

# LA FAMIGLIA

*The Ideology of Sicilian Family Networks*



Eva Carlestål

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Dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Cultural Anthropology presented at Uppsala University in 2005

## ABSTRACT

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Anthropological data from fieldwork carried out among a fishing population in western Sicily show how related matrifocal nuclear families are tightly knit within larger, male-headed networks. The mother focus at the basic family level is thereby balanced and the system indicates that the mother-child unit does not function effectively on its own, as has often been argued for this type of family structure. As a result of dominating moral values which strongly emphasise the uniqueness of family and kin, people are brought up to depend heavily upon and to be loyal to their kin networks, to see themselves primarily as parts of these social units and less so as independent clearly bounded individuals, and to distinctly separate family members from non-family members. This dependence is further strengthened by matri- and/or patrivocinity being the dominant form of locality, by the traditional naming system as well as a continual use of kin terms, and by related people socialising and collaborating closely. The social and physical boundaries thus created around the family networks are further strengthened by local architecture that symbolically communicates the closed family unit; by the woman, who embodies her family as well as their house, having her outdoor movements restricted in order to shield both herself and her family; by self-mastery when it comes to skilfully calculating one's actions and words as a means of controlling the impression one makes on others; and by local patriotism that separates one's co-villagers from foreigners. Hospitality, which brings inclusion and exclusion into focus, is shown to be a means of ritually incorporating non-kin and thus containing the danger the stranger represents.

The author aims to answer the question of whether the social and physical boundaries around the family network, together with the distrust towards non-family members referred to by the informants themselves, constitute a hindrance as regards collaboration with non-kin, or if collaboration beyond the family boundaries is possible and, if so, whether or not this has to lead to the family's losing its position.

Key words: Sicily, anthropology, family, matrifocality, kinship

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*To Teresa*



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## I. INTRODUCTION

While carrying out anthropological fieldwork among a fishing population in a coastal town in western Sicily, I found myself several times in situations where I was unable to grasp the behaviour of the people I met. I did not see any pattern, but an incomprehensible mixture of solidarity, hospitality, and openness on the one hand, and indifference, suspicion, and closure on the other. I saw the same persons acting differently from one time to the next, and what sometimes seemed to me to be a wrong behaviour, seemed to be right to them, and vice versa.

The longer I stayed in the field, the more I felt the need to understand the presumed logic and values behind the behaviour I watched. At one point I decided that this was a much more interesting and urgent issue than studying masculinity, as I had originally planned. The following is therefore a thesis on family networks and the moral, economic, social, and cultural value system dominating within them. The purpose is to show how these values are expressed among interacting individuals and groups and to explain the rationales lying behind people's different behaviour in different contexts.

By relating my own ethnographic examples to anthropological theory, I endeavour to understand how my informants understand themselves as moral and social persons as well as to demonstrate their behaviours and actions as the logical outcome of those understandings.

## La Famiglia – Synopsis

This introductory chapter presents the development of anthropological studies of Mediterranean societies since the 1950s and the position of my own work within this tradition. The notion of South Italian amoral familism as it was once introduced by Edward C. Banfield and the still ongoing debate that it created will be presented as the main current of ideas that constitute the point of departure for this thesis. After this, the physical background of the place of my fieldwork will be depicted with its large fishing population, which constitutes my main informant group, and the chapter ends with a discussion of the field method used.

In Sicily the nuclear family has constituted the dominating household formation at least since the 17th century, while to this very day extended families and multiple households have been more widespread in Central and North Italy. On this nuclear level, informants' families will be shown in chapter two to be strongly matrifocal, while on the level of the larger kin group, the husbands/fathers have a well-defined and culturally significant role. The position of the nuclear family is thus not a hindrance, as argued by Banfield and his followers, to parallel strong family networks embracing larger kin groups. These networks, upon which their members are heavily dependent, help create a stable society, where people distinctly separate family members from non-family members.

Chapter three provides the reader with the ethnographic context in which this thesis takes place. It will show the significance of the family as well as how this significance is upheld and transmitted from one generation to the next. Opening with a magnificent wedding – the most important of all life rituals – it then turns to the planning of this elaborate feast and the parents' long, meticulous planning of the dowry – a fully equipped house – that the newlyweds receive on the day itself. Besides showing the importance given to the creation of a new nuclear family, weddings and dowries also show how the individual is intermeshed in his or her family. Thereafter follows a presentation of a housewife's daily toil with the repetitive household chores. Women seemingly sacrifice themselves for their families while fulfilling their duties,

but at the same time they create a lifelong dependence by their children upon themselves and gain a culturally and emotionally very esteemed position – the most central role within this society's most important social unit. Parallel to this runs an official male ideology making women culturally strongly dependent upon their men. Matrifocality thus gets balanced and indicates that the mother-child unit does not function effectively on its own, as has often been argued for matrifocal families. Lastly, the highly ordered food patterns will be shown to be analogous with a strictly structured family life and with how families mark their identity in relation to outsiders. The importance given to food, the sharing of meals, and the loyalty to traditional food patterns will be shown to ensure the survival of the family socially, materially, and culturally.

While chapter three focuses on the importance of the family, the following chapter explores the kinship system and its relation to informants' behaviour. The system will be shown to be bilateral, with marked features of matrifocality and matrilinearity as well as patrilinearity, and along with the continuous usage of kinship terms instead of personal names, the use of *tu* (informal you) among consanguines, and the traditional naming system, this contributes to cracking the traditional picture of the Sicilian family as intensively nuclear and to showing lasting alliances with both the paternal and the maternal kin group. These usages moreover continuously stress the individual's role as member of his or her kin group and strengthen the group's internal relations, while at the same time outwardly they underline the difference between 'them', that is, non-family members, and 'us'. I will argue that informants look at themselves and are looked upon by others as parts of their families above all, and less so as independent, clearly bounded individuals; that is, that they constitute their personal identity through family belonging. The kin group stays united, further, by its various nuclear families often living close by and socialising and assisting one another on a daily basis. At the same time as this pattern of matri- and patrilinearity strengthens the kin group, it diminishes the dominance of the nuclear family in favour of the larger unit. The family's position is quite unique, and in spite of its not always being a conflict-free unit, it is a strong metaphor for good social relations even with non-relatives, though for a friend, however close he or she may be, to really surpass

the family boundaries will be shown not to be possible. However, using the family metaphor is one way of giving prominence to traditionally highly appreciated values concerning family, friendship, equality, and social relations as such.

The penultimate chapter pays particular attention to the social and spatial boundaries set up around the family to protect its members. After an introductory discussion on distrust, I will refer to my informants, who claim that Sicilian history, which they see as an everlasting conquest of a subjected people, is one important explanation for their closure/suspiciousness. Thereafter, the shame and honour complex, which has often been said to characterise and unify the whole of the Mediterranean area, will be shown to be constantly interwoven with all the other characteristic boundaries presented in this chapter, through them capturing its local form. This holds, for instance, for the architecture, which symbolically communicates the closed family unit by its distinct separation between public and private space. The mother, who embodies her family as well as their closed dwelling, has her freedom of outdoor movement restricted as a way of protecting not only herself, but also the honour of her whole family. Local patriotism and the importance of skilfully playing one's various roles in the ever ongoing social drama in order to make a *bella figura* (good impression) are other means of building up a guard against the others. Hospitality brings inclusion and exclusion into focus and will be shown to act as a well-regulated and socially approved way of incorporating the guest into the host community and thus containing the danger that he or she may represent.

The last chapter aims at answering the question whether collaboration beyond the family boundaries is possible in the society studied and, if so, whether this has to lead to the family's losing its position.



## Positioning My Study Regionally, Nationally, and Thematically

Though a number of early anthropological scholars like Durkheim, Frazer, Fustel de Coulanges, Maine, and Robertson-Smith all had a thorough interest in the Mediterranean area, like many anthropologists of their time most of them never carried out any proper fieldwork. And after them it was a long time before Mediterranean anthropological studies were heard of again – then by their more empirical successors; in fact, it was not until 1954.

That year, Julian Pitt-Rivers published *The People of the Sierra* after carrying out fieldwork in Andalusia, Spain (1971 (1954)). Together with other Mediterraneanists-to-be – Emrys L. Peters, Paul Stirling, Jean Peristiany, and John K. Campbell – Pitt-Rivers had had his anthropological training at Oxford under the guidance of Evans-Pritchard (see chapter 2). During the 1950s and 1960s Pitt-Rivers, together with Peristiany, initiated several regional symposia on the Mediterranean area. Important works following these symposia were *Honour and Shame – The Values of Mediterranean Society* (Peristiany 1974 (1966)), examining the concept of honour and its cultural similarities in the area; *Mediterranean Countrymen* (Pitt-Rivers 1977 (1963)), dealing with the diversified social structures of Mediterranean rural communities and their different ways of adapting themselves to the larger society; and *Mediterranean Family Structures* (Peristiany 1976), concerned, as the title says, with family structures in the Mediterranean area, but also with how these structures respond to political, social, and economic innovations. Though these three books helped in a decisive way to establish modern anthropology in this part of the world, it is a fact that Mediterranean ethnography as a whole has remained marginal to the development of modern anthropological theory (Herzfeld 1989:91).

One of the contributors to the last-mentioned book was John Davis. A couple of years earlier he had published *Land and Family in Pisticci* (1973), based on his doctoral thesis. It was a work of the structural-functional era showing how the basic structure of the society studied was revealed by rules about how land was allocated to different purposes, how it was distributed within

the population, and how it was transmitted from one generation to the next. Davis' book too has become one of the early standards for us Mediterraneanists.

It was characteristic of these early anthropologists that they were all very cautious with ethnographical details, and they often specifically stated that their findings referred to particular villages, though probably, they said, their findings had recurring features of other villages. This goes also for Campbell's *Honour, Family, and Patronage* (1974 (1964)), which is another classic no Mediterraneanist can afford to miss. The title of his work can also be said to cover much of the early anthropological Mediterranean research, as the three concepts honour, family, and patronage have been fundamental for the studies in the whole area (Peristiany 1974 (1966)).

At the beginning of the 1990s Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers edited their last book in common – *Honour and Grace in Anthropology*. This one was a continuation of their book from the 1960s on honour and shame, but it concentrated on an aspect that had been neglected at the time of their first work – the relation between honour and the realm of the sacred. It is impossible, the writers now maintained, to make a complete analysis of honour without examining how it is related to ritual and religion: 'The ties with ritual are obvious, for rites establish consensus as to "how things are" and thus they fix legitimacy. Hence ritual is the guarantor of the social order, conveying honor, not only in the formal distribution of dignities on ceremonial occasions, but also in the sense of making manifest the honorable status of the actors.' As for religion, honour is brought into this sphere through its relation to 'the ultimate source of the sacred within each individual' – in this sense, a person's honour is sacred. Both honour and grace are thus shown to deal with the destiny of man and his relations with other people and with God respectively, and, acting within the prevailing value system, they both legitimise the established order (p. 2ff).

The choice of place for their fieldwork has often led to early Mediterraneanists being accused of concentrating their research on small, marginalized mountain villages and presenting each village set in a very shal-

low time-scale and as an isolate with no relations to a larger regional or national level, and without putting their findings in relation to studies of other scholars (see e.g. Davis 1977:7-10). However, this certainly does not hold for everybody. Pitt-Rivers' first book dealt with local social structures and their interplay with national social structures. Another renowned early Mediterraneanist, Ernestine Friedl, specifically wrote that one of the good things about doing research in a Western European country is that it gives the scholar the possibility to take advantage of work done by academics representing other disciplines, like linguistics, history, economy, psychology, and sociology (1962:4-5).

Nor could this preference for small marginalized villages be true for anybody working in western Sicily, if by small villages is meant communities with a couple of thousand inhabitants or less. The fact is that the countryside here is sparsely populated, as even farmers prefer to live not on scattered farmsteads or in small villages but in larger communities, so-called agro-towns – compact, nucleated settlements, which are 'overwhelmingly rural in their basis of subsistence yet urban in size, townscape and orientation' (Blok and Driessen 1984:111). This is due to a general depreciation of agricultural work and country life as such, and a general view that only in towns and cities one can live a decent life and be part of *civiltà* (civilisation) (see chapter 5, see also e.g. Schneider and Schneider 1976:66; Ginsborg 1990:136; Gabaccia 2000:85,96).



More foreign anthropologists were to come to the Mediterranean area, including South Italy. In the 1960s and 1970s Jeremy Boissevain, Anton Blok, and Constance Cronin carried out work in Sicily, and today the American anthropologists Jane Schneider, Peter Schneider, and Anthony H. Galt are among the most internationally well-known scholars working on the island. These scholars have all carried out their fieldwork in the western part of the island, most of them thus not very far from my own field.

Though the first generation of modern Mediterraneanists did not in general talk about the area as a culturally homogenous unit, such a discussion was to

come. In a path-breaking article, Jane Schneider (1971) argued that the pre-occupation with female chastity had long been a pan-Mediterranean characteristic. As her argumentation went, the whole area shows similar ecological, political, and economic circumstances, which produce similar cultural codes. Under these circumstances, atomistic kinship units have competed during history with one another over scarce natural resources as well as over prestige and power in the absence of an effective state control. Women have been regarded as one of the resources, and the control each group exercised over its female members is comparable with the group's protection of its physical boundaries. Therefore, Schneider concluded, the Mediterranean is to be regarded as a cultural unit. (For a further discussion on women, female chastity, and the honour and shame concept see chapter 5.)

True, Schneider was not the very first scholar to present the concept of Mediterranean unity. In 1949 the historian Fernand Braudel had published his book *La méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, in which he introduced the concept of a circum-Mediterranean unity due to the area's ecological unity – a homogeneous climate and a triumvirate of the three crops wheat, olives, and grapes (1997 (1949)). It was Schneider's article, however, that started off the debate that still continues on whether or not it is correct and useful scholarship to regard the Mediterranean as a more or less homogenous culture area.

As pointed out by João de Pina-Cabral, there is a dividing line between American anthropologists, like Schneider, on the one hand, to whom the notion of culture areas has been central to the development of the discipline, and British anthropologists, on the other hand, who have generally shown an unwillingness to regard the Mediterranean as a culture area. The latter's negation of unity, Pina-Cabral understands as a reflection of Evans-Pritchard's notion of the comparative method in social anthropology, stressing fieldwork methodology and therefore insisting 'on the greater sociological relevance of differences than of similarities' (1989:400-401).

Thus, when in the late 1970s the British scholar John Davis published *People of the Mediterranean*, in which he surveys most of the anthropological lite-

rature on the Mediterranean published before 1975, he did not propose cultural homogeneity for the area, though he argued that it certainly constitutes a unit due to its common history. Urging anthropologists to deepen their historical perspective, he wrote that the Mediterranean people 'have been trading and talking, conquering and converting, marrying and migrating for six or seven thousand years – is it then unreasonable to assume that some anthropological meaning can be given to the term "mediterranean"?' (1977:13).

As this is a thesis on the Sicilian family, there is reason to stress that also among scholars specifically studying family structures on the two opposite sides of the Mediterranean Sea, there are disagreements about whether the emphasis should be laid on diversity or on unity. Scholars stressing differences point to the importance of the descent group, close marriage, and polygyny in North Africa, while circumstances are quite the reverse in South Europe. Believers in unity, on the other hand, stress 'the common role of dowry, perceive bilateral elements in the schema of unilineal descent and point to the notions of honour and shame that mark the whole of the Mediterranean world' (Goody 1983:6).

One of the most persistent opponents to the view of the Mediterranean area as homogenous has been Michael Herzfeld, who argues strongly against the culture area concept as such, since, according to him, it runs the risk of perpetuating cultural stereotypes. Discussing, on the one hand, cultural traits which have been said to characterise the area, like honour and shame and the evil eye, and, on the other hand, Mediterraneanism, Herzfeld convincingly shows that one term not only strengthens the other but in the end confirms the existence of the other – the result is a circular discussion which does not lead anywhere (1984).

Personally, I sympathise with Pina-Cabral, who, in contrast to Schneider's viewing of the Mediterranean as a cultural unit, Davis' viewing of it as historically homogenous, and Herzfeld's emphasis on particularism, advances an argument in favour of regional comparison. His point of departure is that without contextualisation, ethnographic knowledge would be meaningless.

Thus he suggests that instead of defining an area on the basis of political and academic interests, we should begin by thinking more in terms of indigenous categories, while relying ‘increasingly on cultural, social, and geographic contextualisation to assess the meaning of the sample we are studying’. In line with Evans-Pritchard’s advocacy of the comparative method, he also urges us to engage in quoting other ethnographers. To start from subregional comparisons and work towards wider and wider levels of comparison, while trying to assess the degree of sociocultural uniformity and differentiation within a historical and sociological framework, would allow us to get the necessary categories of regional comparison in order to delimit our fields of expertise (1989:403-405).



Let me finish this section by adding that the Mediterranean area as defined by anthropologists does not correspond to the geographical area bordering the Mediterranean Sea. Usually the Balkans north of Greece and the French mainland are not included, and only rarely so is Israel but then hardly ever the Jews. On the other hand, Portugal on the Atlantic coast is always included. However, this mapping out may perhaps not hold forever. The new politically united Europe, for instance, may make the anthropologists decide to rearrange the ethnographical map (Stewart 2000:210). Time will tell.

### **Italian Anthropology**

As the development of Italian anthropology has followed a somewhat different route compared to the works presented so far, it is presented here under a separate heading. When family studies are discussed in the following, however, the two traditions will be put side by side in order to better illustrate their partly diverse views on the South Italian family.



In making a brief summary of the development of Italian anthropology there are three names that must be mentioned – Benedetto Croce (1866-1952),

historian and philosopher; Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), political philosopher; and Ernesto de Martino (1908-1965), historian of religion. These three men have all had an exceptional influence upon modern Italian anthropology, though none of them was an anthropologist in the current sense of the word and only de Martino carried out fieldwork.

Following Croce, historicism has been one of the main characteristics of Italian anthropology. In fact, historians (most often historians of religion) have often taught the discipline and, for instance, from the academic year starting in the autumn of 2002 a historian is responsible for the anthropological basic studies at the faculty of *lettere e filosofia* (literature and philosophy) at La Sapienza, the biggest university in Rome. In his vast scientific production, however, Croce maintained that history was to be found only in the developed parts of the world and that doing anthropological work meant studying the truly ‘others’ – that is, peoples without a history (see e.g. Saunders 1984; cf. Wolf 1990 (1982)).

From the time the fascists took power in Italy until they lost it by the end of World War II, Italian anthropology was forced to stand more or less still – only folkloristic studies were permitted, along with a couple of studies on the Italian colonies. (Here we have to remember that Italy had only a few colonies, so these never did become an important focus for the attention of Italian anthropologists in general (Grottanelli 1980:232).) After the war, a high degree of politicisation continued to characterise Italian anthropology, parallel with the historicism, as a consequence of Gramsci’s writings.

Gramsci was one of the founders of the Italian Communist Party in 1921. A few years later the fascists put him in jail, where he remained until his death. His prison notebooks, published after the war (see e.g. Hoare and Nowell Smith 1997), have had such an extraordinary impact on Italian anthropologists, as well as other groups of intellectuals, that from the late 1940s until at least two decades ago, being Italian and doing anthropology meant having made a leftist political choice.

To Gramsci, doing anthropology meant studying the culture of oppressed

groups, like peasants and workers, and their relation to power – he himself being particularly interested in the role of ideology in class relations. Pointing to the situation in South Italy, he maintained that because of its underdevelopment Italy could not be studied as a homogenous whole (see the discussion on the two Italies below) and that anthropologists should study the lower classes of the South. In fact, it was not until the late 1970s that Italian scholars really included North Italy in their work and, with a few well-known exceptions like the Africanist Vinigi Grottanelli, it is not until lately that they have begun working abroad on a larger scale. Gramsci thereby also contributed to a third characteristic of Italian anthropology, namely that of studying its own society.

De Martino embraced all of these three characteristics – historicism, politicisation, and the study of one's own society. He was the first Italian to actually carry out anthropological fieldwork, which he did on popular religious traditions in South Italy. In 1948 he published his most significant book, *Il mondo magico* (The Magic World) (1973 (1948)), which is still read by Italian students of anthropology. In spite of always remaining strongly influenced by Croce, de Martino, however, came to the position that all peoples have a history – no people are to be found outside history.

In the 1950s young Italian anthropologists, among them the renowned Tullio Tentori, had begun to see anthropology as an activist and applied social science and they had turned their attention to the study of complex societies of the contemporary world – especially in Italy. In doing so, they remained loyal to historicism and leftist political ideas, though blending it with contemporary American anthropological ideas. One of their focuses of investigation was family structure and dynamics in subaltern groups in the spirit of Gramsci. This holds, for example, also for Alberto M. Cerisi, another giant in Italian anthropology. Parts of Tentori's work, however, did not focus on subaltern society, and following him Italian anthropologists began in the 1970s also to study the bourgeois culture, including youth culture, and youth movements (see e.g. Saunders 1984:454,458-459).

Anthropology has become a well-established discipline in modern Italian



intellectual life. Anthropologists often contribute to 'political and cultural reviews, newspapers, and national television. In addition, "anthropological" insights appear to be respected by the public, and politicians, journalists, Vatican spokesmen, and other public figures often make reference to anthropology,' Saunders writes. In spite of the high level and richness of Italian anthropology, however, it is known only to a limited extent outside the country, which may be explained by Italians usually publishing their works in their native language. Thus, they are writing more for one another and for a domestic rather than an international public (ibid.:448-449).

Throughout this thesis modern Italian anthropologists, inheritors of this academic tradition, will be referred to. However, there is also a group of trained sociologists and historians working in South Italy who are of utmost interest to this study on the family. In the middle of the 1980s they founded *IMES – Istituto Meridionale di Storia e Scienze Sociali* (The Southern Institute of History and Social Sciences) and the journal *Meridiana*. I will have several reasons to come back to these scholars, as they have done profound studies of family and kinship in the South.



In the course of discussing the South Italian family and its structure in the chapters to follow, it will become clear that there is a cleavage between how it is presented by the literature in English on the one hand and by the literature in Italian on the other. Though the family has been one of the main focuses for both academic traditions, English-speaking scientists have generally described the South Italian family as distinctly nuclear in its structure and isolated from the larger kin group, while Italian scholars, quite contrary to this, have stressed the importance of the kin group. In this thesis I will let the two traditions confront one another specifically on this point, and I do hope that my efforts to do so, thereby also making the literature in Italian known to a larger audience, will contribute to further developing Mediterranean studies.

Leaving the general discussion on the growth of anthropology in the Mediterranean area, I will now present the scholars who laid the groundwork

for the view that in South Italy it is the nuclear family that completely dominates family structure.

### Amoral Familism

One of the contemporaries of Pitt-Rivers and other early non-Italian anthropologists working in the Mediterranean area was the American social scientist Edward C. Banfield, who published in 1958 *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*, which created a debate that is still going on. Banfield had found that in a small town called Montegrano (fictive name for Chiaromonte), situated in the South Italian region Basilicata, where he and his family lived for altogether nine months in 1954 and 1955, everyone acted as if they were following an ethos which ran: 'Maximize the material, short-run advantage of the nuclear family; assume that all others will do likewise.' He maintained that this ethos was an impediment to political and economic progress, as it made people unable to act jointly for the common good outside the nuclear family. In fact, for a private citizen to take a serious interest in a public problem was regarded by the people as 'abnormal and even improper', and the general assumption would be that whatever group was in power, it was self-serving and corrupt. Banfield labelled this ethos *amoral familism* (1958:8-10,85-87,102).

According to Banfield, people lived in a world filled with fear because of poverty, apprehension about premature death, and a feeling of not being altogether of the larger society due to the degraded status of their manual labour. Moreover, they suffered the absence of the security an extended family may give to its single members. Thus, every adult had to protect his or her own nuclear family by any means and preoccupy himself or herself exclusively with what was best for it – that is, its material short-run advantage. Outsiders were seen as potential competitors and therefore treated with suspicion. An advantage given to an outsider was by necessity thought of as being at the expense of one's own family.

As the gentry of Montegrano were 'as exclusively preoccupied with material

advantage as [were] the peasants', Banfield maintained that it was approximately correct to say that amoral familism was the ethos of the whole society. He drew the conclusion that 'most people of Montegrano have no morality except, perhaps, that which requires service to the family'. This last statement was followed, however, by a footnote saying that '[e]ven this does not always operate' (ibid.:124,141).

As shown above, many scholars working in the Mediterranean in the middle of the 20th century also usually lived in small places like Montegrano, but unlike Banfield they would describe these places in their entirety. Writing about a specific ethos, as Banfield did, was something different, and the book drew much attention. To be able to better understand Banfield, who in the debate following the publication of his book has not only been praised but also, and more often, severely criticised, he has to be put into the historic, political, and scholarly context of his day.

As an American, Banfield belonged to the winning side after World War II. Together with the fact that, as it seems, he had little or no interchange with Italian sociologists while carrying out his study, this may very well explain the ethnocentricity in his understanding of the South Italian social reality – something he was often to be accused of later (see below; see also De Masi 1976:9,15).

In Italy the 1950s were the days of far-reaching national development plans for the South, like an agrarian reform and the introduction of the *Cassa per il Mezzogiorno* (Fund for South Italy). It was also the period following the European Recovery Program (the American Marshall Plan, as it was called). The scientists involved in these programs had to pave the way for economic growth by proposing reliable development plans based on their findings regarding, among many other things, the reasons for the 'backwardness' of South Italy.

Banfield was certainly not alone in his negative way of viewing the South Italian society. One of his fellow countrymen, F. G. Friedman, for instance, had also found among the peasants an incapability to collaborate with non-

family members and an ‘almost pathological sense of insecurity’ and distrust of the outside world. The only form of real social cooperation found was *l’omertà*, defined by the author as ‘the conspiratorial silence of a whole community when a crime is committed’, a cooperation through which the individual, according to Friedman, surrendered nothing (1953:221-225).

Among Italian academics and intellectuals in general it was also obvious after World War II that the socio-economic conditions in South Italy were a disaster. Carlo Levi, for example, had published his book *Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli* (Christ Stopped at Eboli) in 1945, in which he very realistically described the conditions under which people were living. This purely literary work was an enormous success. Together with the general understanding of the difficult situation in the South, Levi’s book certainly helped to pave way for Banfield.



The picture of the South as presented by Banfield was thus generally accepted, but it was his way of explaining the difficult situation as having its roots in amoral familism that was soon to be criticised by both Italian and foreign scholars. Though Banfield was describing something very real and pervasive when it came to behaviour and cognition in the Mediterranean region, many of these scholars kept maintaining that Banfield’s model was much too simplistic (Gilmore 1982:189-190). Banfield was accused of mistakenly seeing the prevailing ethos as a cause instead of a consequence of certain social and economic characteristics like poverty, historical marginalization, and social stratification and thereby putting the blame on the victim, instead of seeing the problem as emanating from above. Some critics thought that there was no need to turn to a complicated concept like amoral familism in order to explain the situation in South Italy, that these more concrete structural causes were enough to explain it. Banfield was also accused of cultural bias in maintaining that a certain kind of community ethos was the road to economic salvation and in regarding short-run material advantage as morally inferior to the long-term (see e.g. Pizzorno 1966:64-66; Brøgger 1971:115-116; De Masi 1976:20-21; Pitkin 1999 (1985):283).

Another American scholar, the anthropologist Sydel F. Silverman, who stands for a more materialist predilection, did not reject the term familism as such, but argued from a social-structural perspective that it was misleading to regard an ethos as the foundation of a society, since values never have that role. Instead, she was of the opinion that the agricultural system organised around socially isolated nuclear families, together with the lack of formal associations, instability of political alignments, and a weakness of the community as an entity, were the reasons for familism in South Italy. The situation was quite the opposite in Central Italy, Silverman argued, where extended families worked together on the farms and where there were cooperation and formal organisations outside the family circle as well as stable political alignments. Thus, the ethos of familism was a consequence of social characteristics, which had their foundation in the agricultural system. This was why, according to the author, the southerners were “prisoners” not of their ethos but of their agricultural system’ (1968:1-3,17-18).

Rather than discussing whether it is the ethos or the social and economic characteristics which constitute the foundation of a society, which I consider to go beyond the scope of this thesis, my point of departure is the family organisation and the norms and values guiding people’s social relations, in order to understand the relation between these two components, irrespective of which comes first. And contrary to Silverman, I avoid the term familism, which in my view has too many negative connotations. Instead I prefer to talk about family networks.



In spite of these critical voices, many scholars continue to point to the lack of voluntary associations for concerted action among South Italians. One of these has been Percy A. Allum in his depiction of the political situation in post-war Naples. Starting from Ferdinand Tönnies’ well-known model of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*,<sup>1</sup> he maintained that the Neapolitans were

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<sup>1</sup> Allum summarises the two concepts as follows: *Gemeinschaft* ‘is a social formation based on feeling, in which every individual considers every other individual as an end in himself, knows him personally and shares a great deal in his private life. The individuals who compose it intrin-

trapped in their *Gemeinschaft*: 'A Neapolitan's conduct is rarely dictated by formal procedures but rather by personal ties of gratitude which leads to exploitation of subordinates by those with power and authority.' Although *Gesellschaft* values are to be found within certain groups, informal networks dominate heavily, and the lack of organised group activity is almost total. This society is thus, according to Allum, characterised by a contradiction between the predominantly *Gemeinschaft* values of local society and the *Gesellschaft* norms of the state system (1973:61,91-93,111,120,325).

Thomas Belmonte, whose work was concentrated in the poor parts of Naples, also saw the Neapolitan society as composed of two polarities; there is the recognition, on the one hand, that the 'social philosophy of the poor Neapolitan is attuned to the imperatives of individual survival', and on the other, 'that the requirements of human well-being are rooted in communal support and within networks of positive reciprocity'. Social phenomena, he said, are perceived in personalistic terms and 'social order emerges alternately as an uneasy truce between hostile individuals or as the mutual expression of empathy and need'. People are thus not antisocial. On the contrary, Belmonte found that people mattered to one another but that, within what he called 'the tragic framework of community', human interactions tend to be instrumentalised, although not randomised, and 'people continue to live in communities, albeit broken part-communities, which suffer the egoism of the individual and at the same time relieve him of his immense loneliness'.

In this Neapolitan society, families are 'intensely nuclear', although people of the same quarter are close to one another. This closeness, however, provides opportunities for exploitation as well as protection and aid. As for collective organisation, Belmonte claims that people may be quick to riots, but 'they are not a people for organized rallies and marches, unless these be corrupted with

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-sically value their mutual relationship and the fact that they are a vital part of such a social entity.' *Gesellschaft*, on the other hand, is 'the social formation founded on interest, in which the individual considers the others as the means, knows them impersonally, and shares his external life only with them. Individuals value their relationship only extrinsically' (1973:5; see also Tönnies 1974 (1887)).

a carnival air'. Remaining attached to personalistic hierarchies of traditional authority, they have no influence on the outside political and social environment, and cunning is the means to staying alive in a hostile world extremely full of violence (1989:36-39,44-46,83,123,128,140-144).

Neither Allum nor Belmonte was as totally negative as Banfield when describing the South Italian society – in fact, according to Belmonte, Banfield's view was 'causally lopsided' (1989:85) – but they both drew a rather dark picture of the society they studied. When *Meridiana* in 1995 published a series of articles on a study of *associazionismo culturale* (cultural voluntary associating) in South Italy, we got quite a different picture (see also chapter 6). The purpose of the study was to evaluate the meaning of these associations for the development of the South. Quite unexpectedly for the scholars themselves, the study showed that the number of cultural associations in Sicily was as high as in other parts of Italy. It also showed that more than two-thirds of these associations were created after 1980 (which is a much higher figure than the corresponding one in Central and North Italy) and that they were to be found also outside the major cities. This was all interpreted as a result of modern education and increased well-being in *il Mezzogiorno* (South Italy, including Sicily and Sardinia) as well as a significant sign of decreased fatalism, increased belief in one's own powers, and increased trust in others. Associations, it was concluded, showed a tendency towards breaking down traditional familistic patterns, which used to be a potential obstacle for development, and towards creating a resource for yet other forms of organisation and social participation (Ramella 1995:151ff; Trigilia 1995; see also Putnam 1993; Diamanti 1995; Florida and Ramella 1995).

Gabriella Gribaudo too has shown that the family does not make the individual incapable of acting as an autonomous person, and neither is it the family as such that impedes various forms of solidarity with the outside world. Believing otherwise would be to give the family too much importance when it comes to how to explain the difficulties of the South, according to her. She points to the well-known group of justices in Palermo, led by Falcone and Borsellino until they were murdered at the beginning of the 1990s, and she writes that though they were all members of strong family networks they,

perhaps more than anybody else, represented lawfulness and personified the sense of the state (1993:19). And in the book *Famiglia meridionale senza familismo – Strategie economiche, reti di relazione e parentela* (Mediterranean Family without Familism – Economic Strategies, Networks of Relations and Kinship), twenty-one Italian scholars aim at differentiating the old stereotypes of familism and nuclearity by showing the many different family organisations to be found in the modern South as well as through history (Meloni 1997).

Thus Italian scholars, more often than others, maintain that the family does not need to be a hindrance to collaboration and development, even though it might render them more difficult, and this is what I too say in this thesis. There may be differences among these various scholars as well as between them and me with regard to what they see as the reasons for the problems of the South, but we all show in different ways that there are many examples of successful joint actions and thus that the picture is much more complex than the stereotype often referred to. The massive demonstrations after the assassinations of justices Falcone and Borsellino are but one of many examples put forward showing joint actions (Benigno and Giarrizzo 1999e:129,140; see also Ginsborg 1998:232; Alcaro 1999), even though the rage manifested directly after the murders has now faded away (Gunnarson 2002; Santino 2002). In the last chapter I will give examples of the kind of collaboration I found outside the family networks studied.



Other Italian scholars have protested against viewing the South as undifferentiated in its backwardness instead of seeing the society as diverse and changing (Bevilacqua 1996:85-86). They pay much attention to various stereotypes regarding the southerners. One of them is Italo Pardo, who once urged us to reinterpret the southerners and to question the view that 'bogged down by lack of trust in each other and by their amoral familism and superstitious beliefs, southerners are politically and socially backward; narrow individualists who lack social sense and cannot be trusted' (1997:84). This does not mean, though, that these scholars are trying to deny the actual problems when



it comes, for instance, to public institutions not functioning in an effective way (Meloni 1997:ix).

Like Allum and Belmonte, Pardo too carried out his study in the big city of Naples. He showed that the Neapolitans he studied were not passive, but strong entrepreneurs negotiating between material and non-material aspects in dealing with the objective restrictions of everyday life. Distrusted by the élite in power, and despite their preference for acting as individuals, they did take actions that had a socially oriented character. As examples Pardo took collective actions such as people fighting together against unemployment or mothers fighting against drugs. According to him, it is a matter of defining citizenship and responsibility from above or from below, and moral density from below is important to political ethics and civil life.

Important for Pardo's argument is that moral considerations are to be found in individual as well as collective actions, albeit in interaction with material interests. Pardo shows that 'obligation is governed by negotiated decisions which are in line with the complex relationship between morality, social norms and personal entrepreneurship', and 'that an individual-oriented understanding of rational choice and action in a given structure need not be bonded to an instrumental (or marketistic) view of motives' (1996:89,168).

Pardo also found awareness among ordinary Neapolitans that collective action is appropriate when it is about moral goals of public interest. 'In these instances, competition gives way to a clear emphasis on solidarity, organization and collective identity, including the sense of belonging and of fighting together for a just cause. This kind of approach is supported rather than contradicted by the equally widespread belief that mass action is of little use when one is trying to redress unfair work relations or to obtain a job, a licence or proper medical treatment.' Thus an inclination to private action should not be interpreted as a lack of ability among Neapolitans to organise themselves. It indicates that they remain committed to individually significant and well-defined objectives (ibid.:178-180).

In *Sull'identità meridionale* (About South Italian Identity) (1999) Mario

Alcaro gives the reader examples of what he sees as traditional South Italian values – hospitality, gift-giving, friendship, godparenthood, and solidarity among family members, neighbours, and fellow villagers – and he raises the question why these values should be regarded as impediments to economic and political development. He goes on to show that this is not so, but that, quite the contrary, they may contribute to development.

It is the weak state that is to be regarded as impediment number one to development, according to Piero Bevilacqua. In the foreword to Alcaro's book he writes that during the last decade the traditional negative view of *il Mezzogiorno* and its role in the Italian nation has changed, at least in many intellectual settings. The old position has been shown to be intellectually as well as scientifically untenable. Bevilacqua, like Alcaro, maintains that one should not look for the shortcomings of the South in its traditional values. The main problem of modern Italian public life is instead the state, which has not been able to create a judicial system that treats all citizens in the same way. This weakness has damaged the whole Italian society, but particularly so the South. The state's incapacity has led to private sanctions of which organised crime is but one outcome, to a lack of trust not only towards the state but towards any forms of cooperation, and likewise to a lack of national feeling (1999).



As this summary of the debate following the publication of Banfield's book shows, the discussion he started almost half a century ago continues. Before ending this section I will briefly comment on the common understanding of the concept familism: In the Italian dictionary Zingarelli familismo is defined as a *[v]incolo particolarmente intenso di solidarietà fra i membri di una stessa famiglia, spec. quando prevalga sul legame con la comunità sociale* (a particularly strong relation of solidarity among members of one and the same family, in particular when it prevails over the bonds to the social community [my translation]) (1994:670). In this thesis I will use the term family network instead of familism for reasons given above. As I understand it, the family networks that I found in field are in agreement with the Zingarelli definition

of familism, though it must be added to this definition that the relations among members of one and the same family do not necessarily have to be only of solidarity but, as I intend to show, are also a matter of social, cultural, emotional, and economic dependence. Moreover, Zingarelli does not define what 'family' means; this I will do in the following chapter. I will also show in this thesis that the families studied are very closed units.

### **The Position of the Nuclear Family**

In studying modern family systems on the South Italian mainland, the non-Italian scholars mentioned above have usually stressed the nuclear family not only as the dominant household formation but also as the centre of the social organisation, while, according to them, the wider kin group is often filled with tensions and conflicts. Belmonte, for instance, described his Neapolitan families as 'intensively nuclear' and moreover wrote that while among rural poor the nuclear family can sometimes afford to grow another stem, among urban poor in South Italian cities and agro-towns, poverty contributes to pressuring towards nuclearity, and hence in Naples '[m]afia-style clans are a bourgeois luxury', while poor people 'prefer to travel light when it comes to kinsmen' (1989:83-84).

This goes also for the American Constance Cronin, who in 1970 published a comparative study of Sicilians in Sicily and in Australia. Stressing the importance of the nuclear family, she wrote that '[t]he Sicilian nuclear family, composed of mother, father, and unmarried children, is the center and the core of the social organization', and 'the socialization techniques employed make it impossible for individuals to exist alone'. She found that single individuals completely identified themselves with their nuclear family, while there was distrust and competition between related nuclear families. The advancement of one of them meant loss of prestige for the other; thus contacts were 'kept at a minimum'. Cronin later wrote in an article that the nuclear family was 'the hub' of the Sicilian society. People did not have any sense of belonging in reference to the country or the town, and closeness to a relative outside the nuclear family, to a friend or 'even oneself' was a potential threat

to the unity and integrity of the nuclear family (1970:59-60,117-119; 1977:71-72).

It is not far-fetched to believe that Belmonte and Cronin as well as other American scholars were to some extent influenced either directly by their fellow-national Banfield, who had strongly emphasised the centrality and isolation of the nuclear family, or by the same influences that had had their impact on him (cf. Colclough 1994:33-34). This may very well also hold for other non-Italian anthropologists who have likewise stressed the nuclear family as *the* central institution, like Susan G. Berkowitz (1984), Jeremy Boissevain (1966:19), and Jane Hilowitz (1976:56). According to Pina-Cabral, Schneider's article on the supposed cultural unity of the Mediterranean from 1971 (see above), where she argued among other things that 'throughout the Mediterranean the nuclear family is the primary economic unit' (1971:7), also strongly contributed to this family stereotype (Pina-Cabral 1989:403).

Native scholars, in contrast to their foreign colleagues, have many times stressed the importance of wider kin relations among the southerners. Fortunata Piselli, for instance, does not share the opinion that it is the nuclear family which predominates the social organisation. She writes that it is the kin group that has traditionally been the main element for cohesion and stability within the South Italian society she studied. Modern times have not changed that but have only found other forms for its perpetuation (1981). Another Italian, Vincenzo Guarrasi, carrying out a study among urban poor in Palermo in the 1970s, showed the importance of the kin group in times of economic hardships (1978:61). Necessity has made the southerners used to turning to family, kin, and friends as a mode of compensation for the historical deficiency of the Italian state, Alcaro argues (1999:44-45).

