Università degli Studi di Padova

Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Letterari

Corso di Laurea Magistrale in
Lingue e Letterature Europee e Americane
Classe LM-37

Tesi di Laurea

Sacred and Profane Sea:
Anthropology of Religion on the Maritime Lives of
Clodian Fishermen

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n° matr.1211121 / LMLLA

Anno Accademico 2019 / 2020

Abstract

By the time of Chioggia's founding, Clodian inhabitants provided sustenance for their lives through the lagoonal sea enclosing the surroundings, as fishing and maritime activities perennially represented the most profitable sources for residents. In addition, Clodian fishermen developed over centuries a precise lifestyle that connoted, and connotes up to day, their work activities. Such way of living has been extensively analyzed in previous publications. What does not seem to be analyzed, however, is the supernatural aspect permeating such social sphere.

The primary objective of the present study is to delineate the importance of the otherworldly dimension in the Clodian maritime identity, which would seem to develop in two directions: one concerning Catholic sacredness and one comprising unreligious beliefs and behavior. A similar study attempts to provide an answer for the following question: to what extent beliefs and attitudes concerning the otherworldly exert influence on the social sphere here considered? Additionally, the present dissertation attempts to present an overview of the maritime Clodian religiosity in order to determine whether it could be considered as a form of proper religiosity or not, given the presence of profane demeanor connoting it.

In order to achieve a scientifically thorough answer, this study analyzes the lifestyle of fishermen of Chioggia and the beliefs concerning the Other. Literary considerations and methodological pondering will be followed by the presentation of ethnographic fieldwork conducted on three selected social actors, as a way to enhance the understanding of their religious imaginaries and personal perceptions of their own 'tradition'. With similar premises, the author of such dissertation prospects a comprehensive and considerably truthful representation of Clodian fishermen's lives, divided between sacred Catholicism and profane demeanor.

Ed io mi ricorderò di te, e di un altro canto ancora.

Acknowledgements

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Figure 1: Fishing pot and nets, Chioggia, 2020.
Personal archive.

Introduction

Although perilous and disruptive, the sea has consistently been present in the minds and the hearts of humankind. Thousands of maritime travel stories reside among extensive literatures, worldwide imaginaries, and historical records. Nonetheless, the achieved cognizance of the sea appears insufficient and incomplete, as men seemingly continue to experience an unquenchable thirst of knowledge for thalassic matter. This impending need resulted in a plethora of journeys that had the scope of describing, exploring and revealing the chaotic nature of the sea. These investigations, however, rarely focused on the bond men constructed with saline waters. In fact, although thalassic nature has been the focus of both literary treaties and scientific accounts, its bond with humankind has not been explored as extensively, not even in social sciences[1]. Several are the reasons that would motivate a similar tendency, as the scientific nature of aqueous realities is arguably arduous to study. Similarly, the relationship culturally encompassing men and sea can be difficultly analyzable, as the boundless nature of these waters appears to reflect the vast complicacy of human culture. As a consequence, it naturally ensues that their relationship itself, although surely interesting, may be potentially diverting when studied.

Notwithstanding the complications fleetingly presented above, questioning the sea and its influences on humankind could and should nevertheless be encouraged. Besides, such is the generic purpose of this dissertation: to shed some light on the strands interrelating men and sea, within a cultural perspective. Metaphorically, the inquiry here presented does not represent a map that should be necessarily used to achieve a safe academic 'harbor'; these considerations cannot and should not be applied under any circumstance and in every case. Instead, the present study tentatively traces one of the innumerable routes that navigators of social disciplines may follow, to make their way among murky waters of social matter.

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[1] Jake Phelan's suggestions on the lack of social studies concerning the sea should not come as a surprise. The same author suggests a sore neglecting of the sea and 'the movements of those upon it' (Phelan 2007: 1) perpetrated by the scientific community.

Considering the matter of research here introduced, it seems rather obvious that the most appropriate way to study human life is through a discipline that primarily questions the *ánthropos* itself: cultural anthropology. Such discipline would certainly appear to be the most considerate academic field of study to deal with people and cultural phenomena. Indeed, over decades, cultural anthropology proved to be an effective scientific approach that could successfully scrutinize human culture Specifically, choosing to focus on this academic area has been motivated by the academic tradition concerning the discipline itself: several theories and methodologies, that have been thoroughly conceived and tested through centuries by anthropologists, are useful tools to inquiry humankind. Some of these same instruments and theories have been consulted before attempting to conduct the investigation here presented. Besides, drafting an anthropological inquiry without proper theoretical consultations and practical directions could concur to create flawed and lacunose analyses of social actors, from this point referred to as 'ethnographies'. For these reasons, founders and developers of the discipline itself have been preliminarily considered. The theories of 'giants' in anthropology, e.g. Bronisław Malinowski, Emile Durkheim and Clifford Geertz, have been scrutinized in order to acquire fundamental anthropological notions. Adopting a critical approach, some of these same assumptions have been further integrated with additional postulations by recent authors, for the development of a solid and thorough scientific basis.

Consulting theoretical requirements only, however, would not suffice to the extent of an anthropological analysis. Conducting an anthropological inquiry on the sole basis of theoretical conceptions and academic advices would still comport to write derailing and hazarded reflections. In fact, as in every other type of research, academic complexities that could undermine the course of an investigation should be avoided by restricting the research field. Indeed, the present study does not focus on the cultural relationship regarding men and sea as a whole: this would not only result in a gargantuan body of work, it would also be scientifically inaccurate. The present work, instead, focuses on a specific aspect concerning the culture that stemmed from the man-sea correlation, i.e. religiosity. Furthermore, the research area has been restricted by focusing on a particular form of religion that characterizes the lives and culture of a

specific geographical area. Indeed, the present paper considers precise coordinates detecting an Italian cultural setting that hosts a specific maritime religiosity: Chioggia.

The Clodian cultural realm is here tentatively analyzed, in order to achieve the factual objective of this paper, providing scientific proof to prove the research question that inspired the present paper, i.e. whether the Clodian 'thalassic' religiosity can be considered as a proper form of religious cult or not. Indeed, despite Chioggia's evident bond with Catholic sacredness, its society would seem to heavily rely on unreligious demeanor, seemingly defiant of Catholicism itself. Notwithstanding their apparent contradiction, both these two elements would hypothetically concur to create a proper religiosity that bases its existence on apparently oxymoronic relationships. With specific regard to the peculiar bond relating Clodian inhabitants and lagoonal environments, this dissertation presents the two major faces of a same religiosity, as the resulting relationship between the sacred tradition and the profane demeanor displayed by inhabitants of Chioggia has yet to be determined to date. Indeed, despite the presence of a considerable corpus of literature addressing Chioggia and its religiosity, this 'maritime' religion would seem yet to be fully revealed in its actual multi-leveled nature: these same texts, although surely interesting and useful, still appear to be lacunose, as they do not address all the different components composing Chioggia's apparently oxymoronic religiosity.

The preliminary literary analyses conducted in this occasion did not exclusively comprise sources concerning maritime texts, anthropology, and religion. Prior to fieldwork, historical texts and sources dealing directly with Chioggia's cultural construction have been consulted as well. Indeed, before attempting either to prove or dismiss the hypotheses above reported, a literary corpus consisting of sources addressing the Clodian culture and its religiosity have been analyzed, in accordance with academic common sense and scientific requirements: in order to be cognizant of what has been already revealed of the culture here considered, historical records and studies reporting qualitative and quantitative data dealing with Chioggia's religiosity have been scrutinized. Further addressing such aforementioned literature, it may be well to highlight the importance of the term 'tradition' here used, as these sources were additionally analyzed to compare present-day data with traditional habits reported on texts. The study here described, besides, does not analyze Clodian religiosity

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synchronically, and instead proposes some references addressing the variation of 'tradition' itself.

As partly aforementioned, the present paper does not stem from mere consultations of pre-existing material. Preliminary literary research has been correlated with other types of investigation, which has been conducted on the field, i.e. proper ethnographic fieldwork. After evaluating several potential subjects, in order to achieve the objectives set, procedural ethnography has been carried out on three social subjects, *Ottavio*, *Spartaco* and *Pacifico*, fictionally renamed to preserve their identity. These Clodian fishermen, chosen prior to begin the investigation, have been selected as representatives of a Clodian social field concerning the sea, namely maritime wild fisheries. Fieldwork has been used as a means to gather data concerning the customs, attitudes, ideas and beliefs of the subjects analyzed, and to aid the writing of this final report. Specifically, fieldwork conducted on the selected actors consisted of different types of observational techniques that allowed for the recording of cultural phenomena. These observational procedures consisted in participant observations, interviews, audio recordings and visual photographic captures, some of them here attached. These same multimedia observations perpetuated in such journey were conducted within a considerable timeframe. In particular, the fieldwork carried out elapsed a period of time approximately consisting of two months and a half, starting from April 2020 to mid-June of the same year. A similar timeframe was relatively shortened as a consequence of the currently ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which considerably restricted the research period due to lockdowns and government restrictions. The shortened time period has been balanced with other elements. In detail, preexisting acquaintance of both the discipline and the analyzed field compensated for a similarly scant period of time. Eventually, the resulting ethnography resembles the form of a short-term theoretically informed ethnography (Pink and Morgan 2013: 351–352). Within the same chronological frame, participant observations have been constantly conducted almost every day, recording the daily activities of the subjects in a variety of social contexts. Indeed, *Ottavio*, *Spartaco*, and *Pacifico* have been followed during their quotidian life, as their sea-expeditions, daily sales and recreational habits have been witnessed personally. Furthermore, these same men have been questioned through different interviews that have been conducted both individually and collectively with all of the

selected actors. Ultimately, the overall study here presented, overall consisting of preliminary conceptions, literary consultations, fieldwork and final remunerations, elapsed a chronological period consisting of eight months.

As far as the social actors are concerned, the same fishermen have been chosen for their affinity with the aforementioned maritime sphere of Chioggia's society, and for a variety of other reasons. Most considerably, these fishermen appeared to embody different concepts contemplated during literary consultation. Indeed, the cultural phenomena manifested through their actions and words eventually served as a way to capture a more profound glimpse of the cultural realm they belonged to. In addition, the investigation of the Clodian religiosity through the perspective of these subjects allowed for the addressing of different components that concur to create the culture of Chioggia in general, e.g. linguistic features, social conceptions, and local phenomena. Choosing fishermen as subjects of the investigation constituted a deliberately conscious choice, as they appeared to be more influenced by the aforementioned cultural elements. In particular, as preliminarily hypothesized, *Ottavio*, *Pacifico* and *Spartaco* were supposedly more involved with the sea, being their job closely related to it. Furthermore, it may be worth noting that *Ottavio*, *Pacifico* and *Spartaco* consistently lived in Chioggia for their entire lifetime and, as attested, belong to families of longstanding Clodian heritage. It seems necessary, however, to evaluate these considerations within a critical perspective: although these men certainly embody the culture here addressed, their cultural personas should not be necessarily considered the aseptic result of old folkloristic heritage. Instead, their reinterpretations and perceptions of their culture should be primarily considered. As a general result, while the present study could certainly provide readers with a more profound representation of maritime Clodian customs, in return, it could also be useful to the inquired subjects themselves. Indeed, through the elaborations here presented, the fishermen analyzed would eventually be more cognizant of their lives, as ethnographies could serve as a mirror that may potentially lead to major cultural self-awareness and cognition. Eventually, reprising Johannes Fabian's word-play, ethnographic analyses would represent a means to present 'what we know about how they know what they know' (Fabian 2012: 443).

The identities of the subjects, as well as the hypotheses above reported, will eventually be thoroughly discussed in the tripartite body of the dissertation. Starting

from generic considerations on the matter here considered, progressively focusing on specific phenomena witnessed, the present dissertation is structurally divided into three main chapters. The first section provides readers with some background information concerning cultural anthropology itself, and serves as a way to address the methods, techniques, and theories that have been scrutinized prior to fieldwork investigations. Referring to different contexts that could be analyzed through anthropology, the chapter additionally addresses different types of religion that would seem to present significant strands with thalassic matter, progressively leading to the main subject of such paper: the role of religion within the Clodian maritime identity. In detail, the second chapter outlines a diachronic analysis of the history and geography of the town; a subsequent synchronic perspective is later adopted to focus on Chioggia's present-day culture. The stereotypes, folkloristic traits and collective beliefs fleetingly depicted through both perspectives will serve as a comparing term to analyze the lives of current-day fishermen. 'Tradition' and history, besides, serve as fundamental reference points to draw comparisons between both Clodian past and present. As anticipated, the present paper engages in dialogue with these elements, as the ethnography, addressing the present, is additionally integrated through historical and literary sources, thus addressing the past. Following an accurate scanning, data gathered through fieldwork is partially presented in the same chapter, as the profane aspects of the Clodian religiosity are progressively tackled and addressed. The third and final chapter, conversely, focuses on the other side of the Clodian multi-leveled religiosity. 'Proper', sacred customs and beliefs, characterizing the lives of the selected social actors, are similarly presented adopting a similar 'comparative contexting' (Finnegan 2005: XVI). Final considerations regarding such compounded religiosity are presented in the same section, referring to other anthropologists' writings to further prove the proposed conclusions. From a narrative perspective, observational first-person narration, concerning phenomena witnessed through fieldwork, frequently submerges and leaves room for literary and historical considerations. Linguistically, Anglo-American is used to convey the content scientifically gathered and the considerations that stemmed from it.

The hypotheses and research questions here presented will eventually be resolved in the main body of the dissertation, and partly summarized in its conclusion. As a final result, the present paper ultimately correlates not only observation and

participation, but also sacred and profane, religion and culture, and, most importantly, men and sea, in a resulting interdisciplinary and transversal thalassic ethnography that provides a deeper interpretation of the Clodian maritime religiosity.

Figure 2: *Ottavio'*s fishing vessel*, Laguna di Chioggia, 2020.
Personal archive.

Chapter 1.
Method, investigation, matter

Before ditching the land and hoisting the sails, sailors have been acquainted with the custom of considering beforehand every aspect of their expedition, e.g. by defining a route to follow, choosing what gear to use and considering all of the potential perils they may face. Similarly, before plunging into the investigation, it seems here necessary to lay the anthropological foundations in order to successfully achieve a proper scientific result. Thus, it seems considerate to define the method that should be applied in pursuing the objectives set and to contemplate how the investigation should be conceived, before dealing directly with the selected matter.

1.1   Defining the Method

Before departing from the shore, seafarers should consider which type of cruising they are attempting, pondering the type of gear that would be suitable for navigation. Similarly, as obvious as it may seem, one of the foremost aspects of attempting to perform a successful investigation is to openly enunciate its typology, as well as the method and the techniques adopted by the researcher.

Being cultural aspects of human life the matter of this present study, adopting a method that considers phenomena in their complexity would seem to be fundamental. Similar types of methods can be academically defined as qualitative ones. In anthropology, qualitative analyses differ from their counterparts, i.e. quantitative methodologies, as they allow the observer to focus on specific aspects of human life, depicting and understanding the nature of specific phenomena. In addition, contrarily to quantitative approaches, qualitative methods do not consider the distribution of studied phenomena, providing insights on how and why a selected phenomenon occurs (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011: 2). This idea is further explored and explained by Mario Cardano, who addresses the effectiveness of this type of method. In particular, Cardano denotes some of the common traits qualitative techniques share and the advantages they involve:

> Il primo tratto che accomuna tutte le tecniche di ricerca qualitativa ha a che fare con l'adozione di uno stile di ricerca che predilige l'approfondimento del dettaglio alla ricostruzione del quadro d'insieme, gli studi intensivi a quelli estensivi. Con questa scelta metodologica [...] la ricerca qualitativa segue la strada della riduzione dell'estensione del dominio osservato, la focalizzazione su pochi casi, di cui ci si propone di rilevare i più minuti dettagli (Cardano 2011: 16–17).

As partly suggested, when dealing directly with individuals, qualitative methods would seem to allow intensive analyses of the subjects considered, e.g. pondering the thoughts and the opinions of those analyzed.

The type of research here considered implies the meticulous observance of the matter selected. Indeed, to achieve a superior understanding of this same matter, observing the subjects of the inquiry proves to be not only a useful methodology to pursue scientific clarity, but a fundamental necessity. Such a compound of techniques, that would allow direct observation of the subjects, has been thoroughly tested in a variety of contexts as well as in several types of research. As Kathleen and Billie DeWalt argue, these same techniques, universally known in the academic world as 'participant observation', are accepted almost globally as one of the most effective methods used in cultural anthropology (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011: IX). As related by several anthropologists and social scientists, such method would require that 'a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture' (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011: 1). Participant observation, a common feature in several disciplines at the present time, has become the main technique adopted in writing proper and accurate 'ethnographies' of those observed. To write an ethnography implies the act of analyzing specific cultural aspects of subjects involved. The International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences similarly defines ethnography, alternatively known as 'culture writing', as 'an in-depth description of one culture [...] based on personal observation of a living culture for an extended period of time' (Miller 2008: 123 [1]).

Before diving deep into the concept of ethnography, explaining how participant observation can pursue it, it seems considerate to provide a general portrait of one of the establishers of such methodology, whose ideas served as a solid base to transform modern anthropology into a practical discipline: Bronisław Malinowski.

1.1.1   Historical footprints

Writer, sociologist, religious studies scholar and traveler, Bronisław Kasper Malinowski (1884 – 1942) is considered one of the uttermost important theorists of twenty-first century anthropology. Famed to the scientific world by virtue of his revolutionary theoretical–practical conceptions, Malinowski rewrote the guidelines of the discipline, giving birth to modern anthropology. The Polish academic sharply criticized the widespread methods adopted by the majority of both his predecessors and contemporaries, declaring their inefficacy and openly questioning their adequacy. The application of such methods, which involved 'writing culture' using traveling stories prewritten by others, presumably produced sterile ethnographies. Specifically, Malinowski argued how the main result deriving from these applications concurred to create fallacious descriptions of the subjects analyzed. Indeed, scrutinizing cultural entities using preexistent documents apparently resulted in depicting shallow, inconsistent and rarefied portraits. Despite recognizing how few of these studies on 'tribal life' functionally performed to the comprehension of 'exotic' cultures, Malinowski decided to prove the inadequacy of these methods. Quoting the anthropologist himself: 'The time when we could tolerate accounts presenting us the native as a distorted, childish caricature of a human being are gone. This picture is false, and like many other falsehoods, it has been killed by Science' (Malinowski 2005: 8). A prophecy, under many respects, as anthropology, since then, eclipsed these stagnant methodologies.

Malinowski's revolutionary contributions were included in his magnum opus titled *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. Published in 1922, the text was written after the author resided overseas for a considerable time period that elapsed two years, precisely from 1916 to 1918. In this multiannual experience, the anthropologist decided to investigate the Pacific oceanic environments, focusing on the culture connoting the Trobriand archipelago, off the coast of New Guinea. Malinowski's analysis, however, did not encompass the Trobriand culture in its entirety: the ethnographer decided to deepen a selected custom of Trobriand natives, the *Kula* ring, in order to exhaustively capture its real essence and meaning. Nonetheless, before presenting his own experience and his consequent considerations, in the same text Malinowski stated the method he applied, placing it as a prolegomenon to the body. Additionally, before accounting his

journey, Malinowski even stated the scope of his investigation, and the useful means to achieve it:

> This goal is, briefly, to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise *his* vision of *his* world. We have to study man, and we must study what concerns him most intimately, that is, the hold which life has on him. In each culture, the values are slightly different; people aspire after different aims, follow different impulses, yearn after a different form of happiness. In each culture, we find different institutions in which man pursues his life-interest, different customs by which he satisfies his aspirations, different codes of law and morality which reward his virtues or punish his defections. To study the institutions, customs, and codes or to study the behaviour and mentality without the subjective desire of feeling by what these people live, of realising the substance of their happiness—is, in my opinion, to miss the greatest reward which we can hope to obtain from the study of man (Malinowski 2005: 19).

Although Malinowski is considered an authority in this scientific environment, it is important to note that other authors had the same intuitions before Malinowski published his book (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011: 3). Ugo Fabietti (2010: 65–66) discusses the contribution other authors introduced in the anthropological theoretical landscape. Specifically, he highlights how some researchers, namely Lewis Henry Morgan, Franz Boas, William Rivers and Maurice Hocart[2], proved to be pioneers in their field, as they conveyed the importance of extensive and exhaustive investigation on the field. DeWalt and DeWalt (2011: 3) adopt a similar perspective, presenting other authors and their opinions on the matter. Among them, ethnologist Raymond Firth (1901 – 2002) is presented as an example. In detail, the author personally addresses the issue highlighting the contributions anthropologists and ethnographers theorized prior to Malinowski, listing, among others, his own experience of 'field work by direct observation in rural areas of New Zealand' (Firth 1985: 29). Nevertheless, despite devising sound ideas, it seems arguably safe to state how these same authors were reasonably overthrown as founders of modern anthropology by Malinowski: contrarily to his academic colleagues, the anthropologist successfully managed to compile these important considerations into a devised approach, deliberately conjugating theory and practice, as admitted even by Firth himself (1985: 29). In point of fact, further quoting

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[2] Lewis Henry Morgan (1818 – 1881), American ethnologist, among the first scholars to apply fieldwork while studying Iroquois Indians; Franz Boas (1858 – 1942), German-born American anthropology, primarily involved with the study of North-Western American natives; William Halse Rivers Rivers (1864 – 1922), English anthropologist and ethnographer best known for his expeditions in Oceania; Arthur Maurice Hocart (1883 – 1939), Belgian anthropologist whose fieldwork predominantly focused on Polynesian culture (Fabietti 2010: 65–66).

DeWalt and DeWalt (2011: 3), 'original or not, Malinowski's discussion of his approach still serves as the fundamental description of the method'.

1.1.2   Malinowski's method

As presented above, the main accomplishment ethnographers strive to achieve is the proper depiction and description of a specific culture. Accordingly, in order to depict said culture, there are some requirements researchers have to consider. Malinowski's contribution was not devising these ideas on his own, but to 'supply principles of systematic, intensive collection and interpretation of field data to a degree of sophistication not known before' (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011: 3). The description of his method relies on three fundamental notions. The first requires researchers to directly interact with the object, and subject, of their analysis: this necessarily implies ethnographers should move to the environment (*field*) where considered phenomena occur, in order to simultaneously observe it. Additionally, 'observers' should protract their analysis for a considerable time period, possibly isolating themselves from other individuals belonging to their same 'origin' culture. The second notion emphasizes the importance of professionalism and concreteness of the research question, which should be scientifically grounded and that should propose a concrete objective. The third, final notion, addresses the importance of data gathering and data validation. Elaborating data should, indeed, elicit an inductive process that considers revealed information to produce general principles. Consequently, as Malinowski (2005: 19) argues, 'man's mentality will be revealed to us, and brought near, along some lines which we never have followed before'. Besides, the final, main scope of the anthropological inquiry should aim for the comprehension of the perspective of those observed. Clearly, a similar goal would be possibly achievable only through the annihilation of the point of view of the observer: the latter should identify with the former, in order to aseptically describe actions witnessed and to detect the meanings individuals give to them.

Although Malinowski's observations definitely serve as a valid basis for considerations here conceived, it would be reductive to exclusively contemplate his theorizations on the approach. Indeed, apart from Malinowski himself, several academics proposed fundamental guidelines researchers should examine when

approaching a new cultural realm. It will be then wise to draw on an extensive range of sources, quoting authors from both the recent past and the contemporary present.

1.1.3 Participant observation: theoretical requirements

Participant observation is not a mere compound of techniques that can be applied in whatever situation, whenever possible. Applying participant observation as a method, when pursuing scientific research, implies considering several aspects. Factors listed in this section should be precisely pondered by researchers, as potentially inhibitory to their purpose when erroneously neglected. Among these same factors, Francesco Gobo (2001: 22) emphasizes how participant observation deeply relies on the scope of the inquiry, its subjects, namely the observer and the observed, and the connection between them. Ignoring these variables when attempting to write an ethnography may result in facing some challenges.

Although later discussed more attentively, it seems important to state the following: before writing ethnography, the first and foremost requirement that has to be fulfilled is the definition of a scope. To define a scope in an anthropological inquiry does not exclusively imply to decide which phenomena to observe. It requires positing a precise research question, to pursue a clear objective and to decide which specific aspect should be considered. This is adamantly explained by Francesco Ronzon, who presents the process that allows the definition of a precise research question. Firstly, researchers should start considering a general research area, such as religious anthropology, the case of this present study as well, focusing then on a particular related issue. Finally, scrutinizing the selected matter, researchers should formulate a research question (Ronzon 2008: 33–34). Given the abundant quantity of information progressively collected throughout the investigation, Ronzon highlights the importance of defining a scientific query, as ethnographers could founder on the data gathered throughout the investigation (Ronzon 2008: 33). Starting from a general and wider perspective, however, does not imply researchers should neglect other aspects of the selected research matter: although qualitative research leads scholars to focus on particular aspects, a proper ethnographic investigation should consider the context in which said aspects occur. This is clearly exemplified by Malinowski:

The field Ethnographer has seriously and soberly to cover the full extent of the phenomena in each aspect of tribal culture studied, making no difference between what is commonplace, or drab, or ordinary, and what strikes him as astonishing and out-of-the-way. At the same time, the whole area of tribal culture in all its aspects has to be gone over in research. The consistency, the law and order which obtain within each aspect make also for joining them into one coherent whole. An Ethnographer who sets out to study only religion, or only technology, or only social organisation cuts out an artificial field for inquiry, and he will be seriously handicapped in his work (Malinowski 2005: 9).

This idea as a whole can tentatively be summarized as 'holistic perspective', recalling an expression reported, among others, by Ugo Fabietti (2010: 72). The holistic perspective proves to be worthy of consideration, when dealing with anthropology, as it allows researchers to focus on a certain phenomenon, without neglecting the context in which it occurs. Once a scope has been defined, ethnographers should reflect on how to connect with those 'ethnographed'.

1.1.4   Participant observation: observer and observed

In order to participate while observing, researchers should establish a connection with those analyzed (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011: 47). This necessarily implies that observers should not assume a passive role. Besides, the term *participant* itself should be quite revealing of said respect. However, in some cases, participation succumbs to observation, and vice versa. As a matter of fact, DeWalt and DeWalt report different types of participant observation, listing the potential degrees of participation and their related techniques. The lowest on the scale is, comprehensively, defined as *non-participation,* as the researcher observes phenomena from outside the research setting, e.g. reading newspapers or watching documentaries. *Passive participation* follows, requiring researchers to act as pure observers, thus not interacting with people. Such degree of participation is then followed by *moderate participation*, occurring when ethnographers are physically present in the setting, requiring the occasional interaction with the subjects of the study. *Active participation,* on the other hand, requires researchers to engage in what observed subjects are performing. Lastly, *complete participation* foresees that the ethnographer should become a member of the studied group, as in the case of ethnographers studying music while analyzing musicians (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011: 21–28). Having stated the above, it appears reasonable to conclude that researchers should pursue the precarious stasis between mere observation and complete participation. An effective ethnography, as the same authors previously

mentioned highlight, should be as balanced as possible, allowing the ethnographer to place himself in the middle of the spectrum ranging between 'becoming the phenomena' (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011: 23), thus annihilating the objective component of the study, and isolating oneself totally. For the reasons here listed, *moderate participation* appears to be the most appropriate option to select, here adopted both as method and technique in attempting the present investigation. In fact, the positive outcomes in pursuing research adopting such degree of participation would seem to be numerous. Concretely, the ethnographer should actively participate in everyday activities performed by those observed, documenting jobs and quotidian activities, or, when useful to the scope of the study, collective rituals and religious ceremonies. Such procedure would allow for the collection of more grounded data. Additionally, a prolonged contact with the 'object' of the analysis would permit researchers to accumulate enough knowledge of the surrounding environment, and to become progressively confident in the 'alien' field. Following this line of reasoning, Carla Bianco notices how the role researchers assume is nonetheless considerably peculiar: relating to an alien cultural realm within a consistent timeframe implies the acquaintance of the culture itself; however, it is important to recognize that the overall knowledge achieved still remains scant, even by the end of the ethnography. Indeed, although studying a certain culture, to absorb every notion of it would still be impossible (Bianco 1994: 142). As highlighted by both Bianco and Gobo, this necessarily implies a theoretical-empirical paradox: even though an objective attitude is necessary to avoid preconceived ideas, aspiring for total and unbiased objectivity is quite utopian, as every individual instinctively uses their own culture when interpreting something 'different' (Bianco 1994: 146; Gobo 2001: 22–23). The aforementioned paradox, however, can be easily associated with yet another oxymoron, the former concerning the observer, the latter affecting the observed. Over the course of the analysis, the analyzed subjects are required to produce 'culture-saturated' content. However, the ethnographer may experience inhibitions in collecting it. As Fabietti (2010: 69) highlights, ethnographic research can potentially generate tension and stress within a community. Additionally, being the result of an encounter between individuals belonging to distant cultural entities, ethnographic research would imply several ethical non-negligible issues. As an instance, in some contexts, anthropologists can be charged with crimes, e.g. spying, or considered to be both a

public and private threat (Fabietti 2010: 69–70). Public and private indeed, as not only communities as a whole could feel threatened. In detail, Ronzon (2008: 24) denotes how singular individuals may feel their personal sphere profaned while being the subject of a study. As a matter of fact, anthropologists could inadvertently reveal personal information belonging to those scrutinized, who may initially see the interviewer as friend or as a confidant. Furthermore, having to live their usual life under the gaze of foreigners, analyzed individuals may develop aversion, perceiving their privacy violated or even their existence menaced. Culture-producers could consequently give birth to untruthful content, or, alternatively, they could not produce any content at all, perceiving unease. Overall, as Mario Cardano suggests, factors related to the privacy of a community or an individual have to be prioritized by ethnographers (Cardano 2011: 114). Besides, fieldwork does not exclusively relate to gathering data, since it also concerns interacting with other human beings. Further quoting Fabietti (2010: 70), it is thus important that the role of the anthropologist is bargained, as the culture subsequently produced is actually co-constructed between the two parties.

