up by two of his sisters and niece. Likewise, a sixty-two-year-old fisherman's mother had the principal role of selling both her husband's and her sons' catch. Further fish to sell was procured from the fish market via her own mother. His aunt took up the same role and helps her own sons by selling their catch along with the fish she purchases from the fish market. Even though her contribution to direct fishing does not classify her as a professional fisherwoman, his wife joined him in *makku* fishing (see section 4.4.4) for the last three consecutive years with the season lasting for a month and a half per year. Her contribution is nonetheless crucial seeing as this fishing practice requires two crew members. Interestingly, his wife never had any affinity to fishing whatsoever. Yet another *Xlukkajr* fisherman is also surrounded by women deeply rooted in sea related activities with his mother being one of the few remaining living women to have been involved in direct fishing. All her three unmarried sisters took up selling fish. His wife's mother and sister were fishmongers as well. The latter helped him by selling his catch. Upon her demise help started being provided by his wife. Although not involved in direct sales she takes it upon herself to deliver his catch to the fish market and keep an eye on the fish until the sales are concluded. Whenever opportune she tries her best to sell the catch directly to the customers by taking orders and making contact anytime their requests can be met. Her husband also remarked on her role in painting his *frejgatina* with a fresh coat of paint; a task which was not reported by anyone else.

The last *Xlukkajr* fisherman interviewed in the over sixty-year category also happened to have both parents with a long history of fishing. From the maternal side both his mother and her sister were professional fishers who worked both with their father and subsequently with their husbands. They were also involved with selling the fish before and after getting married. This also happens to be the only fisherman interviewed whose younger sister, presently sixty years of age, was a fisher herself and accompanied her father in his endeavour. Nonetheless, her life at sea was short-lived. She gave up fishing in her late teens and secured for herself a reliable on land job a few years prior to marrying a non-fisherman. The fisherman in question did not marry a local village girl and yet his wife helped him in selling his catch when his mother could not do so herself. Being the sole driver in the family she also helped by driving him to and fro a better situated selling point every Sunday morning for

many years after. As opposed to the latter, a fifty-nine-year-old fisherman married a woman from the locality who, just like him, hails from a fishing family. Irrespective of her background she never sold any of her father's catch, nonetheless, she rose to the occasion and took up professional selling upon marrying. To this end, they purchased a van that meets the EU's standards for this specific purpose. To attract a larger clientele, she includes imported and other selected fish to complement her husband's catch. His father before him was likewise lucky in having a wife who sold his catch who also used to include other species purchased from the fish market to accommodate all the customer's needs.

A fifty-eight-year-old fisherman's mother is a great example of the abilities and fortitude of fisherwomen. Having lost her husband at a relatively young age, she took up solo fishing using both shrimp hoops and the shrimp-dredge. With relentless hard work she managed to bring up ten children on her own. Prior to his demise at fifty, she also helped her husband in cleaning and repairing his trammel nets. Moreover, the fisherman's grandmother also used to weave both trammel and shrimp-dredge nets. As opposed to his female predecessors, his wife does not provide any direct contribution to her husband's enterprise. Not being from the locality might be a further deterrent to participating. Even though married into the fisheries, a fifty-one-year-old fisherman's grandmother never accompanied her husband on fishing trips. Nevertheless, she was responsible for selling his catch and used to walk all the way from Żurriq to the fish market, then at Valletta, on foot.

The youngest *Xlukkajr* fisherman interviewed for this study was forty years old. His relatively young age also classifies him as one of the youngest fishermen in the Maltese archipelago. Additionally, he is a full-timer which combination makes it even more difficult to come by. As with fishermen much older than himself he has his own fair share of familial women directly involved in the fisheries including a fisherwoman. Being the oldest of the family, his aunt used to accompany her father in his fishing expeditions. As with the larger part of fisherwomen she was also in charge of selling the catch. Other fishmongers in the family include his mother and another aunt who is still active in the enterprise.

The interviews conducted with fishermen hailing from other Maltese localities traditionally linked with fishing reveal a completely different picture to the one presented by Marsaxlokk since none of them have women who participate in the fisheries in one way or another. This holds true for both present day women and ancestral family members. With regards to selling, the exceptions to the rule are two fishermen whose fishing port is Marsascala. One of these fishermen's wives sells both his

and their son's catch and joins them on a venture at sea every now and then. The other fisherman's mother sold both her husband's catch as well as *lampuki* purchased from the fish market. Even though to a much lesser extent, it is also worth mentioning that the wife of a full-time fisherman from Birżebbuġa used to accompany and help her husband in selling *lampuki*. On the other hand, a St. Paul's Bay fisherman mentioned his wife's contribution in organising and managing his paperwork.

The stark difference between Marsaxlokk and the other fishing localities was made even more pronounced by a fisherman hailing from Birżebbuġa who claimed that neither his wife nor his mother were ever involved with selling fish irrespective of having fisher husbands. When asked whether his wife gives a helping hand in anything else related to the fisheries he answered in the negative. Consequently, he is obliged to hire an accountant to help with the paperwork. Hiring an accountant seems to be the only alternative available to fishermen whose wives do not undertake the task; a necessity which incurs further expenses to the fisherman's already limited profits. As a fisherman from Siggiewi explained, an accountant's help is indispensable. In his case he managed to reach an agreement with his accountant whereby he is required to take care and look after the latter's fishing boat used in his leisurely fishing endeavours in exchange of accountancy. This fisherman also remarked on his wife's lack of comprehension of the hardships involved and the expenses incurred with every fishing trip. Consequently, she urges him to sell the fish at the first opportunity or even to give it freely.

Further contrast between Marsaxlokk and other localities was provided by a fisherman hailing from St. Paul's Bay who remarked on not having any women in the family who have ever helped in the fisheries. The only remote connection he has with one thus involved is through his son who, at the time, was dating the daughter of a fishmonger woman from Marsaxlokk. As with the rest of the localities except for Marsaxlokk, St. Paul's Bay does not have any links with women involved in the sector irrespective of its long history interlinked with fishing. This fact was further confirmed by another fisherman from the locality who explained that women from the village were never involved with selling fish and that the involvement of women is indeed exclusive to Marsaxlokk. The same was remarked upon by a fellow fisherman from the same locality who claimed that the only women in the village who do sell fish are the owners of Azzopardi Fisheries whose husbands are fishermen themselves.

Although the greater part of these fishermen has never benefited from the support of women and consequently do not know any better, they acknowledged that not having any support whatsoever is

indeed problematic. One fisherman explained that apart from fishing he must take it upon himself to dispose of the fish. Due to the lack of time at his disposition he is often left with no alternative other than to take his catches to the fish market. Apart from the taxing trip, disposing fish at the fish market requires paying a third person; the middleman. Contrary to the women who sell for their kin, middlemen do not go to any lengths to obtain the best price for the hard-earned fish. Furthermore, they are eligible to 6% of the profits which further deducts from the money the fishermen pocket. Whenever possible one of the fishermen interviewed counteracts the problem by contacting potential buyers and selling the fish himself even if at a reduced price. Not having a wife involved in selling, yet another fisherman faces multiple obstacles. He admitted that selling one's fish is very inconvenient and thus reverts to the fish market which, in light of his circumstances, considers a blessing. He explained that irrespective of considerable loss in profits, the fish market is still 'profitable' in that a fisherman is left free to go out fishing again. The greatest loss in profits when selling at the fish market is experienced by fishermen whose expertise is trammel net fishing. With fish caught thus being small and requiring more preparation time than steak fish, less people are apt to buy it. Consequently, the already deducted prize is further reduced by the fish market unless the fishermen take it upon themselves to sell their catch or have someone in the family to do so in their stead. Whenever viable, still another fisher tries to counteract this problem by contacting potential buyers hence avoiding the fish market altogether. Further weight to this statement was provided by a full-timer from Birżebbuġa, who claimed that trammel net fishing is not worth undertaking unless the fisherman has a family member who manages the sales. This truth is held by all the *Xlukkajri* fishermen with many remarking on the fact during the interview.

Similar to the Maltese localities other than Marsaxlokk, women's contribution in Gozitan villages is limited. Amongst the few Gozitan fishermen who get help is a fifty-seven-year-old whose wife purchases the fishing material he needs. Another's share of help was provided by his mother who helped him in net repairing. The youngest fisherman interviewed, who happens to be Gozitan, is also blessed with help from his mother who takes it upon herself to cut up his frigate-mackerel (*m. tumbrelli*) catches whenever purchased by a hotel in the locality. Since his father is illiterate, she is also responsible for his accountancy. As with many Maltese fishermen, Gozitans who do not have any help with the paperwork have to revert to the services of an accountant. This might result from lack of time to do so themselves, an unsuitable temperament for the task, or because of illiteracy.

However limited the help provided by women may be, it is still considerable when compared with their involvement in fish sales. Apart from not having women involved in selling, all the Gozitan

fishermen also remarked on the non-existence of female fishmongers with one of them explaining that they were rare in the old days as well. Only one of the interviewees had a female relation who happened to be both a fisher and a fish hawkker. Indeed, his grandmother used to fish with her husband and sell the catch. The only other exception to the rule was a fisherman whose sister-in-law sold both her husband's catch and other fish purchased for selling purposes.

The lack of family kin, particularly women, who sell fish, is more problematic for Gozitan than for Maltese fishermen as they cannot revert to commissioning a middleman to sell their fish at the fish market irrespective of the price which leaves them with no option other than to sell the fish themselves. Even though profitable, the task robs them of precious hours at sea.

Women's contribution absence in the department does not, at any point, imply that they do not give their share to supporting their husbands and provide for the wellbeing of the family. On the contrary, the greater part of these women take it upon themselves to invest their time and energy to supplement their fisher husband's income by taking up a job themselves, one which does not bear any affinity to fishing. Depending on the nature of the job, the second income procured by the wife could indeed be more 'worth it' from an economic point of view than it could ever be possible if she takes up selling the fish and/or actively supporting her husband's enterprise. However, since this study focuses on fishermen's perseverance, resilience, and the benefits of the local small-scale fishery in the hope of both understanding and supporting it, the research asked for an analysis of the factors that sustain their resolve to keep doing what they love doing best without going into the merits of what is more economically viable. With regards to the latter, a couple of fishermen remarked on their ability to continue fishing only because their wives make good for their lack of profits by taking up jobs themselves.

The stories told by the fisherwomen, women who are directly involved in the sector, and the fishermen themselves, reveal that women help fishermen in their endeavour and render their toiling hours more profitable by keeping them free to work at sea, by keeping the profits within the family, and not having to recruit third persons such as middlemen, accountants, and additional help in the repairing and cleaning of nets amongst other things. Women's understanding of the nature of the job also enables them to be emphatic to their husband's preoccupations and difficulties and, consequently, to provide them with the psychological and emotional support they need. By taking charge of all the familial responsibilities, men are free to solely focus on the fishing career. The unpredictability of the job requires them to economise and give up on commodities. Moreover, their unrelenting support

induces them to face numerous difficulties to which they have to adapt. The situation, irrespective of any arguments that might be raised by other fields of study, demonstrates that women's support and contribution to small-scale fisheries is important for its survival and perpetuation. Apart from the narratives, living proof and evidence of the phenomenon is attested to by Marsaxlokk whose fishermen receive major support from the women, mostly provided by the wives, thus enabling it to thrive better than any other fishing village in the Maltese archipelago. It is mostly to this reason that this village retained the largest number of active fishermen which earned it the title of Malta's main fishing village.

3.4 Belief in the Supernatural

The term 'supernatural' is self-explanatory. It encapsulates all that does not fall within the natural parameters and cannot be scientifically explained. With their higher-order thinking capacities and their need to make sense of their surroundings and very existence, humans have always sought answers to their questions. When rationality falls short, people attribute phenomena to the supernatural. Most cultures, including 'advanced' communities distinguished by their technological sophistication and higher level of education, incorporate the supernatural in their everyday lives. The supernatural is connected to belief, which is in turn 'rooted near human cognition itself.'⁶⁷³ Walker (1995) explains;

Referring to something as 'supernatural' is not to call it unreal or untrue – on the contrary. The existence of the term itself is a linguistic and cultural acknowledgment that inexplicable things happen which we identify as being somehow beyond the natural and the ordinary, and that many of us hold beliefs which connect us to spheres that exist beyond what we might typically see, hear, taste, touch, or smell.⁶⁷⁴

Within this context, the supernatural will be categorised in two broad categories, the religious aspect as promoted by the Roman Catholic Church, this being the principal local religious institution and which is most often accepted by the wider community, and the supernatural which, though highly adhered to by the wider society, is usually shrugged off and frowned upon.

⁶⁷³ Barbara Walker, 'Introduction', in *Out of the Ordinary: Folklore and the Supernatural*, Barbara Walker (ed.) Utah State University Press, Utah 1995, 1.

⁶⁷⁴ *ibid.*, 2.

3.4.1 Faith: The Heartening of the Fisherman's Soul

Faith, as expressed by Christians, is deeply rooted in the Maltese Islands. Although tangible evidence of Christianity can be traced back to the 4th century AD, it is believed to have been introduced much earlier by St. Paul in the year 60 AD when shipwrecked in Malta on his way to be charged in Rome. A turn of tables was experienced with the Muslim invasion, however, Christianity resurfaced during the Norman reign and was further consolidated by the local establishment of the Knights Hospitaller of the Order of Saint John who originated from the sacred city of Jerusalem. During their 268-year stay, many churches were built, and the Christian faith entranced itself in all aspects of life.

One's faith is put to the test when faced with perilous situations caused by natural phenomena. People who make a living from the sea, as with others who live in remote areas, rely heavily on their instincts. They have first-hand experiences of the natural forces and been exposed to imminent risk and life-threatening situations, which is the reason why, in the greater part, these people tend to be more religious than others and seek refuge in their faith. They are heartened in their trust of God.⁶⁷⁵ Through the centuries, Maltese seafaring people have always been staunch Catholics and lived up to the expectations of the church.⁶⁷⁶ Consequently, they were inclined to pray and express their gratitude on a more profound level than anyone else.⁶⁷⁷ In the past, their gratitude was most often tangibly expressed through *ex-voto* paintings.

3.4.1.1 Ex-Voto Paintings

Muscat (2003) defines a votive offering as the people's expression of agony when confronted by the force of nature or other perilous situations, and are testimonies to the people's humbleness, faith, and gratitude to God. In more technical terms they are offerings donated to God and can take any shape. They are donated by people from all walks of life who have come face to face with an uncomfortable circumstance such as a natural disaster, an enemy attack, the ordeal of giving birth, and famine just to mention a few. The term 'votive' originates from the Latin word *vovere* which means to vow, nonetheless, a votive offering does not automatically represent the fulfilment of a pre-established understanding from the person's end upon receiving what has been asked of God. In other words, it

⁶⁷⁵ Joseph Muscat, *Il-Kwadri Ex-Voto Marittimi Maltin* (Malta, Pubblikazzjonijiet Indipendenza, 2003), 23.

⁶⁷⁶ *ibid.*, 21.

⁶⁷⁷ *ibid.*, 23.

is not necessarily given upon the fulfilment of the bargain from God's behalf but could be merely given as an act of thanksgiving for his intervention.⁶⁷⁸

It must be noted that votive offerings are not the prerogative of Christianity. Be that as it may, the popularity of *ex-votos* experienced a surge with the growth and expansion of the church across the countries chief amongst which those cradled in the Mediterranean especially from the 16th century onwards. One can find numerous examples in Italy, France, Spain, and Croatia just to mention a few.⁶⁷⁹

Being an island, it is easy to understand why many Maltese *ex-votos* are marine related. Marine votive offerings reflect a seafarers' way of life and include cuttings from ropes, pieces of sails, chains, handcuffs and even bombs.⁶⁸⁰ Others include timber panels and scale models of ships with the most common being paintings. These offerings were given to the sanctuary dedicated to the saint and/or the Virgin Mary to whom people made the vow. In turn they were displayed on the respective sanctuary's walls.⁶⁸¹ Locally, maritime votive paintings can trace their origins to the beginning of the 17th century or end of the 16th century.⁶⁸² This research will focus exclusively on maritime *ex-voto* paintings these being the most common form of offerings offered by seafarers.

Almost all the local paintings pertaining to this genre display a seafaring vessel caught in a misgiving with the most common being foul weather and enemy attacks respectively. Except for a few, an iconographic representation of the Virgin Mary and/or a saint is always present at either the top left hand or right-hand corner with some being centrally positioned. Most often the paintings also include a short script narrating the event. Another prominent characteristic is the inclusion of the letters V.F.G.A⁶⁸³ which stand for *votum facit et gratiam accepit*, meaning that a vow was made and the grace received.⁶⁸⁴

The majority of the votive paintings (90%) depict the Virgin Mary⁶⁸⁵ to whom Maltese people have always harboured a strong devotion and venerated under various titles including Our Lady of Graces,

⁶⁷⁸ Andrew Cuschieri and Joseph Muscat, 'Maritime Votive Paintings in Maltese Churches', *Melita Historica*, x, 2 (1989), 121.

⁶⁷⁹ Muscat, 11.

⁶⁸⁰ *ibid.*, 7.

⁶⁸¹ Isabelle Borg, *The Maritime Ex-Voto: A Culture of Thanksgiving in Malta* (Malta, Heritage Books, 2005), 5.

⁶⁸² Muscat, 3.

⁶⁸³ *ibid.*, 9 and 10.

⁶⁸⁴ *ibid.*, 17.

⁶⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 63.

Our Lady of Mellieħa and Our Lady of Mount Carmel.⁶⁸⁶ Seafaring people are especially devoted to the Virgin Mary and hold her as the Star of the Sea.⁶⁸⁷ As explained by Borg (2005), *ex-votos* were mostly donated by a category of people at the primary faith-stage who perceived God as being far above and thus better reached through the intervention of a mediator with the most popular being the Virgin Mary.⁶⁸⁸ Since many *ex-votive* painting included her image, the painters thus engaged started being called *Madonnari*, however, the title was originally attributed to painters who specialised in copying the images of the Virgin Mary from famous paintings.⁶⁸⁹

A person wishing to commission an *ex-voto* approached a *Madonnaro* of his choice and provided him with the incident details. Amongst others, the information thus given included the day, month and year of the incident, the type and name of the seafaring vessel involved in the incident, and the place where the unfortunate event took place. Most often, the latter could be deduced from the coastal depictions or important landmarks. The level of detail included in a painting reflects the amount of information given to a *Madonnaro*. On some occasions, the seafarer painted the *ex-voto* himself. Despite being commissioned, few votive paintings are pleasing to the eye with many deprived of the aesthetic beauty expected of paintings. Unlike the fine arts exhibited in art museums, *ex-votos* are the manifestations of the seafarers' piety, faith, and infinite gratitude at being spared from certain death. Nevertheless, one may come across *ex-voto* masterpieces.⁶⁹⁰

Picture 30 is a typical *ex-voto* painting depicting a miracle. The narrow escape from disaster was perceived as a miraculous intervention from above. This was the only plausible answer that could be given by those who lived through the trauma when everything else was ruled out and no logical explanation could be provided.⁶⁹¹

⁶⁸⁶ Borg, 5.

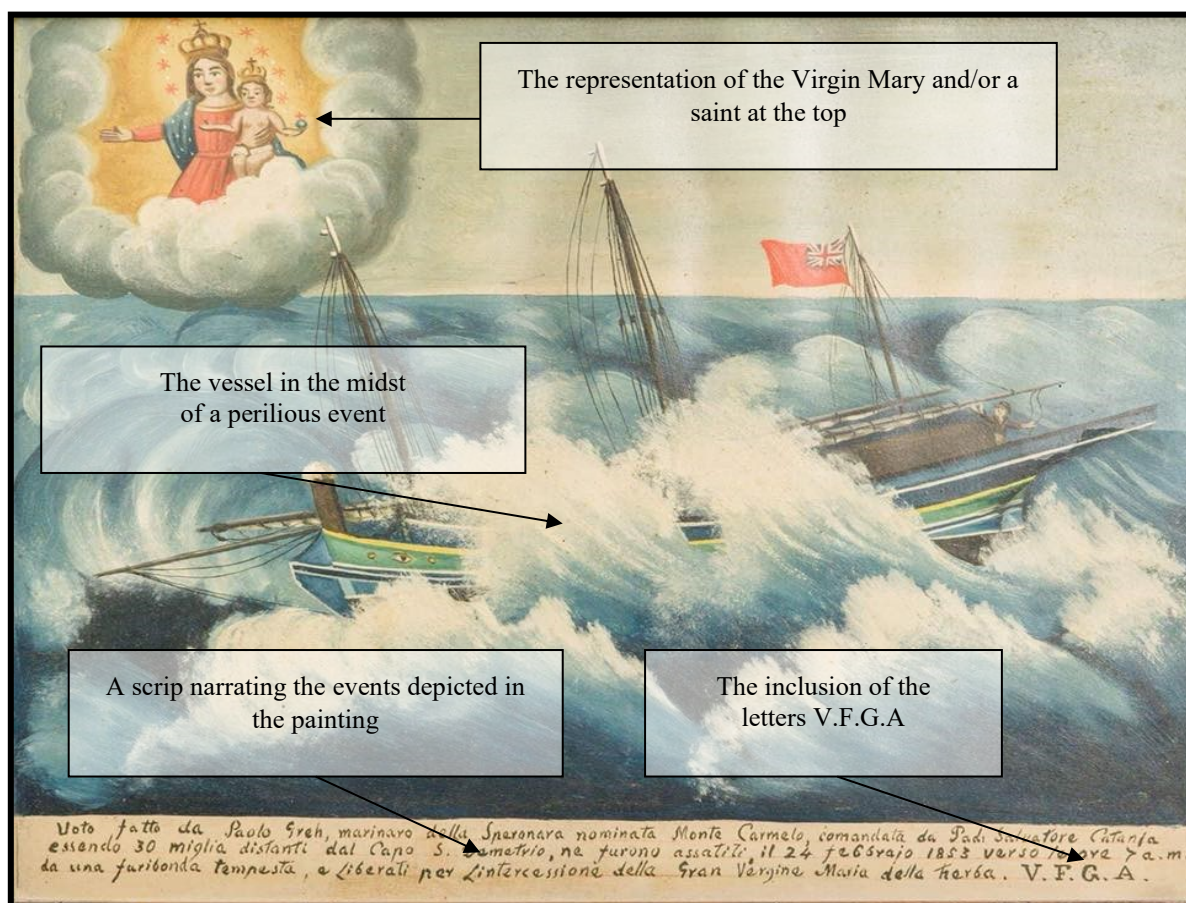
⁶⁸⁷ Muscat, 63.

⁶⁸⁸ Borg, 29.

⁶⁸⁹ Muscat, 105.

⁶⁹⁰ *ibid.*, 109.

⁶⁹¹ Muscat, 23-4.



Picture 30: The main components of a Maltese maritime *ex-voto* painting

(Source: Malta Maritime Museum)⁶⁹²

The Maltese Islands can boast of more than five hundred votive paintings related to maritime ventures⁶⁹³ spread across thirty local churches.⁶⁹⁴ For the purpose of this study, only votive paintings that narrate the misgivings of fishermen will be looked into. As with all maritime related votive paintings, the nature of the incident depicted relates either a natural disaster or an enemy attack. Considering the nature of fishermen's job, it comes as no surprise that the former by far surpasses the latter, nonetheless, the few examples of human attacks that are more characteristic of times past are fascinating to behold and have an extraordinary story to tell. Some *ex-voto* paintings hold elements of both. A case in point is an *ex-voto* painting at Mellieħa's sanctuary which gives an account of the threefold misgiving of two fishermen who, after narrowly escaping disaster from a storm while at sea, ended up in a deserted place. To make matters worse, they came face to face with seven escaped

⁶⁹² Picture 30. Cf. Malta Maritime Museum Facebook Page.

⁶⁹³ *ibid.*, 18.

⁶⁹⁴ *ibid.*, 160.

soldiers armed with bayonets that took possession of the fishermen's *speronara* (m. *xprunara*) and fled the scene. It was at this point that the stranded fishermen asked for the Virgin's Mary intercession.]Not only was their life spared but they also managed to trace down their fishing boat once the soldiers were caught.⁶⁹⁵

The most common natural hazard that fishermen face is foul weather. The terror that gripped fishermen who found themselves amidst storms, especially at a time when fishing boats were propelled by oars and sails, resulted in the commissioning of several votive paintings regardless their meagre income. It can be safely assumed that, had their financial means been better, more votive paintings related to the topic would have been found. One must also keep in mind that the paintings were offered by those who survived the ordeal. Most of the fishermen who found themselves in similar circumstances were not as lucky and lost their lives. A votive painting at Mellieħa's sanctuary that captures this sentiment, portrays a capsized *firilla* with its crew of five fishermen struggling to keep at the surface and supplicating Our Lady of Mellieħa to spare them.⁶⁹⁶ The only votive painting pertaining to the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus at Fontana, Gozo also depicts a stormy incident. The painting, which is attributed to G. Agius and dated 1918, is particularly well executed. It shows the fishermen on board a *luzzu* straining against the tempest. The iconic representation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is shown at the left-hand side.⁶⁹⁷ The Basilica of the National Shrine of the Blessed Virgin of Ta' Pinu at Gozo, houses a votive painting that tells the story of fishermen hailing from Ġhajnsielem who, on the 3rd of June 1914, were thrown overboard when their fishing boat was hit by a large wave in the vicinity of Ras il-Qala. Help was asked of the Blessed Virgin of Ta' Pinu who appears in the top left-hand corner of the painting. Assistance was provided by Angelo Demanuele and his crew on board their *firilla* who quickly made their way towards the unlucky men.⁶⁹⁸ Another interesting story as depicted in an *ex-voto* painting can be found at the Shrine of Our Lady of Mercy at Qrendi. It illustrates the incident of fishermen who ended up stranded on Filfla for eight days without any food following a storm. They were saved in the nick of time by two fishing boats and a *firilla* that assisted them in their hour of need.⁶⁹⁹ This shrine also houses another *ex-voto* that, as with the previous, depicts fishermen caught in a storm while fishing from their *firilla*. Similarly, another *firilla* approached to save the fishermen's lives.⁷⁰⁰

⁶⁹⁵ *ibid.*, 30.

⁶⁹⁶ *ibid.*, 210.

⁶⁹⁷ *ibid.*, 146.

⁶⁹⁸ *ibid.*, 193.

⁶⁹⁹ *ibid.*, 220.

⁷⁰⁰ *ibid.*, Illustrazzjoni no. 7.

The sole *ex-voto* painting originally pertaining to the Church of Saint Joseph at Qala and which happens to be fishermen themed, is nowadays housed at the Maritime Museum at Birgu. Unlike the others mentioned so far, St. Joseph with the infant Jesus is the iconography used.⁷⁰¹ Yet another painting tells the story of four fishermen who fell overboard when the *firilla* from which they were fishing capsized. The only survivor commissioned the *ex-voto* which is housed at the Marian Sanctuary referred to as 'Tal-Herba' at Birkirkara.⁷⁰² A crew of fishermen who were likewise caught in a storm but managed to swim and drag themselves on land commissioned the *ex-votive* painting housed at the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Graces.⁷⁰³ A unique *ex-voto* that displays both St. Catherine and St. Joseph can be found at Żurrieq's parish Church which explains the depiction of the former. However, it is unclear why St. Joseph had been included. The nature of the incident, which took place on the 10th of March 1971, is also unclear. Whatever it may be, the *ex-voto* shows a crew of fishermen who found themselves in trouble when their fishing boat, probably a *firilla*, started to make water. The fishermen were at risk of drowning when their prayers were answered with the approach of a *speronara* sporting the Order's flag that succoured them.⁷⁰⁴



Picture 31: The *ex-voto* of fishermen thrown overboard at the Shrine of Our Lady of Mercy at Qrendi

(Source: Il-Kwadri Ex-Voto Marittimi Maltin)⁷⁰⁵

⁷⁰¹ *ibid.*, 195.

⁷⁰² *ibid.*, 214.

⁷⁰³ *ibid.*, Illustrazzjoni no. 72.

⁷⁰⁴ *ibid.*, 182.

⁷⁰⁵ Picture 31. Cf. *ibid.*, Illustrazzjoni no. 7.



Picture 32: *Ex-voto* of fishermen in the risk of drowning after their boat started making water

(Source: Il-Kwadri Ex-Voto Marittimi Maltin)⁷⁰⁶



Picture 33: Fishermen escaped a storm and succeeded to scramble on land

(Source: Il-Kwadri Ex-Voto Marittimi Maltin)⁷⁰⁷

⁷⁰⁶ Picture 32. Cf. *ibid.*, Illustrazzjoni no. 9.

⁷⁰⁷ Picture 33. Cf. *ibid.*, Illustrazzjoni no. 72.

An *ex-voto* asserting to another form of potential danger fishermen are subjected to; attacks by sharks, is housed at the Sanctuary of Our Lady at Żabbar.⁷⁰⁸ Another that narrates a similar story is located at the church of Our Lady of Mercy in Żejtun. As with the previous example, the fishermen Giuseppe Mifsud, Angelo Degabriele, Francesco Galea and Luigi Carabot were thrown overboard by a large fish on the 14th of May 1891 in the vicinity of Marsaxlokk. A *firilla* can be seen approaching to assist the fishermen. Apparently, this is the only painting that exhibits exclusively purgatory souls.⁷⁰⁹



Picture 34: Ex-votive painting of fishermen being attacked by a large fish or a whale

(Source: Maritime Votive Paintings in Maltese Churches)⁷¹⁰

⁷⁰⁸ *ibid.*, 33.

⁷⁰⁹ *ibid.*, 176-7.

⁷¹⁰ Picture 34. Cf. Andrew Cuschieri and Joseph Muscat. "Maritime Votive Paintings in Maltese Churches." *Maltese History and Heritage*. 30 March 2019 <<https://vassallohistory.wordpress.com/maritime-votive-paintings-in-maltese-churches/>>.



Picture 35: Ex-votive painting of fishermen thrown overboard by attacking sharks
(Source: Maritime Votive Paintings in Maltese Churches)⁷¹¹



Picture 36: The *ex-voto* painting exhibited at the Maritime Museum
(Source: my own)

⁷¹¹ Picture 35. Cf. *ibid.*

Irrespective of their importance in providing fishermen with hope, the practice of commissioning *ex-voto* paintings diminished around the mid-20th century most probably due to the liturgical directive that asked for the removal of votive offerings.⁷¹² Other reasons why their popularity diminished may include the adherence to greater safety, the on board installation of technological devices, the construction of sturdier boats along with their motorisation, and accurate weather forecasts. Nonetheless, one can still come across the occasional donation. An example would be the *ex-voto* donated in 2012 by Carmen Axiaq who prayed St. Catherine to return her husband who had been lost at sea for two days safely home.⁷¹³ Her husband was likewise praying to Żabbar's patron saint for a safe deliverance. Assistance was finally provided by a large tanker. The fisherman admitted to having gone out fishing without being properly equipped.⁷¹⁴ The latter further confirms that, amongst others, commissions for *ex-votos* have decreased since better equipment and efficient means of communication have become a commodity.



Picture 37: Carmen Axiaq, the fisherman's wife, with the *ex-voto* dedicated to Our Lady of Graces following her husband's safe return from the 2012 incident

(Source: Keeping the Faith: Ex-voto paintings)⁷¹⁵

⁷¹² Borg, 5.

⁷¹³ Fiona Vella. "Keeping the Faith: Ex-Voto Paintings." Fiona Vella. 3 April 2019 <<http://fionavella.com/features/2014/03/keeping-the-faith-ex-voto-paintings/>>.

⁷¹⁴ Arladne Massa, 'Sharks Circled My Boat – I Despaired', *Times of Malta*, 23 September 2012.

⁷¹⁵ Picture 37. Cf. Fiona Vella. "Keeping the Faith: Ex-Voto Paintings." Fiona Vella. 3 April 2019 <<http://fionavella.com/features/2014/03/keeping-the-faith-ex-voto-paintings/>>.

Even though votive paintings have decreased in popularity, it does not necessarily mean that the fishermen's faith has dwindled. Amongst others, it must be acknowledged that present day fishermen are not familiar with the votive offering tradition. Consequently, they reverted to alternate ways by which to express their gratitude.

3.4.1.2 St. Andrew; The Patron Saint of Fishermen

The cult towards saints saw its origins during the first years of the Christian's faith establishment. It was the time when Christians were persecuted, martyred, and sanctified. Their inspirational faith gave rise to cults. The saints chosen to be thus venerated were the ones groups of people could identify themselves with. Being a fisherman, St. Andrew was highly looked upon by fishermen and was subsequently declared their patron saint. As expected, the Maltese Islands' devotion towards St. Andrew developed in fishing areas including Marsaxlokk, Luqa, Żurrieq and Xlendi. The spread of this saint's popularity to other areas that do not bear any affinity to fishing was spread through demographic movements between localities. This explains why devotion to St. Andrew can be found in Birkirkara, Lija, Sannat and Xewkija.⁷¹⁶ A good number of churches, altars, confraternities, and statues have since been dedicated to him. Devotion to St. Andrew reached its epitome in the parish of Ħal Luqa (Malta) and Fontana (Gozo) who chose him to be the patron and co-patron saint respectively. Even so, devotion towards St. Andrew stretches way back in history long before the establishment of these parishes as evidenced by the frescos depicting the saint in the medieval chapels of the Annunciation in Ħal Millieri and St. Mary's chapel in Bir Miftuħ.⁷¹⁷

Although presently Ħal Luqa does not have any ties with fishing whatsoever, historians claim that the first settlers were fishers who fished in neighbouring Marsa prior the Knights' arrival. They built a chapel dedicated to St. Andrew in the 1400s. The parish was subsequently founded in 1634.⁷¹⁸ With the first church being in disrepair, another church was built between 1539 and 1542. A priest was brought to the locality to celebrate Mass on the patron saint's feast.⁷¹⁹ Yet another new church was built in 1686 with additional constructions added in subsequent centuries only to be destroyed by the

⁷¹⁶ Fiona Vella, "Il-Holqien ta' Kult." Fiona Vella, 15 April 2019<fionavella.com/features/2010/11/il-holqien-ta'-kult/>.

⁷¹⁷ Hermann Duncan, 'The Devotion Towards St. Andrew the Apostle on Our Island', *The Malta Independent*, 18 November 2017.

⁷¹⁸ Stephanie Fsadni, 'Exhibition Traces Devotion to St. Andrew', *Times of Malta*, 20 November 2010.

⁷¹⁹ Hermann Duncan, 'The Devotion Towards St. Andrew the Apostle on Our Island', *The Malta Independent*, 18 November 2017.

9th of April 1942 bombings. The present grand church was built between 1945 and 1954.⁷²⁰ Hal Luqa also boasts of another statue of the saint in Carmel Street which dates to 1877.⁷²¹

Fontana in Gozo, which recognises St. Andrew as a co-patron saint, was also characterised by fishers. Up till the first half of the 19th century, a considerable number of fishers that operated from Xlendi's port settled in Fontana since no houses were built in and around the harbour. The fishers residing here played a paramount role in the founding and building of the parish church and the village's extension.⁷²² Late in the 19th century they started to set aside part of the proceeds from their catches for the building of the church.⁷²³ Work on the church's foundations started on the 11th of August 1892 with the first stone being laid on the 29th of January 1893. The building process was halted on numerous occasions from lack of funds. Eventually, the newly built church was consecrated on the 29th of January 1905 and dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Due to the presence of fishers, St. Andrew was chosen as its co-patron. With the joint efforts of Rev. Ġużepp Hili, who was later established as the first chaplain, and the fishers, the Bishop Giovanni Maria Camilleri established the parish of Fontana on the 27th of March 1911.⁷²⁴

Xlendi was attributed the motto *Navium Tutela*, meaning 'Protection for Vessels' (m. *Ħarsien għall-Imriekeb*).⁷²⁵ Considering it is a fishing port, a prominent statue of St. Andrew was erected in Xlendi Bay, this being the area in which boats are kept on land during winter or when not in use. The statue was inaugurated and blessed by the then bishop of Gozo Fra Giovanni Maria Camilleri on the 18th of June 1882. In 1901 a plaque was fixed to its pedestal indicating that the same bishop gracefully bestowed forty days worth of indulgence to whomever recited prayers to it. Devotion towards St. Andrew is still extensive, and the statue is decorated with both lights and flowers every November 30th in his honour.⁷²⁶

A similar statue can be found at Marsaxlokk's fishing port. For the first time in its history, about the year 1785, the number of fishermen residing in this village surpassed that of farmers. The larger part

⁷²⁰ "Parroċċa Hal Luqa." *L-Arċidjoċesi ta' Malta*. 20 April 2021 <<https://parrocchi.knisja.mt/parrocca/hal-luqa/>>.

⁷²¹ "St. Andrew Statue, Luqa." *Restoration.gov.mt*. 19 April 2019 <<https://restoration.gov.mt/en/otherprojects/projects/Pages/St--Andrew%27s-Statue,-Luqa.aspx>>.

⁷²² "L-Ewwel Familji fil-Fontana." *Fontana Local Council*. 29 April 2019 <fontanagozo.com>.

⁷²³ "Fontana." *Gozo Diocese*. 2 May 2019 <<http://gozodiocese.org/churches/parishes/fontana/>>.

⁷²⁴ "Il-Knisja tal-Fontana." *Fontana Local Council*. 29 April 2019 <fontanagozo.com>.

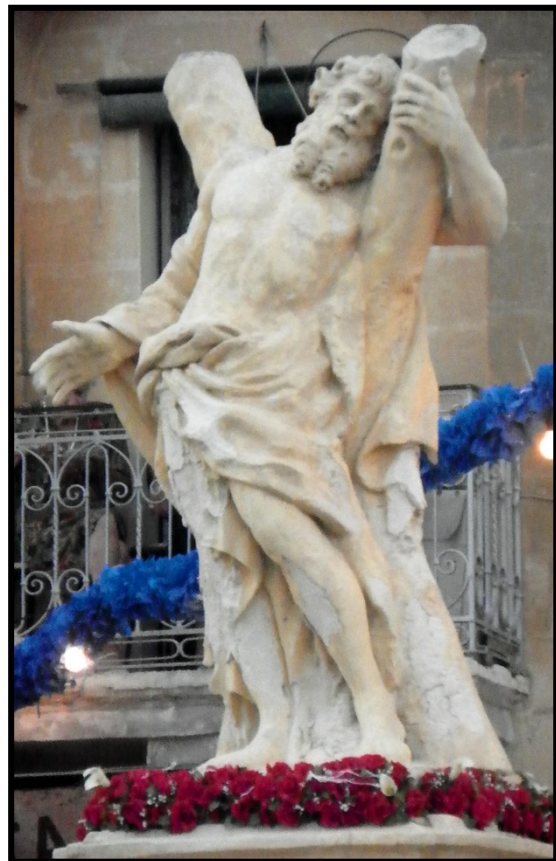
⁷²⁵ "Villages." *Discover Gozo*. 8 May 2019 <<http://www.discovergozo.com.mt/towns-and-villages/zebbug/80-information/villages>>.