Official data support this, and ISTAT (the Italian Institute for National Statistics), for instance, sees the extended family, even though it does not compose a shared household, as the main social security cushion (*il principale ammortizzatore sociale*) in Italian society (1999:259ff). The reformed Italian family law of 1975, which abolished the father as the official family head (see chapter 3), moreover upheld a wide range of family and kin obliga-

tions. Thus parents are financially responsible for their children virtually without any age limit, and children for their parents, children-in-law for parents-in-law and vice versa, as well as siblings for each other (Timoteo 1995:273ff).

I ally myself with the Italian social scientists who have shown that the larger kin group is of utmost importance in the life of the southerners. In the chapters to follow I will show that in spite of the nuclear family dominating on the household level, related nuclear families often live close to each other though in separate households, and members of related nuclear families visit, assist, and collaborate with one another on a daily basis.

### The Two Italies – An Everyday Symbolic Geography

In writing about familism, the scholars cited above referred to the situation found in southern Italy without saying anything about the country's northern parts. This is due to a general understanding in Italy that the country is divided into two very different parts – the two Italies – where North is regarded as the norm and South (including Sicily)<sup>2</sup> as its strange variant (see the discussion above on Italian anthropology). Northerners and southerners look at each other with mutual suspicion, but while the northerners may feel contempt for the southerners, referring sometimes to them as *gli africani* (the Africans) or *cafoni* (country bumpkins), the southerners, in spite of this, regard the North as a more civilised and a more developed part of their country (see e.g. Douglass 1983:182-183).

Ever since the Unification of Italy in 1861,<sup>3</sup> much has been said about the

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<sup>2</sup>One may sometimes find more diversified ways in which to divide Italy. ISTAT, for example, divides the country into five parts; northwest, northeast, central, south, and the islands (Sicily and Sardinia) (2000b:88). However, the division most often referred to is the one dividing the country into two parts.

<sup>3</sup>Italy was unified in stages. This is why one can see different years given as the year of Unification. However, 1861 is often referred to as the year of Unification, although the whole country including Rome was not unified until 1870 (see the historical appendix).

economic, political, and social gap between its northern and southern parts. The political scientist Robert D. Putnam dated the origin of this gap to the years around 1100 AD. At that time the South had a new Norman regime with its court in Palermo, a period often referred to as the most prosperous and best-administered epoch ever in Sicily. However, the Normans were also feudal, bureaucratic, and absolutist – the king had received his power from God and the people were his subjects. In contemporary North Italy, on the other hand, the towns developed a successful republican system, where each town had a self-government based on the participation of a great part of the male population.

According to Putnam, this is how vertical ties of dependence came to characterise the South, while in the North horizontal ties of reciprocal solidarity dominated. The modern institutions of the society have not succeeded in homogenising these different patterns, long characterised in the South by reciprocal distrust, exploitation, and crime, but have themselves been affected by them. In his well-known book *Making Democracy Work – Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Putnam shows with statistics that the difficult situation in the South, often referred to by scholars as the *Southern Question*, remains problematic to this day and that the difference has become even more marked since 1970, when the Italian regions were given more independence (1993; see also chapter 6).

Putnam's quantitative work presents a simplified dualistic picture, which will always put the South second after the North (Lupo 1993:166), and Tarrow in a critical article rightly raises the question what Putnam would have made of the events taking place in North Italy just after he had finished writing his book, a situation that was filled with 'corruption scandals on top of separatism; of *mafia* infestation on top of years of terrorism and political kidnappings; of the collapse of the Marxist and Catholic subcultures with their panoply of mass organizations' (1996:392).

*Italy's 'Southern Question' – Orientalism in One Country* (Schneider 1998) is an interdisciplinary book which discusses the divided Italy in a more quali-

tative way, using the discourse of Orientalism as explored by Said (1978).<sup>4</sup> The authors aim to clarify the background to the supposed backwardness of the South and, at the same time, to reinterpret its history.

The book convincingly shows that the negative way of viewing the South originates not only from the northerners but that southern intellectuals as well have contributed to this view by criticising their own native society. Internationally known Sicilian writers like Giovanni Verga, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, and Leonardo Sciascia, for instance, have stressed the fatalism among their fellow countrymen and have clearly shown ambivalence as regards Sicily's possibility of ever changing (Rosengarten 1998:117ff; see also Petrusiewicz 1998:45-46). Even racial explanations of the difference between northerners and southerners once had their spokesmen, however few, among the southerners themselves (Patriarca 1998:88-89).

The contributors to Schneider's volume do not aim at denying the actual differences between the North and the South, but as Patriarca puts it, there is a need to criticise the strong tendency in Italy of naturalising and taking these differences for granted instead of historicizing and questioning them and thereby taking 'into consideration the contribution of representations in the making of realities'. As regards Putnam, he is criticised by Patriarca for paying too much attention to quantitative analysis of the degree of 'civicness' to be found in the northern and southern regions of Italy. This use of facts tends 'to re-enforce a classificatory and oppositional way of thinking' (1998:90-92).

The Southern Question discourse – which in social and political analysis is often also referred to as *meridionalismo* – has without doubt become 'an everyday symbolic geography for northerners and southerners alike' (Schneider 1998:1). Like the contributors to Schneider's book, many Italian scholars, some of whom will be referred to several times in this thesis, do not deny that there really is a difference between Italy's two parts, including a

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<sup>4</sup> Orientalism, in the words of Said, has to be understood as the way in which one part of the world imagines another, while at the same time dominating it.

general lack of trust and civic spirit (*spirito pubblico*) characterising the southerners, in particular the Sicilians, in their relations with public institutions as well as horizontally with other individuals, which obstructs development and cooperation (Bevilacqua 1999:xxv; Benigno and Giarrizzo 1999e:133; see also Cucchiari 1988:421), though their picture of the South is certainly not as lopsided as it once used to be.

In agreement with Schneider's statement, there is an often-heard saying in Sicily that all good things, including *una vita civile* (a civic life), come from north while the opposite comes from south. In this case, north may refer not only to North Italy but also to the countries further north, and correspondingly, south may refer to Africa as well as South Italy. This shows that the Southern Question discourse seems to have been internalised by the people themselves and that they thereby contribute to promoting old stereotypes. In the following chapters I will have reason to come back to this.

Figures to support this short review of the marked cleavage of Italy into two parts may easily be found: For instance, the average unemployment in Italy in 2000 was 10.6 per cent. The highest figures were to be found in the South, where 21 per cent of all men and women were unemployed, compared to 8.3 per cent in Central Italy, 5.3 per cent in North West, and 3.8 per cent in North East (ISTAT 2001:55). This gap between the South and the North is further emphasised, for example, in contemporary political rhetoric by, among others, Umberto Bossi, leader of the party *Lega Nord* (Northern League), who wants to separate North Italy from the rest of the country.



## Map of Central Mazara del Vallo

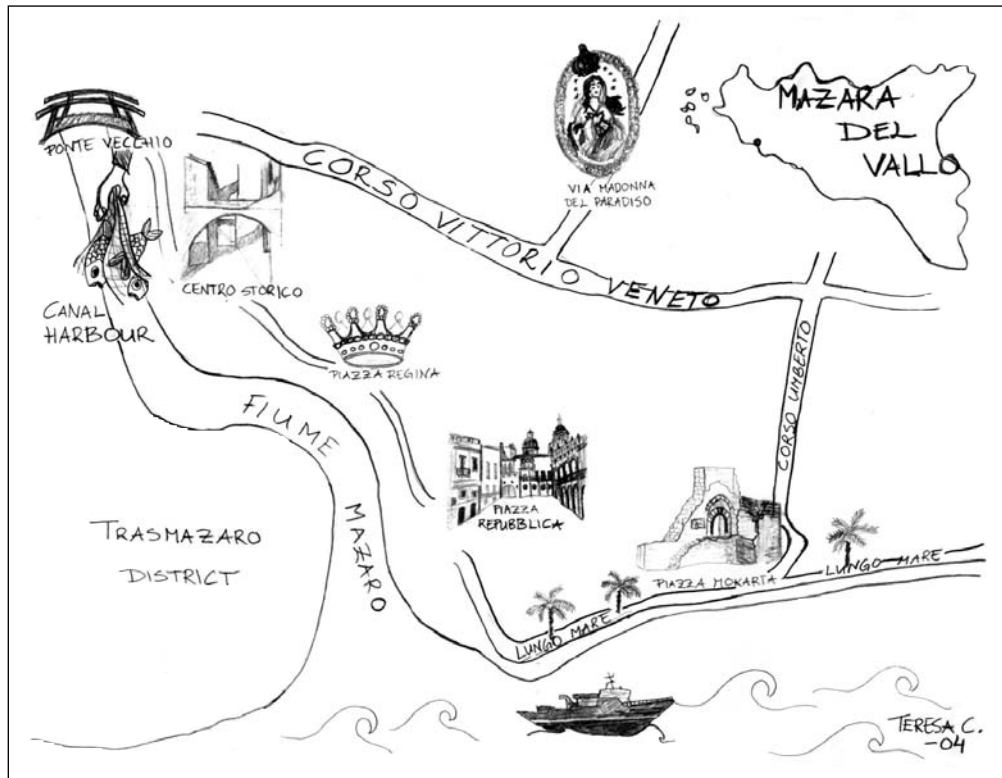


ILLUSTRATION: TERESA CARLESTÀ

## Getting Acquainted with the Local Setting

Sicily, with its approximately 25,000 square kilometres, is the largest of all Mediterranean islands. Situated right in the middle of the sea, for more than two thousand years, in times of peace as well as war, it has been reached by a great number of various navigators ranging from the ancient Greeks colonisers to today's modern Japanese fishing fleet (see the historical appendix).

Today the island has slightly more than five million inhabitants, most of them living in coastal towns and cities, the mountainous hinterland being populated to a much lesser degree.

The climate is subtropical, with hot summers and mild winters. The average coastal temperatures are 11 degrees Celsius for January and 26 degrees Celsius for July, though the *scirocco* winds from Sahara in summertime may cause temperature increases to 40 degrees, or even more. The interior mountain areas have a somewhat cooler climate, and Etna, the highest European volcano with an altitude of approximately 3,300 metres above sea level, is covered with snow for several months of the year.

Not only have the Sicilians witnessed eruptions of Etna many times, but earthquakes as well have time and again hit the whole of Sicily. The latest earthquake in Mazara del Vallo, causing material damage but no casualties, was in 1981. While in the field, I experienced one minor quake – scaring some of us, but leaving no damage behind. During the cold winter night of 15 January 1968, however, there was a large-scale catastrophe in the nearby Valle del Belice, with several hundreds persons dead, thousands of people hurt, and several villages more or less completely destroyed. The subsequent reconstruction work was accompanied by many scandals, including the disappearance of large amounts of money coming from both the Italian and foreign states as well as from various aid organisations. For decades people were forced to live, work, go to school, and do their shopping in military barracks while waiting for new houses to be constructed. Some of these villages were moved from their place of origin to new areas, while others were rebuilt on the same place where the old villages had been destroyed (see chapter 6).

Since ancient times up until at least the 18th century, wheat has been the dominant crop in Sicily (Benigno and Giarrizzo 1999c:38ff), with large quantities exported to the north as well as the south (North Africa). During the ancient era Sicily was, in the words of the Roman politician and writer Cato the Elder (234-149 BC), the 'Republic's granary, the nurse at whose breast the Roman people is fed' (cited in Finley 1968:123). Today wheat is still cultivated, but so, for example, are oranges and lemons, especially in the eastern part of the island, while in the western part grapes are cultivated to a larger extent. Here Marsala, with its famous dessert wine named after its town of origin, is situated right at the centre of the wine trade. Olive trees all over the island give the landscape its special character. This so-called Mediterranean triad – wheat, grapes, and olives – characterises not only Sicily but also much of the Mediterranean area due to its rather homogenous climate (see the section above, 'Positioning My Study...').



Mazara del Vallo, the place of my fieldwork, has approximately 52,000 inhabitants. It is a seaport situated at the extreme south-western tip of Sicily in the province of Trapani. As ports are never isolated, and this is true not least for the Mediterranean ports, Mazara del Vallo has been in contact with the outside world since ancient times. The closest mainland from here, Tunisia, is at a distance of approximately 140 kilometres.

Though the area has been inhabited since prehistoric times, there are almost no traces to be seen today of people living in the area of Mazara del Vallo before the Arabs. But one does not have to go far to find outstanding ancient archaeological sites. In the 7th century BC the Greeks founded Selinunte, situated approximately forty kilometres to the east, and today the excavated town is one of the archaeological parks of greatest interest in the Mediterranean area. Eighty kilometres north of Mazara del Vallo one may visit the ancient town Segesta, once in continuous conflicts with Selinunte, with its Greek theatre on the top of the mountain Barbaro and the Doric temple on a hillock below.

Under the Arabs, who dominated Sicily from the 9th to the 11th centuries,

Mazara del Vallo developed from a small village into a big, flourishing city. Although the Arabs did not leave any architectural remnants like mosques or baths (archaeologists have, however, found minor traces of this kind of buildings), their imprints on the city plan and the local culture are well attested to. Thus even today, in spite of traces left behind by later conquerors, western Sicily is often referred to as the Arab part of the island, while eastern Sicily is said to constitute the Greek part.

In the most recent decades the Sicilians have seen a second wave of Arab immigration. This time, though, the Arabs (mainly Tunisians) have not come as colonisers but as poor immigrants in search of job possibilities. This new trend has made Mazara del Vallo, thanks to between five and ten thousand North African immigrants (the figures vary due to many immigrants being there without permission), the most Arab of all Italian towns and cities expressed as a percentage of the number of inhabitants (Cusumano 1994; Hannachi 1998:49,58).

I never heard Arabic spoken, though, in spite of walking through the central town daily while carrying out my study, doing shopping, or visiting bars, *pizzerias*, and restaurants. The two people coexist in apparent peace, but are not integrated. Even if both groups confirm that there is no racism to be found, and this also accords with my own observations, Arabs and native *mazaresi* (plural form of *mazarese* – a person from Mazara del Vallo) do not mix. Tunisian children, for example, have a school of their own with teachers provided by the Tunisian state, who teach entirely in Arabic and French while following the curriculum of their home country. Only at the weekly market, when itinerant merchants bring their goods (all sorts of kitchen wares, linen, clothes, shoes, and other things at a convenient price) to an open area close to the churchyard outside town, did I see a number of Tunisians, represented among merchants as well as customers. The lack of racism or organised violence does not, however, preclude mutual prejudices between the two groups or sometimes a disparaging attitude among the locals towards the immigrants. In spite of this, Mazara del Vallo has been referred to as *la capitale della tolleranza* (the capital of the tolerance), which, as it was explained to me, is due to the Sicilians having experienced migration themselves, so that they

sympathise with and show acceptance towards the newcomers (Hannachi 1998:73ff; Cusumano 1998; Cusumano 2000:45; see also Cole 1997:100-102)



Downtown Mazara del Vallo is situated near the old canal-harbour. This is the classic view of the town and still the most appreciated motif on local post-cards, for example. From here, during the first decades of the last century, small fishing boats with sails and oars set out. A splendid view, I have been told. Today this is the harbour for minor fishing boats, and in addition, a minor fish auction as well as a small fish market are held here every day except Sunday.

Nearby we find the *centro storico* (historical centre) with its Arab town plan. Here one might easily get lost in the narrow, winding streets bordered by an old architecture reminiscent of the Islamic urban tradition, though to a large extent fallen into decay. Abandoned by the Sicilians after the earthquake in the beginning of the 1980s, the area, often referred to with the Arab word *casbah*, is now inhabited by immigrants, that is, North Africans and, lately, Slavs. Drug dealers and addicts may also be seen here.

*Piazza Repubblica* (the Square of the Republic), situated between the *centro storico* and the modern districts, is the heart of the town. It is flanked on one side by the cathedral constructed by the Normans at the end of the 11th century and later rebuilt, on another side by the bishop's palace, and on a third side by the 18th century theological seminary. On my very first day in Mazara del Vallo I was taught to stand with my back to the fourth side of the *piazza* with its ugly concrete town hall where the mayor resides, and which was constructed after the earthquake had destroyed the old building in 1981. From this position the view of the *piazza* in Baroque style would be really overwhelming because of its beauty, if only the number of cars and light motorbikes were limited.

From here the town extends to more modern quarters. The central streets *Corso Umberto* and *Corso Vittorio Veneto* make up the shopping area. Here

the latest Italian fashion is to be found in modern boutiques for teenagers or elegant shops for adults. In between these fashionable premises there are minor shops, bars, and offices. Here and there one can see groups of old men sitting on simple wooden chairs in bare locals open onto the street. Some of the men might be busy playing cards, others chat, and still others sit in silence watching the ongoing street life. These are the *circoli* (social clubs) for retired men, where they may spend their free time. Each club is the meeting point for a defined professional or interest group. Thus, for example, the old fishermen, the artisans, the civil servants, and the hunters have their clubs, where many men come to meet informally with their friends – some of them more or less on a daily basis.

This is also the area where my daughter and I rented a simple furnished flat in a house reconstructed in the beginning of the 1980s. The house had two storeys with one flat on each. Like all other local houses, it also had a *terrazza*, an open space for hanging out the laundry on the roof. Hanging out my laundry on the *terrazza*, I would see other women in the surroundings doing the same on top of their houses, while they were chatting across the streets. From here I could also see blue water tanks on most of the roofs. Four days a week, at least when everything worked well, the water pipes in our part of the town were turned on and water was distributed. With the help of an electric pump, we and our neighbours could then fill our tank in common. This we did in turn, in order to divide the costs of the expensive electricity.

Most restaurants and *pizzerias* are to be found along the sea front. Especially in summertime there is a row of eating-places open onto the shore in central town and further along the sea-road outside town. Some of these places have big advertisements saying that *couscous*, a typical Arab dish, is served. The usual supper out, though, especially among teenagers, is a *pizza*.

Near the modern harbour, constructed in an area that until the 1970s was regarded as outside town, the *Trasmazaro* district is situated. This is the home of a great part of the fishing population, which constitutes my main informant group. Here, as in other areas of the town, rich and poor buildings mix. The general picture of Mazara del Vallo is that different areas are not

each characterised by people and buildings of a more or less homogenous economic level, but that just as a small, very simple shop may be next to a fancy boutique in the shopping area, dwelling houses of various categories stand side by side. In *Trasmazaro* it might be a huge villa of one of the wealthy boat-owners standing side by side with a simple house of one of the fishermen. On the bottom floor of many of the houses one can see elderly men mending fishing nets. I never saw a young man doing this kind of job, and I know there is a general concern regarding who will be able to take over this important task when today's elderly generation is gone.

In the modern harbour the new premises of *la Capitaneria* (the military port authorities) are situated. The enormous Italian bureaucracy is well known and this authority is no exception. It is a heavy job for the owners of the fishing boats to have all the necessary documents prepared for the boats as well as for the crews in order to get the obligatory permissions each time a boat leaves the harbour. The military and the civil administrative staff keep all kinds of hand-written registers in big old-fashioned books, and on one of their writing desks I counted nineteen different stamps. As in many other offices, there were computers, but I never saw anyone using them.

The feeling of enclosure one gets walking through the *casbah*, with its expanses of walls surrounding the dwellings and separating private life from public, remains after one has left the historical centre behind and entered more modern neighbourhoods. The agglomeration of the houses is very dense. Windows are closed and covered by curtains, Venetian blinds, and shutters. Backyards and gardens are invisible to the walker passing by. The grey-yellowish stone houses rarely have an inviting frontage and many look rather run down, though upon entering them one will realise that the first appearance of the housing standard is very often deceiving (see chapter 5). Many streets are in bad shape too, and cats and dogs may be seen scavenging among the garbage left for the dustmen. It is a stone wilderness with very few exceptions, and in spite of the lively traffic and not least the noise pollution from the continuously present light motorbikes, it all gave me a feeling of gloominess and desolation.

Wherever one walks, the town is full of monumental religious complexes like churches, monasteries, and convents. Most of them came into being in the Middle Ages but underwent major transformations up until the late Baroque epoch. To find any imprints of the old city wall, demolished in the middle of the 19th century, however, one has to be a trained archaeologist.

Local culture takes its expression par excellence in connection with the religious celebrations of *la Madonna del Paradiso* (the Madonna of Paradise) and *San Vito*, the local male patron saint. During a few days in July the much-loved 18th century painting of the *Madonna del Paradiso* is brought in a series of corteges from one church to another. The *mazaresi* are indeed devoted to their *Madonna*. This devotion, together with the miracles attributed to the painting, is overwhelmingly manifested in the very last of these corteges, which brings the *Madonna* back to her own church. Thousands and thousands of devotees, many of them barefoot to fulfil a vow to the *Madonna*, form an endless procession behind the image. They carry lighted candles as they sing. In accordance with the tradition, beautiful handmade embroidered bed linens hang from the balconies here and there along the route of the cortege, and over the streets there are electric arches in fancy colours making the town look like a fairyland. This impressive scene touched me very much when I watched it for the first time on my reconnaissance tour in 1996. Two years later I took active part in the procession with some of my female informants. Participating in it, it all seemed less solemn and more like a social event than a religious service to me. People were chatting with each other about all sorts of things, now and then interrupting their small talk by partaking in a prayer or a hymn. However, they unanimously confirm their devotion to the *Madonna* in their talks with me.

The martyr *San Vito* has been the local patron saint since the beginning of the 17th century, with a special relationship to the fishermen. He is celebrated at the end of August with various religious and folkloristic manifestations. On the very last day of the celebrations the cortege brings his statue to a fishing boat waiting in the old canal-harbour. A ceremony of blessing the sea follows, and a laurel wreath is thrown into the sea to commemorate sailors who have drowned. The frequency of the name Vito among the *mazaresi*



males also bear witness to the vitality of this cult.

There is no organised tourism to Mazara del Vallo and spontaneous tourists are rare, despite the town's being situated not only close to the sea, but also, as mentioned, near archaeological zones of great interest. Nor is transportation any obstacle for a potential visitor. Highways and modern air-conditioned buses as well as slow old-fashioned trains permit an easy entry to Mazara del Vallo for a visitor, and a similarly easy departure from town for any *mazaresi* wanting to leave the island or visit nearby places like Trapani, their provincial capital; Palermo, capital of the Sicilian region; and Agrigento, capital of the province to the east.

Unemployment figures among the *mazaresi* are high, especially so among young people. The town has only a few minor industries, like a *pasta* factory, minor shipbuilding yards, and a cannery. Other places of work are the fishing boats, agriculture, construction businesses, the hospital, the municipality and other authorities, shops, restaurants, minor workshops, transports, and the schools. Regarding the latter, teenagers have the possibility to choose locally between various high schools. A couple of them concentrate their teaching on more theoretical studies preparing the students for university studies at a later stage. Other high schools have a more practical direction, like accounting or navigation, permitting students to start working (if they find a job!) directly after finishing school. For those who want to continue their studies at university level, Palermo University, approximately 120 kilometres north, is the closest.

### The Fishing Population

Once dominated by agriculture, the local economy today has fishing as its main constituent. With approximately 350 fishing boats – with an average weight of slightly more than 100 register tons – and a total of 3,500 men on the crews (Bondi 1997:2-5), Mazara del Vallo has the largest fishing fleet in the whole of Italy. In addition, other men are busy with the maintenance and service of the fleet. However, there is very little local processing of the fish

that are brought in. Most of the catch is transported away from Mazara del Vallo by lorries awaiting the boats upon their arrival in the harbour.

In the late 1960s and in the 1970s there was a real fishing boom. Those were the golden days still spoken of, when many simple fishermen turned into wealthy boat-owners, which sometimes meant that they themselves did not have to go on long fishing trips anymore, but could stay ashore. Some of these men also became influential local politicians. From these days are dated the many stories of fishermen's families constructing fabulous houses with fantastic kitchens and bathrooms with gilded taps. Much too luxurious to be used, I have been told, but nice to look at. In another part of the house simpler facilities for daily use were to be found. From these times also stems the saying often heard in Mazara del Vallo that the fishing population has *poca cultura ma molti soldi* (little culture but much money). They are sometimes compared with farmers and are then said not to make investments for the future the way farmers do, but to live for the day and spend whatever they have got (cf. Moruzzi and Parisi 1994:72). This first generation of great boat-owners is to a large extent still active in the fishing business, although some have begun to hand over the responsibility to their sons.

Men who have not succeeded in getting their own boats, but who have remained as members of the fishing crews, tell me that they do not want their sons to follow their choice of profession (or, as they sometimes say, they did not have much of a choice when they were young). They see the job of fisherman as much too hard and, above all, much too risky. I have not met one single fisherman who has told me that he likes his job. On the contrary, they all say that *è una vita di sacrifici* (it's a life full of sacrifices) or *è una brutta vita* (it's a terrible life). Although they admit that life on board is much more comfortable nowadays than it used to be (once, they had to sleep on the floor and, as there was very little fresh water available, they could never wash themselves properly), they say they want something better and safer for their sons. The sons seem to agree with their fathers and often prefer unemployment, while seeking another professional route, rather than joining their fathers on board (cf. Zinn 2001:146-147). While their fathers may be semi-literate, some of these young men choose to go to the university.

The fishing boom together with the refusal of the young generation to join the life of their fishing fathers encouraged the take-off of the Tunisian immigration starting in the late 1960s. In the first years, there were almost only men arriving, but later women and children have joined them. These men now constitute an important part of the lower-ranking manpower on board.

The Sicilian crewmembers are often related. Frequently brothers or a father and his sons own a boat jointly. One of them might be working ashore with the administration including the selling of the fish caught (only very few have proper offices of their own where this part of the work takes place), a second brother may be responsible for the making and repair of the nets, yet another may be the captain aboard, and another brother or let's say a cousin may be the engineer.

When the boat leaves the harbour, it is usually out for up to twenty-five days. Back home again the men stay ashore just for a couple of days, during which there may be maintenance work to be done on the boat and the cook must think of the supplies. Only during the compulsory *fermo biologico* (biological stop) are the men free. This stop is forty-five days long and the aim of it is, as the name indicates, to protect the growth of the stock of fish. However, it is often regarded more as a holiday and the period is usually split into two parts, giving the crews the possibility to spend the most important festivals, Christmas and *ferragosto* (the Feast of the Assumption celebrated on August 15th), with their families. Thus, according to critical voices, the stop does not always take place when it would be best for the fish.

Other fishermen leave Sicily by air to join the really big boats in the Atlantic. These men may be away for six months, but then again, they may spend a month ashore between two trips.

For the fishermen's wives and children this all means that to a very large extent they must carry on life in the absence of their husbands and fathers. The wives, who have to make most decisions without the support of their husbands, get very strong and used to handling life, house, and the upbringing of their children on their own. Women told me, for instance, about giving

birth to children and celebrating their *cresima* (confirmation) in the absence of their men. 'We have to act as fathers as well as mothers,' they used to say, and their husbands often expressed to me their admiration for their wives and their total trust in them.

Women also tell of their worries about their men out there on the dangerous sea. At night the sound of a terrible wind will keep the women awake worrying and praying for their husbands and sons. Other risks at sea are being fired at and sequestered by the Tunisians or, even worse because of the severe punishments, by the Libyans due to accusations of passing the limits of the fishing zones.

The men themselves tell about homesickness, about their children not recognising them upon their return, and about their wish to hear from their wives everything that has happened to their children while they have been away. Young people tell me about a constantly missing father, who sometimes becomes almost like a stranger to them. But then again, women and children smilingly usually say, when the husband/father comes home *è festa* (it is festivity). The whole family gathers, money is spent, and there is much joy!

## Method

I first came to Mazara del Vallo on a reconnaissance tour to western Sicily in 1996. The explicit aim of the trip was to find a place for my coming research and to make the first acquaintances. On this very first visit I stayed in the town for two months. In 1997-1998 I came back for one year (with a break for Christmas holidays). In the summer of 1999 I spent another two months there, in 2000 I was back for one month, and in 2001 my stay lasted three weeks. Thus, in sum, I have spent almost eighteen months in Mazara del Vallo and I have lived there during all seasons. Moreover, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, that is, before becoming a trained anthropologist, I lived for one year in Partinico (a small town near Palermo) and another three years in Taormina (a tourist place on the Sicilian east coast). In those years I also spent one summer in Rimini-Riccione on the north-east Italian coast and half a year in

a small tourist village north of Naples. Lately I have spent seven months in Rome making academic contacts while finishing the writing of this thesis.

Obviously, it is good for an anthropologist to know his or her field over a long period. Thanks to my long acquaintance with Sicily, I have been able to see changes that have taken place since the 1970s when, as a young woman, I first came to Sicily to take part in the development work carried out by the sociologist Danilo Dolci.<sup>5</sup>

My acquaintance with Mazara del Vallo and my *mazaresi* informants spans a much shorter period. In this case I have benefited very much from the possibility to live there for one long continuous period, enabling me to get a good picture of what local life is like, and then to come back repeatedly for shorter visits. Each return permits me to know my informants a little bit more intimately. My experience tells me that it has been more important to come back repeatedly than it would have been to stay there all eighteen months on end. My informants could see that I stuck to my promise to come back, and I believe this is why they opened up to me more and more each time I returned.

When I came to Sicily in 1996 to look for a place for my fieldwork, I had not decided beforehand to go to Mazara del Vallo. I was determined, however, not to settle in any of the places I knew from before, but to look for a place unknown to me and where I was likewise unknown to everyone. I thought that this would help me, an inexperienced anthropologist, to look more objectively upon my field. So, when I came to Mazara del Vallo for the first time, and I liked the town and the sea, I decided that this would be my place of field research. Thus, the aim of my research did not dictate the choice of place or the choice of informants. But as it very soon became clear to me that in Mazara del Vallo the fishing population constitute an important and easily distinguished group, I decided to concentrate my study upon them.

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<sup>5</sup> Dolci, who died in December 1997, was a very productive writer. For more information about his ideas and work with how to change and develop western Sicily see the reference list (1959; 1967; 1968).

The fact that I brought my teenage daughter into the field was of course due to personal circumstances and feelings, but it was also an advantage for my work. Not only did she turn out to have a keen eye for anthropological observations, but through her I also came in contact with a school, its teachers, and her young classmates, people I would not have met without her help. Besides, as a foreign woman, turning up one day out of nowhere, I think that I was normalised in the eyes of the people making my acquaintance thanks to my role as a mother.



People I met sometimes asked me how an anthropologist could carry out field-work in a society so full of distrust as Sicily. 'Will people really give you an interview?' I was asked. And indeed, in spite of my daily endeavours, it took me several months before I had even come close to interviewing somebody privately.

The boat-owners and the crewmembers in Mazara del Vallo have various organisations working for them. The boat-owners have a co-operative and two interest groups. The crewmembers have trade unions and a couple of interest groups. These organisations are usually very weak and have few members, their representatives often told me when they complained about the difficulties with collaboration and trust between their members.

For me, wanting to make the acquaintance of the fishing population, these organisations were important, however, as door openers. Visiting them and explaining my purpose, I met with friendly receptions. The representatives were usually very talkative and did not seem to mind spending an hour or so with me. I learned about the organisations and the life of the fishermen and their families. Time and again I was told what a hard life the fishermen have and how admirably their wives are handling everything on their own while their husbands are at sea.

So far so good; these door openers gave me important background for further work, but my main purpose with these visits was to establish contacts that would help put me in direct contact with boat-owners and fishermen as well

as their families. But, as I intend to show in this thesis, the family studied is a very closed unit, which a stranger cannot approach very easily, and the step from these public offices into private family life therefore became much more difficult than I had anticipated. As time went on I realised that in order to bridge this gap I needed recommendations. The parish priest in *Trasmazaro* district, the district of the fishing population, was helpful. Not only did he share with me his own experience of living close to this group, but he also introduced me to some of his parishioners. Slowly, I managed to get some persons to accept my interviewing them. Usually young people were the first to put themselves at my disposal. Through them I managed in some cases to get in contact with their parents' generation, but in other cases I never succeeded in reaching that point.

Six families, representing families of boat-owners, captains, and engineers, became my key informants to whom I returned repeatedly. Throughout this thesis I will refer to these families using the names of the women representing them. However, in accordance with my promise to my informants that they would remain anonymous, all personal names in this thesis are fictive. For this reason I have also altered the composition of my informants' families, like, for example, the number of children, their sex, and if they are married or not. Moreover, times and places of certain events and interviews have also been changed. The following are my female key informants:

<i>Angelica:</i>	Thirty-five years old, unmarried, living with her parents
<i>Enza:</i>	Middle-aged, married with four grown children of both sexes, two of them married with children of their own and the other two living with their parents
<i>Giovanna:</i>	Middle-aged, married with four grown children of both sexes, one of them married and the other three living with their parents
<i>Graziella:</i>	Old widow with three grown children, one of them married with children of his own and the other two living with their mother
<i>Mariella:</i>	Young, married with two small children
<i>Stefania:</i>	Young, married with two small children

To a lesser extent I made acquaintances with lower ranking fishermen and their families. This might partly be due to my own shortcomings, but it is also explained by the fact that nowadays Tunisians often occupy these positions, and they are not part of my study. Whatever the reason, the lack of representatives of lower ranking Sicilian fishermen and their families may be of limited importance to this study. Informants themselves were unanimous in saying that there is no cultural difference between these various families. Generalising from my own findings, I have come to much the same conclusion. They all have the same origin, whether boat-owners or fishermen today: 'Our fathers and grandfathers were all simple fishermen,' they used to say, and *Siamo tutti mazaresi e ci conosciamo tutti* (We are all from Mazara del Vallo and we all know each other). Likewise, most of these men as well as women have very little formal schooling. And just as the boat-owners are former fishermen and used to being away from home for long periods, so have their wives too been used to handling everything at home on their own as all fishermen's wives do. Thus, I believe that it is fair to say that culturally and socially, boat-owners and their Sicilian crewmembers constitute a rather homogenous group. I will therefore treat them as constituting one single category, when I do not explicitly state otherwise.

This does not mean that I am unaware, for example, of the power relations and the economic difference between a great boat-owner and a hired fisherman, but I see no reason, when it comes to the purpose of this thesis, to separate them into various social classes. It would have been different had I included other groups of professionals in my work. This will be hinted at in the chapters to follow, where the fishing population will be described, by themselves as well as by others, as more *all'antica* (traditional) compared to others. This traditionalism means, for instance, that fishermen's women have less freedom of outdoor movement compared to other groups of women. I also met a widespread view that closure and distrust belong to the traditional society while modernity will bring its opposite, that is, openness. This suggests that choosing the fishing population as my informants may have contributed to making my endeavours to make contact with informants more difficult, compared to if I had chosen another group of informants (see especially chapter 5).





I often met with the boat-owners' and the fishermen's different collectives in various public settings. I met them at their various organisations, co-operatives, and trade unions, at the boat-owners' offices, in a club of retired fishermen, in the bars, at meetings with authorities and politicians, on board, and in their homes. As a woman, I would never really gain access to this world of men, though (cf. Giovannini 1987:72). I strongly felt that I could not just 'hang around' in these various male settings, but that I had to have an explicit purpose for each visit. When I ran out of imagination and could not invent any reason for visiting them, or when I had no appointment with any of my female informants, I often went for long walks hoping something would happen. Later I came to realise that many *mazaresi* recognised me as the foreign woman whom they used to see taking long walks.

My interviews were semi-structured. I prepared myself by making notes on what issues I wanted to touch upon – always concentrating on social relations within the family and with the outside world – but let the conversations also run in various directions. These interviews, which were always agreed upon beforehand, usually took place in my informants' homes as regards the women, and in public offices when it comes to the men. During our talks I made short notes for my own memory and back home I would then transcribe them immediately, while I still had the discussions fresh in mind. The tape recorder I used only after almost a year in field, and then very rarely, as I had realised that informants often felt hesitant, or even negative, about the interview being recorded.

As time went by, 'my' families now and then invited me to dinner, and so I got the opportunity to spend some time with whole families quite informally. Other occasions for meeting more informally with female family members were, for example, when walking with them in religious processions or going to the beach together in the summer.

Apart from the fishing population, I also came to know other people with whom I spent much free time. They were mostly young and middle-aged

professionals, representing the local middle class and, I would say, the local cultural elite. Of course, I learnt a great deal from these friends as well, and not only from the fishing collective representing my main informant group. The most obvious difference between these two groups is the level of education, the fishermen representing a lower level. Still, when it comes to the values studied, I found even here far more similarities than differences between the two groups.

In the following I will refer to the fishing population as my informants. If needed, I will compare the two different groups I spent time with and point to similarities and/or differences between them. When I talk about *mazaresi* or Sicilians in general, I am referring to both groups.

In addition, I benefited, while gathering data, from taking part in all kinds of events that took place in Mazara del Vallo. Whenever anything was going on, I tried to be there. So I not only attended religious processions, but also beauty contests, meetings of the local government, conferences on fishing, political speeches, and various cultural events. Reading local papers, which I look at as representing the popular discourse, also gave valuable information, and so did the very rich Sicilian literature. Good literature indeed gives the anthropologist valuable insights (Herzfeld 1987:83; see also Sant Cassia 1991:7). A substantial part of my data also stem from the official contacts I had with authorities and with employees of various kinds.

The *mazaresi* in their daily communication with one another usually speak the Sicilian dialect. Although some, especially older illiterate people, speak Italian with certain difficulties, they all understand it, much thanks to frequent television viewing. Talking to me, people usually turn to Italian. Although I understand much of the dialect, I do not speak it, but I always use Italian. In short, I did not find, except on very few occasions, any language problems and thus I never used an interpreter. In the following some quotes will be given in Italian, and they will be italicised. There will be no quotes in Sicilian.

## 2. FAMILY IN THEORY AND IN PRACTICE

### Family Studies within Anthropology

There is certainly no consensus on what is meant by the word family – neither among anthropologists nor in everyday language; still, the concept has a long history within our discipline, not the least within Mediterraneanist studies, where the family has been one of the main focuses (see chapter 1). This chapter therefore starts with the presentation of a couple of anthropological trends of *longue durée* having bearing upon my work on the family, before turning to the Italian family systems through history, and, finally, to the family networks found among informants.

### Historical Approaches

According to Lewis Henry Morgan, the conjugal family grew out of more complex systems of kinship and cohabitation. Elaborated kinship systems belonged to less developed societies, he argued, while in economically and industrially more complex societies the importance of the nuclear family increases – the latter constituting the apex of the developmental trends (Morgan 1985 (1877)).

At Morgan's time and further into the beginning of the last century, anthropology was to a large extent a historical discipline dominated by evolutionism and diffusionism. But with functionalism, these early historical perspectives on anthropological studies were dismissed as 'pseudo-historical speculations' (Radcliffe-Brown 1976 (1952):3). Instead, spokesmen for functionalism, among whom A. R. Radcliffe-Brown was one of the most prominent, argued

for a scientific anthropology, while trying to find out what were the social structures that maintained equilibrium within a certain society and made possible an ordered social life. As regards family studies, Radcliffe-Brown argued that it was the ‘elementary family’ – that is, husband, wife, and their offspring (regardless of whether or not they lived together) – that was *the* natural and thereby also *the* universal building block of all kinship systems (ibid.:51).

E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Radcliffe-Brown’s successor at Oxford, in contrast to his predecessor, strongly argued for the importance of humanities, not least history. However, the way in which anthropologists following him, including several of the early Mediterraneanists-to-be who were students of his (see chapter 1), made use of the past, that is, how they related it to the present state of affairs, never became a really radical departure from what had been done before (Davis 1977:241-243).<sup>6</sup>

It was not until the 1980s that history really converged with anthropology (Thomas 2000:272), and most recently, Jack Goody has argued strongly for the importance of a historical perspective. In the preface to *The European Family* he writes, ‘I came back to European studies because I was convinced

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<sup>6</sup> Pitt-Rivers, one of Evans-Pritchard’s students, for example, wrote in the appendix to *The People of the Sierra* (see chapter 1): ‘[W]here I have referred to the more or less distant past I have done so haphazardly with no other object than to illuminate the point under discussion through an analogy or a contrast which the reader was left at liberty to take or leave. I have, in the main, resisted the temptation to account for anything observed today by a reference to its historical origin or to explain any historical facts through an analogy with the present. I have done this in recognition of the limitations of my theme and my material and not through any methodological stricture regarding the relevance of the diachronic view. On the contrary, the structure of a society at a given moment, whether its past has been recorded or not, appears to me to be very largely determined by its previous state’ (1971 (1954):211). Another Mediterraneanist of the same generation, the Norwegian Jan Brøgger, tells the reader that the people studied by him in South Italy were conscious of their history, but that he only mentioned that ‘as an appeal to my envied friends the archaeologist and the historian [...] as an anthropologist I have to leave these inviting topics and venture into the light of the social day’ (1971:30).

that scholars had taken too narrow a view of their task in attempting to deal with the history of the European Family' (2000:ix).

