Anthropology of Europe redux: Deja Vu in the South

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Deja-vu

Recent events in Southern Europe generate something of a feeling of deja-vu for anthropologists who have worked in the region for a long time. The politics of nationalist separatism, and the dynamics of patronage, clientelism and corruption were once central to Europeanist – or Mediterraneanist – concerns, but have to a large extent been replaced by issues of migration, multiculturalism and neo-nationalist populism. However, the recent moves for independence in Catalunya, and the assassination of journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia in Malta have brought separatism and corruption back into the frame in a dramatic manner. I will focus on the latter, in tribute both to Ina-Marie Greverus and Daphne Caruana Galizia.

Mobility and Territoriality

In a 2003 special issue of this journal, Ina Maria Greverus elaborated on themes of mobility and territoriality (Greverus 2003: 35). Written just prior to the 2004 expansion of the EU, the focus on mobility and territoriality was fitting. The European Union was established in part as a preventative response to a particular type of nationalistic territoriality, and had mobility enshrined in its central freedoms of movement for goods, services, capital and labour.

These mobilities were circumscribed by regulation, to ensure a level playing-field within the single market, and to prevent a re-territorialisation of economic

interests. In many accession states, regulation also required reform, to harmonise the market, and many Europeans (particularly before their countries joined) saw the EU as a mechanism for reforming political process. In Malta, for example, there was an expectation – somewhat ambivalently anticipated – that Europeanisation would erode and eventually eradicate endemic forms of political patronage (Mitchell 2002).

The Eclipse of Patronage

Once central to the ethnographic study of the cultures of (particularly Southern) Europe, patronage and clientelism rather disappeared from the Anthropology of Europe in the 1990s, following the shift in focus from an earlier Mediterraneanism (Goddard 1994; Herzfeld 1987). Central to Mediterraneanist anthropology was the invocation of an honour-based and familial moral system, combined with a highly personalized system of politics. *Honour, Family and Patronage* was not only the title of one of the classic Mediterranist ethnographies (Campbell 1964), but also a motto for the demarcation of the Mediterranean culture area. Mediterranean peoples were therefore characterized by a kind of 'touchy individualism' (Sant Cassia 1991: 8) and 'traditional' attitude towards gender; and a sociality that favoured 'friends of friends' (Boissevain 1974) over more abstract and universal principles of meritocracy or bureaucracy.

Taken to task for its ethnocentric and Orientalist overtones (Herzfeld 1987), and in keeping with the early eighties' Mediterranean enlargement of the EU, Mediterraneanist anthropology was replaced by a new anthropology of (Southern) Europe. This was a redemptive move for anthropologists, as in many

ways was the Europeanisation process itself, for Europeans. Led by the European

Commission, Shore (2000) has demonstrated the extent to which EU

enlargement and consolidation was not only a technical or economic process, but

also one of creating modern European citizens with universal values of justice,

freedom and meritocracy, from the range of 'traditional' or 'pre-European' (read

Mediterranean) peoples of the continent.

With the move away from Mediterraneanism also came a move away from

treating forms of anti-bureaucratic political practice as evidence of an

indigenous 'culture' of patronage, or of a deficiency characteristic of 'traditional'

or 'transitional' societies (Zerilli 2005). Rather, 'corruption' was treated

ethnographically – as an indigenous category or narrative mobilized strategically

by situated social actors.

Malta

This is, broadly speaking, how I approached the subject when writing about

Maltese perceptions of political process in the 1990s (Mitchell 2002). I argued

that Maltese strategically mobilized stereotypes about patronage, clientelism and

corruption, to make political claims and justify political positions. Malta had

submitted its application to join the EU in 1990, three years after an incoming

Nationalist Party government replaced the 16-year government of the socialist

Malta Labour Party. The Nationalists are Christian democratic in their leaning,

with a strong historical sense of Malta's links to Europe, particularly through

Italy. This contrasted in the 1990s with the Labour Party's Euroscepticism, and –

interestingly given its implications for anthropology, Mediterraneanism (the

promotion and invocation of a distinct and discrete Mediterranean history and identity, as separate from Europe).

Doing fieldwork in the mid 1990s in Valletta, Malta's capital, among mostly Nationalist supporters, I observed an overt and explicit support for EU accession among my research participants, which was nevertheless tempered by anxieties about what the future might bring. Maltese politics was dominated by narratives of clientelism, or *klientelizmu,* in which politicians garnered support – and votes – in return for help of various sorts – government employment; housing or housing renovation; or turning a blind eye to irregular or illegal building. It had also come to be dominated by an anti-*klientelizmu,* and anti-corruption (*korruzjoni*) narrative, which in turn was a narrative of Europeanization. To be properly European, which was certainly an ambition for my interlocutors, meant moving away from *klientelizmu* and introducing a more bureaucratic rationality to the distribution of government jobs and housing. It also meant eradicating *korruzjoni* – the manipulation of public resources, including the resource of office itself, for personal gain. A 1992 survey by Gallup found that 65.8 per cent of those Maltese asked believed such corruption to be widespread. However, die-hard Nationalists and Europeanists though they were, my Valletta friends were ambivalent – a position that stemmed from their vision of the structure of Maltese society. This pitted a relatively powerless and dependent populace – *il-poplu* – against a powerful and well-connected 'polite' elite – *il-puliti,* sometimes also referred to as 'the clique' or *il-klikka.* With this view in place, there was concern that eradicating *klientelizmu* would simply rid *il-poplu* of the one reliable means of accessing resources, raising the draw-bridge, as it were.