⁷²⁶ "2015 - Statue of Sant Indrija, Xlendi." 19 October 2018. *Wirt Għawdex*. 10 May 2019 <<https://www.wirtghawdex.org/index.php/component/k2/statue-of-st-andrew,-xlendi-2>>.

of the fishermen who settled here hailed from neighbouring Żejtun, whereas others made their way from Bormla and Żurrieq. Having grown in number and harbouring a strong devotion to their patron saint, it was deemed fit for a statue of St. Andrew to be erected in the newly established fishing village. The sculptor entrusted with the work was Vincenzo Dimech. The completed statue was brought over on a cart pulled by bulls and set in a prominent place nearby the shore on the 13th of June 1791.⁷²⁷ In time, it gave rise to the nomenclature of the surroundings. Marsaxlokk's entry point from the sea known as *Id-Daħla ta' Marsaxlokk* (Marsaxlokk's Entry) also became known as *Id-Daħla ta' Sant'Andrija* (St. Andrew's Entry). It also lent its name to the *Għajn tal-Hasselin* (Washers' Spring), a natural source of brackish water next to the shoreline, which also became known as *L-Għajn ta' Sant'Andrija* (St. Andrew's Spring).⁷²⁸ In Marsaxlokk's parish church of Our Lady of Pompeii, one can also find an altar adorned with a statue dedicated to St. Andrew.



Picture 38: The statue of St. Andrew at
Xlendi's port
(Source: my own)



Picture 39: The statue of St. Andrew
at Marsaxlokk
(Source: my own)

⁷²⁷ Joseph Grech, *Marsaxlokk: Mitt Sena Parroċċa 1897-1997* (Malta, Outlook Coop, 1997), 15-6.

⁷²⁸ Alex Camilleri, 'Il-Port ta' Marsaxlokk u Madwaru', *L-Imnara*, ix, 1 (2008), 22.

Being a village with fishing ties, Żurrieq pays its respects to the fishermen's patron as well. Amongst others, a chapel dedicated to this saint was built back in 1634. The painting depicting the saint that used to adorn the chapel's altar has since been moved to the sacristy of Żurrieq's parish church which also houses an altar dedicated to St. Andrew, a fine work by Mattia Preti.⁷²⁹

There are many other statues, chapels, paintings, and altars dedicated to St. Andrew that testify to the strong devotion towards this saint, however, this study limited itself to mentioning artefacts found in the fishing villages. The strong devotion was also evidenced by the National Exhibition of St. Andrew's cult in Malta held between the 19th and 28th of November 2010 at Luqa's parish on the 1950th anniversary of St. Andrew's martyrdom. A vast array of works of art and objects of historical significance related to the saint were exhibited on the occasion.⁷³⁰

3.4.1.3 The Blessing of the Boats

The blessing of the boats is an old tradition that is carried out in many countries prior to an important fishing season (see section 1.2.5) to augur fishermen a prosperous season characterised by bountiful catches. In Malta's case, the blessing of the boats is associated with the esteemed *lampuki* fishing season which opens annually on the 15th of August. The ceremony, which is held at Marsaxlokk, is preceded by the celebration of Mass in the open. To bless the boats, the parish priest embarks a traditional Maltese fishing boat that takes him around the fishing harbour. During the ceremony, the parish priest exchanges words with the fishermen who happen to be tending to the last preparations in readiness to setting sail at the morrow's dawn.

The exclusiveness of the ceremony to Marsaxlokk was confirmed by all the fishermen interviewed with some claiming that the blessing of the boats prior this fishing season used to be carried out at Mgarr as well, this being the main fishing village in Gozo. Two of the fishermen operating from the said port claimed that it is still in place, however, others confirmed that the custom, which was the prerogative of one of the previous Ghajnsielem parish priests, was abandoned once his successor took over. An eighty-year-old Gozitan fisherman who has long since retired to Ġnejna, Malta, was unsure whether the blessing in Mgarr was still in place whilst another Mgarr fisherman expressed his desire for the custom to be resumed.

⁷²⁹ Hermann Duncan, 'The Devotion Towards St. Andrew the Apostle on Our Island', *The Malta Independent*, 18 November 2017.

⁷³⁰ Stephanie Fsadni, 'Exhibition Traces Devotion to St. Andrew', *Times of Malta*, 20 November 2010.



Picture 40: Marsaxlokk's parish priest celebrating mass in the open prior to the blessing of the boats
(Source: my own)



Picture 41: The parish priest being taken around the harbour on board a traditional Maltese boat to
bless the boats set for the esteemed *lampuki* season
(Source: my own)

A fisherman from St. Paul's Bay explained that the custom used to be carried out at his home port as well. A veteran fisherman hailing from Marsalforn claimed the same for his fishing village which was further confirmed by the few remaining Marsalforn fishermen. The custom has since been abandoned because of the ever-dwindling number of fishermen to the extent that, presently, only one fisherman from the area has a *lampuki* fishing permit. Likewise, a fisherman from Birżebbuġa explained that the blessing of the boats is not carried out in his locality from lack of fishermen in possession of the said fishing permit. The local blessing of the boats prior the *lampuki* fishing season was frowned upon by only one fisherman who claimed that he does not believe in the bestowing of blessings considering he caught much more fish than those who had their boats blessed.

The blessing of fishing vessels is also called upon with the launching of a new boat. Pulè (2000) explained that for the occasion a small congregation of people gathered at the venue of the blessing. Upon being blessed, the boat was carried to the shore in readiness for its first launch amidst the admiration of those present.⁷³¹ When asked if the custom was still in place, almost all the fishermen answered in the affirmative. Only two fishermen answered in the negative with one explaining that it had been quite some time since he had last heard of someone who had his new boat blessed, which could be explained by the fact that few new boats are being commissioned from the ever-dwindling number of fishermen. Moreover, a considerable number of the interviewed fishermen never had their boats blessed only because they had either purchased a second-hand boat or inherited it from their fathers. Otherwise, all the fishermen who had a new boat asked for the parish priest to bless it except for one who refrained from asking for the second boat he had commissioned to be thus endowed. Even though never in possession of a new boat himself, another fisherman explained that he still wouldn't have had it blessed following an argument he had had with the parish priest. As opposed to him, a fisherman who changed boats on several occasions have always seen to their blessing even though they were preowned.

Another interesting example was provided by a Gozitan fisherman who asks the parish priest to bless his *luzzu* on a yearly basis before he starts fishing with the trammel net. Similarly, a St. Paul's Bay fisherman asks his second cousin priest to bless his boat every year prior the tuna fishing season as does a friend of his at Msida. One more fisherman from St. Paul's Bay also asks for his *luzzu* to be blessed on a yearly basis whilst the priest is attending to the annual household blessing. Finally, a

⁷³¹ Carmel Pulè, *Qxur, Biċċiet u Opri tal-Baħar* (Malta, Pubblikazzjonijiet Indipendenza, 2000), 79.

Xlukkajr fisherman asked for his *luzzu* to be blessed after it had undergone major modifications to suit his needs by which the greater part of the original woodwork had been replaced.



Picture 42: The *luzzu* undergoing extensive modifications
(Source: Rudolf Cassar)



Picture 43: The same *luzzu* complete from renovations being blessed before taken to sea
(Source: Rudolf Cassar)

3.4.1.4 It-Terz tal-Madonna

The *Terz tal-Madonna*, meaning 'Our Lady's One Third', was a donation system originally put into place by *Xlukkajri*⁷³² fishermen to cover the expenses for the commissioning, execution, and transportation of the titular statue of Our Lady of Pompeii. Nonetheless, the contribution thus given to the church did not stop with its completion but started making good for its proper maintenance.⁷³³ Nowadays, the funds thus collected are used to cover the expenses incurred by the locality's feast. The *Terz tal-Madonna* was donated via the shared payment system (see section 3.2.1.1) whereby a quarter⁷³⁴ of the amount due fishermen from each fishing trip of a given fishing season, with the most popular being *lampuki*, was deducted to be thus donated. Another veteran fisherman explained that approximately forty *lampuki* fishing permits used to be issued each year to *Xlukkajri* fishermen each of whom set aside about €500. Consequently, an approximate of €20,000 was donated at the end of the fishing season. It is understood that the *Terz tal-Madonna* is exclusive to *Xlukkajri* fishermen, however, an old fisherman hailing from Xewkija recalls a time when the *terz* was given by his locality's fishermen as well to fund the parish's building expenses.

Some *Xlukkajri* fishermen maintained that fishermen from the locality no longer adhere to the *terz*'s system but are free to donate any desired sum of money. Others claimed that even though no longer popular, the *terz* is still practised. A veteran *Xlukkajr* fisherman explained that as the end of the season approaches, the parish priest asks the fishermen to pass unto him the donations. Being small boat owners who work independently of crews with no possibility of endorsing this donation mechanism can be in part attributed to the lack of consensus. Even though the *terz* may still be in place, its popularity has most certainly diminished. Several reasons can be put forward to explain the phenomenon. Seeing as donations in general are still popular, lack of faith can be ruled out. On the other hand, this change can be attributed to the ever-decreasing number of Maltese fishermen in possession of large enough boats that require crews. Moreover, the decrease in Maltese fishermen in general has compelled larger boat owners to recruit foreigners who may not share the same religion and sense of belonging. Besides, as opposed to Maltese fishermen, foreigners' wages are given independently of the sharing system.

⁷³² *Xlukkajri* is the name by which people hailing from Marsaxlokk are known.

⁷³³ Grech, 28.

⁷³⁴ Even though *terz* literally means a third, the donated money amounted to a quarter of a fisherman's wage.

3.4.1.5 The Fear of God

Being the day of Christ's resurrection, the Second Vatican Council decreed Sunday a day of worship, thus refraining people from working on the day.⁷³⁵ Even though still held as the day of worship and church going, new exigences induced Christians in general to work on Sundays as well. Until a few years ago, Maltese people still held working on a Sunday sinful, regards which a Gozitan fisherman had an intriguing story to tell of the occasion his brother-in-law asked him to take him fishing on the day. Upon catching a tuna, the fisherman realised that he had forgotten to bring his knife with which he would have sliced the fish and rendered it inconspicuous to onlookers. Having no other means by which to go about the task, they tried to conceal it as best they could by inserting it in a sack. Fishermen who happened to be on the spot back at port gave them many disapproving looks. Upon learning what they had been about, the fisherman's mother called the fishmonger and sold him the fish. The money was in turn donated to the church. Permission to fish on a Sunday was exclusively granted for amberjack fishing against the donation of half the proceeds to the village priest which obtained them absolution from working on the holy day.

Another day on which many fishermen still refrain from working is Good Friday. When still young, one of the fishermen had a canon as a client to whom he sold fish on Tuesdays and Fridays. Upon buying fish on the Tuesday preceding Good Friday, the canon informed the fisherman that, as customary, he would be visiting again the following Friday. Upon informing him that he would not be catching and selling any fish on the said day, the canon attributed the custom of not fishing on a Good Friday to ignorance. The fisherman confessed to having lost many potentially good fishing days by abiding to the custom. Many interviewees still abstain from fishing on Good Fridays, however, they do so out of respect rather than from fear of committing a sin. Being a public holiday is a further incentive to take the day off.

3.4.1.6 The Boat Names

Most of the boats are either named after saints or have a religious connotation. Those named otherwise include names of wives, fathers, children, and the families' nicknames just to mention a few. Most of the interviewees owned religiously named boats, nonetheless, this does not necessarily reflect adherence to faith since many were either inherited or bought second hand. The same holds true for

⁷³⁵ "The History of Sunday Observance." The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Ukranian Catholic Parish. 24 May 2019 <<https://abvmcalgary.com/abvmcalgary/index.php/our-faith-practise/18-history>>.

non-religious named boats. A better representation of the fishermen's faith is provided by boats which had been either commissioned or had their names changed by their current owners. It must be noted however, that changing the name is not always simple especially with the traditional boat types in which case the name is often engraved on the gunwale-stake.

Two brothers who commissioned a large fishing boat asked the boat builder to name it in their stead. Being Gozitan and hailing from Mgarr, he decided to name it after the chapel of Our Lady of Lourdes that stands on a promontory overlooking the harbour. Likewise, a substantial number of the interviewees named their boats after their village's patron saint. Even though not linked with his village's patron, a fisherman who had commissioned a large fishing boat named it after the Mosta Chapel of Our Lady of Good Hope; this being the area in which his father was brought up. In a particular fisherman's case, the choice of religious name depended solely on its uniqueness since he did not want any numerals following the name to distinguish it from others. To this effect, he decided on Holy Child Mary; this being a name that none had come up with before him. Yet another fisherman named his boat after his son, but had it preceded by the prefix St. thus also dedicating it to the saint after whom his offspring was originally named. A second fisherman who likewise named his boat was initially set on naming it for his parish's patron saint. Being unavailable, he opted for St. Theresa, this being his sister's name, but was likewise disappointed. Finally, he decided to name it St. Anthony in memory of both the saint and his deceased brother. A most interesting reason for his choice of name was given by a *Xlukkajr* fisherman whose boat is named for 'The Divine Shepherd's Psalm' which reads;

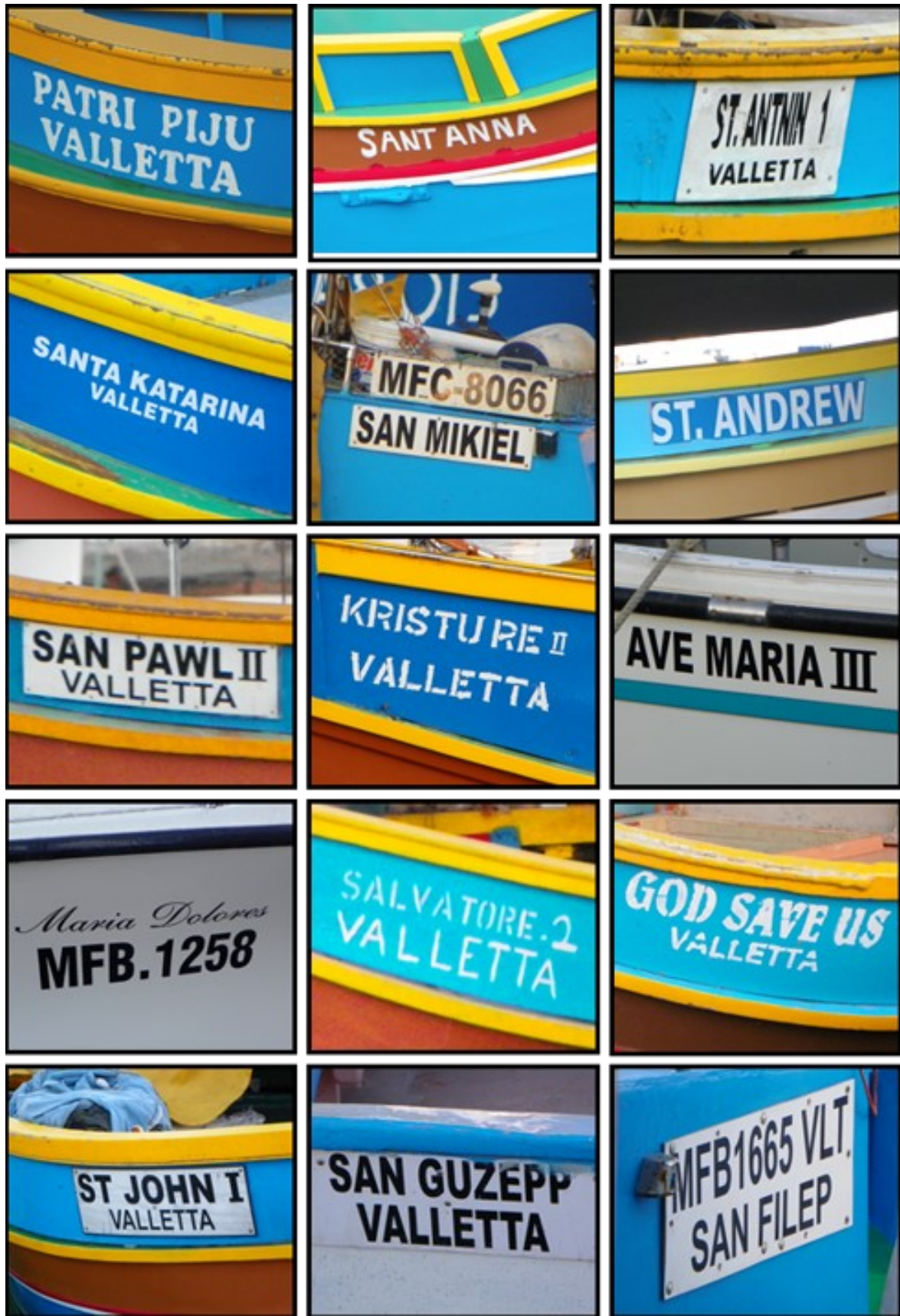
The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures...⁷³⁶

He explained that just as God makes one lie down to rest in green pastures, he wishes to be laid to rest in the blue sea when his days on Earth come to an end. Upon selling his boat and commissioning a new one, a fisherman decided to bestow it with the same religious name of the former for the sake of convenience. Comparably, his son decided to name his own boat after Our Lady of Sorrows in commemoration of a family-owned public transport bus which also happened to be the first to ever operate in the locality. In both cases, even though named after religious entities, the religious faith was not the primary motive for doing so. As for the fishermen who provided their boats with alternate

⁷³⁶ *The Holy Bible: The New Testament*, Psalm 23.

names, two named it after their wives, one of whom named all the boats he had ever owned after his long-deceased wife. Others named their boats after their children. Fishermen who have more than one offspring combined the names in one. A father of three named his boat after his eldest daughter most probably because she was born long before the others as evidenced by the age gap. Yet another fisherman gave the boat his father's name. Similarly, others named their boats after their father but instead of applying his name, they reverted to the nicknames by which they were known. A substantial number of fishermen provided their boats with the family nickname in general. Only two of the fishermen interviewed named their brand-new boats something other than the nomenclature attribution mentioned above.

This section demonstrated that the fishermen's adherence to faith can also be attested to by the boat names especially by those who named their brand-new boats after a religious entity. It cannot be excluded that others would have likewise named their boats had it been possible, however, the same holds true of fishermen who bought/inherited religious named boats. The stories also revealed that many fishermen were decisive from the start to have their boats religiously linked and attributed secondary meanings such a commemorative place or a relative's name if viable.



Picture 44: Various examples of religious boat names

(Source: my own)

3.4.1.7 The *Tonnara*

Several religious traditions were associated with the *tonnara* (m. *tunnara*) which, as mentioned in section 2.7.1, was locally introduced in 1748 by Grand Master Pinto. The *tonnara* was set up in various northerly Maltese coasts with the most popular being Mellieħa Bay and Anchor Bay to the extent that the latter derived its name from the large anchors used in *tonnara* fishing.⁷³⁷ In his interview with an old *tonnara* fisherman, Spiteri (2011) recorded the custom of setting the net's entry facing the Sanctuary of Our Lady at Mellieħa. In her article, Fenech (2005) further elaborates that it was customary for the *tonnara*'s *padrun* to place a wooden cross bearing holy pictures of their patron, the Madonna tal-Mellieħa, and other saints at its entrance. Palm fronds specially blessed on Palm Thursday were also hanged. When the net was fully set, villagers went down to the bay to witness the net's blessing. The task was entrusted to the parish priest who was rowed to the net's site by means of a boat. The blessing for a successful catch was accompanied with the reciting of prayers for the safety of the men.⁷³⁸ Interestingly, Lanfranco (2015) reports yet another religious custom associated with the net, whereby a small statue of St. Anthony of Padua, housed at the small church dedicated to the same saint in the limits of Marsascala, used to be lowered in the sea on the net by the fishermen to ensure abundant catches.⁷³⁹

When the net was full with tuna, the *padrun* shouted *lieva* (rise) whereby fishermen lifted the bottom netting of the death chamber whilst loudly reciting prayers and singing Maltese folk songs (m. *ghana*).⁷⁴⁰ Yet another religious tradition associated with the *tonnara* was the 3:00 pm reciting of the rosary before the fishermen returned to land.⁷⁴¹ As thanksgiving for the abundant catch and for their safe deliverance, the fishermen used to light an oil lamp in front of the icon of the Madonna tal-Mellieħa. Fenech (2005), also explained that it was customary of fishermen to provide the inquisitor with a specimen as a token of the good catch, whereas another was donated to the Mellieħa Sanctuary to be raffled.⁷⁴² Similarly, Spiteri (2011) claims that a specimen used to be raffled amongst the

⁷³⁷ Charles B. Spiteri, *Tifkiriet u Xogħol tal-Imghoddi* (Malta, Pubblikazzjonijiet Indipendenza, 2011), 120.

⁷³⁸ Doris Fenech. "Tuna Fishing: It-Tonnara." Maltese Traditions. 10 August 2018 <<https://sites.google.com/site/maltesetraditions/tuna-fishing---it-tunnara>>.

⁷³⁹ Guido Lanfranco, 'Some Folkloristic Aspects of the Sea', in *The Maltese Islands and the Sea*, Timmy Gambin (ed.) Midsea Books, Malta 2015, 202.

⁷⁴⁰ Doris Fenech. "Tuna Fishing: It-Tonnara." Maltese Traditions. 10 August 2018 <<https://sites.google.com/site/maltesetraditions/tuna-fishing---it-tunnara>>.

⁷⁴¹ Spiteri, 120.

⁷⁴² Doris Fenech. "Tuna Fishing: It-Tonnara." Maltese Traditions. 10 August 2018 <<https://sites.google.com/site/maltesetraditions/tuna-fishing---it-tunnara>>.

fishermen and the proceeds donated to the sanctuary.⁷⁴³ Nevertheless, it is not clear whether the two customs were carried out conjointly or whether the latter eventually substituted the former.

3.4.1.8 Holy Images and Artefacts

Further insight into the fishermen's faith is provided by the holy images and artefacts kept on board and/or at their working place. When asked whether they keep anything religious on their boat, almost all the fishermen answered in the affirmative. The only two who denied having anything on board keep a holy picture in their wallet and/or garage. The most popular artefact is the crucifix or cross followed by holy images (m. *santi*). Other artefacts include scapulars (m. *labti*), memorial cards of loved ones (m. *santi tal-mejtin*), holy medals (m. *domni*) and holy water (m. *ilma mbierək*). The holy images portray different saints including the respective village's patron saint, St. Andrew, and others of Our Lady and the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Most of the fishermen have two or more artefacts on board.

The popularity of the cross is mainly due to the boat builders' tradition of affixing a cross with a blessed olive branch at the top of the stempost the moment it is fixed to the keel during boat construction and kept thus throughout the building process and the launching. Once launched, the cross was taken off and permanently placed inside.

As opposed to boat names, holy images and artefacts can be easily removed, therefore, their presence can better attest to the fishermen's faith. These could also be observed on the occasions when the interviews were conducted at their workplaces. Pule (2000), explains that boat builders were also known for their religiosity proof of which was provided by the numerous pictures, photos, and holy images attached inside their toolbox.⁷⁴⁴

⁷⁴³ Spiteri, 120.

⁷⁴⁴ Pulè, 13.



Picture 45: The cross and the blessed olive branch affixed at the top of the stempost
(Source: Rudolf Cassar)



Picture 46: The cross attached on the inside following the boat's launching
(Source: my own)



Picture 47: Another picture of the original cross attached to the inside of the boat
(Source: my own)

Another boat area which may be decorated with motifs is the boat side. Contrary to the gunwale-strake, the motifs on this part of the boat are never abstract. Morris (2016) noted that the most popular depicts a bird with a banner, most probably reminiscent of the religious representation of the dove with an olive branch in its beak. In his study, some of the fishermen did not identify the bird species, whereas others asserted to it being a dove or a pigeon, the bird that helped Noah find dry land which, in the fishermen's case, acts as a protective image for the fishing boat. The dove also symbolises the soul and the Holy Spirit.⁷⁴⁵ Another popular motif also steeped in religion, is the lamb and the flag design for which Morris (2016) also has an interesting explanation;

According to ancient legend, sorcerers, witches and the devil could turn themselves into any creature except the dove or the lamb. This is yet another reason for the prevalence of dove emblems (which also occur elsewhere on the boat), and it also explains a number of Lamb and Flag emblems that appear on the bows. In Christian art, the lamb is given the role of Christ the Redeemer, the 'Lamb of God', who takes away the sins of the world.⁷⁴⁶

⁷⁴⁵ Desmond Morris, *The Boats of Malta: The Art of the Fishermen* (Malta, Faraxa, 2016), 71.

⁷⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 74.



Picture 48: The lamb and the flag motif on the side of a *luzzu*

(Source: my own)

3.4.1.9 Prayers

Praying has always been an important aspect of the fishermen's lives. A veteran fisherman explained that it was customary of fishermen his age to recite, '*Il-mant tal-Madonna ikbar minnek*' (the veil of Our Lady is larger than you) whenever faced with an oncoming wave of large dimensions that could have easily spelt disaster. All the fishermen answered in the affirmative when asked if they consider faith important. Many of them remarked on their habit of making the sign of the cross before starting their work. Others also make the sign of the cross upon embarking, before hauling nets, and relaunching their boat. Many of them automatically revert to praying when caught in foul weather. A fisherman explained that even though he does not consider himself a saint, he never fails to express his gratitude for a new day in prayer. He also stops eating to pray along a radio transmitted prayer programme that is broadcast at the time. A *Xlukkajr* fisherman makes it a point to recite the Rosary on all fishing trips.

A few fishermen maintained that, whenever possible, they attend Sunday Mass whilst others refrain from doing so even though they hold faith to be important. Despite being attributed to the younger generation, the fishermen who do not attend Mass are aged 38, 43, 52, 55 and 72 respectively.

Muscat (2003) refers to a long-lost prayer steeped in superstition which was reverted to by fishermen when faced with extremely dangerous situations like waterspouts. On these frightening occasions, the oldest crew member knelt at the boat's prow and recited the prayer meant to disintegrate the imminent threat. Being secret, the fisherman chosen would have been the only one to know the prayer, otherwise, it would have lost its power. The prayer couldn't be passed on to anyone else unless necessary and could be only done at midnight on Christmas Eve. Muscat (2003) narrates an incident whereby a foreigner tried to talk a fisherman hailing from Vittoriosa into telling him the prayer. The fishermen who happened to be in the square caused an uproar asserting that it could only be passed onto someone else at the said time and date. Moreover, it could only be passed onto a fellow fisherman.⁷⁴⁷ As reported by Lanfranco (2015) the existence of a prayer used to break up an approaching waterspout, which fishermen called *tromba*, *dagħbien* or *dragunara*, was also recorded by the folklorist Luigi Bonelli back in 1895. Even though meant to be kept secret, a fisherman confided it in a priest. According to Bonelli, it went '*Deus sanctus, Deus fortis, Deus immortalis, miserere nobis.*' Indeed, these words had always been uttered in dangerous situations and recited in unison while people sheltered underground during World War II air raids. Irrespective of this knowledge, it cannot be excluded that other forms of 'magical' words were used. Bonelli also reported that fishermen recited the Creed backwards in face of calamities.⁷⁴⁸

3.4.2 Superstition

Apart from being fervent religious people, seafarers have always been held to be highly superstitious. Being at the centre of civilisation, the countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea have always been rife with superstitious beliefs. Ancient seafarers narrated horrifying encounters with dreadful creatures and terrifying monsters the like of which feature in legends.⁷⁴⁹ As with superstition in general, the belief in these sea creatures was common to almost all civilisations especially by those which are geographically close to large bodies of water. Having always been dangerous and mysterious, sightings of whales and other large sea dwelling creatures must have given rise to beliefs

⁷⁴⁷ Muscat, 46-7.

⁷⁴⁸ Lanfranco, 207.

⁷⁴⁹ "List of Legendary Mythical Sea Creatures." 26 November 2019. Theoi Project. 20 December 2019 <<https://www.theoi.com/articles/list-of-legendary-mythical-sea-creatures/>>.

in sea monsters.⁷⁵⁰ These beliefs might also have been fuelled by the unexplained loss of fellow seafarers or the sudden disappearance of large ships.⁷⁵¹

One of these popular creatures is the Leviathan, a Biblical sea monster mentioned in the Old Testament. Reference in religious texts could however be purely metaphorical and meant to represent the power of God's creative abilities. Outside the religious context, the Leviathan became synonymous with any large sea dwelling creature. Legendary-wise, its appearance varies according to culture. Some claim that it resembles a whale with a thick cylindrical body, whereas others think of it as a dragon-like creature with the ability of breathing fire.⁷⁵²

Another popular mythical creature is the Kraken. The Kraken entered popular folklore as a large octopus or squid which was sighted by fishermen off the coasts of Norway and Greenland. The Danish-Norwegian author Bishop Erik Pontoppidan described it as a squid-like monster that was so large that when a part of its body surfaced it resembled a floating island. The Kraken used to surface and drag large ships underwater. It could also create deadly whirlpools whilst submerging.⁷⁵³ Two other mythological sea creatures are Scylla, the six-headed sea monster that lived in the Straits of Messina, and Charybdis, the gigantic whirlpool that devoured the ships of sailors who managed to escape the wrath of Scylla.⁷⁵⁴

Yet, another popular mythical creature is the siren. As opposed to the above-mentioned creatures, sirens were depicted as beautiful creatures that used their looks and captivating singing to lure sailors and fishermen to their death.⁷⁵⁵ Sirens, also known as mermaids, are well-known by the Maltese and feature in a local legend popularly known as 'The Mermaid's Cave'. Mermaid Street (m. *Triq is-Sirena*) in Senglea (m. *L-Isla*) is duly named due to its proximity to the said cave. The legend narrates how, during an exceptional storm, a mermaid was forced into the Grand Harbour where she sought shelter in a cave. Finding herself comfortable, she decided to remain there. Many boatmen and fishermen in the area claimed to having heard her sing. Once, a young boatman took it upon himself

⁷⁵⁰ "Leviathan." New World Encyclopaedia. 30 November 2019 <<https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Leviathan>>.

⁷⁵¹ Muscat, 25.

⁷⁵² "Leviathan." New World Encyclopaedia. 30 November 2019 <<https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Leviathan>>.

⁷⁵³ Evan Andrews, "6 Mythical Monsters." 18 February 2014. History. 22 December 2019 <<https://www.history.com/news/6-mythical-monsters>>.

⁷⁵⁴ "List of Legendary Mythical Sea Creatures." 26 November 2019. Theoi Project. 20 December 2019 <<https://www.theoi.com/articles/list-of-legendary-mythical-sea-creatures/>>.

⁷⁵⁵ Muscat, 25.

to find out the mermaid by following her voice. Upon glimpsing the mermaid, he was struck by her beauty and started to secretly visit her every day. On one occasion, driven by passion, the young man dared to touch the mermaid. Being cursed to turn into stone should a human-being ever touch her, the mermaid met her end and solidified on the spot. To this day, one can find a rock shaped as a mermaid inside the cave.⁷⁵⁶

Nowadays, people have placed these sea creatures where they rightfully belong; in fantastical and folkloristic stories, mythologies, and legends, nonetheless, superstition withstood the test of time and was successfully passed down from one generation to the next. Rather than breathing life into fantastical creatures, superstition is reverted to provide that extra pinch of hope in a world full of uncertainties where one's living is highly dependent on luck; characteristics highly pronounced in a fisherman's job.

3.4.2.1 The Boat's Moustache and the Iconic Eye

The most prominent feature of traditional boats is undoubtedly the moustache (m. *mustaċċ*) which colouration demarcates the fishing villages they hail from. Fishing boats from Msida and St Julian's sport a lemon-yellow moustache, whereas ochre yellow is used for boats hailing from Marsaxlokk and Marsascala areas. St Paul's Bay is associated with a red moustache⁷⁵⁷ whereas a white moustache is usually indicative of a Gozitan vessel.

Nowadays, however, fishermen are moving away from this tradition. Some hold the red moustache to be a relic of ancient traditions which required animals to be offered and sacrificed to supernatural entities.⁷⁵⁸ In times of mourning the moustache also used to be painted black to symbolise the death of a fishermen's relative and left thus for a year,⁷⁵⁹ a tradition which has also been done with except by the occasional fisherman who adheres to the custom held by his forefathers.

⁷⁵⁶ Lanfranco, 218-9.

⁷⁵⁷ Tatrik, Katre. "Luzzu Truths." Think Magazine. Issue 25, 49.

⁷⁵⁸ Muscat, 27.

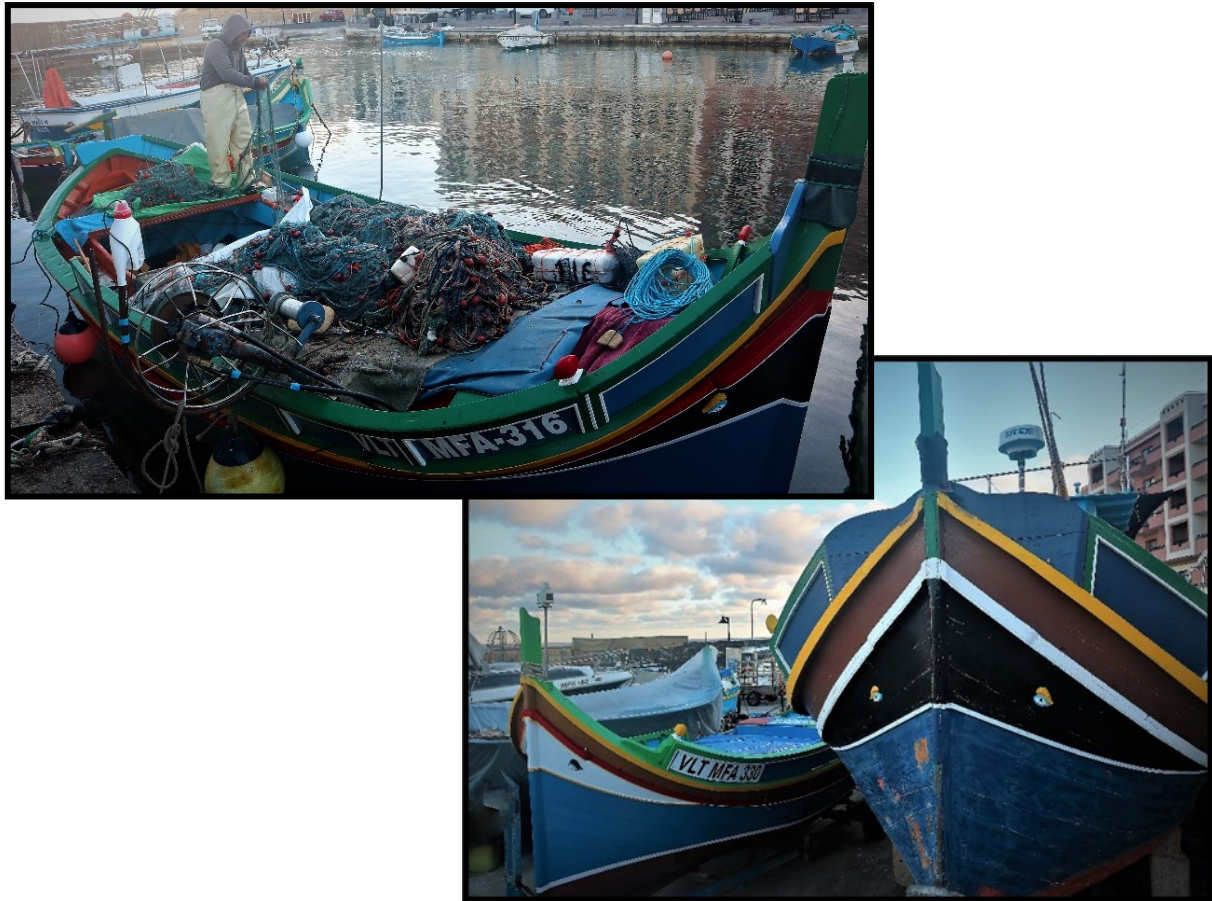
⁷⁵⁹ Morris, 31.



Picture 49: Marsaxlokk's traditional fishing boats sporting an ochre yellow moustache characteristic of the area
(Source: my own)



Picture 50: One of the few fishing boats at St. Paul's Bay, a *firilla*, sporting a red moustache; the colour traditionally associated with the village.
(Source: my own)



Picture 51: The black moustache symbolising the death of a relative or loved one

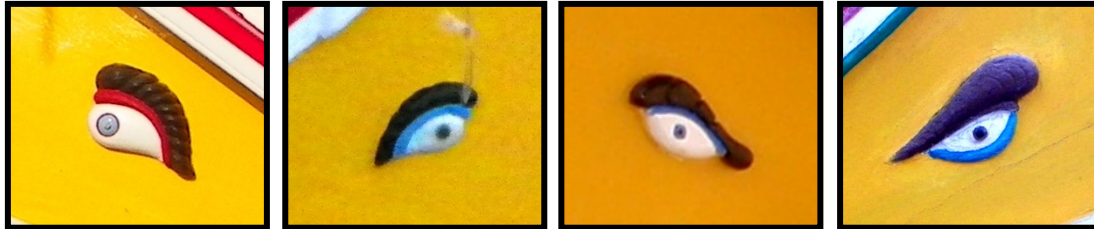
(Source: Joe Morana)

Apart from its colouration, the moustache is primarily renowned for the prominent eyes centrally positioned at its fore which give the *firilli*, *kajjikki* and *luzzijiet* a life-like dimension. The trend of sporting a pair of staring eyes on the bows of ships has a long and ancient history and is not exclusive to one country. A popular example would be the eye displayed on the boats of ancient Egypt, a symbol which is still synonymous with the country. Other countries' boats that displayed an eye include ancient Greece, Etruria, and Phoenicia. The tradition has survived the eons of time in several countries especially in the Orient and the Mediterranean.⁷⁶⁰

Even though some countries' boats still display the eyes, in his study, Morris (2016) observed that they differ from the ones used locally. The eyes used on the Maltese *firilli*, *kajjikki* and *luzzijiet* have an exaggerated and heavy eyebrow which he found to be missing in all the other countries' examples,

⁷⁶⁰ Morris, 81.

both ancient and modern. This does not mean that the idea has developed independently of other countries. It merely means that the Maltese have stylized the eyes and made them synonymous with the islands rendering it difficult for historians to trace the origins of the Maltese eyes.⁷⁶¹



Picture 52: The eyes of Maltese traditional boats all have exaggerated and heavy eyebrows

(Source: my own)

Regardless the origins being shrouded in mystery, many people hold the belief that the eyes represent The Eyes of Osiris or the Eyes of Horus; an idea that has been repeated time and again by all the travel books on Malta. Morris (2016) claims that if this were true, the origins would be traced back to Ancient Egypt; a link which is entirely lacking in Maltese history. Yet another popular belief is that they can trace their origins all the way back to the Phoenicians. Even though unfounded, Morris (2016) asserts that this is the most plausible answer of the two since there is no denying of the Phoenician establishment on the Maltese Islands.⁷⁶²

It is a well-established fact that the eyes function as a protective amulet. They specifically protect fishermen from the Evil Eye.⁷⁶³ Irrespective of fishermen, the Evil Eye is known to be a curse and believed to cause damage to anyone who gets it. The damage caused can range from minor to very serious. A person can get the evil eye from another person's glare, praise, or compliment, and can be inflicted on the victim either with the intention of causing him harm or unintentionally. When a Muslim person passes a compliment, it is important to follow it with the phrase '*mashallah*', meaning 'God has willed it'⁷⁶⁴ which is practically the equivalent of the Maltese custom whereby a compliment is followed by '*Alla jbierek*' (God bless). A person can also inflict the Evil Eye onto

⁷⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁷⁶² *ibid.*, 83.