It seems considerate to stress the value of the 'co-constructing' formula. Indeed, the critiques regarded to participant observation and its oxymoronic nature referred even to the very nature of the culture produced during the observations, and the subsequent interpretations of it. Roberto Malighetti addresses the issue listing the importance of considering the data gathered through observation not as a simple transcription of culture, but more as a polyphonic text mediated through exchanges between the anthropologist and those ethnographed (Fabietti et. al. 2002: 83). Therefore, ethnographies should not be considered as mere transcriptions of 'aseptic' cultural phenomena: despite attempting to mask their subjectivity, anthropologists would still infect the culture produced by actors throughout the investigation. Ethnographies, then, can be considered more as a dialogue, created, or better co-constructed, between the two realms. Malighetti further addresses the issue reporting the following:

> Non solo il 'punto di vista del nativo' è solo un punto di vista fra tutti quelli possibili. Ma soprattutto esso è sempre mediato. Una volta che i nativi sono costruiti come informatori, la loro voce è già mediata e 'redatta' dalla comprensione e dalla scrittura antropologica [...]. Ciò che i nativi dicono non sono verità culturali, semplici esplicitazioni di concetti presenti nella loro mente, ma risposte circostanziate alla presenza e alle domande dell'etnografo, risultati dell'interazione fra le domande dell'antropologo e i modelli culturali dell'informatore (Fabietti et. al. 2002: 84).

The components concurring in this 'negotiation' are seemingly several. However, as the interaction between anthropologist and native is mediated and transformed by the oral code of the native language to the written code of the scientific language (Fabietti et. al. 2002: 81), code learning seems arguably one of the most important among them.

1.1.5   Participant observation: contact and code

Reiterating what was earlier explained, to gather information from the inside of a culture implies living within the culture itself, mimicking the lifestyle of those analyzed and undergoing their same experiences. As obvious as it may sound, however, ethnographers should possess interpretative competence to filter and systematize the information retrieved. One potential way to achieve such competence is surely by learning the code of those analyzed, meaning establishing a contact and learning, for instance, their manners. Indeed, by relating to the natives, thus creating a bond, the ethnographer can possibly learn the code used by those ethnographed. These assumptions have been thoroughly presented by Malinowski, who notes the necessity, on behalf of the ethnographer, to 'find out the typical ways of thinking and feeling, corresponding to the institutions and culture of a given community' (Malinowski 2005: 18). Similar considerations are presented by DeWalt and DeWalt, as both scholars add that code learning coincides additionally with an appropriate behaving:

> The heart of adopting the method of participant observation is to behave appropriately enough to be accepted as a participant at some level and to participate in the daily activities of people with whom the researcher is working. By behaving appropriately, we mean learning what constitutes good manners and practicing them to the best of your ability. It can include proper, polite speech; appropriate reciprocity; table manners; appropriate levels of eye contact: all the many niceties (as defined by each culture) that make up day to day interaction (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011: 58).

Understanding personal space, respecting cultural customs, and even accommodating to local norms, as DeWalt and DeWalt (2011: 60) later add, appears then to be fundamental. However, as the same authors highlight, to achieve 'cultural learning', ethnographers would need to comply with another cultural aspect: 'Participation [...] requires being able to communicate effectively in the local setting; being able to follow informal conversations; being able to understand and join in jokes, etc' (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011: 56). Nonetheless, code learning in social sciences does not refer specifically to cultural behavior, since it is also, and most importantly, related to

language learning. With respect to this issue, the 'Malinowskian' fieldwork can be further quoted to confirm these assumptions. Malinowski was, indeed, one of the first among anthropologists to declare the importance of using local languages to deeply root into an alien culture. In *Argonauts,* the Polish anthropologist provides readers with a related clarifying example, recalling his experience in working with Kiriwinian culture:

> One step further […] can be made by the Ethnographer, who acquires a knowledge of the native language and can use it as an instrument of inquiry. In working in the Kiriwinian language, I found still some difficulty in writing down the statement directly in translation which at first I used to do in the act of taking notes. The translation often robbed the text of all its significant characteristics—rubbed off all its points—so that gradually I was led to note down certain important phrases just as they were spoken, in the native tongue. As my knowledge of the language progressed, I put down more and more in Kiriwinian, till at last I found myself writing exclusively in that language, rapidly taking notes, word for word, of each statement. No sooner had I arrived at this point, than I recognised that I was thus acquiring at the same time an abundant linguistic material, and a series of ethnographic documents which ought to be reproduced as I had fixed them, besides being utilised in the writing up of my account (Malinowski 2005: 18).

Through Malinowski's experience, there would therefore seem to be a definite need for solid language learning while writing an ethnography, as speaking an idiom ensures deeper and more solid analyses. Language learning and code assimilation, in addition, would seem functional for additional reasons: the constant contact between observer and observed would not only provide linguistic imput, but could also lay the groundwork for the facilitation of other issues. As an example, the abovementioned tension and stress provoked by the sudden arrival of a stranger would progressively alleviate, resulting in a gradually more natural behavior of those observed, along with other positive outcomes. Indeed, the lighter the attitude, the better the cultural content (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011: 47). Conversely, yet similarly, on the ethnographer's side 'life in the village, which at first is a strange, sometimes unpleasant, sometimes intensely interesting adventure, soon adopts quite a natural course very much in harmony with his surroundings' (Malinowski 2005: 6). Hence, maintaining a constant and prolonged contact allows the fieldworker and natives to better perform their role.

In all, the interrelation betwixt observers and observed seems to provide purely positive outcomes. Furthermore, it seems obvious to reiterate how contact serves as the common denominator for these resulting facilitations. In this same situation, however, another oxymoron seems to emerge. Without a solid strand between the two parties, all of this would be partly inhibited, resulting in a less fructuous investigation; hence, the

importance of a linguistic strand between foreigners and natives. However, said strand can be established through communication. Paradoxically, this cross-cultural exchange relates to a vicious circle, by which to learn a code prolonged contact is necessary, yet to maintain said contact a shared code is needed. In short, contact enables code learning, yet code learning is needed to enable a deeper contact. Still, despite its complexity, interlacing a bond with those ethnographed, given its positive outcomes, seems to be 'not only worth the time and effort […], it is imperative' (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011: 57).

The lack of contact with subjects analyzed is not the only issue that can prevent achieving interesting results. Indeed, in order to perform a qualitative study that adopts participant observation as a method, it is important to preliminarily consider other facets. That is to say, conceiving the actual investigation.

1.2 Defining the investigation

Back referring to maritime similes, before sailing to reach a destination it is necessary to chart a course. Seafarers should design the route they need to follow considering variables, such as latitude and longitude, and adjusting the helm accordingly when necessary. Similarly, before attempting to conduct an anthropological inquiry, designing the investigation, while pondering decisions, is mandatory to prevent issues.

As discussed above, qualitative research and the participant observation method are the compounds of several aspects which should be carefully considered by researchers. Similarly, investigation and research design are the result of the choices made among a variety of options. However, although method and investigation are strictly connected, they discern from each other for a core difference: while the former is fundamentally theoretical, despite its pragmatic implications, the latter focuses more on the practical aspect. As reported above, over the course of the ethnography, anthropologists connect several concepts, observing and interacting with those analyzed within their environment. Anthropologists, however, could and should also reason on which techniques they need to use to gather data. Therefore, it is necessary to reflect on which strategies to use and on how to plan an investigation. According to Gobo (2001: 57), investigation planning is one of the crucial aspects of attempting anthropological

research, and, while designing an investigation, ethnographers should even contemplate a series of pragmatic complications they may potentially face. Thus, once a method has been chosen, it is useful to properly design the practical facet of the proposed ethnography. Designing every step of the investigation in advance, indeed, allows researchers to considerably limit potential obstacles.

To assist readers in understanding some of the decisions undertaken by the writer of this dissertation, concerning the results later presented, it would be wise to briefly discuss the process of research planning.

1.2.1 Designing re(sea)rch: steps of the investigation

To design an investigation, different guidelines have been proposed by several scholars. As a consequence, it seems considerate to focus accurately on some of said proposals. The following listing is the result of a thoughtful consideration of different, yet similar, subdivisions. Cardano, Gobo and Ronzon seem to agree in drawing a distinction within the investigation planning process: although not admittedly, all appear to arrange minor steps of the research process into three main phases. Indicatively, the first phase seems to consist of preliminary steps, dealing with argument selection and entering the fieldwork (Cardano 2011: Ch. 2; Gobo 2001: Ch. 3; Ronzon 2008: 36–37). The second main phase appears to be related to data gathering throughout the investigation (Cardano 2011: Ch. 3; Gobo 2001: Ch. 4–5; Ronzon 2008: 36–37). The third and final stage involves data analysis and the draft of the final report (Cardano 2011: Ch. 6; Gobo 2001: Ch. 8–10; Ronzon 2008: 36–37). This tripartite division is here further expanded, although not extensively, by presenting the specific points of their listings, as well as their application in the case here presented. Primarily following Gobo's subdivision, the crucial steps of investigation planning can be concisely listed as follows.

Problem formulation. As previously mentioned (Section 1.1.3), Ronzon suggests defining an investigation plan requires researchers to attentively reflect on an objective they want to achieve. Proper considerations have to be devised starting from a general interest area, subsequently focusing on specific aspects of it, meaning the phenomena later analyzed. With these premises, anthropologists can thereafter reflect on a relative problem affecting said area, e.g. the need for sounder knowledge on the matter or the

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necessity to state additional remarkable information. Finally, the last step of this first phase is the formulation of a research question.

As an instance, as previously mentioned in the introductory section of this dissertation, the present case is an attempt to overcome the absence of scientific research concerning the matter here addressed.

Hypothesis proposals. As already noted, according to some scholars formulating research questions would seem to be fundamental. Others, however, seem to argue the opposite, especially when a research question is converted into a research statement, or hypothesis. Indeed, although not necessarily, research questions can be transformed into hypotheses by converting them into a statement. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, some academics argue that research questions or statements may not be necessary at all, since they would naturally stem as investigation continues (Gobo 2001: 70; Ronzon 2008: 35). As Bianco (1994: 62) exemplifies, some scholars produced fallacious and incorrect ethnographies while attempting to corroborate their hypotheses. Such situation would appear to stem from the influence of preexisting hypotheses in the minds of researchers themselves. Indeed, to prove the validity of their statements, they would force data into a scheme that attempts to confirm erratic assumptions. As the same scholar later highlights, researchers should then be cognizant of these considerations and, when possible, formulate 'ipotesi esplorative molto circoscritte, […] provandole cioè sul terreno e rinviando a fasi posteriori la costruzione di ipotesi teoriche vere e proprie' (Bianco 1994: 63). Interestingly, Bianco's considerations would seem to indirectly refer to the cyclical nature of the anthropological analysis. These same ideas are reported by DeWalt and DeWalt (2011: 15): 'The active, insightful investigator should continually be reviewing field notes and transcripts and continually tossing out old ideas and posing new questions for study during the fieldwork and post-fieldwork phases of research'.

In the present case, the suggestion regarding the relation between local beliefs in supernatural beings and the lives of local fishermen has served as generic hypothetical proposal. Whether this relation actually exists, and whether it actually exerts influence over their lives, it will be later demonstrated or dismissed.

Background research. Among the several preliminary procedures of an ethnographical inquiry, background research would appear to be fundamental. DeWalt

and DeWalt (2011: 123) place documentary analysis as the first step of research processes, noting how research question should be based on preexisting literature. Although it would not seem necessary to state here how documentary analyses should be conducted, it surely would be considerate to state what should be regarded as a document. In anthropology, 'document' does not refer exclusively to published papers and academic material. Indeed, resembling several other aspects of ethnographical research planning, researchers should construct their own bibliography exploiting a variety of potential documentary resources. Bianco identified assorted categories of virtually useful documents, suggesting, however, research for general and encyclopedic material should precede other documentations. Other categories of useful material which can be scrutinized afterwards comprise, among others, tourist guides, travel journals, local publications, dictionaries, folklore tales as well as non-written material, i.e. photographs, audio recordings and maps (Bianco 1994: 117). Most notably, however, readers should be reminded documentary research is not only convenient for comparative purposes; further quoting Bianco, documentary analyses seem to be useful for other respects, such as hypothesis formulation mentioned above (Bianco 1994: 116). As previously reported, literature preliminarily analyzed would not seem to successfully investigate the relation between religious beliefs and profane behavior displayed by Clodian fishermen. Indeed, before embarking in the expedition here presented, different texts have been taken into consideration, to create a solid scientific background as well as to avoid the repetition of previous analyses. Said literature, consulted prior to the study itself, comprised both scientific documentation and local publications.

Conceptualization. Having examined documentary materials, defining what to analyze through the investigation, it would be rational to *conceptualize* the chosen matter of research. Reprising Ronzon (2008: 34), conceptualization can be defined as the subdivision of the matter of research into smaller, and therefore simpler, concepts. Through this process, analyzed phenomena would appear significantly more accessible by researchers. Gobo (2001: 62–63) further presents the process of conceptualization as the reflection on the object of the ethnography. Said proceeding would allow the researcher to focus on crucial aspects of the phenomena analyzed. Essentially, to divide matter into concepts would consist of posing several questions and trying to answer

them. This procedure allows researchers to reflect on the properties of phenomena considered.

As later presented in this same chapter, the matter of research here tentatively scrutinized experienced a similar process, as it has been progressively restricted in order to present it less intricate and abstract. These same concepts will subsequently be further defined in the following chapter.

Sampling the 'actors'. Following conceptualization, researchers can further develop their investigation in sampling the 'actors' of their analysis (Gobo 2001: 73). While the former process refers specifically to the selection of the concepts that will serve as epicenter of the study, i.e. the actual object, the latter assists ethnographers in designating which individuals may serve as subject of the same investigation. Both objects and subjects are directly interrelated, as actors are chosen using the selected concepts as criteria. The more concepts related to an actor, the better the analysis of the cultural phenomenon. As Ronzon (2008: 38) highlights, the main scope of sampling is identifying individuals that represent a particular social group; by studying their beliefs and behavior, socio-cultural considerations can be conceived.

Clearly, to the scope of the inquiry here presented, I personally 'sampled' local individuals that could embody the concepts later presented in this chapter. It naturally ensued I chose, among other local people, local fishermen that actually performed their job and proved themselves to be functional actors to the scope of the study itself. A more detailed description of these actors will later follow (Section 2.2).

Entering the field. Clearly, actors perform on their stage. For such reason, it is necessary to observe actors in their field. Besides, readers have already been notified on the importance of pursuing fieldwork research. However, it is also necessary to remind the complexities possibly originated by entering the field. Gobo (2001: 91) wisely distinguishes, reprising other scholars, the distinction between *getting in* the field, meaning the physical access, and *getting on* the field, meaning socially interacting with actors. Indeed, to properly analyze actors and to enter their social setting, observers would need to form a bond with those observed. In other words, as previously mentioned, it is important to establish a contact. Although it would definitely interesting to list all of the facet concurring to create a field, in the case of the present study it would be superfluous and deceptive.

It seems rather sufficient, instead, to state that actors here analyzed have been approached through a mutual acquaintance. Subsequently, I personally agreed on some aspects of the investigation with fishermen involved, thus revealing my role as researcher.

Data gathering: types of participation and fieldwork techniques. Turning now to the second phase of investigation planning, it would seem essential to partially echo previous considerations regarding participant observation. As continuously reiterated throughout this paper, all sources here contemplated appear to declare the importance of a method that implies fieldwork research. However, participant observation as a method does not merely consist of theoretical assumptions, as it can also be applied practically. In point of fact, participant observation can be adopted as a pragmatic method, and even adapted according to the field entered by researchers. Ethnographers may choose from a range of different 'types' of participant observation techniques, on the basis of several factors, i.e. the degree of participation (Gobo 2001: 81) and the type of observation (Gobo 2001: 81–84). Consciously avoiding the enumeration of all the factors and related degrees of observation and participation, it seems useful to briefly recall here the main difference between two of the various subtypes of participant observation: *complete* participation and *semi*-participation. While the former implies *living as* those observed, participating in every aspect of their life, the latter entails *living with* them, partially participating in the lives of those observed (Gobo 2001: 82–84). As a general rule, researchers should bear in mind all of the types of participant observation imply the urgent necessity to gather data in the field. Hence, it naturally ensues fieldwork techniques are required by researchers. The construction of an empirical basis can be accomplished through the use of reporting procedures, meaning annotative techniques, as compiling records, creating questionnaires, writing field notes and conducting interviews (Bianco 1994: 90). The latter cases will be exhaustively presented in the following section.

As previously anticipated, moderate participation has been here adopted for the scope of the present study, as discussed in the following chapter, since the subjects of the study have been personally followed. However, a full immersion in their activities has been avoided, in order to participate yet thoroughly be aware of occurring phenomena, thus simultaneously noting essential information.

Reordering, interpreting and analyzing notes. Once data has been sufficiently collected, researchers have to reorder, interpret and analyze what has been gathered. Ethnographers, however, should not merely classify information obtained; they should reproduce a thematic itinerary of selected concepts. In particular, according to Ronzon, the outcomes of the study should adhere to the following requirements:

> [Negli] esiti finali della ricerca non si propongono solo l'esposizione dei dati – sebbene questa sia una parte essenziale –, ma anche l'analisi, la spiegazione e la comprensione degli eventi ai quali tali dati si riferiscono […]. Ciò avviene in varie fasi: a) si inizia dalla descrizione iniziale dei dati; b) si passa attraverso la loro scomposizione in unità più semplici; e c) si arriva all'esame delle interrelazioni fra queste unità, come parte di una nuova elaborazione basata sulla ri-concettualizzazione dei dati stessi (Ronzon 2008: 98).

Cardano, DeWalt and DeWalt, and Gobo all seem to share the same considerations Ronzon proposes, concluding the same: it is necessary to deconstruct all the data, dissecting concepts and highlighting patterns to present an answer for the research question proposed in the beginning (Cardano 2011: 247; DeWalt and DeWalt 2011: 180; Gobo 2001: 145). Nonetheless, there is some evidence to suggest that such process is considerably dangerous for the purposes of the study. As Gobo (2001: 149) concludes, deconstructing and analyzing data requires equilibrium and judicious competences: data should not be summarily manipulated, as patterns have to disclose almost naturally.

Redacting the final report: The final step of the investigation consists of reporting the final outcomes of the investigation. In writing the concrete ethnographic report, anthropologists should merge data configurations with solid cogitations, as Cardano (2011: 289) highlights. However, quoting Ronzon, the main scope in writing a definitive account is providing readers with a content-saturated text. Hence, the final redaction of data, whether addressed to experts or general readers, has to answer extensively to research questions and simultaneously present accessible information to the audience (Ronzon 2008: 115). It would seem arguably correct, then, to consider content as more important than form. Nonetheless, reports should still follow common guidelines of both scientific and narrative descriptions, ʻwhether the write-up takes the form of conventional published books and articles, or reportsʼ (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011: 209).

Following the end of fieldwork, notes have been here rearranged and reordered accordingly, in order to produce final considerations presented here in the form of the present written work.

Acknowledging what has been concisely presented in this section of the dissertation, readers should bear in mind investigation planning requires time and effort. As anticipated, all these steps have been performed by the author of this same thesis, as theory has been applied into practice.

1.2.2   Field notes: why to write, what to write

Writing is a common *leitmotiv* in ethnography. Before embarking in an anthropological inquiry, it is intermittently necessary to conceive and record research questions, while to conclude said inquiry it is crucial to note final outcomes in written form. Between these two extremes, however, lies the most important writing process of them all: creating field notes. The term ethnography itself proposes the analysis of 'culture' (*éthnos*) through the process of 'writing*'* (*graphós)* (Forte 2008: 14 [3]). In fact, to properly describe and reflect on cultural phenomena, the disposal of written records is fundamental. Before providing readers with tentatively extensive descriptions of field notes, it seems considerate to state *why* field notes should be preferred to other recording techniques. Indeed, although other documenting procedures, e.g. photography, audio and video registrations, would surely allow observers to catch every detail of a phenomenon, they do not allow researchers to grasp part of relevant information. Besides, these devices, although efficient, cannot capture smaller details the human mind can conversely detect (Bianco 1994: 102). Furthermore, the use of audio and video recording devices may threaten those observed, provoking a sense of menace or unease in their minds, thus ruining the tracking of the event (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011: 164). Still, these same devices could be used if paired to field notes, as additional recordings would allow researchers to reexamine fugitive features of culture, embossing them on concrete support. Indeed, the conjoined use of written and visual/sound recording could be potentially the most fructuous combination, as reported by Bianco (1994: 102): the former would allow to capture fleeting aspects of human interactions, while the latter could catch and depict concrete material repeatedly accessible (102). Therefore, implementing written tracking with other types of

recordings, once those ethnographed sufficiently trust researchers, should be encouraged. Nonetheless, the role field notes perform would still appear to be fundamental.

As readers may have realized by now, when depicting a scene, every detail is potentially revealing. Attempting to record anything, however, is unrealistic and possibly deceptive. Therefore, researchers should focus primarily on observing and tracking consistent aspects of events. Define *what* to write, however, is quite problematic. Quoting Gobo anew may help readers in discerning whether something has to be accounted or not. Among the several items and features of culture scientifically relevant for the purpose of the study, the same author highlights the importance of considering some social codes and systems, here concisely listed: *social conventions,* although not directly analyzable, they materialize on collective occasions, such as rituals and ceremonies, while actors perform their social routines, subsequently producing culture; *social relations,* they refer to the structure, dynamics and intensity of relations stabilized within a social cluster or among several social clusters; i*nterpretations and explanations of participants,* they can be reconstructed listening to participants' dialogues or comments produced while performing social practices; *social context,* it constitutes a transversal dimension among the others, since every social practice is always executed within a specific context, in which several social restrictions are implicitly present. Considering the context does not refer to analyze exclusively social situations, but also to physical environments and their spatial extension. On the contrary, neglecting the context undermines the comprehension of the social customs observed. (Gobo 2001: 110–118).

In addition to Gobo's indications, other academics argue about the importance of considering several elements of a social situation. Among them, Cardano highlights how indications concerning what to write in field notes can be recollected to a single golden rule, that is the 5Ws and 1H rule of journalism:

> Le note di campo devono funzionare come una sceneggiatura composta con il livello di dettaglio sufficiente a consentire a chi l'ha redatta di essere in grado – virtualmente – di rimettere in scena gli aspetti salienti delle interazioni che ha avuto modo di osservare. A questo scopo torna utile la regola del buon giornalismo, quella [...] delle *question words* inglesi: *who?* (chi)*, what?* (che cosa)*, where?* (dove)*, when?* (quando)*, why?* (perché), cui è comune aggiungere anche un'acca, quella di *how? (come, in che modo)* (Cardano 2011: 138)*.*

Essentially, Cardano (2011: 138) concludes stating how notes should perform as solid 'screenplays', having to consider all of these aspects, i.e. qualifying the action, allocating it in time and space, identifying actors and the reasons for their action.

1.2.3 Field notes: how to write

Having defined why it is important to concretely write reports and what it is essential to include in them, it would be useful to explain how ethnographers should write them. As Gobo resolutely reveals, while reporting witnessed phenomena, ethnographers should assume a specific attitude, that of the 'stranger':

> L'estraneo, ignorando molti aspetti della cultura del gruppo a cui tenta di accedere, cerca di capirne le convenzioni per agire come membro competente. Inizialmente l'estraneo dà poche cose per scontate e ha la capacità di accorgersi di particolari che agli occhi dei membri appaiono banali e irrilevanti, o che sono totalmente invisibili (Gobo 2001: 106).

Gobo additionally provides readers with useful techniques which would permit researchers to assume the 'stranger' perspective. Given the characteristics and main objective of this dissertation, however, it appears plausible to consciously omit them. Considering these limitations, it still seems relevant to restate how ethnographers should avoid taking things for granted. Indeed, these assumptions have been elaborated by other scholars as well: in the same vein as Gobo, Ronzon (2008: 48) notes that in participant observations the role of the 'stranger' provides positive outcomes, and should therefore be pursued by researchers.

How to write, however, does not only refer to the attitude researchers should have when tracking events. It also refers to the suggested approach to adopt when concretely redacting notes on paper. As for many aspects of investigation processes, there are several types of notes, as presented by scholars here evaluated. A notable distinction is reported by Bianco (1994: 100), who separates brief and temporary notes, *jot* or *scratch notes* according to DeWalt and DeWalt (2011: 160), from extensive, definitive notes. Scratch notes consist of words, phrases, sentences and thoughts written on the run, while experiencing events in the field. Hence, this type of notes is used to annotate distinctive events and their relevant contexts. It is interesting to notice how Gobo further categorize brief notes into additional categories. In detail, these same notes can consist of different considerations, as they may contain information about the actual events, but also regarding the methodologies used, hypothesis proposals, or even

personal considerations (Gobo 2001: 133–138). Despite the diversity of the content, however, these different types of notes seem to share common features. Among those, writing *verbatim,* meaning reporting exact terminologies and expressions used by subjects observed, appears to be an imperative in tracking events. Using the language of the ethnographed subjects would prevent 'translation' errors, and maintain the proper meaning of their parlance (Gobo 2001: 128–129). Accordingly, reported speech in field notes has to mirror the language, or variety of language, used by actors in the field. These same assumptions have to be regarded by researchers when redacting the other major variant of field notes: the definitive ones. Indeed, once scratch notes have been collected, they can be reordered and recomposed to create extensive notes, which should comprise useful and functional information previously gathered (Bianco 1994: 106).

1.2.4 Questioning data: interviews

Once scratch notes have been collected, they might seem obscure and hardly revealing of the phenomena observed. To interpret what has been gathered, then, further elucidations are needed. In some cases, however, repeatedly observing the same custom may not aid researchers in deducing factual considerations. Alternatively, then, instead of questioning the cultural product, it may be useful to question the cultural producer, conducting an interview. Indeed, the easiest and most effective procedure to adopt in interpreting collected culture is interviewing subjects analyzed. In anthropology, interviews have consistently been adopted as an effective technique to validate previously gathered data and to further collect relevant information. As readers might have predicted, however, ethnographic interviews differ from journalistic interviews in several respects. A definition of ethnographic interview is provided by Gobo, which defines it as follows:

> Con il termine 'intervista etnografica' si intende un tipo particolare di intervista discorsiva che l'etnografo realizza sul campo, nel corso della sua indagine [...]. Attraverso essa egli si propone di scoprire i significati culturali che gli attori usano e di approfondire aspetti della cultura osservata che non gli sono del tutto chiari, che nonostante l'osservazione risultano ancora ambigui [...]. L'intervista etnografica aiuta quindi a cogliere significati e interpretazioni che non sono sempre direttamente osservabili o facilmente riconoscibili (Gobo 2001: 119–120).

Anthropological interviews diverge from 'classical' consultations for the scarcity of formality required. In point of fact, conducting ethnographic interviews should be

prevalently informal, as the process should resemble casual conversations among acquaintances. In fact, the goal of the technique 'is for the researcher to participate in naturally unfolding events; informality would function as to observe them as carefully and as objectively as possible' (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011: 137).

As in every ethnographical procedure, some rules should be contemplated by researchers. Concretely, before starting the interview, Cardano (2011: 168) advices to create a concise draft of hypothetical interviews, focusing on no more than ten 'themes', revolving around the matter of research. Having defined these thematic areas, researchers should organize them establishing a hierarchy, by placing them in a continuum that ranges from generic to specific. Once themes and their related questions have been judiciously categorized, interviewers can initiate the colloquium.

Interestingly, questions, and hopefully answers, might stem from non-verbal stimuli: Bianco (1994: 168) suggests ethnographers to commence the interview using different expedients, e.g. showing a photograph and asking those interviewed to describe it and to express consequent considerations. Despite the opening stimulation, nonetheless, it appears fundamental to relieve the interviewed subjects and to progressively conduct them in revealing 'personal' information, since avoiding pressuring and ameliorating the situation would imply to obtain scientific trustworthy answers (Bianco 1994: 179). In all, the essential rule in conducting interviews or conversing through participant observation requires that the researcher is constant in 'following the lead of the informant, exerting only minimal impact on the topic and flow of the interaction' (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011: 137).

Once notes have been collected, the subjects of the study here presented have been questioned regarding obscure aspects of data gathered. To this extent, I personally compiled a set of thematically cohesive questions, which aimed to further investigate the relation between these same fishermen and the sea, the influence of religion and its concrete actualization in their everyday life. As presumed, when necessary, I personally conducted anthropological interviews in order to overcome hindering aspects of data gathered through fieldwork.

1.3 Defining the matter

When sailors embark on expeditions across the sea, they attempt to meet a target. Jason desired to possess the Golden Fleece, Ulysses went after Ithaca and Malinowski, an anthropologist but nonetheless a sailor, pursued knowledge concerning Melanesians. As these mythical and historical sailors, I am similarly pursuing an achievement, that is to say answers for the scope of this study. As initially stated, explicating the scope of an anthropological inquiry is fundamentally crucial. After having defined the method here applied and the investigation process of ethnography, it appears considerate now to define the matter of this study.

Similes aside, the 'anthropological' desire to acquire better understandings of foreign cultures has been the greater, general objective of the discipline itself. In point of fact, considering what has been presented above, pursuing knowledge that can extensively cover the entirety of humanity, from a cultural standpoint, can be considered the actual ambitious intent of anthropology (Puccini 1995: 86). The matter the discipline proposes to investigate, however, is not only related to the unknowingness and remoteness of exotic cultures; it can also relate to geographically 'near' cultures. Anthropologists, most notably in recent years, began to direct their interest even to technologically advanced and geographically adjoining cultures (Fabietti 2010: 29). This is the case of the present paper, which consciously avoids the investigation of an exotic culture, and conversely aims to study an aspect of a contemporary western culture. It seems important, nonetheless, to emphasize the 'aspect of a culture' formula. Indeed, before restricting the focus on the matter subsequently presented, considerations have been drawn from a general field area, following Ronzon guidelines discussed above. Nonetheless, before directly revealing what has been selected, it seems appropriate to present the process underwent in reducing the theme, not only to provide readers with information regarding concepts here presented, but also to present academic context of the chosen matter as well.

1.3.1 Anthropology of the sea

At this point, readers are currently aware the maritime domain is one of the general area analyzed in this present study. This should not come as a surprise, as sea and fishing have already been matter of interest for anthropologists. Maritime

environments can be factually analyzed from an anthropological perspective, even from various standpoints.