Such historical awareness has led Goody, like Alan Macfarlane and Peter Laslett, to dispel the belief in the myth of the historical primacy of the extended family. In England, Laslett wrote, 'the large joint or extended family seems never to have existed as a common form of the domestic group at any point in time covered by known numerical records' (1972:126). And Macfarlane argued that today's English family system is roughly the same as it was in the mid-13th century and has been ever since (1978). Evidence put forth by these scholars as well as others shows, moreover, not only that the average English family group was a nuclear family long before industrialisation, but also that in still other parts of the world where the extended family preceded industrialisation, this larger unit often remains important or even gets strengthened in modern society (Laslett 1983:91; Segalen 1996; Goody 2000).

The belief that the extended family preceded today's European nuclear family, the latter being a product of modern industrialised society, has, however, been persistent and widespread among scholars as well as among laymen (see e.g. Laslett 1983:90). The works of the modern scholars mentioned here, showing varying development trends of the family, contribute to revising this distorted picture. However, their findings seem not to have had nearly the same pervasiveness as the old evolutionist ideas (cf. Macfarlane 1978:197-198).



In the preceding chapter we learned that Italian anthropology developed largely along different lines compared to the dominating British anthropology. Here, since the days of Benedetto Croce, history has had a great impact, and in the section following this introduction on family studies within anthropology, it will be shown how Italian scholars dealing with the historical development of their native family have found that the picture is very heterogeneous. Still, this sort of knowledge, together with Italian studies showing the importance of the wider kin group in contemporary society to which I will

refer throughout this thesis, seem to have had limited influence on foreign colleagues working in the country. Instead they have generally presented the South Italian family as distinctly nuclear not only as regards locality (as do their Italian fellow colleagues), but also on an overall level as regards socialising.

In Italy, moreover, it is not only among scholars that history has a prominent place; I was often impressed by the historical sensitivity of informants. Though this was not always paralleled by depth of knowledge, many were well acquainted with their classical heritage – a result of the stress put on classical studies, believed to mould a person's character, in school – and in general people were very proud of their supposed glorious ancient past. In the following it will therefore be shown how alive history is among my informants: throughout this thesis they will make reference to their history in various situations – when explaining to me, for instance, why they are so suspicious or why they prefer to present themselves as having a more Norman than Arab mentality. We will also learn, for example, that couples who are marrying have a preference for having their wedding photos taken at sites of archaeological remains. To facilitate the understanding of such references for my readers, I have chosen to include a historical appendix in this thesis. People often also took it for granted that classical antiquity was also the period I intended to study while I was in Mazara del Vallo. Upon hearing that, quite the contrary, I intended to concentrate on their society today, many showed surprise and demonstrated a firm belief that there was nothing positive to study in modern Sicily.

### The Developmental Cycle of the Domestic Group

Until the 1960s, anthropologists had focused their studies mainly on the so-called primitive world, and as for the family, the dominating functionalist theorists regarded it as a more or less static social structure. Now, however, scholars began to see this unit more as a process. Decisive for this new viewing was Meyer Fortes.



At the time of the early Mediterraneanists, that is, in the late 1950s, Fortes launched his now well-known idea of a developmental cycle through which every domestic group passes. Though it may seem rather obvious to us today that the composition of a family changes through time in respect of its age structure, up until Fortes this unit had been studied to a large extent as a fixed system, without any attention to its replacement process – a process of social as well as physical reproduction.

One of Fortes' achievements was that in his analysis he distinguished between the domestic group and the family. By family he referred to the reproductive group – a heterosexual couple and their offspring. This unit, he wrote, constitutes the core and the nucleus of the domestic domain, while the domestic group, which may include three generations as well as collateral kin members, 'is essentially a householding and housekeeping unit organized to provide the material and cultural resources needed to maintain and bring up its members' (1958:8).

Fortes demonstrated that though the domestic group as a unit retains its form as time passes, its members, and the activities which unite them, go through a sequence of changes that culminate in the dissolution and replacement of the original unit. This developmental cycle of the domestic group consists of three main phases and involves different residential patterns and different individuals at any given time. It is characterised by the reproductive group first passing through a phase of expansion that lasts from the marriage of a couple until the birth of their last child. Second, there is a phase (which may overlap the first one) of dispersion or fission, beginning with the marriage of the oldest child and continuing until all children are married. Finally, there is a phase of replacement, ending with the death of the parents and their children replacing them in the social structure.

This is how it looks from the perspective of the group. From the point of view of the individual, on the other hand, the phases of the developmental cycle mean changes in the control over productive and reproductive resources as the child grows up and creates his or her own family. The individual's passage through the developmental cycle also has direct bearing on the society at

large, as it implies radical changes in the individual's jural status. The importance given by the society to the various phases of this passage is shown in the widespread occurrence of institutionalised procedures to legitimise each step in the passage, like the termination of the jural infancy and marriage.



This thesis focuses mainly on the first two phases of the developmental cycle. Chapter three opens with a wedding, the beginning of phase one, and in the chapters to follow we will variously meet with informant families in phases one and two of the cycle.

### **Matrifocality**

Of special interest to this study are family studies dealing with various forms of matrifocality. The word matrifocality literally means mother-focused. Thus, in a matrifocal family it is the mother-child relation that constitutes the core. This family has often been connected with low status, poverty, and irresponsible fathers, and it has generally been regarded either as dysfunctional or as a response to a difficult situation (see e.g. Harris 1975:485; Smith 1996:45).

Matrifocality is most commonly associated with the Caribbean (Paul 1979), where Raymond T. Smith's works on Guyanese families, by now classic, originated. Smith saw three main elements as characterising the matrifocal complex: mothering as the central activity of the domestic domain and intensively affective; conjugal roles as segregated, with less solidarity and less affective intensity; and absence of property and status considerations. Though, starting from earlier works by Fortes, he contrasted Fortes' generalisations 'about the elementary structures of kinship, and particularly his idea that the bilaterality of kinship systems universally arises out of the experience of parenthood and procreative cohabitation'. Instead he argued that it is the mother-child relationship that is the basic unit of all kinship systems. At the same time he showed that matrifocality might be found regardless of



whether the husband/father is absent or present. In later work Smith has strongly argued that matrifocality should be seen as a system in its own right where priority is put on the mother-child relation and not as a kind of functional compensation for marginalised fathers (1973:139-143; 1996; see also 1956).

However, matrifocal families are to be found not only in the Caribbean but in widely separated societies all over the world. Carol B. Stack in the 1970s wrote a well-known book about poor Black Americans in Detroit adapting to the social-economic conditions of poverty through female-centred multi-generational families linked to each other through kinship-based (or sometimes neighbourhood-based) exchange networks (1974). And in Africa, Wendy James writes, matrifocal assumptions of the centrality of women are to be found in jurally matrilineal societies as well as in societies which, for the purposes of the transmission of rights and property, may be 'patrilineal, double unilineal or not even lineal at all' (1993:137).

In *Matrifocality in Indonesia and Africa and Among Black Americans* Nancy Tanner compares five matrifocal societies, with different kinship systems, residence rules, and economic situations, from three different parts of the world. She is principally concerned with two constructions: '(1) *kinship systems* in which (a) the role of the mother is structurally, culturally, and affectively central and (b) this multidimensional centrality is legitimate; and (2) the *societies* in which these features coexist, where (a) the relationship between the sexes is relatively egalitarian and (b) both women and men are important actors in the economic and ritual spheres' (1974:131). Tanner finds that the roles of the mothers in these different societies show important similarities and that these commonalities appear to be related to similarities in the women's status in the societies at large. She is fascinated by the relative egalitarianism between the sexes and argues that matrifocality implies 'the capacity for mother-child units to function effectively on their own', though contributions of men are highly valued. What does differ between the five societies studied is the structural level on which matrifocality occurs – whether it is on the level of the elementary family or on the level of more inclusive kin units (ibid.:153ff).



Showing that a wide range of socio-economic as well as cultural factors may lie behind matrifocality, Tanner argues that it is because matrifocality was originally discussed with reference to Black Americans in the United States and in the Caribbean that discussions have focused on 'economic and social marginality as determinants of the phenomenon' (1974:156). So instead of looking lopsidedly at what this family is not and defining it in negative terms, we may, just as Smith suggests, define it starting from what it is, namely a mode of putting a very strong value on the mother and the mother-child relation.

This is the case for my informants, where I found matrifocality – that is, a very strong valuing of the mother culturally, emotionally, and structurally – on the nuclear family level. This mother focus does not mean, however, that the husbands/fathers have to be either irresponsible or absent; quite the contrary. However, while men are important parts of this basic unit, I would argue that it is on the level of the larger kin group that my male informants have a very well-defined and culturally significant role, and that women give way to their men as the persons in focus on that level. There is one important difference between the mother-focus and the father-focus on the two different levels, though: the father never gets the same strong emotional focus as the mother; his is of a more structural kind (see chapter 3).

Tanner also argues that the relationship between the sexes is relatively egalitarian. In each of the five societies compared, the mother role is the central one within the domain of kinship, 'women are relatively equal participants in the economic and ritual realms', and '[i]n each case both women's and men's roles are significant and important' (1974:131). In the following, I do not aim to compare female and male status/hierarchy on an overall level in order to arrive at a quantified measure of power or influence for women and men respectively. That, I feel confident, would be to distort a lived complex reality. I will avoid the word power, but I will show that spouses live rather segregated lives, meaning that the primacy of the position of women and men respectively takes place in distinctly separated contexts (cf. Newbold Chiñas 1992:87), implying, among other things, that in contrast to Tanner's findings that the mother-child unit has the capacity to function effectively on its own, this does not, I maintain, hold for my informants.

As I understand it, this difference between Tanner's cases and my own has to do with the fact that in none of the five societies studied by her 'are women socialized to find their identity in intimate dependence on men' (1974:155). For their Sicilian counterpart, I think that to a very large extent the opposite is true, as I believe that my female informants, not only for economic or practical reasons but also from a cultural vantage point, are strongly dependent upon their men. They need their men in order to meet cultural expectations of how a good mother/wife should be and what a good family should look like. This is so in spite of these women being very strong and used to taking care not only of child rearing but also of house and economy and having to act as spokespersons between their families and the surrounding society in the absence of their fishing husbands (cf. Newbold Chiñas 1992:106).

This all leads me to define matrifocality, as found among my *mazaresi* informant families, as a very strong cultural, affective, and structural primacy of the mother and the mother-child bond on the nuclear family level. While discussing these various aspects of matrifocality in the following, I will demonstrate how the attached cultural and moral values influence the daily social life of my informants.



The three theoretical perspectives on the family presented here – the historical perspective, the developmental cycle of the domestic group, and matrifocality – have all had a crucial impact on the development of modern anthropological thought. Thanks in great part to the works of the above-mentioned scholars, today's anthropological studies are full of nuances compared to work done before them. Individuals actually living in different social systems have become more visible today, compared to times past, when the structures as such were the main object of the studies carried out. Practice rather than structure is thereby stressed, and so is plurality and difference rather than universality.

## The Italian Family Systems

### Heterogeneity

In the introduction to their book on the Italian family through history, Richard P. Saller and David I. Kertzer write that what follows will show ‘a picture of diversity of family values and practices within and between Italian communities that amounts to a fundamental critique of both developmental accounts and typological analyses’. In fact, this diversity ‘may make *the* history of *the* Italian family impossible to write’ (1991:2). In an article of his in the same book Kertzer argues that the heterogeneity of the Italian family system ‘raises serious questions about the whole effort to generalize a single demographic and family system for large geographical areas, even when we confine ourselves to a relatively limited historical period’ (1991:247; see also Douglass 1991:302).

Likewise, Francesco Benigno found that in the South the family system is not one, and that heterogeneity has been the rule. The differences are to be found on a regional level, that is, one type of household may predominate in one particular area, as well as on a local level, where different local patterns may be found in one and the same village. However, as far as Sicily is concerned, sources show that nuclear family households have dominated for centuries. Though wealthier households have tended towards complexity, in the Sicilian village where Benigno carried out his study the percentage of nuclear family households between 1623 and 1747 was never less than 81 per cent (1989:168-170, 182-183; cf. Schneider and Schneider 1976:73-79).

In contrast to these writers, Marzio Barbagli did see an overall pattern. He found that for the 18th century and the first half of the 19th there were three main household formations to be found in Italy. Patrilocality, together with late marriage, predominated in rural Central and North Italy. In some regions this was coupled with the presence of stem families (a nuclear family plus one married son, his wife, and their offspring) and in other regions with multiple households. Neolocality and late marriage, for women as well as men, dominated in the cities and towns of Central and North Italy and in Sardinia. In

the South, neolocal residence and early marriage for women (on occasion for men as well) were prevalent. Certain data indicate that Sicilian women, and perhaps even men, also married young during the centuries before the period studied by Barbagli (1991:257-259,264; cf. Goody 2000:107).

As for the last century, Barbagli writes, extended and multiple households were still widespread in the mid-20th century in approximately Central and north-eastern Italy, whereas they were particularly scarce in most parts of South Italy – the north-western regions occupying an intermediate position between the other two parts. However, for the percentage of married Italians who live in the same municipality as their parents, the situation is reversed; in this case the highest number is found in the South and the lowest in the North (1997:37-39).

In *The House that Giacomo Built*, the American anthropologist Donald S. Pitkin gives us an example of how kin relations may become strengthened in the Italian industrialised society of today. While letting us follow the developmental cycle of the Patella Savo family for three generations, Pitkin shows how the structure of this South Italian domestic group changes. Francesco and his wife Rosa were both born in nuclear families in Calabria, South Italy, at the turn of the 20th century. For reasons of poverty they left the South in 1933 with their small children to settle in a small town outside Rome. By staying together and always working hard, the family slowly managed to get a small house of their own and later to settle each of their children. Maria, one of the daughters, married Giacomo. When the first edition of Pitkin's book ends in 1978 Giacomo and Maria have a small modern house of their own, built by Giacomo with the help of members of their two kin groups. Their first-born son lives with his wife and daughter in a neighbouring house also built by Giacomo on the family's piece of land. For his second son, Giacomo is just about to construct another storey on his and Maria's dwelling. The Patella Savo family, starting as a very poor nuclear family, with the economic and social progress in post-war Italy developed into a tight cooperative network of nuclear families (1999 (1985)).



The family pattern of the fishing population in this study is made up of nuclear families constituting domestic groups of their own; none of my informant families includes any kin members other than members of the same two-generation reproduction group. This is the same pattern that I have been able to observe in Mazara del Vallo in general: during phase one of the developmental cycle (which in chapter three will be shown to be very long among the group studied) there is almost a complete overlap of the reproduction group and the domestic group. Exceptions found to this general pattern were households consisting of people who had never entered phase one, that is, who had never married and had therefore remained alone upon the death of their parents. The latter also explains why, in a couple of cases, I found siblings living together. I found no single individuals living apart from their nuclear families but still in Mazara del Vallo. Only when they are forced to leave the town because of work or studies do single individuals live separately from their families, but then they are still regarded as very much part of their domestic group of origin, and their absence is referred to as unfortunate and temporary.

With very few exceptions, the same pattern is found all over Sicily, according to official statistics. Only 2.6 per cent of all nuclear families live with persons who do not belong to the same two-generational reproductive unit, which is one of the lowest figures found in the whole of Italy (ISTAT 2000b:11). Thus, the nuclear family and the domestic group are indeed so intermeshed that together they represent a cultural principle. Still, as I intend to show, this is not a hindrance, as some scholars have argued, to parallel strong networks embracing larger kin groups.

This thesis, then, will demonstrate that today the nuclear family continues to dominate the Sicilian household formation just as it has since at least the 17th century, while in the more economically and industrially developed North Italy at the same time, the extended family is constantly more widespread. This certainly goes against the widespread conception, once presented by Morgan and other evolutionists, that the extended family always precedes the nuclear family but due to industrialisation and a parallel urbanisation turns into a detached and alienated nuclear family. The chapters to follow will show the opposite.

## The Holy Family

Anyone having some familiarity with Italy will be acquainted not only with the importance of the family, but also with the importance of the Catholic Church, as both institutions have such prominent positions in this society. And since the latter is perhaps the very strongest supporter of the former, always preaching its sanctity, writing a thesis on the Sicilian family without mentioning the Catholic Church cannot be done, I believe.



According to Catholic values, the Church gives precedence to the family over the individual as well as over the society at large (Ginsborg 1990:173ff; Mingione and Magatti 1997). Drawing parallels between the pattern of the Church's own family, the Holy Family, and the nuclear family in society, we may see that just as only two of the Holy Family's members – the mother and the child – are really salient, so, among my informants, prominence is given to the mother and to the very special and very strong relation between her and her children, while the husband/father will be shown to be more distant in spite of an ideology of male dominance in other contexts. Though this matrifocal family pattern might be widespread in Sicily, with my study concentrating on the fishing population, where the husband/father is physically absent for long periods, the pattern of distant fathers becomes particularly clear, and fishermen's wives, due to their having to run their home and educate their children on their own most of the time, are regarded, by themselves as well as other *mazaresi*, as having a particularly strong and prominent position compared to other women.

It is also of importance for the discussions to follow, that when it comes to the Holy Family Jesus is generally referred to not by his name but as *il bambino* (the child); that is, stress is laid not on him as an independent individual but on his role as part of the family and, not least, as Mary's child and on the strong connection between the two (cf. chapter 3). This is what the pictures of the *Madonna* and her child that we are so used to seeing in Italy, show. To a much more limited extent we find pictures reproducing the whole family.

In a study on the cult of Virgin Mary in southern Italy and Spain, Frey Breuner writes that the *Madonna*, so strongly worshipped in this part of the world that she is sometimes even said to rival her own son Jesus, is a culturally sanctioned role model for mothers. Since the most socially highly valued role of women is to be mothers, and since the *Madonna* is not a weak but a most powerful figure, she thereby gives women 'a means of coping within the machismo society and to gain acceptance and power by living up to a model venerated by both men and women'. Thus, Virgin Mary 'provides women with a culturally sanctioned means of achieving power' (1992:81,88-90).

Having the Holy Mother as a role model (one of my informants called the *Madonna* her first mother and her earthly mother the second) not only gives mothers a prominent and strong position, but also implies that they should be like the *Madonna* in a broader sense. To be a good mother, therefore, every woman should seek to be as pure as she is. That means, for instance, that every woman should have shame according to the honour and shame complex described in chapter five. This demonstrates moreover that the values attached to the sexes and family according to the honour and shame complex not only have social implications, but, as argued in *Honor and Grace in Anthropology* (Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers 1992; see also chapter 1), that honour also has an intimate connection with the realm of the sacred. Paraphrasing the authors of that work, we may say that the earthly family, needing the sacred order to assure its legitimacy, brings the notions of honour and grace together: the legitimate status of the family is achieved at the wedding ritual through the Grace of God. This ritual, like any other life cycle rituals, is a guarantor of the social order, and through it, the sanctity of the family becomes linked to its honour. Thus, honour and grace are concepts that together stand for legitimacy, sanctity, and purity, and while reinforcing one another they help hold the society together.

Thus the church gives the mothers a very prominent position and, when it comes to family life, women may therefore be regarded as the main beneficiaries of Catholic teachings. This may be one of several explanations for why it is also the women among my informants who are particularly engaged in the religious life. In connection with this it may also be worth mentioning that



the most well-known local patron saints in Sicily are all women: Santa Rosalia in Palermo, Santa Lucia in Syracuse, and Santa Agata in Catania. This is not to say that men are not believers, but they are generally less active when it comes to participating in religious activities. For instance, they do not go to mass on Sundays to the same extent as women do. Likewise, it is the women who regularly go to the churchyard to clean and adorn the tombs of their dead dear ones. When I took part in various religious processions (see chapter 1), I always saw many more women than men, though men were definitely there too.



If the Church is a strong supporter of the family, *La Democrazia Cristiana* (the Christian Democrat Party), which for half a century following World War II strongly dominated Italian politics, has been a very strong supporter of the Catholic Church. As the name indicates, this party, which ceased to exist in connection with the upheaval that occurred in the political elections of 1994,<sup>7</sup> had its ideological roots in Christian values, and the Christian Democrats and the Catholic Church have generally supported one another wholeheartedly. This means, for instance, that the party has supported the pre-eminence of the family, seeing its own duty as protecting it and giving it primacy in civil society. Thus both the pervasive Catholic Church and the political system have strongly furthered family values, which is what this thesis is all about.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> On the occasion of these elections the whole Italian political picture radically changed. A new party called *Forza Italia* led by Silvio Berlusconi put together a new coalition government and the Christian Democrat Party disappeared but was partly reborn under the name *Allianza Nazionale*.

<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed discussion on the relation between the Catholic Church and the Christian Democrats, see Ginsborg (1990).

## Family Networks

In the introductory chapter, I introduced to the reader an ethos coined by Edward Banfield as *amoral familism*. Familism is a form of collectivism, which, as the name says, has the family as its point of departure. That is, relations among members of one family unit prevail over bonds with any other unit, including the society at large. It is a moral system as well as a specific form of social and economic organisation, and for the people concerned, it is a matter of solidarity as well as dependence. Since the days of Banfield, familism has been an important part of the Southern Question discourse (see the introductory chapter), understood, in accord with its originator, as amoral and as an impediment to any development of *il Mezzogiorno*.

While, in the chapters to follow, I will explore the family, its organisation, and the cultural values governing the relations between its members, I do not intend to use any form of the concept familism, in order to avoid reproducing the traditional Banfieldian negative discourse about an underdeveloped South. Instead I will talk about families and family networks without adding any value statement. By family network I refer to a wider kin group and not only to the nuclear family, since, in contrast to Banfield, I firmly believe this unit to be of utmost significance for the people studied.

As regards the concept family, according to etymological dictionaries it signifies 'household' (Hoad 1986:165) or possibly 'belonging to the house' (Klein 1966:573). However, since the days of Fortes, anthropologists have been taught to distinguish between the two entities family and domestic group (see above). Thus today, by family we usually refer to kinship, and by household to residence (that is, where people eat, sleep, and keep their belongings), and the same distinction will be made in this work. Moreover, besides its significance as a social structure, I will continually refer to the strong emotional, cultural, and symbolic connotations of the family, and in chapter three I will come back to the fact that definitions of household may also emphasise the unit as task-oriented and include the pooling of members' incomes (see e.g. Yanagisako 1979:162-166; Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zúñiga 1999:2-3).

My informants use the native term *la famiglia* to refer both to their nuclear family and to a wider kin group, depending upon context. I will use the concept family in the very same way. That is, in using just 'family' I do not specify whether I am referring to the nuclear unit or a wider kin group if the context clearly shows which unit I refer to, or if there is no need to make any distinction between the two levels of kinship. When necessary, I will use 'nuclear family' when referring specifically to this unit and 'kin group' when referring to a wider, not precisely defined group of consanguines and affines.



I found that among my informants, related nuclear families constitute strong networks which help create a stable society, in the sense that people rarely do leave their collectives, but live and die within them. The basis of these strong family ties is to be found in the upbringing of the children – children are socialised from early on to become dependent upon their families. And since these days both males and females marry late and, until they do, continue to live with their parents, family ties are strengthened even further beyond the actual upbringing. When, upon marrying, the couple creates its own household, they very often do so close to either his or her family. If unemployment and/or economic hardships ultimately force them to go north, where economic possibilities are better, after a few years they often prefer to return home to a less secure future in order to be able to live close to their families (see chapters 3 and 4).

These stable in-groups characterise themselves very distinctly, separating us (family members) from them (non-family members) and private from public spheres. Within the family there is high interaction among members and little privacy for the single individual. Emphasis is put on the good of the collective, while closedness is shown towards out-groups (see chapters 4 and 5).

People's behaviour is thus guided by the context. Of course, this is nothing peculiar to the *mazaresi*; we all contextualise persons as well as events – we do not appraise things in the abstract. Nor is this a new insight of mine; half a century ago K. E. Read wrote that a context-dependent conception means

that 'it is the social context itself which largely determines the moral character of a particular action' and that 'human nature as such does not necessarily establish a moral bond between individuals, nor does it provide a standard against which all actions can be judged and either approved or disapproved' (1955:260-261).

The extent of this context dependency and the kind of behaviour it leads to may vary, though. I believe that the stronger the individualistic trait – that is, the assumption that not only are all individuals clearly bounded entities but they are also equal and should therefore be granted equal respect – the less one's moral evaluation of events and actions varies from one context to another. On the other hand, as an anthropologist I am also convinced that we may never reach an absolute point where the individual's judgement is totally free from influence by the actual context. Even the effort or the wish to try to reach such a context-independent evaluation may be differently appreciated, and among my informants I have not been able to see any indication of this as a desirable position. On the contrary, the particular position of the family means that to a certain extent, what is right for one's family is also morally right (see chapter 6).



In relation to their families people act first of all as collectivists (cf. Cronin 1970:26-27), but beyond that constellation they prefer to act as individualists (cf. Triandis 1995:xiv). People do not easily adapt to collectives beyond their families, above all not to society at large, as Justice Gherardo Colombo pointed out in an interview in the Italian daily paper *La Repubblica*. He said that for any Italian, a law or a rule is associated not with the common good but rather with impediment, confusion, trouble, and limitations and thus should, if possible, be evaded or violated (19 November 1997; cf. Hilowitz 1976:118; Putnam 1993:135-136).

Despite the large differences between collectivism (whether in the form of family networks or in any other form) and individualism, however, they are neither contradictory nor mutually exclusive. They always parallel one another in any society – the existence in a very pure form of either one on its own

without the support of the other being unimaginable. For example, even for an individualist, family relations are most probably based at least partly on something besides individualism, and, on the other hand, in a culture predominantly collectivist I do firmly believe that the individual always has a sense of being a unique self; Marcel Mauss argued back in 1938 that 'there has never existed a human being who has not been aware, not only of his body, but also at the same time of his individuality, both spiritual and physical' (1985 (1938):3; cf. Morris 1994:193), and two decades later Hallowell explained that 'the phenomena of self-awareness in our species is as integral a part of a human sociocultural mode of adaptation as it is of a distinctive human level of psychological structuralization' (1955:75).

Minor individualistic expressions are, however, to be found also within the family (see e.g. the section on commensality in chapter 3), and they seem to be acceptable as long as they do not threaten the unity of the primary group. At this point, I would like to call attention to the fact that individualistic expressions are not necessarily always similar to individualism as a philosophical theory, where we are talking about a worldview which privileges the individual over any larger group and sees relationships as inter-individual instead of inter-group. What my informants had in mind when they sometimes said that they were very individualistic was, as I understand it, very often an egocentric trait – not a worldview.



The stressing of the kin group does not mean, though, that frequent contacts among members of one and the same kin group always go hand in hand with harmonious relations. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, Sicily has often been described in the literature as full of interpersonal conflicts. This also goes for people who are supposed to be closest to each other, that is, relatives (see e.g. Schneider 1969:154). Conflicts do indeed occur, as I have myself experienced, and they may be both intense and long lasting. Still, contrary to the literature, I did not find these conflicts so widespread as to put the general pattern of very close kin relations at risk.

## Open Individuals but Closed Families

As I watched and listened to *mazaresi* men in the streets and in other public settings, they seemed to know everybody and everything going on in town. They were continually turning to people they met for greetings, a joke, a chat, or to discuss and settle various matters. These men seemed always to be on the move, and to an observer they gave the impression of being very open and easy to approach.

In the midst of this common scene, knowing that the *mazaresi* families on the other hand remained closed and segregated, I would often think of Geertz' description from Morocco, where he found a variety of men interacting in public settings while they stayed carefully segregated in private ones – 'all-out cosmopolitanism in the streets, strict communalism (of which the famous secluded woman is only the most striking index) in the home'. Geertz argues that the *nisba*<sup>9</sup> system has the capacity 'to create a framework within which persons can be identified in terms of supposedly immanent characteristics (speech, blood, faith, provenance, and the rest) – and yet to minimize the impact of those characteristics in determining the practical relations among such persons in markets, shops, bureaus, fields, cafés, baths, and roadways that makes it so central to the Moroccan idea of the self. Nisba-type categorization leads, paradoxically, to a hyperindividualism in public relationships, because by providing only a vacant sketch, and that shifting, of who the actors are [...] it leaves the rest, that is almost everything, to be filled in by the process of interaction itself. What makes the mosaic work is the confidence that one can be as totally pragmatic, adaptive, opportunistic, and generally *ad hoc* in one's relations with others [...] as one wants without any risk of losing one's sense of who one is. Selfhood is never in danger because, outside the immediacies of procreation and prayer, only its coordinates are asserted' (1986 (1984):133-134).

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<sup>9</sup> *Nisba* stands for a pattern of associative relations individuals have with the surrounding society. '[T]heir identity is an attribute they borrow from their setting,' Geertz writes. That is to say, 'Men do not float as bounded psychic entities, detached from their backgrounds and singularly named' but 'are contextualized persons' (1986 (1984):132-133).

While acting differently depending on the context, the *mazaresi* too can be very *ad hoc* in their relations with others, as I will develop further in chapter five. Putting on a chosen public role, they may, just like the men meeting in the street, act very individualistic and be very open and easy to approach, while at the same time their families are kept segregated in private settings. That, for example, no private objects such as family photos were to be found in any of the many offices I visited, regardless of whether they were big offices of the authorities or small private offices, I think is symptomatic of this separation between private and public life. This lack of personal objects, I believe, shows that one's place of work is part of the official arena, distinctly separated from the private life of the people spending their working day there.

Parallel to these examples of openness and closedness demonstrated by people interacting, there are also evidences of a certain increased importance given to people's privacy. Mass media nowadays refer to the privacy of people as an explanation of why they cannot give the reader certain information. This was not so when I lived in Sicily at the end of the 1970s. The fact that it is the English word 'privacy' that is being used indicates in itself that the phenomenon is new (see also Booth 1999:151). At my daughter's school, for instance, in the summer of 1998, for the first time ever, the administration did not post the pupils' course results on a public board by the school entrance at the end of the school year. The teacher pointing this out to me explained that it was no longer done out of respect for the students' privacy. Now there was an information sheet instead stating only whether or not the pupil had been promoted.

However, on still other occasions I found what to me seemed to be a total lack of respect for personal privacy. For instance, I sometimes went to one of the trade union offices in the town, to learn what kinds of matters the visitors came to discuss. There I could sit down in the only room available and listen to any visiting member going through his or her personal situation. People seemed, in accordance with what Shweder and Bourne argue for members of what they call holistic sociocentric cultures,<sup>10</sup> to 'take an active interest in

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<sup>10</sup> Defined by Shweder and Bourne as a context-dependent and occasion-bound concept of the

one another's affairs, and feel at ease in regulating and being regulated' (1986 (1984):194). Only when visiting the medical doctor did I see visitors taken from the waiting room into a separate room where they could speak alone with the physician.

I had a similar experience one day when I went to my usual photo shop to pick up some pictures I had had developed and the man who handed them to me commented on the subjects of my photos before I opened the envelope. Obviously he had had a look at them before I had and did not hesitate to say so. As another instance of lack of privacy, when a crime has been committed, newspapers publish the name, address, age, and place of birth of the accused as well as of the victim, before as well as after the trial. Often there are also photographs. Other characteristics of the people involved that diverge from the 'standard', such as nationality if not Italian, ethnic belonging, and sexual inclination, may also be mentioned. In the case of organ donations, the donor's as well as the recipient's name and personal data are published. When news from abroad is published, here too names are given whenever possible, even when it is obvious that hardly any reader would know the person it is all about. If a name is not published, it will not just be left out, but a Sicilian daily paper will then often point out that the name is not known to them, as in the case of a short notice about a man in Iran who had divorced four of his twelve wives (*Giornale di Sicilia*, 4 November 1997). As already mentioned, there are exceptions to this, however. The name of a child who has been sexually abused, for example, will not be published, though the name of the perpetrator will be.

An interesting balance between private and public appears in the way obituary notices in the papers are formulated. Usually, only the name and surname of the deceased are published, with no other personal data. Thus, in cases of common names the identification of a deceased person may be difficult for

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person: that is, '(a) no attempt to distinguish the individual from the status s(he) occupies; (b) the view that obligations and rights are differentially apportioned by role, group etc.; (c) a disinclination to ascribe intrinsic moral worth to persons merely because they are persons' (1986 (1984):191).



the reader, and even more so in those cases where there is no mention of the surname but only a first name or a diminutive form of it, or a kinship term. In some cases it is only through the mourners, who are identified by name and (usually) surname, that the dead person can be identified.

It is the members of the deceased person's family, not the journalists, who formulate the obituary notice. Publishing only the name without any further data to facilitate the identification of the deceased probably does not mean that the death is regarded as a strictly family business. If it were, there would be no sense in publishing a notice in the paper at all. That the death is not something the family wants to keep to itself is further confirmed by the fact that traditionally, before daily papers were widespread, and still today to some extent, first an obituary notice and then a notice of thanks to all who had participated in the mourning were printed and posted on the walls in the streets. Thus, the departure of a family member is clearly an event that relatives want to make known outside the narrow family circle, though not necessarily to just anybody. The notice is addressed only to those who are in a position to recognise the deceased through the scant information given, and as the deceased person in the obituary notices is often recognisable only through the names of the mourners, my interpretation is that he or she is still regarded primarily as part of his or her collective – the family. And, since family life is private, as little information as possible about its members, living or dead, is given to the readers (cf. Pardo 1989).

### **Rights and Duties**

The family is without comparison the most important social unit among the people studied, and people sincerely believe that their interests are best realised within and/or with the support of their family networks. It is within the frames of one's family that rights as well as duties are most strongly felt and expressed, and hence it is here that the individual involves herself or himself fully, morally and socially. This is why, as Cronin maintained (1970:119), it is so difficult, not to say impossible, for single individuals to exist alone. To have family relations of one's own is a necessity if one is not to become a perpetual

outsider. Coming alone as a young unknown woman to Sicily in the 1970s, I realised that people found it difficult to understand who I was and why I had chosen to settle down so far away from my family. I caused astonishment, and I remember being asked if I really did not have anybody who cared about me, who loved me. Without my family I seemed to be lost in people's eyes, as if I was no one, turned adrift in this world.

Social and moral rights and duties help cement the family/kin network. Friends and neighbours are connected by similar rights and duties to a much lesser degree (see chapter 4), and least responsibility and respect is felt for the complete stranger or for society as a whole. Nobody really feels like part of the latter, which is not trusted, as it has never been able to protect all its citizens equally (see chapter 5). When Justice Colombo said above that for an Italian a law is associated with impediments and limitations, he was pointing to exactly this lack of concern for the common good. The litter thrown in the streets is another obvious daily reminder of the same thing. The same lack of shared responsibility can also be seen among the fishermen, who are often accused (even by themselves) of not caring about the sea, in spite of the fact that it feeds them, but of throwing all kinds of garbage right into it.

The lack of responsibility for the stranger may also, I think, explain a situation my daughter and I experienced several times in Mazara del Vallo. It so happened that because of parked cars completely blocking our entrance door, we were unable to use the door – to leave our house if we were inside, or, if we were outside, to enter it. We were either simply forced to wait for the owner of the car to come back and drive away or, as we sometimes did, to ask (or better, if we were inside, to call loudly) for help. The kind artisan working next door would then come and try to move the car. Besides getting really angry in this situation, I also felt humiliated. By parking their cars so that we could not go in and out of our own house whenever we wanted, the drivers made me feel that in their eyes my daughter and I were not worth any courtesy or consideration, not even that of being able to go in or out of our own house. As I doubt the car owners would have parked in the same way in front of a friend's house, it all gave me the impression that we were regarded only as parts of a big unknown mass, to whom the driver did not feel related and

to whom he or she therefore did not have to show any respect or responsibility. This reaction of mine I take moreover as a sign of my coming from a more individualistic culture and therefore being used to a lesser degree of context-variation than the *mazaresi* when it comes to evaluating a certain situation. That is, I believe that everybody's values and rights should be equal and therefore the car owners should not park in front of an entrance door regardless of whether or not they know the persons living in the house (cf. Jacobson-Widding 1997:68-69).

Not being related in Mazara del Vallo, I thus experienced that my social and moral worth was limited, as were my rights as well as obligations. Not only did cars block the door to my house, but being human was often not enough to qualify for being treated in a friendly way when visiting the authorities or asking for information in a shop or at a public office. Going to a shop for the first time or visiting offices of the authorities where nobody knows you often means that you will not be treated in an obliging way. The employees just do not seem to care about a stranger (cf. Boissevain 1966:21). As I have experienced many times myself, they may not respond to your greeting but, without looking at you, may continue their work on the other side of the desk for quite a while before turning to you. Nor did I ever hear employees excusing themselves for making a mistake such as giving wrong information that forced people to come back a second time. One day, for instance, I witnessed a fisherman coming back to an authority's office with his documents because he had realised that his errand had been incorrectly handled earlier. The civil servant did not excuse herself for the mistake she obviously had made but angrily told the man that it was all in his interest to check that his documents were filled in properly.

On another occasion I witnessed a fisherman being informed by an employee that he did not have any right to economic compensation for the biological stop, as he had only taken forty-four days off and not forty-five days as the rule states (see chapter 1). The compensation lost was a large sum for a fisherman, but as the official representative and the fisherman obviously did not know one another, the latter was not met by any friendliness or compassion whatsoever.

When I discussed these things with friends of mine, they used to confirm my picture by adding similar experiences of their own. One of my friends, for example, told me about an old woman being rudely treated by a civil servant in one of the authorities' offices, until my friend frightened the civil servant by acting like an influential person and asking for the woman's rights. The old woman's errand was then immediately concluded and the civil servant excused himself, saying that it was all an unfortunate mistake.

However, there is yet another, quite different, way in which one is sometimes met as a stranger. It may happen, for instance, that a civil servant or shop assistant will make you understand that, as a personal favour, she or he will see to it that you get what you are asking for. The treatment may then be very obliging. This I interpret as a way of modelling a public relation on a personal one, permitting the civil servant/shop assistant to move from the public to the private sphere by creating social relatedness between the two of you and granting you your rights as personal favours (cf. Pardo 1996:137,140).

This behaviour accords with the observation that in collectivist cultures many situations are converted into collectivist ones if they are not so already. Thus, before making any purchase, a collectivist is likely to establish a personal relationship with the storekeeper through kin relations or friends (Triandis 1995:8; see also Alcaro 1999:28). So what at first may be thought to show two different modes of behaviour completely contradicting one another – that is, treating the client with indifference or excessive friendliness – I see as two sides of the same coin, confirming one another. Treating an unknown client like a dear friend is yet another 'exaggeration by inversion' (see chapter 5), confirming that it is a situation artificially created.

How one is treated, then, depends on the context; that is, in *a given situation* it is decisive whether or not the individual is socially related. As I understand it, people unknown to each other who meet in the public sphere do not expect that sphere to complement the private one. They do not identify with one another, and therefore here they may treat another person by ignoring him or her and being impolite – but not, without severe consequences, in the private arena. Moreover, and as a consequence of this separation between the priva-

te and the public spheres, employees also do not identify with the work they are carrying out. This lack of identification furthers their negligence even more. My examples here have to do with civil servants, but the behaviour fits well with boat-owners telling me that they always prefer to hire relatives as crew members, since relatives are believed to identify more with the business and therefore to work more and better than non-kin without having to be supervised (see chapter 4).



Consequently, people prefer to deal with persons they are related to in order to get the best possible treatment. That is why, for example, they tend to always go to the same bar, restaurant, beach, hairdresser, shop, and so forth. Turning one day to another bar may make one feel not only disloyal because of breaking the relations created, but also uncomfortable, as one will most probably be less favourably received. My daughter and I had no local social relations whatsoever when we came to Mazara del Vallo for the first time in the summer of 1996. Not having anybody to introduce us in the shops, in the restaurants, or at the authorities, the only way we could figure out to get somehow related to the town and its people was by returning again and again to the same places. Very slowly, we would then benefit from being recognised as regular customers, and with this, better and more personal service was offered as time went by.

Providing oneself with a *raccomandazione* (recommendation) makes the process much faster and easier. It immediately turns you from a stranger into a socially related individual. When I tried as a foreign anthropologist to make contact with *mazaresi* fishing families for interviews, I was a complete stranger to them and, trying to bridge an impossible gap, I was met by closure. I needed a personal recommendation from a person with a certain influence, someone they knew and respected. In time I got this from a parish priest, among others, who introduced me to some of his parishioners, who then, though somewhat hesitantly, put themselves at my disposal for an interview.