⁷⁶³ *ibid.*, 84.

⁷⁶⁴ Leila Ettachfini, "The Meaning behind the Evil Eye Symbol You See Everywhere." 5 June 2018. *Vice*. 8 January 2019 <https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/59qwd8/i-accidentally-gave-myself-the-evil-eye>.

himself when he acts without humility.⁷⁶⁵ It is not uncommon to hear a Maltese person say '*shitt lili nnifsi*' (I cursed myself).

Belief in the Evil Eye can be dated back to at least 5,000 years to the Sumerians of the Euphrates Valley. However, historians attribute its existence to a much earlier date from cave drawings in Spain which are estimated to be 10,000 years old. Amulets from 3,300 BC were also found in Syria and believed to have been used to ward off the Evil Eye. Belief in its widespread is not secluded to any one place. Charms believed to ward it off can be found anywhere from street vendors to renowned jewellery department stores.⁷⁶⁶ In all the tourist related shops scattered around the Maltese Islands and selling stalls at Marsaxlokk, one can also find the traditional Maltese boats' eye being sold as a souvenir, nevertheless, the reason behind it might be purely iconic and meant as something representative of Malta. At the other end of the spectrum, a popular jewellery brand of local origins has also developed its line of Evil Eye jewellery.

Even though it takes the shape of an eye, the eye used as an amulet, as with the eyes displayed on the traditional Maltese boats, act as prophylactic eyes that out stare the Evil Eye and thus save the person who is in possession, in the boats' case the fishermen, from disaster. It is also interesting to note that a boat has only one pair of eyes displayed at the fore. A mid-nineteenth century painting by Giovanni Schranz, however, reveals that this may not have always been the case, since the boat depicted in his painting has a pair of eyes at the rear as well. Being more superstitious, past fishermen might have felt the need to be protected both at the front and rear of the boat.⁷⁶⁷

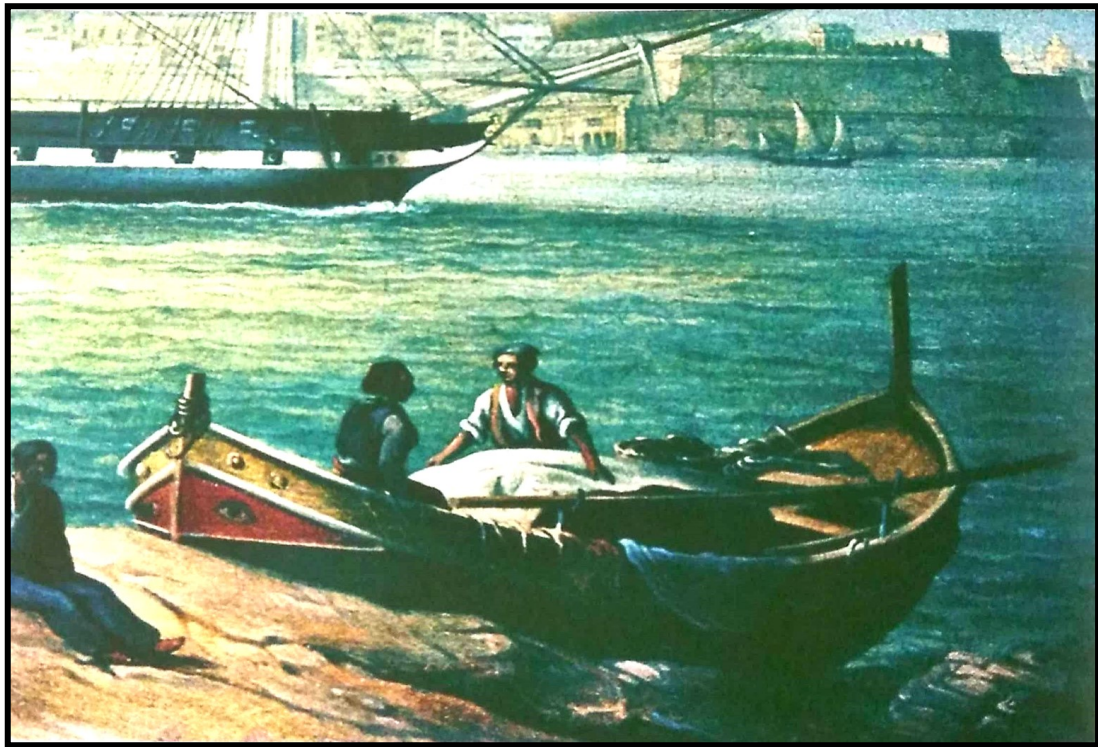
Regardless the general belief held that the eyes on the Maltese boats act as a talisman against the Evil Eye, Morris (2016) attest to alternative motives for their use, with the first being that they enable the boat to look ahead and see where it is going in order not to get lost or sail into disaster. Another would be that the eyes make the boat look alive giving it the appearance of a gigantic, weird sea creature that frightens away any enemy or evil that might lurk on the horizon.⁷⁶⁸

⁷⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁷⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁶⁷ Morris, 84.

⁷⁶⁸ *ibid.*



Picture 53: A mid-nineteenth century painting by Giovanni Schranz of a traditional boat bearing a pair of eyes at the rear

(Source: The Boats of Malta: The Art of Fishermen)⁷⁶⁹

When asked the reason for the eyes on traditional Maltese boats, most of the fishermen interviewed replied that they function as a protection against the Evil Eye. Of these, two claimed that they represent the eyes of Osiris, whereas another two mentioned that they are a reminiscence of the Phoenicians. Only three fishermen provided the second explanation for their use as mentioned by Morris (2016), namely that the eyes enable the boat/fisherman to look ahead. It is interesting to note that all three fishermen who came up with the latter explanation hail from Gozo, however, this does not imply that Gozitans perceive the eyes differently from the Maltese since the majority believe them to be a talisman against the Evil Eye as well, nonetheless, it can be understood that the second explanation is exclusive to Gozo. One of these fishermen asserted to this being the only reason why the eyes are set at the front. It is interesting to note that the meaning given for the inclusion of the eyes by Gozitan fishermen noted in this study, was likewise remarked upon by Hornell back in 1923. In his century old work, he explained that;

⁷⁶⁹ Picture 53. Cf. *ibid.*

The fisherfolk of Gozo (Malta) have a somewhat similar belief; the older generation look upon their boats as animate; to them the oculi are made for the boat or its spirit to see with, and so signify much more than an evil-eye amulet.⁷⁷⁰

A *Xlukkajr* fisherman familiar with this explanation, claimed that he had heard it from a Greek tourist who happened to stop and converse with him. The Greek explained that since a *luzzu* ventures out of sheltered harbours it requires the eyes to be on the lookout for larger ships, whereas other boat types, including the *firilla* and *dghajsa tal-pass*, which operate within harbours and do not face similar dangers, can do without them irrespective of being traditional boats as well. This explanation is questionable since some of the few remaining functional *firilli* sport the eyes, however, it cannot be excluded that the eyes might have been a later addition. It is difficult to ascertain since all the remaining *firilli* are at least 80 years of age. An insight into the truth can only be provided by old photos in which one can come across a mixture of *firilli* with, and without eyes. A photo dating to the early 20th century shows a newly built *firilla* displaying the eyes (picture 54), whereas another shows fishermen working on board an eyeless *firilla* (picture 55). Interestingly, none of the old *firilli* displayed at the Maritime Museum sport the eyes. Another old source of reference is Hornell's study of the *oculi* dating to 1923 in which he states, 'very many of the three principal types of fishing boats, ferillas, lozzus and cayicos (cayiques), follow the custom of placing oculi on their bows.'⁷⁷¹



Picture 54: A newly built *firilla* from the early part of the 20th century adorned with the eyes

(Source: The Boats of Malta: The Art of Fishermen)⁷⁷²

⁷⁷⁰ James Hornell, 'Survivals of the Use of Oculi in Modern Boats', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, liii, (1923), 303.

⁷⁷¹ *ibid.*, 313.

⁷⁷² Picture 54. Cf. *ibid.*, 22.



Picture 55: An old photo of a crew of fishermen hauling a shore seine net onto an eyeless *firilla*

(Source: Fishing in Malta)⁷⁷³



Picture 56: An old *firilla* displayed at the Maritime Museum without the iconic eyes

(Source: my own)



Picture 57: Another old *firilla* displayed at the Maritime Museum without the iconic eyes

(Source: my own)

⁷⁷³ Picture 55. Cf. Stanley Farrugia Randon, *Fishing in Malta* (Malta, Stanley Farrugia Randon, 2007), 17.



Picture 58: A *firilla* which has since been removed rotting away at Marsaxlokk quay without the eyes. It cannot be excluded they fell off from neglect

(Source: my own)

Only one fisherman attested to the third possible use of the eyes as suggested by Morris (2016), whereby they are meant to instil fear. According to Morris' research, however, they are meant to frighten evil or a potential enemy, whereas the fisherman specified that the eyes might intimidate a large fish into thinking the boat to be an even larger fish than itself. Apart from this explanation, the fisherman concerned asserted that they are mainly included to conform with the tradition. The latter idea was brought up by two other fishermen whereas another claimed that they provide protection without specifying from what. Four fishermen replied that they do not know what the purpose of the eyes is.

Even though the eyes are linked with traditional Maltese boats, some fishermen affixed them to their modern boats. A fisherman who got a pair of eyes for his schooner explained that his brother-in-law, being a carpenter, expressed his desire to manufacture them for his perusal. Similarly, a fisherman applied a pair of eyes to his *frejgatina*, which, even though a traditional boat, is not characterised by eyes.



Picture 59: Non-traditional boats sporting the eyes

(Source: my own)

An interesting and altogether different ‘use’ of the traditional boats’ eyes was provided by Joseph Caruana, one of the traditional boat builders interviewed for this research. According to his father, a fisherman might take off an eye from a fellow fisherman’s boat in the still of the night to let him know that someone is holding the grudge against him, which might explain the origins of the Maltese saying ‘*naqlalek ghajnek*’ (I’ll take off your eye). Since this was done anonymously, the fisherman who suffered the loss was left unaware as to who was harbouring feelings of rancour. This narrative was confirmed by an old study carried out by James Hornell back in 1943 in which he claimed that;

Gozo fishermen are intensely superstitious and may even contemplate murder if the luck-bringing oculi of their boat be maliciously damaged by a neighbour jealous of a special run of good luck experienced by a newly built boat.⁷⁷⁴

⁷⁷⁴ James Hornell, ‘The Prow of the Ship: Sanctuary of the Tutelary Deity’, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, xliii, (1943), 127.

A more thorough narrative of the above statement was provided by Hornell himself in an earlier publication dated 1923 as follows;

Mr. G. Caruana, who belongs himself to Gozo, related a significant incident concerning a newly-built fishing boat that had belonged to himself; carved oculi had as usual been affixed upon the "moustache" before launching. The boat had phenomenally good fortune on her first day's fishing, and this continued for some time to the great satisfaction of owner and crew. But one morning it was found that one of the oculi had been slashed as by a knife and half cut away. It was inferred that some other fisherman was jealous of the boat's heavy catches of fish and had spitefully cut the oculus in the hope of breaking the run of good luck. The crew were much perturbed and angry, and a few days later Mr. Caruana found that a young fisherman belonging to the crew had slept nightly under the boat on the beach, in the hope of catching the miscreant red-handed--he expected him to return to complete his evil work. He told the owner that had he caught him he would have killed him--evidence of how seriously he viewed this treatment of the oculus.⁷⁷⁵

Despite not being asked whether they believe in its protection against the Evil Eye, a substantial number of fishermen claimed to not believing in the widely held notion of their own accord with some attributing it to past generations. Another jokingly remarked on his *luzzu* having only one eye since the other had fallen off. Notwithstanding, he never bothered to have it replaced. Many fishermen commented on the eyes' aesthetic appeal which render the boats even more beautiful, this being the reason why tourists always take photos of the boats' fore.

An interviewee explained that fishermen are inclined to believe in the Evil Eye even if they declare otherwise. He admitted to denying belief in the Evil Eye himself but becomes self-conscious when a streak of ill luck ruins a promising fishing day. He attributed an unexceptionally disastrous fishing trip to the Evil Eye bestowed unto him by a person who happened to augur him a bountiful catch before setting out for work. Another fisherman explained that there is absolutely nothing wrong in believing in the Evil Eye considering that the Catholic Church attests to its existence as well. As confirmed by Ettachfini (2018), 'the Evil Eye is mentioned or alluded to in each holy text of the Abrahamic religions respectively.'⁷⁷⁶

⁷⁷⁵ Hornell (1923), 314-5.

⁷⁷⁶ Leila Ettachfini, "The Meaning behind the Evil Eye Symbol You See Everywhere." 5 June 2018. *Vice*. 8 January 2019 <https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/59qwd8/i-accidentally-gave-myself-the-evil-eye>.

3.4.2.2 Animal Skin

Hornell (1934) tells of a superstitious custom whereby the skin of a sacrificed animal was hung over the stem post of a boat before its first launch. The ritual held that, when offered to the gods, the skin became sacred whereby the vessel became intimately associated with the gods. Consequently, the vessel was henceforth protected from any accident and ill-fortune. Hornell (1943) linked the custom with Malta as follows;

The custom of preserving the skin of the sacrifice as a visible token of the act and with amuletic intent appears to be confined to regions where Moslem influence is or has been strong. This is particularly noticeable in the Mediterranean area; Malta, Sicily, parts of the Adriatic coasts and the southern shore of Spain and Portugal, are all localities where the people have been for some considerable period in their history in intimate cultural contact with the Arab world; in several instances they have even come under direct Moslem rule and have been overrun by Arab armies and immigrants.⁷⁷⁷

He further elaborated that during his 1943 research, he did not come across any ruminants of the custom in Malta. The only indication was provided by a picture of a *firilla*, labelled as a *speronara*, at the Valletta Museum in which the vertical stem post projection could be seen covered by a wig-like object which he identified as an animal's pelt. Otherwise, none of his informants could recall the custom, none that is except for the above mentioned Mr. G. Caruana, a Gozitan fishing boat owner who attested to having seen fellow Gozitan fishermen lashing a rabbit skin over the stem head of a newly built fishing boat before its first launch into the sea.⁷⁷⁸

3.4.2.3 Other Superstitions Adhered to by Fisher Folk

There are other means by which fisher folk protect themselves from the Evil Eye with the most common, especially in times past, being an animal's horn. Only one interviewee attested to having a pair of bull's horns on board his boat. So strong is his belief in its power to ward off the Evil Eye, that he is inclined to include a pair of stag's horns as well. Some fishermen hang the horns of a bull elsewhere other than their boats as can be seen in picture 61. In the latter's case, the horns are hung at a garage in which all the preparatory work for future fishing trips is done.

⁷⁷⁷ Hornell (1943), 127.

⁷⁷⁸ *ibid.*



Picture 60: A *luzzu* undergoing maintenance work spotted at Birżebbuġa sporting the horns
(Source: my own)



Picture 61: Bull's horns hung next to a fishermen's garage to ward off bad luck
(Source: my own)

Another protective emblem against the Evil Eye is the horned hand. Even though none had one as a means of protection, a fisherman told the story of when a young apprentice of his put a sticker of the horned hand on the rear moustache of his *luzzu*. Upon seeing it, he immediately removed it peeling off the paint in so doing. He explained that if left at the aft, fishermen sailing behind him might have taken offence if perceived to have been put there as a protection against them. When he bought the *luzzu* several years back from a former fisherman, the motor keys had a *corno portafortuna* (lucky horn) as a keychain. Being against any form of superstitious beliefs, he threw it away on his first ride.

Other sorts of talismans are also kept on board or in garages, however, they are not meant to safeguard the fishermen against the Evil Eye per se. Instead, they are used to either ward off bad luck, or to attract good luck. Even though denouncing any sort of superstitious adherence, a fisherman admitted to believing in the horseshoe and keeps one both on land and on board. This was quickly followed by his insistence of including them solely for aesthetic reasons. The denial and offering of alternate explanations can be attributed to embarrassment as remarked upon by Poggie and Gersuny (1972) who likewise identified a level of embarrassment from the fishermen's behalf when talking about superstitious beliefs.⁷⁷⁹ However, this study revealed that not all fishermen feel thus. Contrary to the previous example, one of the fishermen was more than comfortable in explaining that he liked keeping numerous lucky charms that happen to be to his liking. Yet another explained that he always experiences a disastrous fishing week following a photo upload of a beautiful catch on social media. He was unsure whether to blame the Evil Eye or put it down to mere coincidence, but he noticed that sometimes there just seems to be too much of a coincidence. As with the latter examples, most of the interviewed fishermen admitted to believing in superstition, whereas others were outright in their dismissal and attributed such beliefs to past generations. Nevertheless, some of the non-superstitious fishermen had interesting stories to tell of fellow superstitious fishermen. One recounted his uncle's incident while out fishing during which expedition the netting got stuck in one of the propellers. Left with no alternative, two of the fishermen jumped in the water to cut it free using their pocketknives. The rest of the crew kept on the lookout lest a large fish approached. A shark, which fishermen refer to as *murruna* of which there are several species, approached them. The other fisherman managed to scramble on board whereas the narrator's uncle panicked and kept slipping from the others' outstretched hands. They managed to pull him on board just as the fish was about to attack to the extent that he felt it brush against him while being lifted. To this end, he promised himself to never

⁷⁷⁹ John J. Poggie and Carl Gersuny, 'Risk and Ritual: An Interpretation of Fishermen's Folklore in a New England Community', *American Folklore Society*, lxxxv, 335 (1972), 72.

go fishing on that weekday again. On another occasion, amongst other injuries he sustained during a fishing trip, his uncle accidentally stabbed himself with a knife. Upon recalling the day of the week, he realised his mistake of going out at sea on his prohibited fishing day. A unique form of superstitious practice was divulged by a full-time fisherman whereby he prohibits his crew to whistle while at sea. He claims that, by so doing, the wind is called upon. Anyone caught whistling is immediately stopped.

The most popular superstitious belief with fishermen is the avoidance of starting a new fishing season on a Friday, which is believed to invite a disastrous fishing season. A fisherman explained that his cousin refuses to start the much waited for and anticipated *lampuki* fishing season if the opening day falls on a Friday, whereas another fisherman recalled the year his crew could not engage in tuna fishing from the beginning since his boat needed an engine replacement. When the new engine was finally fitted, his brother was reluctant to go fishing irrespective of the fine weather and the bountiful catches being fetched by others, as it happened to be a Friday. He was finally convinced and did not live to regret it since, on the occasion, they managed to catch six large specimens. Some fishermen also refuse to launch their boats at sea following the routinely maintenance on a Friday from fear of bad luck. All the fishermen who hold the same belief avoid the dreaded Friday by launching their boats either on Thursday afternoon or on Saturday morning. A fisherman explained that he refrains from being tempted into launching his boat on Friday on seeing fishermen indifferent to the belief doing so. His father was equally cautious of Fridays. The belief was further instilled in him by the veteran fisherman from whom he purchased one of his boats who advised him against launching a boat on a Friday explaining that whenever he ignored the prognosis he was always struck down with bad luck. Similarly, other fishermen do not use new fishing material on a Friday. Apart from limiting himself to Fridays, another fisherman restricts himself from starting a new fishing season or launch his boat on the thirteenth of the month irrelevant of the day of the week since the number is associated with Judas Iscariot, he being the thirteenth guest to arrive at the Last Supper and the one who betrayed Jesus.⁷⁸⁰ He also keeps an olive branch on board his boat. The olive branch, traditionally steeped in religion, is witness to one's faith, nonetheless, the fisherman keeps it as a protection against the Evil Eye. Indeed, it is often difficult to denote with any precision where religion ends, and profanity starts. The same holds true for Fridays with one fisherman claiming that the connotation of Fridays with bad luck can be traced to the Bible since Jesus was crucified and executed on the day. Being a public holiday due to its commemorating a sacred event, many fishermen refrain from working on the day

⁷⁸⁰ Barbara Maranzani. "What's so Unlucky about the Number Thirteen?" 13 September 2013. History. 14 January 2019 <<https://www.history.com/news/whats-so-unlucky-about-the-number-13>>.

out of respect, nonetheless, a fisherman explained that he refrains from fishing on Good Fridays from fear of bad luck. Such beliefs are not limited to fishermen and are adhered to by the wider fishing community including boat builders. Believers in the Evil Eye hung a bull's horn over the *blataforma* during the designing process of a new boat.⁷⁸¹

The late Ġużu explained that they never started the mounting of a boat on its keel on a Friday. Similarly, they refrained from launching a new boat on the day. In other words, they never started nor finished a project on a Friday. Apparently, the Italians, with whom Malta had extensive contacts, hold the same superstitious belief but include Tuesdays for which they have the saying '*Né di venere, né di marte non si sposa e non si parte, né si dà principio all'arte*' (Neither on Venus, nor on Mars does one marry, part, or start a new project). This proverb, and belief, has its roots in Greek and Roman mythology as well as the Jewish cabal which stipulate that Tuesday is the day of Mars, the god of war, while Friday is the day when, according to the Cabal, evil spirits were created. Consequently, a happy event such as the wedding or the beginning of a trip is not recommended on either of these days.⁷⁸²

Even though some fishermen associate superstition with previous generations, this study revealed that it is still rife in fishing communities and is equally popular with the younger generation. Of the nine fishermen who admitting to being superstitious, four were aged 23, 40, 42, and 45. The remaining five consisted of two 52-year-olds, a 58, 59, and 60-year-old. The ages of those who claimed to not being superstitious ranged between 30 and 68. That being the case, the youngest fishermen interviewed is superstitious. Interestingly all the superstitions mentioned by the local fishermen are proscriptive in nature whereby a particular behavior is avoided to keep misfortune at bay, which correlates with Poggie and his colleagues' 1988 study results described in the theoretical review section.⁷⁸³

⁷⁸¹ Pulè, 11.

⁷⁸² "Né di Venere, né di Marte non si Sposa e non si Parte, né si dà Principio all'Arte". 29 September 2021. [Proverbi.Net](https://www.proverbi.net/ne-di-venere-ne-di-marte-non-si-sposa-e-non-si-parte-ne-si-da-principio-allarte/). 1 September 2022 <<https://www.proverbi.net/ne-di-venere-ne-di-marte-non-si-sposa-e-non-si-parte-ne-si-da-principio-allarte/>>.

⁷⁸³ John J. Poggie, and Richard B. Pollnac, 'Danger and Rituals of Avoidance among New England Fishermen', *Maritime Anthropological Studies*, i, 1 (1988), 69.

3.4.3 The Gunwale-Strake: Superstition or Religion?

As opposed to the rest of the boat, which is painted, the gunwale-strake (m. *tappiera*) is traditionally varnished, a custom which is quickly becoming a thing of the past with fishermen resorting to painting the section brown in imitation of varnished wood. This alternative reduces maintenance demands seeing that varnish requires more attention than paint when exposed to the elements to which the boats are continuously subjected.⁷⁸⁴

If carved, the gunwale-strake is one of the most decorative sections of the traditional boats. To further pronounce it, the carved pattern is usually filled with coloured paint which creates a striking effect against the dark wood background. Other boats have the pattern painted in imitation of the real carvings.⁷⁸⁵ Unfortunately, both carvings and paintings are also being replaced by plain wood to keep maintenance work to a minimum.



Picture 62: A *luzzu* displaying a beautifully carved and varnished gunwale-strake

(Source: my own)

⁷⁸⁴ Morris, 35.

⁷⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 76.



Picture 63: A *luzzu* with a brown painted gunwale-strake in immitation of the varnished original
(Source: my own)



Picture 64: A carved, though unpainted, gunwale-strake
(Source: my own)



Picture 65: A gunwale-strake with painted artwork immitating original carved wood.

(Source: my own)

As already remarked upon, sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between religion and superstition. Boissevain (1978) remarked on how Maltese people ‘move unconsciously from the religious to the secular and back again’ and ‘do not draw a clear line between [the] two fields.’⁷⁸⁶ A case in point would be the gunwale-strake.

The intricately carved varnished wood typical of the older traditional boats can display different patterns with the most common being a bird/dragon motif. Whereas some motifs are easily recognisable as either a bird or a dragon, others may prove more difficult to tell apart. In his study, Morris (2016) noticed that fishermen refer to the highly recognisable bird as a dove, which is said to hold an olive branch in its mouth. The swirling tendril pattern extending further down the gunwale-strake is defined as either the sea, the wind, or an extension of the olive branch. In cases where the creature is less bird-like and more dragon-like, the swirling tendril pattern is often depicted issuing from or held in the creature’s mouth. In these cases, there are those who still hold the creature to be a dove holding an olive branch, whereas others understand it to be a dragon issuing fire from its

⁷⁸⁶ Jeremy Boissevain, ‘The Maltese Islands’, in *Face Values: Some Anthropological Themes*, Anne Sutherland (ed.) British Broadcasting Corporation, London 1978, 133.

mouth. No one denied it being a dragon when the motif was evidently depicted as such. The origins of the carvings and their meaning have been lost into oblivion.⁷⁸⁷ The identification of the bird as a dove clearly indicates an association with religion. The persistence of fishermen in it being a dove/bird even when difficult to differentiate between the creatures reflects their desire for religious symbolism. Unlike the bird/dove, the dragon depicted has a superstitious connotation. Even though usually associated with evil, dragons are also thought of as protectors especially when linked with waters. In some contexts, the dragon is shown as the controller of the sea and with the ability to regulate tides. This could be a plausible explanation for its inclusion on Maltese traditional boats.⁷⁸⁸



Picture 66: The rear end of the gunwale-strake of a restored *luzzu* depicting a well-defined bird

(Source: my own)

⁷⁸⁷ Morris, 77.

⁷⁸⁸ *ibid.*



Picture 67: The rear end of the gunwale-strake of an abandoned *luzzu*, which has since been destroyed, depicting a well-defined dragon
(Source: my own)



Picture 68: The front end of the gunwale-strake of the above mentioned *luzzu* depicting a mermaid holding Žejtun's coat of arms; the village the original owner hailed from, which is also a superstitious relic
(Source: my own)

3.5 Conclusion

Fishermen have always been known for their resilience and adaptability. Investigation into what mitigates their dynamism reveals three main mechanisms that provide them with the support needed to counteract many challenges; the strong sense of community shared amongst fishermen, the priceless support received by the women, and the hope provided by their belief in the supernatural.

Fishing communities defy all boundaries and bring together people who have a shared passion for the fishing way of life. Fishermen's mutual understanding of their need of the sea and the hardships their job entails induces them to support each other. In so doing they strengthen their resilience to stick to fishing which is the very essence of their identity, this being the reason why they commit themselves to it even when no longer economically viable; a reality which perplexes outsiders and stakeholders alike. This comprehension provides them with a common understanding the like of which cannot be found outside their niche resulting in the 'us' against 'them' scenario which further fuels their resilience to hold strong in the face of adversity knowing full well that to renounce fishing is not a matter of choice. Nevertheless, the last couple of decades have forced many fishermen to seek land-based jobs whilst retaining fishing on a part-time basis. Unrepairable damage ensues from fisheries management systems with the enactment of legislations that weaken the social fabric of fishing communities by forcing many fishermen to abandon fishing altogether whilst forcing others to fight over the remaining resources. The ever-dwindling number of fishermen is compelling those remaining in the picture to recruit foreigners which, amongst others, is further deteriorating the social cohesions of local fishing communities and bring forth changes the like of which have never been experienced before.

Whilst highly thought of masculine, the hub of fishing villages is most assuredly matriarchal with men toiling away at sea. Women assume a huge portion of work and attend to a vast array of duties linked with the fishing enterprise in direct support of the men. Other than that, women also assume additional responsibilities. Fisherwomen were a common occurrence way before they became officially recognised. Their fortitude is still attested to by the narratives of the long-retired fisherwomen themselves and the fishermen who were blessed to have them in their lives. Even though direct fishing is no longer associated with them, women are nonetheless very much present in other fish related activities particularly fish sales. The narratives provided by women pertaining to different generations reveal many changes in this domain as well. Whilst technological advances have seen fishmongers, with the greater part being women, better off in terms of transportation and selling procedures, social changes have seen them worse off. Amongst others they had to shift their working

schedules to accommodate working women, had to start including imported fish even though economically less viable, had to take on the time-consuming task of cleaning and gutting the fish for their clientele, and started experiencing losses from the sales of small fish species. The diminishing importance of religious observances and the rife competition with large supermarkets and fish farmed species have also manifested themselves in reduced sales. The largest number of women still actively involved in the fisheries are *Xlukkajri* which explains why it fares better than other fishing localities; a reality which highlights the certainty that fishermen with women who cover their backs are more resilient in their resolve to keep up fishing and everything related to this way of life. To this end, women in the fisheries need to be better recognised, empowered, sustained, and encouraged in their endeavours from a legislative perspective if the small-scale fishing sector is hoped to persevere especially in light of the modern-day difficulties.

As with the other entities, belief in the supernatural fuels the fishermen's resilience by providing them with the psychological support needed to cope with the risks, uncertainties and dangers that characterise their job. The supernatural, be it either religious or superstitious, is essentially resorted to when everything else fails to help to safeguard against uncontrollable aspects. Some customs associated with religion are being lost not from a diminishing of faith but from the dwindling number of fishermen which no longer make them feasible as with the blessing of a boat prior its first launch and the blessing of the fleet at large to augur a bountiful catch before the commencement of a fishing season. The phased out *tonnara* fishing practice is indicative of religious customs thus lost. The *Terz tal-Madonna* donating mechanism as based on the shared payment method is likewise diminishing in popularity. Irrespective of traditional means by which people worship and donate, both of which no longer fall within the parameters of fear from committing sin, faith still plays paramount importance in fishermen's everyday lives as evidenced by the religious artefacts and the need to pray. On the other hand, superstition has lost some of its lustre but is nowhere near expiration. Notwithstanding it being frowned upon by rational thinkers, superstition acts as an additional precautionary measure that provide fishermen additional reassurance. To be sure, irrespective of some fishermen's denial from fear of being ridiculed, superstition, be it either in the shape of an amulet, a behaviour, or a combination of both, is still popular amongst fishermen especially when it comes to protecting oneself from the Evil Eye, the belief in which is rife amongst the wider society in general.

Chapter 4

The Multifaceted Problems Fishermen Face And Their Resilience



Chapter 4

The Multifaceted Problems Fishermen Face and Their Resilience

4.1 Introduction

The fishermen's job is an endless trial; an unrelenting test to their resilience and perseverance in face of adversity which, in turn, attests to their love of fishing. The hardships endured result from both natural and human induced circumstances. Notwithstanding these hardships, the fishermen's resourcefulness, and adaptability skills, have seen them through many precarious circumstances. They have always been able to rely on the unrelenting support readily provided by their community and family members, with women bearing great responsibilities and assisting the men in their fishing struggles. Furthermore, reliance on intangible sources, offer fishermen additional reassurance against all odds; both their religious faith and observance of superstitious rituals boost their resilience when everything else seems to fail. Other coping mechanisms, be it either diversification or innovative fishing strategies, further enable them to keep pursuing a life at sea.

Notwithstanding their adjustments, the vast influx of modern-day problems inflicted on small-scale fishing communities are proving to be too much, too many to counteract causing an alarming deterioration of small-scale sustainable fishing communities the like of which has never been experienced before. This chapter will explore the vast array of problems, both natural and man-made, afflicting the Maltese small-scale fishing sector and how, when possible, they counteract them.

4.2 The Hardships Emanating from the Nature of the Job

Fishing is highly stressful and fishermen are particularly affected by stress because they are exposed to high psychosocial factors at work and organisational constraints related to difficult working conditions and financial difficulties with worries about their daily gain. The dangerousness and complexity of this profession is explained by an arduous and laborious activity with numerous and countless constraints requiring a sustained degree of attention.⁷⁸⁹

The difficulties enlisted in the above quote emanate from the nature of the job and have always been part and parcel of being a fisherman. Since it involves primary hunting with potentially dangerous tools for creatures dwelling in an altogether different environment, fishermen are exposed to factors

⁷⁸⁹ Omar Laraoui, Nadia Manar, Salwa Laraoui, Tarik Ghailan, Frédéric Deschamps, Chakib El Houssine Laraoui, 'Occupational Risk Perception, Stressors and Stress of Fishermen', *International Maritime Health*, lxix, 4 (2018), 233-4.

that mitigate stress, injuries and accidents, all of which are further accentuated by long working hours characteristic of strenuous work, little rest, exposure to the elements, and encounters with dangerous species.

4.2.1 Stress, Injuries and Accidents

As part of the theoretical review, section 1.2.1 investigated the precarious living of fishermen in other countries as indicated by national statistics and other studies carried out internationally. This study reveals that Maltese fishermen have no shortage of psychological stress, physical ailments, accidents, and injuries. Like their international counterparts, Maltese fishermen are subjected to;

...exposure to cold, wind, rough seas, substantial participation of physical effort, frequency of injuries during work, unpredictability and abruptness of threats, equipment failure, everyday psychological stress, and constant economic pressure.⁷⁹⁰

4.2.2 Long Hours, Little Rest

An early start followed by long hours toiling both on land and at sea is a prerequisite to being a fisherman. This prevalent truth was remarked upon by all the fishermen interviewed in this study. Many of them used the phrase '*m'għandekx ħinijiet*' (you do not have a fixed time schedule) which was further complimented by the fishermen's saying '*fi x'ħin tibda taf, fi x'ħin tispicċa ma tafx*' (you know the starting time but not the finishing time). Some fishing expeditions take much longer than others with many fishermen claiming to spending three days in a row at sea during the *lampuki* fishing season.

The hardships endured due to the undetermined, long hours at work, are rendered even more cumbersome by the equally undetermined working days. Fishermen must be at the ready to set out to sea on any given day irrespective of it being the weekend, a holiday, or a special occasion. They have no summer vacations or special leave. Nor do they have a shutdown period. Many fishermen confirmed to working on both Christmas and New Year's Day if it happens to be ideal for fishing. Indeed, fishermen embark on fishing trips whenever it is fair weather and make the most of the summer season. A veteran fisherman hailing from Marsaxlokk explained that it is always a fight

⁷⁹⁰ Maria Jeżewska, Marta Grubman-Nowak, Irena Leszczyńska, Bogdan Jaremin, 'Occupational Hazards for Fishermen in the Workplace in Polish Coastal and Beach Fishing - A Point of View', *International Maritime Health*, lxiii, 1 (2012), 40.

against time. In his words, ‘You can tell what the weather is like now, but you never know what it will be like in half an hour’s time, so you have to be continuously on the go and make the most of fine weather while it lasts.’

Upon returning home from his land-based job, a retired part-timer used to spare just enough time to grab his weatherproof fishing overalls and packed lunch before heading to port and setting out to sea. Most often he was required to repeat the process for seven consecutive days without respite. Likewise, another part-timer explained that he heads home from his land-based job just to grab his coffee beverage flask and immediately takes his leave to be at the ready to set out at sunset, this being the best time for catching squid. When working with long-lines, he is required to wake up as early as half past one or two in the morning to deploy them on his outbound journey; a task which takes him till sunrise before commencing to hauling them back on board. He re-enters home at half past six or seven in the evening to store the fish and catch some sleep before making his way to the fish market in the early hours; a routine which can be repeated for several days.



Picture 69: Jigs or multi-pronged hooks (m. *kulpari tal-klamari*)

(Source: my own)

A full-timer specialising in trammel net fishing must wake up at four in the morning to haul the nets set at sea the previous day. When the catch is substantial the task takes all morning, otherwise, he finishes by ten o'clock. Once back on land, he sells the catch which is in turn followed by the mending

of the nets. When done, he embarks on the outbound journey to deploy the nets at sea again to haul the following morning. The cycle is repeated for as long as the weather permits.

Nevertheless, long hours and countless days at sea do not necessarily translate into successful fishing trips and bountiful catches. On several occasions fishermen return home with nothing to show for all the hard work. One of the fishermen admitted to heading back home emptyhanded on several occasions following a fifty-hour tuna fishing trip. This results in double folded repercussions, namely loss of income and fuel expenses, sometimes coupled with gear loss and maintenance expenditures.

Fishermen are on the go even when stuck on land because of foul weather. On such days they see to the maintenance of their boats and gear in readiness for the next fishing opportunity. A fisherman explained that occasionally foul weather is a blessing since it provides them with enough time to catch up on maintenance work without feeling bad at having to skip a fishing day due to insufficient preparations.

Being very labour intensive, wooden boat maintenance requires many days, even weeks, to go about and is the epitome of on land hard work and dedication from the fishermen's behalf. The routinely boat hull maintenance requires the boat to be hauled on shore as explained in section 3.2.1.1 every three months for the removal of the accumulated biological debris by means of a power wash, after which a fresh layer of antifouling is applied over the old one. The antifouling layers thus accumulated must in turn be stripped off every four years or so. To postpone the hard work the latter entails by a few more years, some fishermen prefer to smooth the boat's hull with sandpaper after removing the debris every time it is hauled onshore. This helps to remove the previous antifouling layer before applying a fresh one. In this case, the complete stripping of the hull needs only be done every seven years or so with the rest of the boat's structure as described further on.



Picture 70: Washing off the debris attached to a *luzzu*'s hull

(Source: my own)

The rest of the boat also needs to be tended to every year in which case the paint work must be sanded before applying a fresh layer of primer mixed with linseed oil. Any spaces between wood planks are filled either by caulking (m. *tqalfit*) or else, if the spaces are not too deep, with wood putty. Once the necessary repairs are attended to, an undercoat wash is applied to the boat's body. The final task requires fishermen to paint their boat in the traditional colours all over again.