The sea, in its seeming eternity, is an extremely complex entity, especially when related to the fleeting lives of human individuals. Given its relation to humankind since day one, it naturally ensues these two facets of existence share a consolidated bond. Besides, saline waters has been explored, studied, frequently exploited, and lived by humans for millennia. And yet, this relationship remains moderately difficult to explain both scientifically and culturally. Indeed, this intrinsic complicacy of the relation interrelating men and seas may be one of the reasons that influenced anthropologists in disregarding and omitting sea from their core interests. Nonetheless, a reduced number of analyses that place 'sea-culture' as matter of research does exist. Actually, according to John Poggie (1980: 1), 'Although the number of individuals who identify themselves as maritime anthropologists is not large, there are more than one might expect'. Poggie does enumerate some exempla of actual ethnographies conducted by some of his colleagues, some having the sea as an environment, others as the objective of the analyses. Among them, Poggie recalls academic magna opera of the anthropological discipline, such as Malinowski's *Argonauts,* as well as more recent investigations belonging to his contemporaries. In the latter analyses, however, the scholar notes how the field had been imperatively restricted, as all his colleagues analyzed small-scale cooperatives. As a matter of fact, these publications seem 'not to deal with specific topics other than structural and organizational problems of cooperatives in the areas they studied' (Poggie 1980: 2). Similarly to Poggie, James Acheson (1981: 275) proposes an ethnography of fishing, stating the need for further investigations on the matter. The same author addresses the lack of thorough analyses, specifying how considerations conceived in the literature he presents seem oriented solely on technicalities. Acheson, therefore, proceeds to propose interesting considerations focusing not only on fishing techniques and organizational issues, but also on other sociological facts, i.e. relationships and family (Acheson 1981: 297–298). In all, it seems rather apparent that research on maritime subjects has been mostly restricted to technical aspects of fishing, e.g. crew-organization and other social factors. In support of these suppositions, Jake Phelan argues continental territories have been the primal focus of anthropologists, as the sea and the strand connecting it with man have been

anthropologically neglected (Phelan 2007: 1). The author appears to argue the ineffectiveness of previous maritime anthropology that paradoxically, to date, 'has had so little concern with the sea, yet the sea affects the land in countless ways' (Phelan 2007: 1). Partly agreeing with Phelan's criticisms, this dissertation casts arguable doubts on the general value of the studies above listed, as far as culture is concerned. The main focus of this dissertation, indeed, will not deal solely with technicalities. As stated above, maritime anthropology could be used to study several aspects concerning the thalassic environment. It seems thus important to state that among these factors lies religion. Reprising previous considerations, this dissertation aims to partly overcome and fill the lacunar aspect of previous analyses. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to introduce the religious academic field from which this study draws material.

1.3.2 Anthropology of religion

The sea has rarely been studied by anthropologists, producing semi-comprehensive analyses of cultural phenomena related to such environment. Culture, however, is difficult to study not only when related to the sea. Many aspects of cultural constructions are intrinsically related, thus rendering it remarkably arduous to study. Religion figures among these interrelated aspects. Religious expressions, contrarily to the sea or other concrete factors that influenced human culture over millennia, are not concretely tangible and analyzable. However, despite its evanescent nature, religion has been constant matter of analysis in anthropology. As Enrico Comba reports, many anthropologists attempted to study religion in several respects. Comba presents a plethora of studies addressing several aspects of religion, such as its origins and declinations, aiming to define it. Nonetheless, the same scholar seems to cognize the tedious burden defining religion implies. In point of fact, religion is not only difficult to analyze: it is also difficult to define. Religious expressions can profoundly vary in a multitude of aspects, hence the struggle in classifying them collectively. It should not surprise that even the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences stammers in defining religion. In the same text, the focus is not specifically directed to the term 'religion' and its meaning, but on the challenges in providing a comprehensive definition. The Encyclopedia, in fact, reports the several facets that concur in

complicating the definition process, listing, among the several, that 'the problem of defining religion is further complicated when one attempts to differentiate it from other systems of belief, behavior, organization, and symbolism' (Clements 2008: 159 [7]).

Some scholars tentatively proposed suggestions for defining such a complex concept. This is the case of Paolo Scarpi, who proposed to define religion semantically starting from the root of its etymology, the Latin word *religio*. Scarpi asserts that originally the term expressed the intention of performing worship practices meticulously and precisely (Scarpi 2010: 25). Despite the validity of his conceptions, however, Scarpi himself concludes the impossibility to apply such original meaning to every instance of existent religious expression. Considering these limitations, it seems inappropriate to tentatively comprise religious phenomena in a singular definition. In point of fact, when approaching religious matter, other scholars advice a different strategy. Further reprising Comba, a major tendency in anthropology, when dealing with religion, would seem to consciously avoiding defining it, using the term 'in forma intuitiva e implicita' (Comba 2014: 37–38). In other words, Comba's intuition seems to confirm how religion should not be necessarily defined. Instead, after being fugaciously introduced, academics should later contextualize the concept of religion they are considering using other concepts and terms to address a specific issue. This same technique seems to be adopted by other scholars, as in the case of the aforementioned Clements, as he later adds that:

> Theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of religion generally reflect different emphases in how the concept is defined. Whereas social scientists, for example, usually focus on how religion operates within specific cultural contexts, theologians and comparative religion scholars may examine the nuances of religious beliefs (Clements 2008: 159 [7]).

Following these suggestions, the anthropological considerations here presented do not specifically attempt to define religion in its complexity. Instead, in order to further narrow the general concept of religion here taken into account, it seems appropriate to relate such notion with yet another important cultural facet: folklore. There is, indeed, a specific compound of religious expressions which merge folkloristic aspects of culture and institutional religion.

1.3.3 Belief and folklore: popular religion

It seems natural for individuals to conceive religion as the belief in either monotheistic or polytheistic deities. In truth, religious expressions may significantly diverge from each other for a variety of other elements: some may idolize nature, as in the case of animism, whereas others could worship immortal spirits, as in the case of Taoism (Massenzio et. al. 1998: 411–413). Such differences, however, cannot be exclusively detected when comparing remote cultural realities, as they may be identified even in culturally related contexts. As previously anticipated, this leads to categorize as 'religious expression' an inconceivably vast multitude of religious phenomena, which encompasses even the infinite variety of 'small', local religions, occasionally neglected by scholars. As Comba notes:

> La varietà, complessità e molteplicità dei fenomeni religiosi comprendono anche l'infinita casistica delle piccole religioni locali, delle religioni popolari e delle religioni indigene, una dimensione che spesso sfugge agli studiosi delle religioni, ma che non può eludere l'antropologo, in quanto una parte considerevole delle ricerche che vengono svolte nell'ambito di questa disciplina sono effettuate proprio in contesti locali, specifici, in piccole comunità e in ambiti circoscritti (Comba 2014: 12).

As it will later be reprised, local religion are strictly connected to folklore. The importance of 'traditional' and folkloristic facets of culture appears eminent, as Comba's considerations are reprised by a diverse range of writers. Among them, Fabietti considers 'traditions' and folklore as significant components of 'demagogical' sciences, highlighting the academic importance these same studies possess (Fabietti 2010: 25). And although readers may be potentially cognizant of what these synonymic terms refer to, it may be useful to present academic definitions for both terms.

Being 'folklore' a compound noun, Lynne McNeill defines the concept starting by its etymology, firstly focusing on the definition of 'folk', then proceeding in defining 'lore'. In all, McNeill concludes the following:

> Folklore is informal, traditional culture. Those three words are our shorthand for the whole general mish-mash of what folklore is. In those three words we are reminded of the importance of both halves of the word folk-lore: without the folk (people sharing an informal culture) we wouldn't have dynamic variation, and without the lore (the stories, beliefs, and customs), we wouldn't have anything to pass on traditionally (McNeill 2013: 13–14).

A similar definition is provided by American folklorist Simon J. Bronner, who further illustrates folklore as a dynamic process of communication which allows individuals to

culturally define their identities (Bronner 2008: 18 [3]). On the other hand, the term 'tradition' can be similarly defined. Reprising the definition postulated by Paolo Toschi, 'tradition' can be outlined using 'folklore' as a synonym. The author openly declares the strong relationship between the two terms, recalling that the etymology of the latter, when disassembled, can be interpreted as 'knowledge of the people' (Toschi 1962: 15). In other words, both terms seem to refer to the compound of cultural customs bequeathed from one generation to another. Interestingly, the association between 'tradition' and folklore is further depicted by Bronner, as he underlines that:

> Folklore and ethnology are related, sometimes linked, concepts for the way that individuals and groups use tradition to express values, beliefs, and ideas in a number of forms, including art, architecture, story, song, speech, and custom. Both terms refer to the process of tradition that results from informal learning: word of mouth, imitation and demonstration, and custom (Bronner 2018: 17 [3]).

In all, given their synonymic nature, these two terms might be interchangeably used.

As previously anticipated, religion, in local contexts, shares multiple strands with folklore. The affinity between 'official' religions and local ideals should not surprise, as the former could be conceived as the core of the latter. As a matter of fact, Toschi reprises other scholars' ideas on the matter, inferring that a plentitude of 'traditions' root in religious expressions themselves, in so far as customs can be intended as religious phenomena permeating everyday life (Toschi 1962: 99). These two concepts, which will be from now on categorized collectively as 'popular' aspects of culture, when strictly intertwined to religion, give birth to popular religion. Such categorization is clearly not conceived ex nihilo, as other academics, such as Nicola Tommasini, use it to refer to the hybrid reality of institutional religion merged with folkloristic knowledge (Tommasini 1980: 45). Further quoting the anthropologist, popular religion can be outlined as the variety of religious expressions transmitted through generations, based on beliefs shared by a community or part of a community. 'Popular', indeed, would refer to consolidated 'traditions' of collective groups, which would serve as a way to eventually find solace when needed. In point of fact, among these communities, devotional aspects would supply psychological and cultural reassurances to individuals. Tommasini concludes stating that popular religion, overall, would comprise 'ciò che ha radici profonde negli usi e costumi di una comunità, ciò che

è nato e si conserva proprio perché aderente a fattori genuinamente umani legati a precisi fattori ambientali' (Tommasini 1980: 45).

Having progressively restricted the matter of research here acknowledged, it seems now appropriate to merge the other two dimensions previously presented: religious and maritime matter and their corresponding anthropologies.

1.3.4   The sea of religions, religions of the sea

'*Here is the sea, great and wide, which teems with creatures innumerable, living things both small and great. There go the ships, and Leviathan, which you formed to play in it.*'[3]

<div align="right">Psalm 104, 25—26</div>

Merging the maritime environment with popular religion may be perceived as preposterous and potentially unproductive. The premises of such association, however, echo a long history that sees these two dimensions significantly related.

Thousands of considerations can be conceived about a selected religion, a particular belief or religious expression. However, when enlarging the perspective, it seems obvious these considerations can exponentially multiply, especially while contemplating the entirety of religious expressions encompassing time and space. Indeed, given the overwhelming quantity of existed and existing cults, it can be said there is a multitude of religions, or a sea if readers please, worth studying. Interestingly enough, amidst of all these cults and forms of worshipping lies a series of strands that merge devotion and navigation. Religions, besides, have been considerably intertwined with thalassic matter in several respects. The biblical quote mentioned above emplaces a glaring instance, as references to the sea are scattered throughout the entirety of the Bible itself: God creates heavens and earth hovering on 'waters' (Genesis 1, 1), Moses controls the Sea of Reeds (Exodus 13, 7), and so on. These religion-sea associations, however, are not resolved in mere literary mentions. Some cultural expressions that may be here briefly mentioned as instances actually merge religious belief and maritime aspects of a culture. At the time of Ancient Greece, common religious belief associated

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[3] Biblical references henceforth reported refer to the English Standard Version of the Holy Bible, published by Crossway in 2007.

otherworldly creatures to the sea: as reported in Hesiod's *Theogony* and Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca,* seas were preeminent in relation to deities, as in the cases of Okeanos (Hes. *Theog*. v. 20 in Arrighetti 1984), Poseidon (Hes. *Theog*. v. 278 in Arrighetti 1984) and Aphrodite (Hes. *Theog*. v. 196 in Arrighetti 1984), as well as to monsters, such as Scylla (Apoll. *Bibl*. E VII [20] in Scarpi and Ciani 1996) and Charybdis (Apoll. *Bibl*. E VII [21] in Scarpi and Ciani 1996). These Greek exempla not only outline an insight about collective mindsets partly relating sea and religion, since they even testimony the belief in entities living in the sea or related to abysses.

To portray the bond between the devotional sphere and the thalassic world, recent cultures can be mentioned as well. As an instance, as Fabietti reports, Vezo fishermen live strictly connected to the sea, and such bond culturally reflects in their religiosity. These Madagascar fishermen deeply believe in the sea as an eternal entity and, in addition, both the sea and its creatures have been associated in their mindset with religious ideology and prohibitions (Fabietti 2010: 124). Hybrid expressions between sea and religion can also be observed overseas, as in the case of the 'oceanic religion' analyzed by John Barker. The author addresses the religion of Pacific islanders highlighting some ritual acts performed by them. As an instance, the author recalls Melanesians prayers before attempting interatoll voyages, and documents their pronunciation of incantations to attract fish into nets (Barker 2013: 237–238).

Strands between the cultural fields here considered can not only be detected in ancient or overseas cultures. They can also be observed in Western and European settings, as in the Italian one. In the following chapter, lagoonal waters will be explored, investigating the culture of the Venetian environments, in order to write an ethnography of a popular religion associated to a northern Italian coastal town: Chioggia.

Figure 3: *Casón dei Sette Morti,* Laguna di Chioggia, 2013.
Courtesy of Mario Della Loggia.

Chapter 2.
Among Clodian tides

Having chosen which type of gear should be used in this expedition, pondering the potential perils that could undermine it, it is time to hoist the sails and to concretely ditch the land. In order to follow the course charted beforehand, however, it is necessary to test the waters in which the study is conducted. In other words, sailors should be aware of the environment they are exploring. Similarly, ethnographers should be cognizant of the setting they occupy throughout their investigation. It is therefore necessary, for their part, to practically set the coordinates of the analysis as a way to contextualize the phenomena analyzed. Besides, stating 'how' an investigation is conducted does not quench scientific thirst; the concepts of 'when' and 'where' should be equally defined. Concretely, anthropologists should first reveal their occupied position in space and time. Indeed, in order to thoroughly understand the cultural phenomena analyzed, the researcher should mandatorily present the *hic* and the *nunc* of the investigation, behaving accordingly to the anthropological need to contextualize the phenomena observed. As reported by Fabietti (2010: 73), 'il ricercatore è obbligato a considerare ogni aspetto della cultura in relazione ad altri aspetti di essa, cioè a definire il contesto in cui si collocano i fenomeni da lui presi in considerazione'. Secondly, ethnographers should define the amount of time elapsed since the beginning of their work.

In the present case, 'how' research had been conducted has been eloquently presented in the previous chapter. Differently from such case, 'when' and 'where' the investigation has been performed should be further addressed. As for the former aspect, it seems sufficient to state that the study here presented lasted for about three trimesters of a year. Specifically, the concrete fieldwork operated in the cultural environment considered elapsed a considerable time period of two months. As for the latter aspect, however, few phrases cannot comprise the complicacy of the occupied cultural setting. Before narrating the events witnessed throughout the fieldwork and narrating the

content of what has been discovered, it would seem necessary to present the environment in which I immersed myself.

2.1 Introducing Chioggia

Presenting a place from a cultural perspective is a challenging task to execute. Given the multi-faceted nature of areas inhabited by individuals, displaying information concerning these environments may regard many aspects, including their historical formation and their geographical conformation.

Readers may be aware of the existence of Chioggia for a variety of reasons. Historians, as an instance, may remember the town and its port for the Venetian-Genoese war. Italian literature enthusiasts may recall some quotes from *Le Baruffe Chiozzotte* (*Brawling in Chioggia*) by Italian playwright Carlo Goldoni. Alternatively, tourists may reconnect the existence of the coastal town to the famed Venice, given the similarities between the two cities. This latter aspect, that significantly connoted Chioggia's 'identity'[1], appears to be worthy of additional considerations. It seems worth highlighting, as an instance, that this same resemblance fostered the creation of the appellative 'Little Venice', used to denote Chioggia (Boscolo and Perini 2002: 93). For similar reasons, local Clodian inhabitants seem to perceive an enhanced adversity towards the Venetian municipality. Chioggia's existence, indeed, has been heavily overshadowed by her pompous and pampered bigger sibling. Despite being neglected, Chioggia's identity should nevertheless be regarded as deserving of undeterred attention, specifically given one of its most peculiar features: its strong and everlasting connection with the sea that eventually gave birth to a unique culture. Thus, as mentioned above, before discussing the cultural phenomena witnessed through the ethnography I personally conducted, it seems worth presenting some of Chioggia's peculiar features, including the origins and the conformation of the town itself. Such information will be necessary to further contextualize the connection Chioggia's identity interrelated with its enclosing waters.

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[1] The notion of identity here introduced is henceforth considered within an anthropological perspective, i.e. as the provisional balance between in-group and out-group representations (Fabietti 2002: 14). The former tend to foster positive evaluations of the in-group itself by individuals belonging to it (Fabietti 2002: 133–134).

2.1.1 History of the 'Sea-born'

'Pars eorum et proximum portum facit Brundulum, sicut Aedronem Meduaci duo ac fossa Clodia.'[2]

<div align="right">Pliny the Elder, Naturalis Historia III. XVI, 121</div>

The origins of the town are still uncertain. If legends were to be considered partially truthful, Chioggia's existence would seem to emerge from the mythical accounts of the Trojan War. An embryonic form of the town was presumably founded in the pre-Hellenic era, in the form of a village named *Clodia[3]*, as an aftermath of its founding father and companion of Trojan hero Aeneas, Clodio. The existence of a pre-Hellenic settlement, however, would seem to be factually attested by recent discoveries: historical artifacts dating back to the 2000 B.C. would testimony the existence of a settlement created by the ancestors of the Greeks, the Pelasgians (Bellemo 1998: 239). Nonetheless, Chioggia's existence in ancient times appears to be attested through other documents, such as actual references to the village in Roman texts. It should not come as a surprise, then, that historians of the caliber of Pliny the Elder (A.D. 24 – 79) were aware of its existence. Over the centuries, the settlement presumably developed into other civic institutions that were differently renamed as *Cluza, Clugia,* and eventually Chioggia (Bellemo 1998: 239).

By the beginning of the Early Middle Ages, the town established itself as one of the most important producers of salt, through the auxiliary of salt pans artificially built by locals. The result, named *Sal Clugiae,* was considered to be a luxury product that eventually aided the economic growth of the town (Boscolo and Perini 2002: 88), as attested by Roman legislator Cassiodorus (c. 485 – c. 585), in his *Tribunis Maritimorum* letter (Cassiodorus, *Variae* XII, 24 in Bjornlie 2019). Shortly thereafter, as it usually happens, Chioggia's existence temporarily submerged, and the township hid itself through the following centuries. Architectural historian Richard J. Goy further highlights the deficiently chronicled story of the town. Goy, in particular, addresses the relatively scant documentation that covers quite a consistent period, from the inexorable disintegration of the Western Roman Empire until the emergence of the Venetian

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[2] 'A part of those streams also forms the neighbouring harbour of Brondolo, as likewise that of Chioggia is formed by the Brenta and Brentella and the Clodian Canal' English translation by H. Rackham in Andrews et. al. 1938.
[3] Hence the adjective *Clodian*.

lagunar confederation (Goy 1985: 13). It seems worth noting how the discovered documents report the several reconstructions the town underwent through those years, as a consequence of the raids of different 'Barbaric' civilizations. However, what seems to be certain is that Chioggia's existence continued to heavily rely on salt production, trading and fishing (Goy 1985: 15). These activities progressively increased, serving as a source of income during the rest of the Late Middle Ages, and allowed the expansion of the town. The economic growth within this time period allowed the construction of several structures. The aquatic artery of the town was progressively developed and churches, as well as a new cathedral, were built (Goy 1985: 17).

Over the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries, the chronicles attesting the history of the town remained scant, presumably because of the tragic events that occurred during the period. The few exempla of unearthed records report how Chioggia's role in trading progressively diminished, given the particularly unfortunate times that followed. Most notably, the town suffered the devastating outcomes of the Black Death plague, as well as the invasion of the Genoese army (Goy 1985: 34). Following the destructive and gruesome war of Chioggia (1379 – 1380), once freed from the enemy, the town underwent yet another reconstruction (Goy 1985: 40). The situation aggravated as the main source of income of the area, the production of the *Sal Clugiae*, was progressively undervalued. The consequent economic crisis led to investing money in different fields that were still bound to the sea, e.g. sea-defenses and maritime building sites. Indeed, the town directed its efforts towards the construction and maintenance of its maritime defenses, as well as the construction of different *squeri,* boatyards for construction and repair of small boats (Goy 1985: 56, 82). In this same period, consistent church-building projects were one of the main interests of the institutions (Goy 1985: 93). Such an 'unnecessary' need in times of poverty supposedly served as a way to motivate the citizenship in maintaining their religious and moral values while facing adversities, as argued by Giorgio Vianello (Boscolo and Perini 2002: 111).

By the time of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the citizenship continued to heavily depend on the sea in several respects. The major categories of employment were concerned with the sea itself, as they included various types of mariners, boat builders, chandlers and fishermen (Goy 1985: 89). Specifically, the

population relied on fishing activities that further propelled the connection between men and sea. Among the several communities that faced the Adriatic, the citizens of Chioggia progressively became the undisputed leaders of the surrounding maritime areas (Boscolo and Perini 2002: 94). In fact, the citizenship gradually evolved into a full-time fishing society, in which, statistically, 'something like 80 per cent of the entire population of the town was directly dependent on the sea, a higher proportion than any earlier period in its history' (Goy 1985: 104).

Such dependence progressed and lasted throughout the following centuries, until recent times. Indeed, despite very recent diversifications into other industries, including the remarkable addition of tourism (Tiozzo 2010: 42–45), Chioggia's existence still depends on its enclosing sea (Boscolo and Perini 2002: 94).

Clearly, the reports reported above constitute a scant summary of the actual history of the town. Indeed, the historical facts here presented correspond to a single drop of the diachronic ocean that the township created over the centuries of its existence. It seems worth highlighting, however, how the events above presented have been preeminently chosen as a way to present the bonding of the town with maritime customs and economy, stressing the significant relation Chioggia shares with its surrounding natural environment. Furthermore, it seems worth noting that the strong presence of such connection still appears to be present nowadays within the collective mind of the citizens. According to local expert Pier Giorgio Tiozzo:

> Nella storiografia locale è presente un'idea di Chioggia come antica città sorta dal mare, centro urbano che proviene direttamente dalla natura e che ritrova nel mare la sua palingenesi [...]. Una lettura dettata da un ambiente particolare, dovuto non tanto e non solo all'essere città di mare, ma storicamente un porto sicuro, vicino ai principali fiumi italiani e alle antiche vie di comunicazione acquea lungo il litorale nord Adriatico (Boscolo and Perini 2002: 88).

Overall, Chioggia could be defined as a town formed and forged by the sea, or, alternatively, sea-born and sea-nurtured. The persistence of such bond, however, given its persistence up to date, is not only a consequence of the story of the town. Both these identity and history, indeed, were clearly elicited by the conformation of the town and its encircling geography.

2.1.2 *45°12'32" N, 12°17'38" E*: **Geography of the 'Sea-born'**

Chioggia is located in the northern area of the Adriatic Sea. The most preeminent geographical feature of Chioggia is its insular nature; thus, as expected, the coastal town is completely surrounded by water. As far as the 'thalassography' of Chioggia is concerned, the island is enclosed by the tides of the Venetian lagoon, in the Veneto region. The surrounding waters, however, do not isolate Chioggia from the rest of the neighboring territories. Public transport between the town and other emerged territories of the lagoon, e.g. Venice, Malamocco and Pellestrina islands, is guaranteed through nautical travel systems, both private and public, operating on established routes. Other neighboring islets, along with a relatively small territory of the Italian mainland, are included within the municipality of the Clodian township. Geographically, Chioggia is connected to some of these aforementioned territories through causeways and bridges, of which function serves also as main connection to the mainland. Given the location and conformation of the town and the surrounding environments, such strong bond with the sea should be expected: statistically, overall, the municipality territory of Chioggia is water-based up to the 90% of its entirety (Boscolo and Perini 2002: 87).

Chioggia's 'aqueous' nature is not only guaranteed by its geographical conformation. The saline tides of the lagunar sea flow even inside Chioggia's terrestrial core. In fact, the relationship with the maritime environment of the territory has been additionally propelled by the architectural construction of the town itself, thus in its 'cultural' geography. Specifically, four major artificial canals run through the entire territory of the main island, thus allowing the sea to further invade the emerged land of Chioggia. As argued above, the town resembles her bigger Venetian sister for factual reasons, e.g. for the aforementioned canals and the bridges built over them. As Goy highlights, the town's site is 'very similar indeed to that of Venice – a group of firm, low islets within the same lagoon' (Goy 1986: 5). Nonetheless, from an architectural point of view, Chioggia's artificial conformation appears to be quite unprecedented. As noted by Vincenzo Bellemo, the old town's structure consists of a *cardo*, the town's main axis, locally known as *Piazza*, crossed by several perpendicular *decumani*, the *calli*. As a result, from an aerial view, the plan form of the town resembles the form of a fish spine (Bellemo 1998: 50–51). Further addressing the architectural construction of the town, it seems worth to highlight the presence of several churches within the

relatively modest territory. Goy, in his recount of Chioggia's history, continuously reiterates the considerable amount of church-building projects prompted throughout the centuries (Goy 1985: Ch. 6–10). These buildings are further described in depth by historicist Pietro Morari (2001: Ch. 5).

As expected, such geographical conformation further promoted the creation of the aforementioned cultural strand betwixt citizenship and sea. As demonstrated in the following chapter, the same strand appears to be inextricably intertwined with yet another cultural seam: the religious expressions characterizing the identity of the Clodian citizens. A cultural identity that was conceived centuries ago, and that continued to evolve over time, thus far.

2.1.3 *Ciosoti*

The environment presented above, paired with the history lived by the different generations of locals, progressively led to the creation of a specific cultural identity that based its existence on the same 'seascapes' surrounding the town. Before addressing some of the aspects concerning such culture, it may be worth to define more specifically the concept of 'cultural identity' itself. From an anthropological perspective, cultural identities can be defined as relational constructions created through power relations and interactions between different dimensions, e.g. past and present, in-groups and out-groups, local and global (Fabietti 2002: 17). The cultural component of identities can be addressed by referencing Snow and Corrigall-Brown's assumptions on the idealization of collective identities:

> The concept of collective identity, just as the base concept of identity, is rooted in the observation that interaction between two or more sets of actors minimally requires that they be situated or placed as social objects. To do so is to announce or impute identities. Hence, interaction among individuals and groups, as social objects, is contingent on the reciprocal attribution and avowal of identities. This process holds for both individuals and collectivities, and it probably has always been a characteristic feature of human interaction (Snow and Corrigall-Brown 2015: 174 [4]).

The same scholars further define such concept by highlighting the overlapping of social and personal identities, which eventually concur to create cultural personas (Snow and Corrigall-Brown 2015: 175 [4]). The main advantage granted by similar definitions is considering the cultural identity displayed by social actors as representative of a more widespread culture. Conversely, addressing these same identities as a collective product

could potentially lead to an overgeneralization of the social and individual complexity, erasing their multi-faceted and varied nature. Thus, it is duty of the anthropologist to strike the right balance between these advantages and disadvantages.

As related before, a typical cultural identity developed in the town of Chioggia, locally known by inhabitants as *Ciosa.* Indeed, the folklore, lifestyle, habits and customs of the maritime Clodian society here presented, should be regarded as a form of collective identity, the product of both individual and collective experiences belonging to a specific social sphere. The same culture, however, already seemed to be imprinted in the minds of different people, as documented in several sources belonging to a variety of time periods. In fact, some of its dimensions, i.e. those concerning the sea, appear to be partly synthesized and vividly visualized in several imaginaries that stemmed from different centuries. As reported by local expert Alberto Naccari, the archetype of the Clodian man, the *Ciosoto,* was already present by the time of the eighteenth century. Such archetypal and stereotypical visualization recurs in several art pieces that depict the typical fisherman in open sea, smoking a pipe while being surrounded by the daily catch he gathered through fishing. Similar representations are later reported in other artistic productions that date until the twentieth century (Naccari 1995: 27–28). Nevertheless, stopping at these artistic impressions to represent and interpret a whole culture would be reductive and diminishing. The actual lifestyle practiced by the *Ciosoti* cannot, and should not, be confined in the stereotypical image of an old man dressed in raggedy clothes, smoking while returning to the mainland at the end of a hard working day. Besides, it seems redundant to state that present-day's Clodian fishermen do not fit in this outdated portrait. Additionally, if actual fishermen do not fit it, let alone people who are not actually concerned with fishing activities. Indeed, as obvious as it may sound, not all *Ciosoti* work as fishermen, nor they work specifically in relation to the sea. Readers, then, should not regard Clodian citizens as people that rely exclusively on the sea, from an economical perspective.

Considering the reflections presented above, the lives of nowadays' *Ciosoti* still appear to be connected with the sea itself to some extent, even if not necessarily concerned with nautical or fishing activities. As Clodian folklorist Pier Giorgio Tiozzo argues, the persistence of such anthropological and social elements characterizing the place and its people is probably due to the environment itself (Boscolo and Perini 2002:

99), that contributed to the maintenance of the existing conditions of the town's cultural identity. Besides, the entrenched influence of the sea can be instantly retrieved from simple observations. As an instance, walking the main *piazza* would suffice to catch a glimpse of people performing quotidian tasks using little motorized boats. Such considerable reliance on sea-based vehicles should not come as a surprise, given the quantity of people owning boats in Chioggia. Through these vehicles, locally known as *barchini,* many citizens move through the canals and circumnavigate the island to perform quotidian activities. In the middle of the summer, for instance, people can be seen buying pizza or ice-cream, docking in specific wharves that constitute integrant part of stores.

A town born from the sea, that nurtured its inhabitants with its products for millennia, and geographically encircled by saline tides, could not but deeply influence the local culture. As Tiozzo summarizes: 'Chioggia città d'acque per antonomasia, dunque, centro di tradizioni, economiche, consuetudini legate agli elementi che derivano dalla civiltà del mare e della laguna' (Boscolo and Perini 2002: 100). To actually understand a culture, however, it is necessary to apply the participant observation technique, as previously mentioned. Indeed, the best way to learn about a culture is to perform a prolonged investigation, such as the one I personally performed, presented from the following paragraph.

2.2   Out to sea: chronicles of thalassic ethnography

Before crossing the sea to undertake research as planned, I had to select representative subjects for my inquiry, i.e. actors that embodied the concepts I wanted to analyze. As mentioned in the previous chapter, while designing the investigation presented in this paper, I personally approached some local fishermen of Chioggia. Following some pondering moments, discriminating the men that could assist the pursuing of my scientific target, I discerned the actors whose activities I wanted to witness, and whose religious beliefs I wanted to observe. Among the others, I chose *Ottavio*, *Pacifico* and *Spartaco*. I have been introduced to the three men by an acquaintance we shared. Considering the peculiarity of my inquiry, from the moment in which I was introduced to the fishermen, I expected a distrustful and cautious attitude

from some, let not all, of them. By the end of our first encounter, however, the fishermen were seemingly willing to help me.