Recommendations are deeply interwoven with the patron-client mentality, one of the traits often said to characterise the Mediterranean cultures. It may

be described as a hierarchical, long-term, and many-stranded personal relation between two persons. At its heart is the asymmetrical and mutually beneficial exchange of items and services (see Wolf 1966:81ff). It involves honour as well as loyalty and, according to Davis, it is an alliance between individuals who in other societies would be divided by class and who act within a common framework of ideas about their respective rights and duties, each recognising the strength of the sanctions which can be invoked by the other party (1973:91).

The patronage system can be looked at as a negation of the legitimacy of the state, as clientelism means perceiving legal polity and politics in strictly personal terms; while private relations are trusted, the impersonal government's official representatives are not. It has been argued, moreover, that from a functional point of view it exerts a stabilising and anti-revolutionary influence (Giordano 1992:58). According to some scholars, this stability of the patron-client tie is further reinforced by its patterning on kin relations. Silverman, for instance, writes that the patron sometimes becomes like a father in obligations to and respect due from the client (1965:179), and as the bilateral kinship system in the South can be ascriptive, it is also possible to actually convert clientship into kinship, according to Davis (1973:66).

Clientelism is most firmly rooted in situations of resource scarcity, where the power of the patron increases in proportion to the limits on supply of goods and services – that is, clientelism depends less on the distribution of plenty than on the skilful manipulation of scarcity (Wolf 1966:94-95) – and the more followers the more important the patron, who is himself most likely the client of another patron. Networks so created permeate the society as a whole, and they may lead to a weakening of the law, to corruption, and to criminality.

Clientelism is thus a wide field, but here I am interested in the kind of recommendations that are part of daily life – that follow the individual from birth to death, so to speak. These may be small or big matters, which are all carried out with the help of a recommendation. It may start with the baby's parents trying to get someone to recommend them, so their child will be able to attend a certain kindergarten or a certain school class. Many parents have tried

through recommendations to protect their sons from having to do their military duty, and trying to find a job without a recommendation is normally regarded as useless. When a friend of mine got a job without any recommendations whatsoever, but only through a formal written application, a mutual friend remarked on the unusual, and very honest, behaviour of the employer. A recommendation may also help speed up one's business with the authorities. If, on the other hand, a person does not want to make use of this way of doing things, he or she may, intentionally or unintentionally, offend the influential person who has not been asked for help but thinks he would have been able to give a useful recommendation (Zinn 2001).



Once my daughter and I managed to overcome initial obstacles and succeeded in creating our first social relations, things changed radically. Slowly we began to be socially related persons, meaning that we were met by wonderful warmth and hospitality; people seemed to care about us. On our part, it meant of course that we had to behave appropriately to deserve their friendliness, as we were by then invested with both rights and duties (see chapter 5). However, regardless of how good a friendship one may be able to create, there always remains a deep cleavage between family relations on the one hand and relations among friends on the other, as will be shown in the following chapters.

## Summary

This chapter begins by dispelling the belief in the myth that the extended family always precedes the nuclear family. Though in Italy as a whole the heterogeneity of the family system has long been a fact, in Sicily it is the nuclear family that has constituted the dominating household formation since at least the 17th century, while to this day extended families have been more widespread in Central and North Italy.

Informants' nuclear families are shown to be strongly matrifocal, that is,

cultural, affective, and structural primacy are given to the mother and the mother-child bond, while on the level of the larger kin group the husband/father has a well-defined and culturally significant role. That the strong positions of women and men occur in distinctly separated contexts implies, among other things, that in contrast to the findings of other scholars who have studied matrifocal societies, this mother-child unit does not have the capacity to function effectively on its own, but needs the man in order to meet cultural expectations of what constitutes a good family.

The Catholic Church, just like national politics and people in general, favours the family's prominent position within the Italian society, giving it precedence over the individual as well as over the society at large. Drawing parallels between the Church's own family, the Holy Family, and the Christian nuclear family, the prominence given to the mother and the relation between her and her child, while the father stands somewhat aloof, appears clearly in both cases. Moreover, it holds for the Holy family as well as its earthly equivalents that the individuals constituting these units are not viewed as clearly bounded individuals, but first of all as parts of their families.

The position of the nuclear family is not a hindrance, however, as Banfield and others have argued, to parallel strong family networks embracing larger groups of consanguines and affines. These networks help create a stable society, where people distinctly separate family members from non-family members. Emphasis is put on the good of the family, while people do not easily adapt to other collectives.

As will be shown throughout this thesis, family networks are closed units, within which their members are heavily invested with rights and duties – it is a relation of solidarity as well as dependence. Though individualistic traits are demonstrated and accepted as long as they do not threaten the family unit, it is the individual who generally has to give precedence to his or her family and not the other way round.

In a very stark contrast to these closed family networks, one may meet with individuals acting very openly on the public arena. This disparity can be



explained by the context determining not only the moral value of a certain action, but also identity; that is, in the public arena the individual does not necessarily act as a family member and therefore there may be much less at stake for her or him and she or he may be more *ad hoc* in relations with others than within the family network.

Coming alone as a complete stranger to this family-oriented culture means being regarded as lost and turned adrift in this world and often being met with closure and neglect. Before this situation will change, one has to somehow become socially related. The speediest way to achieve that position is by providing oneself with a recommendation.



### 3. DOMESTIC LIFE

The purpose of this predominantly ethnographic chapter is to introduce the reader to the domestic life of my informants in order to show the significance of their families as well as how the family ideology relates to social action and is upheld and transmitted from one generation to the next. It starts with a magnificent wedding and a discussion of marriage and dowry, before turning to daily life.

#### Rosalba and Vito's Wedding

Rosalba and Vito are both children of *mazaresi* boat-owners. They had met seven years ago and fallen in love. The long, meticulous preparations for their marriage were now about to reach their climax. It was time for their wedding to take place.



As it was right in the middle of the hot summer period, Rosalba and Vito had avoided a morning wedding and had chosen instead to marry in the afternoon in order to have the feast in the cooler evening. The invitation card thus said that the wedding ceremony was to take place in the cathedral at four o'clock in the afternoon. A couple of days before her great day, however, Rosalba told me not to be punctual but to delay a quarter of an hour or so. 'I won't be there at four,' she said.

Still, anxious not to miss anything, I decided to get to church right on time. Upon my arrival I found another four wedding guests who had arrived before me. A nun and a priest were preparing the altar, which the bridal couple had

chosen to decorate with green leaves and flowers of all sorts and colours. Meanwhile a couple of boys were rolling out the long red carpet covering the aisle from the entrance door up to the altar. I sat down beside an acquaintance of mine for some small talk while we waited for the ceremony to begin.

For Rosalba this day started with hours of beauty treatment – every single detail of which had been planned well in advance, like the new silk dress she wore this morning and the town's best hairdresser, whom she had booked more than a year ago. She was now prepared at her parents' house, where, during the many hours the beauticians were treating her, her closest relatives now and then popped in to see how she was doing. When she was finally about to leave as a bride ready for church, the photographers, who had been hired to immortalise the day, were there to take the first pictures and to start making a film of her and Vito's wedding day.



Around four-thirty, Rosalba arrived at the cathedral. In the meantime all of the guests had also arrived and they now took their seats. As wedding witnesses Rosalba had chosen two of her best friends and Vito his two brothers. They now lined up at the altar with the groom. The bride entered the church in a cloud of white, led by her grave-looking father. As she came up to the altar her fiancé greeted her with a kiss on her cheek. The ceremony could begin.

The priest spoke gently about the importance of love, of having a family, and a home. In between the various parts of the ceremony, the mixed choir sang. It was a solemn ceremony, and this time almost everyone had remembered to turn off their mobile telephones and only the very youngest participants were sometimes heard crying.

After the ceremony everybody gathered outside the cathedral, rice was thrown on the newlyweds, and the day's first congratulations and kissing of the couple took place. Before the night ended, the bride and the groom would be kissed thousands of times by the fully three hundred guests. *Auguri* (best wishes) were also conveyed to the couple's parents, siblings, and other close relatives.

The bridal couple then left for wedding photos at various places in the surroundings. Generally, these pictures are taken at the site of archaeological remains, like temples and ancient theatres, or possibly in a public garden. The guests took their cars and went to one of the biggest restaurants on the outskirts of Mazara del Vallo, where the wedding supper was to be served.

Next, people gathered outside the restaurant awaiting the newlyweds. Loud applause greeted them upon their arrival. As they still had not finished with the photographing, they now slowly walked through the restaurant's garden with their photographers, stopping every now and then for another picture.

Back again among their families and friends, the bridal couple were the first to approach a very long table with all sorts of *antipasti* (starters), and the rest of us were then invited to do the same. These starters were served outside and we were standing as we enjoyed the many dishes. After this we were invited to enter the restaurant, at the entrance of which Rosalba and Vito smilingly received each and every guest by handing out a small gift – the obligatory *confetti* (almond bonbons in a nice package), which are said to bring the recipient luck.

Inside the restaurant we were free to choose for ourselves where to sit. The bride and groom, as the custom is, sat at a reserved table of their own. Next to their table a couple of tables had also been reserved for their parents and siblings. As for the guests, most of them had been invited as families, and members of each nuclear family tended to look for a table where they could sit together. Not really knowing anybody but the bride and her closest family, I was invited, much to my pleasure, to sit at one of the tables next to the bridal couple with her parents and siblings. From them I learnt that the aunts, uncles, and cousins of the bridal couple had all been invited. So were the parents and siblings of the bride's and groom's sisters and brothers-in-law. Young friends of Rosalba and Vito constituted a group of their own.

The wedding meal among this food-loving people (see below) was the most elaborate possible. After the lavish outdoor *antipasto* we were served two *primi* (first courses), that is, two kinds of *pasta*, and then two *secondi* (main

courses), before the strawberries were brought in. From the comments around me I understood that the others, just like me, found everything just delicious.

During the dinner the newlyweds got up every now and then and walked around in the big dining hall, stopping at the various tables to have a cheerful chat with their relatives and friends and then returned to their table when another course was to be served. Many guests did the same. In the background, popular music was coming from the loudspeakers.

Dancing was frequent a generation or so ago, but has almost disappeared at today's weddings. So at midnight, after the last course had been served and we had had coffee and a *digestivo* (digestive) in the bar, all of the guests went out into the garden to see the bride and the groom cut the wedding cake. Champagne was served with the huge cake. This was the finale of the day when Vito and Rosalba became husband and wife.

### The Purpose of Life

It is *lo scopo della vita* (the purpose of life) to see one's children getting married, informants would say. This saying is reflected by the elaborate celebration of the creation of a new family that we have just seen – without comparison the most important of all life-cycle rituals and far from weakening. Moreover, weddings give the bride's family, especially, a possibility par excellence to demonstrate wealth, prestige, and the kind of people they perceive themselves to be and thus to govern the impression they want to make on others (see chapter 5 on the *bella figura* complex), as the feast is paid for entirely by them. No wonder that Rosalba and her parents had had several discussions with the restaurant chosen for the wedding supper. The deliberations included not only tasting, but covered every detail of the menu as well as the serving.

The wedding described here is certainly a middle-class wedding. Not all families will have the same possibility when it comes to arranging wedding feasts for their daughters. Between weddings of daughters of hired fishermen on the

one hand and daughters of well-off boat-owners on the other, there will be a difference in degree but not in kind. The obligation, not to say burden, on all parents when it comes to weddings and dowries for their daughters weighs extremely heavily, and they often start planning and saving from the birth of their baby girls. Their sacrifices may be enormous, including fathers taking on extra work and the family going into debt. Weddings therefore are more or less always fantastic celebrations, at which families spend much more money than one would think was objectively possible.

Since many guests at Rosalba and Vito's feast knew that I was attending the wedding not only as a friend but also as an anthropologist interested in the Sicilian culture, I was told time and again about other weddings, especially how they used to be some twenty or thirty years ago. Middle-aged women told me that at their weddings there had been between five, six, or seven hundred guests partaking. I even heard about weddings with one thousand invited guests. This explains why parents used to tear their hair when a daughter was born, one woman said; they had to begin saving money immediately for their daughter's wedding as well as for her dowry. Nowadays a big feast like that is not possible, it would be too expensive, and that is why today's weddings are small, with only two hundred or at most three hundred invited guests, I was also told. But, then again, the women said, in the old days the food was much simpler. The conclusion of all this was, we agreed, that with today's habit of inviting guests to the very best restaurants where a lavish meal is served, the costs for the bride's family are still more or less the same as they used to be, relatively speaking.

Official statistics, however, clearly demonstrate that marriage feasts are growing increasingly bigger. Of all marriage feasts celebrated in Sicily before 1968, 40 per cent had one hundred invited guests or more, but after 1987 as much as 77 per cent of all marriage feasts had a minimum of one hundred guests (ISTAT 2000a:23). One possible explanation for the contradictory information that I received from the women attending Rosalba and Vito's wedding may be that a generation or more ago, the number of guests invited to wedding feasts of wealthier families and poor families respectively differed much more than they do today, when more people have the possibility to

have a big wedding, that is, that well-off families once had really big wedding feasts with several hundred invited guests, while others had much smaller ones. It may also be that having had a small wedding, the persons concerned do not speak much about it – only the big feasts are talked about.

Still, the wedding is not the only feast but the climax of more feasts taking place before the main event. The first party – the engagement party – may have taken place years before, as engagement periods tend to get longer and longer. According to official statistics, the average period nowadays is thirty-six months for Sicilian couples (ISTAT 2000a:12). Rosalba and Vito were engaged for five years, before they now, at the age of twenty-seven and thirty-four respectively, got married. Long engagement periods may be due to the fact that both families need time to get all wedding preparations ready, that the couple have to finish their studies, that they are out of work, or that they are simply too young to marry (cf. Lanoue 1991:53; see also Goody 2000:104). During the last weeks before the wedding there had also been several receptions for the young couple, mainly at the bride's home, but even at the groom's place, on the occasion of which people come to present the couple with their wedding gifts. After delivering them and admiring the gifts of others as well as the displayed dowry of the bride (most people follow the old tradition of showing the dowry on this occasion), people stay together informally for a few hours, enjoying themselves while drinks and snacks are served.

## Marriage and Dowry

Marriages create new social bonds embracing not only the bride and the groom. The ritual that united Rosalba and Vito also united their families. From this day forth Rosalba's family has gained not just one more member, that is, Vito, but his parents and siblings are also looked upon from now on as family members by Rosalba's family, and vice versa. Together with the preparation of the elaborate dowries by the families, these new relations show that marrying is indeed not only the couple's business but also a family matter. Various expressions used by my informants also bear witness to this, like a mother saying about her daughter that *la sposiamo quest'estate* (we will



marry her off this summer) or about her children that *li facevo fidanzati* (I have had all my children engaged). We also saw above that at the wedding not only Rosalba and Vito, but also their close relatives, were congratulated.

The new bonds created are also of importance to the society at large, which is demonstrated by the obligatory participation of secular and/or religious authorities at weddings in order to integrate the new family relations into the society (see Fortes 1958:6). A couple of weeks before their wedding Vito and Rosalba had therefore also been to the municipality office with their parents for a simple ceremony legally making them husband and wife before the Church now blessed their union. Another way of supporting and legitimising the marriage is through the wedding courses organised by the Catholic Church. The wedding preparations of Rosalba and Vito thus also included their participation in one of those. There are priests who would refuse to marry a couple who has not taken part in such a course, during which a group of young couples will meet with priests, medical doctors, gynaecologists, lawyers, and other professionals, each of whom discusses marriage from the aspect of his or her specialisation.

## Dowries

Just as weddings and marriage institutions vary, marriage prestations vary as well. Sicily is situated within the 'dowry belt' extending from the Mediterranean and eastwards, including large parts of South Asia. This is where we find some of the world's most far-reaching dowry traditions.

Compared to bride-wealth, dowry long received little attention in the literature. In fact, concern with dowry did not really arise until the 1960s, when households and property transfers between households rather than lineages began to receive more attention. Concomitantly there was a shift as regards the societies studied. For instance, as we learned in the first chapter of this thesis, it was not until then that South European societies, which are part of the dowry belt, really came to be covered by anthropological studies (cf. Schlegel and Eloul 1988).

The most prominent scholar when it comes to marriage prestations is probably Jack Goody, whose extensive work on the structure and the development of family and marriage through time and across vast parts of the world has had a great impact on anthropological family studies. As regards dowry and bride-wealth (the two most common forms of marriage prestations worldwide), Goody links them to Eurasian and African societies respectively, and he argues that they have to do with a more general opposition between societies that have a bilateral ideology emphasizing alliance on the one hand and societies with unilineal kinship systems emphasising descent on the other. Dowry, Goody argues, being associated with bilateral kinship, reflects a general interest in preserving the status of offspring of both sexes, as it is not related to the retention of property within a unilineal descent group (1973:17).

Generalisations like these are rarely unchallenged, though, and in polemic with Goody, Comaroff has shown that the meaning of marriage payments cannot really be understood by grand cross-cultural comparisons of their surface manifestations, but that there is much greater ethnography diversity than is often supposed in these paradigmatic conceptions of dowry (1980). Still others, in keeping with much of Goody's work, continue to argue that dowry does exist in complex societies where there is substantial private property and significant difference in the distribution of wealth. Dowry, moving property down a generation, then becomes a means of keeping wealth as well as power and status within the family (Schlegel and Eloul 1988).



Turning now to dowry in modern Sicily, the studies just mentioned may help us to elucidate the content, context, and meaning of local marriage transactions. Let us begin with the content of the dowry. Though local customs differ from one community to another, it is always the bride's family who equips the couple with a *corredo* (stock of linen). These embroidered dowries were once a tradition of the aristocrats, but at the end of the 19th century it was taken over by the broad masses. Before that, spinning and weaving had consumed much of non-aristocratic women's time. Now consumer cloth became available and women were consequently left with time free. Schneider sees multi-

ple reasons for their then choosing to spend this spare time on embroidery. One of the reasons has to do with the symbolic link between embroidery and female purity: in accordance with the honour and shame concept, the hours liberated had to be spent within the home in order to safeguard the family honour – only the poorest women worked out of necessity outside their homes. Delaying marriage, embroidered white trousseaux made by young unmarried women under the supervision of their mothers therefore came to symbolise virgin girlhood and family honour. Embroidered dowries were moreover a potentially liquid resource, which could be used in different spheres of exchange. When times got really hard, selling or pawning linen could be the last, although almost immoral, resort. Schneider writes that, for instance, church-sponsored pawnshops made loans against linen. A third reason for choosing embroidery has to do with the emulation of elite behaviour. Before, only noble women had had the time to embroider; now all but the very poorest women demonstrated that they too had the same possibility. A rich *corredo*, moreover, could attract spouses of superior status (1980). Yet another motif, I think, is the inclination among Sicilians, discussed in chapter five, to turn nature into culture, that is, their special liking for elaborating nature, in this case the linen.

Middle-aged and elderly women told me how they used to carry out the embroidery work under the guidance of their mothers. Sometimes, as in Giovanna's case, their mothers also sent them to the nuns to learn various kinds of needlework. Some of these women also said that in spite of having been married for many years and having large families, they had never in their lives bought a sheet and they knew they never would – the quantity once received lasts a whole life or even more.

As for Rosalba's dowry, her mother started to embroider the first linen sheets when Rosalba was still in her cradle, but Rosalba herself has never done any needlework. Nowadays school keeps the young girls busy, mothers usually say – a modern tendency that leads Schneider to argue that education has taken the place of embroidered trousseaux (1980:352). After Rosalba and Vito announced that they intended to marry (the tradition of asking for the girl's hand from her father has been abandoned) and her parents arranged for the

engagement party, the preparations of the trousseau escalated parallel with the actual wedding preparation. The preparations were all on her mother, while her father did everything possible to contribute the money needed. It was their obligation as parents to get their daughter *sistemata* (settled), that is, married, and the way to do that had been long and filled with hardships when it came to creating the economic possibility for carrying their hopes and dreams through.

I have been shown enormously rich *corredi* (plural of *corredo*), the content of which clearly carries a sexual and procreative element. Young girls receive huge quantities mainly of bed-linen (including sheets for the baby cot) but also of bedspreads, towels, and tablecloths. Clothes, especially underwear, nightgowns, dressing gowns, and clothes to wear on the honeymoon, also constitute part of the *corredo*. This all corresponds to very large sums of money, and the trend seems to be that the size of dowry, like the size of wedding parties, is increasing. Nowadays, however, the main part of the dowries consists of factory-produced wares. Mothers, both within and outside the fishing population, confirmed to me that they continually buy items for the dowries of their not yet married daughters. Sometimes they spend a fixed sum every month on the expensive so-called *cose classiche* (classic things), that is, sheets and tablecloths made of linen. Modern ready-made less expensive cotton wares for daily use are often bought in larger quantities as the wedding gets closer. However, I suggest that there are differences to be found between families among the fishing population and families of professionals I have met, the former being more traditional, as already suggested. Among them, girls seem to be amply supplied with linens from early on, while Stefania's mother, for example, belonging to a professional family, had not prepared a dowry for her daughter, though as the wedding got closer she bought all things necessary. Besides, Stefania, just like Rosalba, also brought her academic training with her.

In some South Italian villages the tradition is that the bride should also bring the house (see e.g. Banfield 1958:53; Davis 1976:291,301-302; Davis 1977:195; Pitkin 1999 (1985):26). Telling me that this is the case in some of the nearby places, the consensus among my informants, though, was that

among the *mazaresi* it could be either the bride or the groom: *chi può* (the one who can) contributes the house. This, which contrasts the general picture of dowry paralleling patrilocality (Schlegel and Eloul 1988:297-298), might mean that the bride's or the groom's family constructs another floor on the parental house, or that they reconstruct an old house inherited from a deceased relative (see chapter 4; see also Barbagli 1997:33). In our case, Vito's family had reconstructed an old house which had once belonged to a now-deceased relative. Of course, there are also cases where neither of the parties has a house at its disposal nor the economic possibility to buy or construct one. The couple will then look for a rented flat to live in until they have the possibility to get a house of their own, the latter always being the goal.

Some seventy years ago Chapman Gower wrote that 'dowry is important for a woman but less so for a man. Among the poorer classes it seems fairly usual that the bridegroom bring no marriage portion other than his own ability and willingness to work' (1973:97).<sup>11</sup> However, in Mazara del Vallo today it is the groom's family who equips the couple's home with furniture and kitchen equipment. Although this may involve large sums of money too, the family of the groom does not normally make the same expenditures as the bride's family. These things are not much discussed compared to the common discussions about the dowry of the bride, nor do they have a special name like the *corredo*. Likewise there are no sayings about the expenditures of the groom's family as there are for the bride's family. One of those sayings goes *Bambine nelle fascie, biancheria nella cascina* (Swaddling clothes on the baby girl, whitewear in her hope chest) (cited in Schneider 1980:325).

Relatives and friends also contribute to the new home. To communicate the wishes of the young couple and to avoid their receiving several gifts of the same kind, the invitation card to the wedding tells which shops to turn to when choosing gifts. In these shops, chosen by the couple, their preferred items are listed. Often, though, the couple receives cash when they have written on the invitation card that they prefer the present to be delivered *in busta*

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<sup>11</sup> Chapman Gower's manuscript was lost and was not found until 1966, when Fred Eggan found a carbon copy of it and had it published.

(in an envelope). I have heard about one wedding with four hundred guests where the bridal couple received one hundred million lire. At three other weddings I have been informed about, the couples received thirty, forty, and ninety million lire respectively (one million lire was approximately five hundred US dollars in February 2001).



Status, and above all hypergamy, has often been discussed in connection with dowry (see e.g. Comaroff 1980; Schneider 1980:335). As I will show in chapter five, a generation and more ago young girls and boys were not free to meet with one another and thus they had little opportunity to make their own choice as regards whom to marry. Instead, their parents, often with the help of a mediator, sought what they thought would be a suitable partner for their offspring (Chapman Gower 1973:95). The value of the dowry was thoroughly discussed, and according to Schneider, parents then generally attempted upward mobility through their daughters (1980:327-335).

The situation is quite different today. First of all, I have not heard of any modern arranged marriages; the young people chose their own partners. Moreover, Vito's and Rosalba's families never came together to have an economic discussion in order to evaluate what the other party was able to contribute to the young couple. Instead, as the engagement period went on and the families got to know each other, they were able to understand fairly well what the other party could do for the young people and what expenses they were able to front. And whenever anything needed to be discussed regarding the various preparations each family was undertaking before the wedding, it was discussed together with Vito and Rosalba – never above their heads – their parents told me.

As regards status, the marriages I know of are broadly speaking homogamous, which per se indicates that marriages are not free from status considerations. The tradition of putting the *corredo* on view (see above), allowing its size and quality to be evaluated by relatives and friends, is another, perhaps more concrete, sign of the importance of status considerations. The same applies to the

house which has been prepared for the newlyweds, as well as to the elaborate wedding feast. Apart from this, the cultural value of the *corredo* based upon traditional symbolic meanings is still very much alive and distinctly separates female and male dowry.

In spite of the large economic investments made in connection with the preparation of the wedding and the dowry, it is questionable, however, whether this can be regarded as a means of moving property down a generation, which has been regarded as the common effect of dowries. Though Schneider might be right that the *corredo* once constituted a potentially liquid resource, this is not the case today. Just like the furniture and kitchen equipment that are parts of the man's dowry, these things have a negligible second-hand value, despite the large sums spent on buying them. The only part of the dowry that has a real economic value is the house, which one of the spouses might bring.

The economic investments that are made therefore only indirectly affect the young family's economic situation. That is, the young couple does not have to spend their own earnings on establishing their home, but the dowry does not give them a further economic base, in spite of the fact that it surely affects the parents' estate negatively. This is quite a different situation compared to when land or other economic durables make up the dowries. The situation among my informants therefore supports Comaroff's remark that there is greater ethnographic diversity than is often supposed in the paradigmatic conceptions of dowry regarded simply as a transfer of familial property.



Friends of mine from the north of Italy tell me that their wedding parties are nowhere near as big as those of their Sicilian counterparts, and they also express surprise at the lavish dowries in the South. Official statistics confirm that weddings in the North are much smaller than the average wedding in the South (ISTAT 2000a:23). According to Goody, there is a tendency in modern industrial societies towards marriage prestations even disappearing and being replaced by parents providing children with education and training needed for work, though in many parts of southern Europe dowry transac-

tions continue to be important (1983:241; 2000:86,92). Here, however, I have been able to show that though there are signs of education sometimes replacing traditional dowries in the South, as in the case of Stefania, in still other cases education just complements rich dowries, as in the case of Rosalba, and I have shown moreover that these dowries are getting increasingly larger.

Thus, dowries continue to be of utmost social and cultural importance, besides their economic aspects. They are therefore meticulously planned, and weddings will not take place until all plans have been carried out. These preparations include the completion of studies for both men and women, and the finding of a job for men. The honeymoon too is planned well in advance with the help of travel agencies, which invite engaged couples to special information meetings. A couple that married in 1999 went to such a meeting in 1997. Rosalba and Vito left the day after their wedding for a cruise in the Greek archipelago. From there they called every second day, either to his or to her mother.

## An Ordinary Day of a Housewife

Getting married also means moving out of the parental home. There is no intermediate stage between living with one's parents and with one's husband or wife, but a sudden and radical change in any man's as well as any woman's life.<sup>12</sup> So, just like everyone else, until her wedding day Rosalba has always lived with and been cared for by her parents. She has been taking part very little in the common household chores but has dedicated herself to her studies and to social life. Within a few hours she has now, at the age of twenty-seven, turned into a married woman with responsibility for her own house, which, as time passes, will become more and more a symbol of herself (see chapter 4).

What then will an ordinary day in Rosalba's life as a married woman look like?

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<sup>12</sup> Singles under the age of thirty-five constitute only 2 per cent of all Italian households, with the highest figure (2.5 per cent) in North Italy (ISTAT 2001:238)





Although today many young girls study and get academic degrees, finding a job corresponding to the level of their studies is not easy for them, quite the reverse. Rosalba may therefore, in spite of her academic degrees and a possible wish to enter the labour market, very well become a well-educated housewife dedicating her time to the household, to her husband, and one day to her children,<sup>13</sup> but not to a profession (cf. ISTAT 1999 (1994):108-110). This is the most common life for the women within the fishing group, which is often said, especially by the non-fishing population, to be more *all'antica* (old-fashioned) than other groups, and thus to prefer that their women be housewives regardless of the situation in the labour market.

Being a housewife means having a long working day. It is she who is the first to rise in the morning in order to prepare a simple breakfast for her family. Just a very small cup of strong *espresso* coffee or a bowl of warm milk in which the coffee is poured is usually served to adults, while children get biscuits with warm milk. Breakfast finished, having children means that one of the parents will have to take them to school, at least during their first school years. Among fishermen's families it will usually be the mother taking her small children, dressed in aprons, to school in the absence of the father. Back home again the woman will then continue her repetitive daily routine chores, which seem to create a village-wide commonality among the women (cf. Dimen 1986:57). These chores take on an almost ritual character and begin by pulling up the Venetian blinds, after which the cleaning and putting in order of the house starts. Anyone passing by in the street will see that the usually closed and covered windows and the likewise usually closed doors (see chapter 5) are now open, while women are giving dusters a shake or come out

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<sup>13</sup> Low fertility, Goody argues, seems to be associated with late marriage, longer residence of children with their parents, and high unemployment (2000:104). In Italy the nativity is among the lowest in the world. In 1998 it was 1.19 children per woman, with a slightly higher number for South Italy, where women had an average of 1.4 children (ISTAT 1999:261). In Mazara del Vallo nativity has gone down from 25 births per 1000 inhabitants in 1958 to 11.3 in 2000 (Lentini 2002:108).

to sweep and scrub the street in front of their houses. Now and then they may be seen taking a break to have a chat with one another or someone passing by.

The houses I frequented were always in a perfect state whenever I came for a visit, regardless of whether I had announced my visit or not (which I usually had, though). Time and again I was impressed by the perfectionism, realising what an effort it takes to keep a house tidy in spite of having family members who more often than not neither help the mother/wife with her housework nor, by trying to avoid making the house untidy again, show respect for the efforts she has put into her work.

This is how Giovanna, a middle-aged woman with four grown children of both sexes, three of them still living at home, described her life as a housewife:

‘The housewife is cursed... Being a housewife is for me the most contemptible thing that exists... It is not a work which gives me satisfaction, no. It is a job which has destroyed me... As a professional you are more respected, and even the husband says when his wife comes home from work that she is tired. But in this house nobody says so. Here the housewife has to do everything... In the evening I am very tired... The housewife’s work cannot be compared to any other work, only with those working in the mines... It is not that I do it with disgust, no, no, because they are my children and it is my house, thus you do what you have to do with love. But you are not recognised [neither by the state which does not give the housewife a proper pension nor by her family, Giovanna explains]... I make their rooms, make their beds, and prepare their breakfast in the morning. I do it as if they were still small children. I prepare everything in the morning, the milk, whatever they want. I know what they want and I prepare it. I make their breakfast and then they leave for work. At one o’clock they will find the *pasta* if not on the plates in the pot. Because that is the time. I am always obliging towards them. That is my character... After lunch they sleep, before they return to work. Once again their rooms are in disorder. The beds – how many times do I make them! It is incredible that they are always in disorder. You know how they are... In my house they are taken care of like children, always served. I do not

think this can continue [that is, once they are married, as many young wives nowadays are professionals and thus will not be able to do all this for their families]... I have a big family, they are affectionate, I do not lack love from my family, I do not lack respect, I do not lack anything. But I do notice that there is nobody saying, "But poor thing, she has been on her feet all day."

To me it seems, though, that women's work is sometimes made heavier and more difficult by the women themselves, than it in fact has to be (cf. Dimen 1986:57). One example is the washing of clothes, which is part of the daily repetitive morning ritual, too. This is done by hand, even though everyone has a washing machine. The machine, however, is used mainly for linen. Another example, and one of the seemingly most unrewarding tasks I can think of, as regards these women, is the just-mentioned scrubbing of the streets in front of their houses. As soon as the women have finished this work, anyone walking by might drop whatever litter she or he happens to have in hand, or the driver of a car parking just outside one's door may decide to empty the car's ashtray there. At least this is what happened to me, when I had cleaned the street outside my house in one of my efforts to adapt to local practice.

Women's cleaning and washing are partly visible through the open doors and windows, but the most visible task of all is, of course, the scrubbing of the streets. If the character of the woman is thought of as being reflected by the state of her house, it might be that being seen while carrying out these tasks is important – cleaning becomes performance and thereby a demonstration of the fulfilment of housewifely duties (cf. Dubisch 1995:209). Thus, it may not be as unrewarding as it might seem.

When the house sparkles, it is time for the woman to do the shopping for provisions. As Sicilians prefer fresh food (see the section below on commensality), the housewife needs to make daily purchases and to spend much time on the preparation of the lunch – the pivotal point of family life. If one is in Sicily without a watch, there is absolutely no problem in knowing when it is one o'clock, that is, lunchtime. Very suddenly, all activity seems to stop, work places and shops are closed, and streets are emptied. On one occasion I

wondered why the streets were already so empty at noon. Then I realised that I had forgotten that summer time had begun and the clocks turned ahead – it was already one o'clock. On the beach in summer it is the same thing. From being very crowded and noisy in the morning, it suddenly turns into a very silent and deserted place when everybody leaves for lunch.

For three or four hours society appears to stand still. Men and children may take a nap after eating, while women clean the kitchens. As the other family members wake up, the women will make their beds for the second time on the very same day. Not until around four o'clock in the wintertime and five o'clock in the hot summertime are the shops' iron gratings raised again with a bang, and people and cars begin to fill the streets.

Especially during summer, however, many do not return to their jobs after lunch break. For those who do not, it is now time for receiving or making visits or doing errands of various kinds. When the housewife went out on her own in the morning, she did so because she had to do the necessary shopping. Going out in the afternoon, in contrast, even when it is just to do more shopping for the day, has a different and more social character and demands, for example, dressing up. Now women prefer not to go out on their own, as people would just start talking, I was told (see chapter 5). Thus, they are accompanied by either their husbands or female relatives or friends.<sup>14</sup>

One may thus say that there are qualitative differences between various parts of the day, or that people act according to different rules in the mornings and in the evenings. Mornings mean individual activities. This can be seen already at breakfast, which is not regarded as a meal in the same sense as lunch and supper. The family does not sit down to share it and very little is eaten and drunk. Then each family member leaves, perhaps at different times, for his or her own activity. Only the housewife remains at home, if she is not accompanying her children to school or going out to do errands on her own. At lunch-

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<sup>14</sup> This different behaviour in the morning compared to the afternoon, can be described, in Goffman's terms, as the women in the morning extending their backstage when shopping in nearby shops without dressing up as they do in the afternoon (1982 (1959):127-128).

time the quality of time changes and family life begins. The family then gathers to share the meal as they later will do for supper, and for the rest of the day many of the activities will be carried out together. Just as the afternoon and the evening are more bent on family life compared to the morning, so is Sunday compared to the other days of the week (see below).

Supper is not served at an exact time like lunch, but sometime between eight and ten o'clock in the evening. It is usually somewhat lighter than lunch. After supper and after having cleaned the kitchen again, the housewife has finished her long working day. Visiting may be done also after supper, more so in the warm summer nights or on Saturday evenings, but to a much lesser extent during the working week in winter.

This is how Stefania, a young woman who had newly married a boat-owner, described her own mother's working day (her family of origin does not belong to the fishing population):

'What I blame my mother for, and at the same time I admire her for it, is this hyperactivity. My mother never stands still. She has these very rapid rhythms. If she is not in the shop [where she works] she is ironing, if she is not ironing she is putting things in order, if she is not putting things in order she is dusting, if she is not... I have never seen her, for example, reading even a paper or doing a crossword. She is not very willing to watch a movie in the evening, because she has this culture of activity. She has to work. In this sense I envy her, because I have never seen her tired. It is even nicer that I have never seen her overstrained because of her rhythms... She has never asked us [referring to her sister and brother] to take any responsibility for household chores. She has never let us do anything. Instead she told us that we should think of our studies.'

On weekends daily life changes. Saturday morning is the same as any other morning during the working week – grown-ups go to work and children go to school. But since few of them return to their work after lunch, there is more time for social life, and in the evening one may also stay up late, since Sunday is free. Saturday afternoon I used to meet many couples doing shopping together

or just strolling around in the centre. Friends were invited for supper or they decided to meet at a *pizzeria* later in the evening. Teenagers agreed to meet in the *piazza* after supper.

Fishermen's wives, however, will restrict their going out and their social life to a large extent during the long absences of their husbands. Young wives without children or with small children may prefer to spend much of this lonely time in their parental house. But if they are not able to visit relatives and friends, people keep in continual touch over the phone. Besides traditional telephones, mobile phones are used very frequently and people are usually well updated on each other's whereabouts. Mothers especially are called daily when their children are not able to see them.

When the men return from sea, life changes for them as well as for their families:

'It [life] changes. You may wonder why it changes. It is because knowing that my husband is coming home, certain things I do not do while he is at home in order to be more at his disposal. If for example he says that we should take a walk, I cannot say that I cannot come because I have to wash the linen... I feel a strong emotion [when her husband comes home]. You [the anthropologist] are a woman, you understand me. Even though I am old, I can tell you that I have the same feelings as always. It is something wonderful. This is really something, the very best... You feel these very strong emotions, when you have to stay alone with him. You may think that I have grown-up children, that I am a grandmother, but the fisherman's wife has this nice situation together with her husband the first three days when he is ashore [laughing], after three days it is all gone.'  
(Giovanna)

Sunday means relatives coming together and sharing the most important and most elaborate meal of the week – Sunday lunch. The difference when it comes to foodstuff compared to weekdays is less the kind of food that is offered than the number of dishes and the quantity. For the woman, another difference is logically the time required for preparing these lavish meals. She may have attended an early mass in her parish church and after that quickly retur-

ned home to start the long preparations for the luncheon in order to have everything ready at one o'clock.

Because the women were at home cooking, I did not feel quite at ease when I went out on Sunday mornings to buy the newspaper, as I used to be more or less the only woman walking through the centre. All the more men were to be seen, as it is part of their weekly programme to have a lot of free time on Sundays and to go out for a walk in the morning to have a coffee, buy the paper, and meet with other men doing the same (cf. ISTAT 1999 (1994):83-85).

Late Sunday afternoon, after the football on television is over in the winter, the whole family dresses up for the famous *passeggiata* (walk), a cultural institution which often has been described in anthropological literature on Italy (see e.g. Silverman 1975:19,41-42; Booth 1999:135). Slowly the family strolls again and again up and down the *corso* (the main shopping street), which is now closed to traffic for a few hours. They continually stop to chat with people they meet or to look at the shop windows. This is the greatest public social event of a normal week.

## Commensality

If food is treated as a code, the messages it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed. The message is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and trans-actions across the boundaries. (Douglas 1972:61)

This section deals with the importance informants give to food and to sharing of meals, and the analogy between the organisation of food and meals on the one hand and the social organisation on the other. It will be demonstrated that just as the ingredients of a dish are not exchangeable but fixed, various dishes are strictly kept apart, and the diet as such has little flexibility, so too with the make-up of social categories and social groupings (cf. Douglas 1982:82ff). The meal as a social and cultural institution thus marks who are the persons one is closest to, and the sharing of food ensures the survival of this group of

persons, in our case the family, both socially and materially, according to Counihan (1999:13). To this I would like to add culturally as well, since the sharing supports the idea of the family as the cultural norm.



Food and meals are of central interest to Sicilians. Not only do people often gather to share a meal, but they also enjoy just talking about food and sharing recipes. They usually have very firm opinions about how various dishes should be prepared, and they like to tell about it and to compare their way of cooking with how others prepare the same dishes, though the differences are generally minimal. (The notebook I always kept within easy reach could then be lent to whoever needed to write down a recipe.) This goes for men as well as women, in spite of most men laughingly boasting about only having the theoretical, not the practical, knowledge. I have even seen small children in restaurants having enough knowledge to tell the waiters how they wanted their food to be prepared.

As will be shown in the following section, young people of both sexes take very little part in common household chores in their parental homes. This applies to cooking, too, meaning that newly married women have to take on this responsibility with very little or no training beforehand. The theoretical knowledge, shared by so many, will of course be of great help then. This theoretical training is quite different from many other cultures, where cooking is learned through playing and doing from an early age.