Irrespective of the hard work required of the above mentioned monthly/yearly maintenance works, the hardest task asked of traditional boat owners is the one in which all the paintwork needs to be completely stripped off ⁷⁹¹; a daunting process which has to be seen to every seven years or so and which takes a considerable number of days or weeks to complete depending on the boat size. The reasons why the paint must be stripped off are manifold. Many paint coatings accumulated over the years result in a thick layer of paint which is prone to cracking and peeling; a process which is further accelerated by the hot temperatures characteristic of summer, exposure to direct sunlight and ultra-violet rays. It is also required so fishermen can spot and fix any damage in terms of cracks that might

⁷⁹¹ Maltese fishermen and boatmen alike refer to this process as '*taħraq id-dgħajsa*' which literally means 'to burn the boat'.

be hidden underneath the paint. Fishermen planning on undertaking the task have to make sure that the intended landing space will be available for several consecutive weeks without causing any inconvenience to other fishermen.

The paint layers are softened by the flame emitted from a torch blower. Once the required temperature is reached, which is determined by the bubbling paint, a small triangular sharp scraper is used to take it off. The process is very time consuming seeing as only a very small area can be scraped at a time. When the painstaking process is complete after several days or weeks, the entire boat is smoothed with sandpaper after which the painting process can commence. Several layers are applied to the hull the first being primer mixed with linseed oil after which fishermen need to attend to any spaces by either caulking or applying putty. Once the necessary repairs are attended to, fishermen apply a layer of higher concentrated primer with linseed oil followed by a layer of pure primer. All these layers help the paint to last longer and seal the pores in the wood seeing as it is a permeable material. Finally, a silverine coating followed by an antifouling layer completes the hull maintenance.



Picture 71: Burning and scraping off the layers of paint

(Source: my own)



Picture 72: Another fisherman undertaking the burning process
(Source: my own)



Picture 73: Applying wood putty to the openings with a chisel
(Source: my own)

Several layers are also applied to the rest of the boat the first being primer mixed with linseed oil. As with the hull, this is followed with the application of wood putty or chalking as needed, followed by a layer of higher concentrated primer mixed with linseed oil and another consisting of pure primer. An undercoat layer precedes the boat's painting in its vibrant, traditional colours. The final step to the labour-intensive task is the relaunching of the boat back to sea.

Traditional boats also need to be taken care of while at sea. During winter they are fitted with an awning (m. *kabuż*) to protect the wood from the evening and morning dew as well as rain since fresh water, contrary to seawater, is particularly damaging to wood.⁷⁹² Additionally, it must be protected against excessive dryness. Wood tends to expand when wet and shrink when dry. To this extent when a traditional boat is left on land for a long period of time causing excessive dryness, the wood surrounding the nails that hold the boat together shrinks leaving ample space for water to enter the boat when launched back to sea. Repetitive periods of excessive shrinking and expansion can also loosen the nails thus jeopardising the whole structure.⁷⁹³ While at sea, sacks or cloth attached to the boat that extend into seawater help to keep the wood soaked.



Picture 74: A *luzzu* fitted with an awning to protect against the damaging fresh water from rain and dew, and fitted with cloth to soak it with sea water which protects it against excessive dryness

(Source: my own)

⁷⁹² Carmel Pulè, *Qxur, Biċċiet u Opri tal-Baħar* (Malta, Pubblikazzjonijiet Indipendenza, 2000), 145.

⁷⁹³ *ibid.*, 36.

4.2.3 Exposure to the Elements

Any fishermen's job description must include the high level of exposure to the elements and harsh weather conditions. Amongst these, one cannot fail to mention the cold winters rendered even more bitter at night and characterised by continuous soakings from cold waters and rain without any hope of shelter. A veteran fisherman complained of an unrelenting backache from years on end working in humid and wet conditions more notably back in the day when they did not have adequate attire, worked barefoot, and had no option other than to catch some rest soaked from head to toe. Even though waterproof attire has since elevated this problem, younger fishermen still complained of backaches caused by both high humidity levels and continuous boat swaying. Alternatively, fishermen suffer terrible headaches from the scourging sun typical of Maltese summer days. Dizziness can also result from the continuous swaying and prolonged exposure to the blazing sun as attested to by one of the fishermen who considers himself lucky to having made it safely home whilst suffering a bout of queasiness.

Even though bad weather provides fishermen with a respite and an opportunity to catch up with land-based work without feeling bad at wasting what could otherwise have been an excellent fishing opportunity, it tends to be more of a curse if it persists for several consecutive days impeding them from procuring an income. Winds can also build up a storm and conjure threatening waves in a matter of minutes. When asked to recall bad experiences while out at sea, most of the fishermen mentioned being caught up in terrible weather.

It cannot be denied that life-threatening episodes were more common in the past when fishermen were left to their own devices to predict the weather. Being caught in a storm usually resulted in fatality seeing as little could be done to reach the shore and combat nature's power with oar-propelled boats. However, even though technological innovations have allowed for better weather forecasts and sophisticated navigational instruments, disastrous outcomes have not been completely ruled out. Accidents while at sea, sometimes resulting in fatalities, still occur every now and then.

The worst can be expected when the wind unpredictably changes its direction in a matter of minutes causing great apprehension to the small-scale fishermen caught in its midst. The narrations provided by fishermen are testimony to the dangers they are subjected to. One of the interviewed fishermen recalled the jeopardising situation he found himself in while fishing in St. Thomas Bay. The northern wind present at the time he set out and reached his destination, worked to his advantage at the chosen

fishing location, however, the sudden change into a southwestern gale proved to be dangerous in the said area. Unluckily for him, Delimara's power plant, which fishermen consult to determine the wind's direction from the smoke it emits, happened to be out of order at the time of the incident. The homebound journey was very difficult and was rendered even more perilous on board a small *frejgatina*. During a spell of foul weather, special attention must be given on how and when to turn a boat round to prevent waves from hitting the boat sideways which could easily throw fishermen overboard or capsize the entire structure. On another occasion the wind took a sudden change in direction from northwest to northeast causing a lot of turbulence in the fishing spot the same fisherman had originally chosen to shelter from the latter. Once again, he had to be very cautious in how to steer the boat round and reach the home port safely. Apart from worrying about the potential of being thrown overboard, he feared getting something in the propeller which would have left him to the mercy of the wind. Should this have been the case he would undoubtedly have been crashed against the rocks.

Yet another veteran fisherman recalled the day he was caught in terrible weather when still working on board his father's fishing boat. Even though the outward trip was only two hours long, it took them nine hours to cover the same distance back home seeing as the massive waves were surging from the opposite direction. They feared not making it to the top of each wave and being engulfed halfway up. Similarly, it took another fisherman well over three hours to complete the homebound trip in a north-western wind, as compared to the three quarters of an hour needed to cover the same distance on his outward trip during fair weather.

A fisherman with over three decades of life at sea, experienced the worst weather has to offer on a November night whilst alluring squid below the sheltering Żurrieq cliffs. After fishing for a couple of hours, he became aware of a rise in the breeze which induced him to head back to his home port. As he approached Ghar Ħasan's limits, the conditions took a turn for the worse and the water became very turbulent. The situation was rendered even more precarious at Wied ix-Xakka's reef. Seeing as reefs are shallower than surrounding waters, waves tend to break and spill over making them very dangerous. He prayed fervently to make it safely to the top of the next wave each time he was plunged downwards.

The weather becomes even more unpredictable with the approach of October and the onset of the colder months. Many fishermen lived their worst nightmares at this time of the year whilst fishing for *lampuki* which induces them to venture in the open seas and out of reach of immediate help. An older

Gozitan fisherman recalled the day he set out for *lampuki* to what promised to be a fine day for rounding up the *kannizzati*. Initially, the approaching storm looked like suspended fog. He became instantly worried and advised his crew to head back to port. Two foreigners, whom he had recruited on board his seven-meter *luzzu*, dismissed his advice and threatened not to accompany him next time round if made to head back home. His brother was of the same opinion and wanted to extend the fishing expedition. Things quickly took a bad turn with the onslaught of grey clouds which were quickly followed by tempestuous dark clouds, flashes of light, and the rolling of thunder. The storm quickly caught up with them seeing as the trip back to port was long and the horsepower allowed on fishing boats is limited. The fisherman suffered the worst for giving in to the plight of his crew who lacked his knowledge and expertise. He held this event to be the worst he had ever experienced while out at sea. Back then, he honestly believed they would not make it out alive with him being denied the opportunity of ever seeing his then two-year-old son ever again.

Another fisherman had his own story to tell dating to 1974. Whilst rounding *lampuki* in the dead of the night with the other members of the crew, an uncalled-for change in the wind direction brought along a colossal tempest giving rise to huge waves. With the waves crashing from the opposite direction, it took them many hours to cover the distance home and recalled finding his mother sobbing. Even though engines had long since been fitted unto boats, on board tracking instruments were still a long way from entering the fishing domain. Communication was only possible by means of the VHF radio. As it happened, the boat involved in the incident was equipped with a VHF radio used in communicating with other fishermen while out at sea, nonetheless, he did not have a VHF receiving unit installed at home by which he could have contacted his mother.

Dense fog is yet another dangerous natural element which causes the most skilled of fishermen to lose all sense of direction irrespective of being equipped with the most technologically advanced instruments available on the market. They explained that sometimes the fog becomes so dense and thick they are unable to see the boat's stern from its prow. Tornadic waterspouts characteristic of winter are both dangerous and terrifying. Two fishermen commented on the havoc a waterspout leaves in its wake. They have always tried their best to steer clear of them since it can easily lift a small-scale fishing boat wrecking it in the process.

Sometimes, fishermen must stomach harsh weather conditions for different reasons including the need to make their catch worth the effort. Such was the reason why two brothers set out fishing on a stormy day without informing their father who would have objected and persuaded them against

going. The conditions were so dire, the customary trips undertaken by Gozo Channel ships for the transportation of cargo and passengers between Malta and Gozo had already been suspended for two consecutive days. They set out for picarel (m. *arżnell*) fishing against all odds knowing full well that being amongst the few, if not the only, to work in such conditions would result in little fresh fish available on the market. Consequently, their catch would fetch a much better price than it could have ever been possible on any other day. Even though the catch consisted of eleven boxes worth of picarel, substantially less than the amount they could have caught under normal circumstances, they managed to sell each box for Lm5 (equivalent to circa €12), amounting to €116 thus justifying their ordeal. Similarly, the second oldest fisherman interviewed explained that back in his younger days he used to stomach bad weather to fish for bouge (m. *vopi*). Seeing as this species can be fished in all weather conditions, he took it upon himself to run the risk of fishing in unfavourable weather to secure for himself a better price.

Another reason why fishermen must venture out in bad weather is the need to recuperate their fishing gear. As two fisher brothers explained, one piece of trammel net is worth €800, therefore, having twenty laid out at sea at any given time amounts to the grand total of €16,000 leaving them with no option other than to brave the storm and fetch the netting not to suffer an economic blow. The weather can also wreak havoc of octopus traps. On one occasion the foul weather destroyed thirty out of the two hundred traps they had at sea. When successfully recovered following a storm, the traps end up filled with seaweed that need hours worth of cleaning to make them fit for use again.

Some fishermen decided to give up fishing altogether following a terrible experience, however, the spellbinding effect the sea holds over them, induced them to give up their resolve almost immediately. In a fisherman's words, 'Humans forget. God forbid they do not forget.'

4.2.4 Strenuous Work

Apart harsh weather conditions and their effect on their strength, fishermen also suffer physical stress from the nature of the job itself. Continuous tugging at the fishing equipment, especially heavy nets, has its toll on their general well-being. Amongst others, fishermen complained of suffering of fatigue, back pain, shoulder strains and muscle soreness.

A fisherman in his fifties recalled the time when everything had to be done manually. The crew used to stand in a row and pull the heavy nets on board. The strain demanded of the task was so great that on one occasion he suffered from an extreme case of external haemorrhoids. Since his condition was acute, he had no option other than to undergo a medical intervention whereby his haemorrhoids were removed. The pain that ensued was unbearable causing him great discomfort whenever he coughed and sneezed. He also suffered excessive bleeding during his convalescence period.

Even though winches are the order of the day, their functions are limited to certain jobs. Indeed, manual work still constitutes the greater part of the fishermen's job. Moreover, some fishermen still have to do without a winch. One of the retired fishermen interviewed could not install a mechanical winch on board due to the limited space typical of *frejgatini*. Consequently, he suffered even more from manually hauling the shrimp-dredge; a very heavy fishing equipment composed of two iron semicircles to which a long net is attached (see section 2.6.1). He decided against investing in a larger vessel, which would have allowed him the luxury of a winch, to retain access to shallower waters impossible to reach by other fishermen who, in the great part, owned larger boats.

The constant pulling and tugging is the reason behind a young fisherman's unrelenting shoulder pain from which he had been suffering for years. A short respite from the pain is always followed by two to three days of unyielding ache. Similarly, another fisherman is subjected to weekly spells of pain that frequently effect his mobility.

4.2.5 Fishhook Injuries

Another form of hardship fishermen are subjected to, are injuries while at work with the most common caused by fishhooks. The greater part happen when the fishing lines to which the hooks are attached break while they are pulling at them. On other occasions hooked fish manage to wriggle free during the tugging process causing the line to bounce back from the released tension, and pierce fishermen. Fishhooks come in all shapes and sizes depending on the fish targeted. They are used in many of the Maltese traditional fisheries explaining why injuries of this nature are common. Only a small number of the fishermen claimed to never having been injured. This can be put down to their specialisation in fishing with nets.

Interestingly, many fishermen denied suffering any painful incidents related to fishing equipment. Only when specifically asked about hook injuries did they answer in the affirmative. Indeed, they dismiss such incidents as minor and not relevant enough to be mentioned. Since they are commonplace, they consider them to be part and parcel of the job and do not make a fuss about them.

In most cases, they manage to take out the hooks themselves or with someone else's help there and then. As some fishermen explained, they must stomach the pain and get it over and done with to get on with work rather than lose a day or more worth of fishing by going all the way back to port to seek medical attention. Removal on board is rendered easier when the hook's barb penetrates all the way through to the other side rather than remain embedded in the flesh. This way the barb can be snipped off with cutting pliers followed by the removal of the rest of the hook from where it entered. When the hook remains embedded in the flesh, fishermen take it upon themselves to push it through the rest of the way before snipping off the tip and remove it in its entirety. The severity of the case also depends on the size of the hook. A fisherman recalls when his brother was hooked with the larger type used in tuna fishing which is both very long and thick. Since it did not penetrate to the other side, the fisherman and his brothers had to take it upon themselves to push it all the way through before snipping off the barb. He recalls feeling weak at the ordeal knowing full well that his brother suffered even more for it. When it proves impossible to remove, fishermen have to undertake the journey back home to seek medical attention. As one fisherman narrated, on one occasion he had no option other than to leave his fishing spot and undertake the 60 NM journey home to have it extracted. Another had to head to hospital as he could not extract it himself from underneath his fingernail.

Yet still, there are those who choose to keep working with the hook embedded in their flesh and have it removed only when they finish their work. One such example was provided by a fisherman who got stung by a bottom longline hook. Even though not large, he could not remove it since the hook was oddly shaped. Moreover, the barbed end remained deeply embedded in his hand. To this end, he cut off the part that was still jutting out and reassumed working for the remaining two days of the fishing expedition. Only upon his return to port did he make his way to the hospital where he provided the personnel with a fishhook of the type that needed extracting to help them go about the job efficiently.

A similar accident was experienced by a *Xlukkajr* fisherman while baiting *lampuki* longlines. The process involves baiting the hooks and throwing them overboard one at a time until the entire line is at sea. Unfortunately for him, the fisherman has the habit of keeping the next hook in line between

his teeth while baiting the current. As it happened, five fish took the bait attached to the hooks that had already been thrown overboard. Their tugging caused the hook thus held to slip from between his teeth and puncture his lower lip the whole way through. Being alone, he could not take it out himself. Since it was still early in the morning, he kept it thus till four in the afternoon to keep fishing. Once at port, another fisherman cut off the barbed end and took it off. He concluded his story by claiming that the fishing expedition was worth the pain since he managed to catch three boxes worth of the fish. On an altogether different occasion, his son, who used to accompany him every now and then, was also pierced by a hook from the said longline but, contrary to his father, it stuck in his leg. A baited fish's continuous tugging caused the hook to further embed in his flesh. Given that his father could not stomach the task of removing it himself, he stopped a fellow fisherman who happened to be in the vicinity to give a helping hand. Eventually the task was undertaken by a foreign fisherman recruited on board the latter.

Even though no accident should be taken lightly, some are of a more serious nature than others. A case in point would be the damage caused to a fisherman while longline fishing. A ferryboat passing close by, caught the line in its propeller and pulled it along causing the nylon to grip and tighten around the fisherman's hand and dig deep into his flesh. In the process, three of the line's hooks got embedded in his arm as well. Had the fishing line not broken, it would have severed his hand. The extent of the injury was rendered even more precarious seeing as the fisherman was diabetic. The malady brought the medical staff to seriously consider amputating one of his fingers. Luckily, he was spared the ordeal and instructed to abstain from fishing for six weeks. He also had to pay daily visits to the polyclinic. The kin who accompanied him on the fishing trip was luckier and managed to get off with two hook pierces.

4.2.6 Injuries Sustained from other Equipment

Another fishing equipment responsible for various injuries is the mechanical winch used for hauling nets. A seasoned fisherman sustained two separate injuries thus. On the first occasion, his finger caught in the winch. A missing part is testimony to the accident. On the second occasion, his hand was likewise caught in the rotating winch while hauling a *lampuki* net. Luckily, he was quick enough to turn it off before his hand could be severed.

Another fisherman sustained injuries while cutting a swordfish with a saw whereby he accidentally caught his fingers and severed the nerves for which he needed several physiotherapy sessions to regain their use. He was advised to avail himself of three months of sick-leave, however, he was compelled to go back to work after just fifteen days explaining that it is impossible to sustain one's family on the compensation provided for prolonged sick-leave. A third fisherman was similarly hurt by absent-mindedly placing his hand next to the boat's rudder while hauling his boat onshore. A friend who was assisting him happened to steer the rudder in the process of manoeuvring the boat and caught the fisherman's fingers in so doing.

4.2.7 Life-Threatening Situations and Deaths

Although all accidents are uncalled for, some are less anticipated than others. Irrespective of weather forecasts, fishermen know too well that a sudden change in wind can spell disaster. They are also aware that physical ailments and equipment injuries cannot be fully deflected notwithstanding all precautions. Nonetheless, accidents of an altogether different nature, which may be as equally dangerous or potentially life-threatening, are mostly unaccounted for and can catch fishermen by surprise.

As one of them explained, fishermen need to be continuously on the lookout for leakages and mechanical problems. He happened to witness an uncalled-for accident when the boat he was working from, caught fire. Thanks to proper maintenance and regular safety services, the crew managed to put out the fire using one of the fire extinguishers installed on board before it was too late. Another fisherman had an altogether different story to tell but of an equally frightening nature of the time his boat came to a standstill upon catching a net in its propeller. Disaster loomed ahead with the approach of a tanker ship heading in his direction. Failing to detect them, the ship showed no signs of slowing down. In their despair, the fishermen on board made haste contact with the crew of a Maltese fishing boat working in the vicinity via the VHF radio transmitter. The latter's crew immediately flew into action and tried to catch the tanker's attention by flashing lights in its direction. The tanker made an abrupt turn just as the fishermen braced themselves for the worst and were ready to jump overboard.

Fishermen also had near drowning experiences to tell. With a long career at sea, one of the oldest fishermen interviewed recalled being in danger of drowning on numerous occasions with the worst one experienced a couple of decades earlier at the age of sixty-three when the boat threw its crew

overboard upon taking a sharp turn. With no means of communication, they had no option other than to wait for someone to notice their absence. His wife back home became restless and realised that something was amiss. The Armed Forces of Malta were immediately alerted and a searching team aboard a helicopter set out for the rescue. The fishermen were saved after spending three hours at sea with the interviewee spending a week hospitalised as an aftermath.

Engine failure also prevents a boat from heading safely home as explained by a fisherman who had an interesting story to tell of the occasion when his then twelve-year-old father spent three days lost at sea. Being unable to turn on the engine, the fishing crew concerned revived the boat's dead battery by connecting it to a car's engine battery. Once they got it going, they set out at sea for swordfish with the belief that the boat's battery would recharge during the long outbound journey. Upon reaching the fishing spot they turned off the engine only to discover that it would not restart when needed. The fifteen-mile distance from shore continued to grow as the waves propelled them further out to the extent that they lost sight of land. In their desperation they made makeshift sails using clothes. Eventually they managed to head to Xlendi. The interviewee explained that his father still finds it very uncomfortable to talk about the incident.

A perilous situation developed when the *luzzu* from which another fisherman and his crew were working started making water. They could not figure out where it was getting in from and tried to counteract the problem by bailing water as quickly as possible to keep the boat from sinking. Eventually, they readied themselves to abandon the *luzzu* and get in the boat of fellow fishermen who were called to succour them. When hope was all but lost, the interviewee identified the problem. One of the engine's pipes had broken and was ushering water inside. To this end, he turned off the engine causing the water collected in the bilge to surge forward. He still feels appalled to recall the incident that almost cost them their lives.

As attested to by many fishermen, heart attacks can result from the strenuous work asked of them. The worst possible case scenario unravels if the incident happens while out at sea. This reality was lived by one of the interviewees who was afflicted with a pain in his chest while out fishing. Help was immediately asked for. He was succoured by a helicopter that took him straight to hospital. He was lucky enough to live to tell the story. Unfortunately, the same does not hold true for all. Indeed, the worst possible experience a fisherman can ever come across is indisputably death. One of the fishermen interviewed was unfortunate enough to witness the death of his fisher cousin while out at sea rounding *lampuki*. A colleague drew his attention to his cousin who was seemingly unconscious.

Upon reaching out to him, his relative slumped back in the arms of his colleague at which point they noticed his swollen tongue. The former immediately set about trying to revive him by administering CPR but to no avail. They quickly asked for assistance via the VHF radio transmitter. Finally, a helicopter approached them from which a nurse descended only to declare the fisherman dead and thus beyond help.

4.2.8 Dangerous Fish

Incidents do not only happen while handling and working with fishing equipment. Potential danger can result from the subject of the fishermen's interest; fish. Dangerous fish come in all shapes and sizes even though people tend to relate the subject to the larger type especially sharks.

Shark sightings by fishermen, scuba divers and bathers alike are not uncommon. According to the Globetrotter's dive guide to Malta and Gozo, the deep expansion of water running between the Maltese Islands and Sicily is home to none other than the world's second largest shark population in the world. Luckily, the last recorded local great white shark catch occurred several years back on the 17th of April 1987. The specimen caught by local fisherman Alfredo Cutajar was a female measuring 7.13 metres, making it the largest recorded fish to ever be caught locally and the second largest in the Mediterranean. Upon inspection, it was revealed that her stomach contained a two-metre dolphin, a two-metre blue shark, and a turtle.⁷⁹⁴

Attacks on humans in the waters between Malta and Sicily are not so common with the last occurring in 1998 when a twenty-foot great white shark attacked a cabin cruiser twelve miles off the Italian coast. The attack was captured on video by the boat owner himself. On the other hand, the latest fatality in the region occurred in 1989 off the coast of Elba. In this incident, a forty-seven-year-old scuba diver, Luciano Costanzo, was killed by a great white shark ranging between twenty and twenty-five feet in length. On the day, Luciano resurfaced from a depth of seventy-five feet crying 'shark' upon which he lunged for the boat only to be seized by the fish and taken underwater before he could make it to safety. The shark was subsequently seen leaping off the water twice with its jaws clamped around the victim's waist until they vanished from view for good.⁷⁹⁵

⁷⁹⁴ Rachel Zammit Cutajar, 'Shark Attack or Just a Fishy Tale', *MaltaToday*, 11 August 2010.

⁷⁹⁵ *ibid.*

The latest fatal attack recorded for the Maltese waters occurred on the 20th of July 1956 at St. Thomas's Bay. The victim was Jack Smedley, a retired British navy officer who, at the time of the incident, was swimming with his Maltese student Tony Grech. Smedley was dragged underwater in a pool of blood and his body was never retrieved.⁷⁹⁶ Interestingly, one of the fishermen interviewed recalls sighting the said fish way back when he was still ten years old on a fishing trip with his parents. He kept to the boat's bilge while his parents were busy hauling the net. He recalls his mother exclaiming about a big fish at which his father instructed her to go down in the boat's bilge as well. The fisherman claimed that the large shark spotted by his parents was the same that killed Smedley a few days later.



Picture 75: The great white shark caught by Alfredo Cutajar in 1987

(Source: Sharks in Malta Part II – A Killer Reputation)⁷⁹⁷

⁷⁹⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁹⁷ Picture 75. Cilia, David P. "Sharks in Malta Part II – A Killer Reputation." 3 June 2010. *Multicaria*. 14 March 2021 <<http://muticaria.blogspot.com/2010/06/sharks-in-malta-part-ii-killer.html>>.

But dangerous fish are not limited to certain species of shark. Small and less conspicuous fish can be equally dangerous and far more common. The most dangerous stinging fish species mentioned by fishermen are the greater weaver (m. *sawt*), streaked weaver (m. *traćna tal-fond*) and the common stingray (m. *boll*). A considerable number of the fishermen interviewed had their fair share of incidents involving one of these species. One was stung by a venomous stingray. The species' potential danger is attested to by the death of the worldwide famous wildlife expert Steve Irwin nicknamed 'The Crocodile Hunter' back in 2006 who was killed by the fish upon being stung in the heart. In the fisherman's case, the fish's sting did not prove fatal as it did not strike any vital organs, nonetheless, he had to be hospitalised for no less than three days. He described the pain to be unbearable, and the painkillers administered failed to alleviate the pain.

A particularly unfortunate episode was experienced by another fisherman whose catch of the day included four large-streaked weaver specimens whose sting had not been removed by his colleague. Since the latter was in a hurry to get back home, he urged the fisherman to hasten the unloading of the catch. While so doing, the fisherman recounting the story, brushed his hand against one of the specimens and stung his finger. The sheering pain made the short trip from the boat's mooring spot in Marsaxlokk's harbour to the shore by means of a *frejgatina* unbearable. By the time he stepped ashore he was already feeling lightheaded but managed to drive the other fisherman home before he made his way to his. He headed straight to bed thinking that the pain would subside of its own accord, but he was proved wrong. With time, the excruciating pain got even worse, and he was left with no choice other than to be taken to a health centre where the medical staff urged him to immerse the stung finger in scalding water. The relief was immediate but resumed as soon as he removed his finger which he could not keep indefinitely immersed due to the high temperature. The medical staff suggested a tetanus shot. Once back home he tried to catch some sleep, but the pain could not let him rest and he had to be taken back to the health centre.

Another fisherman declared to having been stung by a streaked weaver no less than four times. On one occasion his finger was so swollen that he sincerely believed it would erupt. The pain prevented him from driving to the health centre himself and had to be taken over by a friend. Upon admittance, he was vaccinated against the pain which he described as being incomparable to anything he had ever experienced before. It was so violent that he wished to have his finger amputated for immediate relief and moved on to voice his opinion on the need of providing fishermen with a medicinal product that could be self-administered to alleviate the acute pain long enough for them to head back to port. This would mostly benefit fishermen who undertake long distance fishing trips single-handed especially

seeing as small-scale fishing boats have small horsepower motors and can take them up to four hours to cover a seven-to-eight-mile distance.

The excruciating pain following a sting by a streaked weaver was evidenced by yet another fisherman's unfortunate account. Being at a considerable distance from shore, the fisherman in question persisted in hauling his fishing gear on board whilst fighting against the pain. Upon completing the task, he promptly set for the return journey, nonetheless, he did not manage to complete the trip and fainted from the pain halfway through, leaving the fishing boat unattended whilst its engine was still running. The sound of the boat hitting the rocks brought him back to his senses at which point water started pouring in. He steered his sinking boat towards shallow waters to make it easier to retrieve later. Even though the ending to this story can still be considered positive, one cannot help but speculate as to what could have happened if he did not wake up just in time to take prompt action.

Other fishermen had similar stories to tell concerning greater weavers. One of the fishermen thus stung, explained that he always takes it upon himself to set out fishing an hour earlier than it is customary for squid just to catch enough fish to make his ailing father a fish soup. Some of the fish thus caught included a couple of greater weaver specimen which he placed in the storing channels before commencing to catching squid. Once back at port, he undertook the task of transferring his catch into containers. Having momentarily forgotten about the fish stored at the bottom, he brushed his finger against one of the greater weaver specimens concealed underneath the squids resulting in excruciating pain. Yet another fisherman stung by the said species attested to the pain experienced. Having mistaken a greater weaver for a harmless fish, he reached to untangle it from the trammel net he was hauling on board. Upon being stung, his hand started to swell out of proportion. The incident occurred at half past seven in the evening with the pain starting to subside only at half past five of the following morning.

Other fish and sea dwelling creatures that often sting fishermen whilst being handled include the scorpion fish (m. *skorfna*) and the sea urchin (m. *rizza*). Nonetheless, the pain and hazards that can be caused by fish is not limited to stings. Sharp toothed fish can easily cause serious injuries while relatively gentle fish can prove dangerous because of their sheer size. The latter happened to be the case of a fisherman who, while gaffing a large tuna to haul on board, was pulled downwards and thrown overboard. He was in shock but otherwise unharmed. The same cannot be said of fishermen who come in direct contact with moray eels (m. *murina*). The father of an interviewee was bitten by

this species on two separate occasions with the second dealing him a deep wound that required no less than thirty stitches to be properly sewn.

The hardships mentioned thus far can never be completely ruled out no matter how meticulous and attentive a fisherman may be. Hardships in terms of long working hours, hard work and accidents while at work, have always been part and parcel of the job. To this end, fishermen grew up knowing what to expect, and in turn, to accept them, however, the same cannot be said of more recent disruptive occurrences. In all cases, disruptions of this nature are human induced and are being introduced in a relatively short period of time with no possibility of adapting accordingly, leaving fishermen striving to make ends meet as best they can irrespective of the consequences. Their resilience is being subjected to numerous tests which they try to overcome as best they can. The long list of human induced problems, which will be further subdivided in two broad categories; appropriation of the sea and legislative repercussions, is overwhelming. The fishermen's reluctance to give up fishing in face of all the obstacles encountered confirms that fishing is not just a job but a way of life; a whole being's identity that cannot be done with.

4.3 The Appropriation of the Sea

The sea has always been an important medium for the transportation of both people and merchandise and has been protected from invading nations and entities since time immemorial. Locally it could be mostly discerned from accounts on the Knights of St. John's fleet which occupied The Grand Harbour and the British fleet which likewise occupied the area for its use. As of late, new emerging entities are equally appropriating the sea to meet their needs and agendas amongst which are the scuba-diving industry, the tourism industry, an extensive increase in bunkering activity coupled with boat traffic, adjacent generating plants, the creation of an amateur fishing category, and fish-farming as discussed hereunder.

4.3.1 The Scuba-Diving Industry

Many self-proclaimed industries and activities are reserving the right to make exclusive use of areas to the detriment of others foremost of whom are fishermen. An example would be the scuba-diving industry which is fast expanding in coastal areas and has already proclaimed for its exclusive use over forty sites along the Maltese Islands' coast. Being close to the coast, this industry is securing for itself

sheltered areas traditionally used by fishermen to thrive during bad weather. Having been voted as one of the top three diving destinations in the world and attracting an overall average of 60,000 tourists a year, scuba-diving in Maltese waters generate a lot of income for the local economy.⁷⁹⁸ For this reason, the industry has a lot of power in securing diving sites. Since it is promoted as pro-environment, this industry wields even greater power through the support of environmentalist groups. It has the means of further promoting itself via television, newspaper, and online sources. In conjunction with self-promotion, it uses its power to exclude fishing from diving sites by portraying fishermen as culprits. Indeed, ‘their pro-conservation ideology is often used as a “smoke screen” to promote scuba-diving and snorkelling interests at the expense of fishing.’⁷⁹⁹ Interviews conducted with fishermen revealed their frustration at the scuba-diving industry’s propaganda in portraying them as being destructive to promote their personal interests.

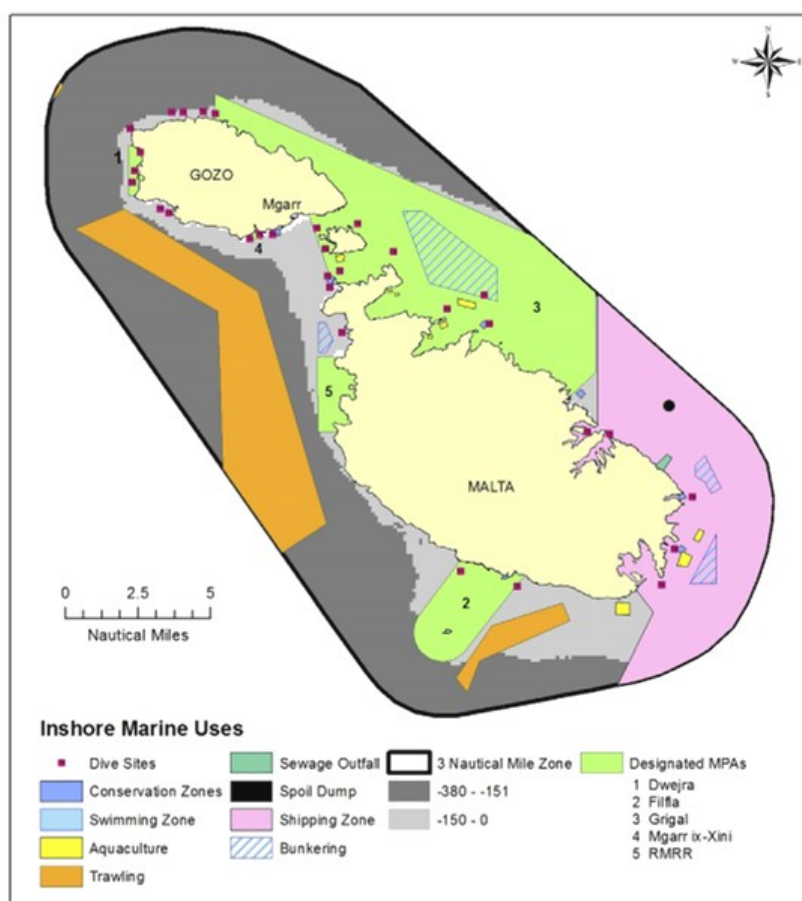


Diagram 6: The entities which are proclaiming marine spaces

(Source: Fishing in a Congested Sea: What do Marine Protected Areas Imply for the Future of the Maltese Artisanal Fleet?)⁸⁰⁰

⁷⁹⁸ Alicia Said, Douglas MacMillan, Michael Schembri and Joseph Tzanopoulos, ‘Fishing in a Congested Sea: What do Marine Protected Areas Imply for the Future of the Maltese Artisanal Fleet?’, *Applied Geography*, lxxxvii, (2017), 250.

⁷⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁸⁰⁰ Diagram 6. Cf. *ibid.*, 248.

Amongst other things, this industry is also urging the establishment of MPAs.⁸⁰¹ In all, more than 35% covering over 4,000 km² of the Maltese waters within the 25NM zone have already been designated as MPAs.⁸⁰² The following extract clearly shows that MPAs are thus envisioned to restrict fishing;

The first step that one has to take to protect the industry is to declare certain zones as marine protected areas (MPAs). This would obviously imply that no fishing would be permitted in such areas and implementation would require the necessary initial enforcement.⁸⁰³

All the pro-environmental talk that the scuba-diving industry uses in meliorating its position conceals the truth. Numerous studies have provided concrete evidence that marine ecosystems become degraded and compromised because of poorly planned diving and intensive tourist use. Degradation is mostly noticeable in coral reefs exploited by scuba-divers of which many can be found around the Maltese Islands. Coral reefs are affected both directly and indirectly. Direct effects include coral breakage, boat collisions with reefs, and anchoring damage. Indirect damage includes the alteration of the water quality from nutrient enrichment and the addition of pollutants, wastewater, and increased turbidity. Numerous worldwide studies have demonstrated that coral populations are deteriorating in heavily dived sites with the largest amount of dead coral and coral rubble recorded for the same sites. The conservation measures are proving to be ineffective.⁸⁰⁴

Diagram 7 lists the negative impacts ensuing from the scuba-diving industry as evidenced by scientific research. As shown, the scuba diving industry has a negative impact on both the biological and social dimensions. Within the Maltese scenario this is also affecting the cultural aspect of life characteristic of the long-standing tradition of its small-scale fishing fleet.

Apart from the ones listed, fishermen also touched on other problems. They remarked on the numerous shipwrecks that have been scuttled during the years. Some of the sites chosen for the purpose were high yielding grounds which have since been the prerogative of the scuba-diving industry. Apart from the appropriation of traditional fishing grounds, local research reveals that wreck scuttling causes the loss of habitat as well as water contamination from remnant paints. The

⁸⁰¹ Franco Mercieca, 'Let's Protect Gozo's Diving Industry', *Times of Malta*, 2 October 2012.

⁸⁰² "Marine Protected Areas." ERA: Environment and Resources Authority. 19 April 2021 <<https://era.org.mt/topic/marine-protected-areas-2/>>.

⁸⁰³ Franco Mercieca, 'Let's Protect Gozo's Diving Industry', *Times of Malta*, 2 October 2012.