Ottavio, *Pacifico* and *Spartaco*, whose names are obviously fictitious to preserve their identity, work as fishermen for several years. Cruising the waters of the Clodian environment with their personal fishing vessel, they fish for *squilla mantis*, a species of mantis shrimp, locally known as *canocia*. The crew operates within the municipality of Chioggia, fishing in the Venetian lagoon, intermittently exiting the *dighe*[4] enclosing the Clodian waters, thus navigating the Adriatic Sea. Their strenuous shifts, that elapse 9 to 12 hours, occur daily, usually six days a week. Their duty period ends with the selling of the daily catch, to customers in the local fish market and to local restaurateurs.

Ottavio, 68 years old, eldest member of the crew, works as a fisherman since he was 15, and is now the captain of his personal fishing boat. Although he lived most of his life in the old town of Chioggia, he currently lives in Sottomarina, a peninsula controlled by the municipality of the same town. Despite his rather minute physical presence, *Ottavio* initially appeared as a stern and obdurate man, especially given his constant frowning expression. Eventually, he showed signs of cooperativeness, and seemed to develop a congenial attitude as the study progressed. The senior, marked by time in his face and in his grey moustache, is a widower, but still enjoys the company of his four children, two of them working with him. The second member of the crew, indeed, is his eldest son: *Pacifico*. The 47-year-old fisherman works in the sea for 32 years circa. He resembles his father in both physical appearance and manners: minus the signs of the times in his face, *Pacifico* appears as a ruder, darker and more silent version of his father. Nonetheless, as fieldwork advanced, he revealed a facetious humor. Since he was born, he lives in the old town of Chioggia, recently moving to a new house with his wife and his two children. 28-year-old *Spartaco*, on the other hand, is the youngest son of *Ottavio*. He started working as a fisherman since he was 16 and has since then kept his job, occasionally working as a bartender or waiter. *Spartaco* is engaged, has no children and, as *Pacifico*, lives in the old town of Chioggia. The young sailor shares common traits with his father and brother, such as their cerulean eyes and physiognomy, but is significantly taller and physically fitter than his companions. Genetic resemblance and working conditions are not the only factors that associate the three men. Father and

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[4] Artificial dams used to delimitate the areas of the Venetian lagoon.

sons, indeed, share even similar beliefs concerning religiosity. All of the three men believe in God and identify as Catholic Christians, as they openly declared before, during and after the investigation. Specifically, in the first encounter referenced above, all of them declared to strongly believe in God, the Virgin and Christ, and to behave accordingly to the Catholic dictates. Some of these aspects were further addressed by *Pacifico*, noting that:

Andemo in ciesa, pensemo a Cristo e tutti i santi, savemo tutte le tradision e ogni tanto preghemo perfin [...]. Fidate che ghe ne savemo mondo de tutte ste robe. Semo devoti come tutti qua.	We go to church, we think about Christ and all of the saints. We are aware of each tradition, and we even pray sometimes [...]. Trust me, we're pretty accustomed with all these things. We're as devout as everyone in here.

Having decided to follow these fishermen in their quotidian activities, I revealed them both the scope of the study and the position I had to cover, and I was accepted as a temporary member of their crew. And thus began my ethnographic research.

As previously referenced, I observed their lives for a period of approximately two months, applying moderate participant observation techniques. Within this timeframe, I experienced several activities related to their way of living, focusing particularly on their professions. I recorded their fishing activity, witnessing the capture of the sea *mantis.* I surfed the salty waters of both the Venetian lagoon and the Adriatic Sea. I pursued my ethnography, recording the events that happened in this thalassic environment. Day to day, I had the chance to observe and witness the maritime culture and the religious customs that characterize their everyday lives. In fact, observations were not limited to their cruising of the Clodian tides. I even attended the auctioning of their daily catch in local markets. I observed them preparing for their ventures, changing their logistical equipment. I joined *Ottavio* and his sons in more intimate contexts, following them in local dive bars, watching them founder in the crimson waters of red wine. I observed, moderately participating, their lives.

The results of such investigation, that elapsed hundreds of hours, stem from notes written in the field, audio recording and visual material. As suggested by Ronzon (2008: 99), a classification of the ethnographic notes and interviews gathered throughout the ethnography was performed before redacting this final paper, in order to identify salient information and to recompose the cultural schemes that regulate the

lives of those observed. The considerations later presented are the result of a co-constructed cultural exchange between their rough world and my scientific goal. The ordering is not casual: the phenomena presented are listed to readers as they revealed to the eye of the witness. A discussion on the bond between fishermen and the sea will later be followed by information regarding their profane lifestyle and beliefs.

2.3   Sea birthing sin

Observing the subjects of the ethnography led me to perceive the tumultuous nature of their relationship with the sea. As the ethnography progressed, I had the chance to observe these men retrieving fish from the depth of the Venetian and Adriatic waters, and I expected they would feel ambiguously about it. On the one hand, I hypothesized they would feel grateful, being the sea the source of their profit. On the other hand, I expected they would experience negative emotions, given the difficult conditions of their job, e.g. weather condition, physical fatigue, 9 hours shifts without breaks. While both these options have been confirmed through participant observation, the latter attitude has been slightly dismissed by the subjects of the study themselves. Their relationship with the sea has been questioned through one of the interviewing sessions I performed with *Ottavio*, *Spartaco* and *Pacifico*. Specifically, before reordering and redacting the final version of this paper, I asked them to define their bond with the sea from their perspective. While *Ottavio* and his eldest son started referring generically to the economic earnings granted by the sea, *Spartaco* recounted a much deeper connection he appears to share with the aqueous environment. The young sailor addressed his reliance on the sea, stressing how he could not imagine a different life, i.e. living far from the coast:

No podarave vivere lontan dal mare. A mi dame gabbiani, dame el salso, el Garbìn[5] [...]. No podarave lavorare diversamente, o forse anche anche, ma ti me cavi el mare e muoro. Anca Padova[6] me sofegarave, per dirte. Vivere via proprio no, al massimo posso molare Ciosa, ma per andare in un posto	I could never live far from the sea. I want seagulls, saltiness, wind [...]. I couldn't work differently either. Perhaps I could, but I'd die without the sea. Just so you understand, even [living in] Padova would suffocate me. Live far [from the coast] is a no for me. Perhaps, I could live away from Chioggia, but still, to move in a

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[5] Local denomination for subtle yet long-lasting southwest wind.
[6] Padova constitutes a neighboring municipality, entirely based on inland territories.

sempre vissin al mare.   place nearby the sea.

Following this line of reasoning, *Spartaco*'s father and brother started reporting similar considerations, referring to a similar need to live within a coastal area.

Overall, the fishermen seemed to be cognizant of the deeply interrelated bond with the thalassic environment that surrounds their hometown. They understood they were born by the sea, maturing and forging through its perilous challenges, and explicitly declared their dependence on it. What they did not seem to perceive, however, is that this same connection with the sea appears to undermine another type of relationship: the one with their self-professed Catholicism. Such a strong connection with the sea, indeed, appears to be reflected in their quite peculiar relation with religiosity, specifically with God Himself. As here tentatively demonstrated, their beloved environment would appear to 'encourage' them to give birth to their sins.

2.3.1   Un-Christian behavior

As soon as fieldwork started, Christianity seemed not to be as present as theoretically presumed ante-research, especially considering *Ottavio*, *Spartaco* and *Pacifico*'s remarks on their devotedness and regard of the Catholic dictates. Rather, their avowed respect for Catholicism appeared to be intertwined with a seemingly defiant attitude that seems to characterize their own sense of religiosity. Indeed, throughout the investigation, it was strikingly obvious the three men did not embody the typical 'Catholic Christian' model, as they seemed to be irrespective of some major guidelines and notions imposed by the Christian faith. The fishermen's behavior here considered, as demonstrated in the final chapter, could arguably be reconnected to a personal interpretation of Catholicism. Besides, slightly personal interpretations of religiosity appear to be widespread, especially nowadays. Many individuals relate to divine beings adopting personal approaches, thus frequently adapting common religious concepts to their private lives. Personal notions of 'deity', 'faith', 'sacred' or 'profane', for instance, may significantly differ from interpretations conceived by fellow devotees. *Ottavio*, *Spartaco* and *Pacifico*'s cases, however, would seem to reveal an even more profoundly different conception of canonical Christian religiosity. Indeed, despite being self-proclaimed Catholics, the fishermen initially seemed to aggressively defy many

conceptions contemplated within the Christian Catholic faith, as atypical and distinctive instances of profane behavior were recorded.

As in every cultural notion, the concept of 'profane' is factually related to its contexts, since it may vary profoundly from one culture to another. Therefore, the distinction between profane and sacred should be contextualized within the background of the religion considered (Massenzio et. al. 1998: 491). Essentially, by definition, the adjective 'profane' could be applied to any action, custom, or symbol that is not specifically sacred (Scarpi 2010: 52). As far as Christianity is concerned, it seems elucidatory to stress that not every Christian worshipper perfectly behaves accordingly to the entirety of the Sacred Scriptures. Nevertheless, Catholic Christians should arguably be cognizant of general guidelines imposed by the religious norms they decide to follow, e.g. what is allowed or prohibited by their God. Devout Catholics, in fact, should be able to generally discern between right and wrong, 'Christian' and 'un-Christian', sacred and profane. At least, they presumably should remember to follow Godly teachings and laws, such as the Ten Commandments, or to avoid misbehaving, e.g. succumbing to sin. In the case of *Ottavio*, *Spartaco* and *Pacifico*, these perceptions seem to vary significantly, as their 'profane' attitude would seem to represent one of the two components concerning their religiosity, i.e. proper religious conceptions and profane attitudes.

2.3.2   Cardinal sins

'Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.'

<div align="right">Galatians 5: 19–21</div>

Cardinal sins, alternatively known as capital vices or, more emphatically, as the Seven Deadly Sins, can be considered as a major classification of amoral human predispositions that would lead to degenerate behavior. Although not explicitly listed in the Bible, as highlighted by Shawn Tucker (2015: 4), these vices would serve as the ground for the majority of immoralities that can destroy the soul of the individual. The

same scholar further analyzes the nature of such terms, stressing the apparent difference between sin and 'actual' vices:

> Vice, which comes from the Latin word *vitium*, meaning "fault" or "defect," is a characteristic, a habit so ingrained that it has come to dominate. A sin is an individual act of transgression. While the vicious will necessarily sin often as a consequence of the state of their souls, otherwise virtuous people may commit isolated sinful acts. According to elements of the Christian tradition, sins are deadly to the degree, either that they manifest a vicious nature, or that they inevitably lead to more sins. That is not to say that every author or artist or thinker is completely consistent, but, in general, the "deadlier" sins reveal a soul's depravity and lead to more character decay (Tucker 2015: 4).

Despite not being grouped together in the Sacred Scriptures, the Catechism of the Catholic Church officially renders them as 'pride, avarice, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony, and sloth or acedia' (USSB, CCC, Part III, Ch. I, Article VIII, 1866). Similar orderings were proposed by several authors, ranging from the Fathers of the Catholic Church to literary masters, such as Dante in his *Purgatorio* (Clarke 2018: 1). In detail, commenting on the orderings proposed over centuries, Tucker (2015) argues:

> Prudentius (348–413 CE), for example, listed eight main vices as well as an entire evil entourage to accompany them. Evagrius (345–399 CE) often listed eight, though he sometimes added a ninth, and Gregory the Great (540–604 CE) shuffled those lists to form one with pride as the principle vice followed by seven sinful attendants. Even this list was slightly altered before Dante (1265–1321 CE) penned his *Purgatory* (4).

Human nature is considerably fragile, and although Christian devotees may be aware that sinning should be avoided, they may still succumb to their instinct, disobeying the dictates of God. Besides, to sin is a 'human business', and repentance would suffice for reconciliation with the Divine. *Ottavio*, *Pacifico* and *Spartaco* seemed to confirm to such 'human norms', as I recorded different types of outbursts that could be labeled as 'sinful'. However, as these outbursts multiplied on different occasions and in several contexts, they appeared to constitute part of bigger behavioral patterns and tendencies. Furthermore, *Ottavio*, *Spartaco* and *Pacifico*'s perception of such profane habits seemingly tends to significantly vary from the 'traditional' Catholic perspective. Indeed, differently from the majority of other devout Catholics, they do not seem to conceive their untraditional Catholic behavior as 'sinful' and defiant of the Divine law.

The following list, that elucidates instances of the sinful demeanor I witnessed, comprises five categories of un-Christian behavior that can be connected with some 'traditional' vices. Although it would certainly have been interesting to state that all

Seven Sins were witnessed during fieldwork, such theorization would have been scientifically inadequate. Not only it would have been a stretch, but it could also have been perceived as a tentative moralization. Besides, it suffices to state that reporting or commenting on similar cultural phenomena does not equate to judge or justify them.

Lust. Through my ethnographic experience, I had the chance to obtain personal information concerning the sentimental lives of my interlocutors. As previously mentioned, *Ottavio* is a widower, as his wife died about five years ago. He recently started a relationship with a younger woman, but eventually the two split. His two sons, on the other hand, are currently involved in a romantic relationship with their partners. Respectively, *Pacifico* is married and *Spartaco* is engaged. It seemed quite peculiar, thus, to detect instances of pornographic material in their cultural environments. During my first observation, I had the opportunity to explore the first of these settings, i.e. the warehouse used by the fishermen as their private storeroom. Filled with an impressive amount of fishing nets, equipment and everyday objects, the warehouse appeared as their lifetime's museum. The second 'space' I explored was their boat. As they were performing their job during the fishing activity, I observed the outsides and insides of their fishing vessel. In both these environments, instances of pornographic content were detected. Respectively, the warehouse presented pornographic magazines, while the cabin of their trawler was 'decorated' with an erotic calendar. From a cultural perspective, such secular relics could be considered quite ordinary and not abhorrent at all, as these environments are presumably attended exclusively by virile attendees. Conversely, however, from the Catholic perspective, any form of lustful imagery that can prompt lustful desire in the mind of a devout Catholic Christian should be prohibited altogether. In fact, in his Gospel, Matthew refers indirectly to Lust quoting: *'But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart'* (Matthew 5: 28). The issue is further addressed by Simon Blackburn, remarking that the 'first jolt' of lustful temptations, for Christians, should be exterminated and annihilated altogether (Blackburn 2004: 55). Clearly, these men are not saints, nor they claim to be. Nonetheless, given their self-professed devotedness, the presence of such imagery appears peculiar. Additionally, the most strikingly profane respect of the material here considered was not constituted by its nature, but by its placement: the pornographic material was surprisingly placed right next to sacred

imagery and other Christian relics. As an instance, in their cabin, the calendar was placed right next to a printed prayer that addressed God and His Mercy. On the other hand, the pornographic magazines in the warehouse were placed on a shelf, nearby a wooden crucifix. However, when interrogated about such peculiar combinations, the men did not seem to be shocked. In detail, as I addressed the proximity of sacred and profane imagery, shameful reactions were not recorded. Instead, while *Pacifico* and *Spartaco* started laughing, slightly embarrassed, *Ottavio* dismissed the issue with a single remark, arguing that such graphic content was used 'per farse un fià gli occi' [to let the eyes feast a little].

Gluttony. As previously mentioned, fieldwork was not confined to sea expeditions, as the investigation was extended and conducted in other social contexts. On some occasions, I followed *Spartaco* and his father in local dive bars, and, as I sat with them during some interviewing sessions, I witnessed their peculiar thirst for wine and other alcoholic substances. Indeed, *Ottavio* and *Spartaco*'s eagerness to drink appeared to be remarkable, given the quantity of alcohol consumed by them. My interlocutors, nevertheless, did not seem to be the only ones to engage in binge-drinking: their gluttonous taste for alcohol seemed to be shared by other *Ciosoti* attending the dive bar, mostly fellow fishermen who greeted my interlocutors as they met. Clearly, the term 'gluttonous' is here purposely adopted not to denote a supposed immorality of their behavior. Rather, it is used as a way to highlight their amoral tendency to consume a remarkable quantity of alcohol. A tendency that would seem to contrast with the typical Catholic idea about self-control. Similarly to Lust, the Bible does not specifically address Gluttony as a Deadly Sin. However, specific references to the immorality of gluttonous behavior still figure in the same text. The Book of Proverbs specifically reports that such attitudes should be avoided, *'For drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags'* (Proverbs 23:21). The supposed un-Christian nature of such habit is seemingly suggested by scholars, e.g. Francine Prose, noting that 'the element of sin enters in [...] when we allow ourselves to relax and enjoy satisfying the needs of the body' (Prose 2003: 18). The peculiarity of the habit appears to be worthy of considerations as the fishermen did not drink exclusively in dive bars. On several occasions, all the three men, mostly *Ottavio,* drank wine during their working shifts. In such cases, however, the use and abuse of

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substances were not specifically limited to wine or alcohol. The captain and the mariners of the fishing boat repeatedly used quite an abundance of tobacco, cigarettes, and even illegal drugs, i.e. marijuana. In one instance, as I was witnessing drowsiness increasing in their bodies, *Ottavio* addressed the peculiar habit, and spontaneously reported to me on such behavior, defining it as completely normal and common among fishermen. The issue was further addressed in another occasion, as I directly questioned them about their drinking and drug use. The three men, however, seemed not to perceive their habits as an 'anomaly'. Instead, the conversation turned to other fishermen's activities. As highlighted by *Ottavio*:

Ghe ze zente che ghe ne fa mondo, ma mondo de pezo de noialtri. Qua ti vedi, un fià de vin, ciapa sigarete. E cassemoghe in mezo qualche canna, tanto per fare quei aposto, ma ti dovaressi vedare altri. Zò de coca, altroché noialtri, no femo niente in confronto [...]. Baste che ti vedi quei che sa copao de notte, che i gera spolpi e chissà de cossa che i saveva fatto[7].	Others act way worse than we do. I mean, [we drink] some wine, [smoke] cigarettes at most. If we got to be honest, we do smoke some joints. Still, you should see the others. Lots of cocaine, we do nothing in comparison [...]. Just think about those who almost killed themselves that night, they surely were stoned. Who knows what they smoke.

A similar attitude, consisting in blaming the others to seemingly justify personal habits, was not observed exclusively in relation to such matter. Rather, it seemed to be frequent in other situations.

Greed and *Envy*. The fishing market is a competitive, yet profitable, environment. The same competitiveness of the profession itself would seem to trigger resentments in the hearts of my interlocutors. *Ottavio*, *Spartaco* and *Pacifico* seemed to assume an intense envious emotional attitude when referring to their competitors. On several occasions, the fishermen reflected on their profession, questioning some of their choices. Their reflections, mostly regarding the dissatisfaction of their daily economic profit, eventually led them to compare their supposedly insufficient income with others' revenues. These same considerations, however, did not serve as an incentive for self-improvement. Instead, they rapidly developed into general accusations leveled against others. As an instance, while heading to the eastern area of Chioggia's lagoonal environment, entering the Adriatic Sea, *Ottavio* and his youngest son *Spartaco*

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[7] *Ottavio* supposedly referred to drunk and drugged *Ciosoti* involved in a local accident occurred on October 19th 2019. The same men wrecked their boat overnight, almost killing themselves.

discussed the dishonesty of other local fishermen. In detail, while the former started referring to their need for more money, hoping for an increase of their usual daily catch, the latter started to accuse other fishermen of possible tampering. The glaring dissatisfaction of their usual income, paired with vile accusations aimed at others, were eminently present in a recorded dialogue between the sailors:

Ottavio: Cossa vuostu che te diga, speremo che [di pescato] ghe ne sia de pì e che no ciapemo i soliti quattro schei.

Ottavio: What do you want me to say? Let's hope today's [catch] is more plentiful than the usual peanuts we get.

Spartaco: No, no stare a sperarghe, sempre quelo ciaparemo, ansi fai conto anca de manco col culo che avemo.

Spartaco: Nah, don't count on that, it's probably the usual amount. Actually, it's probably even less, lucky as we are.

Ottavio: [...] Ze da sperare che no i ne abbia rotto niente altro staltri magnamerda, apposto semo.

Ottavio: [...] Let's just hope those fuckers did not broke anything else. We'd be set.

Spartaco: E fai conto. E sastu cossa? Fai conto che se ciapemo puoco i ne ze venui a ciavare la roba.

Spartaco: You can bet on that. You know what? If the catch is scanty, they surely came before to rob us.

While initially complaining regarding their usual income, *Ottavio* and *Spartaco* subsequently argued that some of their competitors would be responsible for the eventual scarcity of fish in their fishing pots. In fact, suggesting their fishing traps could have been damaged even before verifying their assumptions, instead of blaming the casualty of nature, they accused others. Through my exterior perspective, apart from the notable greed connoting their dialogues, *Ottavio* and his sons seemed to be unsatisfied and envious of others' economic results. Both these attitudes would seem to share some facets with the ideas of Greed and Envy referenced in the Bible. As an instance, in his analysis, Phyllis Tickle stresses the influence exerted by Christian Fathers, e.g. Saint Paul, in defining Greed as a sinful concept (Tickle 2004: 21–22). Nonetheless, *'A greedy man stirs up strife'*, quotes the Biblical Book of Proverbs (Proverbs 28:25). Tickle further addresses the Christian perception of Greed, defining it as the will to possess more than what is needed. Once an individual is possessed by Greed, the fault falls on him, regardless of circumstances:

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> Whether the Christian believer assigns responsibility for his or her failure in this regard to necessity, to other and honorable responsibilities, to a more palatable exegesis, or to outright personal failure, he or she is always aware of being, thanks to greed, just a little bit less than truly Christian in the fullest [...] sense of things (Tickle 2004: 22).

Proverbs, additionally, contain other references to Envy as well, stating that *'A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones'* (Proverbs 14:30). Envy, however, is not here associated with Greed exclusively for such mere reason. These vices may be connected according to other authors. Addressing Envy, Joseph Epstein argues the following:

> Love thy neighbor, even thy enemy. Jesus among his apostles attempted to root out envy by rooting out its arch cause: rivalry. Jesus attempted to convince all that earthly rewards are at best minor rewards. Glory, riches, power were as nothing compared to what was on offer in the world beyond. The prize on which one must keep one's eye is that of heaven, next to which all else isn't even trivial (Epstein 2003: 87).

It seems particularly relevant to stress the term 'riches' used by Epstein in the aforementioned quote. Indeed, among the several factors that could ignite Envy within one's heart, according to Christian thinkers, riches appear to be a perfectly plausible option. Riches, however, are not only accountable for inciting Envy; traditionally, they can be the cause of the other sin presented above: Greed. Indeed, throughout my inquiry, Envy and Greed appeared to stem from a common denominator: money.

Despite the seemingly jealous and envious attitudes of my interlocutors, atypical within the Catholic ideals, it seems worth mentioning I perceived a kernel of truth in their words, given their confidence and use of words. These assumptions were later confirmed, as *Spartaco* swore some competitors were actually used to damage others' fishing gear.

Wrath. Among the different 'vices' recorded over the course of the inquiry, Wrath has been manifested significantly more than the others, and predominantly ruled as the most 'proficient' un-Christian tendency. In particular, several changes in the mood of my interlocutors seemed quite peculiar to witness. Among them, *Ottavio* appeared to be the most inclined to experience rapid shifts in his mood, assuming hostile behavior. His sons, however, considerably reflected his impulsive confrontational attitude. Ireful behavior frequently seemed to erupt, specifically when the three men addressed each other's errors: as soon as one among them made a mistake, anger started to flood the mind of the others. *Ottavio* repeatedly scolded his

sons, remarking how some tasks should have been actually performed. Interestingly enough, however, their attitude shifted towards wrathful behavior even when one of them admitted his culpability. On these occasions, the 'convicted' angrily addressed his own faults, and blamed himself pronouncing self-directed insults. This self-accusing reaction, however, did not incite pity in the others. Instead of reassuring the 'culpable' individual, the others assumed the same heated attitude, and followed insulting him. Furthermore, it seems worth noting that wrathful mood seemed to be remarkably influenced by external conditions. In some instances, as the weather worsened or as the daily catch of crustaceans was scant, their wrath significantly increased. What surprised me the most, however, was that such wrath, whether addressed towards oneself, other individuals, the environment or God Himself, suddenly left their soul as soon as it possessed it. Indeed, following the recurrent altercations that resulted in a series of heavy insults directed towards each other, their pugnacious disposition did not last for long. Instead, in the majority of cases, they started to address each other as nothing happened after a short span of time.

As for the previous cases, these wrathful tendencies can be considered as defiant of the Catholic ideals. As highlighted by Robert Thurman, Wrath was considered 'deadly' among sins because 'it is lethal to the soul's life in God, fatal to our connection to the divine bliss. If you die holding anger in your heart, [...] you condemn yourself to hellish states of existence' (Thurman 2004: 15). The same author, however, later diminishes the same issue, stating that God and Jesus 'seem to manifest themselves and allow for in others a type of righteous anger against infidels, sinners, and all nonelect persons both below and abroad' (Thurman 2004: 17). Nonetheless, in the Book of Psalms, anger and wrath are imperiously addressed as one of the roots of immoral behavior, thus to be avoided at all costs: '*Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil*' (Psalms 37: 8).

Clearly, the reference to God reported above is not here presented exclusively in relation to the Bible. The Entity was actually addressed repeatedly by all of the three men. It seemed quite peculiar to denote that another type of profane behavior sensibly increased as their mood altered and anger started to pump in their veins. Indeed, their shift of mood fostered the pronunciation of plentiful blasphemous remarks towards God Himself.

2.3.3   Blasphemous profanities

'Anyone who blasphemes the name of the Lord is to be put to death. The entire assembly must stone them. Whether foreigner or native-born, when they blaspheme the Name they are to be put to death.'

<div align="right">Leviticus 24:16</div>

Given the complexity of defining cultural and religious subjects, related concepts would appear to be equally arduous to define. As referenced above and in the previous chapter, religious notions may vary sensitively depending on their contexts. As an instance, a phenomenon that can be religiously appropriate and opportune within a religious cult could be tremendously offensive within another. As a result, in addressing the concept of 'blasphemy', a proper contextualization would seem to be necessary, as the lack thereof could lead to potentially erroneous overgeneralizations. In fact, instances of blasphemies could seemingly be witnessed in a variety of contexts, ranging from monotheistic to polytheistic dimensions, in recent cults as well as more ancient religions. Such diffused phenomenon has been addressed by several authors. James Frazer[8]'s considerations on the matter, reported by Libero Cordela, can be quoted as an example, as the author addresses the seemingly universal nature of the blasphemous human behavior addressing divine beings, quoting instances of men that 'threaten' their deities in order to obtain the object of their pleas (Cordela 2009: 41). Significant instances of blasphemous behavior can be observed in more recent sources, as in Ute Hüsken's listing of blasphemies punished by South Asian legislations (Rollier et. al. 2019: 237). What seems to be important to stress, nonetheless, is the varied nature of blasphemous attitudes, of which existence seems to be present since proper cults were conceived (Cordela 2009: 41).

Considering the Biblical quote reported above and the cogitations listed before, it seems redundant to reiterate once again the Catholic Christian perspective here considered. Nonetheless, defining blasphemous behavior still appears to be arduous, even within this specific context. As highlighted in the Sacred Scriptures, in Hebrew and Catholic sources, the term 'blasphemy' can potentially refer to two major types of profane behavior. On the one hand, the name of the Lord could be blasphemed through

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[8] James George Frazer (1854 – 1941), Scottish social anthropologist and comparative religion scholar.

heretic customs. On the other hand, God's name may be blasphemed directly through actual verbal attacks. Both these 'traditions' have been successfully introduced by David Nash:

> The Bible gave western societies an important example which legislators and theologians relied upon in the creation of a modern offence of blasphemy. The people of Israel had been chosen by their God, who aimed and directed the lives of his people, and their obedience and worship was expected accordingly. To this community, denying God, or more importantly even profaning him and his name, appeared to be a form of behaviour that lacked meaningful logic (Nash 2007: 147).

Nash's insight efficiently summarizes both the two dimensions: denying God, thus committing heresy, or directly profaning his name. These same two blasphemous attitudes seem to be connected to the original concept of blasphemy, historically as well as linguistically.

The term 'blasphemy' derives from the secular Greek term *βλασφημία (blasphemía)*. The original meaning of the term, as discussed by German theologian Hermann Wolfgang Beyer, would imply the pronunciation of abusive speech as the strongest form of personal mockery and calumniation (Bromiley 1964: 621 [1]). Over millennia, however, as presented in the Bible and other Apocrypha texts, the term eventually evolved and started to be used exclusively in relation to God. Leonard Williams Levy (1995: 11) reports: 'With the exception of Sirach 3:16, no Greek-Jewish text uses "blasphemy" or any variant of it that is not God-centered'. Additionally, in the New Testament, *βλασφημία* 'always refers to God, whether in the sense of the disputing of His saving power [...], or human arrogance with its implied depreciation of God' (Bromiley 1964: 621–622 [1]). While the former case can be reconnected to the aforementioned contemporary idea of generic 'heresy', *eresia/blasfemia* in Italian, the latter can be interpreted as the proper act of pronouncing deliberately blasphemous profanities addressing God, the proper Italian *bestemmia*, *biastema* in the Clodian dialect.

Acknowledging these considerations, in order to better define concretely the derogatory profanities aimed to God, Beyer can be further quoted:

> In the NT the concept of blasphemy is controlled throughout by the thought of violation of the power and majesty of God. Blasphemy may be directed immediately against God (Rev. 13:6; 16:11, 21; Ac. 6:11), against the name of God (R. 2:24, quoting Is. 52:5 LXX, -> 621; 1 Tm. 6:1; Rev. 16:9), against the Word of God (Tt. 2:5), against Moses and God and

therefore against the bearer of revelation in the Law (Ac. 6:11) (Bromiley 1964: 622–623 [1]).

These notions constitute an elucidatory proposal of what the actual and contemporary act of pronouncing verbal attacks towards God is. Still, Beyer's suggestions do not properly synthesize the idea of modern verbal blasphemy. From a concrete point of view, when present-day individuals pronounce verbal blasphemies, they pronounce derogatory words to negatively address God and the other Sacred entities bound to Him. Italian blasphemies take the form of insults and calumnious swears against the Divine and the Sacred Christian sphere, i.e. Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and the Saints. However, equating blasphemies to mere insults, although appropriate, would be demeaning and approximating. The tirades and verbal attacks directed to God or other Christian entities are created by associating Their name to quotidian or offensive terms, appellatives or actual insults, thus giving birth to epithets no Christian individual should even dare to mentally conceive. A prime example is the widespread Italian profanity '*Dio cane'* [God (is a) dog]. Given the obscene nature of such profanities, presenting similar instances of immoral misconduct in a scientific paper could be perceived as vulgar and unnecessary. The choice of reporting such linguistic phenomenon, however, is pondered on the basis of its diffusion and cultural preeminence in the Veneto region. Furthermore, such choice has been made considering the objectivity that should characterize cultural anthropology. Besides, reporting on these facts does not entail neither their approval or their condemnation: it is duty of the ethnographer to present culture as witnessed, as cultural relativism should involve 'un atteggiamento intellettuale che mira a *comprendere*, dove comprendere non significa affatto giustificare, ma collocare il senso delle cose al posto giusto, nel loro contesto' (Fabietti 2010: 84).