There is high priority on food, but new food, like foreign food, does not seem to be tempting. I once participated in a meeting with a teacher who was to take a group of teenagers on a language course to Great Britain and told her young charges to bring some food with them on their journey. Later she explained to me that, according to her experience, the youngsters would not be very happy with the food abroad. This accords with people's generally being very passionate about Sicilian cooking and expressing in various ways their conviction that it is the very best, and that even for a foreigner it must be preferable compared to any other food (cf. Counihan 1999:166). In fact,



food was one of the few things people expressed pride in when discussing with me what was good about Sicily, and when they are forced to leave Sicily due to unemployment, the things people miss, apart from their families, are the sun, the sea, and the food. This pride in their own food and the efforts made to stick to traditional dishes even when living far away from home,<sup>15</sup> I found therefore to be comparable with Mätzener Bär's argument that '[l]oyalty to certain dishes can almost be compared with patriotism' (1999:56).

According to Douglas, the meal represents all the ordered systems associated with it, '[h]ence the strong arousal power of a threat to weaken or confuse that category' (1972:80). Traditional patterns are stuck to, and just like novelties, fast food is avoided. The same goes for canned and frozen foodstuffs. Fresh food is always preferred, making the seasonal cycle of the cooking very clear. Further, food is always served as a distinct dish with a distinct name, and the basic structure of various recipes is shared. Each *pasta* recipe, for example, not only has specified ingredients and a distinct name, but it also specifies which form of *pasta* to use (there is a great number of different forms of *pasta* to be found even in the smallest provision shop). Indeed, the strong regularities in the consumption of food give the impression that not only do people eat at the same time (see above), but they also eat the same kind of food.

People also follow the same pattern with regard to the structure of the meals as such, and to eating with the people they are closest to. Eating is definitely a social, not an individual, practice. People pity the person who has to eat alone. The norm everyone seems to subscribe to is that the family should share a well-composed meal twice a day, making snacks and sweets between these two meals infrequent. On weekdays it is the nuclear family that eats together, and on Sundays and holidays a larger group of kin members gathers, as we learned in the section above. The custom is that young families visit the

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<sup>15</sup> Scholars have pointed to this deeply rooted interest for food as living on also among Italian immigrants in America, who are described, by themselves as well as by others, as strongly interested in food (Goode 1984:146,164), and as saving on clothing, housing, recreation, and entertainment rather than on food (Gabaccia 2000:102).

older generation on these occasions (cf. Minicuci 1989:299). Very often a young couple alternates between visiting her family and his. 'I get lazy on Sundays, I do not want to cook, but to relax,' Stefania told me. Only when the older generation gets too old to organise these meals does the younger generation take over the responsibility. This system is yet another support for the newly married woman, who has yet to become a fully trained cook.

Thus, who one shares a meal at home with and who one does not is a matter of relatedness. When friends arrange to meet for meals on Saturday evenings, for example, it is usually to have supper out, more rarely in their homes. In summertime they may gather for an outdoor picnic. Eating out seems to constitute a bridge between those with whom one shares a meal in private and those with whom one never eats (cf. Douglas 1972:66).

Thus, food has a prominent place in the life of the Sicilians, and being a good cook is definitely a way of gaining prestige. It is in this context that we find the real locus of family life. Here, at the dining table and as provider of the important food, the mother, who generally takes great pride in her cooking, achieves her supreme role as she turns her husband's income into food. Despite the fact that single family members have the accepted possibility of objecting to her cooking and making demands on her to prepare special courses for them (see the section below), she is the one who controls and distributes the life-giving substance. The meal becomes the most important symbol of the mother, even more important than the house (see chapter 4), and it shows very concretely her centrality within her family.



The visual aspect of the meal is not important. It is not the total setting but the food that gets everyone's attention. Thus, not much effort is given to setting the table. Before eating, though, the dining table is always covered by a large tablecloth, regardless of whether or not it is clean and ironed, which is then removed immediately after the meal. Disposable plates and glasses are often used. Cutlery and paper napkins are placed in the middle of the table, and everyone helps themselves. There are no table decorations, and likewise

the dishes are usually not much garnished or in any other way given careful touches as regards decoration. There is no general fixed seating order.

With very few exceptions, everything eaten is transformed from its natural state. When raw vegetables are served, for example, they are covered by olive oil or dressing; raw meat or fish is never served; and the fresh fruit, which is served after the main course, is peeled, cut by a knife and eaten one piece at a time – one does not, for example, bite into an apple (fresh grapes and cherries are the exceptions, they are eaten as they are). (See chapter 5 for a discussion on nature versus culture.)

Cheese, olives, ham, *salame*, and other small dishes like various pickled vegetables may be put on the table as *antipasti* or extras. It is not passed around – no food is – but is just there for anyone to serve him- or herself while awaiting the *pasta*. The *pasta*, the first course and the heavier part of the meal, without which a real meal would be incomplete, must be eaten immediately when it is ready in order to be good. It is the mother who puts the big *pasta* bowl on the table and who, without any strict order, distributes the contents to each and every one.

In spite of receiving huge amounts of *pasta*, everyone has soon finished their portions. Even if the Sicilians really enjoy good food, they do not seem to find it necessary to enjoy it slowly. Since everyone starts eating as soon as they have been served, the mother may hardly have time to sit down and eat her own *pasta* before it is time to serve the main course. Especially when there are guests, and thus much serving to do, it may be that the mother/wife does not have time to sit down at the table at all.

Different courses are not served simultaneously, but in strict order. Nor are they served on the same plate; a clean plate accompanies each course. Even just a taste of a minor dish requires another plate. On Sundays, for example, when there are several dishes on the table, including sweet baked goods for dessert, the amount of dirty dishes or disposable plates therefore gets very large. The pattern is the same when a picnic replaces the usual Sunday lunch. I have partaken in very lavish picnics where several courses have been served

including big cakes and where at the end of the day the amount of disposables was really huge.

Beverages are not central to the meal and thus not much commented on, though attention may be paid to a homemade or especially good wine. Water is the daily beverage. For Sunday lunch, besides water, soft drinks and a bottle of wine will be on the table, too. The people at the table help themselves.

Each family member expects the mother to cook for him or her according to his or her liking. Eavesdropping while buying my own food, I would often hear women buying various products for various family members, because 'my son prefers this and my daughter that', and so forth. When I ran into an acquaintance one day, she told me that she had prepared the pasta in three different ways on that very day: one way for her daughter, another way for her son, and a third way for her husband. She did not say anything about herself. Thus, it is common that the mother, who knows so well the preferences of each and every person, may end up preparing alternative dishes for the very same meal for various family members. Giovanna said:

'Sometimes when I have already prepared the supper, my husband comes and he says that he does not want this, he wants, let's say, poached eggs. Then I have to make poached eggs. Because he does not want what I have already prepared, he wants eggs. Or maybe he prefers two fried fishes, or a fish soup. In order not to quarrel, I will make it. I always do.'

Nor is refusing or not finishing a dish regarded as bad table manners, but individuality is accepted when it comes to choices within the frames of the fixed system, that is, as long as it does not threaten the system as such. While eating, anyone may also rise without excusing him- or herself. Everyone is allowed to talk and the voices are often loud, as they have to make themselves heard in spite of the television set which seems always to be turned on. As soon as anyone has finished the meal, she or he may leave the table. It may be a rather noisy and very familiar atmosphere, far from formal.



Even if women all over the world are responsible for the feeding of their family members, and food is always and everywhere necessary for survival, the cultural value put on food and meals may vary. Here I have tried to show the great significance given by my informants to the food, the meal, and the eating together, and the analogy between food patterns and patterns of social relations: as there is little flexibility when it comes to food habits but loyalty to tradition is strong, so too when it comes to the social organisation.

Further, by perpetuating male domestic incompetence and by cooking according to the preferences of their family members, the women, as the controllers and distributors of the important food, increase their own importance and indispensability (Counihan 1999:55). This is one way, then, for women to create dependence on themselves through their efforts when it comes to caring for the welfare of their families. The following section will show other ways.

## Family Relations and Upbringing

For a Sicilian, informants told me, *la famiglia è la cosa più bella del mondo* (the family is the most beautiful thing in the world) and *l'affetto che vale è quello della famiglia* (the sentiments which really count are those found within the family). These statements were sometimes contrasted with a presumed lack of family love and solidarity among northerners, showing that the two Italies discourse (see chapter 1) is internalised by the people studied. The North is usually held up as more civilised, but when it comes to family love and friendship, it is taken for granted that the Sicilians have more affection and more concern for their dear ones.

In the previous chapter I argued that the family studied is matrifocal on its nuclear level. Here I will develop this discussion further in order to show how this mother focus is expressed and how it is transmitted from one generation to the next. As will be shown, the mother's central position must not be underestimated – she clearly has the most central position within the most important social unit.

## La Mamma

*Vai dalla mamma* (go to Mummy), small children are told. I would hear this time and again when overhearing talk between grown-ups and children going on around me. The people saying this were strangers to the children as well as non-strangers including their fathers and other relatives. It is so obvious, as a woman told me, that *i figli sono sempre della madre* (children always belong to the mother). *L'amore della madre non si può paragonare con nessun altro* (the mother's love can not be compared with any other love), I was also told, and likewise that *la madre ha qualche cosa in più verso i figli* (the mother has something extra towards her children), that is, compared to the father. Parents are important, another informant said, but it is *la mamma chi ha il primo posto* (the mother who comes first).

People express this alleged very strong and very particular connection between the mother and her child by speaking much more frequently about their mothers than about their fathers (cf. Belmonte 1989:90). My informants would say, for instance, that they were going to visit their mothers, when in fact they were going to see both their parents. Similarly, a friend told me that she would spend the holiday at her mother's summer house in the countryside, and one of my informants said that he and his wife had spent Christmas with his mother. A young woman said that her mother-in-law lived alone, as both her children had had to leave their native village. When an elderly couple had burglars in their house, their children told me that there had been a burglary in their mother's house. Though the fathers are not mentioned, in all these instances they were there too. There is also an endless number of sentimental songs and poems about *la mamma*, but this is not the case when it comes to the father. The same goes for proverbs (Esposito 1989:132).

## The White Widows

The women I met did indeed play a very prominent part within their families, not least as emotional centres, and the significance of this very central position of the women seems to increase as time goes on and as they succeed

in embodying the maternal ideal that is open to them (cf. Du Boulay 1986:159). These *vedove bianche* (white widows), as they are sometimes called because of having to live a large part of their life without the daily company of their husbands, are also capable of taking care of children, home, economy, and the household's relations with the outside world in the absence of their husbands. That is why they often told me that they had to act as both mothers and fathers for their children. The husbands, for their part, realising that they had to rely more on their women compared to other men, acknowledged the indispensable role of their wives. They would praise them for being capable of taking care of everything and tell me that they had complete faith in their wives (cf. Moruzzi and Parisi 1994:86).

There are writers who have emphasised the influence of South Italian wives/mothers to a point where the husbands/fathers become more or less neglected. In doing this, some of them have stressed the importance of the informants' social class belonging. Parsons, carrying out psychosocial anthropological research among 'the proletariat and sub-proletariat' in Naples, concluded that 'the basic family form for the Neapolitan sub-proletariat is strongly matrifocal, sometimes becoming the pure matriarchal family in which paternity is only a biological and not a social fact, but more often remaining in an intermediate position in which, within the family, the father's role is minimized. At the upper reaches of the proletariat, where occupations are more stable or the family has roots in the artisanate, the patriarchal tradition is evidently less subject to strain' (1969:96-97).

Berkowitz too maintains that the lower on the class ladder, the greater the power of the South Italian wife, but she argues further that women at the other extreme of the social ladder, that is, upper class women, also have a strong position. It is in between these two extremes that the father can put most power behind his authority in order to control the dependent members of the family, and thus it is within these families that paternal authority constitutes an element of family cohesion (1984:87-88).

In contrast to Parsons and Berkowitz, Belmonte stated that when it comes to the lower-class Neapolitanian family it is true that it is mother-centred –

women as mothers are simply 'deified' – but it is still father-ruled. According to him, the mother has 'undisputed monopoly over child care and the flow of family feeling', but she 'is not a provider or a power-holder who supersedes the father. She may share power with him and she may have more prestige. She is the living center of a tight-bonded human group, but she is not the boss' (1989:83,87,93).

However, if it is true that Sicilian women outside of the fishing population, such as farmers' wives, for example, are not fully as strong and capable as fishermen's wives are, as I was told by many *mazaresi*, then the strength of the white widows seems to be a result of their men's absence, and not directly linked to their social class belonging, since fishermen and farmers can be said to belong to the same social stratum. Thus, the behaviour of the fishing men's wives is only a result of the circumstances, and not a sign of a real difference of degree of strength between women belonging to different social classes.

Dubisch writes that having their feet firmly in the domestic realm and 'fulfilling their roles as wives and mothers, many rural Greek women feel confident and certain of themselves, whatever else they do' (1986a:31). Likewise, I often found that my female informants too acted in an apparently very self-reliant way in various situations. Having a well-established role model to stick to, they seemed to feel confident and certain of themselves, while having no fixed role model to stick to, on the other hand, would mean that the rules for behaviour are not obvious to the same extent. In spite of exercising much influence within their family units, these women do, however, give their husbands a hearing when they are around. They generally seem to let their husbands have the final word, as I have often been able to observe myself. Giovanna confirmed this by saying that even if she is able to handle everything on her own, she will immediately obey her husband without even discussing the matter if he comes home after three weeks at sea and says 'no' to something she has planned to do. On the other hand, when matters are carried to the extreme the situation may change. Telling me about a female relative with whom she had cut all contact after a very troublesome relationship, one of my female informants said:



‘My husband wanted me to invite her [to their daughter’s wedding], but I said no. That woman will never ever enter my house again... My husband wanted me to invite her. He said that we had to invite her. Listen [I said], if you want her at the wedding, I won’t even let you accompany your daughter to the altar. I swear to you [the anthropologist] before God that I said this. [I said to my husband] I will let my son accompany her, because that woman will never ever enter my house again.’

### The Dominating Male Ideology Versus Absent Husbands and Fathers

The Italian family law states that the husband is not the head of the family and thus has no authority over his wife. Regarding children it also says that both parents ‘must exercise parental authority (*potestà dei genitori*) by mutual consent’ (Timoteo 1995:273,275).<sup>16</sup> In spite of this law and the already mentioned matrifocality, there is a widespread ideology of male superiority.



The Italian bureaucracy often forces citizens to go to the authorities, like the municipality, for various documents. Having official residence in Mazara del Vallo for a year, I too needed sometimes to go there to ask for a document. Just like any Sicilian, I was then always asked who was my *capofamiglia* (head of the family). It was taken for granted that the person registered as *capofamiglia* was a man, that is, the husband/father in the nuclear family, in spite of that fact that each family is free to choose who should be registered as their reference person. Only in cases like mine, where there is no husband or father, does a woman take on that role. Also school authorities regard the father as the head of his family. Whenever there was a document from my daughter’s school to sign, it therefore said *Firma del Padre (o di chi ne fa le veci)* (Signature of Father (or person substituting for him)).

Siebert maintains that South Italian women in certain contexts only

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<sup>16</sup> *Codice civile* (civil code) articles 143-144, 316

outwardly participate in this male ideology. She sees it as a form of ‘female complicity with their own subordination’, according to which the subordinated female behaviour is a means for the women to act in practice ‘with all the power over people and things that is available to them as mothers in the family sphere’ (1996:58). But as Scott sees it, ‘symbolic concessions are “political concessions” as well. That such women’s power can be exercised only behind a veil of proprieties that reaffirm men’s official rule as powerholders is a tribute [...] to the men’s continued control of the public transcript’ (1990:52).<sup>17</sup>

I find that Scott has a good point here. Because of the prevalent male ideology, the white widows, who are so capable from a practical point of view, from a cultural point of view are deeply dependent on their husbands. Women are expected to adhere to their husbands, to let them have the final word, and not to act too independently in order to uphold men’s position. These are ways of paying the men respect and of demonstrating their official position, and with this, not only the husband but also the wife herself lives up to traditional expectations of being a good family. Furthermore, with the role of the husband as the official head of the family stressed in these ways, the matrifocality on the nuclear family level is balanced, and the importance of husband and wife as a unit is demonstrated. Therefore, in my view, it is not a matter of the women only outwardly ascribing to male dominance. This is why I maintained in chapter two when discussing matrifocality that despite the strength of the mother-child unit, it still does not have the capacity to function effectively on its own.

As for fishermen’s children, they grow up with absent fathers. ‘When my father retired, I had to make his acquaintance,’ one of Enza’s sons told me.

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<sup>17</sup> In his book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* Scott by ‘public transcript’ refers to the public discourse of both powerful and powerless and the interaction between these two groups. ‘Hidden transcript’ is its opposite – that is, a backstage discourse. Scott maintains that in confrontations between the powerless and the powerful, the powerless creates a hidden transcript – that what cannot be spoken of in the face of the powerful – as a mode to engender a subculture and thus to conspire against the powerful. The powerful too develops a hidden transcript, which likewise expresses what cannot be openly avowed. Scott uses these terms to explain above all resistance to domination.

Older men confirm this by telling stories about how hard it was to come back home and find that their youngest children did not even recognise them. (These men would often say that today they spend the time lost with their own children on their grandchildren.) The father might even become a frightening figure, due to limited intimacy and trust between the child and his or her father. The mother may also strengthen this by warning her disobedient children about when the father comes home from sea and hears what they have been up to, as children are said to obey their fathers better than they obey their mothers. Children thus partake in the dominating male ideology by paying their fathers more respect than they pay their mothers, with whom they often have a more easy-going, confident relation. Fathers of today, though, do not have as much authority in relation to their children as their fathers once had, according to middle-aged and elderly people (cf. Hilowitz 1976:133; ISTAT 1999:260). A look from the father was once enough to silence a child, I was told.

### **How Family Values are Transmitted**

‘My mother has always run everything at home. [...] She is the hub of the family. [...] Very often the mother is a housewife. You know that if you go home, your mother is there. You know that when you have to eat, your mother will be cooking. It’s a support, a security. The mother figure for us, for me, oh God, it is this. That is, you may feel assured that your mother is there. Really, when I married the most difficult part for me was, well not difficult because..., because I was not used to. Practically, I had to think of all the things. Not being used to..., because of my mother I never had to care about cooking [when living with my parents], I went out, I did what I wanted to do, because I knew that when I returned home for lunch, I would find that my mother had cooked. At supper she had cooked. I mean, I never had to think about washing, ironing, or cooking. That is why at the beginning of my marriage I was a little bit nervous, because now I had to run everything. But my mother had always told me that once you marry there is nobody who will do these things for you. If you leave a plate out of place, you will find it there the next morning.’

(Mariella, married at the age of twenty-six)

‘I never cook, but I do make my bed. I keep my things in order, but I do not clean my room. Some of my clothes I wash myself... When I tell my mother that I should do something, she says she will take care of it. It is not a good system, and I will not bring up my own children in the same way. However, I am too lazy to change the system now.... I am of no use whatsoever to my family.’ (Angelica, a thirty-five-year-old unmarried woman living with her parents)

The source of influence these mothers have in relation to their offspring, I maintain, lies to a large extent in their ability to tie their children close to themselves, through a seeming denial of themselves. One concrete way of doing this is by consciously spoiling their children, like cooking according to their wishes and by rarely asking them to take part in household chores. My female informants would express this attitude of theirs as *ci sacrificiamo per i figli* (we sacrifice ourselves for our children). Our children *sono troppo coccolati* (are much too spoiled), I was also told. (Admitting that they do spoil their children too much might indicate that it is not taken as obvious that this is how it necessarily should be.) Such a pattern of self-denial is heightened ‘because of the exclusive and powerful role women have as mothers’, according to Frey Breuner. Her conclusion is that through self-denial women gain power as well as their identity (1992:88ff).

Among my informant families, no woman is a breadwinner (it is possible, though, to find a small minority of fishermen’s and boat-owners’ wives who work outside their homes); thus they devote all their time to family and housework. My findings, however, show that this ‘attitude of self-sacrifice’ towards children is typical not just for the group studied. Stefania, for example, who before marrying a boat-owner at the age of twenty-nine did not belong to the fishing population, said to me that marrying really makes life change. ‘For example,’ she said, ‘I had never made my bed before.’ Not having any experience of cooking, either, before marrying, she now asks her greengrocer for advice. Her mother did all household chores by herself, in spite of working full time outside the home.

Schneider writes that as a rule Sicilian children are tyrannical, and '[w]hen-ever possible their desires are granted' (1969:149). Pointing to the special devotion sons receive from their mothers, Cronin writes that discipline is unheard of. She once saw a son refuse three successive courses prepared by his mother. Each time, the mother would return to the kitchen and prepare something else according to the preference of her son (1970:91,111). According to Lanoue, in Italy especially boys 'are often sheltered from responsibilities by their parents' (1991:55). *Accontentiamo i figli* (let's grant the children their desires), I often heard both mothers and fathers saying.

This situation may not always have been the rule. Informants said that nowa-days parents have to adjust to and help their children, but once, children had to adjust to and help their parents, the boys by trying to earn money, which was brought back home, and the girls by helping in the household. Today's situation, however, sometimes made me feel like a demanding mother when I asked my own teenage daughter to give me a helping hand at home. This was a feeling I was not used to from home, and at the same time a demonstration of the power of cultural patterns.

Definitions of household often include the pooling of the members' incomes or emphasise the residence unit as task oriented (see chapter 2). However, I found that besides taking little part in household chores, grown-up children with regular earnings might very well live with their parents without contributing economically to the household. Actually, I never heard of any adult children, regardless of their having good incomes, paying for living with their parents, though this may of course be the case in a situation of pure necessity (see e.g. Guarrasi 1978:66; Saraceno 2004:50).<sup>18</sup> Parents, on the other hand, may continue to support their unmarried sons and daughters economically even when they have become adults, either because the latter are studying or because they are unemployed. Today parents have the economic possibility to support their children longer than was possible a generation

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<sup>18</sup> According to official statistics 4 % of Sicilian sons and daughters between 18 and 34 years old living with their parents contribute on a regular basis to the household's economy, approx. 10 % contribute every now and then (ISTAT 2000b:75).

ago, as, in spite of the high unemployment figures (see chapter 1, 'The Two Italies...'), there is an increased standard of living in Sicily in general and a generally high appreciation of academic studies, which therefore leads a large number of young Sicilians to take university degrees with the economic support of their parents. Support between generations is indeed fundamental for the individual throughout a great part of life. ISTAT shows with official statistics that the young generation that is supported by their parents, will support their own children as well as their elderly parents one day, and their children will in turn support the parents when they get old (ISTAT 1999:259ff). This is quite different from a system in which each generation is taught to stand on its own feet.



So, regardless of children's loving and continuously praising their mothers and reaffirming how central they are in their lives, children seem to make great demands especially on their mothers, while mothers, for their part, appear to accept this and continue to work hard and to make all possible efforts for their children. Perhaps this is not as unselfish as it may sound, though. The housewife's hard work meeting the needs and the demands of various family members as well as keeping the home in a perfect state may not be as thankless a task as it might seem to an observer. All the hard work and spoiling can certainly be seen as a form of self-denial, but more importantly, I argue, it is a form of dependence training – that is, it is the very foundation for developing a family ethos in the child. Independence is not a goal of the upbringing of children (cf. Pitkin 1999 (1985):287ff) – Sicilian mothers do not accept their children's becoming independent, I was told – and children's attainment of legal age does not make any change in their relations with their parents. Instead, children are taught from early on to depend first of all on their mothers. Thus, the upbringing strengthens the nuclear matrifocal family, and the spoiling of the children may be seen as a means for the mothers to achieve this dependence upon themselves, which they need to gain their esteemed position. By saying out loud that they sacrifice themselves for their children, a culturally and socially sanctioned sacrifice, mothers constantly remind their children of their dependence upon their mothers. In return,

mothers receive the benefit of being the most central person in the lives of their children and being recognised by the society as good women and as upholders and transmitters of the family morality (cf. Berkowitz 1984:89; Kennedy 1986:126).

## Summary

To see one's children getting married is the purpose of life, informants would say. This chapter therefore starts with the magnificent wedding of Rosalba and Vito, before turning to the planning of this elaborate feast and their parents' long, meticulous preparations of the dowry – a fully equipped house – that the newly wedded couple received upon this very day. Besides their significance for the creation of a new nuclear family, weddings and dowries show how the individual is intermeshed in his or her family.

This predominantly ethnographic chapter then continues by presenting an ordinary day of a fisherman's wife: She is the hub around which family life rotates. While fulfilling her housewifely repetitive duties she keeps her house in a perfect state, but it is the cooking that is her most prominent task. The lunch is the pivotal point of family life and an institution that seems to make the whole society stand still. On workdays it is the nuclear family that unites for this meal, while on Sundays and other holidays larger kin groups come together. Friends come together for an evening out during weekends, but in the absence of her husband the social life of the fisherman's wife is restricted, and young wives may therefore prefer to stay with their parents until their husbands return from sea.

Food and the sharing of meals are indeed of great cultural value to my informants, and there is an analogy between the very distinct pattern of the organisation of food and meals on the one hand and the social organisation on the other. Just as the ingredients of a certain dish are not exchangeable but fixed, various dishes are always served under a distinct name and are strictly kept apart, and the diet as such has little flexibility, so too with the make-up of social categories and social groupings. The meal as a social institution more-

over marks who are the persons one is closest to, and the sharing of food and loyalty to traditional patterns thereby ensure the survival of the family socially, materially, and culturally.

The women's hard work with the household chores together with their attitude of self-sacrifice towards their children might resemble self-denial, but through their behaviour mothers gain their children's dependence upon them and thereby they also get their culturally and emotionally very esteemed position – the mother indeed has the most central position within the informants' most important social unit. However, parallel to this runs a male ideology, which is upheld by informants as well as by the society at large, making women culturally strongly dependent upon their men, in spite of their being capable and used to taking care of children and household all on their own during the long absences of their husbands. Matrilocality thus gets balanced, and the system indicates that the mother-child unit does not function effectively on its own as has often been argued with regard to matrifocal families.



## 4. THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE FAMILY

This thesis deals with the significance a Sicilian fishing population gives to its families and how this significance is expressed through its relations with family members and non-family members respectively. While previous chapter focused on the importance of the family, this chapter will explore its composition. I will argue that informants look at themselves as well as others above all as parts of their respective families – a person is not in the first place an independent, clearly bounded individual, but part of this collective. This family perspective leads to a high estimation of social relations as such, though it always puts an outsider, even an intimate friend, into a category kept distinctly apart from the family category.



Out shopping one day, I happened to run into a friend who told me that she was on her way to the funeral of the old father of a mutual friend. I asked a few questions and soon realised that, just like me, this woman did not know our friend's father personally. However, she told me that as we both knew his daughter, attending the funeral was the right thing to do. I agreed to come along to the church.

Upon our arrival the church was completely full, not of aged relatives and friends of the deceased man, as many of them were gone before him, but of his children, grandchildren, and many, many friends and colleagues of theirs. Probably most of the people attending the funeral did not know the deceased man personally. This holds, for instance, for a large group of the youngest attendants, who were pupils of one of the deceased man's sons, who teaches at an elementary school in Mazara del Vallo.

A family had suffered a loss, and it was this unit, not the dead man, which was central. As the incident demonstrates, it was enough therefore to know any part of the bereaved unit – not necessarily the deceased person – to participate in the funeral ceremony in order to express one's solidarity with the family.

I could give many similar examples which all show that the individual is predominantly looked at as part of his or her family and less as a single bounded unit. When, for instance, one of Giovanna's sons had started to go steady with a girl, Giovanna told the girl that it did not seem right to her to receive visits from the girl without knowing her family. Accordingly, a meeting was arranged between the two families, which included married sisters and brothers of the young couple. On one occasion I put myself in an embarrassing situation by asking if I could bring my daughter to a dinner to which I had been invited. The custom is that when a couple is invited to a dinner or a wedding, the invitation always includes their unmarried children, without its having to be explicitly said. The people inviting me therefore became upset when they realised that I did not take this for granted. Luckily, it was all sorted out when I explained to them that in my home country an invitation is always personal, unless stated otherwise. Analogously, when I had made an appointment for an interview with somebody I sometimes found a whole family waiting, and everybody then wholeheartedly participated in the discussion.

Another example of this emphasis on the family at the expense of the individual is how, for example, when a couple marries, as we saw in the preceding chapter, not only they but also their closest relatives are congratulated on the happy event. The shame and honour complex, which will be discussed in chapter five, is also a sign of the same thing. The loss of honour by one of its members will negatively affect the whole family. As a final example of this phenomenon, when a fisherman did not turn up when it was time for the wages to be paid, the boat-owner let the man's father, who worked on the same boat as his son, sign for the money.



The following sections will show how family belonging is expressed through kinship terms, modes of address, the traditional naming system, locality, and trust between members of the same family.

## Kinship Terms

In this first section I will discuss kinship structures, though emphasis will be put not on the structures as such but on their relation to actual behaviour. In doing this, I will argue that my informants constitute their personal identity first of all through family belonging.

### The Sicilian Kinship System

The Sicilian kinship system is basically bilateral,<sup>19</sup> with features of matrifocality and matrilinearity as well as patrilinearity. Knowledge of one's ancestors is often shallow: few Sicilians are said to be able to construct a complete genealogy ascending to their great grandfather (Schneider and Schneider 1976:75).



In previous chapters I have already pointed to the strong tendencies towards matrifocality at the level of informants' nuclear families. In addition, I also found matrilinearity. This preference towards the mother's family is usually explained by there being a special relation between mother and daughter, which endures after the daughter has married. *L'usanza nostra è che la figlia femmina va sempre vicino a mamma* (It is our custom that the daughter should always be close to her mother), Enza said. When it comes to young families' regular Sunday visits to their parents (see chapter 3), for instance, 'there is generally a preference, something common nowadays, to prefer the wife's parents. It is because the woman is weaker than the man that there is

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<sup>19</sup> I prefer the term bilateral and not cognatic, as the latter is often connected with descent, and among Sicilians in general there is little focusing on their ancestors.

a stronger attachment to her mother than to his,' Stefania's husband explained. This does not exclude a tendency to give precedence to one's patrilineage in other situations. As I will show below, this holds, for instance, for the traditional naming and surname systems.

Looking at the terminology of the kinship system, however, one finds that it has a perfect bilateral symmetry carving out the nuclear family for special emphasis, and not differentiating the nuclear family of mother and father respectively:

### Consanguines

- bisnonno/bisnonna* (great grandfather/grandmother)
- nonno/nonna* (grandfather/grandmother)
- padre/madre* (father/mother)
- figlio/figlia* (son/daughter)
- nipote* (grandchild, child and grandchild  
of one's sisters and brothers)
- fratello/sorella* (sister/brother)
- zio/zia* (uncle/aunt)
- cugino/cugina* (male/female cousin)

### Affines

- marito/moglie* (husband/wife)
- suocero/suocera* (father/mother-in-law)
- cognato/cognata* (brother/sister-in-law)
- genero/nuora* (son/daughter-in-law)



Godparenthood is a widespread phenomenon, and the relation with the godparents appointed at one's christening is of particular importance. It is the child's biological parents who choose godparents, and it is a matter of a voluntary ritual relationship between the two parties. Anthropologists have sometimes explained the choice of godparents as a means of creating alliance outside one's kin group and/or between the classes (see e.g. Boissevain 1966:21;

Pizzorno 1966:62; Campbell 1974 (1964):217ff; Davis 1977:223). As the relation is conceptually one of equality, 'it is effective in circumstances of factual inequality', Pitt-Rivers once argued (1976:324).

It is a relationship halfway between kinship and friendship, according to Alcaro (1999:30), and one important difference between consanguines and affines on the one hand and ritual kin on the other is that when people enter into a ritual kinship relation, it is a relationship only between the two active parties; it does not involve their kin groups. Thus, it should not be understood to be as it was when Rosalba and Vito married and their respective kin groups were regarded from then on as related. Nor, perhaps, should the importance of this relationship be overemphasised:

'Godparents become friends, there is friendship, but they do not become like a brother or a sister, no... There is respect for the godmother and godfather, but they do not become like brothers and sisters... The role [as godparent] is not what they tell in the church.' (Enza)

However, Enza added, godparents may also be chosen from among relatives:

'Once the tradition was, and perhaps it still is, at least within families that are united, that godparents were chosen from within the family and not from outside. This was done in order to stay close to the godmother.'

A captain I met with told me that he had about twenty godchildren – he did not remember the exact number. One of his godchildren, for example, was the daughter of an engineer who had worked for many years on the same boat as this captain. If anything were to happen to the parents of one of his godchildren, however, it would not be he, the godfather, who would assume responsibility for the child. It is the relatives of the child who do this, though of course they and the godparents may sometimes be one and the same people. The duties of godparents, however, are above all to remember the children on birthdays, weddings, and on the occasion of other important life rituals. In return, godchildren, for their part, must give their godparents respect.

The terminology used  
is the following:

<i>padrino/madrina</i>	(godfather/-mother)
<i>figlioccio/-a</i>	(godson/-daughter)
<i>compare/comare</i>	(co-father/co-mother; how the child's biological parents and godparents address one another)



As Triolo points out (1995:253), the practice of choosing relatives as godparents for one's child contradicts the explanation of the choice of godparents as a means of creating alliance. It does, however, go together well with one of the themes of this thesis – the avoidance of letting non-kin into the family circle.

### Referring To and Addressing Relatives

Kinship terms, including the terms for ritual kin, are much more frequently used than personal names when referring to a relative. This I understand as a means of playing up the role element, while at the same time downplaying the uniqueness of the interpersonal dimension (cf. Strathern 1995 (1992):17-18).

Kin terms are used as references regardless of whether the listener is a member of the same family as the speaker and the person referred to, a close friend who knows the person referred to very well, or a stranger, and regardless of whether or not the person referred to is present. I found this usage in all kinds of social contexts in which I participated. Time and again I would hear people refer to *mio marito* (my husband), *tua sorella* (your sister), *mio cugino* (my cousin), and so forth. With me, people used to speak about *tua figlia* (your daughter), even when they knew my daughter and knew her name perfectly well. Being used to always referring to my daughter by name when I am talking to someone who knows her, I had never before referred to her as my daughter as often as I did during the year we spent together in Sicily.

The kinship dimension is also reflected in the linguistic practice of not using definite articles with possessives when referring to relatives. To translate 'my friend' into Italian, one would say *il mio amico* (my male friend) or *la mia amica* (my female friend), where *il/la* is the definite article, *mio/mia* is the possessive, and *amico/amica* is the noun. In contrast, the definite article is omitted when referring to relatives: the correct translation of 'my sister' is *mia sorella*.

Although Sicilians have a descriptive kinship terminology like, for example, us Swedes, the two peoples use it very differently. While Swedes use kin terms to a very limited extent, Sicilians do the opposite. Using kin terms with a possessive very frequently, they continually promote the individual's role as a family member as well as the specific kin relation under discussion.



When it comes to addressing one another, relatives and ritual kin of the same generation generally address each other by name, although kin terms may be used. Children too are usually addressed by their personal names, but they themselves address parents, grandparents, and other adult relatives according to their family roles, that is, by kin terms without the personal name. This usage might suggest that one party of the relationship, the child, appears more unique or individuated than the other (cf. Strathern 1995 (1992):117). At the same time, though, there is a tendency not to downplay too much the child's family role, as every now and then one hears *figlio/a mio/a* (son/daughter of mine) as both exclamation and another way of addressing the child. One also puts the child into the role system by referring to his or her relatives, regardless of whether they are of the same generation as the child, as, for example, *tuo fratello* (your brother) and *tua zia* (your aunt) instead of using their personal names.

Whether informants use a kinship term or the personal name when addressing a consanguine, it is always followed by *tu* (the informal you). For example, a child will call for an uncle's attention by saying *zio* (uncle) and will then use *tu* in the following communication. Addressing affines as *lei* (formal you)

is used in some cases, though *lei* is used mainly outside the kin group. (However, compared to the 1970s, when I first came to Sicily, *tu* is being used more and more even outside the family, above all among young people.)

This means that within the kin group there is a distinction made between consanguines and affines – an in-law always remains *sangue straniero* (foreign blood) (D'Onofrio 1989:220) – and that the mode of addressing affines is not as simple and obvious as it is when it comes to consanguines. In the old days, the normal way of addressing parents-in-law, for instance, was *mamma* or *papa* followed by *Vossia* (the old polite form of you, nowadays replaced by *lei*).<sup>20</sup> This signified a distance between, for example, a young woman and her mother-in-law, I was told – *la suocera era come altissima* (the mother-in-law was very superior). Nowadays there are various possibilities when it comes to how to address parents-in-law, and hence some of my young informants had asked their parents-in-law how they wanted to be called. The latter had then said that they preferred to be called either *signor/a* (Mr/Mrs) followed by *lei*, or *mamma/papa* followed by *lei* or by *tu*, or by the personal name followed by *tu*. Young in-laws, on the other hand, are always addressed by name followed by *tu* by their parents-in-law. In-laws of the same generation also address one another by *tu*.

We may thus get a situation where a small child uses *tu* communicating, for instance, with his or her paternal grandmother, while the child's mother turns to the same person using formal *lei*. This kind of relation between a grandmother and her grandchild is not the same as the tendency to friendly equality between ego and the second ascending generation noted by Radcliffe-Brown (1976 (1952):96), but, as I see it, is a usage which stresses the fact that only the child, not the child's mother, is a consanguine of the grandmother.



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<sup>20</sup> Once *Vossia* was used outside as well as within the circle of relatives as a polite form of you. During my fieldwork I did not hear it even once, though a few informants told me that they would use it when speaking to very old people to whom they wanted to show respect



The very frequent use of kinship terms instead of personal names is analogous with the view that the individual is first and foremost part of his or her family. Together with the use of the informal *tu*, I believe, these are ways of strengthening family relations both internally by emphasising each person's role within a specific kin group, and externally by underlining the difference between them and us. The slightly different usage when it comes to affines is a sign of their always remaining foreign blood – a sister and a sister-in-law can never be the same thing, as Stefania said.

## Names, Surnames, and Nicknames

### Personal Names

Anthropological literature has often explained naming as a ritual means of 'initiating the person into an identity', possibly in order to terminate 'the dangerously ambiguous condition of liminality', Cohen writes. Moreover, and perhaps more important for this thesis, anthropologists' 'accounts of naming practices have in common the virtual absence from them of self-aware individuals'. Concentrating on the social construction of self, while denying selves and self consciousness to the people studied, anthropologists have constructed it for them, and taken for granted that there is no dissonance between their invention and people's own sense of their selves, which has led to various presumptions, such as that for the 'others' their names must be meaningful (1995:71-79).



According to the traditional Sicilian naming system, the first-born son should be given the paternal grandfather's name, and the second son the name of the maternal grandfather. Correspondingly, the first-born daughter will be given the paternal grandmother's name, and the second daughter the name of the maternal grandmother. Subsequent sons and daughters are given the names of other close relatives, always with a preference for the paternal lineage. Exceptions may be children who are named for a local patron saint, or children who are born on the day of a special saint and therefore receive that saint's name.

In this way the naming system not only gives prominence to the individual's patrilineal family, but it also shows the individual's place in the procreational chain. Yet another consequence of the system is that several members of the same kin group may have the same name. If, for example, the old father's name is Giuseppe and he has several sons, each son of his will christen his first-born son Giuseppe. These young cousins will then be identified by the addition of their mothers' name to their own names, like *Giuseppe di Maria* (Maria's Giuseppe) or *Giuseppe di Franca* (Franca's Giuseppe). So, here we see once again that on the nuclear family level it is the mother-child bond that is held up, while on the level of the kin group it is the patri-system that prevails.

Graziella's second-born daughter may serve as a typical case for how the traditional naming system works. Her first name is the name of the saint on whose day she was born. Her second name is that of her maternal grandmother. She also has a third name – Maria – that she got because her pregnant mother once promised the *Madonna* that if everything went well with the pregnancy and a girl was born, the baby would be named after her.

Keeping strictly to the tradition, a parent and his or her child may also have the same name. One of my neighbours was called Mariella, and so was her eldest daughter, christened after the girl's deceased paternal grandmother. Regarding the relation between an old/dead person and his or her little namesake, I believe, however, that one should not take for granted, as does Triolo (1995:253), that the system shows a reproduction of persons as well as of social relations – that time and generation return, so to speak. The tradition of inheriting the name of one's grandfather or grandmother is just not enough to support such a conclusion. My own informants were at the very most able to say that it was a way of paying their parents respect to name grandchildren after them, and that any grandparent would feel a special joy in telling somebody that the grandchild was named after her or him. Thus I would like to stress instead that this usage is one way of affirming kin relations outside the nuclear family. This is only one of the things which researchers who have stressed the nuclear family as the fundament of South Italian social organisation generally seem not to have taken into account.