⁸⁰⁴ Siti Zulaiha Zainal Abidin and Badaruddin Othuman Mydin Mohamed, 'A Review of SCUBA Diving Impacts and Implication for Coral Reefs Conservation and Tourism Management', *SHS Web of Conferences*, xii, (2014), 1.

shipwrecks also induce the settlement of fish species that would otherwise not reside in the surroundings, consequently upsetting the ecosystem of the area.⁸⁰⁵ Another fisherman commented on the damage inflicted by the air bubbles released by divers in underwater caves which cause the cave's wall to become barren of life. This was confirmed by a study which reported that, 'diving may cause both mechanical damage to erect sessile forms growing in these caves, and death of the biota on the ceiling due to trapped air bubbles from diving cylinders.'⁸⁰⁶

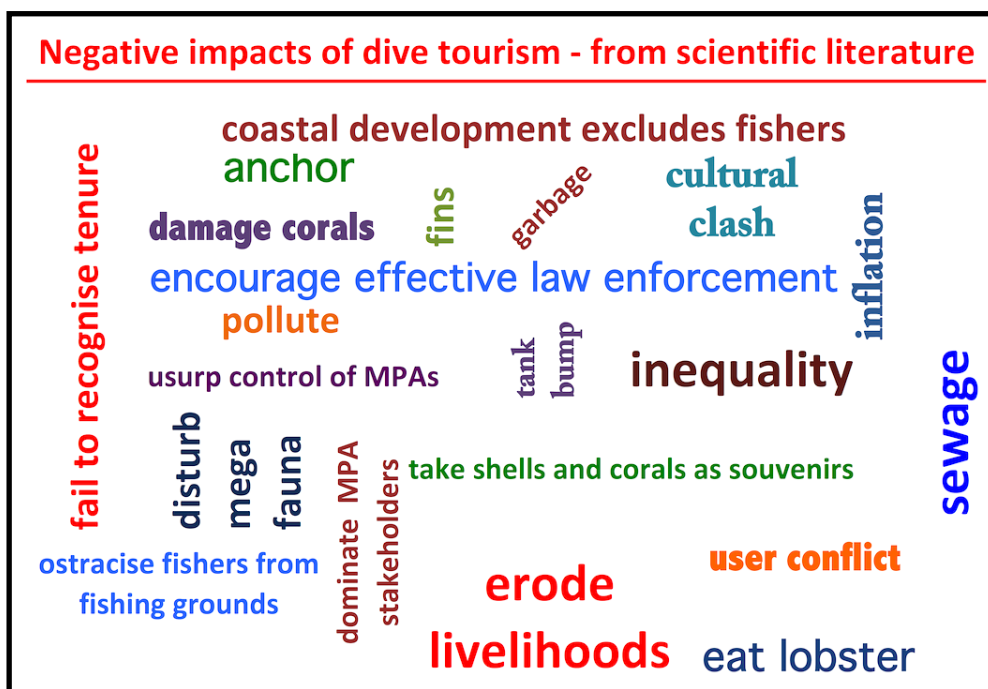


Diagram 7: The negative impacts of scuba diving

(Source: Negative Impacts of Dive Tourism)⁸⁰⁷

Lacking the means to voice their concerns and promote their interests, fishermen are left with no option other than to look on as they are further pushed out of their waters. As a means of survival, small-scale fishermen are reverting to 'trespassing' and fish in these areas under cover of night. In so doing they are risking having their gear confiscated and fined up to €2000.⁸⁰⁸ As of yet, the MPAs envisaged for the Maltese waters have not been established. One can only speculate as to the

⁸⁰⁵ Charles Galdies and Marvic Refalo, *Current and Future Impacts on the Marine Environment: The Challenge to Achieve Good Environmental Status. Malta Report* (Malta, Nature Trust, 2015), 62.

⁸⁰⁶ *ibid.*

⁸⁰⁷ Diagram 7. Cf. Joanne Edney. "Negative Impacts of Dive Tourism." *The Dive Tourist*. 26 March 2021 <<https://thedivetourist.com/dive-tourism/negative-impacts-of-dive-tourism/>>.

⁸⁰⁸ Said, MacMillan, Schembri and Tzanopoulos, 250.

fishermen's fate once they come into being. Having no recourse to counteract this massive problem it can be assumed that many of the small-scale fishermen will be automatically phased out especially since the areas designated as MPAs are massive and span many kilometres. For those who prevail, trespassing would be inevitable seeing as their sole means of survival would have been confiscated in its entirety. Since MPAs are the prerogative of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) more information on their impact on fishermen is provided in section 4.4.3.

4.3.2 Ship/Boat Traffic and Bunkering

The Maltese waters are cluttered with large-scale vessels going in and out of ports including cargo ships, tankers, passenger ships, and pleasure crafts such as yachts. They all have both a direct and an indirect impact upon small-scale fishermen.

The most obvious direct impact mentioned by many fishermen was the loss of fishing gear by large-scale vessels while travelling to and fro. The indirect impact is caused by many factors which have a common outcome; the destruction of the marine environment on which small-scale fishermen depend. The different activities by which the shipping industry inflicts damage to the marine ecosystem were touched upon by the fishermen during the interviews, with the most mentioned being anchoring for bunkering purposes. This usually occurs within 5% of the 150m contour. Both the heavy, thick chains and the anchors themselves inflict large-scale physical damage to fishing beds.⁸⁰⁹ An area used for heavy bunkering is the White Reef (m. *Sikka l-Bajda*). In 2009 alone, 563 oil tankers used this reef for bunkering.⁸¹⁰ The damaging effects thus caused were filmed by a diver. The footage showed large expanses of seabed barren of seaweed from the swaying of large chains, which can be 200m long. Apart from destroying the flora and fauna, the sheer weight of the anchor itself breaks the rocks on which seaweed flourishes.⁸¹¹ As with industrial vessels, other boats that cause considerable anchorage damage include yachts and recreational boats.⁸¹²

Fishermen identified the high level of pollution and contamination caused by large-scale vessels as another factor contributing towards the local environmental degradation. This holds especially true for the Mediterranean seeing as it is a very busy maritime traffic region. Being centrally positioned,

⁸⁰⁹ *ibid.*, 6.

⁸¹⁰ Galdies and Refalo, 70.

⁸¹¹ Keith Demicoli, 'Ships Anchors Allegedly Causing Damage to Sikka l-Bajda', *TVM News*, 9 May 2017.

⁸¹² Galdies and Refalo, 62.

Malta lies along several important shipping routes. More than 65,000 vessels travel within 20NM of the Maltese Islands. The high level of vessels calls for a relatively large amount of bunkering activity. The busiest is the Malta-Adriatic route which caters for 27,600 vessels a year. It is also the route with the highest bunker volume for vessel above 40,000 dead weight tonnage (DWT). The second busiest route, and which subsequently holds the second highest total bunker volume, is the Suez-Marsaxlokk route which caters for ships that exceed 15,000 DWT. Through this route, 10,300 vessels transit annually. These large figures are accountable to circa 101 million tonnes of Hazardous and Noxious Substances (HNS) being transported within 20NM of the Maltese waters a year whereas an approximate of 937 million tonnes of hydrocarbons is transported within the same area during the same time frame.⁸¹³ The seaweed heavily damaged by bunkering is Neptune Grass otherwise known as *Posidonia oceanica* which 'is listed as a priority species under the Habitats Directive (92/43/CEE) as it is endemic to the Mediterranean and forms an important habitat to many species.'⁸¹⁴

Even though no major oil spills have been locally recorded, in the unfortunate case of such an incident, the generation of a potable water supply to meet the demand would be compromised. As a result, other sectors dependent on the marine environment would be brought to a halt not the least the fishing sector.⁸¹⁵ Another form of pollution is noise which disrupts cetacean behaviour and affects critically endangered populations. As previously mentioned, bunkering vessels are also accountable to the introduction of alien species resulting from illegal discharges of ballast water. Furthermore, this large traffic also increases the probability of ship strikes with cetaceans and turtles. This also holds true for cruise liners and yachts.

Indeed, the large vessel category is not exclusively made of tankers, containers, and merchant ships but is also inclusive of cruise liners. As with the others, cruise liners are also accountable for numerous environmental damaging practises including discharges of sewage, grey water, oily bilge water, hazardous wastes, ballast water and solid waste. A typical 3,000 passenger ship discharges from 15,000 to 30,000 gallons of black water, and 90,000 to 255,000 gallons of grey water daily. Furthermore, cruise liners are responsible for 24% of vessel waste worldwide. An additional average of eight metric tons of bilge water is also discharged daily. To make matters even worse, it must be

⁸¹³ *ibid.*, 69.

⁸¹⁴ Melissa Abdilla, 'The Environmental Impacts of Shipping in Malta', *Occasional Papers on Island and Small States*, (2016), 15.

⁸¹⁵ Galdies and Refalo, 69.

noted that cruise liners' waste disposal is mostly unregulated, extending the devastating effects it has upon the marine environment.⁸¹⁶

Large vessel activity within the Mediterranean basin is envisaged to continue increasing and for even larger vessels to be deployed. As a result, the numerous and diverse pressures exerted by the sector will also continue to increase.

4.3.3 The Effects of Generating Plants

Amidst the wide spectrum of environmental hazards inflicted by generating plants, is marine life destruction caused by the discharge of thermal effluents which occurs when the seawater used as a coolant is returned to the natural environment at a much higher temperature.

Malta's main source of power is the Delimara power plant constructed back in 1997. Aside from hazards emanating from its operation, the power plant inflicted a huge irrevocable blow to the environment during its construction with the site chosen for the project originally being a saline marshland. Amongst others, the incorporation of large concrete and iron pillars were placed in the seabed to support the entire structure.⁸¹⁷ A veteran *Xlukkajr* fisherman explained that before its destruction, the seabed in the said area used to be covered in large *Posidonia* meadows which grew tall and large between the months of March and September. During this time frame the meadows provided a haven for spawning to a vast array of living organisms. The versatile fauna was free to rummage and flourish undisturbed for several months in the dense and lush *Posidonia* which further prevented fishermen from accessing the area. Eventually, the organisms ventured out with the first bout of bad weather. This perfect life cycle enabled fishermen to make a sustainable living while allowing space for the sea to replenish itself in subsequent months. As with another veteran *Xlukkajr* fisherman, he narrated how the area was dredged in preparation for construction works to ensue.

In its operation, cold water is taken from Marsaxlokk Bay and discharged into the *Hofra ż-Żghira* cove. Back in June 2003, the water thus discharged was found to be 5.5°C higher than the ambient temperature twenty-five to fifty meters away from the point of discharge.⁸¹⁸ The environmental

⁸¹⁶ Galdies and Refalo, 62.

⁸¹⁷ Isabella Lauri and Katrina Bonavia. "Seawater and the Delimara Power Station." *Young Reporters for the Environment*. 4 April 2021 <<https://www.yremalta.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Seawater-and-the-Delimara-power-station-.pdf>>.

⁸¹⁸ Galdies and Refalo, 80.

impact of cooling water was assessed in 2010. Apart from the original destruction of *Posidonia* meadows, in the course of its construction the assessment revealed that;

Potential impacts to the health of *Posidonea* meadows from significant changes in the water column thermal regime include an increased epiphytic growth, a regression in the extent of seagrass meadows and their replacement by *Cymodocea nodosa* and photophilic algal assemblages.⁸¹⁹

In 2011 a local newspaper reported the temperature to be 8°C above the normal temperature highlighting an increase of 2.5°C than the previous report. Before its extension, the cove received 29,500m³ of cooling water by the hour.⁸²⁰ The cooling waters discharged also contain traces of toxic chemicals including antifoulants and polyaromatic hydrocarbons.⁸²¹

Moreover, before the seawater is used, the salt is removed in the process of demineralisation to prevent it from clogging the channels. Sulphuric acid and biocaf are added which produce chlorine dioxide to keep the process running efficiently.⁸²² The area has been diagnosed with a reduced level of oxygen, high levels of chlorophyll and occasional water turbidity.⁸²³ Further damage is caused by the discharge of caustic soda thrown into the sea upon cleaning the plant's boilers.⁸²⁴

Similar to Delimara, extensive damages to the benthic of rich marine waters characteristic of high yields were mercilessly inflicted at Birżebbuġa during the construction of the Malta Freeport. Apart from being established over a vast fertile area, the container traffic contributes to the degradation of the marine ecosystem of both the surrounding area and far beyond from the unrelenting bunkering and pollution. The large expanses of marine destruction caused by the Delimara power plant and the Malta Freeport both during their construction and their aftermath was touched upon by several south-eastern fishermen. The only means by which fishermen survived the havoc was to seek alternate fishing grounds. To this end, fishermen started covering longer distances to reach their new fishing spot. The greater part of the fishermen from Marsaxlokk and Birżebbuġa had to pave their way to Marsascala's waters. The new distance resulted in more fuel combustion and longer hours at sea. An increase in competition also ensued whereby the fishermen who had always worked the waters had to share the resources with the influx of fishermen new to the area. This resulted in a substantial loss

⁸¹⁹ *ibid.*, 82.

⁸²⁰ James Debono, 'No Solution to Ecological Havoc in Hofra ż-Żghira', *MaltaToday*, 13 September 2011.

⁸²¹ *ibid.*

⁸²² Isabella Lauri and Katrina Bonavia. "Seawater and the Delimara Power Station." *Young Reporters for the Environment*. 4 April 2021 <<https://www.yremalta.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Seawater-and-the-Delimara-power-station-.pdf>>.

⁸²³ Galdies and Refalo, 80.

⁸²⁴ James Debono, 'No Solution to Ecological Havoc in Hofra ż-Żghira', *MaltaToday*, 13 September 2011.

of income both in terms of fuel expenses, additional time spent travelling to and fro and reduced catches from the increase in fishermen. Still, the strategy thus adopted enabled fishermen to overcome the obstacle and somehow survive the ordeal.

4.3.4 The Shift to Tourist Resorts

Old photographs of traditional Maltese fishing villages provide a glimpse of the simple life people in the areas lived with fishing being the centre round which all the other activities and lives revolved. The quaint essence of a simple life and direct contact with nature steeped in tradition has become highly sought by both foreigners and Maltese as a means of detaching oneself from the ever-increasing urbanised areas. To accommodate their needs, new establishments started popping along these villages' waterfront in direct view of the picturesque promenades. Thus, the ever-increasing influx of tourists gave rise to coastal tourism development with tourist accommodations including hotels and self-catering apartments vying with each other for the best spots. So far, the densest development has been experienced in Sliema, Mellieħa and Buġibba.⁸²⁵ These areas have completely lost their grasp on their humble origins, consequently, the tourism industry started seeking alternative areas to connect visitors with traditional fishing villages with the result that the areas thus targeted are following in the footprints of the above-mentioned localities. A quick look at the urbanisation of Marsascalea, St. Paul's Bay, Marsalforn, Mgarr and Xlendi highlight the transition from the traditional and culturally rich villages to the modern and heavily urbanised areas. Another village which has started to follow suit is Marsaxlokk. One of the fishermen remarked on how tourism is encroaching on Marsaxlokk's identity and destructing its cultural value; the very essences to which tourists are drawn. The greater part of them commented on the grotesque tourist accommodations accountable for the loss of the traditional village picturesque qualities. Touristic coastal developments also impact the marine environment through changes in the hydrodynamics. Amongst others, larger hotels have their own desalination plants which discharge the brine back to sea.⁸²⁶ Many restaurants have since been built in place of the fishermen's traditional dwelling places. Moreover, the adjacent shores, which were the prerogative of fishermen for net drying and boat mooring, have also been seized by the restaurants to use as additional space for seating. In so doing, they expanded their territory and maximised their profits to the detriment of fishermen. Practically all the fishermen interviewed touched upon the subject. Indeed, many of them encounter major difficulties to find a suitable and

⁸²⁵ *ibid.*, 61.

⁸²⁶ *ibid.*, 63.

unobstructed spot on which to moor their boats. The sentiment was perfectly captured by a couple of fishermen; a Xlukkajr and one of the last remaining Gozitan fishermen from Marsalforn as follows;

*Is-sajjieda kellhom ix-xatt kullu fejn jitfghu l-upri tagħhom u l-inginji. Issa mimli mwejjed. M'għandekx ċans. Fejn itella' d-dgħajjes ċeknulna. Nikkalkula li kellne metru u tawna pulzier.*⁸²⁷

*Hawn Marsalforn preżenti sajjieda ftiit għad fadal għax il-qalb tas-sajjied hađuha. Għad fadal ftiit xjuħ bħali, għad fadlilhom jumejn ohra forsi jgħaddu u jispiċċaw ukoll għax min kien sajjied kellu garaxx, kien tiegħu, bieghu biex sar restorant.*⁸²⁸

Xlukkajri fishermen are further hit by the popular village's Sunday marketplace whereby the stalls, which sell all sorts of goods for tourists and residents alike, are set up along the whole length of the promenade. A fisherman narrated the difficulty he encounters in parking his van in the vicinity of his boat for unloading purposes and the obstructions on his way out by the marketplace vendors' vans. Other fishermen expressed their frustration at having their moored boats, especially the smaller ones, sustaining damage from the vendors' rough jostling. It is also common for vendors to hurl words of abuse at the fishermen for taking up space on the quay. Other fishermen remarked on the large amount of waste, mostly plastic bags, left behind by the Sunday market with the greater part ending up in the sea. The encroachment of cultural tourism was explained by Boissevain (2013) as follows;

Excessive tourist attention destroys the very culture visitors come to examine. It does this by transforming natives into entrepreneurs, by destroying traditional tranquillity and physical environment and by pricing the local population out of the area, thus transforming the attraction from a living community into a museum or heritage park.⁸²⁹

⁸²⁷ The fishermen had all the quay at their disposition to moor their boats and fishing material. Nowadays it has been taken over by the restaurants' tables. There is no possibility. The mooring space has been reduced. We had metres, now we have inches.

⁸²⁸ In present day Marsalforn few fishermen are left because they have taken away the fishermen's heart. Only a few older fishermen like myself whose time is almost up are left. Past fishermen had garages which were sold to become restaurants.

⁸²⁹ Jeremy Boissevain, *Fractions, Friends and Feasts: Anthropological Perspectives on the Mediterranean* (New York, Berghahn Books, 2013), 225.



Picture 76: A photo of Pretty Bay, Birżebbuġa taken before World War II

(Source: Malta and Gozo: Then and Now)⁸³⁰

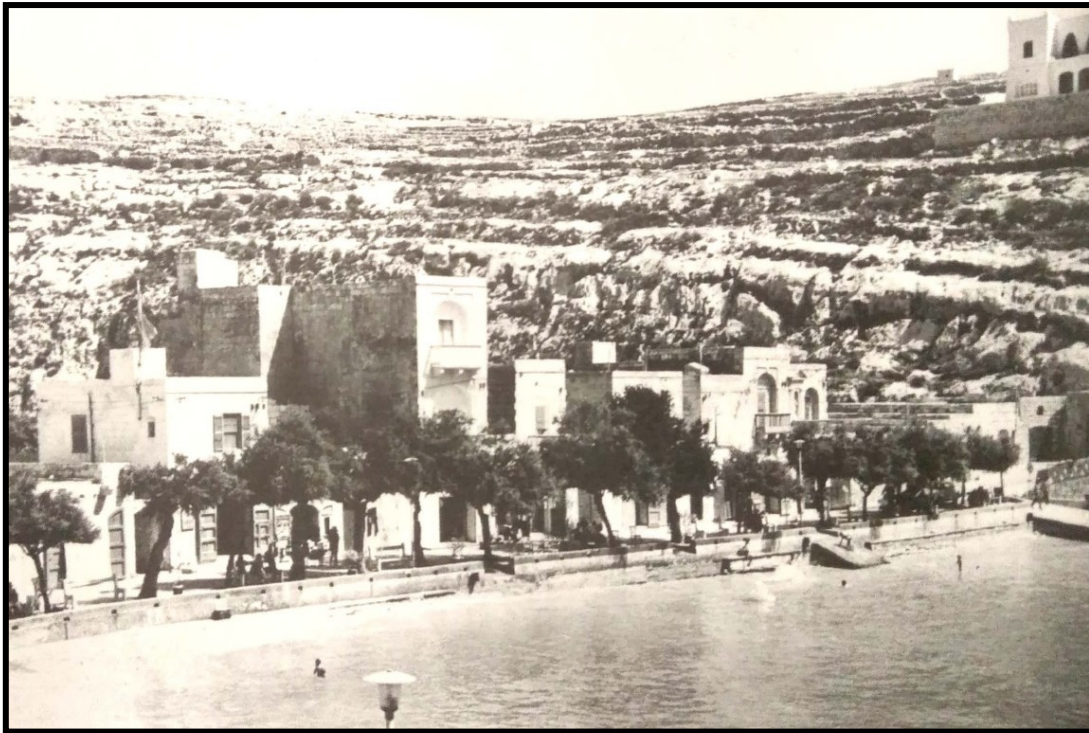


Picture 77: Birżebbuġa nowadays

(Source: Pretty Bay)⁸³¹

⁸³⁰ Picture 76. Cf. Joseph Bonnici and Michael Cassar, *Malta and Gozo: Then and Now* (Malta, BDL, 1998), 13.

⁸³¹ Picture 77. Cf. “Pretty Bay”. [Malta.com](https://www.malta.com/en/attraction/beaches/south-malta/pretty-bay). 7 September 2022<<https://www.malta.com/en/attraction/beaches/south-malta/pretty-bay>>.



Picture 78: An old photo of Xlendi Bay before its transformation into a tourist resort
(Source: Malta and Gozo: Then and Now)⁸³²



Picture 79: Tourist accommodations rearing in the background of the quaint fishing storerooms at Xlendi
(Source: my own)

⁸³² Picture 78. Cf. Bonnici and Cassar, 159.



Picture 80: An old photo of Marsaxlokk's waterfront

(Source: Marsaxlokk ta' Qabel)⁸³³

A respite from the tourism encroachment in terms of restaurant tables and the Sunday marketplace was experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic's timeframe, which required bars and restaurants to remain closed leaving fishermen free to use the shoreline for working purposes without any impediments reminiscent of the old days when Marsaxlokk's identity as a fishing village was not contested for by other entities.

The inevitable changes caused by the tourist industry, forced fishermen to either adapt or perish. A few fishermen opened a restaurant themselves. A thorough look at the phenomenon revealed several contributing factors to this possibility, including the inheritance of a seafront house from their fisher forefathers which was subsequently converted into a restaurant. In so doing, some of them retained fishing on a part-time basis to supply their own establishment with high-quality fish. Still others retained fishing on a full-time basis with their wives managing the catering business onshore. As with the former, they took it upon themselves to supply the restaurant with fish. Since this reality holds true for only few fishermen, the rest had to find ulterior means of survival. Many fishermen rose to the occasion and exploited the restaurants' prerogative of serving fresh fish by selling their catch

⁸³³ Picture 80. Cf. Marsaxlokk ta' Qabel Facebook Page.

directly to them. Seeing as direct sales may be liable to elusive payments, some fishermen avoid the risk and sell their catch to fish shops even at a loss in profit. Others modified one of their boats to take tourists on boat trips. Notwithstanding this adaptation, several fishermen gave up their profession and took up tourism in its entirety which, even though admirable in terms of survival, did not contribute towards the fishing resilient factor.



Picture 81: A *luzzu* adapted for taking tourists on boat trips

(Source: my own)

Fishermen hailing from both Mġarr and Marsalforn also commented on tourism encroachment in terms of the ever-increasing number of yachts that is taking up all the mooring space originally used by fishermen. Yachting is well established in Malta with many yacht marinas scattered throughout the archipelago catering for yachts ranging from eight to ten meters in length. In 2012, 337 yachts longer than 24m and 2,596 yachts shorter than 24m were registered locally. This year also marked an increase of 15.7% of super yachts over the previous years.⁸³⁴ As mentioned previously, yachts can negatively impact the marine environment through the release of contaminants such as tar, lubricating oils, and biocides from anti-fouling paints.⁸³⁵ Additional damage to the seabed inflicted by the ever-increasing number of yachts is caused by anchoring and dredging.

⁸³⁴ Galdies and Refalo, 59.

⁸³⁵ *ibid.*, 62.

4.3.5 Escaped Sea Bream Incidents

A seemingly unrelated incident can also adversely affect fishermen. A case in point would be the large quantity of escaped fish farmed sea bream back in February 2020 ensuing from the appropriation of areas by fish farming activities. The drastic weather conditions inflicted damage to the sea bream cages established outside St. Paul's Bay and Mellieħa. Due to the severity of the storm, a large quantity of the fish was washed on land at Xemxija⁸³⁶ offering people a free fish bounty. Fish made available thus, continued to be collected on the morrow.⁸³⁷ Even though some shook it off as a joke, others took it to a whole new level and sold the fish thus procured both on social media and local advertising websites.⁸³⁸

The latter raised some concern and controversy, with marine biologist Professor Deidun explaining that dead fish is colonised by microorganisms which, if consumed, can be harmful. Some of the fish was crushed by cars making the level of contamination even higher. If consumed, stressed fish can also be harmful from the release of stress hormones which are carcinogenic in humans.⁸³⁹ In the light of this statement, fishermen who traditionally catch wild sea bream legitimately, failed to sell their catch. In a proclamation signed by the two fishermen cooperatives' presidents, it was noted that sea bream usually fetches good prices and help to partially elevate the winter problems fishermen face. To this end, the professor clarified publicly that he was explicitly referring to the fish washed up on land following the storm. He consolidated his argument by urging people to support fishermen in difficult times by purchasing their products.⁸⁴⁰

Apart from the damaging effect outlined above, a study also revealed the damage escaped specimen can inflict on the environment. Amongst others, these fish can act as carriers of pathogens facilitating disease transmission amongst their wild counterparts. Large numbers can also cause disruptions to the food chains, create stress on the availability of resources, and cause genetic drifts and hybridisation if they mate with wild specimen.⁸⁴¹ The damage inflicted by all these criteria on the

⁸³⁶ Antonia Micallef, 'An Easy Fishing Spree at Xemxija – Not Everything that Shines is Golden', *TVM News*, 25 February 2019.

⁸³⁷ Ritianne Agius, 'Seabream Washed Up in Xemxija Makes it to Foreign Media...and to Restaurants?', *TVM News*, 25 February 2019.

⁸³⁸ *ibid.*

⁸³⁹ Antonia Micallef, 'An Easy Fishing Spree at Xemxija – Not Everything that Shines is Golden', *TVM News*, 25 February 2019.

⁸⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁸⁴¹ Lucy Towers. "Escaped Sea Bream, Seabass from Mediterranean Farms: Implications for Sustainable Aquaculture." 14 October 2013. *The Fish Site*. 30 March 2021 <<https://thefishsite.com/articles/escaped-sea-bream-seabass-from-mediterranean-farms-implications-for-sustainable-aquaculture>>.

fishermen's socio-economic world is also considerable. As evidenced by the local incident, escaped fish can be mislabelled. Consequently, the fishermen's higher quality fish becomes synonymous with farmed fish causing people to lose credibility in the high standards fishermen attach to their catches. Apart from the obvious lack of sales of their hard-earned catch, the possibility of disease and genetic modification when farmed and wild specimen mix can have more drastic consequences on fishermen's livelihood.

4.3.6 Recreational Fishermen

The most reoccurring mention by professional small-scale fishermen when asked to list the obstacles they encounter in their everyday life is without doubt the recreational fishing sector. This sector inflicts multifaceted hardships unto professional fishermen both directly and indirectly as will be duly documented in this section.

To begin with, recreational fishing in Malta is well developed. The greater part of the fishing vessels categorised as recreational are registered in the Fishing Vessel Register (FVR) of the Department of Fisheries as non-commercial fishing vessels otherwise known as MFC.⁸⁴² The rest of the recreational fishing vessels are registered with the National Maritime Register. Amongst others, recreational coastal fishing practices include bottom lining, surface trolling, and jigging. Offshore recreational fishermen target fish such as albacore, sailfish, swordfish, and amberjack.⁸⁴³ Yet another category of recreational fishermen are shore anglers. As opposed to boat owners, these fishermen do not need to be registered or own a license. To this end, their number is unknown.⁸⁴⁴

As per regulations, recreational fishermen cannot commercialise their catch unless it is sold for charity purposes, and this can be done only if the necessary approval is obtained. Any swordfish caught must be released immediately. It cannot be kept on board or brought to shore. They can apply for a tuna fishing license and catch a-tuna-per-fishing-trip.⁸⁴⁵ Catch and release recreational fishing is insignificant in Malta. Small fish and juveniles are rarely released.⁸⁴⁶

⁸⁴² Myriam Khalfallah, Mark Dimech, Aylin Ulman, Dirk Zeller and Daniel Pauly, 'Reconstruction of Marine Fisheries Catches for the Republic of Malta (1950-2014)', *Mediterranean Maltese Studies*, xviii, 2 (2017), 244.

⁸⁴³ Galdies and Refalo, 45.

⁸⁴⁴ Khalfallah, Dimech, Ulman, Zeller and Pauly, 244.

⁸⁴⁵ Christian Peregin, 'Newly-Enforced Rules Irk Amateur Fishermen', *Times of Malta*, 18 May 2019.

⁸⁴⁶ Khalfallah, Dimech, Ulman, Zeller and Pauly, 244.

2007 was the year in which the number of MFC recreational fishing vessels exceeded for the first time the number of registered commercial vessels that are registered as either MFA or MFB. In 2014, 65% of the Maltese fishing fleet was exclusively made up of recreational registered vessels.⁸⁴⁷ Their sheer number alone can provide an insight unto the repercussions they can inflict on the species' populations.⁸⁴⁸

During the 1950s, the local Department of Fisheries decided to add an extra 25% to the monthly catch estimates of the fish entering the fish market to account for the marketed fish that bypasses the main fish market such as direct sales to hotels, restaurants, and consumers. Nowadays, the department still abides by the percentage with recreationally caught fish not being accounted for because the fish thus caught cannot be marketed.⁸⁴⁹ A study conducted with the purpose of reconstructing the fisheries catches in Malta, suggests that similar estimates for the fish caught by the recreational fishing sector should be included, especially since their number has exponentially increased during recent years.⁸⁵⁰

The matter should be treated as both serious and threatening since this sector's catches by far exceed the expectations and are often illegally commercialised. Abuse of the regulations is rampant considering that fishermen registered thus, are often unregulated and their catches undeclared.⁸⁵¹ In 2018, a local newspaper reported that none of the 2,102 MFC vessels are equipped with a tracking system, irrespective of the boat dimensions and whether they target protected species or not. Other than the MFC vessels, there are an additional staggering 7,416 vessels registered as small ships (S) and which are also permitted to engage in fishing. The fishing equipment permitted by this category can still be used for intensive fishing activities. Since they fall under Transport Malta's remit, no tracking systems for the monitoring of fishing are installed.⁸⁵²

Even though professional fishermen are regularised, pay their taxes, declare their catches, have limitations on their horsepower, fill in all the necessary papers, have their fishing licenses in order, and abide to the rules prescribed by law, they still feel discriminated against when compared to recreational fishermen who have few, if any, controls whatsoever. Fishermen feel especially helpless in face of the unrelenting spot check controls both while out fishing and at port. They are not

⁸⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 241-2.

⁸⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 247.

⁸⁵¹ Raphael Vassallo, 'Fishing in Troubled Waters: Martin Caruana', *MaltaToday*, 4 January 2016.

⁸⁵² Matthew Vella, 'Tracking of Maltese Fisheries by Authorities Almost Inexistent, Report Reveals', *MaltaToday*, 13 November 2018.

necessarily against the control system but are of the opinion that recreational fishermen should be equally subjected to the system. This is made even more important since the number of recreational fishermen by far outnumbers that of both full-time and part-time professional fishermen. Lack of controls on the recreational sector has induced many fishermen within this category to abuse of the system and sell their catch. Being able to sell, also calls for larger catches than would otherwise be necessary if for personal consumption. Apart from reducing the availability of fish on which professional fishermen depend, the catches sold clandestinely further limits their clientele. Additional repercussions include the drop in price. Having nothing to lose and everything to gain, amateur fishermen are more than happy to sell their catch at reduced prices. Consequently, restaurants, fish shops, and other potential buyers opt to buy from them. Professional fishermen end up unable to sell their catches or having to lower the price to such an extent that they make little to no profit at all, which, sometimes, is not enough to cover the expenses incurred. Having no limitations imposed on the horsepower that can be installed in their fishing crafts, recreational fishermen reach the best fishing spots long before professional fishermen. As explained during an interview, the greater part of the recreational fishing vessels is equipped with powerful outboard motors. Consequently, they also head back to port before their professional counterparts enabling them to sell their catches before the others. Being able to reach the fishing grounds before, also disrupts the *lampuki* fish sheltering underneath the professional fishermen's *kannizzati*, leaving the ones who undertake all the hard work and make all the necessary expenses emptyhanded.

Lack of controls also induces recreational fishermen to deploy more fishing gear than professional fishermen. A fisherman remarked on the thousands of octopus traps deployed by recreational fishermen which by far outnumber their own. Another remarked on the relentless fishing for squid by recreational fishermen during the warm months, leaving them with reduced quantities when they revert to catching squids during winter to earn something when fishing for other species is not possible. As the veteran fisherman Martin Caruana reported to a local newspaper, recreational fishermen often use fishing gear which they are not permitted to use including surface long-lines. On several occasions they are equally or better equipped than their professional counterparts and can fish further out and over a much larger territory.⁸⁵³

Professional fishermen feel further discriminated against in terms of the tuna fishing licenses. As explained in section 4.4.1, fishermen with an unprecedented record of tuna catches had their tuna

⁸⁵³ Raphael Vassallo, 'Fishing in Troubled Waters: Martin Caruana', *MaltaToday*, 4 January 2016.

fishing licenses retracted with little to no hope of reclaiming them, whereas recreational fishing licenses are issued every year enabling this category of fishermen to catch a-tuna-per-fishing-trip. Recreational tuna fishing licenses started being issued in 2011 following great pressure by the recreational sector and are in line with the EU regulations. All it takes to apply for this license is to own a recreational fishing vessel. The only choice left for professional fishermen for whom tuna fishing was a livelihood pillar but had their license retracted, was to register as recreational fishermen. This enabled them to catch tuna and to sell it illegally. Being unlawful allows for further exploitations by middlemen than customary. Claiming that they are taking on a fair share of the risk themselves, they pay for the tuna at the cheapest possible price; as little as €100 for a 50kg fish. Fish thus acquired is in turn sold by middlemen for the remarkable price of €10 per kilo, earning a grand €1000 for the same fish. Desperate fishermen who engage in this activity are running great risks to eke out a small profit.⁸⁵⁴ The desperate measures which professional fishermen are forced into to make ends meet, create repercussions on their fellow professional fishermen who managed to keep hold of their tuna fishing licenses and fish for it themselves.

4.4 Problems Emanating from the EU and Other Legislations

Even though the above-mentioned problems may be influenced and attributed to legislative bodies either directly or indirectly, the following sections will deal with unprecedented high impact legislative measures directly dealt by high-institutional bodies. The repercussions are so great, it is astonishing how small-scale fishing communities manage to make it through; a phenomenon which can only be explained by their need to keep this way of life.

A thorough understanding of the mechanism by which the EU establishes its legislation and controls the fisheries of its member states through the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and the implementation of Total Allowable Catches (TACs) was provided in section 1.2.2. The problems emanating from the system, as revealed by various studies carried out internationally, have also been referred to. In turn, this study investigated the effects the EU and local legislative measures have on the local fishery with the results being reported below.

⁸⁵⁴ Alicia Said, Joseph Tzanopoulos and Douglas MacMillan, 'Bluefin Tuna Fishery Policy in Malta: The Plight of Artisanal Fishermen Caught in the Capitalist Net.', *Marine Policy*, lxxiii, (2016), 32.

4.4.1 The Blow Dealt by the Tuna TAC and Tuna Ranchers

As with elsewhere, the blue fin tuna fishing in Malta is undoubtedly the fishery mostly controlled by the TAC system. Initially, tuna was caught by means of the *tonnara*. It was only in the 1960s that local fishermen reverted to artisanal longlines. The fishery intensified in the 1990s with the development of export opportunities to foreign countries. In 2001, a considerable decrease in tuna catches became noticeable, probably because of the overexploitation of the fish across the Mediterranean. This ensued in further competition for the capture of the scarce fish. As a result, two opposing fractions became involved in the so called ‘tuna wars’, which saw foreign companies catching the fish with large purse-seines and Maltese small-scale fishermen using the traditional longlines. In a single trip, purse-seiners catch hundreds of tonnes of fish through their large nets used in conjunction with technology that detect the areas where shoal of fish dwell.⁸⁵⁵ Purse-seines fought amongst themselves as to who got the tuna first, which is not surprising considering that a single haul can be worth up to £10 million, equivalent to over €11 million. ‘As a result, traditional fishing grounds [became] something akin to a battle zone with allegations of Mafia involvement, gunfights between fishermen and stories of rival boats ramming each other’s nets.’⁸⁵⁶

Apart from catching huge numbers of specimen, purse-seiners allegedly disrupted small-scale fishermen’s longline fishing. As a result of the ongoing conflicts, the National Minister of Fisheries at the time, urged the Maltese fishing sector to ‘equip themselves like their foreign competitors.’⁸⁵⁷ Up till 2005, sustainable fishing was of paramount importance. Indeed, an old standing legislation restricted the local licensing of purse-seiners. The legislation’s purpose was two-fold; to safeguard small-scale fishermen from the possibility of depleting tuna fish stocks on which they thrived, and to act as prevention against the monopolization of tuna catches. It catered for all the local fishermen seeing that the entire Maltese fleet was of a small-scale nature. Nonetheless, just a year following Malta’s accession into the EU in 2004, the local government thrashed the legislation and started issuing permits for the setting up of a local purse-seine fleet. The operations of the newly founded enterprise that appeased the powerful few who could invest accordingly at the expense of the entire small-scale fleet, was fully legitimised in 2007.⁸⁵⁸ Purse-seiners are fully exploited in conjunction with tuna ranches.

⁸⁵⁵ Caroline Muscat, ‘At the End of the Line We are Not Better Off...’, *Times of Malta*, 26 January 2015.

⁸⁵⁶ Andrew Malone, ‘Tuna Wars: The Ruthless Tuna Pirates Who are Driving These Majestic Creatures to Extinction’, *Mail Online*, 3 August 2017. <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-473020/Tuna-Wars-The-ruthless-tuna-pirates-driving-majestic-creatures-extinction.html>>.

⁸⁵⁷ Said, Tzanopoulos and MacMillan, 28.

⁸⁵⁸ Alicia Said. “Bluefin Tuna in Malta: Slime is the Least of the Problems.” 4 September 2018. *Isles of the Left*. 9 December 2019 <<https://www.islesoftheleft.org/bluefin-tuna-in-malta-slime-is-the-least-of-the-problems/>>.

Unlike other species, tuna cannot be hatched in laboratories and raised in aquaculture centres. To this end, large amounts of adolescent fish are caught from the wild by the purse-seiners. The purse-seine nets used in their capture can indeed be described as giant since the nets are wider than a football pitch. Once surrounded, the shoals of tuna are transferred into cages and towed by large boats at a speed of 1NM per hour. In the end, they are ushered into the tuna ranches which, at the time, started springing up throughout the Mediterranean for fattening the fish. Once big enough to command huge prices by foreign markets, the tuna is herded in a corner, shot in the head, butchered, and exported.⁸⁵⁹ 70% of the tuna thus fattened in the Mediterranean is exported exclusively to Japan where it fetches very high prices. Indeed, Malta's tuna industry generates more than €120,000,000.⁸⁶⁰

Mediterranean tuna ranches earned the governments' backing since they proved very profitable. As expected, the blue fin tuna population experienced a drastic blow. Having overlooked the obvious, a global plan by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT) was launched in 2007 to regenerate the tuna population by 2022. Being a member state of the EU, Malta was subjected to the plan. Amongst others, it saw the issuing of Total Allowable Catches (TACs).⁸⁶¹ ICCAT is the main scientific advisory body consulted where tuna is concerned. The information it compiles is passed unto the European Commission. The latter prepares the necessary proposals and moves on to decide upon the TACs which are reviewed and set annually. Once done, the EU moves on to share the TACs between its member states in the form of national quotas. At this point, it is the sole responsibility of the member states to decide how to go about the task of distributing the national quotas amongst their fishers.⁸⁶² As with all the Member States, Malta is requested to annually devise a management plan on how it intends to go about the task. The funding plan thus devised by the Maltese government, was built on three major pillars; the reduction of the tuna fishing fleet by 25%, the introduction of Individual Transferable Quotas (ITQs) and the creation of the tuna recreational fishing segment.