Throughout the ethnography, *Ottavio* and his sons did not display actual conscious heretic behavior. Indeed, as partly mentioned before, they envision themselves as devout Catholics observant of the related dictates. Their constant and severe usage of verbal blasphemies, however, would counter this assumption. As the observations progressed, several instances of generic insults, including many cases of actual *biasteme*, were recorded. The habit of addressing the Sacred sphere through invectives significantly increased as *Ottavio*, *Spartaco* and *Pacifico* enraged and started to address each other through generic slurs. The instances recorded consisted of

different, yet mainstream, versions of standard Italian/Clodian blasphemies. In their case, however, the insults generally concerned and/or were directed at God Himself, minus some exceptions. In fact, it should be noted that, surprisingly, blasphemies were not directed to other Christian entities, i.e. Jesus and the Virgin Mary.

During one of the interviewing sessions, I directly asked to my interlocutors about their perception of blasphemies, and how their blasphemous profanities could relate to their Catholic belief. Specifically, I asked whether their verbal attacks could be perceived by God, according to their opinion. *Ottavio* answered that he believed that God, probably, did not even hear their remarks, i.e. He would not bother observing attentively their lives. Additionally, *Spartaco* highlighted their profanities should not be perceived as a way to mock God or test His powers. He actually argued that directly offending the Lord is not their intention. Rather, he defined their *biasteme* as 'unconscious' slurs, pronounced in an altered mood. Thus, they are not 'meant to be heard' by God. These latter considerations can be reconnected to literary suggestions proposed by some scholars. Consciously omitting neurological and sociological factors that could scientifically explain the use of blasphemies, it seems important to reprise considerations conceived by Cordela, who argues the following:

> Dal punto di logico, bestemmiare dovrebbe essere un'azione totalmente insensata. L'ateo non ha alcun motivo di insultare una divinità inesistente, l'agnostico dichiara di non disporre di elementi sufficienti per decidere in merito, e il credente non dovrebbe maledire un Dio che lo ama e che gli ha promesso la vita eterna. Tuttavia la bestemmia esiste ed è una consuetudine profondamente radicata soprattutto tra i monoteisti (Cordela 2009: 33).

Pronouncing blasphemies directed towards God would seem unmotivated and unnecessary, a nonsense, as the subjects of the study themselves seemed to realize. The rapturous nature of the blasphemy remarked by *Ottavio* and his sons appears to be reported in the same literary source. Cordela further argues:

> L'interpretazione più ovvia e immediata sembra essere quella di equiparare la bestemmia all'imprecazione poiché, posto di fronte alla scelta di motivare razionalmente le sue parole, il blasfemo ammette che i suoi improperi non sono rivolti alla divinità, ma costituiscono un intercalare abituale e irrazionale (Cordela 2009: 34).

These instances of blasphemies, then, should not be considered as a symbolic challenge to test the absolute authority of God, as *Ottavio*, *Spartaco* and *Pacifico* themselves declared. Other types of profane behavior, however, would contrast with this

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assumption: other habits and conceptions of these same fishermen would seem to indirectly challenge what they consider God's omnipotence.

2.4   Superstition

'Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness'

<div align="right">1 Timothy 1, 4:7</div>

From a Catholic perspective, superstitious beliefs would seem to counter the all-powerful supremacy of God, in accordance with the First Commandment: *Thou shalt have no other gods before me* (Exodus 20:3). In the quotation mentioned above, Christian Evangelist Timothy directly addresses the universal 'silly' nature of every myth that escapes the inclusivity of the monolithic Christian faith. Deuteronomy 18:10–12 similarly addresses a variety of other beliefs that are not pursuant to Christianity, i.e. witchcraft, divination and necromancy, labeling them as 'abominations'. Indeed, according to Christian sources, anything that is not controlled by God would question His own omnipotence and should be regarded as demonic or sinful. Thus, to be superstitious would equate to commit idolatry, especially following the Protestant and Catholic Reformations. As Sean Armstrong highlights, both these movements were concerned with popular practice and belief, prompting the erasure of 'the superstition and popular magical practice that encrusted everyday life' (Armstrong 2014: 52). The 'sinful' nature of believing in other entities that supposedly escape God and His control is presented by sixteenth-century Puritan author Godefridus Cornelisz Udemans (2012: Ch. 27), who stresses the ungodliness of superstition, magic and pagan worship.

Differently from Catholicism, anthropology hesitates over confidently labeling superstition. As argued by Marina D'Agati, the concepts related to superstition evolved and were applied accordingly to the historical, and cultural, frame. In particular, the author affirms:

> Nel corso della storia europea l'utilizzo delle categorie di magia e superstizione ha consentito di circoscrivere l'area dell'accettabile, distinguendo le credenze e le pratiche ritenute legittime da tutto ciò che invece era giudicato immorale, antisociale o, come diciamo nel mondo moderno, irrazionale (D'Agati 2009: 150).

The strand connecting irrationality and ingenuity with superstition is additionally addressed by Ernesto De Martino, who highlights its creation as the result of wrongful

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assumption by scholars (De Martino 1973: 158). As the anthropologist further argues, superstitious and magical 'traditions' should be regarded as belonging to the physiology of the religious life of humankind (De Martino 1973: 214). Besides, the discrepancy between the Catholic cult and popular beliefs appears to diminish in some cases, as in the Clodian cultural construction.

Although strictly connected to Catholicism, as related in the following chapter, the literature regarding Chioggia's cultural identity seems to present a peculiar connection with different types of popular superstition. On the one hand, seventeenth-century sources present paranormal phenomena that supposedly happened in the surroundings. Pietro Morari's relations, seemingly historical, appear quite explanatory: while presenting a chronicle of the town, the same writer relates historical facts comprising superstitious phenomena, without questioning their authenticity. In detail, Morari mentions miraculous facts, not necessarily associated with God, e.g. otherworldly and mythical and creatures, including the discovery of a supernatural marine creature, resembling a lion (Morari 2001: 84) and other otherworldly apparitions, such as the one of two suns (Morari 2001: 241). On the other hand, more recent authors, e.g. Pier Giorgio Tiozzo, do not recall considerable references to events concerning supernatural dimensions. Rather, Tiozzo stresses the profound and deep relationship the Clodian culture shares with ghostly dimensions, specifically regarding 'il rispetto delle *aneme* [souls], dei morti' (Boscolo and Perini 2002: 98).

At first glimpse, *Ottavio*, *Spartaco* and *Pacifico* did not seem to be influenced by 'superstitious' beliefs. Furthermore, when interviewed about such aspect of their personal creed, they defined themselves as non-superstitious individuals. As research progressed, however, the fishermen actually proved to believe in notions unrelated to 'aseptic' and standard Catholicism. Clear instances of apparently nonsensical and 'secular' superstition, although unconscious, were observed through fieldwork. The first example relates to a color, specifically purple. As I noticed during my day-to-day observations, the fishermen placed the catch of the day inside multicolored plastic crates. Among them, purple crates were not present, neither on board nor in their warehouse. Subsequently investigating the cabin and the rest of the boat once again, I realized that no purple object was boarded. Intrigued by such oddity, I directly asked to *Ottavio*, *Spartaco* and *Pacifico* about the avoidance of such color. While they initially

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showed some surprise, supposedly regarding the peculiar nature of my inquiry, *Spartaco* and *Pacifico* dismissed the question, and stated that purple, as a color, could attract misfortune: thus, its usage should be avoided. *Ottavio* later clarified and reported that, according to them, 'el viola porte sfiga, dovaressimo tocarse le bale tutto el tempo' [Purple attracts bad luck, we should grab our crotch all the time[9]]. As for the phenomenon in question, no references were present in the analyzed Clodian literature, and, given the scarcity of data gathered, more in-depth analyses were not conducted. The presented superstitious belief, nonetheless, would not seem to be rooted within the Clodian culture or commonly shared by other *Ciosoti*, as the color purple was detected in other communal environments, e.g. local markets. Still, it is worth highlighting that the color purple is traditionally associated with adversities and mischance in the Italian culture, supposedly for its associations with funerary garments. *Ottavio*, *Spartaco* and *Pacifico*'s perception of the same color could then be reconnected to such belief.

As fieldwork progressed, another example of superstitious behavior attracted my attention. While surfing towards the northern tides of Chioggia, I noticed that *Ottavio* followed a particular direction while driving his boat, despite the presence of shorter paths. The captain of the fishing vessel, indeed, avoided some of the innumerable lagoonal routes, as a way to prevent the navigation of a specific delimited area in those waters. As I attempted to learn more, *Ottavio* addressed the issue presenting it as something obvious. Instead of providing me with an answer, he counter-asked me: 'Ti ghe credistu ai fantasmi?' [Do you believe in ghosts?].

2.4.1 Ghost stories

All my interlocutors admitted to believe in ghosts. In detail, while *Pacifico* initially seemed to tentatively state that 'something' otherworldly 'could', 'potentially', exist, *Ottavio* and *Spartaco* seemed convinced regarding the existence of ghosts. Fascinated by their undeterred responses, during an interviewing session with the three fishermen, I asked them to further elaborate their conceptions of 'ghost'. Presently, *Ottavio* reported his suggestions: ghosts, invisible and intangible entities that occasionally wander among people, would correspond to the souls of those who

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[9] In the Clodian and Italian cultures, male individuals grab their crotch as a way to avert misfortune.

physically lived on Earth. However, his remarks seemed to denote an agnostic attitude, as he firmly declared that no human could actually prove their existence, given the impossibility to properly interact with these entities. *Ottavio*'s considerations were subsequently followed by his sons' similar responses. *Spartaco* admitted being both fascinated and frightened by these ghostly presences, referenced as '*aneme*' and '*spiriti*' [spirits]. Nonetheless, according to both of them, the nature of these entities would seem to be benevolent. Their conceptions were slightly shared by *Pacifico*'s opinions, as he stated that these *aneme* should be still respected and feared, given their enigmatic identity: 'Chi te dize che i sia solo boni? No vogio dire che i sia per forsa cativi, però ti sa no le ze robe da schersare, no se sa mai' [Who says they are benevolent? I am not saying they should be necessarily regarded as 'evil', but, you know, you should not joke about them, you never know]. In short, these entities would correspond to the souls of previous earthly individuals, whose intentions are presumably benevolent, but still to fear.

Such unwavering stances regarding the existence of evanescent spirits should not surprise. From an anthropological perspective, the belief in ghostly entities has been defined by anthropologist Donald E. Brown as a 'cultural universal' (Brown 1991: 180). The cultural universality concerning ghosts is similarly addressed by Joseph Baker and Christopher Bader, who still refer to the cultural frame that influences the perceptions of the entities:

> While spirit concepts are cross-cultural, the narrative content given to experiences of and beliefs about spirits is highly flexible, molded into culturally specific expressions. [...] Ghost (or analogous) beliefs and experiences are prevalent and highly flexible concepts, allowing them to exist, persist, and thrive even in ostensibly secular, rationalized cultural contexts (Baker and Bader 2014: 570; 585).

In accordance with these assumptions, the Christian viewpoint does seem to admit the existence of otherworldly beings. Conceiving them as the souls of the dead, different references to ghosts and spirits are recorded in the Bible. These same references, scattered in the Books of the Sacred Scriptures, however, would seem to negatively connote these beings. In detail, biblical writers seem to reiterate the urgency to avoid any contact with ghosts. The prohibition concerning dealing with spirits, as a way to control them, is reported in a passage from the Old Testament, referencing the 'abominable' nature of heathen practices, which may be performed by a 'necromancer

or one who inquires of the dead' (Deuteronomy 18: 9–12). A similar, slightly negative interpretation is delineated in the New Testament, primary source of the Catholic belief. In the Gospel According to Luke, Jesus, while walking on water, was thought to be a ghost by 'startled and frightened' apostles (Luke 24: 37–39). The malignant nature of spirits is additionally referenced in the First Epistle of Paul to Timothy, depicting ghosts as demons in disguise, who 'come to deceive people and draw them away from God and into bondage' (1 Timothy 4:1). Nevertheless, these Biblical interpretations do not seem to be reflected by the ones idealized by my interlocutors. Ghosts, according to *Ottavio* and his sons, do not seem to embody evil will according to their contemplations, as previously reported. Thus, their personal idealization would theoretically collide with the Catholic faith in which they believe. Their remarks concerning ghosts, however, were not limited to their personal beliefs. Their considerations seemed to be influenced by the Clodian folklore, as in the case of a tale concerning haunted places and ghostly entities.

2.4.2 Dead men tell no tale

As the saying goes, dead men tell no tales. In the Clodian folklore, however, dead men would seem to tell tales. Or, at least, they would be capable of speech.

About 4, 86 nautical miles from the island of Pellestrina, to the Northwest of Chioggia, lies the *Vale dei Sete Morti* [Valley of the Seven Dead], home to the remains of an ancient local hut. The shack, locally known as '*casón*' is one of the several isolated huts built in the lagoon for fishing. As revealed by the name of the aforementioned building, this precise *casón* is located within a lagoonal valley, '*vale*' in Clodian dialect, geographically defined as a 'shallow basin of enclosed water within or on the edge of the lagoons' (Goy 1985: XVII). In these surroundings lies the aforementioned route of which waters are constantly avoided by *Ottavio*'s crew. Understanding their will to avoid the trespassing of these sinister waters, I questioned the three men about the reasons motivating such behavior. Following *Ottavio*'s previously reported question regarding ghosts, *Spartaco* and *Pacifico* tried to dismiss the issue, perhaps as a way not to show actual concern regarding these superstitions. Following my response, *Ottavio* promptly referred to the story of the *Vale dei Sete*

Morti. And although his sons attempted to stop him from reporting the whole story, the undaunted old captain recalled the folkloric tale of the homonymous valley.

On the *Giorno dei Morti* [All Souls' Day] [10] of an unspecified year, six fishermen tempted fate trying to catch fish. While fishing in the lagoon, the swollen body of a drowned man stuck in their nets. Retrieved the cadaver, since a storm was approaching, the men managed to reach a lagoonal *casón* to repair themselves. Once on the shore, the sailors left the motionless corpse outside, entered the hut and started cooking a meal. As they began to feast, one of the fishermen's son, who embarked with them, claimed a portion. The men, however, were mean-spirited, and decided to play a prank on him: the young boy was tasked to awake the dead man, who was supposedly asleep, as related by the fishermen. Once outside, the boy shook the corpse, unsuccessfully. Amused by their prank, the men exhorted the kid to try again. Presently, the boy reattempted to awake the lifeless body. Begged by the child, the dead man suddenly opened his eyes, turned his head towards him, and caressed his face. Relieved, the boy exhorted the man to follow him, thus leading him to the fishermen. As the two entered the hut, the laughs froze and terror began to flow in their bodies. Listing their sins, the cadaver supposedly murdered the six fishermen, whose bodies disappeared under mysterious conditions. The dead men became then seven.

As the story ended, to my surprise, *Ottavio* himself seemed cognizant of the folkloric nature of the legend. Nonetheless, he still referred to it as something plausible. The senior, in fact, told me that 'no se scherse coi morti' [You should not mess with the dead]. Clearly, I perceived his exhortation as an advice, not as an imperative remark. Still, his strong opinion on the matter, concerning the partial veracity of the present surreal story, should not come as a surprise. Supposedly, similar strong beliefs have been inherited from generation to generation (Bighin 2007: 152), allowing the circulation of the story in Chioggia, reported both in spoken and written form. The legend seems to be deeply rooted in the story of the lagoon, specifically thanks to its widespread diffusion. Different versions of the same story are documented in local literature, including Guido Fuga and Lele Vianello's version. In their text, reporting one of the different versions of the folk tale, the local folklorists highlight the fact that many

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[10] November 2nd in Italy is a day of commemoration for the souls of the dead. Traditionally, working activities are 'prohibited'.

inhabitants of the Venetian lagoon, mostly elder men, report hearing voices coming from the ruins of the hut (Fuga and Vianello 2001: 23). The story certainly circulated in written form already by the nineteenth century, as referenced by historian Giovanni Battista Rampoldi, who reports the conformation of the geographical *vale*, site of the legend. Rampoldi, in particular, refers to the discovery of seven cadavers in 1695 in the same hut, presenting it as a historical fact (Rampoldi 1832: 517 [1]). The chronological diffusion of the story, that elapsed centuries, would be supported by Dario Galimberti, who dates its origins prior to the sixteenth century, as the same location was already named '*Vale dei Sete Morti*' in sixteenth-century historical records (Galimberti 1943: 15). The version reported by Galimberti appears interestingly connected to a less profane, thus more 'sacred', version of the story. As the same author reports, the cadaver retrieved from the sea supposedly embodied one of the Seven Deadly Sins, and addressed the mean fishermen relating a sin to each one of them. In detail, Galimberti quotes:

> Il morto così parlò loro: "Non si deve scherzare con i cadaveri e con i trapassati. Io sono uno dei sette peccati mortali e voi tutti ne personificate a vostra volta un altro". E additando ad uno ad uno i presenti nominò i sette peccati cominciando da sé medesimo. La paura fu così forte che tutti ne morirono sul colpo. Si salvarono solo il bimbo ed il cane. Cioè il simbolo della fedeltà e della innocenza (Galimberti 1943: 16).

A similarly moral, Catholic interpretation seems to be presented in 1977 version reported by Clodian poet Domenico Perini. Perini's story further addresses the bond between the protagonists and the cardinal sins: a detailed description of the cadaver's rotting physical condition is followed by a reference to his tormented spirit, atoning his sins in Purgatory; as the dead declares with his own voice, he is culpable of Wrath (Perini 1977: 87). On the other hand, the other characters would be culpable of other sins, as revealed by their respective telling-names: *Toni Galeto* [in Clodian, '*fare el galeto*' means to court women], associated with Pride; *Momolo Mucia* [*Muciare*, Clodian for 'accumulate'] with Greed; *Nane Vardaore* [*Vardaore,* Clodian for 'voyeur'] with Lust; *Gigi Stralocio* [literally 'squinting', figuratively 'side eyeing'] with Envy; *Bepo Licatuto* [literally 'liking anything'] with Gluttony; *Nato Stravacao* [*Stravacao,* Clodian for 'lying down'] with Sloth. The majority of the versions here reported, including the one recounted by *Ottavio*, reiterate the major fault of these sailors:

working on November 2nd, the All Souls' festivity, thus disrespecting the souls of the dead (Perini 1977: v. 6; Bighin 2007: 155–156).

The sacredness of the *aneme* and the respect due to them appear as common *leitmotivs* in Chioggia's folklore. These popular influences would reconnect to a much wider series of stories regarding the dead, as indicated by Tiozzo:

> Le questioni poste da queste leggende si rifanno spesso al rapporto tra la morte e l'acqua, un legame molto stretto, evidenziato ad esempio dalla tradizione che ricorda la presenza di lumini nel mare nel giorno dei morti, segnalazione della situazione di non riposo dei dispersi in mare (Boscolo and Perini 2002: 98).

The un-Christian habits and beliefs presented in this chapter, seemingly defiant of Catholicism, serve as instances of religious popular reinterpretations of the Christian religiosity. Similarly to other 'personal' elaborations of religious concepts, the Clodian religiosity would actually reveal a syncretistic connotation, given the presence of elements from different 'traditions' intertwined together (Droogers 2015: 881 [23]). These same un-Christian, profane elements, indeed, appear to be related to more standardized, sacred facets of Catholicism.

Transitioning from the murky waters of profanity to the crystalline tides of 'typical' Catholic behavior, the following part of this paper moves on to describe in greater detail the other component of the Clodian religiosity.

Figure 4: *Madonna del Pescatore,* Laguna di Chioggia, 2020.
Personal archive.

Chapter 3.
Holy water

Unpredictability denotes aqueous environments. The same waters can ambivalently represent a source of danger or turn into a haven of tranquility and relaxation. Indeed, still waters might rapidly morph into agitated and rabid currents, turning sea expeditions from calm sailing to tumultuous cruising, and vice versa. The sea can be a place of death, of wreckage, of danger, and navigators may face death in its saline tides. But the sea can simultaneously represent a source of life, it can aid prosperity, and eventually nurture people. Seafarers are aware of the ever-changing and evolving nature of the environment in which they move and, in some cases, they may reflect its ambivalent nature. The Clodian society, indeed, is an instance of people who similarly has been embodying the sea. Not only the *Ciosoti* relied on water and shaped their identity through it, as presented above; they even appear to be depository of antithetical values and beliefs. As anticipated in more than one instance, such ambivalence is reflected in the Clodian religiosity, an elucidatory exemplum of cultural construction that presents sacred-profane commingling. In this same cult, seemingly opposite yet complementary elements are intertwined together despite the apparent contradictions. Since profane demeanor has already been presented in the previous chapter, the sacred component of the Clodian maritime identity is here being addressed.

3.1   'Sacred', an adaptive concept

'Profane' has been previously defined essentially as anything opposing the 'sacred' dimension. As the counterpart of this dialectic, the 'sacred' realm automatically could be defined as anything opposing the 'profane'. Such contraposition has been theorized by French sociologist David Émile Durkheim (1858 – 1917), who conceived the religious dichotomy as the basis of any religious belief known to man:

> Whether simple or complex, all known religious beliefs display a common feature: They presuppose a classification of the real or ideal things that men conceive of into two classes — two opposite genera — that are widely designated by two distinct terms, which the words *profane* and *sacred* translate fairly well. The division of the world into two domains,

one containing all that is sacred and the other all that is profane — such is the distinctive trait of religious thought. Beliefs, myths, dogmas, and legends are either representations or systems of representations that express the nature of sacred things, the virtues and powers attributed to them, their history, and their relationships with one another as well as with profane things (Durkheim 1995: 34).

The same author further addresses the nature of sacredness, noting, among other features, that sacred elements tend to be regarded with generic distress by devotees: respect and reverential attitude for the sacred, as argued by Durkheim, would be fostered by fear and apprehension perceived by individuals when approaching such 'dangerous' realm (Durkheim 1995: 58). Durkheim's essential definition of the sacred and profane dichotomy has been considerably deemed valid. However, from a concrete perspective, it still does not seem to successfully convey the meaning of the term 'sacred', especially considering the complexity and variation characterizing religious-cultural components. To properly understand the meaning of the concept, other considerations should then be regarded.

Scarpi's idealizations on the matter can be scrutinized to further define the concept of 'sacredness'. To elaborate a definition, the same author refers to the origin of the word, the Latin term '*sacer'*, highlighting how anything sacred, in the Republican Roman culture, had to deal with the public dimension:

> Il sacro era solo ciò che era stato oggetto di dedica o di consacrazione agli dèi, [...] ciò che rispondeva a una decisione collettiva condivisa dalla comunità [...]. Sacro, *sacer*, definisce [...] la rinuncia deliberata da parte dell'uomo a un oggetto, a beneficio del dio, oggetto che in questo modo è sottratto [...] all'azione umana (Scarpi 2010: 51).

In the republican Roman setting, anything sacred was thus conceived as a means to publicly relate the secular realm to divine entities (Scarpi 2010: 51–52). It seems worth noting the importance of the cultural perspective adopted by Scarpi himself in defining Roman 'sacredness'. Indeed, the denotation of the same term significantly changed over centuries, as the concept can be defined differently according to cultural variables. Similarly to its antonym, the meanings of the term 'sacredness' and its related adjective 'sacred' should be contextualized in a specific cultural setting, as the notions concerning religiosity might vary significantly from one cultural environment to another. As Clements stresses: 'What may be perceived as sacred phenomena in some systems of belief may be regarded as secular elsewhere' (Clements 2008: 159 [7]). Given its cultural and diachronic change, the notion of 'sacred' could be then defined as

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'malleable'. The adaptive nature of 'sacredness' is reflected even in the several modalities in which the concept 'manifests'. Durkheim further identifies different categories of 'sacred' elements that concur to multiply the variety of religious phenomena:

> Sacred things are not simply those personal beings that are called gods or spirits. A rock, a tree, a spring, a pebble, a piece of wood, a house, in a word anything, can be sacred. A rite can have sacredness; indeed there is no rite that does not have it to some degree. There are words, phrases, and formulas that can be said only by consecrated personages; there are gestures and movements that cannot be executed by just anyone. [...] The circle of sacred objects cannot be fixed once and for all; its scope can vary infinitely from one religion to another. What makes Buddhism a religion is that, in the absence of gods, it accepts the existence of sacred things, namely, the Four Noble Truths and the practices that are derived from them (Durkheim 1995: 35).

Considerations regarding the wide range of existing religious phenomena are expressed through a variety of elements numbered by Comba, that appear to reconnect to Durkheim's quote reported above:

> Le concezioni religiose si esprimono in simboli, in miti, in forme rituali e rappresentazioni artistiche che formano sistemi generali di orientamento del pensiero e di spiegazione del mondo, di valori ideali e di modelli di riferimento (Comba 2014: 14).

Within the Catholic perspective, it suffices to state that 'sacred' is anything regarding God and His Holy spree. It may be well to note, however, that such varied presence of different elements embodying sacredness is not exclusive to 'extensive' cults, e.g. Catholicism. Similar compound of ritualistic gestures, formulas, folk tales and symbols, can be detected in 'less common' cults as well, e.g. the Clodian religiosity here considered.

3.2   Clodian sacred

As anticipated, among the several customs diffused across the Clodian cultural environment, profane behavior and superstitious beliefs are not sole examples of cultural demeanor concerning religiosity. Despite the presence of defiant conduct, different instances of 'standard' devotional behavior, perfectly in accordance with the Catholic guidelines, apart from some minor popular influences, were recorded through fieldwork.

As attested throughout the ethnography, in the folklore regarding Chioggia, 'proper' religiosity concerning the sacred can appear, at first glance, as profane

behavior. Such is the case of one phenomenon presented in the previous chapter: the belief in ghosts. Indeed, a first instance of sacred phenomena, seemingly influenced by popular tradition and initially perceived as a Clodian 'profane' belief, has been already exemplified by Pier Giorgio Tiozzo. The considerations of the same author previously presented, concerning the 'rispetto delle *aneme*, dei morti' (Section 2.4) can be contextualized within a bigger tradition, concerning Catholic devotion. The same author reconnects the respect due to the dead to a wide range of Clodian customs regarding the profound bond Chioggia created with both the maritime and the Catholic dimensions. In particular, Tiozzo addresses the strand that concerns displaying devotion through a variety of means, mostly visual (Boscolo and Perini 2002: 97–98). These same habits concerning religiosity have been investigated through research. Additionally, as in the case of profane matter, my interlocutors were questioned as a way to inspect their own considerations regarding what has been recorded through fieldwork. As in the case of profane phenomena, visual and concrete habits were the first I had the chance to record and analyze.

3.2.1   Performing devotion: gestures

Given the preponderant presence of profane habits recorded, observing blasphemers paying respect to Holy entities initially felt quite disorienting. One of the first exempla of reverential demeanor was recorded while passing underneath a bridge in the surroundings of Chioggia. *Ottavio*, *Pacifico* and *Spartaco* performed a gesture with their right upper limb, rapidly touching with their hand their forehead, chest and then, respectively, left and right shoulders: they crossed themselves. As I observed the bridge, searching for details that could explain such odd behavior, I had the chance to notice a funeral flower wreath, dedicated to a woman. As I learned thereafter, the flowers were placed as a way to remember the death of a young girl, who died because of a car crash on the same bridge. The gesticulation was initially interpreted as a reverential form of respect to the dead, accordingly to the traditions above discussed through Tiozzo's considerations. Such interpretation, however, would not suffice to provide an explanation of such custom, as the same was recorded in many other situations. Indeed, the gesture here considered did not occur on a singular stance. Instead, to my surprise, it was recorded on several other occasions.

The continuous repetition of the sign of the cross seemed to highlight a certain ritualistic nature of the gesture. On closer examination, the movement of their hands across their upper body, forming the shape of a cross, was a glaring instance of ritualistic Catholic behavior. In detail, such gesture, obviously recalling the sign of the Christian faith, was performed in every singular occasion concerning the 'appearance' of a Catholic entity: the Virgin Mary. As a matter of fact, the Clodian lagoon presents more than one instance of concrete representations of the Virgin, e.g. statues. As they encountered representations of the Lady while cruising the surroundings, my interlocutors paid respect to them. Although it seemed quite redundant to question the subjects regarding their continuous crossing, given the common nature of the gesture, I asked them why they felt the need to perform it repeatedly, especially when encountering a representation of the Virgin. As *Ottavio* declared, for them, it was a way to recall the protection and the attention of the Lady:

A ze un modo per dire 'Oi, va che vago via! Tieme d'ocio.' No beh, se tratte anche de rispetto. Visto che no andemo mondo in ciesa de solito, compensemo cossì.	It's a way to say 'Hey, I'm leaving! Look after me.' No, well, it's a form of respect as well. Since we're not used to frequently enter churches, we try to compensate like this.

The movement of their hands, thus, assumed a conciliatory value, as it was perceived as a way to salute and pay respect to the Virgin, trespassing the waters she faced. When asked if they share such gesture with other people, they seemed to be cognizant of the 'universal' nature of such gesticulation, as they referred to its use by every Catholic individual. Through a comparative and transcultural perspective, the propitiatory nature of these gestures could be reconnected with the performative role of magic in the Trobriand culture analyzed by Malinowski: as the same author highlights, craftsmanship and sailing would be aided through magical rituals, thus attempting to ensure positive outcomes with ritualistic formulae and performative gestures (Malinowski 2005: 88; 304). It may be well to note, however, that the two ritualistic repetitions here compared still differ profoundly for several evident reasons, despite the similar intentions inspiring their use.

Although initially surprising, given the lesser Catholic habits initially recorded, such physical habit as a way to perform devotion should not come as a surprise. As stressed by Durkheim, sacredness can be referenced, and reverenced, through different

'modes of action', as divine forces can attach to 'words spoken and gestures made, as well as material substances' (Durkheim 1995: 202). In the Catholic tradition, these modes of action may correspond to gestures, as related above, and prayers.