Nowadays, however, children are not always given names in accordance with the tradition, but according to the personal choice of their parents. People say that this may upset the grandparents, but that it is usually something that passes. Sometimes today's young parents follow the tradition for their first-born son, but then pick names of their own choosing for the following children. As naming always means individualisation to some degree, the increased trend for parents to pick names of their own choosing for their children might be a sign of an increased importance being given to the child's individuality and/or to that of the grandparents. At the same time, we have to keep in mind that, as shown above, personal names are to a very large extent replaced by kin terms in daily communication, and I do believe that personal identity among my informants, regardless of this new custom of naming, is very much family anchored. They get their identity first of all by identifying themselves, and by being identified by others, as members of a certain family or as someone's wife, husband, daughter, brother, cousin, and so forth, and only secondarily as Vincenzina, Giovanni, Salvatore, Mariella, or whatever their name may be (cf. Jacobson-Widding 1998:157ff). It is still the family member who is stressed, while the individual is downplayed.

### Surnames

Husband and wife keep their respective surnames upon marriage, and children are given the father's surname. The husband's/father's surname is also used as the name of reference for the whole nuclear family. A patrilineal continuum is thus created which does not have any female correspondence. I remember talking once to an ex-mayor of Mazara del Vallo, who, naming his maternal grandmother's family, said that it was completely extinct today. Obviously he did not count himself as her descendant, as he had another surname.

This usage makes the man's surname more widely known than the woman's, and one will therefore often hear a wife presenting herself as *signora* (Mrs) followed by her husband's surname, but never the other way round. This may be for practical reasons, but it may also be seen as one way of stressing that

the family is patriarchal in conception, in spite of the fact that much of the central role within it, as described in previous chapters, devolves on the mother (cf. Allum 1973:57).

So far, no literature, to my knowledge, has treated the significance of two surnames within the Sicilian nuclear family. As I see it, the two names may be seen, just like the traditional naming system, as yet another element which contributes to cracking the traditional picture of an intensively nuclear Sicilian family, as it is a sign of the husband's and the wife's lasting alliances with their families of origin. So too are the inherited nicknames, to which I will now turn.

### Nicknames

Nicknaming among the fishing population is above all a male thing, and it is very widespread. I have not met any fisherman or boat-owner who did not have a nickname, although the frequency of its use may vary. Women rarely have nicknames of their own – some informants even maintain that they never do – but they may, though rarely, be referred to or may refer to themselves as *Signora* (Mrs) followed by their husband's nickname. Young people use nicknames to a much lesser extent than older people do.

A nickname usually refers to a man's physique or to a singular event in his life. The name might be funny as well as vulgar, and it is usually in the local dialect. In some cases, nicknames are used so frequently, both when addressing and referring to the person, that some men told me they did not always know the real name of another man, only his nickname. Depreciating names, though, will not be used directly in communication with their bearers. Their existence may explain, then, why I unwillingly offended a couple of old men by writing down their nicknames and why another man did not want to tell me his (see also Chapman Gower 1973:236-238). (Due to my promises to my informants that they would remain anonymous, I am prevented here from giving examples of nicknames I found.)

Nicknaming means individualisation to a greater degree than naming, as nicknames are unique, while names are not. This is also the explanation both men and women gave me for why all these nicknames existed. They said that the personal names as well as surnames used locally are few, so that very many men are named similarly. In this situation, nicknames make it easier to single out the individual.

Just like surnames, nicknames are usually inherited through the paternal line, but may occasionally be inherited on the female side from maternal grandfather to grandson. One of my informants explained that this was how he had got two nicknames, but that his paternal nickname was the one normally used. Another informant, however, said that he was the third generation with a particular nickname, and as he only had daughters the name would die with him. Obviously he did not count on the possibility of his nephews inheriting their maternal grandfather's nickname.

While some individual nicknames die out in time, others may come to denote a large group of persons when sons and grandsons have inherited them. The individualisation will thereby get more and more lost. The nickname is then no longer a means of individualisation but, on the contrary, its use for all men in the patrilineal group becomes yet another way of putting the individual in line with the patrilineage of his family.

## Neolocality but Matri- or Patrivicinity

One very concrete expression family belonging takes is that, in spite of neolocality being strongly rooted in Sicily, related nuclear families very often live physically close to one another. This system I have chosen to denominate matri- and patrivicinity.

This physical closeness is often a direct result of parents furnishing their newly wedded children with a place to live (see chapter 3). The young people's dwelling may then be another floor constructed on top of the house of his or her parents – a solution which, as siblings marry, may lead to a block of flats

being constructed in stages, with one flat for the older generation and one for each child. Some parents construct another self-contained house on their own land upon the marriage of a child. Inheriting and reconstructing a house which once belonged to a now-deceased relative may also lead to relatives living close by. Even when constructing self-contained modern summer houses, siblings often choose to live close to one another – in some cases, on inherited land. I have never encountered other relatives than parents and their married children or a group of married siblings constructing houses in common or, if separated, next to one another.

The tradition of furnishing one's children with a dwelling when they marry is the explanation usually given as to why many families own more houses than they would seem to be able to make use of: Mazara del Vallo is full of empty houses, many of which are in a bad shape, but the houses might, as informants say, serve their children one day (cf. Lentini 2002:203). Thus there is an ongoing process of building and reconstruction, and many buildings are not finished externally, although they were constructed years ago and are complete internally. Apart from a possible lack of funds or lack of interest in the external appearance, the uncompleted construction can also be explained by seeing the constructing and reconstructing as architectural processes made to coincide with various events and processes in the lives of their occupants and thought of in terms of them (see Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995:39; see also chapter 5).

In order not to misinterpret the predominance of neolocal nuclear households in the statistics, it is important, then, to remember that neolocality often means matri- or patrivicinity: an upper storey in the parents' house, a house next to the parents on their property, an apartment in a block of flats where the neighbours are all brothers and sisters, or an inherited house long in the family's possession (cf. Benigno 1989:186). But as for actually living together and sharing a household of three generations, Sicily has the lowest figure found in the whole of Italy. In 1977-1998 only 1.4 per cent of all Sicilian families lived in households with more than two generations (ISTAT 1999:268). Still, a wider kin group may share a household periodically. In Mazara del Vallo today, very many people have summer houses either on the beach a

couple of kilometres from the centre or elsewhere in the countryside. Here married children often spend a great part of the hot months together with their parents. Separate nuclear families then share a household, something they never do in their permanent dwellings.

When discussing post-marital residence, I never heard any expressed preference for whether it should be the bride's or the groom's family who provided the dwelling, that is, a preference for matri- or patrivicinity, though in other discussions it was clear that mothers and daughters especially would suffer from not living close to one another. In the case of Rosalba and Vito, they moved into a house inherited from a deceased relative of his and restored by his family. Another young couple chose to rent an apartment near her family of origin, so she would be close to her mother at the beginning of the marriage and when their first child was born; then they intended to move to a house of his family's.



The positive thing about living close to members of your kin group is that you feel very secure. You are never really alone at home, as you always hear the sounds of your relatives. On the negative side is the fact that everybody knows what you are doing and that there is *troppa invadenza* (too much invasion) – living on one's own would mean more freedom, female informants said. I could see for myself that there was much informality among related families living close, like children visiting each other while they were still dressed in their pyjamas and slippers. Still, one does not enter another related nuclear family's flat without knocking, as *non è la mia casa* (it is not my house), I was told.

Being in the possession of a house of one's own means not just having a place to return to, but of course it also means having economic security. The symbolic value should not be underestimated, though. Above all it is the mother who is identified with the house – by herself as well as by others. This is so regardless of whether the house originally comes from her family or her husband's. She is *l'angelo della casa* (the angel of the house); all school children learn and as they grow up they get used to talking about the house as *la casa di mia madre* (my mother's house). Women too usually talk about their

homes as *la mia casa* (my house), not as ‘our house’. For these symbolic, as well as practical/economic reasons, the house should ideally be owned, not rented, by its inhabitants (see also Cronin 1977:78). When I visited informants they would often spontaneously raise the subject (cf. Minicuci 1989:15), either telling me that unfortunately they did not own the house, or, on the contrary, that this was a house of their own.

The construction and renting of houses is also thought of as a female matter. ‘I built this house forty years ago,’ Graziella said to me. Now she is a widow, but at that time she was a married woman with her husband and all her children living with her, yet still she tells me that it was she who built the house. Analogously, another married woman told me one day that she had bought a site in order to build a summer house. In fact, official statistics also inform us that Sicilian women have more to say when it comes to how much money should be spent on their home than any other Italian women. According to ISTAT 57.1 per cent of Sicilian women have greater influence upon these costs than their husbands have (2000a:63). This all leads me to argue that among my informants, the strong matrifocality on the level of the nuclear family and neolocality support one another, and that it is a logical outcome that the mother becomes identified with the house.



As discussed in chapter three, today there is a strong tendency for both men and women to marry late, and until they do, they do not leave the parental home. A situation is thus created in which people live with their families of origin for one-third or maybe half of their lives. Given that people never live on their own, and spend a great deal of time within the wider family circle – not only does the kin group, or parts of it, share meals on Sundays or high festivals (see chapter 3), but here I have also shown that related nuclear families often live close to each other, which facilitates their daily socialising and exchange of moral and instrumental support – it is reasonable to believe that the individual’s world view is heavily influenced by a family perspective, and that the system moreover diminishes the dominance of the nuclear family in favour of the kin group.



## You Do Not Share Blood with Your Friend

*[I]l legame di sangue è un dato di fatto che non richiede, per essere rispettato, necessariamente l'amore* (blood relation is a fact which does not necessarily demand love in order to be respected).<sup>21</sup> (Minicuci 1989:404)

‘We do not have to love our kinsfolk, but we expect to be able to trust them in ways that are not automatically possible with non-kinsfolk.’ (Fortes 1969:249)

Generalising from my field experience, young people (teenagers and unmarried adults) are those who spend most time with friends, comparatively speaking. Upon marrying, people seem to change to spending more of their leisure time with their kin groups. In this section, I will let various voices be heard regarding how relations with friends and colleagues differ from family relations, and the family will moreover be shown to be a strong metaphor for good social relations.



Sitting in her kitchen discussing family relations with me, Enza made a comparison between having a sister and a good friend. She said that she always partakes in their problems and assists both of them whenever there is a need for it, but she helps her sister more. When, for example, her brother-in-law is not at home, she never lets her sister be on her own on a Sunday, but when her friend's husband is away, Enza does not feel obliged to invite her friend that often:

‘A friend is a friend, a sister is a sister. Even though I respect a friend a lot, because a friend is always dear, but that is a friend, first comes the sister. It is something within you, a sort of predisposition, an instinct, I

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<sup>21</sup> Minicuci is referring to a group of villagers from Calabria, South Italy, who have emigrated to Argentina. In Argentina, family bonds continue to be very strong, though it is not love but above all kinship relations as such which obligate them to assist one another (1989:404).

don't know. You always help your sister first and then your friend. They are two different things, two different kinds of appreciation.'

Mariella once told me:

'Certain things are sometimes easier to discuss with an *estraneo* (stranger; in this case non-family member), it depends on the topic. Sometimes it is easier to discuss with a stranger than with a brother or a sister. It depends, do you understand? Because it happens that a sister tells you certain things, which upset you, because your sister means so much to you. A friend on the other hand – of course she too means something to you – but she is always a stranger, you do not share blood, it is not your sister.'

Stefania, too, said that a friend is never the same thing as a sister:

'I think this has to do with us being Sicilians. We feel a certain belonging. This is what makes all the difference, the belonging. But of course a sister can still be cruel, she may not be a good sister. She may be a sister for whom you do not feel any sympathy, as it happened to my husband. It also happened to a friend of mine, who has no relation whatsoever with her sister.'

Though friends and neighbours are sometimes treated better than relatives, they can never substitute for a sister or a brother, Giovanna said:

'Although we do not know what happens in the neighbouring house, as each one minds his own business, if we're called by a neighbour who needs our help, we will leave whatever we are doing. But if anything happens to a family member of ours, we will always be the first to go there' [stressing the last sentence].

A young boat-owner explained the difference between a brother and a good friend by saying that when it comes to a brother, trust is there from the beginning, it is part of the family relation. That is how things were between this

man and his own brothers too, and although at the moment they were not really on speaking terms, my informant still had the same trust for his brothers as he always had. In a relation of friendship, on the other hand, he said, trust is not inherent but is something which much be created, and therefore it is not self-evident. Intimacy is something else, he concluded; it is possible to be much closer to a friend than to a brother, although it really should be the other way round (cf. Boissevain 1966:22; Douglass 1980:354; Berkowitz 1984:86).

This trust among members of the same family makes relatives preferred as colleagues and employees on the fishing-boats. They do not have to be supervised and they are generally considered to work better. Informants would refer to them as *persone di fiducia* (confidants), while strangers, on the other hand, are not expected to care about doing more than they are told. In spite of telling me that he was not close to his father and brothers (which was later confirmed by his wife), Stefania's husband, who spends his daily life in the family company, maintained:

'A family business is more, more united and stronger. Because you need a lot of trust in this business, because it is easy to withhold a part of the inheritance – a little bit today, a little bit tomorrow. Because we do not have everything, we do not have everything registered. [...] Thus, as long as it is all among brothers there is maximum of trust.'

Family members also collaborate informally outside their work places. My landlord's family (which only partly belongs to the fishing population) is an example of this. Whenever I had problems like a doorbell not ringing, lamps that had to be installed, or a television that did not work, my landlord would call his brother-in-law. He called a cousin whenever my washing machine did not work, and another cousin when the water-heater was burned out – all depending on each individual's specialisation professionally or by inclination.

### The Family as a Metaphor for Good Social Relations

In discussing friendship and stressing its importance, people often described it in terms of kin relations. Friends were said to be *come parenti* (like relatives). Boat-owners and fishermen who were happy with their fellow crew members would say that they were all like a big family. One captain, who had worked for the same boat-owner for more than twenty years, said that after such a long period you become like relatives.

Family as a metaphor is also used within the hierarchy of the most well-known of all Sicilian organisations, the *Mafia*, where the basic units are called families. Each *Mafia* family controls a certain territory, and under its leader the family embraces traditional values like honour, respect for blood ties, loyalty, and friendship. At the initiation rite the new member chooses a godfather among the other *uomini d'onore* (men of honour) and new ritual blood ties are thereby created. A member of such a family is as dependent on it as any Sicilian is on his or her family (Falcone and Padovani 1994(1991):98-100,128-129; Siebert 1996:17,28ff).

Thus, though family is not always a unit free of conflicts, it is often used as a metaphor as well as a model for other social relations. Schneider and Schneider argue that in Sicily '[i]t is likely that fraternal solidarity, a necessary strategy for ambitious "ranchers", was available as a model to other entrepreneurs closely associated with them and likewise intent on building up a patrimony'. Within construction firms, according to the same authors, the employees' relation to their employer is structured by paternalism and therefore 'their mothers would be furious if they went on strike' (1976:79,236). Silverman, describing the patronage system in Central Italy, maintains that the '[s]tability of the patron-client tie is reinforced by its patterning after a kin relationship, the patron becoming "like a father" in obligations to and respect due from the client' (1965:179).

Then again, in other contexts informants may, as shown above, contradict this comparison between family and non-family by stressing that a friend is not a sister or a brother, however close she or he may be, and looking more closely,

for instance, into the situation on the fishing-boats, one will of course not always find a family-like situation. What is lacking on board, in contrast to what we have learned here about kin relations, is trust, above all. There is widespread mutual distrust among the men. For instance, the crews, being paid on the basis of shares of fish caught, distrust the boat-owners, whom they accuse of not presenting correct figures, neither for the catch nor for its selling price.<sup>22</sup> There is a continuous embarking and disembarking on the fishing-boats, as fishermen very often decide on short notice to change crews because of minor fights. The boat-owner, on the other hand, certainly does not always correspond to an ideal picture of a big daddy, or, as a trade union representative said, 'Behind the patriarch you'll always find the boat-owner hiding.' When asked if they felt like patriarchs, old as well as young boat-owners always said no; some even found the question strange. Thus, a crew that is not related through blood ties is certainly not like a family, which is supposed to remain strongly united, if not by love, then by trust and by respect for the family ties as such.

According to Lanoue, who has described the relation between the master and the apprentice in Central and South Italy, 'The behaviours and attitudes that form part of the *famiglia* complex are not merely a model for interaction with non-kin.' The close relationship between master and apprentice borrows many traits from a father-son relation, but the two individuals involved are not family, as 'the *maestro* consistently invokes boundaries in what is otherwise a familial-type bond'. One of the differences is that the relation between master and apprentice, in order to attain its goals (that is, provide benefits), is public in a way family relations are not. As kinship is not a useful analytical category here, Lanoue introduces the oppositions close-far and public-private 'as intersecting gradients that help unravel the complexities of master-apprentice relationships', which are seen as 'close/public'. From this it follows that instead of seeing the family as a model for other relations, one

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<sup>22</sup> Since the 1950s fishermen as well as local politicians have discussed the establishment of a fish market where the fish is sold at prices publicly known. So far there is no market, and many say there will never be one, as it is not in the interest of those who have the power to decide.

could say that other relations may have close and/or private aspects (1991:47,54,56).

Though I agree with Lanoue, my point here is that, since 'family' is continually used, its importance is shown, if not as a model, as a powerful metaphor for good social relations.

I have met with fishing men and boat-owners at their various organisations, trade unions, on board upon the crews' arrival back home, at the boat-owners' offices, in the clubs of the retired fishermen, at the co-operative owned by the boat-owners, in the bars, at meetings with authorities and politicians, and I have met them privately in their homes. What stands out immediately is that they all seem to know each other well and that they very often know each other in multiple capacities, as relatives, neighbours, friends, and colleagues. Thus, the distinction between socialising and business often seems blurred. There is an informal atmosphere among the men, with much joking and apparently without stress. But looking closer one can see a kind of subtle dominance by the superior, although there is no formal bowing in front of the boss. When, for example, the employer speaks, he gets more attention than the others, and in the office a nicer desk and better chairs show that a person has a superior position compared to the person sitting next to him. In this case, the reference to family-like relations together with a lot of joking and a relaxed atmosphere, I argue, is one way of hiding social differences between these men meeting in public (cf. Silverman 1975:43), stressing important egalitarian ideals, and giving prominence to traditionally highly appreciated values (cf. Ahmadi and Ahmadi 1995:424; Ginsborg 1998:xii-xiii).

## Summary

This chapter shows how the individual's role as family member is continually stressed in various ways, how informants constitute their personal identity through family belonging, and how the family category is distinctly kept apart from other categories.

The Sicilian kinship system is basically bilateral, but has marked features of matrifocality and matrilinearity as well as patrilinearity. The role element in a certain relationship is played up by a continual use of kin terms rather than personal names. Moreover, the use of *tu* (the informal you) among consanguines, but not always among affines, marks the difference between the two groups of relatives. By means of addressing and referring to others, people thus constantly point to the specific relationship under discussion as well as to the individual as part of his or her kin group. This may all be seen as ways of strengthening family relations internally as well as externally underlining the difference between us as a family and the others, and it shows that personal identity is very much anchored in family.

Names, surnames, and nicknames are all inherited from one's parents and grandparents, with prominence given to the individual's patrilineage, and constitute yet other ways of aligning the individual with his or her family and marking the in-group against the out-group. All three ways of naming also contribute to cracking the traditional picture of the nuclear Sicilian family as intensely nuclear: women keep their maiden surnames upon marrying, as men keep theirs, signs of the lasting alliances of husbands and wives with their families of origin. Children inherit names of their paternal and maternal older relatives and boys inherit nicknames along the patrilineage, both patterns showing that kin relations outside the nuclear family are stressed – a fact that researchers stressing the nuclear family as the fundament of South Italy's social organisation seem not to have taken into account.

Children marry late nowadays, and until they do they continue to live with their parents. After marriage, neolocal residence is the rule, but this often means matri- or patrivicinity and daily socialising with kin members nonetheless. This vicinity presumably not only strengthens a family perspective in the individual's world view, but also diminishes the dominance of the nuclear family in favour of the wider kin group.

The family's position is thus unique and can never be replaced by ties of friendship, however strong they are. There is always a distinction made between family members – our blood – and non-family members – strange

blood. Thus, a friend, however close she or he may be, can never cross the boundaries surrounding the family, but always remains an outsider. One of the most outstanding features when it comes to family relations is trust. These ties of trust are sometimes said to be stronger than ties of love, and they make family members always preferred as colleagues and employees on the fishing-boats. Though this unique position of the family does not exclude internal conflicts, and though family relations can never really be compared with ties of friendship, family is still the most frequently used metaphor for good social relations with non-relatives. Using this metaphor is a way of giving prominence to traditionally highly appreciated values of family, friendship, equality, and social relations as such.



## 5. SOCIAL AND SPATIAL BOUNDARIES SURROUNDING THE FAMILY

By now it will probably be clear that the family, which is at the heart of this study, is the most important social unit of the fishing population. In chapters three and four I have described their domestic life, and I have shown that their differing ways of relating to relatives and non-relatives respectively can be seen as a means for strengthening the family inwardly while at the same time setting up boundaries outwards. This chapter focuses on these outward boundaries as such.

### **Mind Your Own Business!**

When I was once visiting a friend of mine (a professional unmarried woman) for some time, the telephone rang while I was alone in her flat. My friend, who had left for a few days' holiday trip to a place nearby, had told me before she left that if there were any calls for her, I should not tell anybody where she was or when she was expected back. Picking up the receiver, I therefore only told the woman calling that the person she had asked for was not at home, but that I could take a message. The woman, however, said that as she did not know me, she preferred not to leave a message.

On another occasion I was in the harbour looking for a certain fishing-boat, the owner of which I had an appointment with. When at last I found what I thought was the right boat but, to make sure, asked some men standing there if this was the boat of Mister X, I got a cursory negative answer. I left, but was soon called back and told that this was the boat I was looking for. As I was able to figure out later, the men knew all the time whose boat we were talking

about, but not knowing me, they provided me with no information whatsoever. Obviously, they found out shortly after I had left that it was all right to give me the correct information.

I sometimes encountered the same attitude when looking for private addresses. People seemed to prefer not to know. Correspondingly, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa,<sup>23</sup> in a very famous book called *The Leopard (Il Gattopardo)* writes about 'this secret island, where houses are barred and peasants refuse to admit they even know the way to their own village in clear view on a hillock within a few minutes' walk' (1960 (1958):36).

*Fattevi i fatti vostri* (Mind your own business) – or the more vulgar version, *Fattevi i cazzi vostri* (literally: Stick to your own dicks) – are common ways of expressing this attitude. Though these are expressions of anger, they may also, for instance, be seen written on small lorries decorated with traditional paintings. Informants also would say that they wanted to keep their private life to themselves, as Giovanna did when she said that *siamo molto, molto riservati* (we are very, very reserved). She was about to explain to me why she had not answered my questions the day before when the two of us were discussing family relations in a group of women. It did not seem right to her to discuss her family in front of the others, so she pretended not to understand my questions, she now said, adding that although they all live the same kind of life, *siamo ognuno per i fatti nostri* (we each mind our own business). In spite of avoiding my questions Giovanna had been very talkative and easy to approach, though this was my very first meeting with her as well as with the other women. This behaviour is exactly what I pointed to in chapter two, under the section 'Open Individuals but Closed Families': she knew the other women, they were all fishermen's wives from the same parish (it was the parish priest who had introduced me to these women), but they were not family members and neither was I. In this context she acted in a seemingly open manner, but when it came to her family she knew exactly what to reveal and what not to.

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<sup>23</sup> Sicilian writer who lived from 1896 to 1957.

Informants would also spontaneously tell me that *siamo molto sospettosi* (we are very suspicious), and that *troverà diffidenza, molta diffidenza* (you will find distrust, a lot of distrust), adding that it could surely not be easy for me as an anthropologist to work in this distrustful environment. Many boat-owners complained about the lack of trust and cooperation within their own group. Distrust and jealousy are *la cultura nostra* (our culture), one of them said. Also crew members, when complaining about bad working conditions, explained to me that their problem was that they were not united as a group and thus could not act jointly in order to achieve a change. For instance, only a small minority of them were members of the local fishermen's organisation or a trade union. (These factors are interesting to consider in light of the preference noted in previous chapters when informants told me that they would rather collaborate with relatives.)

The distrust is indeed very widespread, though not always as drastically and concretely expressed as it was by an old friend of mine who quickly walked directly home, locked the door, and closed the shutters because she had met two strangers while walking through her small village on the Sicilian north coast where she usually knows everyone she meets.

The distrust most strongly felt, though, is probably towards the state. According to Bevilacqua, it is the Italian judicial system which is especially to blame for this, as the rulers have been unable to *amministrare con giustizia la giustizia* (administer justice with justice). This has led to a widespread lack of respect for the state and its institutions and, as a consequence of this, to a lack of national feeling, to distrust towards any forms of cooperation, and to criminality as well. This is especially so in South Italy, Bevilacqua maintains, which explains why individuals as well as families privilege personal relations in their various transactions (1999:xxiii-xxvii; see also Putnam 1993:52).

As representatives of the state, policemen are therefore not to be trusted, and people prefer to have nothing to do with them. In the local papers I would often read about victims of as well as witnesses to various crimes who did not want to cooperate with the police. People avoid the police and they tell their

children to do the same. Children are taught to keep walking straight ahead and not to look when a crime is committed near them, to pretend not to see anything. A family who had witnessed a murder in the street just outside their house told me that they closed the shutters and that was it. They never considered calling the police (cf. Blok 1988 (1974):172,176,211-212; Minicuci 1989:329; Alcaro 1999:47; see also *Il giorno della civetta* (*The Day of the Owl – Equal Danger*), a book of pure fiction by the Sicilian novelist Leonardo Sciascia).

At school, teachers told me, they represent the distrusted state to their pupils. When pupils break the rules of the school, for instance, they therefore protect each other against the teachers in a kind of solidarity. Even a possibly injured party prefers not to talk. If this is a behaviour teachers from other parts of the world might also recognise, the difference may lie in the fact that here, I was told, there are teachers who support it, seeing the not talking as something positive, almost as a matter of honour.

Resignation and indifference, according to several writers, are the outcome of the distrust permeating the Sicilian society. People accept their situation, not believing a change is possible, and so distrust becomes resistance to innovations (cf. Allum 1973:56; Moruzzi and Parisi 1994:77). Among many of my informants, however, there seems to be a general view that closure and distrust belong to the traditional society and that modernity will bring its opposite, openness. As modernity is also thought of as something coming from North, whether from North Italy or from further North (see the two Italies discourse in chapter 1 and the historical appendix), it was only logical that when comparing Sicilians with *Milanesi* (inhabitants of Milan), among whom she had lived for many years, a middle-aged professional woman said that the latter were not as closed as Sicilians. A Sicilian visiting Scandinavia had a similar experience. As a young student, he had rented a furnished flat with a couple of friends for a short stay in Sweden. Without any special formalities, the landlady gave the young men a key of their own to the flat. When meeting with me thirty years later, the man said that this was what he remembered most from his only visit to Sweden. He was astonished by apparently being trusted by people who did not know him. As for Sicily, a distinction is

made between big cities and small towns; people from the big cities, for instance Palermo, are generally regarded as less traditional and thus less closed than inhabitants of smaller towns and villages.

### Historical Explanation of Distrust

My informants sometimes explained their suspiciousness, as does Bevilacqua, by the distrust they feel towards the state as well as by the organised criminality. Often, though, they also referred to the successive conquerors and invaders who throughout historical time have dominated Sicily and who have rarely been trusted by the Sicilians themselves (cf. Allum 1973:56). I found that they showed a fascinating historical sensitivity when telling me, regardless of whether they themselves had much detailed historical knowledge or not, that getting acquainted with their history would help me in understanding the Sicilians of today (cf. Schneider and Schneider 1976:x-xi; see also chapter 2).

Indeed, the history of Sicily is the result of a society in continuous interaction with foreign peoples (see the historical appendix for a summary of Sicily's history from ancient times until today). Situated right in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, which seafarers all through history have criss-crossed, Sicily has seen an endless procession of landing operations. Many of these have certainly not been friendly. Sicilian history is usually told as a story of an everlasting conquest and a subjugated people who do not seem to think of themselves as agents in this historical process, but more as its victims (cf. Wolf 1990 (1982):x).

Sicels, Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Vandals, Goths, Arabs, Normans, Frenchmen, Spaniards, Austrians, and Englishmen – the list could be longer – are among the peoples conquering Sicily for shorter or longer periods. Among these peoples, today's *mazaresi* are proud of their Greek heritage, and when people want to say that they are a modern and efficient person they will say they are like a Norman, while they depreciate others. This goes for the Arabs, in spite of the Arabian period usually being described by the histo-

rians as flourishing, not least in Mazara del Vallo.

So, in spite of glorifying certain historical periods, like the Greek and the Norman, my informants' very homogenous picture of their history, which is also in accordance with the traditional historiography, is that it has been an ever-lasting conquest. In *The Leopard* by Tomasi di Lampedusa the main character, Prince Fabrizio Salina, representing the old Sicilian aristocracy at the turn of the last century, tells the North Italian official Chevalley, who has just arrived in Sicily for the very first time:

‘We [the Sicilians] are old, Chevalley, very old. For over twenty-five centuries we’ve been bearing the weight of superb and heterogeneous civilisations, all from outside, none made by ourselves, none that we could call our own. We’re as white as you are, Chevalley, and as the Queen of England; and yet for two thousand five hundred years we’ve been a colony. I don’t say that in complaint; it’s our fault. But even so we’re worn out and exhausted.’ (Lampedusa 1960 (1958):165)



Within the frame of this thesis, it is primarily the social closure to which the reservation and distrust lead that is of interest. It is shown that boundaries are built up around the family unit, and since that is the most important in-group emotionally, socially, culturally, economically, and for practical support in daily life, a great deal is at stake when it comes to this unit. As relations outside the family present many ambiguous aspects, closure becomes a means of protecting one's prime unit in relation to outsiders.

As I intend to show in this chapter, I found that distrust and closure were expressed, for example, by the construction of houses which are shut off from view, by women's limited freedom of outdoor movement, by a strong local patriotism, by a continual awareness of what one is saying and doing, and, not least, by lavish hospitality. These can all be seen as precautionary measures which help people protect their family life, while at the same time they give people a possibility to influence the impression they make on others. They

are all interwoven with one another as well as with the honour and shame complex, to which I will turn first.

## The Honour and Shame Complex

The honour and shame complex is perhaps the cultural trait which, more than any other, has been said to characterise Mediterranean societies. In fact, the complex was once one of the grounds for asserting the area's cultural unity (see chapter 1), and though more than thirty-five years have passed since Peristiany published the earliest systematic collection of essays on this theme (1974 (1966)), and though the discussion has certainly changed content and direction during the past decades, it is still being addressed.



Honour and shame operate together as a mechanism of social control, evaluating the social worth of interacting individuals and groups. When originally discussed, it was men's honour and women's sexuality which were regarded as being at the heart of the complex. Women's dangerous sexuality required control, and therefore women were supposed to exercise self-mastery by showing deference to men and modesty and sexual purity in their movements, attitudes, speech, and dress. In doing this, women would demonstrate that they had shame. The duty of the men, on the other hand, was to defend the virtue of their women – their mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters – and while doing so they ought to show dominance, aggressiveness, and virility. For a man, lack of shame or chastity among his women meant being defeated and losing manliness as well as social prestige. He would no longer be a man of honour.

Honour and shame have to do with a public presentation of an idealised self – people are judged only by what can be seen by others. This has been regarded as a morality system of small-scale societies, where people adhere to the same moral principles and where face-to-face personal relations are of paramount importance (see e.g. Peristiany 1974 (1966):11). Sanctions – the loss

of honour in the eyes of others – are so heavily felt precisely because very close and intense relations are at their base: in these societies, relationship with others, ‘through its intensity, intimacy and continuity, takes precedence over the relationship one has with oneself’ (Bourdieu 1974 (1966):212).

This is not an absolute moral system, though. In fact, it is in many ways the opposite of impersonal moral obligations in terms of common humanity. Besides different rules governing female and male behaviour respectively, the rules may also differ by social class, as in Andalusia, where Pitt-Rivers found that upper- and lower-class women were subject to less restraint than their middle-class sisters, and that, on the whole, the honour of the aristocracy was rarely publicly affronted. The aspiration to honour is therefore a competition between equals (1974 (1966):62-64). Challenging a man incapable of responding to it means dishonouring oneself, and so does taking up a challenge from an inferior.

Since the mid-1960s anthropologists have come increasingly to recognise that the group’s honour is based on far more than just the control of its female members’ sexuality. Nor is shame any longer regarded as something lopsidedly female; men too are labelled shameless when they transgress various moral boundaries. And when it comes to the presumed cultural unity of the Mediterranean area, it has increasingly been emphasised that the focus on either shame or honour varies among different regions and linguistic groups within the area, and that honour and shame are significant organising principles also outside this area. In arguing for ethnographic particularism, Herzfeld has maintained that the traditional honour and shame complex conflates a rich ethnographic diversity and that it is not possible to find any one model which captures local subtleties and complexities (1980; 1984).



Among the *mazaresi* studied, the shame and honour complex is interwoven with the family’s closure discussed throughout this thesis and with the very concrete expressions this closure takes, as described in this chapter. The following sections, then, capture some of its local form.



## The House and Social Control

Buildings, like poems and rituals, realize culture. (Glassie 2000:17)



A house is much more than its material structure. Indeed, 'houses are frequently thought of as bodies, sharing with them a common anatomy and a common life history. If people construct houses and make them in their own image, so also do they use these houses and house-images to construct themselves as individuals and as groups' (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995:3).

Thus, a house's physical form 'can influence domestic behaviors and values as well as express them' (Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zúniga 1999:28). Or, in the words of Rapoport, what 'finally decides the form of a dwelling, and moulds the spaces and their relationships, is the vision that people have of the ideal life'. The house thereby becomes a 'social control mechanism' informing its inhabitants about life and the attitudes expected of them (1969:47-49).

Here I intend to show that among the *mazaresi*, the family closure is analogous to people's constructing very enclosed dwellings. I take this, referring to the scholars just cited, as being not by pure chance: the buildings express dominant values at the same time as these values have influenced their construction.



The streets of Mazara del Vallo are narrow and they often lack pavements, and as houses are usually constructed without any space between them, it is difficult to get a general overview of a certain area.

The traditional houses have few windows – sometimes the only source of daylight is the entrance door with its pane of glass – and these are covered from the inside by curtains, while externally, the Venetian blinds and/or shutters are usually closed or semi-closed regardless of whether or not the sun is shining (cf. Rapoport 1969:65). With the villas of wealthier families, the

whole house may be more or less hidden by a high wall broken only by a big locked iron gate, behind which one will often hear a dog barking.<sup>24</sup>

As the native village is an important focus of identification (see below), one might perhaps expect the residential house in a sense to be extending out into the village without any clear border between the two. Or one might perhaps expect the village to be an enlarged house united by links between co-villagers (cf. Carsten 1995:117-118). This is not the case, however – quite the contrary. Often, there is no extension whatsoever of the occupants' personal space into the space surrounding the house – no visible porches, verandas, or gardens, and balconies are used not for socialising but for storage and laundry. There are still many simple traditional houses where it is literally enough to take one single step from the public street and one will find oneself in a private home, usually in the kitchen. The doorstep thus becomes an absolute border between the private and the public spheres.

The women's sweeping of the street in front of their houses, mentioned in chapter three, may be seen, though, as one mode of loosening the very distinct dividing line between the two spheres. The cleaning of the dirty public street could then be interpreted as a way of extending the control beyond the boundaries of the house and as thereby creating a bridge between the spheres (cf. Dubisch 1986b:200-201; see also Guarrasi 1978:86-87). Nor do I think it is farfetched to look at the telephone as another possible bridge between private and public, and also a possible intruder into private life. That is how I interpret the usual mode of answering when the telephone rings – just a disinterested and often very faint *pronto* (ready), without any other infor-

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<sup>24</sup> Booth, comparing lower- and upper-class dwellings in a small town in western Sicily, found that traditionally, upper-class houses were more closed than those of the lower class. Lower-class women met for working and socialising in the courtyards. However, by doing so 'they ran the risk of bringing shame upon themselves and their families by being observed while engaged in domestic tasks and in contact with non-family men'. Rich women had houses which offered the possibility of carrying out various domestic tasks inside the house, and they thereby avoided being observed (1999:141). However, the meeting and working together in the courtyards belong, according to my informants, to times past.

mation, like name or telephone number, given as a means of identifying oneself. As soon as the caller is identified as someone known, the voice of the person who answered becomes louder.

Building façades may be very anonymous. Old houses often have small, humble doors, which lack doorplates and thus do not give any hint of what is to be found inside. Even when looking for boat-owners' offices, for instance, I always needed to know the exact address to be able to find them, as there were no signboards identifying this as the place I was looking for. Nor do houses look welcoming and inviting: the streets are full of dull façades, which, on top of their shuttered windows and anonymity, are not well cared for. Friends showing me their homes never commented, though, on a dull or ugly façade. That is part of the public space and therefore not something to care for, I was told. Upon opening one of these doors, however, one might find oneself in a pleasant courtyard or even a garden, in spite of being in the centre of the town, or else one first enters the housing area directly from the street and then reaches the garden by walking right through the flat.

In a modern block of flats the main entrance door is always locked, and there is a house telephone for each apartment where the surnames of the inhabitants are given. After being let into the building, the first thing one sees is a stair-hall, which is very often really huge and elegant, possibly with lots of marble. Here there are usually no names on the doors of the flats; the visitor has to know which door to go to.

On entering one of these apartments, there is, as a rule, little chance for a visitor to get a general overview of the flat, as what one sees is a long narrow corridor. The dining room and/or living room are what comes first in the corridor, and this is as far as guests usually get. The living room usually has a group of sofa and armchairs, in front of which there is only a small table, often more or less completely covered by ornamental objects like porcelain figurines and family photos in silver frames – everything in perfect order. Callers who come for a visit between mealtimes will be invited to sit here if they are not taken more informally into the kitchen.

The perfect order and cleanliness of the houses I visited (see chapter 3) often gave me a feeling that my hosts must have stopped tidying up the very moment I entered their homes. I do not exaggerate in saying that many living rooms for this reason (not always because of the decor as such) looked more like exhibitions to me than like places for living – there being no traces left from an ongoing family life. This, I believe, can be seen as yet another way of not permitting any view of what goes on in private – the living room is so to speak turned into public space. Using Sant Cassia and Bada's terms, we could say that my encounters with various families, despite the fact that these took place in their homes, were formal, as the formal-informal distinction, in contrast to the public-private distinction, 'has more to do with the presentation of the self to others in specific social context, than with the effects of the inherent properties of space upon action' (1992:131).



It goes without saying that the dwelling is a powerful symbol and as such I have pointed in this section to one aspect relevant for my thesis: the family as a very closed unit is symbolically communicated through its likewise closed dwelling. This dwelling, as the focus of family life and a symbol for the wife/mother (see chapter 4), thereby reflects the dichotomy between one's own people and non-family members (cf. Dubisch 1986b:210). This is but one way informants construct themselves as families.

## Gender and Behaviour in Public

Trying to cross *Piazza Mokarta* (Mokarta Square)<sup>25</sup> in central town on a Saturday night in the late 1990s is not an easy task, as teenagers of both sexes crowd here for hours. An evening out in Mazara del Vallo does not necessarily mean visiting any of the various establishments for food and drink, but;

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<sup>25</sup> According to tradition, named after a Muslim warrior who was defeated here by the Normans after having tried to besiege the town a second time in the late 11th century (see the historical appendix).

above all, for young as well as for old, what it does mean is socialising in the *piazze* (plural of *piazza*) and the streets. People meet spontaneously and chat for a while and then turn to another friend who is passing by.

Then, very suddenly one Saturday night in June, the *Piazza Mokarta* is almost empty, and for a few hot summer months the scene will be completely changed. The establishments along the beach a few kilometres away, which have grown up during the last decade or so, have opened for the season. By car and by an infinite number of various kinds of light motorcycles, the young, attracted by the bustling beach life, now go down there. Young couples dressed up according to the latest fashion go in pairs on the same bike; the boy drives and his girl friend sits close against him on the back seat with her arms around his waist. As school closes a couple of weeks later, not only Saturday evenings but most evenings of the week seem to be evenings out for these teenagers.