The ITQ system, which was approved by the fishing cooperatives, was allocated to fishermen according to their historical record of tuna catch. Enacted in 2009, it provided a tuna fishing quota to only 20% of the full-time vessels and 0.6% of the part-time vessels. The rest, indeed, the majority of

⁸⁵⁹ Andrew Malone, 'Tuna Wars: The Ruthless Tuna Pirates Who are Driving These Majestic Creatures to Extinction', Mail Online, 3 August 2017. <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-473020/Tuna-Wars-The-ruthless-tuna-pirates-driving-majestic-creatures-extinction.html>>.

⁸⁶⁰ Victor Paul Borg, 'How the Tuna Racket Operates', *Times of Malta*, 26 February 2019.

⁸⁶¹ Said, Tzanopoulos and MacMillan, 28.

⁸⁶² "Fishing Quotas: Managing Fisheries." European Commission. 24 October 2018 <https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/fishing_rules/tacs_en>.

vessels, were excluded from the national quota allocation with the reason given being that they did not hold any official records of tuna catches declared at the fish market. This was a hard blow dealt to fishermen who sold their tuna via other lawful markets which the ITQ system failed to take in consideration.⁸⁶³ The large number of fishermen who were hence excluded included a substantial number of Gozitans. The reason behind this scenario was thoroughly explained by the interviewed fishermen thus hit. Since Gozo was never equipped with a fish market of its own, many fishermen avoided the hassle of handing their fish to a third person entrusted with the task of transporting their fish to Malta to be sold at the central fish market. This would have incurred extra expenses and left the fishermen unsure as to the real price at which their tuna was sold. To this end, they lawfully sold their priced tuna directly to their clientele or to the restaurants with whom they were affiliated. Not declaring the tuna caught was also linked with tax evasion.⁸⁶⁴

Another sector which did not possess any registered historical records, was constituted by the newly founded purse-seiners. At this point it is worth noting that the purse-seine owners also happen to be the owners of the tuna ranching facilities. The loophole conjured for ascertaining the livelihood, indeed the building up of this sector, is evidenced by the name attributed to the system itself which enables individual quotas to be transferred between catch record fishermen and purse-seiners.

This is what tuna ranchers without any historical catch records – like Azzopardi Fisheries’ AJD Tuna and Elbros MFF Ltd – did: since they could not be assigned a specific quota, they bought their ITQs from artisanal fishermen who had their own historical catch records.⁸⁶⁵

The entire local tuna ranching industry is owned by five companies, two of which are foreign. Between 2009 and 2013, one of the companies also happened to be registered in the name of one of the cooperatives’ ex-representatives, with the said company also owning a purse seine license at the said time,⁸⁶⁶ which explains why the ITQ system was approved and promoted by the fishing cooperatives.

By 2010, the tuna ranching companies were expanding their quota by purchasing the ITQs of small fishermen.⁸⁶⁷ Large iron vessels in possession of large tuna quotas were provided with the opportunity to earn approximately €1,200 daily by towing tuna cages for two months a year. By recruiting

⁸⁶³ Said, Tzanopoulos and MacMillan, 29.

⁸⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁶⁵ Matthew Vella, ‘Muscle out of the Sea by the Malta’s Tuna Giants’, *MaltaToday*, 23 August 2018.

⁸⁶⁶ Said, Tzanopoulos and MacMillan, 30.

⁸⁶⁷ Matthew Vella, ‘Muscle out of the Sea by the Malta’s Tuna Giants’, *MaltaToday*, 23 August 2018.

fishermen thus, the tuna ranchers also started securing their extensive quotas for themselves. This reality was attested to by one of the small-scale fishermen interviewed who claimed that, by so doing, large vessel owners are being doubly paid. On the one hand they are earning money from leasing their quota, and on the other, they are making thousands by towing the cages, thus further confirming that the agenda aims at benefiting large vessel owners. Further policies forced small-scale fishermen into this direction. This includes the policy that prohibited vessels allocated a quota of less than 200kg to fish for it, leaving them with no choice other than to lease it. The subtle enactment of these policies had the desired effect of empowering the profitable tuna ranches via leases. It is enough to say that since 2010, ‘the average number of artisanal vessels that were authorised to operate was less than half of the permit-holders’.⁸⁶⁸ Many small quota fishermen would have liked to catch their small quota over leasing it. The only alternative made available to leasing, was to catch their share as by-catch. However, it must be noted that tuna thus caught is not exported to the lucrative market. Catching it as by-catch also came with its set of rules which automatically destroyed all the fishermen’s hope seeing that, to declare a tuna as by-catch, one had to catch twenty swordfish; a feat which was next to impossible to accomplish.⁸⁶⁹

Fishermen who persisted in catching their share of quota rather than leasing it encountered further obstacles. Being the exclusive owners of nearly the entire national quota, tuna ranchers have absolute control and access to the foreign tuna markets. To this end, fishermen who wish to export their tuna have no alternative other than to revert to the tuna ranchers who are the only channels available through which exportation can be conducted. From their vantage point, ranchers can, and do monopolise the exportation price just as they do with the leasing prices to maximise their personal profits. This is best achieved by reducing the difference between the leased ITQ price, which was at €6 to €8 in 2015, and the exportation price, which was about €9 to €10 for the same year. The minimal difference achieved the desired effect of inducing fishermen to lease out their quota rather than fish for it.⁸⁷⁰ As attested to by many of the fishermen interviewed, the loss in profits for leasing it compensates for fuel, crew payments and boat maintenance expenses that they would have otherwise incurred if they caught the fish themselves. This study’s interviews revealed that fishermen are aware of the price manipulation. In a fisherman’s words, ‘*Ma’ dawn it-tip ta’ nies ma jghixx ħadd*’ (Nobody can make a living with this type of people).

⁸⁶⁸ Said, Tzanopoulos and MacMillan, 29.

⁸⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 30

⁸⁷⁰ *ibid.*

Another obstacle that small-scale fishermen encounter upon persisting to hold on to their quota to fish it themselves, is the controlling system. This involves regular inspections while at sea and the filling in of documentations. Even though legitimate and inline, many fishermen feel disheartened and threatened, which further forces them into leasing their quota.

The reduced quota system conjured by the EU in general, produced the desired effect and considerable blue fin tuna stock recovery could be observed. To this end, Malta's national quota started experiencing a yearly increase as from 2014. Nevertheless, this was not meant to be enjoyed by small-scale fishermen since, by then, most of the fishing rights had been purchased by the purse seine/tuna ranches. As a result, these enterprises, which were the ones who originally depleted the tuna stocks, ended up being the ones who benefited from the increase in quota.⁸⁷¹

In short, the last decade or so has seen a shift of blue fin tuna fishing rights from the many small-scale sustainable fishermen on whose livelihood depended, to the rich and powerful few tuna ranchers who devastate the environment in their wake but reap huge profits in so doing. This was made possible by legitimising the transfer of the right, and indeed encouraging fishermen to do so, by the successive governments and the fishing cooperatives. In the end;

...the sector is now ruled by a system of plutocracy, wherein the power to take decisions and steer national trajectories lies in the hands of the wealthy. This could partly explain why the agenda of successive national governments in power since EU accession has not addressed the resilience of the sector. Catering for the survival of the small-scale fisheries does not seem to have been a priority of governments. Rather, the neo-liberal urge to rationalise the sector so as to promote the interests of a few powerful agents in order to increase the foreign exchange earning of Malta has been the main aim of successive governments.⁸⁷²

Even though the blue fin tuna tragedy narrated above is more than enough to destroy any fisherman's hope of making a decent living, the drama evolving around this sector does not stop here. Deprivation from catching tuna has induced fishermen to fish for alternative species that are not as heavily controlled. The most popular alternatives are demersal and small pelagic species caught by means of trammel and gill nets respectively. Between 2007 and 2012 alone, the days at sea with trammel nets have increased by 4500%, whereas those for gill nets increased by 870%.⁸⁷³ As opposed to previous

⁸⁷¹ Matthew Vella, 'Muscle out of the Sea by the Malta's Tuna Giants', *MaltaToday*, 23 August 2018.

⁸⁷² Alicia Said, 'Are the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines Sufficient to Halt the Fisheries Decline in Malta?', in *The Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines: Global Implementation*, S. Jentoft, R. Chuenpagdee, M. J. Barragán-Paladines and N. Franz (eds.) Springer, Switzerland 2017, 225.

⁸⁷³ Matthew Vella, 'Powerless Spectators to the Hungry Tuna Ranchers: The Demise of Artisanal Fishermen', *MaltaToday*, 7 September 2016.

generations who respected the natural cycle of species and fished for them during their predominant fishing season, nowadays fishermen have been induced to target a multitude of sedentary species all year round. The rotation of targeted fish adhered to by past generations provided ample time for species to regenerate and recuperate before being fished for again. As a veteran fisherman explained, this is causing pressure on the sea life because of overfishing. Irrespective of the damage it incurs, this is the only means of legitimate survival available for fishermen who traditionally caught blue fin tuna during its season but have not been allotted a quota or just a small one. The strategy of seeking alternative sources of income attests to the fishermen's resilience in face of adversity even though it is forethought to be short-lived.

The prevalent drama does not hold true for all. Some fishermen who have been allotted a substantial quota are still reverting to leasing it to tuna ranchers. At the same time, they are deploying their boats in other fishing practices, namely trammel and gill netting. By so doing they are doubling their income. To make matters even worse, large quota holders, who are generally large boat owners, do not stick to sustainable fishing and deploy fifty to seventy nets a day as opposed to the customary twelve to fifteen nets deployed by small-scale fishermen. This is made possible through the recruitment of immigrant labourers as discussed previously. Fishermen are further frustrated in having to discard tuna if the specimens caught are smaller than the size permitted by the authorities. Their frustration arises from the waste in natural resources considering the fish are dead by the time they are retrieved. The number of small specimens caught and discarded can be substantial, nonetheless, they are not accounted for by the quota. Several fishermen explained that it would be far better for everyone if the smaller tuna accidentally caught is included in the kilogram/tonnage quota allotted to fishermen. Seeing as they are already dead, the quota limit would be reached with fewer tuna getting killed in the process.

Apart from the larger part of the quota being allocated to them, tuna ranching facilities have yet another negative impact on small-scale fishermen; the destruction of the natural environment on which they depend. It has already been mentioned that juvenile fish are caught prior to their reproductive age, however, more damage is incurred by the structure itself. In 2016, the owner of one of the local major fish farms, owned up to the pollution being caused by the industry which takes the shape of slime. Slime is the by-product of the fat released from the feed which rises to the surface and is pushed either way by sea currents. Salvu Ellul, being the owner in question, explained that his company had tried to contain the slime by surrounding the feeding cages with canvas and using a skimmer to absorb the fat from the waters. Nonetheless, this did not suffice to stop the slime from

drifting to coastlines and into popular swimming zones.⁸⁷⁴ Slime was reported to have drifted into both southern and northern bays. The year 2016 saw an unprecedented volume of slime, indicating that the number of illegalities got out of hand.⁸⁷⁵ In 2019, the Planning Authority Board approved a temporary permit for several northern stationed cages to be moved further ashore and be distanced at 5km from the Qawra shore, it being one of the areas which was hard-hit by slime. This permit is valid for five years until a permanent one is issued.⁸⁷⁶ In his interview, a veteran Gozitan fisher explained that the havoc caused was mentioned by the news only because the slime drifted into swimming zones, but a much worse scenario could be witnessed out in the open seas. Apart from fat released from the feed, he explained that fish farms further pollute the sea by releasing the carcasses of deceased tuna and the discarded internal organs of the fish following harvesting.

In 2019, a newspaper reported that since then tuna cages, whose operators are affiliated to the Maltese Federation for Aquaculture Products, have been fitted with special booms that prevent oils from fish feed from filtering out and reaching the shore. The Federation claimed that all four tuna ranchers affiliated to it have adopted higher environmental standards.⁸⁷⁷ Only the future can tell whether the measures taken will suffice to better preserve the natural environment.

A local study conducted with the aim of highlighting human induced damage inflicted on the marine environment, lists nine impacts caused by fish aquaculture. These are presented in the following table.

1	Nutrient loading and organic matter from fish waste and uneaten feed in both water column and benthic habitat types in close proximity to and directly beneath the cages; degradation is especially pronounced during the farming season;
2	Localised changes to the physical and biological characteristics of the seabed underneath tuna penning cages;
3	Reversible deterioration of <i>Posidonea oceanica</i> meadows in the vicinity of the fish cages. The issuing of permits for new sites are strongly dependent on the minimisation/prevention of these impacts, particularly on <i>P. oceanica</i> meadows;
4	Changes in oxygen levels in the water column, reduced water transparency and elevated nutrient level during the farming season between July and December;
5	Enhanced eutrophication in the vicinity of fish farms, depending on the nutrient dispersion where fish farms are located;

⁸⁷⁴ Caroline Muscat, 'Owner Says Fish Farms are a Source of Slime', *Times of Malta*, 7 August 2016.

⁸⁷⁵ 'Watch: Slime and Odour of Decaying Fish Along St Paul's Bay, Qawra Coastline', *Times of Malta*, 26 August 2016.

⁸⁷⁶ 'Temporary Permit Approved for Tuna Cages', *TVM News*, 16 May 2019.

⁸⁷⁷ Reno Buġeja, 'Booms Places around Tuna Cages', *TVM News*, 4 August 2018.

6	Low species richness of macrofaunal assemblages within the zone directly beneath the cages and 30m around the farm;
7	Succession of grazers and deposit feeders are the most dominant trophic groups as a result of high sediment nutrients from the organic matter present in the area; appearance of high population densities of detritus-feeding and scavenging macro invertebrates (such as the ophiuroid <i>Ophiura texturata</i> , the crab <i>Inachus</i> spp., and fish <i>Gobius</i> spp.);
8	Disappearance of some megafaunal species such as the sea urchin (<i>Spatangus purpureus</i>) and the crinoid (<i>Antedon mediterranea</i>), and
9	Emission of wastewater effluents from land-based aquaculture installations; however, the significance of marine contamination from this process is considered to be low.

Table 12: The damage inflicted by marine aquacultures

(Source: Current and Future Impacts on the Marine Environment: The Challenge to Achieve Good Environmental Status.)⁸⁷⁸

As mentioned in the section dealing with recreational fishermen, an additional blow dealt to the small-scale sector was the establishment of the recreational bluefin tuna fishing back in 2011, by which the recreational vessel license holders are permitted to catch the fish and allotted a share of the annual national quota. They are authorised to catch one-tuna-per-trip. Even though recreational fishermen are not allowed to commercialise their catch, the reality is known to be otherwise with many selling their fish at reduced prices. This scenario induced many small-scale, full-time, and part-time fishermen to put together yet another survival plan which further attests to their resilience in face of adversity. Having already suffered considerably at the hands of tuna ranchers, they decided to register themselves as recreational fishermen. By so doing, they became automatically entitled to catch tuna and moved on to sell it illegally. This was the only alternative presented, even though the tuna thus caught is sold at very low prices.⁸⁷⁹ Interviewed professional fishermen whose livelihood depends solely on fishing, remarked on the unfairness of not being allotted a quota, not even to catch tuna for their personal consumption, whereas recreational fishermen, whose number by far surpasses that of full-time and part-time fishermen combined, are consented to catch a specimen per trip.

A ray of hope for small-scale fishermen was witnessed in 2019 when the Government granted 52 new tuna fishing licenses to fishermen who had never been in possession of a license and thus given access to the industry for the very first time. This new criterion, composed of vessels under 12m, was

⁸⁷⁸ Table 12. Cf. Galdies and Refalo, 39-40.

⁸⁷⁹ Said, Tzanopoulos and MacMillan, 32.

allocated 40 tons of tuna.⁸⁸⁰ To be eligible for the license, the vessels also had to have a record of at least 440kg worth of swordfish caught during the previous year.⁸⁸¹ However, a demarcating difference between those who were already in possession of a quota, and the new licensed vessels was noticeable in the duration of the fishing season. Indeed, a noticeable difference could also be detected between new small-scale tuna fishermen and recreational fishermen since;

The season for those with under the traditional quotas will open between 20 April and 31 December 2019, while the season for those obtaining the new special license will open between 1 May and 19 June 2019. For recreational fishermen, the season will open between 16 June and 14 October 2019.⁸⁸²

Understandably, resentment towards fishermen who benefitted from the new scheme was expressed by long-standing fishermen who were denied a quota in the first place.

4.4.2 The Quota System Extended to Swordfish Fishing

The swordfish fishery was the next to be subjected to the quota system. The need of a quota introduction, was made evident by the NGO Oceana which revealed that the Mediterranean swordfish population had decimated by 70% in thirty years.⁸⁸³

Fully aware that the Maltese small-scale and sustainable swordfish fishermen were unaccountable for the species' over-fishing, the Maltese government tried to prevent the implementation of the quota system on its fishermen by providing an alternative plan to the local scenario. This included the prohibition of fishing lines to be set with hooks smaller than 7cm, the extension of the fish's closed season from three to six months, and the creation of Fisheries Restricted Areas in sites confirmed to be swordfish spawning grounds. The local government sustained its argument on the fact that the Maltese fishing fleet licensed for swordfish catches is composed of boats under 24m in length. Moreover, Maltese fishermen deploy sustainable and highly selective fishing long-lines. Consequently, the Maltese catch is insignificant compared with those of other countries whose fisheries are mostly of an industrial nature. The Maltese government pushed forward its cause by attributing the decimated swordfish population in the Mediterranean to illegal and undeclared fishing

⁸⁸⁰ Brandon Pisani, 'Tuna Qouta Will Increase by 34 Tons', *TVM News*, 9 April 2019.

⁸⁸¹ Ivan Martin, 'Malta's Tuna Catch Gets Unprecedented Quota Increase', *Times of Malta*, 9 April 2019.

⁸⁸² 'Tuna Quota to be Increased by 34,000kg for upcoming Season', *Malta Independent*, 9 April 2019.

⁸⁸³ Alfred Sant. "Sajjieda Maltin Imhassba bil-Kwoti tal-Pixxispad." 8 March 2017. [AlfredSant](http://www.alfredsant.eu/newletter/sajjieda-maltin-imhassba-bil-kwoti-tal-pixxispad.html#comments). 26 March 2021 <<http://www.alfredsant.eu/newletter/sajjieda-maltin-imhassba-bil-kwoti-tal-pixxispad.html#comments>>.

carried out with driftnets. The government asserted that the quota system would end up rewarding rule breaking countries with large quotas, and small rule abiding Malta with a meagre quota.⁸⁸⁴

The Maltese government's assertion to the illegal use of driftnets by other countries, including Italy, was not unfounded. Indeed, Oceana presented images of Italian boats offloading swordfish, including juveniles, caught with driftnets irrespective of the fact that the destructive fishing method had been banned by the EU back in 2002 and fishermen had been heavily subsidised to convert to other swordfish catching methods. Irrespective of this initiative accompanied by increased controls, the problem could not be eradicated. To make matters worse, Italy is also involved in the importation of swordfish illegally caught with driftnets in Morocco.⁸⁸⁵ Overall, the countries who catch the largest share of the Mediterranean swordfish are Italy (45%), Morocco (14%), Spain (13%), Greece (10%) and Tunisia (7%).⁸⁸⁶

The Maltese fishermen themselves are aware of the continued illegal use of this fishing method. Many of the interviewed fishermen remarked on the use of driftnets by other countries with many of them witnessing Italian fishermen deploying the banned net on numerous occasions. Being many kilometres long and notoriously known as the 'walls of death', this industrial net's relentless use is responsible to the ever-dwindling number of mature swordfish. As reported by a newspaper back in 2011, this resulted in Maltese fishermen's inability to catch any large specimen. Consequently, the only option left for Maltese fishermen to make a living was to illegally sell the young swordfish specimen that managed to get through.⁸⁸⁷

The sound arguments brought forth in favour of Malta's exemption from the swordfish TAC system were of no avail. According to the ICCAT agreement, swordfish catches were to be limited to 10,500 tonnes and gradually reduced over the following fifteen years.⁸⁸⁸ Member states were allowed to authorise only those vessels who had kept catch records for the said fishery, all the while keeping in mind that should new fishing opportunities be made available following substantial stock recovery, priority should be given to fishing vessels without a precedent quota.⁸⁸⁹ Being based on historical catch records automatically implied that the larger vessels were the ones to receive the larger quotas,

⁸⁸⁴ Pierre Jaquet, 'Government Against Introduction of Quota for Swordfish', *TVM News*, 10 October 2016.

⁸⁸⁵ Lucy Towers, "Oceana Exposes Illegal Driftnet Fishing in Italy." 22 July 2014. [The Fish Site](https://thefishsite.com/articles/oceana-exposes-illegal-driftnet-fishing-in-italy). 25 October 2020 <<https://thefishsite.com/articles/oceana-exposes-illegal-driftnet-fishing-in-italy>>.

⁸⁸⁶ Alfred Sant, "Sajjieda Maltin Imhassba bil-Kwoti tal-Pixxispad." 8 March 2017. [AlfredSant](http://www.alfredsant.eu/newletter/sajjieda-maltin-imhassba-bil-kwoti-tal-pixxispad.html#comments). 26 March 2021 <<http://www.alfredsant.eu/newletter/sajjieda-maltin-imhassba-bil-kwoti-tal-pixxispad.html#comments>>.

⁸⁸⁷ George Camilleri, 'Fate of Traditional Fishermen', *Times of Malta*, 22 August 2011.

⁸⁸⁸ Ivan Camilleri, 'Maltese Fishermen Angered by Sworfish Quota Deal Agreement', *Times of Malta*, 23 November 2016.

⁸⁸⁹ Josianne Vella, 'Mizuri Stretti biex Jigi Rkuprat l-Istokk tal-Pixxispad', *Newsbook*, 4 April 2019.

whereas a much reduced share would be reserved for small-scale fishermen. In 2017, a local newspaper reported a fisherman claiming that small-scale fishermen in possession of small vessels, would be the hardest hit.⁸⁹⁰ Furthermore, the hardest to be hit by the quota would undoubtedly be Marsaxlokk fishermen whose swordfish catches amounted to circa two-thirds of their annual catches.⁸⁹¹ As with tuna, fishermen who have heavily invested for swordfish fishing fear not being eligible to a quota at all.

4.4.3 Marine Protected Areas

Amongst other measures taken by the CFP to conserve the marine environment is the establishment of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), which also forms part of the sea appropriation agenda. Their purpose is to conserve exploited fish species and to restore their numbers. Research has concluded that abundance, individual mean size, and spawning biomass of fish in MPAs is usually greater when compared with marine areas that are not thus protected.⁸⁹² MPAs are also being implemented as a shift towards an ecosystem approach over the single-species approach.⁸⁹³ The topic was broached up during several interviews conducted for this research.

In their study, Said et al. (2017) revealed that, thus far, Malta has five prospective MPAs planned for the foreseeable future. This accounts to circa 200km² of inshore coastal area.⁸⁹⁴ Even though the fishing measures to be imposed are still underway and no officially declared restrictive measures on fishing have thus far been issued, it can be safely assumed that whatever the outcome, the Maltese small-scale fishing fleet will be dealt another blow in terms of fishing rights.⁸⁹⁵ To begin with, small-scale fishermen are never consulted in the decision-making process, meaning their interests are never considered. Deciding on the areas to be designated as MPAs is the prerogative of people from the conservation arena.⁸⁹⁶ Secondly, as opposed to no fishing areas, specifically designated areas for fishing have never been mapped, meaning that fishing ‘is not spatially recognised through national

⁸⁹⁰ Kait Bolongaro. ‘End of Line for Quota-Free Fishing in Mediterranean’ Politico, 5 February 2017. <<https://www.politico.eu/article/swordfish-end-of-line-for-quota-free-fishing-in-mediterranean-malta-eu/amp/>>.

⁸⁹¹ Ivan Camilleri, ‘Maltese Fishermen Angered by Swordfish Quota Deal Agreement’, *Times of Malta*, 23 November 2016.

⁸⁹² Amber H. Himes, ‘Small-Scale Sicilian Fisheries: Opinions of Artisanal Fishers and Sociocultural Effects in Two MPA Case Studies’, *Coastal Management*, xxxi, 4 (2003), 389.

⁸⁹³ Silvia Gómez, Josep Lloret, Montserrat Demestre and Victòria Riera, ‘The Decline of the Artisanal Fisheries in Mediterranean Coastal Areas: The Case of Cap de Creus (Cape Creus)’, *Coastal Management*, xxxiv, 2 (2006), 220.

⁸⁹⁴ Said, MacMillan, Schembri and Tzanopoulos, 246.

⁸⁹⁵ *ibid.*, 250.

⁸⁹⁶ *ibid.*, 252.

and/or supranational legislative frameworks.’ Consequently, ‘fishers remain unprotected against the proliferations of uses and risks emanating from new forms of seabed uses.’⁸⁹⁷ This should not come as a surprise considering that all the recently introduced maritime activities have been accorded national and supranational recognition by being provided with designated areas for their specific use. Amongst the maritime activities thus recognised, one can mention shipping, bunkering, aquaculture, diving, swimming, and marine conservation.⁸⁹⁸

Thirdly, they will also be hard-hit by the areas chosen. Apart from covering large expanses of water, the areas chosen for the MPAs are in proximity of the coastline. The coastline, especially areas confined within the 3NM zone, provides the best fishing grounds. Small boats operate within these areas by implementing traditional gear including trammel and gill nets, pots and traps, and long-lines.⁸⁹⁹ Indeed, the designated areas cover a staggering 42% of the traditional fishing grounds.⁹⁰⁰



Picture 82: Anglu ‘*il-Haqqu*’, a Gozitan veteran fishermen constructing a bougue trap
(Source: my own)



Picture 83: A young man constructing a bougue trap as taught by Anglu ‘*il-Haqqu*’
(Source: my own)

⁸⁹⁷ *ibid.*, 246.

⁸⁹⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁹⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, 250.



Picture 84: Ġanni 'il-Pipi', a veteran Gozitan professional fisherman with bogue and picarel traps
(Source: my own)



Picture 85: Bogue traps

(Source: my own)

The interviews revealed that fishermen are well informed on the subject. Of the five areas chosen, MPA number 3 (see diagram 6) is the one they fear the most. Being the largest, it covers a large area of their fishing grounds. As a result, it will directly impact multiple fishing communities spanning across both islands. The most hard-hit would undoubtedly be St. Paul's Bay, Marsalforn, and Mgarr fishermen. As expected, fishermen hailing from these areas were the ones to touch on the subject. They are aware of the area this specific MPA will cover by pointing out that it will span from the Grand Harbour in Malta all the way to Qbajjar Bay in Marsalforn, Gozo. In the native fishermen's maritime speech, this area is known to be '*qiegh tajjed*', meaning good sea floor, and '*baħar sinjur*', meaning rich sea. They explained that the sea depth in this area varies between fifty to eighty fathoms and provides a wide variety of fish that enable fishermen to make a living during the cold months. Lying within a short distance of the coast, they are assured in the knowledge of being able to make it safely home should the weather conditions change in the space of a few minutes. Strong winds characteristic of winter would also make it inadequate for the use of nets any further out since they need to be deployed in sheltered waters at a distance of not more than 1NM from the coastline.

Fishermen also expressed their concern on the MPA's 3NM outward stretch from the coastline in terms of yield. They explained that beyond 2NM the sea reaches a depth of 100 fathoms making it a '*baħar mejjat*', meaning dead sea, in which life does not thrive. Even if shallower waters may be present at certain spots outside the 3NM area, they would still be inadequate for small-scale fishermen due to the presence of industrial trawlers and bunkering activities. A full-time fisherman hailing from St. Paul's Bay explained that his village's fishing community would be the most hard-hit by the MPA. Being nestled within a natural alcove, fishermen from St. Paul's Bay would have to travel a much longer distance to reach permissible fishing ground. Apart from being unsuitable for fishing, the outward distance required would be impossible to undertake with small fishing boats. Fishermen also commented on the pressure these protected areas will automatically impose on the remaining fishing grounds. All fishermen will be left with no choice other than to congregate within a limited space. This will decimate the remaining marine life and leave them without a livelihood even more so if the few resources are to be grasped by recreational fishermen.

Fishermen have been unjustly reputed to be environmentally destructive. While this may hold true of industrial-scale fishermen, the same cannot be said to those of a small-scale nature. The power with which conservationists have always been endowed has resulted in their prejudice of fishermen to filter out into the wider community. To further add insult to injury, the discourses against fishermen, which have become the norm of conservationists, are completely unfounded. They have no proof by which to sustain their argument. Indeed, the opposite can be said of small-scale fishermen. As mentioned in the previous paragraph the areas designated for conservation have served as fishing grounds for many generations. These specific areas have been chosen by the government due to their good conservation status.⁹⁰¹ Therefore, it is safe to assume that;

Their good conservation status indirectly implicates that the long-existing artisanal fishing activity has been conducted in harmony with what are now earmarked as priority habitat and species since the fishing activity has not degraded the pristine value of these resources within the designated SACs [special areas for conservation].⁹⁰²

The focus and agenda of MPAs should be to protect the marine ecosystems and not to further cripple the small-scale fishing sector who has always respected the environment on which it thrives by keeping it in pristine condition for centuries on end. Problems started being experienced with the advent of more recent activities for which fishermen are being unjustly blamed. Being respectful of

⁹⁰¹ *ibid.*, 250.

⁹⁰² *ibid.*

the sea and endowed with a vast knowledge and understanding of life below waters, the contribution of fishermen in the monitoring of MPAs would be an asset to all those who have the environmental wellbeing at heart.⁹⁰³

As deduced, MPAs are a failure in meeting social goals as they don't promote broad participation in the management system. Patrick et al. (2003) claim that MPAs, as with CFPs, will not be successful unless social sciences are included in both the design and evaluation processes. In their words, one of the main challenges MPAs face is their adaptation to the exigencies of local situations and in recognising that each location has its unique social, cultural, and ecological context.⁹⁰⁴ The exclusion of the social sciences is a well-known deficiency of the fisheries management systems in general as will be discussed later on.

4.4.4 Problems Faced by *Makku* Fishermen

The obstacles fishermen face is not limited to the *lampuki*, swordfish, and tuna fisheries. They can be found in every sector no matter how small and insignificant it might seem. An example would be the *makku* fishery. Being the Maltese name for transparent goby, *makku* is fished in shallow bays and caught by a handheld type of seine net of local origins known as *tartarun*. It is highly sought by the Maltese for the popular fish fritters locally referred to as *pulpetti tal-makku*.

Traditionally, the fishing season stretched from mid-May to the 15th of August, however, during the past decade or so, it has been allowed to commence only on the 25th of June, meaning that it has been cut short by a month. Originally, the Fisheries Department attributed the restriction to EU legislations. When proved otherwise, the said department explained the need for the imposition to conserve the fish targeted. Paul Piscopo, chief of one of the fishermen's cooperatives, retaliated against the need for the measure since the biomass of transparent goby had never been an issue of concern. As reported by a newspaper, Dr. Alicia Said further pinpointed that bogue caught by means of other fisheries have always been abundant.

⁹⁰³ *ibid.*, 253.

⁹⁰⁴ Patrick Christie, Bonnie J. McCay, Marc L. Miller, Celia Low, Alan T. White, Richard Stoffle and David L. Fluharty, 'Toward Developing a Complete Understanding: A Social Science Research Agenda for Marine Protected Areas', *Fisheries*, xxviii, 12 (2003), 22-4.

In implementing this restriction, the department has put the *makku* fishery at par with the large-scale fisheries characteristic of the *lampuki*, tuna, swordfish and *lampara* fisheries. This could have been avoided altogether also because the EU makes an exception to manually operated seines. This being the case, the few remaining fishermen who still practice this form of traditional fishing, are being disheartened from participating in the fishery. Losing the best part of the season for no justifiable reason, did nothing other than to further burden the fishermen involved in this already strenuous fishery.

Paradoxically, other fisheries, foremost of which is the *lampara* fishery, were allowed to continue fishing for adult bogue in the same waters with adult females getting caught both prior to, and during spawning. Moreover, *lampara* fishing is permissible all year round irrespective of it being carried out by means of mechanically operated purse-seine nets that entrap large quantities of the fish. It is enough to say that prior the shortening of the *makku* season, a total of 399 kilograms worth of bogue was caught during the *makku* season, whereas a staggering 2,990 kilograms were caught by the *lampara* fishery alone. Further competition is presented in the form of imported, frozen bags of *makku* sold by supermarkets and fishmongers alike.⁹⁰⁵

4.4.5 Weighing the Catch

A recent development, which saw the establishment of weighing facilities in every fishing port, inflicted additional burden on fishermen. With their introduction, fishermen are obliged to weigh their freshly caught catch upon disembarking, a process which takes up considerable time depending on the size of the catch. As one of the interviewees explained, he must undertake the double task of loading the fish on board his truck, drive over to the weighing facility, unload the catch for weighing purposes and go about loading it all over again before going about selling his catch or heading home for the long-awaited rest following a lengthy fishing expedition.

Following the recent introduction of the weighing facilities in Ireland, the Irish South and West Fish Producers Organisation's chief remarked on the folly of expecting fishermen 'to unload already iced and packed catches at the pier side for weighing and then repack the fish in fresh ice.' According to local fishermen, this proves to be even more cumbersome when no adequate parking space in the

⁹⁰⁵ Victor Paul Borg, 'Small Fry, Big Price – The Makku Dish is Becoming Endangered', *Times of Malta*, 26 August 2019.

vicinity of the weighing facilities is available seeing as fishing villages and areas have been taken over by restaurants and tourists alike. Furthermore, every so often, the machines are out of order, forcing fishermen to head to the next weighing facility which can be at the other end of the shore or in another fishing village altogether. A fisherman whose home port is Dwejra, Gozo complained of not having a weighing facility in the said harbour, forcing fishermen from the area to drive all the way to Xlendi to use the latter's facility which, as it happens, is often out of order as well.

An unaccounted-for impediment in the proper use of the said facilities, is the fishermen's illiteracy. Since many of the fishermen are illiterate, they have no choice but to ask for the assistance of a fellow literate fisherman to input the information on their behalf. A fisherman from Birżebbuġa explained that most probably he is the only fisherman from the locality that can use the facility. Consequently, he is approached by others to assist them. The only alternative is to have the fish weighed by a middleman at the fish market, nonetheless, this option is not available to those who do not revert to the latter for selling their catch.



Picture 86: A weighing facility at Mgarr,
Gozo
(Source: my own)



Picture 87: Another weighing facility at
Ghadira, Malta
(Source: my own)

4.4.6 The Revocation of Fishing Permits and Vessel Categorisation

A most reoccurring topic in relation to difficulties was undoubtedly the one concerning fishing permits. It was brought up time and again in almost all interviews. The hardest blow any fisherman can be dealt is the revocation of a fishing permit. The topic has already been touched upon in relation to swordfish and tuna fisheries, nevertheless, it effects all spheres of fishing. As it happens, no commercial fishing can be carried out without valid fishing permits.

To begin with, fishermen have to catch a stipulated amount of fish translated in monetary value for a fishing vessel registered in their name to maintain its categorisation. Thus, if a 10m *luzzu* is registered as an MFB fishing vessel, the fisherman responsible for its use must make circa €2,329 worth of fish a year as per 2004 regulations. The amount increases with both dimension and fishing category, therefore, a larger boat in the MFA category is required to make more money for it to retain its categorisation. If the fisherman fails to catch the amount predetermined by means of the said fishing vessel for three consecutive years, it will be automatically demoted to the successive category by which fishermen lose a lot of fishing rights. Should an MFB registered vessel drop to the MFC category, a fisherman would automatically lose all rights to commercialise his catch. The fisherman's only means of restoring his vessel to its former categorisation is against payment.

A lot of pressure ensues from this legislation with fishermen doing their best to meet the requirements against all odds, foremost of which is the weather. Seasons characterised by foul weather keep them ashore. Additionally, fishermen depend heavily on luck. Long hours and successive days at sea do not guarantee a good catch. Another determining factor is the market. Having no fixed price, fish values fluctuate with abundance and preference. Should a substantial number of fishermen make considerable catches of a particular species, the price would automatically drop drastically due to rife competition. Furthermore, certain species tend to be more popular than others with some fetching good prices and others losing value according to current food trends. Preference also fluctuates with seasonality. By way of example, many species experience a drastic drop in value during the *lampuki* fishing season. Fishermen who do not have women or other family members to sell their catch, must make recourse to middlemen or else sell their catch to fish shop at lower prices. Consequently, they end up with less money in their pockets. The only alternative is for fishermen to sell the catch themselves, however, this option robs them of precious time at sea. These elements and others are major determining factors in meeting the requirements needed to maintain a fishing vessel's current categorisation.

Fishermen also expressed their disappointment about the current situation whereby fishing permits are attributed to a fishing vessel rather than being enlisted in their name. Even though understandable in terms of engine power, fishermen who own multiple boats are frustrated at not being able to deploy fishing gear from another boat, especially when one is subjected to maintenance or repair works. With fishing permits enlisted on vessels, fishermen are not able to retain them should they decide to sell their boat. Thus, a fisherman is apt to lose his permit for tuna fishing if the vessel registered for the said fishery is sold. Consequently, it could only be enjoyed by the new owner. With the current system in place, a fisherman with twenty years' experience in tuna fishing loses all claims upon selling his vessel and paradoxically obtains a much shorter 'experience' should he purchase a boat with a few years' worth of tuna fishing in its name, resulting in the possibility of a reduced quota, or no quota at all, to be allocated to him because of his 'recent' entry into the fishery. A fisherman expressed his frustration with the system and explained that it should be at par with road driving licenses, whereby a person's license is not transferred with the car but is retained irrespective of selling and purchasing other models throughout his life.

Fishing permits for other fisheries have their fair share of heartache. Being the only means by which he made some extra income to make good for his children's education, an interviewed fishermen had no option but to drop fishing altogether following the official revocation of the shrimp-dredge fishing permit as stipulated by EU legislation. He expressed his relief in having met all his children's needs and to being himself on the threshold of retirement by the time it happened. A stop to the use of the shrimp-dredge ensued from allegations of its destruction of *Posidonia*. This conclusion was highly criticised by all genres of fishermen who attribute destructions of vast meadows of *Posidonia* to heavy bunkering by large ships and trawling over large meadows for kilometres on end by industrial trawlers.