3.2.2   Reciting faith: prayers

Despite witnessing devotional gestures, and despite their self-professed Catholicism, no instances of praying activity were observed through the entirety of fieldwork. As I never had the chance to record my interlocutors in the act of praying during the course of the investigation, I addressed the issue through one of the interviewing sessions, deliberately asking them whether they were accustomed to pray on other occasions. *Pacifico* has been the first to admit he is not accustomed to uttering prayers during work, nor on different occasions. Rather, he declared he prays occasionally, i.e. while attending Christmas' and Easter's masses, or, as he said, 'Ogni morte del Papa' [Once in a blue moon]. No verbal answers were granted by the captain of the trawler: while his eldest son proceeded in expressing his remarks, *Ottavio* agreed in silence, nodding with his head in sign of approval. *Ottavio*'s silence continued for the rest of the conversation, occasionally nodding, even when his other son started discussing about his experience. Taking the floor, *Spartaco* recognized his similar lack of praying activity throughout working shifts. The sailor, however, recalled a single episode, in which his life was in peril: on a nighttime fishing session, as the wind suddenly increased and waves started to rage around the boat, he feared he would fall off the boat. As he went on in his narration, he declared he 'thought' about God in that moment. A curious remark was added thereafter by the same man, stressing that God is not the figure he thinks about when feeling discomfort. Instead, he thinks about his deceased mother. Finally, *Spartaco* declared that he tends to pray, sporadically, referring to Jesus or the Virgin Mary, exclusively at home, when sadness overtakes his mind. His considerations were slightly contrasted by *Pacifico*' final remarks: he stressed he sometimes 'think' about God when he is satisfied with the daily catch and income. Being used by both sailors, the verb 'think', 'pensare', appears worthy of other considerations.

Spartaco and *Pacifico*'s peculiar, unvoiced prayers significantly differ from traditional prayers reported in the literature analyzed. Sources regarding Chioggia's

prayers' catalogue seem to report a consolidated tradition of defined, ritualistic chants. As presented in a variety of texts, Clodian fishermen would attest their faith in God, and His relatives, through a wide range of verbal ritualistic formulas. Similar maritime chants regarding Catholic Holiness are recorded by Umberto Bertuccioli, who details historical habits regarding the practice of praying, both in Chioggia and in other contexts. In particular, Bertuccioli reports a variety of oral prayers, relating that 'Almeno sino ai primi anni del secolo scorso, era ferma e fedele la tradizione navale alla preghiera e si pregava a bordo dei velieri adriatici' (Bertuccioli 1956: 20). Among the others, Bertuccioli highlights the Clodian tradition as one of the most important, considering the considerable corpus of texts reporting prayers and other formulations, mostly sea-related (Bertuccioli 1956: 28–29).

The generic term 'formulation' is here consciously used, as in another source different types of Clodian folkloric sayings, resembling less 'traditional' prayers are recorded. Gontranno Tesserin, in particular, documents a wide range of Clodian ritualistic formulas, cataloguing 'proper' prayers (Tesserin 1976: Ch. 1–2), lullabies (Tesserin 1976: Ch. 3) and other types of chants (Tesserin 1976: Ch. 5). In the first chapters of his text, the author reports several types of prayers, addressing the religious connotation of diverse verbal recitations. These same prayers, however, are subsequently integrated, within the same chapter, with other types of texts that resemble magical ritualistic formulas. These same formulas evidently invoked the assistance of Catholic entities, mostly for concrete purposes, e.g. to heal deathly bites from venomous fish (Tesserin 1976: 50), to avoid sea-storms, or to enchant dogs (Tesserin 1976: 52).

Given the different nature of the instances presented above, it would seem different variations of prayers could still be perceived as proper ritualistic invocations, especially in local contexts. The cases presented would confirm that conceiving prayers as fixed formulas of traditions would imply to wrongfully assume that praying would coincide with repeating fixed and standardized texts, e.g. the *Ave Maria*. Traditionally, Christians might perceive the act of praying as a pronounced recitation of fixed formulas, or by verbally referring to God, addressing directly their sins. As reality reveals, however, prayers, when intended as invocations directed towards God, should not necessarily coincide with the idea of voiced standard ritualistic formulas. Besides, Scarpi highlights that the concept of prayer, similarly to other cultural-religious

variables, might significantly differ from one context to the another, quoting the Italian Catholic *Padre Nostro* and the Indian Vedas as declaratory instances (Scarpi 2010: 32). Following this line of reasoning, to state that *Ottavio* and his sons are not accustomed to praying would constitute an unjustified remark. Indeed, despite the lack of quotidian explicit oral praying, these same men still appear to perform actual devotional acts towards Catholic divine entities, although not verbally. Instead, deities would be invoked and addressed through mental thoughts and physical acts, i.e. the gestures previously reported. The most important tradition relating devotees to Catholic entities, however, does not involve prayers nor gestures; the most evident custom concerning Clodian devotedness concerns concrete representations.

3.2.3 Visualizing saintliness: symbols

As soon as humankind conceived the existence of divine entities, a considerable number of religious cults attempted to visually represent the entities worshipped. The same attitude can be revised in some recent Catholic 'traditions': paintings, statues, descriptions and holy cards are clear instances of religious representation of the Christian Holiness. A similar attitude can be revised while analyzing the Clodian culture. Similarly to Tiozzo, Alberto Naccari addresses the visual representations of sacred entities diffused through the environments of Chioggia (Naccari 2004: 11). Listing different instances, the author addresses the typical Clodian customs of impressing Holy figures, i.e. local saints, angels, the Son of God and the Virgin, through a variety of techniques, on different types of concrete material. In detail, the same local expert focuses on the custom of decorating the traditional fishing boat, the *bragozzo*, with sacred imagery. Such custom, according to the author, had a specific function:

> Nella barca l'immagine sacra svolgeva la funzione non di semplice ornamento, ma quasi di elemento strutturale a cui si ricorreva quando le forze della natura superavano quelle dell'uomo e ad esso non rimaneva altro che affidarsi all'elemento sovrannaturale, divino (Naccari 1995: 31–32).

Similar considerations are reported by Mario Marzari. The same writer particularly describes the same painting process, consisting in coating the hull of the boats with pitch-black paint, subsequently depicting religious imagery on both sides of the boats themselves. Marzari, in particular, describes a variety of sacred imagery reported on the wooden boats, listing, among the others, the aforementioned angels, saints, Christ and

Mary, that were usually accompanied by biblical quotes as well (Marzari 1982: 95; 100–101).

Ottavio's boat does not display traces of painted religious imagery. The entirety of the hull, in fact, is monochromatically painted in light grey, lacking symbolic depictions of any kind. It may be well to note, however, that the absence of painted sacred imagery should not surprise: such habit appears to be connected to traditional fishing boats, thus excluding present-day fishing vessels from the 'necessity' of attracting Divine fortune through visual means. Nonetheless, relying on God and other Catholic entities appears to be tentatively achieved through other ways. Indeed, other types of visual representations depicting Holy entities were displayed by the same fishermen. As related in the previous chapter, instances of Catholic memorabilia were mentioned, e.g. a crucifix and a printed prayer, in order to stress the blasphemous character of other adjacent objects. The presence of the wooden cross depicting the martyrdom of Christ, placed on a shelf of their warehouse, initially seemed to represent a singular instance of symbolic material. As the investigation progressed, however, other samples of Catholic items were noticed. A peculiar object that seems worthy of further considerations is the aforementioned printed devotional prayer, hanged on a glass of the cabin. The card reported the following text:

> Quanto è preziosa la tua grazia, o Dio!
> Si rifugiano gli uomini all'ombra
> delle tue ali,
> si saziano dell'abbondanza della tua casa
> e li disseti al torrente delle tue delizie.
> É in te la sorgente della vita,
> alla tua luce vediamo la luce.
> Concedi la tua grazia a chi ti conosce,
> la tua giustizia ai retti di cuore.
> Lasciamoci guidare
> dall'amore di Dio per la vita.

Evidently aimed at praising God and His Divine Grace, the card is a clear instance of traditional holy printed material, a typical *santìn*, or *santino*. Another *santìn*, shaped as an hexagon star, was placed inside the same cabin, similarly hanged near electric cables, depicting an unspecified saint, holding a baby, presumably Jesus. Referring to tradition, as a way to interpret the meaning of such imagery, the *santini* observed in *Ottavio*'s trawler would seemingly perform a specific function. As a norm, through their immediate visual reference to the sacred dimension, these devotional cards served as a

mean to claim protection for the souls of the devotees (Naccari 1995: 32). The presence of sacred imagery detected during the fieldwork conducted, however, is not only confined to concrete objects placed in various places. *Pacifico* and his father *Ottavio* additionally wore religious symbols as body accessories. Most notably, the two men constantly wore a necklace, seemingly casted in gold, representing the effigy of the Virgin Mary. *Spartaco*, contrarily to his fellow sailors, did not display any type of religious imagery on him. As I previously asked them about the association between sacred and profane imagery, that did not stir any remarkable reaction, I asked them how they feel towards these objects, wondering if they functioned or influenced their lives in any way. The first to present a response to my question concerning the function of such objects was the only one who did not display any: *Spartaco.* The sailor anticipated the responses of his fellow companions: 'Guai se ti ghe li tocchi o ti ghe li cavi!' [I dare you to touch or steal those (from them)!]. *Pacifico,* seemingly upset by the foolish remark of his brother, appeared to solemnly regard these objects. Despite not declaring any peculiar type of power they could embody, while touching his necklace, he simply stated: 'Ze ben che li avemo, se ti te trovi in mare e te capite qualcossa vogio vedarte. [To *Spartaco*] Inutile che faghi el semo' [You best have them. Ask yourself what you would do without them, if you fell in the sea. Stop acting like an idiot]. *Pacifico*'s response, addressing such 'amulets', seemed to reflect suppositions that have been presented by some scholars, addressed below.

Surrounding their bodies with religious symbols, devotees would attempt to protect themselves from the adversities of life. Visual and concrete representations of the worshipped Holy entities would serve as a way to embody the entities themselves and their related concepts, a way of referring to fundamental values on which a religious system bases itself (Fabietti 2010: 411). As argued by American anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1926 – 2006), the use of religious symbols can ultimately be conceived as an attempt to emboss the morals and the world-view conceived by a culture in a recognizable, accessible object. These same cultural interpretations of the world would eventually be reflected in the respective religions (Geertz 1977: 89). Partly referencing Geertz considerations, Fabietti successfully synthesizes the pragmatic function performed by symbols, stressing their 'ordering' function of the world, as a way to assure devotees:

> Il tipo di ordine che i simboli sacri suggeriscono riguarda [...] la certezza che, nonostante il mondo si presenti sotto forma di un caotico insieme di eventi imprevedibili, dolorosi e capaci di sconvolgere l'universo morale degli esseri umani, vi è pur sempre una realtà sicura, ultima, vera e immutabile alla quale costoro possono affidarsi. In questo senso i simboli sacri sono ciò che consente alla religione di svolgere la sua duplice funzione: integrativa e protettiva (Fabietti 2010: 412).

The integrative and protective functions mentioned by Fabietti are not only addressed through symbolic objects and visual representations of the sacred. Other means, not necessarily concrete as symbols, can be used as a way to recall God's protection. Indeed, within the Catholic religious system other 'devices' can be used by devotees to ask for Godly help and protection.

3.3   *Stella Maris*

When navigating the lagoonal environment, Chioggia's canals and the rest of its enclosing waters appear to be guarded by a Catholic figure in particular: the Mother of Christ, Mary. Several representations of the Woman are situated in different locations of the Clodian environment, mostly within the whereabouts of the old town. When following the subjects of the study on land, either to observe their daily catch's sale or to join them in dive bars, I observed different representations of the Virgin, mostly present in the *calli* of Chioggia. The composition of such votive depictions varies significantly from one *calle* to the another: in some cases, the Madonna is depicted with Her hands clasped together, in the act of praying; others, for instance, represent a suffering Virgin, mourning the crucifixion of Her Son. The representations significantly vary from each other even for the material through which they were created. Some of them consist in relatively small engravings sculpted on granitic material, placed on little altars at the side of a *calle*. Others consist in simpler paintings on wood pieces, similarly hanged on walls. A third, considerable variation outlines the figure of the Virgin placed inside minute aedicule, locally known as *altarini* or *capiteli*. Naccari recalls the latter category presenting it as follows:

> Generalmente si trattava di un'immagine sacra, dipinta ad olio o a tempera su di un supporto ligneo composto da assi accostate, delimitata da una semplice cornice ed abbellita, in alcuni casi, da lavori in filo riamato. Il tutto poggiava su di una ristretta mensola, guarnita di drappi colorati, sulla quale venivano riposti lumicini perpetui (Naccari 2004: 35).

Despite minor variations, the depictions contemplated throughout fieldwork significantly share different traits. Some, regardless of the material, presented decorative additions, e.g. the rosaries and the *lumicini/lumini* [candles] referenced above by Naccari. Furthermore, some of the exempla analyzed presented a rhyming couplet, reported under the depictions, exhorting passengers to bow to the 'Great Queen'. In detail, the quote, minus some slight variations, always reported the following: 'Fermati o' Passegger / il capo inchina / dal ciel ti guarda / la Gran Regina'. A final characteristic linking different exempla of votive representations, specifically those painted on wood, is the presence of a maritime setting, depicted as the background of the scenes. As I had the chance to observe, despite their conspicuous diffusion, the *altarini*, the engravings and the wooden pictures littered in Chioggia are not the sole instances of imagery depicting the Virgin.

Wandering among the streets of Chioggia, and navigating its waters, impressive imagery outlining the Madonna was additionally observed at the southwestern end of the main Piazza, nearing one of the canals piercing the land of Chioggia, the *Perotolo*. The statue, typically named *Madonna del Sagraèto* [Madonna of the Churchyard], is part of a bigger marble group adjacent to the canal and depicts the Blessed Mother holding Her Child. A frilled, gilded dome hovers over the statue. Despite the interesting nature of the depictions presented up to this point, more peculiar representations of the Madonna figured in Chioggia. These interesting depictions, however, are not placed on land. Instead, they are situated among the waters of the lagoon itself.

As observed while following the sailors throughout research, two statues of the Virgin Mother appear in the southern area of the lagoon. Both sculptures, one significantly smaller than the other, depict the Madonna while praying. While the smaller statue is placed on an artificial pile of rocks on an unpopulated islet, the other is placed on a compound of *bricole*, mooring posts of oak piles delimiting navigable waters (Goy 1985: XV). Towering on its wooden support, the Virgin guards the western area of the lagoon, facing one of the bustling nautical routes of Chioggia. The monochromatic whiteness of the sculpture is defied by the varied color of flower wreaths adorning the *bricole*, presumably placed as an act of devotion by locals. Pier Giorgio Tiozzo describes the same marble statue reporting the following:

> Posta alla bocca di porto [...] marca il punto di contatto tra città, laguna e mare, e si trova quasi a sorvegliare il punto di accesso acqueo; viene popolarmente chiamata "Stella Maris" (Stella del Mare) o anche "Madonna del Pescatore", perché tutte le barche pescherecce ci passano vicino per rientrare in città (Mancarella and Tiozzo Gobetto 2017: 232).

Similar devotion seemed to stem from *Ottavio*, *Pacifico* and *Spartaco*: as the men encountered any exempla of votive representations, they displayed reverential attitudes by crossing themselves, as presented in the precedent paragraph.

Their reverential attitude addressed to the representation of the Virgin, paired with the necklaces depicting Her effigy described above, certainly seemed to denote a particular consideration of the Mother of Jesus on their behalf. In order to further investigate said aspect of their religiosity, I questioned them regarding the Marian imagery present within the Clodian environment, specifically asking for the motivation behind their glaring reverential attitude. Fortunately, the fishermen openly shared their feelings for the Virgin. While it appears important to deem the term 'feeling' as remarkable, as their considerations seemed to be connoted with actual caring for the Virgin, it seems similarly important to stress that the three fishermen appeared to be particularly interested in presenting the bond they share as a community. Indeed, while they previously referred to their individualistic experiences and ideas, they referred now more to a social sense of identity. *Ottavio*'s considerations serve as elucidatory remarks:

A qualche santo bisogna che se affidemo [ride]. A parte i schersi, ti sa anca ti che qua semo pi ligai a certe robe rispetto che ad altre. No me pare che semo gli unici a comportarse cossì, ansi a Ciosa ze pi importante la Madona che el Signore. Dopo no so, magari su che me sbagio ma faghe caso che La ze pi presente, sia de persona che de storia. Baste che ti pensi a la Madona là... quela de Marina, e ti capissi tutto.	We have to rely on one Saint at least [laughs]. Jokes aside, you know we value some things more than others. I don't think we're the only ones behaving so. Actually, the Madonna is more important than the Lord here in Chioggia. Besides, I may be wrong, but take a look at Her presence, Her physical and historical influences. Think about the Madonna of... the one in Marina. You got the idea.

As here reported, *Ottavio*'s words crowned the Madonna as a more present entity, since Her importance in Chioggia would presumably be bigger than God's. Concretely, *Ottavio*'s remarks would seem to actually be proven by the Virgin's factual 'appearances'. Her presence would seem to be guaranteed through the aforementioned necklaces wore by fishermen, as well as through the several representations scattered in

both land and sea. Besides, the influence exerted by the Virgin over the Clodian religiosity appears to be referenced in a multitude of literary sources addressing the matter. In fact, a similar devotion appears to be revealed by Naccari's considerations regarding a conspicuous variety of sacred imagery depicting the same Woman. Naccari quotes, among the others, the Marian altars presented above (Naccari 2004: 22), associating them to the aforementioned *santini* (Naccari 2004: 11), the *tolèle* (Naccari 2004: 36–39) and the visual imagery depicted on traditional boats (Naccari 2004: 40). Similar assumptions are presented by Pier Giorgio Tiozzo, who lists the aforementioned devotional Marian shrines of the lagoon as an instance of the religiosity of Chioggia (Boscolo and Perini 2002: 98). In particular, the statues, *tolèle*, and all of the other representations depicting the Virgin, sometimes with Her Son, have been catalogued and numbered by Tiozzo himself. As the same author reveals, the corpus of sculpted Marian imagery flooding Chioggia and its surroundings would consist of 397 exempla (Mancarella and Tiozzo Gobetto 2017: 304–307).

It seems redundant to state that the Virgin is not only important in Chioggia's religiosity. The position held by the Virgin as the Mother of Christ is quite telling of her importance, and the Catholic devotion addressed to the same Woman is considerably widespread within the Christian tradition as well. Rather, it may be well to highlight that the strong interrelation between the sea and the Blessed Mother Herself is not exclusive to the Clodian cultural identity. Different Marian 'traditions' would conceive the role of the Mother as a guiding star on the way to her Son, interceding to safeguard seafarers in particular. Such considerable strand between the Virgin and the maritime tradition is documented in a variety of sources. Bertuccioli stresses the connection between the Lady and the maritime tradition, specifically referencing the reverential respect directed by fishermen to the Mother of God, by recalling the custom of singing the *Salve Regina* in military ships (Bertuccioli 1956: 22). The bond interrelating thalassic matter and the Mother of Christ would stem from ancient times, as it would additionally figure in ancient and medieval sources. One of the same appellatives of the Virgin, deriving from a Latin formula, denotes the same woman as the *Maris Stella*, the Star of the Sea. Similar appellatives can be retrieved from a considerable variety of documents: James Mearns numbers different Latin hymns dating before the early-medieval period that open with the verses 'Ave, Maris Stella, Dei' used as salutation

incipit (Mearns 1913: 14). Furthermore, it seems worth considering the origin of the epithet itself, analyzed, among the others, by Maurice Camney. While initially suggesting a scribal error by St. Jerome as a possible source that led to the arising of the term, the same scholar stresses the significant relation existing between the divine Lady and maritime realms. Indeed, despite the different interpretation on the matter, the role of Mary as a guiding star, specifically for mariners, would seem to be attested even through the similarities between Her persona and Isis, the Egyptian deity: both these divine women are traditionally associated to the sea and to stars as well. It should not come as a surprise, then, that one of the epithets used to address the Virgin is the aforementioned 'Star of the Sea' (Camney 1937: 91–92). Considering the origins of the appellative and the strand between the Virgin and the thalassic environment, despite their original association, the Catholic tradition seems to heavily rely on it. And, as demonstrated, Chioggia is no exception.

3.3.1 *Madonna della Navicella* and the *tolèle*

During the discussion of the Marian devotion in Chioggia reported above, *Ottavio* referenced the *Madona de Marina* as an exemplifying instance of the importance attributed to the Virgin by the *Ciosoti*. Presumably, the old captain referred to both the local myth that associated the Virgin with the sea, and the church built for Her. Indeed, the Mother of Christ is not only worshipped by Clodian inhabitants through objects and visual imagery such as the flags, cards, altars and statues above referenced. To honor the Virgin, buildings have been built from scratch as well. Although I was already aware of the existence of the architectural building and the myth that inspired its construction, I deceitfully declared I was not cognizant of the subject[1]. Thus, I asked my interlocutors to further elaborate their conceptions. *Ottavio*'s previous response has been followed by *Pacifico*'s remarks. Specifically, he attempted to report a summarized version of the folk tale regarding the *Madonna de Marina*:

[Mio pare] ze che a parle dela ciesa dela Madona dela Navesela, quela a Marina [...]. Quela fatta perché i dize che la sa presentao al vecio, perché	[My father]'s referring to the church dedicated to the Madona dela Navesela, the one in Marina [...]. The one built because of Her

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[1] Unfamiliarity with such matter has been declared to avoid the dismissal of this part of the discussion, as I feared that my cognition on the subject would foster fleeted considerations.

tutti gera drio farse i cassi soi[2] [ride]. Astu presente, dove che ghe ze tutti gli ex voto là? Zo, le tole sempre co la Madona, quele messe verso Vigo[3]! Ecco, quela!

apparition to that old man, since everybody minded their own business [laughs.] You know, the one with the *ex-votos*? C'mon, the panels with the Madonna, near Vigo! That's it, that's the one!

Pacifico's assertions further expanded the considerations briefly mentioned by his father regarding the *Madonna della Navicella* folk tale. In the meantime, the other interviewees affiliated with him, murmuring in agreement.

The story referenced by the fishermen belongs to the corpus of folk tales relating the sea with peculiar entities. Such mythological, or more accurately folkloristic, body of myths involving Chioggia does not refer specifically to dead men coming alive. Rather, it appears related to sacred narratives as well, as it addresses proper theological beings. The folkloristic Clodian tale of the *Madonna dela Navesela*, alternatively renamed *Madona de Marina* (Galimberti 1943: 16), serves as an elucidatory example. The protagonist of the legend is *Baldassare Zalon*, a greengrocer who lived in Clodia Minor, nowadays know as the already-mentioned Sottomarina. On June 24, 1508, following a devastating thunderstorm*, Zalon* exited his hut in order to check on his properties. Upon the calling of his name by a feminine voice, the man noticed a magisterial woman sitting on a stranded tree trunk. The lady, revealing her identity as the Mother of God, urged *Zalon* to warn the local bishop and the rest of the community: Chioggia and the *Ciosoti* would have been flooded, unless they revised themselves and returned to behave accordingly to the Catholic faith. Before leaving, the Virgin embarked on a *navesela,* a rowboat, and disclosed Her garments, revealing the body of Her deceased Son, blaming the people for His death. As requested, *Zalon* warned the bishop, who presently requested to investigate the surroundings. Followed by masses of curious devotees, the bishop witnessed the presence of both the trunk and the rowboat, with Mary standing on it. As people arrived, the rowboat slowly took off and drifted offshore. The Virgin slowly disappeared by sight (Galimberti 1943: 17).

The apparition of the Virgin, and the subsequent miracles that supposedly occurred in those years, eventually led not only to the edification of the church, but even to a renovation of the spiritual identity of the town, as related by Umberto Marcato

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[2] *Farse i cassi soi*: Clodian expression denoting carelessness, as in 'minding your own business', without caring about the consequences nor of your actions.

[3] *Vigo* serves as the northeastern end of the *Piazza*, facing the lagoon.

(1962: 16–17). The bishop of those times, Bernardino Venier da Capodistria, ruling the Church of Chioggia from 1487 to 1535 circa (Vianelli 1970: 76–108), demanded the construction of a chapel on the same place, in order to contain the trunk, later turned into a relic. The sanctuary was built by locals and consecrated in 1584 (Marcato 1962: 5). Nevertheless, following the devastating events of the nineteenth century, the temple was destroyed and rebuilt years later. The church of the *Madonna della Navicella* referenced by *Pacifico* was actually rebuilt and consecrated in 1957 (Marcato 1962: 9). Overall, the *Madona de Marina* seems to be significantly important for the *Ciosoti*, especially given Her evident connection with the sea. Tiozzo successfully summarizes the important role performed by this 'specific' Virgin in Chioggia:

> Una Madonna quindi che unisce terra e mare; il luogo dell'apparizione, dove sorge l'omonimo santuario, ha rappresentato un riferimento per i pescatori, se non altro come punto di avvistamento nel litorale. Alla Madonna di Marina molti pescatori e navigatori hanno manifestato la propria devozione e portato in parecchi casi segni di riconoscenza per qualche scampato pericolo, quegli ex-voto costituiti da rappresentazioni pittoriche sul legno, chiamate *tolèle*, che vengono considerate una delle più significative vestigia della pietà popolare (Boscolo and Perini 2002: 98).

Tiozzo's reasoning would appear worthy of consideration not only for the reference to the Madonna, as he mentions another typical Clodian custom connected to Her: the *tolèle*. These same objects consist in devotional paintings traditionally depicting dramatic scenes, painted by locals as a way to call for the protection of either the Virgin or Christ. Both entities are usually depicted in the upper left corner of the paintings themselves, the main imagery usually representing sea storms and fishing-related scenes. The panels, depicted in wooden panels, were painted as a way to make a vow in order to receive Divine assistance, hence the term *ex-voto,* literally 'from the vow made', derived from the Latin formula *ex voto suscepto*. As exemplified by Padoan, these devotional objects were created to demonstrate 'tutta la riconoscenza del devoto committente per l'intervento del sovrannaturale' (Boscolo Cucco 2011:16).

These same objects were referenced by my interlocutors as well: as reported above, *Pacifico*'s words referenced the ex-voto panels that were shortly after discussed. As the conversation progressed, the sailors were asked about their relationship with the Madonna and her 'temple', specifically asking some information regarding their attendance. Unexpectedly, they confessed they are not used to frequently attend masses in the aforementioned church, neither to pay visit to the Virgin. Instead, they declared to

attend mass at the Duomo, Chioggia's cathedral, located in the middle of the old town. As the same men explained, they tend to frequent the cathedral as a familiar habit, for sporadic occasions, e.g. funerals or baptisms. Although they seemed to 'guiltily' admit the lack of attendances and visits, they appeared to justify themselves by referring to their job. According to the men themselves, infrequent participation in the liturgies would be caused by their strenuous job, as it would consistently consume their time and their forces. Besides, they declared they pay respect to the Virgin every time they embark, crossing themselves as they see Her effigy, as related above. On the other hand, as I questioned them regarding the creation of personal *tolèle*, they remarked they never created one, as they consider the tradition as something belonging to the past. Accordingly, these same panels were regarded as 'robe da veci, no se fa pi ormai' [old stuff, it's no longer done nowadays] by *Spartaco*.

Despite being clearly cognizant of the traditions concerning the *tolèle* and the *Madona dela Navesela*, it would seem the fishermen probably confused two different local churches. The *tolèle* referenced by the same sailors were usually dedicated to the Virgin, and are actually present in the *Madonna della Navicella* and other local churches as well. The majority of these panels, however, are traditionally conserved within the insides of another church, dedicated to the Son of the Virgin. Christ, indeed, is regarded in Chioggia's folklore similarly to His Mother.

3.4 The Christ that came from the sea

'Ma no solo ela eh, anca so fio' [Not only Her, Her son as well]. These words were pronounced by *Pacifico*, following his remarks regarding the devotion they dedicate to the Madonna. As the same sailor later added: 'Ti sa che no ze che semo solo ligai ala Madona, qua se varde mondo anca Gesù. Tale mare tale fio [Ride], tutti do co storie e ciese dedicae' [You know that we do not worship exclusively the Madonna. We tend to highly regard Jesus as well. Like Mother like Son [Laughs], both with a folktale and a dedicated church]. In fact, the Madonna is not the only Catholic entity that is particularly worshipped by the *Ciosoti*. Similarly to His Mother, Christ has been perceived as a fundamental entity by locals, as His aid has been requested for centuries. The strand connecting the Sacred realm to the Clodian secular life is guaranteed, once again, by the sea.

As partially referenced above, the majority of the *tolèle* have been preserved in a church dedicated to Jesus: the church of San Domenico. The insides of the building were entirely covered in these wooden panels that were gifted to the Christian Messiah once the fishing campaign ended, in order to show gratitude to the Deity and to dissolve the vow. As remarked by Giorgio Aldrighetti, despite the innumerable exempla of devotional panels produces over decades, the *tolèle* preserved up to date consist of 106 copies, mostly placed inside the aforementioned church (Aldrighetti and Bellemo 2005: 56–58). The ex-votos, however, are not the most important sacred items preserved in the construction. *San Domenico* was not erected to serve as an archive for these votive offerings. It was built in order to contain a much bigger relic depicting Jesus Himself.

Inside *San Domenico*, towering over the altar stands a wooden cross, retrieved centuries ago from the sea by locals. The composition depicts a *Christus Patiens*, a typical representation of the Crucifixion in the Catholic iconography. The majestic composition, measuring 4.87 meters in height and 3.50 in width, displays the emaciated Son of God, nailed on an epsilon-shaped cross. Angelo Padoan details others elements composing the ligneous representation, consisting of a pelican that surmounts the reclined head of the Christ, and a scroll quoting the following text: *Mors XPTI (Christi) dura mons / tratur in ista figura / Jesus Nazarenus Rex / Judaeorum. Passio Domini* [This image depicts the truce death of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, King of the Judeans. The Passion of the Lord]. Byzantine letterings adorn the cloth covering the pelvic area of the body (Tosello 2006: 16; 61).

Bellemo reports that these same writings served as a major clue in dating the origin of the composition. Historians compared the writings reported on the *Cristo* with others recovered from Constantinople, signaling similarities that initially suggested a fourteenth-century origin of the crucifix. In detail, one of the terms reported in the cloth, the name *Isacio*, would further elucidate the chronological and geographical coordinates of the origin of the Cross. While on the one hand the name seems to confirm the byzantine origin of the Crucifix, on the other it would attest an even older origin: circa 1204[4]. Although some light has been shed on the origins of the Crucifix, the trajectory it had to endure to arrive to Chioggia is partly obscure. Initially, scholars argued that,

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[4] The term *Isacio* would refer to Byzantine Emperor Isaakios II Angelos, *basileus* of Constantinople from 1185 to 1195 and from 1203 to 1204.

being the *Christ* a Catholic icon of the Byzantine empire, it was probably casted aside in accordance with the iconoclast attitude of the later year: as Mahomet II conquered the Imperial city in 1453, the same piece was presumably threw in the sea along with other Catholic imagery. Recent analyses of textual documents, however, would contrast these assumptions, and prove that the Cross was transported from Constantinople to Jesi, Italy, by the will of Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II, in circa 1228. The Cross was presumably stolen, fell into the sea because of a wreck and stranded on Chioggia in the fourteenth century (Bellemo et. al. 2012: 55–61).