For those of us who are not teenagers any more, an evening out usually means strolling slowly along the *corso* (the main street in central town) in family groups, window shopping, and stopping every now and then for a chat with friends we meet or to enter a café or bar. When summer comes we do not move to the beach in the evenings, but to the sea-front promenade in the centre. In July and August the promenade gets really crowded with people strolling along and foreign street-vendors offering their wares.

During my evening strolls I never saw a woman or group of women walking or visiting the *pizzerie* (plural of *pizzeria*) and restaurants without male company, just as I hardly ever saw women without their husbands at any of the cultural and political events in which I often took part during fieldwork. I found two exceptions to this behaviour: the religious ceremonies and processions, which to a large extent are female matters (see chapters 1 and 2), and the 8th of March – Women's Day. In the evening of that day groups of female friends go out together to have a *pizza*. It is an evening of inverted behaviour with the husbands left at home to take care of the children and the women enjoying themselves in public (though the wives have prepared supper for their families before leaving home, as more feminist-oriented women complained,

adding that after an evening out with their friends, the women turn back to their usual life and absolutely nothing has changed). It would be difficult to find a more direct statement of this inversion than the advertisement I once saw in a small town in eastern Sicily for male striptease on Women's Day.



Between my first time in Sicily in the 1970s and my recent visit I have seen a great change when it comes to women's freedom of movement in general. I remember my young female friends in the 1970s having almost no freedom whatsoever. Always there had to be a brother or a parent accompanying them, and I remember young girls quitting school at an early age because their parents wanted to protect them from the risks of meeting boys at school (since the school reform in 1962 classes are mixed) or on their way to and from school.

At that time there certainly were no meeting places for teenagers of both sexes like *Piazza Mokarta* today. The bars, for instance, were definitely male space. In the 1970s women could, though, enter them in male company – the generation before them could not even do that. Visiting the same villages today, I can see school girls going into the bars to buy ice cream, young mothers asking the bartenders for a glass of water for their children, or professional women taking a coffee break together. However, the traditional bar is without doubt still very much a male place. There are bars no woman would enter (like the bars close to the harbour in Mazara del Vallo), and a woman will never hang around in a bar, as men may do. Women finish their glass of water or cup of coffee quickly, and then they leave.

The *corso* and the *piazze* also used to be the men's public space. This was the site for formal as well as informal business and political activity. The exceptions to male dominance in these spaces were, for example, during religious processions or the Sunday afternoon *passeggiata* (walk) when the whole family dresses up and strolls along the street (Booth 1999:135; see also chapter 3).

Unaccompanied women used to avoid these male spaces by possibly not going

out at all or, when they had to go out, by taking indirect routes. Sometimes they would choose to wear their aprons to point out the momentary and obligatory aspect of their errands (Di Bella 1992:153). Besides, traditionally it was the men's task to do much of the shopping, which of course meant that women had less reason for going out on their own. Travelling vendors also made it possible for women to do some shopping in the street just outside their own house. It was there, around the house and in the courtyard, that women had their semi-public space, partly invisible to people passing by. If there were no courtyard, the street or a balcony would to a certain extent substitute for it (see e.g. Cronin 1970:70; Allum 1973:57-58; Tentori 1976:282; Booth 1999:136-137,150).

Middle-aged female informants often told me how it used to be when they were young, comparing it with the different situation of their own daughters today. Often it was not only the girls' parents but also their brothers who prohibited them from going out on their own. 'I first had to serve my brothers, then they would allow me to go out, but only in the company of my mother,' Giovanna remembers. And when these women got engaged, they were usually not allowed to go out alone with their fiancés but had to be chaperoned. A little sister in the backseat of the car, a so-called *candela* (candle), would sometimes do as chaperone. Enza laughingly told me that when she visited her fiancé's family, her future husband was not allowed to accompany her home, but his brother was.

These women also explained to me that in the absence of their husbands, especially at the beginning of their marriages, they only left home when absolutely necessary. One woman said that she had not been able to attend a relative's wedding because her husband had not been at home. Enza too said that she had felt that she should not go out, out of respect for her husband. For instance, she did not take her children to the beach, even if accompanied by her brothers and sisters-in-law, while her husband was away. Her daughter remembers how she used to cry because she was not allowed to go to the beach with her cousins, and how she then used to put her swimming suit on and go out to play on the roof terrace.

On Saturday afternoons, when many men are free from work, there were still sometimes more men than women in the shop where I usually made my purchases, and likewise there are still some travelling vendors in Mazara del Vallo. But today women generally move around more freely than they used to, and as regards Enza she now finds it right that young mothers do go to the beach even in their husbands' absence (her daughter-in-law does). Today she would have done that too. Mothers also agree on giving their teenage daughters more freedom than they themselves used to have, the restrictions once put on them being exaggerated and not good. But they emphatically stress that freedom must have its limits, as too much of it is not good.

Thus, women have entered the public spaces, though according to Booth, there was and still is an imbalance between the classes. Upper-class women were once more secluded than their poorer sisters, the latter sometimes being forced, for instance, to take on another job outside the home. Now the trend is reversed, and well-educated upper- and middle-class women are entering male spaces, including the labour market, while lower-class women adhere more to the traditional norms of female proper behaviour (1999:149-153).

These class differences also appear when comparing how much freedom various *mazaresi* families of today give their young daughters. (Needless to say, boys and men have always had much more freedom than their sisters, wives, and mothers.) When it comes to teenage girls who are still in school, their possibilities of joining a journey organised by the school, for example, vary significantly according to social class belonging. At vocational schools it is much more common for young girls not to be allowed either by their fathers or by their fiancés to join a tour. Planned trips have had to be cancelled because of this. Upper schools do not have this problem, some teachers explained, since, in contrast to vocational schools, these schools attract children of professionals, who are regarded as having a more modern and open attitude and thus not minding that their girls go on organised tours.

A family that does not give its daughters a certain degree of freedom is said to be *all'antica* (old-fashioned). The fishing population is generally regarded by others, and sometimes also by themselves, as belonging to this group. Some



teenage sons of fishermen explained to me that due to this traditional mentality their sisters do not always have the same freedom other girls have and their mothers rarely have a job outside the home. The boys did not agree with one another, though, on whether this was something good or not (cf. Ginatempo 1997:357ff).

Nowadays a professional woman heading for her job in the morning will not be criticised for being out in the streets, nor will any woman who has to do some shopping, see a relative, take her child to school, or do any other accepted errand. But women, in contrast to their men, are still not supposed to go out without a reason. So, in spite of an increased general freedom of movement, many fishermen's wives, both young and old, told me that they feel reluctant to go out without their husbands. If they do, they do not go out just for the fun of it, and preferably not alone. People would start talking, Mariella said.

The car makes a change for today's women. Having a driver's licence is very common, and this opens up new possibilities for the women, as the car, at the same time it helps the women move around, protects its passengers (cf. Booth 1999:145). As I did not have a car during my stay in Mazara del Vallo and there were very few buses and no taxis, I was well known in the town because people used to see me taking long walks on my own. Being conscious of the limitations on women's movement and being forced to walk myself, I was always very aware of how I walked. I never strolled along when on my own but always walked rather fast, clearly showing that I was heading somewhere. My informants, both men and women, noticed this and approved of my way of walking. Moreover, because of the general restrictions on women's movement pattern, I could never choose, for instance, to sit down in a sunny public place to warm up when my cold, damp flat forced me out of the house during some of the winter months. Instead, when I was tired of walking, I had to climb the stairs to our roof terrace, where few could see me, to let the sun warm me up.

This is what Mariella, the youngest of my female informants, said when discussing these limitations with me:

'I don't like going out on my own. Oh God, if I have to go to a specific

place to buy a certain thing, then I do go out. Or if I have to go to see a friend. But not for a walk or just for fun. I do not go on a shopping expedition alone, either. I would not like to do that. Every now and then I find it difficult to support this mentality [she refers to the local mentality compared with the mentality found in the bigger city from which she originally comes].<sup>26</sup> Here you will always meet the same people and everybody knows you. It is not because what you are up to, because going to the city, visiting the shops just to have a look – there is nothing wrong with that. To me this is normal. But I do not do it, because I do not feel good doing it. If I go out, somebody will perhaps think..., that annoys me. Just imagine, this summer I was alone many mornings and so I could not go to the beach. Just one morning did I go.'



Different patterns of movement for women and men respectively show that the opposition between the inside and the outside of the house may be perceived in gendered terms. The inside of the house stands for female and private space, while the outside stands for male and public space. As the inside is not for the public to see, it is only logical that the woman/mother, who embodies the house as well as her family, however much the father represents if officially, has her outdoor movements restricted in order to protect not only herself but also her family. Her movement thus becomes a mode of constructing as well as mirroring her reality/life. Generalising from my field experience, when they marry, young women, regardless of whether or not they had spent Saturday nights in *Piazza Mokarta* as teenagers, still today adapt to these restricted rules of behaviour for women.

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<sup>26</sup> Women living in larger towns and cities are usually considered to be more emancipated (cf. Floridia and Ramella 1995:169).

## The Native Village as Focus of Belonging and Identification

There is a general preference among Sicilians for ‘culture’ compared to ‘nature’, which is expressed in widely differing situations. In chapter three, for instance, we learned that raw food is always transformed from its natural state before it is eaten. Not even a fresh fruit is eaten without being peeled and cut into pieces. The same preference is expressed in the urban ethos, which ever since the Greek period has given Sicily a strong urban character (see the historical appendix). According to this often-described ethos, *cultura e civiltà* (culture and civilisation) are to be found only in towns and cities, while nature/countryside is regarded as their distinct antithesis – it is an uncivilised world, where disdained physical work is carried out, and where nobody wants to live.

Peasants share this negative attitude towards agricultural work and are said to lack an emotional attachment to their own land.<sup>27</sup> They have therefore always preferred to live in so-called agro-towns (see chapter 1) in spite of often having hours to ride daily on mules to and from their fields, before modern times permitted them to buy a moped or a small car (Cronin 1970:40-41; Schneider and Schneider 1976:66; Blok 1977:77-79; Cronin 1977:69-70; Blok and Driessen 1984; Gabaccia 2000:85,96).

The importance of the town as the only place where one can live a decent life does not mean that any town will do for the individual; it is one’s place of birth that really counts. *Campanilismo* (local patriotism) is very strong and certainly much stronger than the feeling of national belonging (Cusumano and Lentini 2002:17; Jones 2003:2). This important focus of belonging is life-long and, as some of the following examples will show, there is a strong identification with the native village as such, not just with one’s family members living there.

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<sup>27</sup> For a comparative discussion on peasants’ views of agricultural work worldwide, see Redfield (1973 (1960):63ff).

## Local Patriotism

*Campanilismo* as a form of community socio-centrism 'is one of the defining characteristics of Mediterranean and Italian society', according to Cohen. It operates to portray the village as an undifferentiated whole, and separate communities are expected to have differences in behaviours and customs. The uniqueness or superiority of one's locality is accepted as something self-evident, as is the parallel denigration of other communities. Cohen maintains that 'the continual and mutual affirmation of inter-village differences operates as a social mechanism that defines one village from another, regardless of the objective reality of social and cultural distinctions and boundaries. By talking and thinking about villages as bounded cultural entities, villagers are stating and defining boundaries that demarcate village communities as unique and discrete units.' Moreover, it is 'in the articulation of inter-community differences and animosity that *campanilismo* finds its major forum for expression and these feelings of distinctiveness and antipathy are most vocal and acute between neighboring communities' (1977:103,107-109).

Cohen's statements are in accord with what I myself experienced when I was living in Partinico a quarter of a century ago. People from neighbouring villages were regarded with much suspicion. An old man who wished to see me married expressed this ethos by saying that I could choose any of the boys from the village where both of us then lived, as they were all good and not like the boys from the surrounding villages.

However, since Cohen wrote this, almost at the time as I was living in Partinico, things have changed, at least in western Sicily. Today inter-village animosity is to a large extent gone, or it remains on a joking level. One can probably explain this by people's being less isolated nowadays compared to former times. Many young *mazaresi*, for instance, go to study in Palermo, and there they make friends with students from other villages. Some of these relationships lead to inter-village marriages, which nowadays occur more often than before. My informants would say that today there is no preference for local endogamy because of inter-village tensions, though any mother would regret not having her married children in the vicinity. The limited freedom,

especially for young girls from traditional families, discussed above may result, though, in differing between various families as regards both preference and practice when it comes to local endogamy.

This is not to say that the importance of *campanilismo* has decreased. The strong identification with one's place of birth is still there, and it means that in relation to people from other places the individual is very aware of the fact that he or she is *mazarese*, for instance, and the other is not. Being *mazarese* then means having certain habits and traditions, which the other may not have, but it does not necessarily mean that each feels superior in relation to the other. Nor does *campanilismo* mean that all fellow villagers feel close and trust each other, though a certain community among co-villagers is certainly felt in relation to outsiders. Nor does the ethos include a feeling of shared responsibility for the common community. Public property, for instance, is not seen as common property but as belonging to nobody and therefore not to be cared for. Thus, however strong the feelings the *mazaresi* may have for their town, they do not care, for example, about keeping the town tidy. It does mean, however, that when the individual is not in the home village, he or she always feels lost to a certain extent.



'No, I am not *mazarese*, but I have lived in Mazara del Vallo for thirty-five years now,' I overheard an elderly man saying to another elderly person. Thirty-five years is not enough to make you a real part of another locality. Sometimes being born there is not enough either, but your ancestors should preferably have been born there as well. A well-educated middle-aged man said that although he was born in Mazara del Vallo and still lived there with his wife and their children, he did not feel like a real *mazarese*, but more as if he were adopted by the town, as his grandfather was not born there, his brother had left the town to settle somewhere else, and he himself had lived for a short time outside Mazara del Vallo. (This statement is interesting, I think, as it not only says something about the relations a Sicilian has to his or her native village, but it also shows the closeness between the kin group and its individual members. There is obviously so close a relation between this

man and his grandfather and brother that it is not possible to make any exact distinction between them – one of the family members does not feel like a real *mazarese* because the others are not.)

Making friends with a woman in her early forties, I asked her if she was Sicilian. She said that she was not, but that she was from one of the big cities in the North. Wondering how she found life in Sicily, I was told that there were many things she did not approve of. In her answer there was not the slightest reference to the fact that I only later found out, namely that she had lived in Mazara del Vallo with her parents and siblings since she was a small child. No doubt, though, that in spite of the fact that her family of origin lived close by and she herself was now raising her own family with her *mazarese* husband, she was very sincere in saying that she did not feel like a *mazarese*.

Due to *campanilismo* a friend of mine, a North European woman, was forced by her Sicilian husband to deliver their baby in their home village, which was also the husband's native village. My friend would have preferred to go to a modern clinic in the big city close by when it was time for the delivery, but according to her husband the child had to be born in their village in order to get it registered as the child's native village. Another friend, who was to open an exhibition in his home village, had to convince the authorities/financiers that the speaker he had invited was the right person to give the inauguration talk in spite of being from another village. The authorities would have preferred one of their own fellow villagers, as they regretted having to admit that in their village there was no one as suitable as the man who had been chosen.

This nostalgia, that is, the attachment to one's native village, should not be mixed up with the preference for living close to one's family. As some of my examples show, *campanilismo* is about the village as such, and to be able to live in their village of origin, people are prepared to make great sacrifices. When people are forced to live in North Italy due to a very high level of unemployment in the South, the move is always regretted and explained by this lack of work at home. I have never heard of anybody settling in the North out of free choice. Emigrants often decide to return home, leaving behind a well-paid job and a society which, according to them, functions much better than

their own. Still, they prefer to go back home to an uncertain future, to be able to live in the place they feel they belong to.



As has already been pointed out, one form of *campanilismo* is the frequently expressed awareness that local customs differ from one village to another, or, as an oft-cited proverb says, *Paese si va, usanze si trova* (Wherever you go, you will find different habits). When discussing dowries, for example, informants would often begin a statement by telling me, 'This is how we *mazaresi* do it, but in other villages they do it differently,' or 'In Mazara del Vallo we do like this, in Castelvetro they do like that, and in Marsala they do it in yet another way' (see chapter 3). I was also told, for instance, that in other places women do agricultural work, but in Mazara del Vallo they never do, or that in Sciacca fishermen's wives are very actively involved in their husbands' work, while in Mazara del Vallo they are not (all three villages mentioned are within easy range of Mazara del Vallo). Food, a topic very dear to everyone (see chapter 3), was discussed in the same manner. A special dish, a kind of cheese, and so forth, would be discussed in terms of how it was prepared and how it tasted in various villages. This awareness of local differences does not necessarily indicate that the *mazarese* way is always the best, but it acts as a constant reminder that the individual belongs to a given village and a given tradition.

*Campanilismo* is also expressed in politics. In regional elections people prefer to vote for somebody from their own village, thereby often giving little consideration to the politics the person represents, but taking for granted that the politician's shared bonds to their village will benefit them. Consequently, any politicians visiting their home villages will stress their bonds with the place and its people in order to gain votes. The pattern is mirrored in local elections, where people vote for a relative or a friend, often without regard to political affiliation (cf. Minicuci 1989:318-319).

Also in religious life *campanilismo* is expressed. Each community has its own patron saint or *Madonna* (Mazara del Vallo has both), who is celebrated in yearly local festivals (see chapter 1; see also Schneider and Schneider

1976:52). As a final concrete example of *campanilismo*, people have surnames which are the same as local place names. Thus, in Sicily one may meet *signora* (Mrs) Mazara, *signor* (Mr) Messina (city on the northeast coast), *signor* Favignana (a small Sicilian island), *signora* Taormina (the most well-known tourist resort), and so forth.



Along with *campanilismo* there is a contrasting tendency expressed as *sono diverso* (I am different). Several informants told me that although they certainly were *mazaresi* as well as Sicilians, they were different; they were, they said, for example, more open, less suspicious, and better organised than the average Sicilian. Saying that one feels different is always expressed as something positive. Likewise, when complaining about the Italian society at large, which is regarded as a disordered and unjust society where politicians are corrupt and people lack culture and only care about themselves, people showed pride in being different.

These complaints about others and about the Italian society were often followed by sayings like *In Sicilia siamo in Africa* (In Sicily we are in Africa) or *Siamo come gli Arabi* (We are like the Arabs) – societies south of Sicily usually being regarded as even worse than their own. Being like a Norman stands for the opposite – for the ordered society in the North and a more modern and open mentality. When a woman told me that she felt more Norman than Arab, this was therefore by definition to be understood as something good. I was also told that coming from Sweden to Mazara del Vallo must be like leaving the civilisation behind and going to Africa. This discourse also entails an evolutionary bias. When comparing certain phenomena in Sicily with how things are further north and seeing the differences, people would often say, 'We have not reached that level yet.'

Despite this, this section has shown a very strong feeling for and identification with one's village of origin with all its advantages and disadvantages. The important thing for the argument of this thesis is that there are clear parallels between these patriotic values and the family values discussed in



previous chapters. They are of the same kind, so to speak, or, perhaps better, part of one another. Members have a strong sense of belonging when it comes to both of these institutions, and they regard them as unique and build up boundaries around them. This parallel between the village and one's family becomes obvious in connection, for instance, with political elections, when people prefer to vote for somebody from their own village in regional elections and for a family member in local elections – without regard to political affiliation. So while the family constitutes the most important part of one's identity, one's home village constitutes an important part of it as well (cf. Minicuci 1997), and just as in-laws never really become part of one's family (see chapter 4), the outsider moving into a village will never completely succeed in demolishing the boundaries surrounding it and will therefore never really become part of it.

## A Mask Called Bella Figura

The Latin word *persona* originally denoted a mask, i.e. a mask behind which an actor playing a role in an antique drama or in a ritual concealed his true face/personality. (Mauss 1985 (1938))



According to Goffman, we all act as if we were on a stage in our everyday communication with other people. From the perspective of the dramatic performance, we put on various roles, presenting ourselves differently depending on the context in order to make a certain desired impression. In accordance with this theory of 'impression management', a team of actors are completely dependent on one another to achieve their goals, and confronting their public they keep any secrets they may have in common and stick to the three attributes of loyalty, discipline, and circumspection. A single member who lacks these virtues can spoil the whole situation for the other team members. Only backstage, out of sight of the public, are participants allowed to relax their image. In order to avoid inopportune intrusion, the stage and the backstage must therefore be kept strictly apart (1982 (1959)).

Sant Cassia, discussing everyday performance, maintains that '[i]n many Mediterranean societies it is through one's style that identity is created, formed and transacted'. This 'suggests that the self is a composite of *persona*, of *prosopa*,<sup>28</sup> assumed by author-actors in their search for characters which they embody in a social drama to indicate themselves. These *persona* are formed in and through interaction with others, and whilst "playing *at*" a role (such as being a man, or a woman, etc) may in fact be one of the *personaggi* one assumes, that role is not to be confused with the self' (1991:12). (Herzfeld expressed this very accurately when he said analogously that among the Cretans there was less focus attached to 'being a good man' than to 'being *good at* being a man' (1985:16)).

'Identity', Sant Cassia continues, 'is revealed by the skill with which one assumes different *personaggi*, characters, often at very different but equally important levels of interaction with others [...] [T]he "true self" is realised, instead of exposed [...] through the author's embodiment in his or her *personaggi* which are read by others as his or her style [...] [T]he self is not concealed from and/or revealed to others; rather the self reveals itself as process through its various "characters" or *personaggi*. It is through this display that the author of these *personaggi* discovers him or herself and is evaluated by others' (1991:12).

Many writers have pointed to the pronounced importance among South Italians to make *una bella figura* (a good impression) when interacting with other people (see e.g. Banfield 1958:65; Silverman 1975:4; Douglass 1980:354). However, in daily talk its opposite, *brutta figura* (poor/bad impression), is talked about even more, perhaps. People may be accused of having made a *brutta figura*, or they express their desire to try to avoid making it. In the following I therefore intend to show how people, while playing at their various roles, are actively involved in trying to make *una bella figura*. The better they play their chosen roles, that is, the better they succeed in realising these through embodying them, the more the roles are perceived as their true identity.

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<sup>28</sup> A Greek word also denoting a theatrical mask (my remark).



A topic frequently raised spontaneously by my informants, showing its all-pervasive power, was the anxiety a great majority of the *mazaresi*, regardless of social class belonging, were said to feel about how others see them: that is, public opinion. I was told that people in general, though apparently not the informant him- or herself, act more in accordance with the presumed expectations of others than in accordance with what they themselves feel like doing in order to avoid making a *brutta figura*. It is keeping up a good appearance that counts, I was told. As a means of 'locating oneself as regards others' (Machin 1996:252), people were said to spend more money than they really could afford on conspicuous consumption like restaurants, clothes, jewels, cars, and houses. I myself was struck, among other things, by the fancy and expensive gifts among relatives and friends, of which the *corredo* and the display of it (see chapter 3) is the most illustrative example, and on the whole by the importance of an expensive superficial look to material things, which at a closer look could sometimes be of poor quality.

Important means of locating oneself in the eyes of others are the celebrations of the main life-cycle events. Not only the wedding party, as described in chapter three, but all life events like baptism, communions, funerals, and mourning are public occasions. This is so despite the family's being a closed unit in so many ways. What may look like a contradiction can be explained, I think, by considering that the public character of these events, apart from reflecting the importance of the various phases of this passage given by the society (see chapter 2, section 'The Developmental Cycle...'), also shows the importance of controlling the impression one makes on the others in the 'social drama' (cf. Davis 1973:10).

Making good impression, however, is not only a matter of these more concrete superficial expressions. There is much more to it. To make *una bella figura* is also very much a matter of showing integrity and of behaving in a way that makes people pay you their respect. Being a good family member, having a family which corresponds to the norms, and protecting one's family life, like the restrictions on female movement discussed above, are important parts of

this behaviour.

A very subtle non-material way of handling the constant awareness of being evaluated by others is the capability of my informants to express themselves in a very measured and precise way. They gave me the impression of having a very strong self-control that never permitted a slip of the tongue (cf. Friedman 1953:220), and more than once I felt that I was certainly not as good as they were at self-mastery – or discipline and circumspection, as Goffman puts it. Similarly, Schneider argues that Sicilians are ‘very sensitive to the demands of social etiquettes’, and they therefore give ‘much attention to the fine nuances of social transactions’ (1969:141; see also Douglass 1980:354).

Not only are people capable of expressing themselves in a very measured way, but, according to the well-known Judge Falcone mentioned in chapter one, who was brought up in Palermo, the Sicilians even have a special liking for not talking at all. There is also a common reluctance to show one’s feelings. The Sicilians, including himself, Falcone writes, are quite different from the typical Mediterranean who demonstrates all his or her inner feelings. In Sicily it is completely inappropriate to officially demonstrate one’s feelings; that is, doing so one would make una *brutta figura*. Feelings are private and there is no reason whatsoever to let them out in public (1994 (1991):49,86; see also Dino 1998). This self-mastery, as I understand it, is of great help for people when embodying different characters/*personaggi*.

Sicilian society is full of social differences, just like most other societies in the world. For instance, school children are taught to stand up for a teacher but not for a porter entering their classroom, many more men than women have leading positions in the society, and immigrants are asymmetrically addressed by the informal *tu* (you) instead of the formal *lei* (you). Marking social differences in various ways, like standing up for some people but not for others, is a way of demonstrating which group ego belongs to, and of marking off the socially inferior, whether it be a porter, a woman, or an immigrant, or, on the contrary, of honouring the superior. Having met with the fishermen in many different contexts, I have been able to see, though, that much of the status differences, like the captain being the one who decides

everything on board and who earns three times as much as the lowest ranking crew members, are often neutralised by an informal and egalitarian atmosphere and constant jokes among the men. There is no reason, however, to believe that this informality is less conscious than any other means of communication; knowing how to deal with lack of equality and how to get oneself respected if one has a superior position is still another way of making a *bella figura*.

Making a *bella figura* is about playing one's public role well – it is what can be seen by others that counts, as we also learned when discussing earlier the honour and shame complex. When they are not able to adapt to social pressure – that is, when they make a *brutta figura* – people therefore feel shame. This can be exemplified by people who were said to feel shame when they were not able to care for an old parent but had to leave him or her in a home for aged people. (Sicily has a higher number of homes for aged people than any other Italian region (ISTAT 2000c:474).) Doing such a thing, people will try to excuse themselves in front of others, a friend of mine said. She did not say anything, though, about feeling shame in relation to the parent.



Constantly being aware of the fact that one's words and every little sign will be scrutinised and interpreted by others means a heavy pressure on the individual. More important for the purpose of this thesis, though, is that the *bella figura* complex gives each and every person a means of influencing how he or she is perceived by others whilst playing *at* a role, as Sant Cassia put it. For a *mazarese* this is all of utmost importance, and words and actions are therefore well calculated in order to protect the individual and his or her family and/or to gain the impression aimed at. This certainly requires 'loyalty, discipline, and circumspection' (Goffman 1982 (1959):222) from the team of family members.

I will now turn to one very important way of making a *bella figura* – that of being a generous host.

## Hospitality

I was invited to spend a public holiday with Enza and her family at their summer cottage. Already at nine o'clock in the morning I was picked up by her youngest son. This was going to be an all-day party with many relatives and friends coming together.

My friends' house is situated by the *mazarese* beach. In wintertime this area gives a very dull impression. The many summer houses constructed here during the last decade are empty then, and there is no street lighting. The area is completely dead – apart from wild dogs drifting around and, now and then, hard-working burglars. Time and again I heard stories about acts of house-breaking in wintertime. This is why my friends empty their house of everything each autumn.

From June to September the scene changes completely. Middle- and upper-class people now actually move from their apartments in town down to this area, where houses are generally big two-storey stone buildings surrounded by gardens and high protecting walls and where people live permanently during the hot summer months. Down here the beach becomes the meeting place for everybody during the day and for young people also in the evenings, while adults then meet on their terraces. Now the area is full of life until very late at night. This was the place where I was going to spend a summer day with the most generous and hospitable hosts possible.

Arriving at my friends' house, I was met by the smiling hostess, to whom I handed over the obligatory pastries I had brought. The host, who was already working at the outdoor grill, told me to feel *come se fosse casa tua* (as if this were your own house). In the kitchen I met other female family members. This, the women said spontaneously, was the normal way of dividing the work: women do all the work in the kitchen (which in this area sometimes means a fancy outdoor kitchen), while men are responsible for the grill. During the whole day it was the older generation who took care of the cooking and the cleaning (see chapter 3), while the younger ones of both sexes enjoyed themselves (cf. Assmuth 1997:257).

I was shown around the house inside and out, and I was also taken for a visit to my hosts' relatives in a neighbouring house. The atmosphere of the visit was very pleasant and relaxed. After a short time of friendly small talk, though, we had to return 'home', as it was time to sit down at the very long table, to have the first lavish meal of the day.

During the day I counted approximately fifty persons coming together, though all did not stay the whole day through. Besides the host, hostess, and their four children, two of them with families of their own, there were siblings and cousins of both the host and hostess together with their children, and there were also friends of the various members of the host family. No wonder, then, the enormous plates with huge amounts of various kinds of fish and vegetables, which were brought to the table along with mountains of the compulsory bread.

The atmosphere around the table on this sunny day was, as always among the *mazaresi* with whom I have shared a meal, never formal. There was no fixed seating order, though the spontaneous placing showed a tendency towards division by sex and age – young girls formed one group, elderly women another, and so forth. During a long sitting like this, one may easily get up and take another place in order to change conversational partners. There was continually a lot of movement around the table (see chapter 3).

The whole time, I was treated almost like a guest of honour, always having somebody by my side asking if everything was all right with me, explaining what we were eating and how the fish should be cleaned – or they promptly cleaned it for me. I was constantly offered more to eat and shown all possible attention. I could not have been better cared for.

### **'We Are Very Hospitable'**

In a discussion of the honour and shame complex, Herzfeld suggests that honour is 'displaced by descriptively simpler and less ambiguous glosses such as "hospitality", in order to allow more precisely calibrated comparisons'.

Hospitality means behaving in a socially appropriate way – that is, living up to social and moral obligations – which renders honour. A concept like this has several advantages compared to honour and shame, according to Herzfeld, one of which is having a more precise definition, thus not only making comparisons easier, but also allowing the scientist to go beyond the circum-Mediterranean area when making comparisons. As hospitality naturally includes the anthropologist, it also forces the researcher to examine his or her own presence in the host community. That is, the ethnography which is at the base of anthropological studies is thereby shown as a condition for the research (1987:75-76,87).

Hospitality brings inclusion and exclusion very sharply into focus (ibid.:76). Hence, as inclusion and exclusion are what this thesis is very much about, I find that the use of the concept hospitality may be yet another mode for understanding my main discussion as well as my own role/status as newcomer and stranger within the *mazarese* community.



The *mazaresi* in general are very proud of their hospitality, and they themselves often put it forward as one of their true virtues, telling me that *siamo molto ospitali* (we are very hospitable). I remember that when I was working in Partinico with Danilo Dolci (see chapter 1) he wanted me to be the one who maintained contact with the families whose children frequented the experimental school initiated by him. The reason for choosing me as a stranger to do this job, regarded as very delicate by Dolci as it meant visiting the families in their homes and collecting information about their domestic life, was that, according to him, among the hospitable Sicilians a foreign guest/visitor will always be well received, even better than a co-villager. This widespread hospitality was a heritage from the classical Greeks, he explained to me.

Carrying out my work in Partinico, however, also presupposed that somebody from the school had introduced me to the families – that I had a recommendation (see chapter 2). Arriving in Mazara del Vallo in 1996, I found myself in a situation quite different from the one in which I had once found



myself in Partinico. This time I had nobody who could furnish me with a recommendation, as I was a complete stranger to everybody. I therefore had great difficulties establishing contact with possible informants for my study. Without any local recommendations it was a very long way indeed from total anonymity to being able to accomplish the first interview and to being allowed to take part in the local hospitality. However, step by step I overcame these difficulties, and the lavish hospitality shown to me in time made it clear to me that I was ritually incorporated into my host community. The special treatment I received – at the party just discussed, for instance – also showed, however, that my status was not that of one of them, but of a guest. As such I was even better treated than a friend or a relative.

Thus, better treatment does not necessarily go hand in hand with more closeness or affection among interacting individuals. When my host welcomed me to the party above, he used an expression saying that I should feel/behave as *if* I were in my own house. I also found the same kind of rhetoric when I was told now and then that ‘you speak better Italian than we do’ (which is certainly not true). Such a statement is a form of ‘exaggeration by inversion’ – that is, a way of complementing the outsider on ‘*virtually* matching the speaker’s own social worth’ (Herzfeld 1987:80). It meant that I was ritually incorporated into my new status as a guest, which gave me a position somewhere midway between that of a stranger and a community or family member. Another way of putting it is to say that the status of guest means that the person is ‘practically rather than morally’ incorporated into the community (Pitt-Rivers 1977:97).

Pitt-Rivers has argued that the stranger always constitutes a potential threat, as his or her assertions about him- or herself cannot be checked. The unknown is said moreover to be sacred, belonging to the extra-ordinary world/the realms of mystery, which also makes him or her dangerous. The threat is eliminated by the stranger’s either being denied admittance or becoming socialised, that is to say secularised (1968).

Though I think it is too speculative to ally the stranger with the sacred, it is obvious that the unknown may constitute a threat. In my own case, therefo-

re, I had brought a letter of recommendation from the rector of Uppsala University. I rarely used it, though, for not being used to the system of recommendations, I felt embarrassed to do so. Besides, I was unsure about the worth of that piece of paper for my informants, and thus I used it only when presenting myself to the mayor and other dignitaries.

I never had to overcome a specific ordeal or ritual before changing my status from foreigner to guest, as is the case in many cultures; it was more a very long process of waiting, as already described, before I was incorporated. Once I had overcome this obstacle, I was honoured and given precedence. However, this also required that I was able to fulfil my new status as a guest, that is, that I knew how to behave appropriately. The pastries I brought to the party are but one small example of my living up to obligations (cf. Pitt-Rivers 1968).

I also believe that my status as a guest did mean that I was not permanently incorporated, that I was expected to leave and never to be able to reciprocate (ibid.). This, I believe, also explains why I really felt a change in my relations to my informants every time I came back to Sicily. Leaving but coming back several times meant that my belonging to the place was increased and my bonds to my informants were deepened – I was turning from being a guest towards slowly becoming more of a friend. That is why I have come to the conclusion that it was fruitful that I did not stay for eighteen months on end, but divided that time of fieldwork into five visits: keeping my promise to come back was important.

Pitt-Rivers himself, while carrying out his Spanish fieldwork, was never allowed by his upper-class acquaintances to escape his status as a guest – a status which gave him no rights – into a community member asserting himself in various ways (as members of the plebeian community did allow him to do). This was their way of escaping from the threat he embodied (1971 (1954); 1977:99-105). It is always the locals who, '[b]y controlling the right to treat, [...] maintain moral advantage over strangers' (Herzfeld 1991:84). So, in spite of the fact that my host might have offered me hospitality with genuine pleasure, at the level of collective representations hospitality signifies 'the moral and conceptual *subordination* of the guest to the host' (Herzfeld 1987:77; see

also Mauss 1974 (1925):72).

This unequal relationship may be compared with the patron-client relationship (see chapter 2). Just like the patron-client relation, the host-guest relation is asymmetric, hierarchical, and many-stranded, and the host, just like the patron, may act as intermediary between the guest/client and the community. It also holds for both kinds of relation that the higher the status of the guest/client, the higher the honour for the host/patron. (Being a well-educated researcher from the North, I had a built-in status that opened up doors for me when I wanted, for example, to make contact with some of the town's dignitaries.) Although the guest/client and the host/patron may both benefit from the relation, the reason they are never able to become equals is that equality invites rivalry. The only possible way to come close to equality is to alternate the roles, simultaneous equality being impossible (Pitt-Rivers 1977:102). During my fieldwork I never really came close to alternating the roles, in the real sense of the term. No pastries, flowers, or other presents brought when I was invited could change that, although such gifts may be seen as a means not only of paying respect but also of levelling out, at least partly, the difference between the host and the guest (cf. Douglas 1984:10).



I began this chapter with a discussion of distrust and I end it with a discussion of hospitality. Both are cultural traits that strongly characterise the society studied. Though they may seem at first to be contradictory, I do not believe they are. If it is true that hospitality towards the stranger is 'a means of containing the danger that [he or she] represents through a conflation of outsiderhood and presence within the community' (Herzfeld 1987:84; see also Gilmore 1987:93), the lavish hospitality I found may be at least partly explained by the equally widespread distrust.

## Summary

This chapter has shown how the family constantly strives to protect itself when relating with the external world due to a widespread distrust. According to my informants, their lack of trust when it comes to non-kin can be explained by an unjust state, by the organised criminality, and, not least, by their history; Sicily has throughout history been continually invaded by an endless series of foreign conquerors that have rarely been trusted by the subjected Sicilians.

The honour and shame complex is a mechanism for evaluating the social worth of the other. The cultural traits presented here in order to show how boundaries are built up around the *mazarese* family while protecting itself capture some of its local form:

A house's physical form both influences domestic behaviour and expresses it. Among the *mazaresi*, their closed family units are analogous with the architecture – the anonymous houses being built so that very little insight into family life is possible. In the general absence of visible porches, verandas, or gardens, the doorstep becomes an absolute border between private and public space, and the house thereby very clearly reflects the marked dichotomy between one's own family and non-family members.

Space perceived in gendered terms means that the inside of the house stands for female and private space, while the outside stands for male and public space. This way of seeing has traditionally made the woman, who embodies her family as well as their house, restrict her movements outside the house in order to shield not only herself but also her family and its honour. Though today's restrictions are generally not as severe as those which the older generation once experienced, on looking more closely one will find class differences: while upper- and middle-class women were once most secluded, today it is lower-class women who adhere more to traditional norms.

Being born in Mazara del Vallo means identifying with and feeling a lifelong belonging to the place, whether one lives there one's whole life or is forced to

leave due, for instance, to lack of work. And just as people build up boundaries around their families, they do so also when it comes to their home village, which is regarded as unique and distinctly separate from other villages. *Campanilismo* (local patriotism) is also expressed in politics, where people prefer to vote for somebody from their own village, and in religious life, where the devotion to local saints is strong. Patriotism is indeed so strong that it is virtually impossible for somebody who moves into town to become part of it, no matter how long he or she lives there. This does not imply, however, that fellow villagers always feel solidarity and trust for each other or that there is a shared responsibility for common property.

Putting on various roles depending on the context and playing the chosen role skilfully by calculating one's actions and words carefully are means of controlling the impression one makes on others in the social drama. Such self-mastery is yet another way of protecting oneself as well as one's family and of achieving the goal of making a *bella figura*.

To overcome the potential hostility that the stranger symbolises, she or he must either be denied admittance or become socialised into the community. The latter is done through hospitality, which, besides rendering honour to the host/hostess, brings inclusion and exclusion very sharply into focus and may be seen as a means of ritually incorporating the stranger, and thus containing the danger the stranger represents.



## 6. COLLABORATION WITHIN AND BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES OF LA FAMIGLIA

All cultures are permeated by moral values 'so naturalized, so intellectually and emotionally embodied that they are integral parts of our sense of self. Our sense of morality is, after all, what constitutes our sociality, the very basis for relating,' Howell writes. The study of indigenous morality, however, is theoretically as well as methodologically difficult. Whether for this reason or not, she continues, it is safe to say that so far among anthropologists the topic of morality as such, that is, explicit explorations of indigenous moralities, has rarely been directly addressed (1997:6-11).



Despite the fact that we anthropologists are academically trained to grasp that when we are socialised into a certain culture we are at the same time socialised into a certain morality, I think that nothing else is as difficult for us to understand and, not least, to accept as when right and wrong no longer correspond to concepts that are deeply part of our own way of understanding human interaction. At any rate, I was sometimes confused at the beginning of my fieldwork when trying to map out various situations I was watching or taking part in. I found that people were shifting between being caring and open on the one hand and indifferent and/or closed on the other, without my being able to see any pattern that would explain their seemingly contradictory behaviour. However, when looking at it all from a family perspective, I began to see the logic behind their behaviour.

In this thesis I have therefore taken the family as my point of departure when surveying social relations among the *mazaresi*, and I have shown that the

family builds up social as well as physical boundaries around itself and socialises its members into different rules of behaviour for interacting with family members and non-family members respectively. The family networks thus created dominate social life heavily and suggest a very particular relation of solidarity as well as dependence among members of one and the same family. Without the relations always having to be intimate and/or free of conflict, a strong family perspective is developed: family members are the people with whom the individual fully identifies him- or herself and in whom he or she places most trust, and it is here, in and/or with the support of the family, that the individual thinks his or her interests are best realised. When these family relations are held up alongside relations with non-family members and with the society at large, the relationships between actions and morals stand out, and prevailing moral and cultural codes among the people who are studied emerge.