A further revocation of a fishing permit touched upon by two fishermen, concerns fishing for transparent goby with the *tartarun*. For fishermen to retain the right for its use, they must implement it on two separate occasions during its open season from the 25th of June till the 15th of August. Both fishermen attributed their failure to meet this requirement to lack of an additional helping hand on deck. Requiring two fishermen for its implementation, the inability to recruit help dashed all their hopes for its future use.

The revocations of fishing permits without further notice are disheartening per se. Many fishermen commented on the huge expenses incurred for setting up their vessels for specific fisheries only to be

denied access or else having their permit taken away. The revocation of fishing permits, or putting a stop to certain fisheries, is having the opposite effects in terms of conservation to the ones desired. Indeed, discontinuing or curbing certain fisheries, is causing intensification in others. Traditionally, fishermen worked by rotation according to fishing seasons which respected nature's natural life cycle. When forced to give up a fishery, they are left with no choice other than to fish for alternative stock to eke out a living.

4.4.7 The Encroachment of Trawlers

The year 1971 marked the beginning of promising times for Maltese small-scale fishermen with the establishment of an Exclusive Fishing Zone (EFZ). This zone extended to 25NM from the Maltese coastline and was enacted in accordance with the United Nations Conventions of the Law of the Sea. The main purpose for its establishment was the protection of the Maltese small-scale fleet and the marine ecosystems on which it depended.⁹⁰⁶ An already existing 1934 ban on trawling was thus automatically extended over a much larger territory. The veteran fisherman Martin Caruana, who has the wellbeing of small-scale fisheries at heart, explained that, following the EFZ's foundation, small-scale fishermen started to experience a recovery and described the 1970s and 1980s as the golden age for the local fishing fleet.⁹⁰⁷ The EFZ helped in keeping large-scale industrial vessels including trawlers to a minimum.

Considering the EU has rules by which all the member states must abide, the Maltese established EFZ had to undergo a modification process to conform with EU standards. Prior to being accepted as a member state, Malta spent two years of negotiations specifically related to this matter. Malta was adamant that the marine resources within the 25NM EFZ should be safeguarded and maintained at sustainable levels. If the whole concept was dismissed and the area declared Community Waters upon accession in the EU, the ecosystem within the previously established area was feared to disintegrate from an increase in fishing intensity.⁹⁰⁸ The EU recognised the importance of maintaining the sustainability achieved and agreed to let Malta maintain her 25NM hold, however, it was renamed as a Fisheries Management Zone (FMZ). The change in name was accompanied by a variety of management actions with the aim of limiting both the fishing effort and capacity by restricting the

⁹⁰⁶ "Malta Fisheries Mgt Zone." 21 September 2008. University of Malta. 22 July 2019 <https://www.edu.mt/science/biology/research/profpatrickschembri/empafish/malta_fisheries_mgt_zone>.

⁹⁰⁷ Raphael Vassallo, 'Fishing in Troubled Waters: Martin Caruana', *MaltaToday*, 4 January 2016.

⁹⁰⁸ Matthew Camilleri. "Establishing the 25-mile Fisheries Conservation Zone around the Maltese Islands." 29 June 2021 <<http://www.faomedsudmed.org/pdf/publications/TD3/TD3-Camilleri.pdf>>, 7.

size and the engine power of the fishing vessels operating within the area, with the foremost being the exclusion of boats longer than 12m from the zone. This regulation abides to the EU's definition of small-scale fisheries which explicitly points out that to apply as thus, boats must not exceed this length. Since the measure does not discriminate between Maltese and other EU fishermen, Maltese fishermen with boats larger than 12m were no longer permitted to continue fishing in the Maltese EFZ.⁹⁰⁹ Quite a few fishermen operating from the larger traditional *luzzijiet* were henceforth forbidden from continuing to work in the area. Even though the measure was taken to safeguard the Maltese fishing fleet in general, it must be noted that 12m is not exceptionally large by fishing boat standards and is definitely a far cry from the large industrial-scale trawlers which were initially excluded with the setting up of the EFZ. These boats had to start travelling out of the 25NM zone to do what they had previously done closer to home. This incurred more expenses not the least diesel to undertake the same endeavour.⁹¹⁰ However, some exceptions to the rule were put into place by which vessels larger than 12m gained access to the fishing grounds including trawling. Trawlers allowed within specific areas of the FMZ can reach a length of 24m. In areas where the sea depth is less than 200m, trawlers must also have an engine capacity that does not exceed 185KW.⁹¹¹ Martin Caruana captured the sentiment by stating;

At the same time, however, also 'by exception' – an industrial trawler up to 24 metres can now trawl in the same zone. So artisanal fishermen who have hardly any impacts have been kicked out; but large industrial vessels which wreak havoc on the seabed – smashing through everything just to catch a few shrimps or red mullet – those are allowed. A boat twice the size of another, that can no longer fish in Maltese waters, is allowed to practise a destructive fishing method that was previously banned.⁹¹²

Moreover, many illegalities of trawlers fishing outside the legal areas have been reported on numerous occasions. In 2013 alone, twenty-one cases of illegal fishing and trawling were reported.⁹¹³ Illegal trawling further intensifies the fishing effort effecting the sustainability of marine ecosystems while destroying the small-scale fishermen's gear.⁹¹⁴

⁹⁰⁹ "Malta Fisheries Mgt Zone." 21 September 2008. [University of Malta](https://www.edu.mt/science/biology/research/profpatrikschembri/empafish/malta_fisheries_mgt_zone). 22 July 2019 <https://www.edu.mt/science/biology/research/profpatrikschembri/empafish/malta_fisheries_mgt_zone>.

⁹⁰⁹ Raphael Vassallo, 'Fishing in Troubled Waters: Martin Caruana', *MaltaToday*, 4 January 2016.

⁹¹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹¹ "Malta Fisheries Mgt Zone." 21 September 2008. [University of Malta](https://www.edu.mt/science/biology/research/profpatrikschembri/empafish/malta_fisheries_mgt_zone). 22 July 2019 <https://www.edu.mt/science/biology/research/profpatrikschembri/empafish/malta_fisheries_mgt_zone>.

⁹¹² Raphael Vassallo, 'Fishing in Troubled Waters: Martin Caruana', *MaltaToday*, 4 January 2016.

⁹¹³ James Debono, 'New Control Centre Discovers Widespread Illegal Trawling', *MaltaToday*, 12 February 2014.

⁹¹⁴ Said, MacMillan, Schembri and Tzanopoulos, 250.

4.4.8 The Exclusion of Fishermen

The ineffectiveness of conservation policies and legislations can in part be attributed to the distance maintained from fishermen when it comes to both data collection and consultation. This is of concern for two main reasons, namely that fishermen are bound to be sceptical of the scientific publications if they aren't involved, and secondly scientific research would be greatly enriched if fishermen are allowed to voice their vast knowledge. As mentioned in previous sections, stock assessment relies entirely on official records which can lead to inaccuracies when large amounts of fish are caught and landed illegally without their being recorded. Inaccuracies can also result when protected fish is caught as by-catch or when it is discarded at sea due to the illegality of landing it. The only plausible way forward for obtaining sound statistics and for regulation compliance is for scientific research to be conducted in cooperation with fishermen.⁹¹⁵

The interviews revealed that Maltese fishermen feel strongly about their exclusion with one explaining that they have a lot of experience accumulated over the years which should not be disregarded. Another explained that fishermen should be consulted on anything that would eventually affect them for they are not selfish and understand the need of legislation. Their expertise and understanding of fish behaviour and life cycles can help legislation to be more effective in the measures taken, which, in turn, would guarantee better compliance. As it is, many legislations prove to be ineffective. When comparing the past situation with the present, an interviewee pointed out, *'Illum hawn ir-regulamenti, minn ġol-bajja hawnhekk mhix żgur inkalaw tlieta jew tnejn min-nies, ma taqbad xejn. Jekk ma taqlux 'il barra ma taqbad xejn. Jiġifieri duk iż-żmien kulhadd kien jaqbad illum hawn ir-regulamenti u ma taqbadx.'*⁹¹⁶

4.4.9 The Fishing Cooperatives

Having read through an endless list of challenges small-scale fishermen face day in, day out, one would hope the local fishing cooperatives, of which there are two, would offer them a respite from the incessant attacks. Unfortunately, the answer is far from satisfactory. All the fishermen, except for four, were disgruntled by the cooperatives' role. Fishermen commented on the cooperatives lack of

⁹¹⁵ Tim Daw and Tim Gray, 'Fisheries Science and Sustainability in International Policy: A Study of Failure in the European Union's Common Fisheries Policy', *Marine Policy*, xxix, 3 (2005), 194-5.

⁹¹⁶ Regulations are the order of the day. In this bay only two to three people deploy nets, yet nothing is caught. You won't be able to catch anything unless you travel further ashore. Paradoxically, in the past everyone managed to catch fish whereas nowadays, irrespective of the regulations, no fish is left.

sympathy and representativeness. The latter ensues from the members' affiliation with the industrial counterparts. Indeed;

The co-operatives, whose role is to represent the needs of all their members, have also contributed to this fragmentation, by putting the interests of the few within the upper echelons of the fishing community before the communal good of the entire membership (who they ought to be representing). The most illustrative case involved in the establishment of a tuna ranching farm by one of the co-operative leaders back in 2009 (as a private enterprise), using his 'fisher representative's hat' to support the process.⁹¹⁷

Fishermen are not ignorant of the fact that their supposedly representative bodies have industrial enterprises of their own, with many commenting that they are only after their own interests. Consequently, through the cooperatives' support, the large enterprises are the ones who are benefitting from the schemes. Many fishermen explained that the only reason why they are affiliated with either one of the cooperatives is merely to benefit from the duty-free diesel scheme. Others claimed that they render themselves usefully solely for the importation of cheap labour in terms of foreign crew members and for representing those who own a substantial tuna quota. As reported by a newspaper,

There are two cooperatives that would be expected to support fishermen but we learn from [a fisher] that it is not as easy as one would think. [The fisher] and others like him keep a low profile because they depend on the cooperatives for jobs and purchasing of bait, so there is no significant support from there.⁹¹⁸

Some of the fishermen's reluctance in explicitly voicing their opinion was noticeable during the interviews but the feeling was mutual with those who did not restrain to express their bitterness. Gozitan fishermen feel particularly disillusioned from their lack of involvement. Being detached from the mainland, Gozitans are all but forgotten. They find it impossible to travel to the other end of Malta to speak to their representatives in person. A veteran fisherman reported on the endless bickering between the cooperatives who compete with one another. He captured this sentiment with the saying 'too many cooks spoil the broth.'

A move in the right direction was taken in June 2016 with the inception of the non-governmental organisation Marsaxlokk Artisanal Fishers which aimed at offering an alternative to the two

⁹¹⁷ Alicia Said and Douglas MacMillan, 'Re-Grabbing Marine Resources: A Blue Degrowth Agenda for the Resurgence of Small-Scale Fisheries in Malta', *Sustainability Science*, xv, 1 (2020), 97.

⁹¹⁸ George Camilleri, 'Fate of Traditional Fishermen', *Times of Malta*, 22 August 2011.

cooperatives.⁹¹⁹ It was set up by fisherman Martin Caruana to properly represent the interests of small-scale fishermen and tackle their ailments including the problems of trawlers operating within the 25NM conservation zone, the excessive casting of trammel nets by means of cheap labour and to discuss the problem of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing with the authorities.⁹²⁰ As reported by a newspaper the new NGO was;

Set up by a number of artisanal fishers from Marsaxlokk with the aim of protecting their livelihood, community and heritage by practising low impact traditional fishing methods that care for the environment and marine resources.⁹²¹

However, the newly founded NGO was not officially recognised. To this end, the department stopped granting duty-free diesel to its members⁹²² which was ‘grossly discriminatory and breach[ed] the right of freedom of association.’⁹²³ Following nine months of disputes, the issue was finally resolved in favour of the NGO which started being regarded at par with the two cooperatives.⁹²⁴ Unfortunately, from fear of further discrimination, the NGO only managed to attract twenty members. As a result, it failed to function and dissolved. What could have been the small-scale fishermen’s only glimmer of hope, was lost.

4.5 Further Problems

Other than the problems emanating from the very nature of the job, the appropriation of the sea by multiple entities, and legislative restrictions, fishermen come across additional obstacles in trying to make ends meet which do not necessarily fall under either of the above-mentioned categories. These will be delved into hereunder.

⁹¹⁹ Yannick Pace, ‘Despite Ombudsman’s Recommendation, Artisanal Fishers Still Pay More Than Double the Price of Diesel’, *MaltaToday*, 3 October 2017.

⁹²⁰ Jurgen Balzan, ‘Artisanal Fishers come Together to Fight for Survival’, *MaltaToday*, 15 July 2016.

⁹²¹ *ibid.*

⁹²² Yannick Pace, ‘Despite Ombudsman’s Recommendation, Artisanal Fishers Still Pay More Than Double the Price of Diesel’, *MaltaToday*, 3 October 2017.

⁹²³ ‘Marsaxlokk Artisanal Fisheries Laments ‘Blatant Discrimination’, Files Judicial Protest’, *Malta Independent*, 31 May 2017.

⁹²⁴ Victor Paul Borg, ‘Traditional Fishermen Win Fight for Tax-Free Diesel’, *Times of Malta*, 29 October 2017.

4.5.1 Alien Species

The first problem, which may be inconspicuous and overlooked, is the introduction of alien species, also known as non-indigenous species, and which refer to the flora and fauna found living outside their original habitat. Even though also native to the Mediterranean, some marine species have travelled from one side of the basin to the other due to the ever-increasing warm temperatures. Warm dwelling species that are usually native to the southern and eastern areas of the Mediterranean have been noted to move northwards and westwards. This is more notable in fish, with over thirty species having already spread to the northern area.⁹²⁵

On a more drastic scale is the introduction of fish previously unknown to the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean hosts up to 15,000 different species including fish, crabs, and seaweed. Of these, 1,000 are alien species which paced their way from other waters.⁹²⁶ The number of alien species in Maltese waters alone is fast approaching the 100th mark.⁹²⁷ These species can affect the local marine biodiversity by disrupting the indigenous self-regulating process with some of them becoming invasive, competitors for resources or predators of local species.⁹²⁸

Alien species can be introduced either naturally or by human activity. With regards to the former, it must be noted that the Mediterranean is naturally connected to the Atlantic via the Strait of Gibraltar, and the Black Sea via the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. Basically, the arrival of species via the former has happened since its natural re-opening 5.3 million years ago. The present-day fauna dwelling in the Mediterranean is thus made up of species from different origins and endemic Mediterranean species. Nonetheless, global warming is speeding up the arrival of new species via this passage. The Bosphorus strait links the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara. In turn the Dardanelles Strait links the Sea of Marmara to the Mediterranean Sea. The species that travel via these straits are of little consequence to the Mediterranean since it mainly happens in a Mediterranean to Black Sea direction rather than the other way round because of the Mediterranean's higher salinity. It is easier for species accustomed to saltier waters to adapt to lower salt levels.⁹²⁹ With the opening of the Suez

⁹²⁵ Alan Deidun. "Marine Alien Species." 21 February 2019. ATLAM Sub Aqua Club. 28 February 2021 <<https://maltasac.org/marine-alien-species/>>.

⁹²⁶ Melvic Zammit, '36 New Alien Fish Species Identified in Maltese Waters', *TVM News*, 2 June 2017.

⁹²⁷ James Debono, 'Alien Fish's First Mediterranean Appearance is in Malta', *MaltaToday*, 22 May 2020.

⁹²⁸ "Safe-Guarding Marine Biodiversity and Artisanal Fisheries through Research." University of Malta. 28 May 2018. 22 March 2020 <www.um.ed.mt/newsoncampus/researchinitiatives/archive/safe-guardingmarinebiodiversityartisanalfisheries>.

⁹²⁹ Pascaline Bodilis, Patrice Francour, Habib Langar and Sousha El Asmi, *Non-Native Species in the Mediterranean: What, When, How and Why?* (Tunisia, UNEP-MAP-RAC/SPA., 2011), 11-3.

Canal in 1869, the Mediterranean has automatically become connected with the Red Sea. The Canal, intentioned to facilitate trade between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea, has removed the natural barrier that separated the two basins. Many species native to the former have thus paved their way to the latter.⁹³⁰ German professors who visited the Suez Canal in the late 19th century noticed the marked difference between the marine life on both sides. The first recorded migrant species dates to 1902. Nowadays, the count has risen to 150 or 20% of the fish species in the Mediterranean.⁹³¹

This canal's recent expansion has further contributed to an acceleration of the phenomenon. Since the expansion project was completed in 2015, eight new fish species have travelled into the Mediterranean. 'This represents an eight percent rise in species numbers and double the average annual detection rate compared to the period between 1869 and 2015.'⁹³² The Bitter Lakes of the Suez Canal had always acted as a hypersaline barrier that restricted marine life movement between the seas. Human activities and the canal's expansion have diluted the lake salinity, thus eroding the natural barrier and facilitating the organisms' movement.⁹³³

Human induced introduction of alien species include maritime transportation. The oldest way of this form of introduction occurs through ballast water and the attachment of live specimen to boat hulls. The use of ballast water in balancing boats has been required ever since steel ships paved their way. When seawater is pumped in a ship's hull, organisms suspended in the water are absorbed in the process. The ballast water which contains the said organisms including larvae, eggs, microscopic algae, viruses, and bacteria is discharged in a different area than the one it was originally pumped from giving potential for foreign species to establish themselves and reproduce in new waters. Other means of travelling include the attachment of fish larvae, molluscs, crustaceans, and annelids to the walls of boat coffer.⁹³⁴

Aquaculture poses another threat in that species can be accidentally introduced while attached to the species that is intentionally introduced. On the other hand, species may invade an area upon being intentionally introduced with the aim of setting up new aquaculture industries. Recently, aquariology is another means by which alien species are introduced. This results from seawater aquarium fish

⁹³⁰ *ibid.*, 12.

⁹³¹ Alan Deidun. "Marine Alien Species." 21 February 2019. ATLAM Sub Aqua Club. 28 February 2021 <<https://maltasac.org/marine-alien-species/>>.

⁹³² Kira Walker. "More Fish Invade Mediterranean after Suez Canal Expansion." 8 September 2020. Nature Middle East. 3 March 2021 <<https://www.natureasia.com/en/nmiddleeast/article/10.1038/nmiddleeast.2020.93>>.

⁹³³ *ibid.*

⁹³⁴ Bodilis, Francour, Langar and El Asmi, 15.

being released in the sea by people who do not want to look after them any longer. Fish thus released can survive and even reproduce if several individuals of both sexes are found.⁹³⁵ Sea water aquarium releases explain the penetration of the Blue, Purple, and Yellow Tang in Maltese waters.⁹³⁶

The impacts on the native biodiversity are manifold even though yet not fully understood. The most obvious are those which are noticeably visible. A case in point is the rise in population of the rabbitfish in Turkey which resulted in the overgrazing of sea beds. Others have affected the economic value of catches. The shrimp species *Metapenaeus monoceros* introduced via the Suez Canal has replaced the native *Penaeus kerathurus* in Tunisia. Even though shrimp fishing is still bountiful, 50% of the catch is composed of the invasive species which also happens to be seven times less commercially valuable than the native species.⁹³⁷ Fishermen are also affected in other ways as illustrated by the alien nomadic jellyfish *Rhopilema Nomadica* which, so far, has not been recorded in Maltese waters. Amongst others, the large swarms formed by this jellyfish clog fishermen's nets.⁹³⁸

As reported by a local newspaper, marine biologist Alan Deidun explained that the largest number of alien species sightings have been recorded for the Great Harbour, Marsamxett Harbour and at Marsaxlokk since these witness large shipping movements. A fish which is feared of making its appearance in Maltese waters is the lionfish which has been sighted in the vicinities. This species is not only dangerous when touched but is also capable of eradicating other species including groupers since it feeds on the same food. A similarly dangerous fish is the silver-cheeked toadfish.⁹³⁹ Interviewed fishermen witnessed alien fish swimming in Maltese waters, and some were caught in their fishing gear as well. Thus far, no environmental and economic repercussions have been noted in Maltese waters, therefore, as of yet, alien species have not negatively impacted fishermen. Notwithstanding, a potential increase in their numbers, as well as a further increase in species variety, will inevitably harm the Maltese ecosystem which will undoubtedly negatively impact the local fishermen's livelihood.

⁹³⁵ *ibid.*, 16-7.

⁹³⁶ Melvic Zammit, '36 New Alien Fish Species Identified in Maltese Waters', *TVM News*, 2 June 2017.

⁹³⁷ Bodilis, Francour, Langar and El Asmi, 18-9.

⁹³⁸ Alan Deidun. "Marine Alien Species." 21 February 2019. *ATLAM Sub Aqua Club*. 28 February 2021 <<https://maltasac.org/marine-alien-species/>>.

⁹³⁹ Melvic Zammit, '36 New Alien Fish Species Identified in Maltese Waters', *TVM News*, 2 June 2017.

4.5.2 Encounters with Dolphins

Even though dolphins are the epitome of grace and intelligence, they inflict considerable problems on small-scale fishermen. To be sure, the topic was brought up by a good number of interviewees, especially by those whose trammel net are damaged by the animal.

A newspaper article focusing on the dwindling *lampuki* catches, reported a fisherman explaining that being formidable hunters, dolphins are one of the causes behind the phenomenon.⁹⁴⁰ Upon sighting dolphins, an interviewee heads back to port since they are apt to follow them knowing full well that fishermen can procure them an easy, ready caught meal. On such occasions, fishermen are deprived from making the most of a fishing opportunity.

A fisherman managed to elevate the problem ever so slightly by using artificial Atlantic mackerel fish lures that have an opening for the bait to be fitted in. Holes running along the side help the smell to waft out and attract fish while fishing with hooks. The fisherman moved on to explain that this device is not the prerogative of professional fishermen and is not as effective in terms of yields, but it manages to ward off dolphins who are not tempted by the plastic bait covers. It must also be noted that, sometimes, dolphins provide fishermen with exceptionally good catches by directing shoals of fish into their nets.



Picture 88: The artificial Atlantic mackerel fish lures with a bait opening
(Source: Charlie Tonna)

⁹⁴⁰ Owen Galea, 'It-Tonn u d-Dniefel Mhux Ihalluna Naqbdu Lampuka – Sajjied', *TVM News*, 10 May 2017.

4.5.3 Low Selling Fish Species

As expected, many of the interviewed fishermen expressed their disappointment on when unable to sell their hard-earned catch. There are many factors contributing to lack of sales, with the foremost being the much lower demand for certain fish species. As with everything, fashion pretty much controls every aspect of our lives. The food industry is no exception. Like other foods, fish product sales are largely influenced by the cuisine trends of the time. The fish species which are currently favoured above all others are undoubtedly tuna, swordfish, pandora, white bream, gilthead bream, dentex, stone bass, axillary bream, and squid, amongst others. These species are either steak fish or fleshy fish.

As opposed to the above, fish species which are currently unpopular include the Mediterranean parrotfish (m. *pappagall*), ray (m. *rajja*), spotted dogfish (m. *gattarell*), bouge (m. *vopa*), picarel (m. *arżnella*), chub mackerel (m. *kavall*), scad (m. *sawrella*), frigate mackerel (m. *tumbrella*) and the common spiny dogfish (m. *mazzola*). All these species are less fleshy than the ones currently in demand. The reasons for their unpopularity can be attributed to lack of promotion, competition from imported fish, insufficient appreciation, and the substantial time required in their preparation/cooking. The major contributor to the last is the hectic lifestyle typical of contemporary living which leaves little to no time for cooking, rendered evermore true with the ever-increasing number of women seeking employment. Consequently, many delicious dishes including the traditional fish soup (m. *aljotta*) have all but disappeared from Maltese homes. The ones keeping these traditions alive are those pertaining to the older generation on whose several fishermen's livelihood depends. All the fishermen recall selling their entire catch irrespective of the species caught just twenty to thirty years back with one of them recounting a time when a box worth of picarel fetched Lm15, equivalent to circa €35. Nowadays, picarel fetch very low prices whereas, on other occasions, it does not sell at all. Another fisherman explained how a couple of days prior the interview, he managed to sell only four of the eight boxes of the said fish. On such occasions he ends up giving out the unsold fish to relatives and friends. When this proves to be futile as well, he is left with no alternative other than to throw it away. He went on to express his frustration at the little money he makes from low-selling species explaining that, presently, a box of Mediterranean parrotfish, sells for the meagre price of €5 making it unworthy of the hardships and long hours spent at sea. A third fisherman narrated how a fellow fisherman gave him two boxes full of parrotfish for free to use as bait in other fisheries.

Lower sales also result from the ever-dwindling number of fish hawkers and fishmongers, especially women who are renowned for selling these species in different localities. They help in raising awareness about undervalued species by reaching out to a large clientele. Even though undervalued, one of the fishermen explained that real connoisseurs of fish delicacy opt for these species which are very tasty and rich in nutrients. Unfortunately, lack of knowledge induces people to buy fleshy fish raised by or in the vicinity of fish farms. Being artificially fed and confined to small spaces, fish thus reared lacks in natural savouring and are characteristic of high levels of fats and oils. Another deterrent is the increased competition from imported and foreign fish with salmon being the most popular. Large supermarkets are in a better position to commercialise their frozen, imported fish via advertisements and by sponsoring television programmes that host chefs by providing them with their products for their cooking sessions.

Another point in favour is the environmental factor. In the greater part, these species are caught through the implementation of sustainable fishing methods by small-scale fishermen. The fishing methods involved in their capture include fishhooks, bottom long-lines, traps, and trammel nets. Even though the latter is criticised for not being selective, trammel nets deployed responsibly and in small quantities do not necessarily pose serious threats to the environment. Most of the fish caught with trammel nets fall in the underrated department which result in large discards. For better sustainability, fish thus caught should be better promoted to reduce waste and ensure that none of the fish is discarded. ‘Undoubtedly, in order for sustainability to be maintained, it is not only the fisheries which need to be under the spotlight but also the general public as consumers.’⁹⁴¹

This statement calls the need for the public to be better informed and educated about alternative and local products. Environmental activist J.D. Farrugia from the NGO *fish4tomorrow*, explained that ‘consumers are kept in the dark about what they are eating.’⁹⁴² This NGO was founded in 2010 and aims at raising awareness on the importance of seafood caught by legitimate and sustainable means. In achieving their goal this NGO has created such tools as the Quickfish Guide, which helps consumers make responsible choices by opting for sustainable fish species. It also organises events such as pop-up dinners called ‘From Our Seas’. Chefs prepare delicious dishes with sustainable seafood including bogue and Atlantic mackerel during the events.⁹⁴³

⁹⁴¹ Joanna Demarco, ‘FIRST: Fishing in the Dark. Consuming in the Dark’, *Malta Independent*, 17 April 2018.

⁹⁴² *ibid.*

⁹⁴³ Gabriel Pullicino, ‘Sustainable Fishing in Malta’, *Times of Malta*, 5 May 2019.

As opposed to small-scale fishermen, foreign large fishing operations such as bottom trawling, inflict damage to the fish stocks, environment and non-targeted species including sharks, dolphins, and turtles. Fish farming such as tuna ranches of which a substantial number operate locally, are unsustainable and inflict their fair share of environment damage via waste by-products as discussed in section 4.4.1. Moreover, the tuna fattened and grown in ranches is caught when still young and before they are of a reproducing age. Since tuna does not reproduce in captivity, the fish is killed without ever reproducing.⁹⁴⁴

Further promotion of the underrated sustainable marine products can be achieved with the application of the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) label to local products. This council's goal is to put a stop to overfishing by promoting sustainable seafood which is in turn marked with the blue fish label. The label is applicable only to wild fish or seafood from fisheries which have been approved by the MSC as sustainable. A survey carried out with the aim of assessing Maltese people's awareness of the MSC label revealed that 87% recognised the label to be fish related with only 13% knowing that it is linked to sustainable fishing. 30% had a sound understanding of what constitutes sustainable fishing as opposed to the 15% who had never heard of it. A staggering 55% acknowledged to having heard the phrase but did not know its meaning. So far none of the locally caught fish sport the label irrespective of the fact that the absolute majority is caught by sustainable means. On the contrary, 90% of the imported frozen fish in a major supermarket in the Sliema/St. Julian's area was duly marked, whereas only 25% of the imported frozen fish in a small store had the label.⁹⁴⁵ Even though the latter percentage is considerably smaller than the former, it is undeniably better off than the local product which is not labelled whatsoever.

Another effective way by which a large section of the population can be reached is the promotion of underappreciated fish via television programmes, local council organised activities, fishing village special events, leaflets, and posters.⁹⁴⁶ An innovative approach that can be adopted locally is the development of a mobile app through which customers can trace the fish all the way back to the small-scale fishermen who capture it. This was the idea behind the development of the app ABOLABI. The explanation behind the whole concept is captured as follows;

The ABALOB I initiative is an open, transdisciplinary and social learning endeavour, bringing together various stakeholders, with traditional fishers taking centre stage. ABALOB I, as a mobile app

⁹⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁹⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁴⁶ *ibid.*

suite and programme, is aimed at social justice and poverty alleviation in the small-scale fisheries chain, transformation in the way we produce knowledge, stewardship of our marine resources, and resilience building in the face of climate change. Promoting traceable, storied seafood by empowered small-scale fishers from hook to cook, in a manner that is not only ecologically responsible, but also socially fair. Because who fishes matter.⁹⁴⁷

In this way, support is given to fishermen whose activity is steeped in tradition and cultural value, and most importantly, catch fish using traditional and low environmental impact methods. It also helps consumers to rethink and develop more sustainable eating habits and adhere to ethical food systems.⁹⁴⁸

Benefits can also be reaped by restaurants who wish to promote their local seafood-oriented cuisine. By benefiting from the app, they would enable customers to trace the fish they eat in support of the local fishermen and in promoting higher-end genuinely caught fish as opposed to fish-farmed products. Apart from eliminating the possibility of misleading information as to the product's origin, this would also help to further elevate the standards of the restaurants who genuinely serve locally caught fish by providing proof to their claims. This approach was first taken up by the restaurant Bistro Sixteen82 which enable customers to 'scan a QR code at their table and get the full story of the fish on their plates.'⁹⁴⁹

4.5.4 The Fish Market

As from its conception, the fish market has always been stationed at Valletta, however, as from 2015, a new fish market has been established at Marsa with the latest, state of the art standards. Nevertheless, one of the floors which had been exclusively set up for fish filleting, remains idle. A highly informed fisherman with many ideas for the betterment of the Maltese fishing sector, explained that a filleting factory can only be expected to operate effectively if a large abundance of the same species is made available at one go with all specimens being of a similar weight. With the Maltese fishing sector targeting a multitude of species during any given time, this proves to be both impossible and unnatural. He suggests that the floor be converted into a fish processing facility whereby unsold bycatch and other derivatives are processed into pellets to be used as feed by fish farms. In so doing, zero waste of the already limited natural resources would ensue whilst creating a self-sufficient

⁹⁴⁷ "ABALOBI." *DigestAfrica*. 30 March 2021<<https://digestafrica.com/companies/abalobi>>.

⁹⁴⁸ "From Hook to Cook: Bistro Sixteen82, Abalobi Partners on First Restaurant-Supported Fishery." 20 March 2018. *BizCommunity*. 5 May 2021<<https://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/196/520/175000.html>>.

⁹⁴⁹ *ibid*.

system. Fishermen could be given a small compensation for their discards, whereas the facility would generate a substantial income from selling the pellets.

Other fishermen put forward equally interesting suggestions that would ameliorate fish sales. The first step needed to achieve the desired results would be for the fish market to open its doors to the public rather than limit itself to fish hawkers. Back in the day, this proved feasible considering the large amount of fish hawkers, most of whom were women, who competed to get their share of fish. Since then, the number of fish hawkers has dwindled considerably. As a result, competition is no longer rife, and prices remain low causing fishermen to make less profits. The only viable solution to the problem would be the creation of an open market by which people could gain direct access to the sales increasing both the demand and the prices. The public would still be able to purchase fish at relatively the same prices, the only difference being that the profits thus made would be rightfully pocketed by the fishermen rather than the fish hawkers who always aim to lower the price to maximise their profits.

Another point touched upon vis-à-vis the fish market was its opening hours. Fishermen must wake up early in the morning or head straight to the fish market following an exhausting fishing night to have their fish at the ready by the time auctioning commences at four in the morning. Although this made sense back in the day when freezers were undreamed of and fish had to be sold off before high temperatures set in, it is no longer viable today. Should the fish market open its doors to the public in the early afternoon, a larger clientele would be targeted, foremost of which would be restaurant owners who would want to purchase fresh fish and have it at the ready by the afternoon when the vast majority open for business.

4.5.5 Cheap Labour

Restrictions imposed on certain fisheries, especially tuna (see section 4.4.1), induced the hard-hit fishermen to turn to other fisheries as a means of survival with the most popular alternative being trammel net fishing. This strategy proved successful and thus far has seen fishermen through many years, however, it is not envisaged to hold on for much longer seeing as an excessive use of trammel nets is exerting tremendous pressure on the marine ecosystem. Whereas traditionally fishermen deployed between ten to twelve pieces of net, some have taken it upon themselves to deploy an average of fifty to seventy pieces by means of cheap labour.

Even though the recruitment of foreigners against a small payment is a means of survival, the quickly vanishing fish caused by employing excessive hands is leaving sustainable small-scale fishermen worse off. Seeing as fish stocks are diminishing, other fishermen are being left with no choice other than to follow suit and deploy more nets to catch the same amount of fish they traditionally caught with fewer nets. Indeed, an interviewee whose area of expertise is trammel net fishing, explained how a few years back a substantial catch could be procured with just ten pieces of net. Nowadays, the same amount can only be made if twenty-five pieces of net are used. Another explained that fishermen who rely on cheap labour employ up to five immigrants to work exuberant hours whilst the fisher employer is left free to make extra money from boat trips.

The negligible wages given to foreigners thus employed is an extra incentive for business minded fishermen to revert to cheap labour. Many of the interviewed fishermen expressed their concern on the poor way recruited foreigners are treated. The issue had been raised by the local paper 'Illum' back in 2017 which claimed that the immigrants employed, most of whom are Indonesians, Philippines and Arabs, were being forced to work hours on end and paid as little as €400 a month. A week after the article's publication, Paul Piscopo, then secretary to the local fishing cooperative Għaqda Koperattiva tas-Sajd, explained that employing immigrants as extra deckhands is legalised. The immigrants thus employed are brought to the islands by means of an agreement and Transhipment Visa. According to the said agreement, the immigrants are only allowed on land to run errands, otherwise they must spend the night on board the recruiting boat. He also explained that their monthly salary amounts to €550 with others making much more. He denied that they are worked exuberant hours. Notwithstanding the explanations provided, it must be noted that the working conditions are far from enviable with the pay being too little for too much work. Recruiting five immigrants at a go is proof that the pay is poor. Piscopo himself claimed that he does not exclude the possibility that such abuses might have occurred, or, as a matter of fact, are still happening, nonetheless, he attributed this comportment to foreign fishers and people.

Irrespective of the morality issue, fishermen who indulge in fishing beyond sustainability are not adhering to the code of ethics characteristic of traditional small-scale fisheries, consequently, they are jeopardising the very existence of the community. Many of the interviewed sustainable fishermen whose main source of income is trammel net fishing expressed their concern about the future. They remarked on the need for this sector's regularisation to contain fishermen who deploy excessive nets.

4.5.6 *Lampuki* Fishing

It is widely known that the *lampuka* is the traditional Maltese fish and a staple favourite with the locals who anticipate its yearly comeback with great fervour. Its fishing season kicks off in mid-August and stretches up till the end of December. Sometimes the season is extended by a month depending on the yields. This highly benefits Gozitan fishermen considering that the *lampuka* moves further north with the approach of the cooler seasons. Being stationed in the southernmost area, *Xlukkajri* fishermen are thus induced to wrap up their *lampuki* fishing season by as early as October.

Apart from the favoured gusto, the *lampuka* is also traditionally linked with the Maltese due to the ingenious fishing method developed by local fishermen for its catch. Popularly known as *kannizzati* or *ćimi*, this fishing method is categorised as a fish aggregated device (FAD) whereby human-made structures are used to attract fish. The technicality of the *kannizzati* is based on the fishermen's understanding of the fish's behaviour acquired through the observation of this fish's tendency to collect underneath floating objects in the open sea. The *kannizzata* is composed of two large pieces of cork or any other floating material, tied together. On the other hand, a slab of limestone is used to anchor the whole device. Palm fronds are added to provide extra shade as well as food in terms of algae and growths that appear on the leaves. When a substantial amount of fish is present, a specifically designed purse net is used to encircle it. The hauling process is done using a winch. During the hauling process the fish aggregates in the middle section of the net, the mesh of which is smaller and the make thicker for extra strength. As with many fishing methods used by small-scale fishermen, the method deployed for catching *lampuki* is highly selective. Only a few fish are caught as by-catch including pilot-fish (m. *fanfri*) which are equally sought by consumers. The only fish that needs to be released is the small and very young tuna (m. *tunnaġġ*) which cannot be kept due to size restrictions.⁹⁵⁰

⁹⁵⁰ Karl Azzopardi, 'Each Year I See the Lampuka Catch Decline. Only the Price of Fish Keeps Us Going', *MaltaToday*, 8 August 2018.



Picture 89: A fishing boat displaying the palm fronds on board
(Source: my own)



Picture 90: A traditional *luzzu* loaded with floats and in the process of loading stone slabs
(Source: my own)



Picture 91: Another traditional Maltese *luzzu* loaded with stone slabs and floats numbered according to the *kannizzati*
(Source: my own)

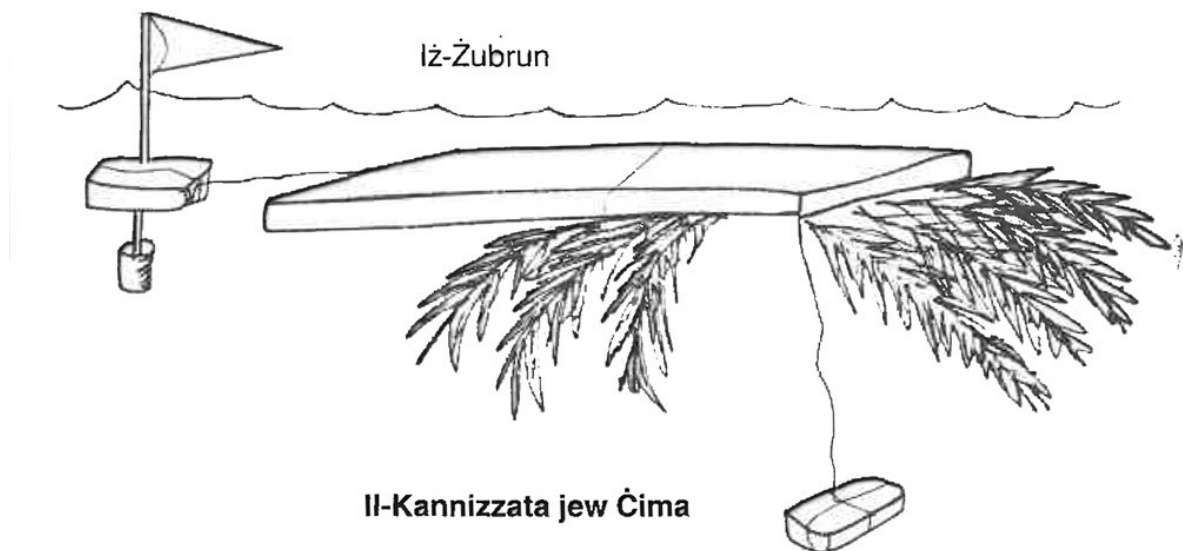


Diagram 8: The *kannizzata* or *cima*

(Source: It-Tbaħħir u s-Sajd (V))⁹⁵¹

⁹⁵¹ Diagram 8. Cf. "It-Tbaħħir u s-Sajd (V)." 12 June 2019. *Il-Miklem: Vokabularju Tematiku, Enċiklopedija tal-Kliem, Tagħrif Kulturali*. 8 November 2019 <<http://www.ilmiklem.com/it-tbahhir-u-s-sajd-v/>>.