The uncertainty of the historical documentation regarding the origin of the Crucifix is reflected by the enigmatic nature of related folkloric legends, both concerning its creation and its discovery in the Venetian Lagoon. Angelo Padoan reports one of the stories, in which Nicodemus, a disciple of the Son of God, figures as the protagonist. Following the Crucifixion, the same man assisted fellow disciple Joseph of Arimathea in preparing the body of Christ for burial. Nicodemus attempted to depict Jesus' final moments sculpting His suffering on wood, aided by heavenly forces. The same legend refers that the aforementioned *Cristo* was transported on a ship cruising the Venetian tides. As the ship wrecked, however, the composition washed ashore on the Clodian islet occupied by Dominican friars, San Domenico islet (Tosello 2006: 62). The islet, which serves as an appendix to the old town of Chioggia, is referenced in another folk tale regarding the detection of the Cross. Former citizen Antonio Boscolo highlights the lack of records regarding the discovery of the composition, highlighting that tradition refers to its finding under the bridge connecting Chioggia's old town and the islet, according to God's will. The crucifix, hence renamed *Cristo di San Domenico*, was supposedly lodged within the Cathedral of Chioggia. Surprisingly, however, the following day it returned in its original collocation, under the same bridge, leading to the construction of a sanctuary on the San Domenico islet (Scarpa 1988: 28).

The evanescent character of both folkloric and historical tales concerning origins and travels of the *Cristo di San Domenico* is compensated by the rather evident devotion perceived by locals for the same composition. As testified in different sources, the wooden Christ has been remarkably hailed by the population. Besides, the construction of a sanctuary functional to preserve the *Cristo* serves as an elucidatory instance of the devotion perceived by the *Ciosoti*. Although a monastery was

supposedly built and occupied by the Dominican friars in 1290, before the crucifix arrived in Chioggia, religious authorities decided to built a dedicated sanctuary anew. Following the discovery of the *Cristo*, the monastery was supposedly transformed into a church through architectural modifications (Tosello 2006: 33). The relic was probably allocated in the sanctuary between 1300 and 1446 (Aldrighetti and Bellemo 2005: 8). The church went under several reconstructions, as it was damaged during the War of Chioggia in 1380, and repaired shortly theretofore. New reconstructions followed in later centuries, as the ancient temple was destroyed in 1745 and rebuilt in 1762 (Tosello 2006: 33–35).

The sacred nature attributed to the Christ that came from the sea was used additionally as a way to bless Chioggia and its lagoonal waters. In fact, from the time of its discovery, annual pompous processions were performed in the town, involving thousands of citizens that marched to hail the Christ, carefully upheld on a chariot when on land, on typical *bragozzi* during lagoonal cruises. It is worth highlighting the actual *Cristo* was not used in these occasion: a smaller copy was used instead, as a way to prevent potential damages and to preserve the original (Tosello 2006: 68). Nonetheless, the original *Cristo di San Domenico* was used in seven circumstances, listed by Angelo Padoan. Peculiar are those occurred on June 13, 1926, and September 22, 1946, as the original *Cristo* was embarked on a boat, to liturgically bless the sea (Tosello 2006: 68–72). The relation with the sea is further referenced in the collocation of the Christ itself, as the grandiose simulacrum is placed on the main altar of the church, surmounted by an inscription quoting Psalms 77, 20: In Mari Via Tua / Et semitae in acquis multis / Et vestigial tua / Non cognoscetur [Your way was through the sea, your path through the great waters; yet your footprints were unseen] (Tosello 2006: 43). Padoan further addresses the devotion felt by locals by directly referencing its connection with seafarers:

> Tale sacra Immagine ha suscitato, in ogni tempo, un culto vivissimo e una devozione specialissima da parte del popolo chioggiotto, in particolare dalla gente del mare che ne ha sempre invocata la protezione nei momenti di maggior pericolo (Tosello 2006: 84).

The profound reverential attitude mentioned in the passage reported above appears to be perceived by my interlocutors as well. Although Christ was briefly referenced exclusively by *Pacifico* through the interview concerning their faith towards the

Madonna, I wanted to go deeper and to understand more regarding the fishermen's relation with the Son of God. In the final interview I conducted with my interlocutors, I asked them how they tend to relate with Christ Himself, and how they regard Him. The responses were similar to the ones concerning the Virgin, as the same men declared to regard the Son with the same respect due to His Mother. Some differences between the two Entities, however, have been highlighted by the men themselves. In particular, their 'physical' presence has been addressed. As their words seemed to reveal, the main difference differentiating Christ from the Virgin would be caused by the minor representations of the former. Indeed, concrete acts of worshipping the Madonna were recorded during the investigation, given the several crossings performed by the men as they encountered Her depictions; the same, however, cannot be said for the Son, as His representations seemed to be much less. Although some instances of symbolic representations of Christ were present in the *calli*, these seemed not to be present in the sea. As *Ottavio* remarked: 'Ela la vedemo sempre, Elo un fia de manco. Però se ghe lo avessimo davanti faressimo le stesse robe eh' [She's always right there in front of us, He still is, but to a lower extent. However, we would act in the same way if He was before us]. Overall, their responses actually seemed to reflect the lack of data concerning their worshipping of Christ. Still, their words seemed to indicate a similar reverential attitude, equally addressing Christ and the Virgin. It seems worth reminding, however, that the two out of the three men wear the aforementioned necklaces representing the Virgin, instead of Her Son. As I eventually referred to their 'choice' to wear Marian imagery, *Ottavio* and *Pacifico* dismissed the question, relating that their personal choice was not meant to prefer one of the two entities in spite of the other. Eventually, a remark has been added by *Spartaco*: 'Tanto alla fine ti va in ciesa e ti li ha tutti là, ze la stessa roba. Per carità[5], ti vedi che qua se ze pi per la Madonna, ma alla fine Mare, Pare, Fio, fa tutto parte de tutto' [In the end, you go to a church and you can pray all of them, it's the same. I mean, you know here the Madonna is more important, but still, Mother, Father, Son, everything's part of the same stuff]. Although *Spartaco'* remarks were not further tackled, he indirectly seemed to refer to the 'Omni-comprehensive' nature of Catholic holiness, that is, deriving from God. Nonetheless,

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[5] 'Per carità', in *Chioggiotto*, can convey different meanings, depending on the pitch and contextual use, e.g. disapproval, approval, admission.

these remarks served as a way to introduce other reasoning, and to question another aspect of the Clodian religiosity, that eventually served as a way to accord both the sacred and profane aspects observed.

The most interesting facts related by the same fishermen, indeed, regarded neither the Mother nor the Son, but the Father. God Himself was referenced in detail, and their relationship with the Deity was tackled more in depth, in this same final interview.

3.5   A cry for help

Throughout the interviews concerning sacredness conducted with the Clodian fishermen, once the ethnography ended and some of their own perceptions concerning their lives were already elucidated, I attempted to understand more in depth their own perception of the Clodian religiosity. By the beginning of the interview, the inquiries I proposed were concerned with their own direct and personal relationship with God Himself. Specifically, I questioned them regarding their consideration of God, i.e. whether they positively evaluated their relationship with Him, or whether they would want more from God. Pondering moments halted the conversation. Words, however, shortly started to flow from their mouths. *Spartaco*, *Ottavio* and *Pacifico* seemed to regard Mary and Jesus as entities more concerned with their lives, referencing, once again, their physical and symbolic representations scattered throughout their environments as a reason to justify their major consideration for them:

Pacifico: Dizemo che lori do ti li vedi sempre. [Maria] ti la ha là, ti ghe parli se ti vuoi, se ti te senti cagao ad esempio. So Fio istesso, ti lo vedi, vogio dire, a ze là che a te varde, no ze la stessa roba co el Signore, che no ti sa manco se a te senta.

Pacifico: Let's just say you can constantly see them: [Mary] is there, you can talk to her if you feel like to, if you feel fucked, for example. Her Son too, you can see Him, I mean, he's right there in front of you. It's not the same with the Lord, you don't even know if He's there listening to you.

Spartaco: Vabè savemo che ze diverso co [Dio], alla fine no ti puoi pretendere che a se veda se no se puole proprio-

Spartaco: C'mon we know He's different, you can't pretend to see Him if that's not even possible-

Ottavio: E ho capio, però quante volte ze che ti ciami ti ciami e no te risponde nissun co niente de

Ottavio: I get it, but still, how many times you call for help again and again, and no one answers, nothing

concreto? Almanco lori anche che no i te caga ti li puoi vedare, te darà sto senso de rassicusasion.

comes. Even if they [Jesus and Mary] don't give a fuck about you, at least you can still see them. It gives you a sort of reassurance.

Pacifico: [...] Sì ecco, no ze nianca el problema de ascolto, ze che no ti sa su cossa che ti te affidi.

Pacifico: [...] That's the problem: not about listening, you don't know on who you are relying on.

The considerations reported above seemed to indicate a peculiar and intricate relationship with God. As *Ottavio* seemed to highlight, God is considered as more absent than other entities. His remarks were shared by *Pacifico*, stressing they perceive God as something mysterious given the lack of His representations, while *Spartaco* seemed to almost defend Him, as His presence would be something you cannot pretend given His evanescent form. Following these considerations, I encouraged *Ottavio* to further elaborate his ideas concerning God. The captain boldly reprised his considerations reconnecting to his own pleas addressed to the Entity:

Sastu quante volte che ho chiesto aiuto? Ma credame, no solo per el lavoro: per mia mugiere, per tutto, eppure niente. Chiedaghe anca a altri, no penso che i te dirave robe mondo diverse dale mie. Adesso mi no vogio mettarmelo contro, ma ghe sarà dei motivi se qua se varde pi lori dò [Maria e Gesù] pittosto che Elo [...]. Saremo noialtri semi, saremo noialtri che pretendemo massa.

Do you know how many times I asked for help? Trust me, not only for my job: for my wife, for anything. Still, nothing. Ask to the others, I don't think their ideas would differ much from mine. Now, I don't want to oppose Him, but there probably are some reasons why those two [Mary and Jesus] are more regarded than Him. Perhaps we're the delusional ones pretending too much.

Ottavio's remarks, addressing the supposed 'absence' of God from their secular lives, seemed to present negative connotations. Although his declarations seemed not to denote a defiant attitude towards God, they seemingly conferred an idea of abandonment, sounding more as a cry for help and attention.

It may be well to note that these same considerations may be tied with the conspicuous presence of blasphemous remarks witnessed during fieldwork. As previously related, *Ottavio*, *Pacifico* and *Spartaco* initially appeared to directly attack God through their profanities, conferring the idea of a typical literary Romantic interaction, in which man stands against nature and its Creator. Under these circumstances, however, a mere 'man vs. God' interpretation of what has been observed and listened would be misleading. Besides, the same fishermen declared their intention

not to mock God, nor to test His powers, through their verbal profanities. From a rational point of view, blaspheming God's name, then, would represent an illogical behavior. Thus, a possible, plausible interpretation of such peculiar relationship could be conveyed through a simple comparison, typically relating God to a fatherly figure, and the fishermen to His sons. Metaphorically, crying, scouting and misbehaving to pursue something, *Ottavio* and the rest of the crew would attempt to attract the attention of their Father. The literature previously considered would seem to support the suggestion here tentatively presented:

> La bestemmia è [...] anche un appello disperato ad un padre ideale, ma tragicamente assente. Forse anche un fulmine dal cielo che incenerisce il bestemmiatore sarebbe più confortante di questa assenza sprezzante. Il valore catartico e liberatorio della bestemmia, della ribellione dell'uomo contro il volere degli dei, è perciò momentaneo e illusorio, poiché quasi sempre il bestemmiatore, e questo non dobbiamo mai scordarlo, è sostanzialmente un credente (Cordela 2009: 31).

The will to obtain more consideration from God was seemingly confirmed by the last question concerning such issue, as I asked to my interlocutors whether they would like to change some aspects of their relationship with God, referring to either giving more to God or receiving more from Him. As *Ottavio* concluded: 'Noialtri semo qua, no ze che no volemo averghene niente a che fare. Bià vedare se Elo se degne, però' [We're (waiting) here, it's not like we don't want to deal with Him. Still, it's up to Him].

3.6   Asking for conclusions

By the end of the fieldwork conducted and by the time of the final interview, an evident discrepancy between the self-perception of the fishermen as devout Catholics and their factual multi-leveled behavior was eventually unearthed. As already presented and reiterated, their religious identity, drawing on both sacred and profane dimensions, would seem to present a contrasting clash within its own core. The sacred reverential attitude reserved to Catholic entities would seemingly conflict with the instances of profane behavior recorded, i.e. blasphemies and sinful behavior. Furthermore, other elements could be perceived as slightly defiant of tradition, in a purist Christianly perspective, such as *Pacifico*'s own irreverent attitude and use of colloquial and vulgar terms when referring to sacred entities, e.g. the previously reported 'tale mare, tale fio', '[Maria] ti la ha là [...] se ti te senti cagao'. Notwithstanding these elements, these same

men declared to believe in God, to respect tradition and to behave accordingly to the Law, prior to research. And indeed, devotion and sacredness are evidently present in their lives. Still, the simultaneous presence of both attitudes would reveal an apparently oxymoronic relationship. A possible solution to untie and understand such intricate religiosity would imply to end everything how it all started, coming full circle: asking directly to the subjects of the investigation. In fact, presenting some conclusions without considering the point of views of those living this life and breathing such culture would be an anthropological error. Thus, I asked for conclusions to the members of the crew.

Referencing their untraditional habits recorded through fieldwork, I asked how they conceived their own beliefs, and how these conciliated with the profane respects of their secular lives. Specifically, acknowledging their profane demeanors, I even asked whether they still consider themselves to pay the due respect accordingly to the tradition and if they were satisfied with their own behavior as Catholic Christians. Evidently intrigued by the questions, my interlocutors started to refer, once again, to their own job, relating it to their prayers and tracing a comparison with others' behavior.

Spartaco: No saremo i pi santi, ma no credere che sia mondo diverso qua nei dintorni.

Spartaco: We surely are not the holiest of all people, but it's pretty much the same for everyone.

Ottavio: Ti me lassi n'attimo in balòn.

Ottavio: You weirded me out for a moment.

Spartaco: Sì anca mi ghe su restao.

Spartaco: Yeah, me too.

Ottavio: [...] Cassaremo qualche biastema ma cossa vuostu che sia. No ze che copemo o massemo. Ciapa quale pugno ogni tanto ghe lo avemo anca dao, tempo indrio… Però no me pare che se comportemo male, capissistu?

Ottavio: [...] We tend to spit out a bunch of blasphemies, but that's not much of a deal. It's not like we kill or murder people. Perhaps we threw some punches around, a long time ago… But I don't think we're actually misbehaving, you get me?

Spartaco: Gnanca ben se ze per questo, però effettivamente no ghe ne femo da risciare la scomunica.

Spartaco: We don't behave appropriately neither. But still, not to the point of risking a ban.

Pacifico: No andaremo in ciesa tutti i dì, ciapa. Andaremo na volta ogni sie mesi, ma baste no comportarse

Pacifico: Alright, we don't attend mass every day. We probably attend it once every six months, but what's

come chei quattro ludrassi[6] che ogni dì fa baruffe per strada. Ghe ze zente che spacce, che se cope, che fa malani, e mi penso de essare anca massa megio de lori. No penso proprio che [Dio] ne castiga per quattro biasteme e dò capele che femo ogni tanto.

important is to avoid misbehaving as those 'ludrassi', brawling everyday on the streets. People selling drugs, killing, messing with others, and I know I'm better than those people. I don't think [God] will punish us for some blasphemes and a couple of mistakes every now and then.

Ottavio: [...] Che po', quelo che femo noialtri lo fa tutti, no ze che semo gli unici. Ti sa che qua a Ciosa se va avanti a biasteme.

Ottavio: [...] Actually, everyone does what we do, it's not like we're the only ones. You know here in Chioggia people live by profanities.

Finally, I asked *Ottavio* and his sons if they perceived their behavior as potentially dangerous for their moral and Catholic integrity; in short, I asked them if they conceived themselves as 'good' Catholics. The answer that followed was hesitant, but the men confidently answered affirmatively. A final remark by *Pacifico* addressed tradition, as he declared: 'No femo niente de cossì scandaloso [...] semo anca massa in linea co la tradission' [We do nothing exceedingly scandalous [...] we follow closely tradition].

It may be well to highlight the use of the term tradition reported in the remark above. *Pacifico* did not explicitly refer either to the Catholic or the Clodian traditions. Nonetheless, he still referred to tradition. Thus, from an external perspective, his remark could assume an ambivalent value: while on the one hand the men certainly tended to follow different, although not all, aspects of the Clodian tradition, on the other, they seemingly 'disrespected' the Christian one, living according to a personalized idea of Catholicism. Indeed, despite some minor differences that could be influenced by their personal life experiences, *Ottavio*, *Pacifico* and *Spartaco*'s religiosity appears to be highly influenced by elements of the Clodian culture. Literary texts concerning Chioggia's religiosity address the peculiarity of Chioggia's identity, stressing the significant role played by some elements in particular. Among the others, local scholars emphasize the heavy reliance on the Catholic visual representations, presented above, and the personal reinterpretations of standard Catholicism itself, according to the peculiar, and rough, maritime customs that permeated and still permeate the lives of the locals. The secular difficulties given by the perilous job conditions that formed

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[6] *Ludrassi*, pejorative for *ludri*, literally 'filthy'. The term is used to indicate the lowest social category in Chioggia.

generations of *Ciosoti* could serve as an interpretative key for the profane strand as well. In these same sources, however, the profane behavior observed throughout fieldwork is not addressed.

As far as the sacredness of Chioggia is concerned, Naccari addresses the high regard of Jesus Christ and his Mother and their numerous depictions in different variants, on different supports, as observed during fieldwork, that eventually aided the religiosity of generations (Naccari 2004: 17). Furthermore, Naccari addresses the humility characterizing the conditions at the base of the Clodian religiosity:

> La gente semplice del popolo partecipava per fede alla vita liturgica della Chiesa, ma non la comprendeva appieno, con tutte quelle formule, quei canti, quelle preghiere in latino spesso recitate storpiando le parole. Aveva così ripiegato su forme "inferiori" di liturgia, semplici e spesso drammatizzate, come le Sacre Rappresentazioni, la Via Crucis, il Presepio, il Rosario. Sceglieva i "suoi" Santi e li portava nelle case, nelle barche, nei capitelli, perché nei Santi sofferenti, perseguitati, dediti a fare il bene dei bisognosi, vedeva sé stessa nelle varie avversità della vita: nelle pestilenze, nelle carestie, nelle guerre, nelle tempeste (Naccari 1995: 31).

As presented above, the *Ciosoti* reinterpreted the 'complicated' oral formulas of Christianity for much more direct and immediate forms of reverential respect. As the author further argues, these same forms, specifically the visual ones, can be interpreted as follows:

> Culturalmente si possono intendere come l'espressione di quel linguaggio visivo e parlato di una classe sociale che poca confidenza aveva con il testo scritto, come il simbolo di un sentire religioso profondamente radicato ma diverso da quello istituzionale, più "primitivo" ma non per questo meno sincero, lontano dall'ufficialità della liturgia ma capace ugualmente di appagare il bisogno del sacro, la risposta dei semplici ad un apparato, quello religioso, che non sentiva come proprio perché troppo indottrinato, e perciò loro distante (Naccari 2004: 34–35).

Similar aspects of the Clodian religiosity, e.g. the attempt to visualize holiness as much as possible, would constitute an instance of popular religiosity, that can be observed in different forms even in the rest of the European landscape (Naccari 2004: 7).

3.6.1 A drop in the ocean

In the same passage, Naccari presents popular religiosities as the results of religious syncretism between standard Catholicism and local cultural dimensions. Despite the monolithic perspective adopted by the Catholic ecclesiastic authorities, popular forms of religion tend to coexist with official and standard religiosities in some

realities, as in the case of the Clodian tradition, in form of syncretistic cults. As presented by André Droogers, syncretism would represent as a 'corrupted' version of standard religions, condemned by authorities:

> Whereas syncretistic clergy is more the exception than the rule, syncretism can be found as a normal part of popular religion, generally condemned by the representatives of official religion. Correspondingly, syncretism has often been depicted as an unconscious, implicit, and spontaneous routine, as typical of what Redfield called the little tradition of the unreflected many (Droogers 2015: 881–882 [23]).

Similar considerations have been presented by Naccari, who can be once again quoted to address the adversity perceived by the institutional clergy towards popular reinterpretations of standard religiosity:

> Accanto alla religiosità ufficiale, colta, istituzionale, gerarchica, si registra [...] la presenza di una religiosità fatta di preghiere semplici, invocazioni, sacre rappresentazioni, processioni, segni particolari di devozione, spesso velati da forme di magia, nei riguardi della quale dovette prendere posizione, per salvaguardare la propria autorità e perché non si allontanasse dall'ortodossia, il potere ecclesiastico (Naccari 2004: 7).

In addressing the issue, Naccari recalls the Second Ecumenical Vatican Council. The same council, alternatively known as Vatican II, addressed relations between Catholicism and the modern world, and was similarly concerned with fighting such instances of popular cults, with ambivalent results:

> La forte tendenza innovatrice voluta dalla Chiesa ha sortito, da un lato, una maggior spiritualizzazione della religiosità individuale, in alcune zone del nostro Paese ancora prepotentemente legata a riti di origine pagana ed a pratiche magiche, ma ha pagato questo cambiamento con l'abbandono progressivo di devozioni popolari le cui origini si perdevano nella notte dei tempi. [...] Tuttavia, alcune manifestazioni proprie della religiosità popolare erano sopravvissute al fluire dei secoli ed erano ancora ben vive nella nostra Città (Naccari 2004: 8).

As already mentioned, the Clodian religiosity can overall be as a glaringly evident instance of popular religion that eventually evolved through time, as previously discussed (Section 1.3.3). Considering my interlocutors as effective representatives of the Clodian collective identity, the society of Chioggia can be conceived as a group apparently defiant of Catholicism, in which blasphemes constitute a verb, vices are commonly 'displayed', and superstition 'affects' the minds of people. On closer inspection, however, reality discloses at the eyes of the observer. The relationship between sacred and profane should not conceived as consciously defiant of standard

Catholicism. Instead, it should be regarded as a peculiar relationship merging the Divine, the secular local components and hardship in working. Besides, the *Ciosoti* themselves, represented by my interlocutors, would seem to interpret their profane demeanors as completely 'normal'. Furthermore, when some customs are conceived to be excessively sinful, e.g. blasphemies, these are seemingly justified referring to God's lack of presence and their will not to offend Him. These consideration, that would compare religious conceptions with an interpretative key to deconstruct everyday life, would partially reflect Comba's reasoning on the matter:

> Il pensiero religioso si presenta come interpretazione del mondo con valore epistemico: il suo ruolo è quello di costruire un sistema di conoscenze e di stabilire gli strumenti attraverso cui la conoscenza può venire convalidata e giustificata. Il quadro epistemico consente all'individuo di agire all'interno di una visione del mondo, di una cosmologia condivisa con gli altri membri della comunità, attraverso la quale il mondo esterno e quello interiore assumono significato (Comba 2014: 63).

As Naccari himself anticipated in his considerations, referring to popular strands present in European contexts, Chioggia's case would not be the only one. The persistence of different elements in different contexts, that eventually influence 'standard' religiosities, and vice versa, is similarly stressed by Paolo Toschi, who highlights their importance in cultural analyses. It seems worth highlighting, however, that Toschi's stance on the matter would seem to sound very problematic: the scholar declares the importance of superstitious beliefs, while still regarding them as 'avanzi di una mentalità primitiva' (Toschi 1965: 100), thus labeling them as inferior conceptions of spirituality and religious 'otherness'. Despite the dated and questionable nature of some remarks, Toschi's imput could be deemed worthy of consideration for his regard of geographical elements in popular contexts. Quoting maritime societies as revealing instances, the scholar asserts the importance of geography in influencing cultural and religious syncretism, subsequently highlighting its important role in anthropological analyses. The same geographical variables that could have fostered the influence of some customs would supposedly concur to the maintenance of popular traditions in different Italian social environments (Toschi 1965: 96–100). Different instances of studies regarding these realms can be quoted. Alfonso Maria Di Nola's analysis on popular traditions in the Abruzzo region serves as a evident example. Following fieldwork and data analysis, the anthropologist addresses the popular religious traditions

he analyzed defining them as phenomena denoted by fragmentary and incoherent respects, typical of subaltern cultures, reprising Antonio Gramsci[7]'s ideas (Di Nola 1976: 251). To regard popular religion and culture as something exclusively belonging to 'incoherent' and 'fragmentary' subaltern realities would imply to diminish the bigger influence exerted by these same traditions. Di Nola himself seems to recognize that such definite classification should be revised, seemingly recognizing a continuum between rural traditions and hegemonic religion (Di Nola 1976: 18). Indeed, as argued by Gabriele De Rosa, popular religion should be actually conceived as mere 'official' religion but 'vissuta secondo gli umori, le convenienze, gli interessi, le abitudini, le resistenze mentali dell'ambiente storico locale' (De Rosa 1978: 7), as it can be recorded in every social class and every social context, thus revealing a 'universal' nature (Tommasini 1980: 128).

Similarly, Chioggia's religiosity here analyzed should not be regarded as exclusive to fishermen. Instead, it should be conceived as something permeating the Clodian realm, simultaneously influencing its inhabitants and being influenced by them. A mutual relation, then, that can be once again tentatively summarized through Nicola Tommasini's ideas:

> La religiosità popolare è prevalentemente affettiva, sentimentale, non sorretta abitualmente da una logica razionale. Di qui la sua complessità, i suoi paradossi, la sua tendenza a sopravvalutare le "credenze religiose", la sua resistenza al cambiamento. Contiene un profondo senso di Dio e della sua provvidenza, fino a giungere ad un certo fatalismo. Dio viene incontrato soprattutto nel culto, nei riti e nelle cose sacre, di qui la considerazione che si dà delle benedizioni, delle immagini, dei luoghi, delle candele, dell'acqua benedetta e di altri simboli. La morte conserva un profondo un profondo significato religioso; esiste un vero culto dei morti, unito alla certezza dell'aldilà (Tommasini 1980: 46).

All of these elements appear to be present in the Clodian religiosity: the cult of the dead, the importance of sacred imagery and the tendency to apparently overestimate religious, and superstitious, beliefs. The only element that would differentiate Chioggia's aqueous religiosity from Tommasini's definition is its 'fatalism' concerning God, paradoxically absent: as recorded through the observations and presented up to this point, the Clodian religious identity would not seem to heavily rely on God as an entity. Discovering contrasting elements that differentiate popular religious, however, should not come as a surprise. Paradoxes themselves, besides, are mentioned by the same author.

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[7] Antonio Gramsci (1891 – 1937), Italian politician and philosopher. Gramsci conceived a Marxist interpretation of cultural hegemony, distinguishing minor subaltern cultures from dominant ones.

Notwithstanding the considerations associating these religions, it is worth noting that readers should remember the similarities they all share. These same similarities, however, are similarly equated by the innumerable differences that certainly distinguish every popular religion from the other. Regarding popular religiosities as an unique and homogenous phenomenon, indeed, would correspond to an overgeneralization. Referring to a final, perhaps over-abused, 'aquatic' simile, every 'drop' composing this peculiar ocean, or should I say lagoon, considerably differs from the other.

Figure 5: Waves on the Diga di Chioggia, Chioggia, 2020.
Personal archive.

Conclusion

The present paper has demonstrated the presence of outwardly oxymoronic elements, i.e. sacred and profane components, constituting the religiosity of selected Clodian subjects. As hypothetically presupposed, these same elements concur to create a multi-leveled reality that characterizes a religious tradition that would be seemingly shared collectively by fishermen. In addition, some aspects of this same religiosity would apparently characterize the religious tradition of the town as a whole, as demonstrated through the evident presence of sacred symbols scattered throughout Chioggia itself. Concretely, the resulting Clodian religiosity appears to be interfaced as a form of religious syncretism that allows for the simultaneous coexistence of seemingly contrasting minor elements, e.g. legends and history, blasphemies and prayers, ghosts and God. As demonstrated, however, the incorporation of such elements in the Clodian syncretism does not seem to denote a consciously defiant attitude in local devotees. Instead, the different elements, blended with each other, appear to highlight a collective reinterpretation of 'standard' Catholicism, which would accord to their own personal and religious needs. Besides, as elucidated throughout the investigation of *Ottavio*, *Pacifico* and *Spartaco*, data gathered would testify their unwillingness to challenge the Catholic tradition. Rather, through the perspective of the ethnographed fishermen, the Clodian religiosity would be seemingly conceived as perfectly respective of Catholicism: the 'Catholically' profane elements here discussed would not be perceived as defiant of tradition at all. Instead, as declared through my interlocutors' overt remarks, the irreligious nature connoting these elements should be either curtailed or considered as perfectly respective of Catholic devotion. It seems worth noting that, in some instances, the profane nature of some of their habits has been actually recognized by social actors. In these cases, however, such demeanor is apparently 'justified' by actors themselves, since it would originate as a result of their strenuous job conditions. All things considered, this form of religiosity appears to characterize the everyday lives of local fishermen, and vice versa. Simultaneously, the same religiosity is influenced by those experiencing it as well, in a resulting osmotic mutual relationship.

In order to achieve the results mentioned above, a proper evaluation of the sources presented in the first chapter served as an effective means to present the theories and techniques adopted to plan the investigation and to conduct fieldwork. The same chapter additionally served to properly contextualize the matter considered in the following sections, briefly introducing the anthropological bond accommodating religion and sea. As presented in the same chapter, anthropological considerations on such subjects served as an introduction of the primary theme concerning the following sections, i.e. the Clodian maritime identity. The second chapter proposed generic yet functional information that effectively summarized the historical and geographical features of the enclosing lagoonal waters that eventually influenced the lives of local inhabitants. Furthermore, the same section addressed the first major component constituting the religiosity of the *Ciosoti*, i.e. the profane habits: blasphemies, Catholically sinful behavior and superstition have been examined through fieldwork observations and interviews, leading to conceptions that subsequently introduced the major subject presented in the third chapter. In particular, the final section of this paper similarly addressed the antithetical aspect of the unreligious demeanor, focusing on 'proper' religiosity regarding Catholic and Clodian devotion. Within this perspective, Clodian phenomena concerning God and heavenly creatures have been described in relation with 'traditional' Catholicism. By the end of the section, the phenomena witnessed were perceived as reinterpretations of standard Catholic religiosity, modified according to the peculiar tradition of Chioggia and the rough maritime customs that individually permeate the lives of local actors.