Similarly, there was doubt as to whether it would ever be possible to eradicate corruption. History was always on the side of *il-puliti,* or 'those with moustaches', as which they were also referred.

Following a narrowly-won Referendum in 2003 and subsequent Nationalist electoral victory in the same year, Malta acceded to the EU in 2004. This followed what the European Commission (1993) referred to as a 'root and branch overhaul' of Malta's 'entire regulatory framework', to bring it in line with the rest of the EU. Despite this reform, though, eleven years after accession the internal critique of Maltese politics still revolved around the issue of *klientelismu.* In 2015 a debate ensued between the opposition Nationalist leadership and members of the Labour government about *klientelismu.* Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Nationalists maintained the stance which valued Europeanisation and modernization. Although commentators pointed out that the Nationalists were no less clientelistic than Labour, they nevertheless proposed creating new institutions – a new ministry – that would make clientelistic practice unnecessary for the populace, and impossible for their leaders. Labour, for their part, returned to their Mediterraneanism, and with it also to the earlier Mediterraneanism of anthropology. As Michael Falzon observed on the *Malta Today* blogspot: 'A Labour-leaning political observer pooh-poohed the idea insisting that clientelism has been the main characteristic of political campaigning for the last 60-70 years and this culture is here to stay.' (http://www.maltatoday.com.mt/comment/blogs/57853/the_way_to_hell)

Writing about identity in the 1990s, Richard Handler (1994) pointed to a dilemma in which just at the time when its theorization among anthropologists pointed towards the constructed and contingent nature of identity, social groups around the world were increasingly themselves appealing to an essentialist account of identity, as a political strategy. Maltese accounts of their own entrenched 'culture of clientelism' present a parallel – or obverse dilemma. Whilst it is (perhaps politically) correct for anthropologists to avoid the essentialization of others' political cultures as clientelistic or corrupt, how are we to respond when members of those cultures themselves indulge in such essentialization? Moreover, how are we to respond when this essentialization leads to assassination?

Daphne Caruana Galizia

I knew Daphne Caruana Galizia in the 1990s, as a regular columnist for the Maltese national press and one of a group of mature students studying anthropology and archaeology at the University of Malta. She was interested in uncovering injustice and speaking truth to power, and through her career as an investigative journalist she acquired a position as the nation's conscience. Her blog *Running Commentary* became the one of the most-accessed websites in Malta. Increasingly, she dedicated her work to the uncovering of political malpractice and corruption, and she had scant regard for the status and power of those she identified as corrupt. At the time of her sudden death in October 2017, she was involved in 42 separate libel suits.

She had been working on the Panama Papers – the leaked dossiers from one of the world's biggest offshore legal practices – which appeared to show links between high-ranking Maltese politicians on both sides of the political divide with offshore shell companies in Panama. The implication was that these companies were used to launder money deriving from irregular financial deals and/or bribes. Her blog posts repeatedly referred to endemic corruption across the board in Maltese public life. In a final post on, October 16th, she concluded: 'There are crooks everywhere you look now. The situation is desperate.' (https://daphnecaruanagalizia.com/2017/10/crook-schembri-court-today-pleading-not-crook/). Soon after this, she left her house and whilst driving away her rental car exploded with such force that she was instantly killed, and the car ended up in the middle of a nearby field.

Mobility and Territoriality – again

Part of the problem with the kinds of corrupt practices that Daphne appeared to be uncovering was their transcendence of 'correct' territoriality. This was financial mobility that by-passed regulation, but also dovetailed with issues of territorial sovereignty. One of her targets was a Maltese citizenship scheme offered to wealthy foreign investors, who could obtain a Maltese passport (ie: a European passport) if they invested in the country. There was also the implication that Maltese politicians had received bribes to include certain people in the scheme, thus bypassing its regulations. Yet corruption also, by definition, works in the opposite direction. Corruption is problematic because it favours the specific over the universal, demarcating a network of those included – and by definition those not included in potential deals (Zinn 2005: 233). This is a form

of territoriality working against the universal principles of freedom, mobility and equality of access to resources. Corruption therefore both transcends and fixes; it is both too mobile and too territorial.

Daphne's murder has led to a major crisis of conscience in Malta. Widespread demonstrations, under the banner Occupy Justice, have been demanding not only justice for Daphne's murder but also answers to the questions she was asking about Maltese political life. It should also, perhaps, provoke us as anthropologists of Europe to rethink our ideas about political culture; the universal and the particular; mobility and territoriality.

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