In this concluding chapter I will take the discussion one step further. Continuing the elaboration of the tight collaboration within family networks, I will at the same time give examples of collaboration among non-kin, and I will discuss how this collaboration may be understood in relation to the field-material presented in previous chapters. In showing that such collaboration may exist without family networks losing their strength and their very particular position, I hope to contribute to a deeper understanding of the predominant value system among my informants, in order to move the ongoing discussion about the South Italian family somewhat further. At the same time I hope, paraphrasing Geertz,<sup>29</sup> to show that understanding a people's morality exposes their normalness without reducing their particularity.



I took Edward C. Banfield's work about amoral familism in southern Italy as a springboard for my thesis. I will now end it by coming back to Robert D. Putnam, whose much discussed book *Making Democracy Work – Civic*

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<sup>29</sup> Geertz once wrote: 'Understanding a people's culture exposes their normalness without reducing their particularity' (1973:14).



*Traditions in Modern Italy* (1993), written almost four decades after the publication of Banfield's book, somewhat echoes the latter.

Putnam's main thesis is that voluntary horizontal collaboration, regardless of whether it has political aims or is of quite another category, is necessary for the creation of a civic community, that is, a community marked by an active, public-spirited citizenry, by egalitarian relations, and by a social fabric of trust and cooperation. This is the kind of social capital that it takes for democracy and its institutions to work efficiently and for an economy to develop.

That thesis is proved through a follow-up of the establishment of local governments in the Italian regions. Until 1970 all but five of the country's twenty regions had been governed centrally from Rome, while the other five, one of which was Sicily, had got special statutes already after the Second World War (see the historical appendix) – but now the remaining fifteen regions got their own governments too. In his study, which covers all twenty regions, Putnam charted the effect of the local institutions on political and economic development in the regions in order to see whether the institutional changes have led to a reduction of the difference between the two Italies, that is, the 'backward' South and the modern North. The South, he writes, had been characterised since Norman times by a culture of mistrust, by a lack of democracy as well as civil culture – associations and horizontal forms of collaboration always being few or non-existent, while patron-client-like vertical relations have been the norm – and by an inefficient administration. Some of the southern regions, he adds, at the beginning of the study ranked socially and economically with countries of the Third World, while the North had been characterised since the Middle Ages by many kinds of voluntary associations and horizontal collaboration, economic development, and efficient administration of its institutions.

In presenting the result of the comprehensive material he and his colleagues collected, Putnam comes to the conclusion that the Italian reform of 1970 had not decreased these differences between the South and the North. On the contrary, the difference between the two Italies had in fact increased since the reform, which 'freed the more advanced regions from the stultify-

ing grasp of Rome, while allowing the problems of the more backward regions to fester' (ibid.: 61).<sup>30</sup> Putnam's point is that it is the lack of horizontally organised associations in South Italy that creates the negative situation.



In 1995, that is, only two years after the publication of Putnam's book, the journal *Meridiana* published a study by a group of Italian scholars who showed that cultural voluntary associations are as frequent in South Italy today as in any other part of Italy. More than two-thirds of these associations, however, had been created after 1980, a figure which is much higher than the proportion of new groups in the North. The authors therefore argue that the increase in voluntary associations has to be seen as a result of modern education and increased well-being and, moreover, as a sign of decreased fatalism, increased belief in one's own powers, and an increased trust in others, and that this indicates modernisation as well as a cultural homogenisation process with the rest of the country.

The authors of this study, who, just like Putnam, see culture and social structures as exercising an autonomous influence upon economic development, argue, however, that this development has led to a homogenisation process that has gone more quickly in the socio-cultural arena than in the economic-productive arena. In contrast to the traditional patron-client culture, characterised by a widespread lack of trust in politicians, the new associations furthermore may constitute – and, it is argued, to some extent already have constituted – an important springboard for a new generation of politicians and for political participation. Referring to other studies showing that the South has the lowest figures for interpersonal trust compared to central and northern parts of Italy as well as other European countries, but that the development is going towards increased trust, the authors conclude that associa-

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<sup>30</sup> The population too was still divided into two parts when it came to their satisfaction with the situation: in 1988, only half as many of the citizens in the South (29 per cent) were 'very satisfied' or 'rather satisfied' with their regional administration as compared to the situation in the North, where the figure was 57 per cent (ibid.:53-55).

tions constitute a tendency towards breaking up the traditional *particolarismo familiare* (giving privilege to one's family) and towards confronting collective problems – thus, towards leaving familism behind (Trigilia 1995).

In one of the sub-studies, Floridia and Ramella make a comparison between associations in Florence and Palermo explicitly. Though they invite the reader to be cautious with the data presented due to their being collected by two different institutions using different working methods and slightly different definitions as regards various kinds of associations, the authors are able to show that from the beginning of the 1980s to the mid-1990s there was a strong expansion of associations, not least associations for the promotion of local cultural traditions, in Palermo. In Florence, on the other hand, associations had a longer historical continuity and were more consolidated. Another difference between the North and the South to which Floridia and Ramella point is that in the South, members of the associations are more often students and people from the middle and upper classes, while in the North, members are of more mixed class backgrounds. This difference is less accentuated in the newly established Palermitan associations, however, compared to the older ones. When it comes to the members' age, the authors refer to a generational segregation, while showing that compared to their Florentine counterparts the Palermitan associations demonstrate a greater separation between age groups – older members mark the old societies, while the new societies have a much larger proportion of young protagonists. As this new development in the cultural field is not synchronised with a similar development in the economic and institutional areas, frustration and insecurity are created among parts of the Palermitan population as to their social identity. Younger people especially, the authors argue, are therefore experimenting with the balance between being exposed to social and cultural openness on the one hand, while simultaneously being exposed on the other hand to traditional, more closed cultural models (1995).

There is a big difference not only between the data Putnam and the Italian scholars present, but also between how they use the material they have collected. Putnam gives a simplistic and static picture of the good North and the bad South, just as his colleague Banfield (who is among the scholars Putnam

thanks in the introduction for having read his manuscript) did, and just as one would expect, the work has been much criticised, not least by Italian scholars (see e.g. Ramella 1995), who, as so often before, do not deny the problems of the South, but who conduct a much more nuanced discussion. At the same time that they do see a homogenisation between the South and the North, where Putnam sees none, they also point to the dualism within the South: with regard to schooling, for example, the South has the highest figures both for dropouts from the obligatory school and for girls and boys continuing to upper school. In the South there is also, according to the scholars, a big difference between groups having strong social-political engagement, on the one hand, and on the other, a parallel apathy with people taking no part in public activities (Ramella 1995:126; Trigilia 1995:108).

Regarding their different opinions about the number of voluntary associations in the South, we have to remember that Putnam's study was long-term, starting in 1970 and published almost a quarter of a century later. His data regarding voluntary associations are from 1982 (p. 91, footnote 35). The study published in *Meridiana*, which was carried out from 1992 to 1994, stresses the fact that more than two-thirds of the voluntary cultural associations were created after 1980. Putnam seems to have missed that development. Perhaps this is partly due to the fact that on the whole, there have been comparably fewer studies carried out on associations in the South; when writing about *il Mezzogiorno* most authors, as Ramella rightly argues, have instead concentrated on the lack of economic development and on the organised criminality (1995:127). Thus Putnam maintains that when the regional reform was introduced the new institutions were implanted into two very different social contexts: in 'less civic regions', that is, in the South in contrast to the North, 'political and social participation was organized vertically, not horizontally. Mutual suspicion and corruption were regarded as normal. Involvement in civic associations was scanty. Lawlessness was expected. People in these communities felt powerless and exploited. They were right' (ibid.:182).

Putnam has also been accused of historical simplification (Lupo 1993) and of reconstructing Italian history to fit his theory of social capital, using a model that conceives of 'civic capacity as a native soil in which state structures grow

rather than one shaped by patterns of state building and state strategy' (Tarrow 1996:395). This is a severe critique pointing to the question of causality – Do people who already have trust join associations or do they acquire trust by joining the associations? – a theme further taken up by Bo Rothstein. According to him, social capital consists of the degree of trust between people interacting – while participation in social networks, which Putnam pointed to as essential, is only a result of that trust – and he argues that it is the existence of universal and impartial public institutions that is crucial for the creation of this kind of capital (2003:222-223,286-287). In spite of their critique, Putnam's fellow political scientists do appreciate his work, as it has set a new agenda for social research thanks to his theories about social capital and the joining of qualitative and quantitative data (Tarrow 1996; Rothstein 2003:75-78).

None of his critics mention the conspicuous vocabulary of Putnam, which I believe is yet another factor to be criticised. Not only does he refer to the southerners as 'amoral individualists' living in 'backward regions' and having an 'ancient culture of mistrust', but on a visit to officials of the Puglia regional government he and his research colleagues found that '[i]n the dingy ante-room loll several indolent functionaries, though they are likely to be present only an hour or two each day and to be unresponsive even then' (Putnam 1993:5,47,61,112,146).

Still, after all, on the last but one page of his book Putnam comes to the conclusion that, in spite of the increase in the gap between the two Italies after 1970, the reform has put the South in a better situation today compared to where it would have been without it (ibid.:184).



Putnam, just like Banfield, Bevilacqua, and several other scholars referred to in this thesis as well as my own informants, have all argued that there is a lot of distrust to be found in the South, though its extent as well as its character may be differently assessed. Likewise, there are differences of opinion as regards the causes of the situation and the possibility of a future change in

what is perceived as a negative situation. In the 1950s Banfield argued that ‘amoral familism’ was the number one impediment to any development in southern Italy. In the 1990s his colleague and fellow countryman Putnam said that the backward situation of the South, including its lack of ‘civic-ness’, was due largely to its lack of horizontally organised associations. Bevilacqua maintains that it is the weak state that is to blame for creating a situation where the family network fulfils the requirements of its members due to the absence of well-functioning social institutions and, in particular, an incapacity of the judicial system to administer justice (1999). These ongoing discussions further indicate that there are no signs whatsoever that the debate on the two Italies is about to end; quite the contrary.

In this section we have discussed particularly the relation between trust and voluntary horizontal collaboration beyond family boundaries. During fieldwork, I personally very much appreciated taking part in cultural events organised by various local associations. I found the concerts, choir and dance performances, theatres, exhibitions, meetings with literature societies of various kinds and with scholars specialising in local culture and traditions presenting their works, and so forth, to be of an impressive quantity for a town the size of Mazara del Vallo. The trade unions and interest organisations among the fishing population as well as the many *circoli* mentioned in chapter one are other examples of associations and horizontal collaboration. It is true that some of these associations have few members, but taken together they represent a large part of the *mazaresi*.

## Two Examples of Successful Collaboration

This section recounts two examples of successful collaboration pertaining to two different levels. The first example is from a place near Mazara del Vallo where I heard about extensive collaboration among the villagers. After this follows the story of a *mazarese* family company.

### Villagers Rebuilding Santa Ninfa

In the summer of 1999 I was shown around in Santa Ninfa, situated approximately half an hour's drive from Mazara del Vallo and one of the villages in the area of Valle del Belice which were destroyed in connection with the devastating earthquake of January 1968 (see chapter 1). Proud friends of mine wanted to show me the many successful local initiatives to social and economic development after the catastrophe. Later I found it all even more substantially described in an article by Michele Rostan (1994), from which I got the following information.

Before 1968, the local economy was dominated by agriculture. After the destruction of about four-fifths of the village, it has experienced better local economic development than the other villages hit by the catastrophe – a development which, according to Rostan, seems to be lasting even at the end of the reconstruction process. Why?

Rostan sees several explanations for Santa Ninfa's better position in comparison to the other villages. Santa Ninfa had the largest number of returning emigrants from abroad during the 1950s and the 1960s before the earthquake, for instance. It also had the most stable local authorities, with the communists in the position of leadership for forty years. Local *Mafia* activities, on the other hand, were not a constant threat but for various reasons had discontinuities. In addition, Santa Ninfa had long had a rather positive economic tradition, with few large estates but a majority of small ones, along with commercial activities that were not negligible. Since 1887 there had also existed a *Società operaia di mutuo soccorso* (Workers' Society for Mutual Support).

This is the background to the success stories of the various enterprises which have grown up since 1968. Rostan shows that these enterprises have shown openness towards local groups as well as to the world outside the home community. This openness, he claims, is the result of the Workers' Society for Mutual Support, which favoured collaboration between diverse local social strata; of the emigration, which meant a continuous link with the external

world; and, thirdly, of the local politicians who, in connection with the reconstruction work, maintained contact not only with one another but also with colleagues at the national level.

Rostan makes a special point of the trust people involved have shown one another – exactly what has so often been said to be lacking among the southerners. He gives several examples of workers who renounced their pay, or parts of it, in order to contribute to the common good. Another kind of trust of utmost importance has been the trust shown among local politicians, who represent different parties but are still able to work together.

### **Family Business**

Angelica's father once told me the story of the firm of boat-owners that he created together with three relatives – a brother-in-law and two cousins – forty-five years before. He was then a young bachelor just returning from military service and now wanting to realise the dream of his childhood – to become a boat-owner.

The young men all had different qualifications, making it easy to divide the working tasks among them: one became the administrator of the company, one the captain, one the engineer, while the fourth was responsible for the fishing. The management of the company was thus all in the hands of relatives and has been ever since. Keeping the company within the family meant that there was trust among the owners, I was told. Given this, along with the capability of each one of them, they therefore felt assured that their business would be prosperous. The rest of the crew was hired and has changed continually over the years.

With great sacrifices, the young men managed to buy their first fishing-boat – a second-hand boat purchased by instalments. When they bought their second boat with financial assistance from the Sicilian region, it was decided that two of the relatives should work on the new boat, so that there would always be kin in command of each boat.



When *La cassa per il Mezzogiorno* (The State Fund for the South – see the historical appendix) offered contributions to boat-owners who were willing to construct new boats if they demolished their old ones, the men agreed to accept this opportunity. Business continued to go well and over the years they managed to acquire another two fishing-boats.

Difficulties were to come, however. The first blow came when one of the boats was completely destroyed by fire and the insurance only covered a small part of the real loss. Then the Libyans, accusing them of fishing in Libyan territorial waters, sequestered another of their boats and put the crew in jail for almost a year, where the ten men experienced terrible conditions. The men were later freed, but the boat was never returned. In addition, Angelica's father and his colleagues had enormous expenditures, all in vain, during the five years the legal process against the Libyans was going on.

Thus there have been bad times as well as good. One of the good things, of course, is that there has been trust and good companionship between the managers. The company was never dissolved during all these years and the managers always remained the same four men who had once started the business. I was not told about any conflicts between the men, only that when they did not agree, decisions were taken by majority resolutions.

Today all four men are old and none of them go fishing any more. One of the men has now decided to leave the company in order to help his son start a business of his own, and another has been forced to leave it for health reasons. Angelica's father keeps his share though he is a pensioner, and he still goes to the harbour everyday. All in all, he feels satisfied with the working life he has had, expressing it as *mi sono realizzato* (I have been able to realise myself). I can see that he enjoys telling about the fishing and about his way of handling things – he was the born innovator, always wanting to make things better for the crew and for the business. The fact that he has no sons to continue his work does not seem to bother him too much, and for a daughter to take over a business, he smilingly tells me, is not done.

Angelica's father and his three relatives belong to the first generation of big

*mazaresi* boat-owners, and the story of their family business is rather typical for this group. It is also completely in accord with the discussion of family networks presented in this thesis. Now the next generation of *mazaresi* boat-owners is about to take over, and the future will tell if they will follow the mode of their fathers when it comes to organising their businesses. Will they, just as their fathers always do when talking to me, continue to stress the importance of having kin aboard? Can this as well as other kinds of family collaboration and the kind of collaboration found in Santa Ninfa on a village level run parallel to one another, or is one of them an obstacle for the other?

## Conclusions

To me it always seemed so easy for my informants to ask for help, above all from a relative, but also from a friend, whenever required. The difference from my own society lies not so much in what people do for one another as in the frequency with which they give and receive assistance and favours of various kinds. Another striking difference is that people do not seem to strive always to be running their own errands. (This ease with asking for help may explain, for example, why there was not a single taxi in Mazara del Vallo, despite the size of the town. If anyone needed a lift, I was told, they would never think of calling a taxi but would ask a relative or a friend for help.)

All the collaboration as well as the solidarity, favours, moral and practical support, the fantastic hospitality, and the many expensive gifts given primarily among relatives and only to a lesser extent among friends, may at a first glance look very spontaneous and voluntary. The ongoing assistance among related people, however, is an important part of social and moral obligations, and it is the relations concerned that are more important than the exchange as such. Claims of reciprocity therefore mean that not to reciprocate is a refusal of good social relations. The potential costs of such refusal would be too high – entailing the abandonment of a system of social protection – and that is why the system may be said to reinforce itself and to generate a stable social structure.

The compulsory aspect, whether conscious or not, in no way indicates, however, that a favour is not carried out with pleasure. Nor is it precluded that moral considerations will sometimes override the compulsory aspects. Indeed, these are moral as well as utilitarian transactions between individuals and groups related above all through kinship but also through friendship, and the transactions have an important social value in themselves in maintaining the interdependence of the persons involved (cf. Mauss 1974 (1925):10-12; see also Falcone and Padovani 1994 (1991):87-88; Pardo 1996:96-102; Alcaro 1999:17ff).

Many favours of both material and non-material kinds are indeed given, but less frequently would I hear people expressing gratitude for what they received. Being such an important part of social relations, favours seem simply to be taken for granted – the obligatory aspect that marks generalised reciprocity means that in time the giving and receiving will level out. Expressing gratitude could therefore possibly be interpreted as a sign of non-reciprocity (Pitt-Rivers 1992:216-217).

As stated in chapter three, independence is not the goal of upbringing; children are taught from early on to depend on their families and to see themselves first of all as family members and less as independent, clearly bounded individuals. This goal is achieved through a number of elements, which have been presented in the previous chapters. The frequent use of kinship terms instead of names and the mode of addressing relatives by *tu* (and not *lei* as non-relatives are addressed) are constant reminders of one's family belonging. So too are personal names, which are traditionally inherited from the older generation by their grandchildren. Of utmost importance is the fact that related nuclear families often live close to one another, facilitating the daily helping and socialising among relatives. Moreover, today children marry late, and until they do, they do not leave their parental home to settle on their own; thus they live with their families of origin for perhaps thirty years or more.<sup>31</sup> When they finally do marry, it is a family matter, and parents do their utmost

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<sup>31</sup> Young Italians make the transition into adulthood later than young people in most other European countries (Saraceno 2004:50).

to supply the young people with a conspicuous dowry, enabling the couple to create their own nuclear families – preferably in the vicinity of their relatives – and at the same time further favouring the interdependence of the persons involved, that is, creating a dependence of the younger generation upon their parents (cf. Mauss 1974 (1925):58) over and above what the general upbringing does.

Thus, throughout their upbringing children are socialised into a world filled with social as well as spatial boundaries surrounding their family unit, strengthening the family unity inwardly while at the same time distancing the group from outsiders. (Barbagli argues that there is empirical evidence showing that the strength of Italian family relations is greater than family relations elsewhere in Europe (1997).) It is this dominance of kin relations compared to relations with non-kin, and the solidarity and dependence connected with these relations, that constitute the family networks studied. Their particular position further implies that what is best for one's family is also morally right, at least if it does not directly damage others (cf. Minicuci 1989:329). The moral imperative therefore signifies identifying with and supporting and protecting one's family.



This is certainly not to say that there is a built-in absolute obstacle in the family structure that impedes collaboration if the individual or his or her family sees benefits in acting together with non-relatives. As Alcaro asks, why should traditional values like strong family ties be an impediment to development in Italy, while in other countries they have been put forth as one of the virtues that has been beneficial for development (1999)? Does the system, however, make people so involved in the lives of their fellow insiders and so overburdened by their obligations towards them, that they are likely to have no time, energy, and/or interest in out-groups, which may, moreover, be seen as competitors and regarded with distrust (cf. Triandis 1995:59,93,177)?

In Santa Ninfa, daily socialising and helping among kin members seem to be as frequent as among my *mazaresi* informant families, as far as I have been

able to observe. And just like other Sicilian parents I know, parents in Santa Ninfa put their very greatest efforts into building and furnishing new apartments/houses close to their own homes upon the marriages of their children. And just as they do everywhere else, children in Santa Ninfa stay with their parents until marrying, even in those cases where they have reached a mature age, have a profession bringing in regular income, and have a new apartment that has been waiting ever since their parents prepared it for them long before. And still, people in Santa Ninfa involve themselves in politics and various rebuilding projects, as seen above.

In this thesis I have shown that it is within the family that most of the individual's rights and duties are concentrated. Though at first the family networks thus created may look exclusive, there are no signs that family networks have to be an impediment to collaboration, nor that collaboration, modern education, and/or economic development will be followed by decreased importance for the family. In Santa Ninfa family networks continue to be strong in spite of collaboration with non-kin, just as they are in the more economically and industrially developed North Italy. There too children marry late, and until they do they live with their parents, and when they marry prefer to settle near them. In fact, that is also the part of Italy where the extended family is (and has long been) most common (ISTAT 2000b:9-13). Of course, the socioeconomic differences between the two Italies may mean that family strategies are not necessarily always the same all over the country, but what I want to stress here is the fact that modern development does not in any way exclude family networks.

There are even signs that modern Sicilian upbringing contributes to an increased dependence among the young upon their parents. Children stay in the parental home longer than before because marriage takes place later in life than it used to. Data show that in 1998, 60 per cent of all Sicilians between eighteen and thirty-four years of age lived with their parents. The young people said that they did so not primarily for economic reasons, but maintained that this is how they liked to live – *Sto bene così* (I'm fine this way). Moreover, upon marrying, today's young couples have increasingly been choosing to settle near one of their families of origin in spite of having met their

partners more often than before in public spaces like discotheques, universities, and work places, not among relatives or friends as was once the case (ISTAT 1999:289; ISTAT 2000a:29; ISTAT 2000b:64-70; see also chapter 3). This means that when the couple does not have an already established place to live, like an inherited house or a flat built on top of their parents' house (see chapter 4), they prefer to rent or buy a flat in the vicinity of his or her parental home. Nonetheless, this trend is paralleled by a general economic development of the society and an increased number of voluntary cultural associations, as shown by the *Meridiana* study.

Appreciating personal relations, informants sometimes emphasised to me that they did not want their society to copy northern European society, even though they were convinced that that is a society which in many ways functions better than their own. The reason they did not wish for such a development, they said, was that family relations as well as other personal relations are much weaker there compared to Sicily. And when, for instance, I complained about having problems with the enormous and very complicated Italian bureaucratic system and told them that in my own society much of the same paperwork can be settled by a simple telephone call, they were not as impressed as I had expected them to be. To my informants the Swedish system certainly seemed to be very efficient, but it also showed, they said, an extreme lack of personal relations. This is exactly what Alcaro also points to when he argues that southerners prefer to turn to a friend when they need to contact a hospital or the authorities. He therefore believes that people really are sad when the authorities mechanise their systems (1999:28). One of my friends, who herself works in a public office, said, 'I wish our society could work as well as yours, but not at the expense of losing the importance we give to personal relations.'

I believe that the valuing of family and other personal relations does not prevent collaboration beyond family boundaries, and I believe that the family will stand firm in spite of such collaboration. It will continue to be a very strong unit – a unit which under certain conditions will open up to the external world and under other circumstances will remain closed. We have to realise that closure as well as suspiciousness does not have to be irrational; it may

in certain situations be very rational, while trusting the untrustworthy might not only be useless but also dangerous. My informants realise this when telling me that their lack of trust is due to their history, which has entailed an endless series of unfriendly conquerors invading Sicily and on top of that the *Mafia* with its very far-reaching criminality. So, when it comes to solidarity with non-family members and with the society at large, it is the lack of trust that is the giant obstacle to overcome – not *la famiglia*.





## Historical Appendix

### THE NEVER-CEASING CONQUEST OF SICILY

In telling the story of the never-ceasing conquest of Sicily, one often begins with the Greeks. However, when the Greeks arrived in the 8th century BC, the Phoenicians were already there, and so were the Sicels, who had immigrated from the Italian peninsula and whose Italian name, *i siculi*, is sometimes still used today to refer to the Sicilians. There were also Sicans and Elymians, both of unknown origin.<sup>32</sup>

The colony founded by the Greeks was named *Magna Graecia* and was to last for almost five hundred years, though times were often turbulent. Its city-states, situated predominantly in eastern Sicily, were to be in combat with each other as well as with the Phoenicians, who had settled in the western part of the island, and natives became their subjects. Still, the verdict of posterity has not been as harsh on the Greeks as it has on most of the invaders who were to follow. On the contrary, the Greeks are usually referred to as representing Sicily's glorious ancient past. As regards the Phoenicians, on the other hand, the verdict of posterity is non-existent, due to a general lack of interest in their culture as well as their religion. According to Professor Barbro Santillo Frizell, this is the result of the Phoenicians losing the war for religious supremacy as well as of historical rhetoric claiming Greece to be the cradle of Western culture (personal communication). Ancient temples and

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<sup>32</sup> Where no other reference is given, this appendix builds on common knowledge that informants have shared with me, as well as the reading of Hobsbawm (1959), Mack Smith (1968a; 1968b), Finley (1968), Napoli (1987 (1932)), Natoli (1979 (1935)), Odelberg (1957), Benigno and Giarizzo (1999a; 1999b; 1999c; 1999d; 1999e), and, regarding the last century, Ginsborg (1990).

theatres still today bear witness to *Magna Graecia*, as does the urban character which has dominated Sicilian residential patterns ever since.

The Romans, who conquered Sicily in the 3rd century BC in the Punic<sup>33</sup> Wars (between Rome and Carthage), have received a harsher verdict in modern historiography. They had no interest in introducing either their culture or their language. In fact, in spite of their presence, the Greek language and culture now spread also to former Phoenician areas. The Romans depopulated Sicily and sucked it dry. In order to grow wheat to be delivered to the inhabitants of Rome, they made slaves work and live in horrendous conditions on the *latifundia* (large estates). Two large-scale slave revolts took place, which, with that of Spartacus on the mainland, were by far the greatest slave uprisings in antiquity. During the long Roman era, Sicily was for the first time united under a single ruler, and Christianity was introduced among its inhabitants.

The Vandals were to follow the Romans in the middle of the 5th century AD and with them once again more turbulent times. The Goths, coming after the Vandals, dominated the island for a short but rather peaceful and prosperous period, according to the historians. The second Roman era, known as the Byzantine era, which began in the middle of the 6th century, was characterised by peace as well, but also by economic stagnation. Furthermore, Sicily was now used as a place of deportation of prisoners.

After several raids beginning in the middle of the 7th century, the Arabs accomplished a full-scale invasion of Sicily in 827 after disembarking close to today's Mazara del Vallo in mid-June of that year. Despite a troubled beginning, the Arab period is usually described as economically and culturally flourishing. The various peoples living by then in Sicily were allowed to keep their religions and to coexist peacefully with the conquering people, even though, for example, they were expected to pay special taxes which the Muslim inhabitants did not pay, to rise when Muslims entered the room, and not to build new churches or synagogues, but only to repair the old ones. The

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<sup>33</sup> = Phoenician; Punic is the usual denomination for people of Phoenician origin settled in Carthage on the North African coast

Roman *latifundia* were split up during this period, and agriculture developed thanks to the introduction of new plants and more advanced techniques such as an excellent irrigation system. Commerce with Italy and Africa also developed. Perhaps more than anything else, though, it was the Arabs' economic policy, which resulted in lower taxation than under the Byzantine Empire, that helped to reconcile the subject population.

The Arabs divided Sicily into three districts (*wali*), each with a principal centre, and Syracuse was replaced by Palermo as the leading city of the island. (This division of the island into three administrative parts lasted until the beginning of the 19th century.) Mazara del Vallo (at that time called Mazara) became the administrative centre of one of the Arab districts, to which it also lent its name. According to local historians, this was a flourishing period for the town economically, militarily, and culturally, and the town is estimated to have had at least thirty thousand inhabitants. Here in the western part of Sicily, where the Arabs remained the longest, there are still many traits left from this period today, like dialect words, geographical names (in 1862 the local government decided to alter the name of Mazara into Mazara del Vallo, referring to the town as the capital district town of one of the three Arab *wali*), and typical dishes like *couscous*. Today's city-plan of central Mazara del Vallo is also of Arab origin. When it comes to actual architectural remains, however, there is almost nothing left, either in Mazara del Vallo or anywhere else in Sicily, though the architectural influence is still to be found.

With the Normans, who appeared on the Sicilian scene in the middle of the 11th century, feudalism was introduced, and, it is said, so was the first European parliament. In fact, while I was in field, I took part in the great celebrations all over Sicily commemorating the 900th anniversary of its very first European parliament meeting. The Normans are often said to have been culturally and scientifically very refined. They invited many prominent Arab scientists and poets to the Norman castle in Palermo, for instance, though in general, the Arabs, just like other peoples living in Sicily, were more or less oppressed by their masters. The situation led to several Arab uprisings, but these were crushed, and many Muslims were deported to the Italian mainland.

Among Sicilians of today, referring to oneself as Norman means showing oneself to be someone who likes the societies of the North, that is, societies that are presumed to be well ordered and where the citizens have an open modern mentality. This viewpoint also includes seeing Sicily as part of Africa and the Sicilians in general as Arabs: that is to say, as a disordered and unjust society which abandons its citizens and where the people lack culture and each and every one cares only about himself or herself.

After a long reign during which the remaining Muslims were either eliminated or assimilated with the rest of the population, with the death of Frederic II in 1250 the Norman era was definitely over. Centuries of decline for Sicily were now to follow. A decade and a half after Frederic's death, Charles of Anjou, brother of the French king St. Louis, with the help of the Pope conquered Sicily in a single battle and was crowned king of the island. Charles, who probably never visited Sicily, let his generals treat his subjects with cruelty, and he offended the aristocracy by centralising public life in Naples – his other kingdom. Together with high taxation, these circumstances generated the uprising of March 1282 in Palermo. During this famous popular rebellion, called the Sicilian Vespers (it later lent its name to one of Verdi's operas; *I vespri siciliani*), the Sicilians managed within just a few weeks to clear their island of the hated French.

The opposition to Charles of Anjou had centred on Peter of Aragon, who maintained that he had claims on Sicily as he was married to the last heir of the Hohenstaufen dynasty, which had been in power a very short period in the 1290s. A group of Sicilian notables therefore formally requested his help, and half a year after the Sicilian Vespers, Peter was crowned king in Palermo. The people greeted him enthusiastically and did not seem to mind having a king ruling them from Spain. Many noble families from the Iberian Peninsula now immigrated to Sicily, where they created close relations with the local aristocracy. However, times were still turbulent and Peter of Aragon and Charles of Anjou were to continue fighting each other. During the following century Sicily suffered several wars between heirs of Peter and their enemies with varying outcomes and, for a certain period, the Pope, siding with heirs of Charles, put Sicily under the ban.

At the end of the 14th century, Sicily was definitely reunited with the Aragons and Spain and was to be administered by Spanish viceroys. The historians have referred to this period as 'the Spanish yoke'. As so often during Sicily's history, the rule was to the material advantage of the foreign power, but at the expense of the Sicilians, who revolted on several occasions. Mazara del Vallo, for instance, lost its economic and political importance and was reduced to a small feudal town. The Aragons expelled the Jews, but Albanians, escaping from the Turkish invasion in the Balkans, were allowed to settle and to create new towns of their own. The baroque palaces in cities such as Palermo still today bear witness to this epoch.

After the long Spanish era, different rulers were to follow one after another at a great rate. The treaty of Utrecht in 1713 resulted in Sicily's being governed for five years from Turin by the Duke of Savoy-Piedmont. Another treaty in The Hague put Sicily under Austrian rule from 1720 to 1734. In 1734 a Spanish expedition retrieved the kingdom they had lost in 1713 and the Sicilians found their country once again united with Naples and the Spanish king residing there – the so-called Kingdom of the Two Sicilies – and ruled by a viceroy in Palermo.

When Naples was threatened by Napoleon at the beginning of the following century, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies allied with England. The English, who needed Sicily as a strategic base in the Mediterranean, peacefully occupied the island between 1805 and 1815. There was now a minor boom for Sicilian industry, commerce, and agriculture, and a new liberal parliament officially abolished feudalism. Such was the popularity of the English, who brought a certain prosperity, that '[t]he salons of Palermo even developed a snobbish affectation of speaking Sicilian with an English accent' (Mack Smith 1968b:339).

As soon as Napoleon had fallen, however, England had no interest in Sicily, and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies continued to rule the island. The English constitutional reforms were abolished and in their place a French-inspired administrative system was introduced. A large part of Sicily's population continued, though, to live under baronial territorial jurisdiction (Sabetti

1984:29). Times were troubled and lawlessness was rife.



*Il risorgimento* was a movement which was to unite the various Italian states into one kingdom. At the beginning of the 19th century new ways of political thinking had developed in various parts of Italy; so also in Sicily. In 1820 a violent liberal independence movement spread all over the island. Mazara del Vallo was one of the first towns to sign a document which was sent to the king in Naples asking for independence for Sicily. In 1848 and 1849 there was another widespread Sicilian revolution, this one more powerful than Sicilian history had ever known. In Mazara del Vallo, as in many other places, a *comitato rivoluzionario* (revolutionary committee) was constituted. The Neapolitan government managed, however, to stop it completely for a short time, but beneath the surface the unification movement continued to grow.

On 11 May 1860 Garibaldi, a freelance soldier and Italian patriot, entered the port of Marsala in western Sicily along with a thousand volunteers, approximately twenty kilometres from Mazara del Vallo. By that time, in Mazara del Vallo, as in other parts of Sicily, political consciousness had reached a more mature level compared to the previous rebellions of the century, and coupled with a hatred of the king in Naples there was a common strong desire to unify with the rest of Italy. Garibaldi's idea was to start a Sicilian rebellion in order to create a base for the unification of all Italy, and once in Sicily he proclaimed himself dictator, ruling on behalf of King Victor Emanuel in Turin. He won strong support from the people, and thousands of Sicilian men joined his forces, of whom about one hundred were *mazaresi*. A Sicilian plebiscite in the autumn of that same year, with a 99.5 per cent majority,<sup>34</sup> favoured the formation of a united Italian nation under King Victor Emanuel II. The following year the Italian peninsula was to be united for the first time since the fall of the Roman Empire.

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<sup>34</sup> The result of the *mazarese* local plebiscite was 98.97 % (Costanza 2002:52).

## Unification Without Unity – The Latest Masters

After the Unification, the parliament leader in Turin, Count Cavour, ruled the new Italy. Cavour and his party, the Right, had no intention of giving Sicily any regional self-government, which immediately offended the Sicilians. Nor was anything done to develop the island. On the contrary, '[t]he Italian centre of gravity, political as well as economic, was firmly located inside the triangle of Turin, Milan, Genoa, and the interests of the new Italy were therefore largely equated with those of the north [...] [T]he north was not only more advanced economically, but these built-in advantages would enable it to go on progressing far more rapidly.' Besides, 'it was assumed without any debate that the northern legal and administrative systems should be imposed on the whole kingdom' (Mack Smith 1968b:454-455).

The difference between North and South of the new nation was indeed very marked, which led the monarchists to coin the well-known saying, *Fatta l'Italia dobbiamo fare gli italiani* (Having made Italy, we now have to make the Italians). On their arrival in Sicily, the northern administrators and politicians found a world completely different from their own, a world built on kinship, *Mafia*, and patronage, in which an unintelligible language was spoken. The United Kingdom of Italy was a fact, though, and continued to govern the South according to a 'semi-colonial formula' (Arlacchi 1983:200-201). Very soon after the Unification, all these inequalities led to new anti-governmental feelings among the Sicilians. This time they directed their protests against the politicians in the new capital, Rome.<sup>35</sup>

The Sicilian protests continued into the following century, the first half of which was characterised by continual social unrest, not least among the peasants, who represented the largest sector of employment.<sup>36</sup> In the 1940s thousands of them marched to occupy the big estates in the vicinity of

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<sup>35</sup> Rome became the capital of the United Kingdom of Italy in 1870, after having been captured by the allied forces from the Papal States, to which it had belonged since the 8th century.

<sup>36</sup> In the census of 1951 the category 'agriculture, hunting, and fishing' accounted for 56.9 per cent of the working population in the South (Ginsborg 1990:210).

Mazara del Vallo as well as other areas in Sicily. Violence was common in these occupations and many of the leaders were assassinated. Finally, in 1950 there was a land reform, which brought the latifundism to an end. To a large extent, however, this reform was a failure and a great waste of money. The standard of living of the peasants continued to be desperately low and much lower compared to the situation among the peasants in the North.

The Second World War was a disaster for Sicily, and it suffered much physical destruction. In July 1943 the Allies landed on the island, and temporarily it was ruled by yet another conqueror. This conqueror was welcomed by the people, though, as he not only brought food but also DDT, which at last made it possible to control the dreaded malaria. The sympathetic attitude towards the Allies was also based partly on the fact that many American soldiers had been picked from Sicilian immigrants. The Americans, however, also contributed to the *Mafia* regaining its former positions. The fascists had succeeded in almost destroying the *Mafia* and had put many of its leaders into jail; however, during the invasion, the Americans made use of the *Mafia* alliances between the U.S. and Sicily and appointed *mafiosi* as mayors in several towns, trusting these men to be anti-fascists as well as respected by the people.

The end of fascism saw a strong separatist movement dominating the Sicilian political debate for a few years. Among various voices heard was that of the bandit Giuliano, a popular hero, who launched the idea of a possible annexation to the United States. In May 1946, the Italian post-war government granted a large measure of autonomy to the Sicilian region as a means of defeating the separatists, and already by 1951, the separatist party had been almost eliminated from the regional parliament.

In 1950 *La cassa per il Mezzogiorno* (The State Fund for the South) was created with help from the Americans, something which in the long run was going to play a decisive role in the economic development of the modern South. However, the initial choice of interventions – mainly agricultural projects and road building aimed at easing the social tensions in the countryside – offered only temporary jobs and did not lead to any development. During its first decade only little more than one-tenth of the Fund's money was spent on



industrial projects – a choice that suited the interests of the northern industry. From the beginning of the 1960s and onwards, however, the Fund spent significantly on the industrial sector. However, without denying the influence of the Fund, it is a fact, according to Ginsborg, both that great sums of money never reached the recipients they were aimed for but were misused by local bosses, and that the Fund never succeeded in removing the big differences between the North and the South (1990:162,229,286ff,331).



Modern Sicily continues to be characterised by waves of migration. For the first time ever, though, the last hundred years have witnessed waves moving out from Sicily and not onto the island. From the end of the 19th century, emigrants went overseas in large numbers to North and South America, the peak being reached in the years between 1906 and 1920, when approximately 470,000 Sicilians left (Lentini 2002:117). After the Second World War, Sicilian emigrants went to North Italy and other parts of western Europe. The very latest trend once again shows large groups coming into Sicily, though this time they come as poor immigrants in search of a job and not as colonisers. In Mazara del Vallo modern immigration took off in 1968, when the first Tunisians arrived. Today between 5 and 10 per cent of the local population is of North African origin – mainly Tunisian (see chapter 1).

It goes without saying that the economic, political, and social gap between North and South – the advanced rich industrial part versus the poor agrarian part of Italy – is still very much in evidence today. When the American anthropologists Jane and Peter Schneider began fieldwork in Sicily in the 1960s, it was ‘an everyday occurrence’ for politicians and social scientists to compare Sicily with the Third World due to its underemployment and overpopulation (1996:247-248). The mutual distrust between northerners and southerners and the traditional assumption among the southerners that any national government is an enemy is still alive. Rome, with its national government, is regarded as yet another conqueror and referred to as *governo ladro* (the stealing government) (Gabaccia 2000:9; see also Cronin 1970:34; Cole 1997:19).

The decrease of the agricultural sector in combination with an increase of the industrial one has not changed this situation. 'Southern urban families also face a situation where the services offered by the state are very much less effective than in the Centre or the North. Money payments to families [...] are a poor substitute for efficient public transport, proper health care, well-run schools. In the absence of honest or prescient local government, the southern cities have for the most part become urban jungles, asphyxiated by traffic and dominated by criminal organisations. The family remains a necessary refuge from a hostile environment; the lack of *fede pubblica* (civic trust) continues to bedevil southern society,' Ginsborg writes (1990:417).

Thus, the so-called *questione meridionale* (Southern Question) remains central to Italian political and economic life as well as to people's daily life. In the words of Schneider (1998:1), it continues to be 'an everyday symbolic geography for northerners and southerners alike'.

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