As intended, from a methodological perspective, the present paper deals with the prefixed subjects through an interdisciplinary approach. As partially referenced above, considerations addressing the spatial and temporal dimensions of the town has been functional for the introduction of the resulting Clodian tradition. Subsequently, the derived considerations on Chioggia's history and tradition were incorporated with the ethnographical process conducted through fieldwork. It seems worth highlighting the preponderant role here assumed by history and tradition, as through their evaluation, diachronic considerations have been merged with observational scientific findings. Historical cogitations and anthropological research are not the sole elements that have been here blended. This study merges several dimensions, applying the transversal

approach to other fields. Scientifically, anthropology has been associated with other disciplines, e.g. history of religion, maritime investigations and folklore studies. From a religious perspective, the profane dimension has been evidently merged with its antithetical opponent, the sacred realm. The resulting dichotomy between the two has been further associated with thalassic matter, in presenting the instances of 'aqueous' cults related in the first chapter. From a linguistic perspective, different and unrelated languages have been associated through linguistic translation and cultural adaptation of local concepts. Italian and English have been necessarily associated through the sources; however, Anglo-American English has additionally been used in the translation of the Clodian dialect, the *Ciosoto*, merging two linguistic dimensions that differ semantically, structurally and phonetically. Most importantly, trespassing the merely scholastic frame of reference, this paper merged my personal academic background with private distinctive interests, i.e. religion and the sea. The personal fascination with aqueous realities certainly derives from my own personal life experiences, being a citizen of Chioggia myself. As related below, this latter element should be deemed as considerably important, given its potential influence throughout the entirety of the investigation process.

It may be well to note that belonging to the same cultural realm of my interlocutors appeared to represent an ambivalent aspect in the investigation, for different reasons later presented. Nonetheless, it seems worth deconstructing a possible misconception concerning the subject of similar ethnographic inquiries. Anthropologically, the attempt to record one's same cultural realm could be perceived as useless or unnecessary. Besides, indigenous or exotic realms could be perceived as more interesting to investigate. However, a similar opinion on culture, that is considering human phenomena as interesting when culturally distant from the ethnographer, should be regarded as a dated fallacy. Studying culturally 'proximate' dimensions should be regarded as similarly interesting, scientifically useful and potentially insightful. Besides, Ugo Fabietti relates:

> Oggi gli antropologi non studiano più solo le popolazioni delle savane africane, delle isole della Polinesia, dei deserti del Medio Oriente o della foresta amazzonica. Essi studiano tanto le popolazioni urbane dei paesi extraeuropei quanto della stessa Europa [...]. Studiano le comunità di villaggio indiane e i fenomeni migratori verso l'Europa, verso gli Stati Uniti e all'interno delle stesse aree meno ricche del pianeta; i supermercati, le sette religiose, le imprese, gli ospedali, la tossicodipendenza, i conflitti etnici, la prostituzione, il

nazionalismo, il commercio di organi, la fecondazione assistita e i culti del mondo postindustriale. Come ha detto [...] Clifford Geertz, "noi antropologi abbiamo il mondo a nostra disposizione" (Fabietti 2010: 29).

Clearly, the cultural differences and similarities between ethnographer and ethnographed could exert influence on the aftermath of the ethnography, potentially comporting disparate results. Indeed, the degree of familiarity and correlation between the two components that co-construct the ethnography could respectively incite positive and negative outcomes. In the present case, my cultural persona differed from those of my interlocutors for several features, being both forged by different cultural backgrounds, e.g. a dissimilar social condition and position. However, my preexisting acquaintance with the Clodian realm certainly exerted positive influence on the results of the study. As an instance, the knowledge of the Clodian idiom commonly shared by both parties surely fostered productive aftermaths. Such shared knowledge allowed for the translation of different expressions directly from *Ciosoto* to English, as related above. In detail, linguistic rendering has been thoroughly pondered in order to convey proper translations of peculiar expressions, i.e. sayings, jokes and idiomatic expressions. As a consequence, minor shades of linguistic meaning have been properly conveyed. It seems rather superfluous to state that a similar operation would have been impeded under different circumstances: while dialects, and languages in general, can obviously be learnt, to gain the knowledge needed to understand subtle variations of idiomatic meanings would require a gargantuan amount of studies, thus considerably protracting the research period required.

Provided that being accustomed with a specific culture, and its related language, could surely grant possible positive outcomes, belonging to the same cultural realm purposefully analyzed could ambivalently incite negative outcomes as well. As previously mentioned, the ethnographer's acquaintance with the ethnographed cultural subject could foster some additional challenges. As an elucidatory example, the same cultural 'proximity' between ethnographer and ethnographed subjects could potentially lead to the underestimation, or conversely an overestimation, of some elements. In a scholastic perspective, positive and negative aftermaths are not exclusively related to the cultural acquaintance between ethnographer and ethnographed. Indeed, assets and liabilities of an ethnography could refer to a wide spectrum of elements that eventually

concur to determine the efficacy or inadequacy of the analysis itself, as discussed below.

Referring to the academic consideration that should be given to this study, the findings here presented would seem to provide significant implications for the understanding of Chioggia's cultural identity, as well as unprecedented considerations on anthropology of fishing in general. As presented in the first section of this research paper, the existing literature on Clodian religiosity is extensive and focuses particularly on the peculiarity of its tradition, emphasizing its heavy reliance on Catholic visual representations and personal reinterpretations of Catholicism. Similarly, the present dissertation reflects some of the considerations presented by these sources. Although substantial research has been conducted on such matter, however, it would seem no single study actually addresses the actual multi-compounded nature of Chioggia's religiosity. Notwithstanding their interesting and insightful imput, these studies fail to depict the multi-composition of Chioggia's religious traditions: while referencing the sacred aspect of the Clodian religiosity, they utterly seem to omit the considerable importance of its other components. As a consequence, salient features concerning the profane that should be regarded as equally important are ultimately ignored. Differently from these sources, this study fails to neglect these important aspects. By addressing both sacred and profane elements constituting the Clodian religiosity, this paper fulfills the aforementioned scientific lacuna. One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study, indeed, is the consideration of Chioggia's religious traditions in its multi-composition. The profane behavior observed throughout fieldwork, and the similarly gathered data concerning the sacred, guarantee a more comprehensive insight of Chioggia's 'complicated' religiosity. As an additional, overall result, the present paper would seem to prove the idealizations hypothesized in the introduction, meeting its proposed initial objectives. These effective answers successfully quench the scientific thirst, at least partially, referenced in the same initial section, elaborating considerate formulations that eventually resolve the preliminary theorizations.

While this study has gone some way towards enhancing the understanding of the multi-leveled nature of Chioggia's religious tradition, by merging several aspects of related, yet unconnected, studies, additional considerations could be proposed. Future studies on the current topic are therefore required to further expand the knowledge of it,

by referencing supplementary information. In particular, more prolonged investigations on the same matter are vividly recommended, as an increase in duration could potentially perfect the elaborations here presented. Indeed, the scope of this study was limited in terms of temporal extent, due to the COVID-19 pandemic that constrained the overall duration of the ethnography. Other investigations on the same cultural field are similarly recommended, as a way to integrate a view that stemmed from a Clodian inhabitant, as previously related. An even more external perspective would allow for the elaboration of additional considerations, overcoming the possible limitations of a perfectible study. In addition, further analyses are suggested in order to extend and further test the theorizations here developed, further comparing diachronically the maritime Clodian tradition and its modern adaptation. As partially suggested in some passages of this same paper, the Clodian religiosity surely has been modified and readapted through time; it would be then useful to understand to what extent, inquiring devotees' perceptions of it as well. Devotees' perception of popular traditions could be similarly analyzed through the perception of standard Catholic authorities, e.g. 'purist' priests and popes, as a means to investigate the evolution of popular religions and their perceptions. A final issue that was not addressed in this study was the extent of actors' belief in God and the other entities, both heavenly and not. A similar gap that would seem to stem from these findings, and would benefit from further research, is the extent of locals' belief, i.e. not only 'if', 'what' and 'how' they believe in otherworldly creatures, but also 'how much'. Similar qualitative investigations, however, would be prevented by the rather ambiguous nature of the cultural beliefs here analyzed. Recalling Alberto Naccari's admissions, measuring the religiosity, beliefs and sense of belonging of devotees would be pretty arduous. As the same author states:

> Sulla profondità del sentire religioso [...], non esistono strumenti di misurazione, tranne che le manifestazioni esteriori, per cui appare ancora più difficile esprimere un giudizio in merito [...]. Non rimane che una considerazione finale, scontata per quanto si voglia ma foriera di una grande verità: pur nell'ortodossia, ognuno di noi vive una propria spiritualità, strettamente connessa ai luoghi, ai tempi, alle esperienze dell'esistenza individuale, ed ha una percezione, se tale può essere definita, sempre sfumata e limitata del Divino (Naccari 2004: 156).

Some elements of human life, specifically those culturally related to personal religious conceptions and beliefs, would not be properly analyzable through a scientific perspective. No measuring devices, minus the subjects' remarks, could concretely attest

the variation or 'amount' of perceived religiosity. Thus, despite momentarily quenching the scientific thirst, more information on subjects' beliefs would be needed to establish a greater degree of accuracy on this matter. Following these suggestions, the seemingly unquenchable scientific thirst, preliminarily referenced, could be progressively satisfied, study by study, drop by drop.

Figure 6: Adriatic Mantis shrimp*, Chioggia, 2020.
Personal archive.

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Summary

Nel corso dei secoli, il mare ha costantemente presenziato nelle menti e nei cuori dell'umanità, malgrado la sua pericolosa e caotica natura, dando luogo a migliaia di resoconti marittimi che figurano all'interno di vaste letterature, immaginari collettivi e tradizioni storiche. Tuttavia, nonostante la presenza di questi stessi esempi, la conoscenza del mare appare insufficiente e incompleta, dal momento che l'uomo sembra provare una insaziabile sete di sapere legata all'ambiente talassico. Questa urgente necessità ha ispirato una moltitudine di spedizioni, le quali hanno avuto lo scopo di descrivere, esplorare e rivelare la natura caotica delle acque salmastre. Mentre la dimensione equorea è stata oggetto di primario interesse di diversi trattati letterari e resoconti scientifici, il suo legame con l'uomo non sembra essere stato esplorato in egual modo, specialmente nel campo delle scienze sociali. Le ragioni atte a giustificare una simile tendenza sarebbero da attribuire alla difficoltosa e sfuggente particolarità della dimensione acquea sopra accennata. Questa stessa difficoltà analitica, inoltre, sarebbe riflessa nelle relazioni di tipo culturale che concernono uomo e mare, dal momento che la natura senza limiti della realtà talassica sembrerebbe riflettere la complicatezza della cultura umana.

L'attività investigativa sul mare e sulla sua natura, ad ogni modo, andrebbe ciononostante incoraggiata, malgrado le complicanze sopra brevemente evidenziate. Del resto la presente tesi si prefissa un simile obiettivo: gettar luce sui collegamenti culturali che intercorrono tra uomo e mare. Avendo a che fare con le materie di stampo sociale appena introdotte, per trattare un argomento quale gli aspetti della vita umana è stato scelto un campo disciplinare che ha indagato e tuttora indaga l'*ánthropos* stesso, ovvero l'antropologia culturale. Disciplina fortemente connessa ad altri ambiti quali la storia delle religioni e la sociologia, la stessa si dimostrerebbe essere la scelta più consona per studiare l'uomo e i fenomeni culturali. L'antropologia possiede le metodologie e gli strumenti più adatti con i quali analizzare i concetti trattanti l'argomento preso in esame. Parte di questo insieme di procedure e metodologie è stato consultato prima di condurre la ricerca qui presentata. Concepire ed effettuare una ricerca antropologica senza un

significativo apporto teorico, del resto, potrebbe comportare la stesura di etnografie difettive e lacunose. Per tali ragioni, fondatori e teorici della disciplina sono stati consultati in modo preliminare: le teorie dei padri dell'antropologia, quali Bronisław Malinowski, Emile Durkheim e Clifford Geertz, sono state ponderate ai fini di poter acquisire fondamentali nozioni. Adottando un approccio critico, queste stesse teorizzazioni sono state successivamente integrate con considerazioni aggiuntive concepite da autori contemporanei, ai fini di sviluppare una solida e comprovata base scientifica.

Una mera consultazione di teorie accademiche non si dimostra sufficiente per poter compilare una analisi antropologica. Condurre ricerca di tale natura sulla base di "semplici" concezioni accademiche comporterebbe la stesura di etnografie fuorvianti e azzardate. Per valicare possibili ostacoli scientifici che potrebbero minare la progressione della ricerca, difatti, è necessario restringere, come in ogni tipo di analisi, il campo di indagine. Nel presente caso, il campo sul quale lo studio si muove non si focalizza sulla generale relazione culturale uomo-mare. Un tale oggetto di ricerca non solo avrebbe comportato la stesura di un lavoro gargantuesco, ma avrebbe anche comportato inaccuratezza scientifica. Il presente lavoro si concentra perciò su un solo specifico aspetto culturale, originatosi dalla correlazione tra mare e uomo: la religiosità. Il campo d'indagine qui preso in esame, in aggiunta, è stato ristretto focalizzando l'attenzione su una religione che caratterizza le vite e le culture di un singolo contesto. La presente tesi considera difatti precise coordinate che individuano uno specifico luogo italiano, il quale ospita una caratteristica religiosità di stampo marittimo: Chioggia.

L'area culturale clodiense viene qui analizzata ai fini di raggiungere l'obiettivo specifico di questa tesi, fornendo prove scientifiche per comprovare la domanda di ricerca alla base dello studio, ovvero comprendere se la religiosità dei pescatori chioggiotti possa essere o meno considerata una vera e propria forma di culto religioso. La domanda qui presentata trae origine da fenomeni caratterizzanti la stessa città: nonostante l'evidente legame con la sacralità cattolica, la società clodiense appare profondamente influenzata e basata su atteggiamenti profani, i quali a primo impatto sembrano sfacciatamente fronteggiare il cattolicesimo stesso. Tuttavia, nonostante la loro apparente contraddizione, entrambi questi elementi sembrerebbero concorrere alla creazione di una vera e propria religiosità, che basa la sua esistenza su legami

apparentemente ossimorici. Focalizzandosi sul peculiare nesso che correla gli abitanti di Chioggia, i *Ciosoti*, e l'ambiente lagunare, questa tesi presenta la devozione sacrale e l'atteggiamento profano clodiensi quali componenti di un'unica realtà. La relazione che scaturisce dagli elementi sopra citati non sembrerebbe essere stata ad oggi oggetto di studio. Nonostante la presenza di un considerevole corpus letterario riguardante la religiosità di Chioggia, difatti, questa stessa religione marittima sembrerebbe essere ancora offuscata da oscuri aspetti che hanno fino a ora accademicamente celato l'effettiva natura della proteiforme religiosità clodiense. Seppur decisamente interessanti e utili, questi stessi testi appaiono perciò manchevoli, in quanto non indirizzano la componente profana caratterizzante la religiosità di Chioggia, come sopra riportato.

La ricerca preliminare qui portata avanti non ha indirizzato solamente testi riguardanti tradizioni letterarie, antropologiche e religiose. Prima di iniziare una ricerca etnografica sul campo, si è optato per una aggiuntiva consultazione di testi storici e fonti che trattano direttamente la cultura clodiense, oltre a registri storici e studi riportanti dati qualitativi e quantitativi riguardo questa dimensione culturale. Risulta utile evidenziare l'importanza della comparazione qui descritta, in quanto queste stesse analisi storiche sono state sondate ai fini di confrontare i dati sul presente con le attitudini tipiche riportate sui testi. La presente ricerca, difatti, non analizza la religiosità clodiense solo da un punto di vista sincronico, ma anzi presenta alcune differenze tra presente e passato, indirizzando diacronicamente la variazione di questa stessa identità.

La ricerca letteraria è stata successivamente correlata a un lavoro di campo di stampo etnografico. Per raggiungere gli obiettivi inizialmente proposti, l'etnografia è stata condotta su tre soggetti, scelti in quanto rappresentativi di un settore sociale clodiense prettamente collegato al mare, ovvero la pesca. Il lavoro sul campo è stato utilizzato per raccogliere dati riguardanti le pratiche, le attitudini, le idee e le credenze degli attori analizzati, al fine di cogliere il loro punto di vista riguardo ai temi oggetto d'indagine. Nel dettaglio, il lavoro di campo ha fatto uso del metodo dell'osservazione partecipante, abbinato a interviste, registrazioni audio e fotografie (alcune delle quali qui riportate). Queste osservazioni multimediali sono state protratte complessivamente per un periodo di due mesi, da Aprile 2020 fino a metà giugno dello stesso anno. Sembra doveroso specificare come la ricerca sia stata relativamente influenzata dalla

corrente pandemia di COVID-19, la quale ha ridotto temporalmente il periodo di indagine a causa di restrizioni sanitarie e governative. La ristretta finestra temporale è stata tuttavia compensata da altri elementi, quali le conoscenze preesistenti della disciplina e del campo di indagine analizzato. All'interno di questa finestra temporale, le osservazioni partecipanti, condotte quasi giornalmente, consistevano nella registrazione di attività dei soggetti all'interno di diversi contesti sociali. *Ottavio*, *Spartaco* e *Pacifico*, i pescatori clodiensi che sono stati scelti prima di iniziare la ricerca, sono stati seguiti nel corso delle loro giornate: le loro spedizioni marittime, le vendite giornaliere e le loro abitudini ricreazionali sono state vissute in prima persona. Gli stessi soggetti sono stati inoltre intervistati in più riprese, sia individualmente che collettivamente. L'eventuale durata della ricerca concernente tutti gli aspetti dell'indagine, ovvero considerazioni preliminari, consultazioni letterarie, lavoro di campo e rielaborazioni finali, ha coperto un periodo temporale di otto mesi.

Per quanto concerne gli attori sociali scelti, questi stessi pescatori sono stati selezionati per la loro affinità con la già menzionata sfera marittima della società clodiense. In particolare, i pescatori incarnano i concetti ritenuti rilevanti durante la consultazione letteraria, e i fenomeni culturali manifestati tramite le loro azioni e le loro parole sono serviti a catturare una visione più profonda della religiosità di Chioggia. Una simile analisi ha inoltre permesso di indirizzare alcune componenti costituenti la cultura generale clodiense, quali ad esempio aspetti linguistici, concezioni sociali e fenomeni prettamente locali. Selezionare dei pescatori come soggetti della ricerca è stata una scelta deliberata, in quanto più influenzati dagli elementi culturali sopra riferiti rispetto ad altri attori sociali. Del resto, *Ottavio*, *Pacifico* e *Spartaco* hanno più a che fare costantemente con il mare, essendo il loro lavoro strettamente legato a esso. In aggiunta, sembra doveroso riferire come Ottavio, Pacifico e Spartaco abbiano vissuto a Chioggia per l'intera durata della loro vita, appartenendo a famiglie di consolidata eredità clodiense. Appare necessario specificare, ad ogni modo, come queste stesse considerazioni vadano ponderate con spirito critico: nonostante questi uomini incarnino per certi aspetti la tradizione clodiense, le loro identità culturali non vanno considerate come risultati asettici di passati folkloristici. Il focus primario, come in parte reiterato, deve essere rivolto alle loro reinterpretazioni e percezioni di questa stessa "tradizione". La presente ricerca provvede certamente rappresentazioni più profonde dei costumi

marittimi clodiensi, ma allo stesso tempo potrebbe risultare utile anche ai soggetti analizzati. Difatti, i pescatori qui presi in esame potrebbero raggiungere un maggiore grado di consapevolezza e conoscenza riguardo le loro vite. L'etnografia ricoprirebbe la funzione di uno specchio potenzialmente utile per raggiungere una maggiore autoconsapevolezza e cognizione del sé culturale.

Le identità dei soggetti, assieme alle ipotesi sopra riportate, vengono discusse estensivamente nello svolgimento della stessa tesi, suddiviso in tre capitoli. Partendo da riflessioni su temi generali, come la questione dell'approccio da adottare, per poi trattare argomenti progressivamente più specifici, quali l'analisi di singoli casi di religiosità marittima, i tre capitoli espongono i seguenti punti: il primo presenta una digressione sull'antropologia, fornendo indicazioni su metodo, tecniche e teorie scrutinate prima della ricerca sul campo. In riferimento ai diversi contesti potenzialmente analizzabili tramite la disciplina antropologica, il capitolo in aggiunta riprende i diversi tipi di religione che sembrerebbero presentare significative connessioni con l'elemento talassico, guidando progressivamente il lettore verso il soggetto vero e proprio della tesi: la cultura marittima clodiense. Nello specifico, per presentare la dimensione culturale qui considerata, il secondo capitolo delinea un'analisi diacronica della storia e della geografia della città, seguita da una visione sincronica, adottata per indirizzare l'attenzione verso la cultura odierna di Chioggia. Gli stereotipi, le tradizioni e le credenze collettive brevemente presentate tramite entrambe le prospettive servono a presentare un termine di paragone per analizzare le vite dei pescatori odierni. Del resto, la "tradizione", intesa come evoluzione dell'identità culturale, e la storia, fungono da importante punto di riferimento per tracciare comparazioni tra il passato e il presente clodiensi. Come anticipato, nonostante il primo aspetto venga presentato tramite le risorse letterarie, il secondo viene analizzato tramite il lavoro di campo. In seguito ad un'accurata lettura, i dati raccolti vengono in parte presentati nel secondo capitolo, indirizzando progressivamente i fenomeni concernenti la parte profana della religiosità clodiense. Il terzo e ultimo capitolo si focalizza sull'altro aspetto che costituisce la "poliedrica" religiosità clodiense. Le credenze e le tradizioni propriamente riguardanti il sacro, che caratterizzano le vite degli stessi attori sociali scelti, vengono presentate in simile modo, adottando un approccio comparativo. Considerazioni finali sulla variegata religiosità clodiense vissuta dai soggetti analizzati vengono presentate nella stessa

sezione, usando gli studi di altri antropologi come ennesimo termine di paragone, al fine di comprovare ulteriormente la veridicità di quanto esposto. Da un punto di vista espositivo, la narrazione dell'osservazione in prima persona, concernente i fenomeni osservati tramite la ricerca sul campo, si immerge e lascia alternativamente posto alle analisi storico-letterarie. Linguisticamente, l'idioma scelto per esporre la presente trattazione è un inglese di stampo angloamericano.

Le ipotesi proposte nella sezione introduttiva trovano risposta nel corpo principale della tesi, e la loro sintesi nelle conclusioni della stessa. La trattazione qui presentata dimostra difatti la presenza di elementi evidentemente ossimorici, sacri e profani, che vanno a costituire la religiosità dei pescatori di Chioggia. Come ipotizzato, questi stessi elementi concorrono nella costituzione di una composita e peculiare costruzione culturale. Il risultato scientificamente appurato sembra interfacciarsi come una forma di sincretismo religioso, il quale ammette la coesistenza di credenze e tradizioni minori apparentemente contrastanti, ovvero leggende e storia, bestemmie e preghiere, fantasmi e Dio. Come dimostrato, tuttavia, l'incorporazione di questi diversi elementi nel sincretismo definibile "clodiense" non sembra denotare un'attitudine coscientemente insolente e provocatoria della comune varietà "propriamente" cattolica. Quando considerati nel loro insieme, difatti, i diversi elementi appaiono come una reinterpretazione collettiva del cattolicesimo tradizionale. Del resto, come rilevato nel corso della investigazione su *Ottavio* ed i suoi figli *Spartaco* e *Pacifico*, i dati raccolti sembrano testimoniare la loro mancata volontà di sfidare la tradizione cattolica, in quanto il sincretismo, dal loro punto di vista, viene percepito come perfettamente in linea con altre concezioni cattoliche. Gli elementi qui presentati, che da un punto di vista "cattolico" potrebbero essere definiti profani, non sembrerebbero essere difatti percepiti come tali. Tramite le narrazioni dei soggetti stessi, la natura irreligiosa che connota questi elementi sarebbe da minimizzare e da concepire come perfettamente conforme alle altre forme di devozione cattolica. Sembra tuttavia necessario sottolineare come in alcuni casi la irreligiosità di alcune abitudini venga riconosciuta dagli stessi attori sociali, i quali tenderebbero apparentemente a "giustificare" questo tipo di atteggiamento in quanto prodotto delle loro fatiche lavorative. In generale, questa religiosità appare caratterizzare le vite giornaliere degli abitanti locali, e viceversa.

Simultaneamente, difatti, la stessa viene a sua volta influenzata da coloro che la vivono, in una relazione mutualmente osmotica.

Come ipotizzato durante la fase preliminare della ricerca, dal punto di vista metodologico, la presente trattazione considera i soggetti prefissati tramite un approccio interdisciplinare. Come già menzionato, le osservazioni riguardo le dimensioni spaziali e temporali della città sono state fatte in quanto funzionali per l'introduzione della risultante tradizione clodiense, unendo riflessioni sulla storia di Chioggia ed il lavoro di campo. É tuttavia necessario evidenziare come le considerazioni storiche e la ricerca antropologica non siano le sole realtà associate in tale istanza di ricerca. Questo studio unisce diverse dimensioni appartenenti a campi diversificati. Da un punto di vista scientifico, l'antropologia viene associata ad altre discipline, ovvero la storia delle religioni, gli studi sul mare e le ricerche su fenomeni di tipo folkloristico. Dal punto di vista religioso, la dimensione profana viene evidentemente unita al suo opposto, ovvero la dimensione sacrale. La dicotomia che risulta da tali elementi è stata ulteriormente accomunata all'ambiente talassico presentando le istanze di culti "acquei", ovvero concernenti dimensioni marittime, descritti nel primo capitolo. Linguisticamente, idiomi diversi e non correlati tra loro sono stati associati tramite traduzioni linguistiche e adattamenti culturali di concetti locali. La lingua inglese e la parlata italiana, ad esempio, sono state chiaramente relazionate tramite l'accostamento di diverse fonti. Tuttavia, la lingua angloamericana viene inoltre associata ad altre realtà linguistiche, come ad esempio nella traduzione del dialetto clodiense, il *Ciosoto*, unendo due dimensioni che differiscono dai punti di vista semantico, strutturale e fonetico. Valicando la mera dimensione scolastica, questo scritto unisce il background accademico dell'autore agli interessi privati dello stesso, ovvero la religione e il mare. Il personale interesse dedicato alle realtà equoree e religiose certamente derivano dalle esperienze personali di vita dell'autore, in quanto egli stesso un cittadino di Chioggia. Un elemento certamente importante, data l'influenza che ciò potrebbe avere esercitato nel corso della ricerca qui presentata, per le ragioni sotto riferite.

In riferimento all'importanza accademica da attribuire al presente studio, i risultati qui presentati sembrerebbero provvedere importanti implicazioni per la comprensione della diversificata identità culturale chioggiotta. Come presentato nella prima parte di questo scritto, la letteratura preesistente che indirizza la religiosità

clodiense è estensiva e si concentra sulla particolarità della sua tradizione, enfatizzando il tipico e marcato ricorso alle rappresentazioni visuali di matrice cattolica e alle reinterpretazioni personali del cattolicesimo stesso. Il presente studio rispecchia alcune delle considerazioni presentate dalle ricerche sovra menzionate. Come riferito, nonostante la sostanziosa ricerca condotta su tale soggetto, nessuno di questi studi sembrerebbe indirizzare l'effettiva variegata natura della religiosità qui analizzata. Seppur decisamente interessanti e utili per il contributo che queste analisi convogliano tramite le ricerche che ne hanno ispirato la creazione, questi studi sembrano omettere la considerevole importanza di alcune sfaccettature che compongono la religiosità clodiense, focalizzandosi esclusivamente sugli aspetti riguardanti il sacro. Di conseguenza, caratteristiche salienti che riguardano il profano risultano essere ignorate, nonostante la loro equamente degna importanza. Diversamente da queste analisi, questo studio evita di ignorare questi fondamentali aspetti, e indirizzando sia gli elementi profani che quelli sacri riempie parzialmente la lacuna individuata. Uno dei risultati più significativi di questa trattazione è, difatti, l'analisi della religiosità clodiense nella sua molteplice composizione. Gli atteggiamenti profani ripresi tramite il lavoro sul campo e i dati similmente rilevati riguardanti il sacro garantiscono una visuale più comprensiva della realtà sociale di Chioggia. Un aggiuntivo, generale risultato che questa ricerca fornisce è quindi l'asserzione della veridicità delle concezioni ipotizzate nella sezione introduttiva, che raggiunge quindi gli obiettivi prefissati.

Nonostante questo studio abbia permesso il raggiungimento di un'aggiuntiva, parziale comprensione della proteiforme religiosità clodiense, unendo diversi studi tra loro correlati, ulteriori considerazioni potrebbero essere avanzate. Futuri studi sul presente argomento sono del resto richiesti al fine di ampliare maggiormente la conoscenza riguardo i soggetti presi in esame. Nel dettaglio, si raccomandano analisi più prolungate sullo stesso soggetto, in quanto un'estensione temporale della ricerca potrebbe perfezionare le elaborazioni qui presentate. Altre analisi sullo stesso campo culturale sono similarmente incoraggiate, in modo da integrare la visione scaturita da un abitante clodiense: una prospettiva più esterna potrebbe permettere l'elaborazione di considerazioni aggiuntive, ponendo rimedio alle possibili limitazioni di una ricerca certamente perfettibile. Altre analisi vengono suggerite per poter estendere e testare maggiormente le teorizzazioni qui sviluppate, comparando ulteriormente la tradizione

clodiense e il suo adattamento moderno da un punto di vista diacronico. Come suggerito parzialmente in alcuni passaggi di questo scritto, la religiosità clodiense si è sicuramente riadattata e modificata attraverso il tempo, e sarebbe perciò utile capire fino a che punto, interrogando i devoti circa la loro percezione della stessa. La considerazione delle "tradizioni" popolari potrebbe essere analizzata similarmente anche dal punto di vista delle autorità ecclesiastiche appartenenti al cosiddetto cattolicesimo "standard", quali sacerdoti e papi "puristi", al fine di poter investigare l'evoluzione delle religioni popolari e le idee che queste scaturiscono in diversi gruppi sociali. Un ultimo fattore non indirizzato in questo studio è l'entità della credenza in Dio e in altri esseri, paradisiaci o meno, percepita dagli attori. Una tale mancanza, che sembrerebbe emergere da questi risultati e che beneficerebbe di ulteriore ricerca, sarebbe utile non solo per comprendere "se" e "come" gli abitanti di Chioggia si relazionino con creature appartenenti ad altre dimensioni, ma anche "quanto" certe credenze siano radicate in loro.