The *lampuki* season requires intensive preparations and commitment from the fishermen's behalf. *Kannizzati* preparations commence in the winter months when fishermen are stuck on land for days on end due to foul weather. Closer to date, fishermen can be seen labouring around the clock loading the *kannizzati* components on their boat. A couple of days prior the 15th of August, when *lampuki* fishing can commence, fishermen station their *kannizzati* in the fishing area assigned to them. When it is officially legal to catch the fish, all the boats involved in its capture depart for their destination loaded with the *lampuki* fishing net.

As explained by the interviewees, a typical *lampuki* fishing expedition involves rigorous work, pressure, and sleep deprivation. As with his crew, an average small-scale fisherman owning between fifty and eighty *kannizzati* needs to wake up at three o'clock in the morning to make any last-minute preparations and set out to sea for the long day ahead at circa half past four to reach the first *kannizzata* by dawn. Upon successfully catching the first *lampuka* via trolling in the first *kannizzata*'s proximity, the crew must cast the net and encircle the shoal of fish which follow in the first specimen's direction. Once encircled, the net needs to be hauled on board. Next, the fish thus caught must be placed in fish market boxes and layered with ice. Fresh ice needs to be continuously added throughout the expedition to keep the fish in pristine condition. Once done, the fisherman and his crew move on to the next *kannizzata* and repeat the entire process, venturing further out at sea with each *kannizzata*. When all the *kannizzati* have been rounded up, the crew takes a long-deserved break to consume the bread they take with them for the journey or cook a couple of their hard-earned *lampuki* before starting the journey back to port. Upon arriving, the inspection routine ensues whereby a landing officer checks and documents the catch. The fishermen also need to weigh their catch. Once all the paperwork and recordings are done with, they add more ice and load the fish unto the transporting vehicle. The entire endeavour is complete somewhere between ten and eleven o'clock at night. Back home, the fisherman in charge takes a quick shower, snatches something to eat and rests for a couple of hours before taking the catch to the fish market at two in the morning to be at the ready for when the sales commence at four o'clock. If the day promises fair weather adequate for *lampuki* fishing, the whole process is repeated all over again. This may be undertaken for several consecutive days until fishermen have no choice other than to stop from sheer exhaustion from all the hard work and lack of sleep. Rather than taking the fish to the fish market, some fishermen opt to call and hand their catch to the distributors with whom they are affiliated upon reaching the shore.⁹⁵² A fisherman in possession

⁹⁵² Karl Azzopardi, 'Each Year I See the Lampuka Catch Decline. Only the Price of Fish Keeps Us Going', *MaltaToday*, 8 August 2018.

of a schooner small enough to fall within the parameters of small-scale fishing, explained that it takes him and his crew a full day to reach their fishing grounds which lay sixty to seventy miles out at sea. The outward journey is followed by a day worth of fishing *lampuki* which is in turn followed by another full day to undertake the homebound journey. The same holds true for bottom long-line fishing expeditions.

If a windy/breezy day which makes it unfit for *lampuki* fishing follows, fishermen undertake preparatory work for the next fishing trip upon returning from the fish market. This includes refilling the fuel tank, cleaning the boat, removing the water accumulated in the boat's hull, loading storage boxes, checking that all the technological equipment is functional, and repairing the fishing net. The latter is undertaken during the outward journey if the weather permits consecutive fishing days. Holes and damage to the fishing net is commonplace and expected when using winches. In the old days, fishermen had to haul the net on board by hand. The hard work thus involved limited the number of *kannizzati* deployed. A veteran fisherman recalls a time when *Xlukkajri* fishermen tried to determine the following day's weather by listening attentively to the weather forecast transmitted via Redifussion and compare it with their own observations. Wind from any direction makes it unfit for fishing *lampuki*. A north-western gale was usually expected to abate following two days of incessant blowing. If the tolling of the neighbouring Żejtun parish church bells could be heard from Marsaxlokk it meant that it was still going strong. Fishermen gathered at the shoreline at one or two o'clock in the morning to consult one another on the morrow's possibility of fishing. If still windy, they tried their luck again at dawn hoping against all odds. Fishermen had to abandon all hope of going out fishing if the wind gusts did not cease by nine in the morning. Venturing out any later would have been futile since not enough time would have been left for completing the endeavour which was undertaken manually.

Since nowadays weather forecasts are more accurate and provided for longer periods of time at one go, fishermen can set out at sea in windy conditions knowing full well it will cease by the time they arrive at their fishing spot. Irrespective of this melioration, present day *lampuki* fishing is nowhere near plain sailing. Fishermen must still endure many of the hardships suffered back then, including subjection to the elements such as extreme heat and direct sun exposure, as well as new challenges that have developed with the years. The following section will delve into each of the major problems present day *lampuki* fishermen face.

Up till a couple of years ago, fishermen had to prune palm trees themselves to acquire the indispensable palm fronds for their *kannizzati*. Following the red palm weevil invasion, the Department of Plant Health issued several guidelines for the trees' proper pruning. It also suggested that the fronds be collected from a common site⁹⁵³ and carried out in collaboration with and under the surveillance of the said department.⁹⁵⁴ Irrespective of the directives, the department failed to control the spread of the beetle causing further loss in palm trees. Up to five thousand trees, accounting to 11% of all the registered palm trees, were destroyed in just eight years.⁹⁵⁵ This resulted in a further scarcity of palm fronds. Consequently, many fishermen were left with no option other than to steal palm fronds from public spaces such as roundabouts.⁹⁵⁶

Luckily, this problem has since been tackled by the authorities and, as from 2018, government workers have been appointed with the task of pruning palm trees in public areas.⁹⁵⁷ The fronds are distributed to fishermen who are registered to qualify for the help at no charge.⁹⁵⁸

During the past decades, an incessant raid of the *kannizzati* has been on the agenda of Tunisian fishermen. The Gozitan *lampuki* fishermen are the hardest hit, since their *kannizzati* extend into international waters close to Tunisian territory.⁹⁵⁹ Two of the interviewed fishermen explained that some Tunisian vessels are bold enough to venture within the Maltese 25NM. Despite the illegality, one of the fishermen who witnessed the breach did not report it to the Armed Forces of Malta from fear of getting into trouble. It is far worse in international waters considering the area does not fall under any country's jurisdiction. Almost all the Gozitan fishermen interviewed expressed anger, frustration, and helplessness in face of such atrocities. They explained that Tunisian vessels are much larger than their fishing boats. Furthermore, they always appear in groups. As reported by a newspaper and further confirmed by interviews, five boats or more tend to band up. They proceed to round and catch the *lampuki* stationed at the Maltese fishermen's *kannizzati* while one of the vessels keeps Maltese fishermen at bay.⁹⁶⁰ Each Tunisian vessel is further manned by a large group of

⁹⁵³ 'Advice to Fishermen Using Palm Fronds', *Times of Malta*, 14 July 2019.

⁹⁵⁴ 'Advice to Local Fisherman on the Use of Palm Fronds', Gozo.News, 25 July 2011. <<https://gozo.news/18633/advice-on-the-use-of-palm-fronds-by-local-fishermen/>>.

⁹⁵⁵ Mario Micallef, 'Red Palm Weevil has Destroyed 5000 Palm Trees', *TVM News*, 9 May 2017.

⁹⁵⁶ Karl Azzopardi, 'Illegalities in Proper Palm Pruning Threaten Malta's Beloved 'Lampuka'', *MaltaToday*, 3 August 2018.

⁹⁵⁷ Alvin Vassallo, 'Government Providing Free Palm Fronds for Fishermen', *TVM News*, 2 August 2018.

⁹⁵⁸ Maria Webb, 'Free Palm Fronds for Gozitan Fishermen', *Newsbook*, 22 July 2020.

⁹⁵⁹ Karl Azzopardi, 'Brussels to deal with Lampuki dispute, Gozo Fisher: 'There Will Be Blood, I'm Sure'', *MaltaToday*, 16 September 2019.

⁹⁶⁰ *ibid.*

fishermen. A fisherman recounted the fear experienced when the Tunisians deliberately sped in his direction while ten crew members gathered at the prow hurling abuse. Luckily, the Gozitan was fast enough to steer his launcher out of the way. Attempts at ramming into their small boats was further confirmed by a newspaper that reported a fisherman's claim that on various occasions Tunisian vessels approached them at full speed from just two feet away.⁹⁶¹

Another Gozitan fisherman tries his best to ignore them by progressing to a *kannizzata* while the Tunisians are occupied rounding some others, however, most often his attempts are thwarted since their vessels are much faster than his *luzzu* and they quickly overtake him. They are further equipped with larger nets that round up a larger amount of *lampuki*. To make matters worse, the Tunisians cause irrevocable damage to the *kannizzati* while catching the fish, thereby destroying the Maltese fishermen's months' worth of work with no possibility of catching *lampuki* for the rest of the fishing season unless they deploy new equipment. A newspaper reported a 65-foot-long vessel nicknamed the Bin Laden amongst the vessels causing the havoc. It has been nicknamed thus from the drawing of the infamous terrorist on the side of its cabin. The vessel's main purpose is to intimidate the Maltese fishermen and has been claimed to directing its bow in the latter's direction and drive at full speed with the full intention of ramming into them.⁹⁶² They further threaten local fishermen with machetes, big iron washers, and Molotov cocktails.⁹⁶³

Back in 2001, the Ministry of Fisheries tried to intervene with the Tunisian authorities. At the time, Tunisian fishermen were deliberately towing away the *kannizzati*.⁹⁶⁴ The accusations of poaching brought forth were denied by the Tunisian authorities until photos and footage showing otherwise were presented. They were left with no choice other than to call in the vessels concerned. Unfortunately, the peace was short-lived and Tunisian poachers resumed their old habits.⁹⁶⁵ A 2002 newspaper article claimed that the incidents had already been ongoing for five years, meaning that the rife can be traced to at least 1997. At the time, the National Fisheries Cooperative secretary, Raymond Bugeja, asked for military presence while Maltese fishermen are fishing.⁹⁶⁶ Amidst further

⁹⁶¹ Karl Azzopardi, 'War on the High Seas: Tunisian Plundering Maltese and Gozitan Lampuki Catches', *MaltaToday*, 8 September 2019.

⁹⁶² *ibid.*

⁹⁶³ Karl Azzopardi, 'Brussels to deal with Lampuki dispute, Gozo Fisher: 'There Will Be Blood, I'm Sure'', *MaltaToday*, 16 September 2019.

⁹⁶⁴ Matthew Vella, 'Brussels Told to Help Maltese Fishers Against Tunisian Lampuki Thieves', *MaltaToday*, 21 January 2019.

⁹⁶⁵ Karl Azzopardi, 'Brussels to deal with Lampuki dispute, Gozo Fisher: 'There Will Be Blood, I'm Sure'', *MaltaToday*, 16 September 2019.

⁹⁶⁶ Rosanne Zammit, 'Gozitan Fishermen claim Tunisians Stealing their Fish', *Times of Malta*, 21 September 2002.

pressure on the European Commission by the Maltese Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) in 2019,⁹⁶⁷ the former acknowledged the problem of spatial dispute between Maltese and Tunisian fishermen and promised to discuss the matter during a General Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) meeting.⁹⁶⁸ Before the commencement of the 2020 *lampuki* fishing season, it was finally announced that Maltese fishermen would be accompanied by an Armed Forces of Malta patrol boat to carry out observations and report poaching by Tunisian fishermen to the European Fisheries Control Agency. Eventually, the happenings will be discussed with the European fora.⁹⁶⁹ This is a step in the right direction and positive results are hoped to ensue.

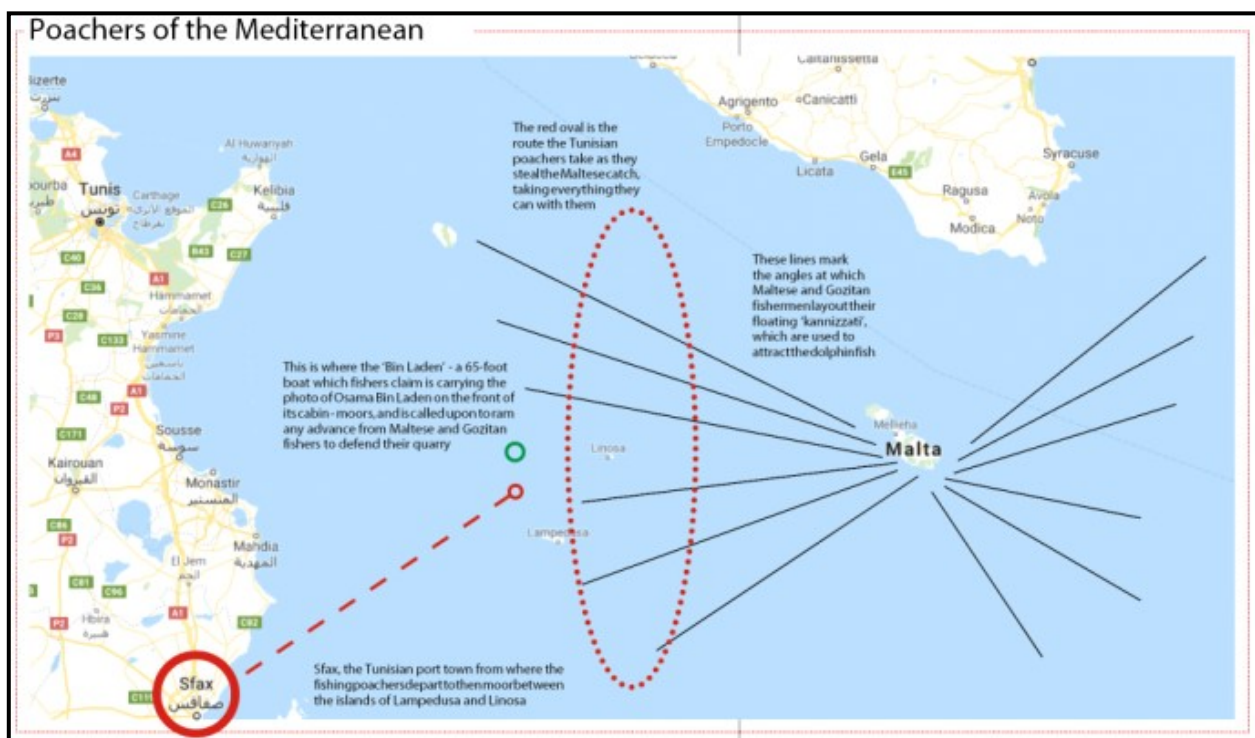


Diagram 9: The area where poaching by Tunisian raiders occurs

Source: War on the High Seas: Tunisian Plundering Maltese and Gozitan Lampuki Catches⁹⁷⁰

⁹⁶⁷ Matthew Vella, 'Brussels Told to Help Maltese Fishers Against Tunisian Lampuki Thieves', *MaltaToday*, 21 January 2019.

⁹⁶⁸ Karl Azzopardi, 'Brussels to deal with Lampuki dispute, Gozo Fisher: 'There Will Be Blood, I'm Sure'', *MaltaToday*, 16 September 2019.

⁹⁶⁹ Matthew Vella, 'Maltese Armed Forces to Monitor Lampuki Fishing Grounds for Tunisian Raiders', *MaltaToday*, 13 August 2020.

⁹⁷⁰ Diagram 9. Cf. Karl Azzopardi, 'War on the High Seas: Tunisian Plundering Maltese and Gozitan Lampuki Catches', *MaltaToday*, 8 September 2019.

Aside from Tunisian raids on Maltese fishermen's *kannizzati*, Maltese *lampuki* catches in general have been noted to decrease in abundance over the past years. Even though all agree to the phenomenon, opinions as to the reason behind the scarcity defer. A newspaper article reported a fishmonger attributing this phenomenon to the Italians' growing taste for the fish. Others claim that the *lampuka* is being drawn away from the Maltese waters by the ever-increasing shipping movements along the Libyan coast.⁹⁷¹

In 2011, biologist Patrick Schembri explained that the cause of *lampuki* shortage is multifaceted and cannot be attributed to a single factor. It could indicate changes in environmental conditions or could simply be part of the natural cycle. The latter was also remarked upon by one of the fishermen interviewed. In his words, 'it is not possible to discuss marine phenomena with any certainty. It can easily put you to ridicule. At present it is being said that fish is on the decrease. This can be nullified the year after with the presence of large quantities of fish.'⁹⁷²

An Italian marine biologist, Fernando Boero, believes that the warmer weather might have changed the *lampuki* migratory pattern. Prof. Beatriz Morales-Nin, a marine ecologist and *lampuki* expert at the Mediterranean Institute for Advanced Studies in Mallorca, Spain, also attributed warmer temperatures for diminishing catches. According to her, warmer months result in delayed spawning. This could also account for the small *lampuki* specimen caught.⁹⁷³

Fishermen have their share of sound opinions. As reported in a newspaper article, some fishermen attribute the dwindling number of *lampuki* to the increase in dolphin and tuna populations which hunt and consume the fish.⁹⁷⁴ Two of the fishermen interviewed for this study were of the same opinion, claiming that they witnessed both tuna and dolphins chasing *lampuki*. On one occasion, they accidentally caught a dolphin who was busy chasing *lampuki* while rounding the fish with their net. Upon noticing the presence of the dolphin, the fishermen slackened the net for it to escape, nonetheless, they were shaken to the core by the unexpected intruder.

Another plausible reason provided to explain the decrease in *lampuki*, is international fishing. Whereas *lampuki* was almost exclusively craved for by the Maltese, as of late many foreigners have

⁹⁷¹ Bertrand Borg, 'Lampuki Season Deemed 'Disastrous'', *Times of Malta*, 9 October 2011.

⁹⁷² 'U fuq il-baħar ma tantx tista' toqghod tithaddet hafna ghax malajr iwaqqghek għaċ-ċajt ghax ahna qegħdin nghidu li spiċċa u jaf tigi sena oħra u l-hut jitla' l-art.'

⁹⁷³ Bertrand Borg, 'Lampuki Season Deemed 'Disastrous'', *Times of Malta*, 9 October 2011.

⁹⁷⁴ Owen Galea, 'It-Tonn u d-Dniefel Mhux Ihalluna Naqbd Lampuka – Sajjied', *TVM News*, 10 May 2017.

developed a taste for the fish. Amongst other countries one can mention Italy, Libya, and Tunisia.⁹⁷⁵ This was further confirmed by the fishermen consulted in this study. With the above-mentioned countries, they included Spain, Algeria, Portugal, Sicily, and Cyprus. A fisherman explained that foreigners have transpired to the Maltese fishing method. The innovative *kannizzati* fishing method invented by the Maltese was copied by the Gozitans which was in turn copied by foreigners who were able to master the method themselves by observing Maltese fishermen while out fishing in international waters. As a fisherman's wife explained, foreigners fish for the *lampuka* earlier than the Maltese do.⁹⁷⁶ As stipulated by the EU's regulations, Italian fishermen are likewise prohibited from catching the fish before the 15th of August, however, due to Italy's lack of surveillance, Maltese fishermen must content with already depleted stocks. Breaching the stipulated date is punishable by law and heavily fined. Back in 2014, a Gozitan fisherman was fined €7,800 for catching 17 boxes of the fish worth €700 before the official opening.⁹⁷⁷

Local fishermen understand that Italians illegally fish the *lampuka* before the stipulated time from the mollusc growth thriving on the Italian *kannizzati*; a phenomenon which proves that the Italian *kannizzati* would have already been afloat for at least a couple of weeks before the stipulated date. To better counteract the problem and guarantee a fairer share of the fish, a fisherman expressed his wish for the authorities to grant permission for local fishermen to position their *kannizzati* at sea at the beginning of August, whilst adhering to the existing date for the commencement of its fishing. He explained that, by so doing, the fish will seek refuge underneath the *kannizzati* and thus discouraged from travelling further ashore.

Whatever the reason behind the dwindling number in *lampuki*, fishermen constantly fear that restrictions on its fishing will be imposed by the EU. Thus far, disproportionate restrictions have already been put into place for tuna and swordfish catches.⁹⁷⁸ Restrictions on *lampuki* fishing would be the final blow dealt to small-scale fishermen who are already fighting against all odds to make ends meet. Dr. Alicia Said captured the sentiment of many of the fishermen interviewed by stating;

One of the biggest challenges for fishers is the fact that since the introduction of quotas for tuna, they have seen a decline in profitability. When previously a fisher's income was split between a good tuna

⁹⁷⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁹⁷⁷ 'Fined €7,800 for Catching Lampuka Too Early', *Times of Malta*, 21 August 2014.

⁹⁷⁸ Ritianne Agius, 'Sant Warns that Sworfish and Lampuki Quotas will Follow After Tuna', *Times of Malta*, 29 March 2017.

and swordfish season and a good *lampuki* season, now it is mostly based on the *lampuki* season, so if that is not good, it raises a big question about the fisher's profitability for that year.⁹⁷⁹

Further havoc is caused by recreational fishermen who fish for single specimen via trolling in the vicinity of professional fishermen's *kannizzati*. In so doing, they disrupt the entire shoal. It can take several days for *lampuki* to regroup and seek shelter underneath the floats.⁹⁸⁰ Moreover, recreational fishermen tend to tie their boat to the *kannizzati* to prevent it from drifting with the currents which causes damages the floats.

Additional problems are caused by cabin cruisers who deliberately damage the fishermen's rafts.⁹⁸¹ The latter is also caused by trawlers and ships that pass in the vicinity of the FADs. Damage can also be caused by swordfish longlines which get entangled with the rafts.

4.6 Conclusion

Being the last, this chapter captured all the problems Maltese small-scale fishermen face; problems which ensue from natural phenomena such as exposure to all forms of elements and encounters with potentially dangerous fish which negatively impact their physical well-being, and problems which are human induced. Since the former are naturally occurring and have always been part and parcel of the job, fishermen learned to expect and accept them. However, the same cannot be said of the latter which encompass a myriad of restrictive measures imposed by governmental bodies both at EU and individual member state level, and which inflict immeasurable sufferings on small-scale fishermen who try to counteract these problems by formulating survival strategies. To this end, they are induced to take extreme measures which can be both detrimental to themselves and to the environment on which they, indeed all humans, depend. They are forced to abandon their nature respecting methods which have seen them through the centuries, and practice different methods which may not be sustainable in a time and age when humanity should not only lash out against nature destroying practices such as the ones which are being promoted, but encourage and promote entities that are respectful of nature with the key objective being the natural balance traditionally adhered to by small-scale fishermen. The fishermen's survival can be attributed to their reliance on the unfailing support

⁹⁷⁹ Adriana Bishop. "It's That Time of Year Again." *GuideMeMalta.com*. 14 April 2021
<<https://www.guidememalta.com/en/it-s-that-time-of-year-again-here-come-the-lampuki>>.

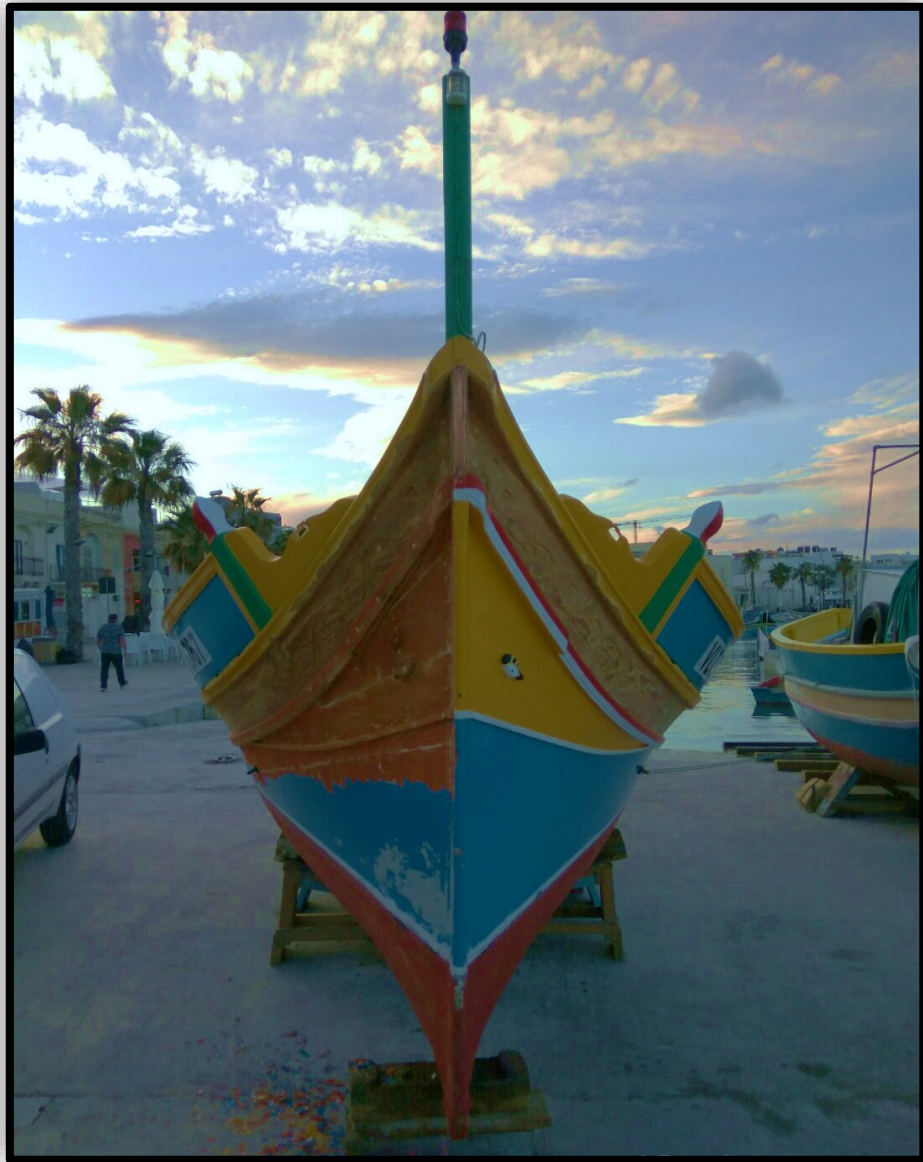
⁹⁸⁰ *ibid*.

⁹⁸¹ Brendon Pisani, 'Fishermen prepare to go out for 'Lampuki'', *TVM News*, 9 August 2018.

provided by the fishing community whose members empathise and understand one another, the constant assistance provided by the family especially women, and their faith in religious and superstitious beliefs which keep them optimistic and hopeful. An additional incentive to their perseverance is undoubtedly their love of fishing and everything related; a passion without which they would have long perished.

Conclusion

Final Reflections



Conclusion

Final Reflections

The realities of the small-scale fishing sector as narrated in this study are visually represented with acclaimed films based on true stories and/or real-life events. Examples would be Visconti's *La Terra Trema*, and Camilleri's *Luzzu*. Even though representing typical small-scale fishing communities in different countries; Sicily and Malta in 1947 and 2022 respectively, both represent the common difficulties fishermen face. *La Terra Trema* (The Earth Trembles) narrates the story of the Valastros fishing family. Filmed in Aci Trezza, a small-fishing village in Sicily, this neo-realist film captures the misery of poor fishermen who are exploited by middlemen who fatten their pockets from the fishermen's hard labour and life-risking expeditions. Wanting to better the family's economic circumstances, one of the siblings embarks on a venture whereby he mortgages the family home to buy a boat. But the stakes are high, and a storm destroys the boat along with all his hopes for a better life which induces the family to suffer devastating blows that delve them into further misery. Rendered more vulnerable than ever before, the middlemen ridicule and exploit them even more. Even though representing local and current affairs, *Luzzu* brings to light realities that are common to *La Terra Trema* such as the middlemen exploitation which is still rife. Irrespective of the time lapse between the events, the fishermen in both stories share other common aspects including the unyielding support of the family/women, superstitious connotations, and religious ceremonies amongst which one can mention the eyes on both boat types and the blessing of fishing crafts. Being representative of this day and age, *Luzzu* brings to light additional problems of a contemporary nature caused by the EU's legislations which induces the fisher protagonist to take extreme measures to make ends meet. Eventually the system failed him and is forced to subject his beloved *luzzu* to the demolition scheme from want of a better life for his family during which process he is deprived from doing what he loves doing best and is robbed of his very identity. Casting real-life fishermen and villagers, both directors deliver the fishermen's plight to the public in much stronger vibes than ever before and help to raise awareness about their reality.

These films, as with this study, have gone to lengths to demonstrate that professional fishing has always been synonymous with hardships. Whereas some hardships have shifted from lack of technological assistance to longer travels and more time spent at sea to catch the same quantity of fish due to environmental degradation, nowadays additional hardships are emanating from the repressive legislations issued by governing bodies coupled with the appropriation of the sea by

emerging commercial entities. The fishing sector has always been controlled but the regularisation imposed on contemporary small-scale fisheries has no precedent. Moreover, the establishment of industrial facilities are seizing areas traditionally used by small-scale fisheries. To sustain society's wellbeing and ensure its survival, social change must be gradual to allow for its adaptation. The same, however, cannot be said of fisheries. Even though highly renowned for their resilience the changes thus imposed are too many, too much, and spread over a relatively short period of time. The ever-dwindling number of fishermen attests to the sector's exhaustion.

This study set out to discover and explore the coping mechanisms by which the Maltese small-scale fisheries have somehow managed to survive in face of all the challenges by buffering the impacts inflicted by the top-down regime. These include the fishing community, the women's support, their spiritual conviction in God's benevolence, and superstitious beliefs which mitigate other problems. The strong sense of community prevailing amongst fishermen translates into solidarity, empathy, and an 'us' against 'them' stance developed from a lack of understanding of fishermen's needs from people, especially governing bodies, outside their niche. Nonetheless, communities are experiencing devastating changes which are eroding their social fabric. A decrease in the number of fishermen is the main contributor to the phenomenon resulting from legislative measures that are phasing out the fishermen whilst creating tension amongst those remaining in the picture by forcing them into competing with one another.

Women's contribution to the fisheries is another asset to fishermen's resilience. Although a shift in chores has been experienced over the past few decades, women's role is still indispensable. Whereas in the past women fished with their fathers and husbands to retain all profits, nowadays women are seeking employment elsewhere to complement the income procured by the men. Being more economically viable, the new approach enables fishermen to stick to fishing by making good for the lower profits made off fishing. Those who still contribute to the sector do so by means of fish mongering, a task which has always been the prerogative of women and, as with fisherwomen in the past, help to keep the profits thus made by the family. Technological advances have certainly seen female fishmongers better off in terms of sanitary standards and transportation, however, other problems ensued from the ever-changing society and competing entities. Apart from other direct contributions, women have to shoulder additional responsibilities and see to the family's wellbeing.

Belief in the supernatural provides additional reassurance. Religious beliefs as manifested through prayers, artefacts and blessing ceremonies augur prosperous fishing expeditions and safe deliverance

from precarious situations. As with the community and women's contribution, this domain has also undergone several changes brought about by a shift in fishing practices, donating systems and overall religious approach. Nonetheless, this study revealed that faith still plays a very important role in fishermen's lives irrespective of age and technological amelioration. Superstitious beliefs are mostly adhered to by people in jobs characteristic of high levels of both wellbeing and income insecurity which explains why fishermen are still as superstitious. This study revealed that, as opposed to religion, superstition has lost some of its lustre, nonetheless, it is still important and provides fishermen with an additional pinch of reassurance. The perceived drop of superstitious beliefs could also be attributed to embarrassment which induced fishermen to deny adherence and belief in it. Belief in the Evil Eye is the best-known superstition, and many measures are taken to ward it off. Complementing these supporting mechanisms, is the love borne by fishermen to a fishing way of life. Even though dismissed as mythical and often romanticised, the spellbinding effect the sea holds over them is real and needs to be taken in consideration by legislative bodies.

Notwithstanding the support provided by their community, women and beliefs, fishermen are finding it hard to cope sustainably. It was also revealed that whereas in the past fishermen respected the ecosystem on which they depended unanimously by switching between species to let the targeted stocks recuperate, the restrictions imposed which benefit the industrial giants, is seeing fishermen deprived of their fishing permits, thus forcing them into switching to alternate fisheries all year round. This strategy is the new means by which fishermen manage to remain in the picture, nonetheless it is not envisaged to last long. In short, governing bodies are contributing to the environmental degradation by supporting large-scale fisheries and crippling the sustainable small-scale fisheries and everything they stand for. Should 'the passive and ambivalent attitude at all levels of governance' persist, 'it is likely that the small-scale sector succumbs to the massive pressures that it has been battling.'⁹⁸² It is well known that fishing communities are ageing with few young people interested in taking up fishing due to the unattractiveness of the current situation, a reality which was brought closer to home when most of the fishermen themselves admitted to not wanting their own children to follow in their footsteps with the most common reason given being the restrictions imposed. Consequently, many fishermen encourage their children to pursue their studies and find a land-based job.

The doom facing this most sustainable of fisheries is also predicted by the fishermen themselves, many of whom believe that their sector will extinguish in a few years' time with the average timespan

⁹⁸² Said and MacMillan, 98.

given being of fifteen years at the most. While a few believe that all spheres of fishing will die out, which cannot be excluded considering the damage inflicted by large-scale fisheries, other fishermen think that only the industrial fisheries will be left in the picture. Similar consideration should also be given to their contribution to local produce especially in the light of the recent COVID-19 pandemic, and lately, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which is threatening the importation of essential food products from other countries and causing inflation of prices.

The survival of small-scale fishermen from the prevailing precarious situation is only possible if prompt action is taken before it is too late. Much can be done by the governing bodies in charge of fisheries first of which is to become aware and recognise the importance of this sector and appreciate that, apart from being the most sustainable, is historically and culturally rich; features that strengthen other economies including tourism; the most economically viable industry on the Maltese Islands.

Amongst other measures, fishermen need to be granted better access to fishing rights and be protected by a system that safeguards their survival. An obvious measure needed in attaining this end is for a more equitable allocation of ITQs or, better still, to replace them with ‘non-tradeable community-based quotas.’ By so doing, a vast part of the ensuing problems would be automatically solved. Another step in the right direction would be the establishment of marine protected areas that cater for the needs of sustainable fishermen.⁹⁸³ An obvious measure that should have long been established to better guard both professional fishermen and the environment, is adequate monitoring of the recreational sector which is notorious for illegal catches, landings, and sales. Their sheer number is cause of alarm. Indeed, as from 2007, recreational vessels have exceeded the number of commercial vessels. By ‘2014 the recreational vessels represented around 65% of the total Maltese fishing fleet.’⁹⁸⁴

It is paramount that the social, economic, and environmental wellbeing of marine related activities are all catered for at governance level. One cannot be excluded at the expense of the others. By empowering small-scale fisheries or, at the very least, restore them to their previous status, all three criteria will be successfully catered for, seeing as small-scale fishermen are socially and culturally rich, secure the income of a large number of fishermen, require much less subsidies, are accountable for a similar annual catch needed for human consumption, are responsible for few fish and other sea

⁹⁸³ *ibid.*, 93.

⁹⁸⁴ Myriam Khalfallah, Mark Dimech, Aylin Ulman, Dirk Zeller and Daniel Pauly, ‘Reconstruction of Marine Fisheries Catches for the Republic of Malta (1950-2014)’, *Mediterranean Maltese Studies*, xviii, 2 (2017), 244.

life discards resulting from bycatch, and consume a much lower amount of fuel oil in their operation than industrial fisheries. To this end, both the social sciences and the fishermen's participation should be taken into account by policymakers.

The public can also contribute to sustaining the local small-scale fisheries by informing itself on the sector's sustainably locally caught fish and buy their catch. This can be easily achieved by buying directly from the fishermen, fish markets, fishmongers and fish shops that sell fish thus caught. Exploring the multitude of local and traditional recipes that can be prepared with different species other than the customary steak fish is also helpful. One could also refrain from purchasing fish farmed species and other imported fish which are inferior in taste, nutrients, and freshness, and negatively impact the environment.

Should small-scale fishermen be left to wither away, there will be no turning back as all the knowledge and expertise accumulated through the centuries will die out with the last traditional fisherman. That being so, 'we risk losing an entire subculture, losing the artisanal fishermen, for so long the guardians of the sea.'⁹⁸⁵

Proposals for Further Research

An interesting research would be the study of the nomenclature of streets, houses, prominent areas, restaurants etc. in villages traditionally linked with fishing to reveal how, and to what extent, fishermen and everything linked with fishing, is thus incorporated to provide these villages with a fishing identity.

Another area that could benefit from further research is the attachment fishermen develop to their boats and if similarities and/or differences exist between the bonding of fishermen with traditional, wooden boats vis-à-vis the one developed with modern, fibreglass boats. Investigation into which material lends itself best for the local environment and how this is reflected into the attachments thus formed could also be looked into.

⁹⁸⁵ Victor Paul Borg, 'Fishermen on the Brink: Small-Scale Fishing is on the Way to Extinction', *Times of Malta*, 1 October 2017.

The third suggestion focuses on the fishing villages' gastronomy and whether a traditional link with fishing is reflected in the localities' people cuisine. This research could also include an investigation into how variables, including the presence of fishmongers, fish stalls, fish shops and the presence of fishermen, translate into fish consumption. Comparison between the villages affiliated with fishing could be carried out along with comparison with other localities that bear no affinity to fishing whatsoever. Traditional fish/seafood recipes and how they vary between localities could also be included.

The last suggestion that would help to better recognise the importance of the Maltese small-scale fisheries is an investigation into how this sector can help in sustaining vulnerable islands' food availability in light of international crises that cause price inflations due to food scarcity and transportation costs, and which may altogether disrupt the importation of food supplies.

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