

TERRANOVA

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THE SPANISH COD FISHERY ON THE
GRAND BANKS OF NEWFOUNDLAND
IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

ROSA GARCÍA-ORELLÁN

Translated by Donald Murphy



BrownWalker Press
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*Terranova:
The Spanish Cod Fishery on the Grand Banks
of Newfoundland in the Twentieth Century*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	VII
CHAPTER 1	
Introduction	I
CHAPTER 2	
The Early Days of the <i>Grandes Bous</i>	13
CHAPTER 3	
The Formative Years of the Fishery: When the <i>Grandes Bous</i> Were Dominant.....	31
CHAPTER 4	
Life and Work at Sea on the <i>Grandes Bous</i>	61
CHAPTER 5	
The Beginnings of a New Spanish Fishery: The First Pair Trawlers (<i>Parejas</i>), 1950-1955.....	95
CHAPTER 6	
The Golden Age of the <i>Parejas</i> , 1960-1977: Ambition Knows No Bounds	115
CHAPTER 7	
The Support Structure of the Cod Fishery.....	165
CHAPTER 8	
Spain's Grand Banks' Cod Fishery after 1977: The Challenge of the Two Hundred-Mile Limit (EEZ)	211
CHAPTER 9	
The Spanish Cod Fleet after 1980.....	233
CHAPTER 10	
The Moratorium: Effects on Newfoundland's Fisheries and the Spanish Fleet.....	247
CHAPTER 11	
Cod and the Grand Banks of Newfoundland: The Symbolic Use of Conservation and Resource Sustainability	265
References	281
Index	289

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INTRODUCTION¹

Terranova: The Spanish Cod Fishery on the Grand Banks in the Twentieth Century is about the Spanish industrial cod fishery² that for many decades worked the Grand Banks of Newfoundland. The bulk of the book is dedicated to the period from 1926—the start of Spain’s industrial fishery—to the early 1980s, when the effects of Canada’s declaration of a two hundred-mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ) pushed the Spanish to other grounds. Although this book is a historical account, it is different from many others because it combines standard, documentary history (data, dates, and names) with oral history (the experiences of over three hundred individuals who made the Spanish industrial cod fishery work, some more directly than others).³

Upon beginning this work, I confronted a reality which would have been unthinkable only thirty or thirty-five years earlier: the commercial cod fishery that began in Spain in 1926 and enjoyed a boom from 1950 to 1970 has now all but vanished. To speak only of the Basque port of Pasajes de San Juan, where the industry originated, by the early twenty-first century the cod fishing fleet was in almost total collapse. Where in any year during the sixties and seventies more than eighty vessels would have sailed from this port, 2009 found the fishing fleet reduced to four. This has brought with it the disappearance of hundreds of jobs connected, either directly or indirectly, with the fishing industry. The once-bustling port of Pasajes now takes on an air of desolation, and the only Newfoundland sea-

men still seen on the docks in the port of Pasajes are those who are retired, though in 2010 there are fewer of them than before. Much the same can be said of Vigo and A Coruña, formerly the key Galician cod fishing ports.

Although this is a history of the Spanish industrial cod fishery and those who worked in it, the approach used in this study reflects my background as an anthropologist. To carry out this study, I have tried to revive as much as is possible the atmosphere in which this industry developed. To do this, it was necessary to locate a great many individuals; speak with them; trigger their memories in order to place in context what were often blurry recollections; dig up details; and check names, dates, and so on. It was necessary to engage in long conversations in the very places where the story unfolded.

In the reconstruction of a collective memory, however, many complementary factors are at play. The reconstruction in this case led to the compilation of numerous biographical sketches from the various ranks of seamen involved, and it is through these that it was possible to approach the myriad different groups who played a role, directly or indirectly, in the development of Spain's Grand Banks cod fishery. What I have thus sought to do is build a solid framework into which the contributions of all the *hombres de Terranova* (men of Terranova, the Spanish name for Newfoundland), which is the title of the Spanish edition of this book, could be fitted together into a harmonious, comprehensive whole, while never forgetting that there remain many aspects still to investigate. Achieving this required assembling and integrating a great quantity of disparate data, which provides a solid base of knowledge about this cod fishery.

In practice, this meant combining oral history with documentary history. Early on, I realized that I needed to provide the supporting framework of Spain's social, economic, and political history during the eight decades examined here to properly situate the oral histories of the men who comprised the fishery. Although this study is not exhaustive, I believe that it is thorough enough to permit a reasonably faithful rendering of this fishery during this period. To compile this history, what I have basically done is present its protagonists and recount their experiences against the backdrop of broader historical events in order to better contextualize their accounts. In this manner, it is possible to journey along that still-living link between individual and collective memory.

Hombres de Terranova, the original Spanish edition of this book, did not have an introduction that presented conceptual frameworks

and theoretical orientations as they probably would have held little interest for that book's intended audience: those who were part of the cod fishery and whose testimonies comprise most of the book. This English edition, however, does include these conceptual frameworks and theoretical orientations for its academic audience who would appreciate the delineation of groundwork.

Most of the research for this book took place between the beginning of 2002 and October 2004. During that time, I did the necessary archival research and interviewed 306 individuals, which required traveling throughout the Basque region and Galicia in Spain, as well as visiting Newfoundland and Saint Pierre, the French island off Newfoundland's south coast. A handful of those whose testimony is included in this book rose through the ranks from seaman to boatswain to captain or *patrón* (the last two posts were positions that one man would hold at the same time, indeed this was true some 90 percent of the time). As a result, occasionally an individual will appear as a seaman in one chapter, as a boatswain in the next, and in command of a vessel still later in the book. There are not many such stories, but they do exist and provide a reminder that "going after the cod" not only offered a stable living to many men but also provided a significant opportunity for social mobility for a few.

It might be asked why I interviewed so many informants. The answer is simply that it was necessary in order to ensure that I had a reasonable representation of those who had worked on the first generation of ships—the side trawlers (*bous*)—as well as those who were employed on the pair trawlers (*parejas*), which came later. Thus, I am able to convey adequately and accurately the environment in which those men functioned. Further, I also had to guarantee that I had a plausible sample of the three generations of individuals—mostly Spaniards and men, but also a few women, as well as individuals from Saint Pierre, and Newfoundland—who labored both on the ships and on shore to make the Spanish industrial cod fishery on the Grand Banks work. Because Spain's industrial cod fishery was but a memory when I began my work, I had decided to record the experiences of those who had gained their livelihoods in this pursuit and so construct an oral history of Spain's Grand Banks cod fishery. The moment was particularly propitious, because it allowed me to collect reminiscences of a period far enough in the past to be history but near enough to the present to be vividly recalled by a substantial proportion of the participants.

To collect the life histories of these “men of Terranova,”⁴ it was necessary to have a guarantor in whom my informants already had a high degree of confidence. In this case, that person was Father Joseba Beobide, a Basque priest who had lived and worked in St. John’s and Saint Pierre between 1970 and 1990. During that time, he developed close relationships with the men, serving as their translator, visiting them in the hospital, and even taking them shopping. It was Father Beobide who first introduced me to the men whose testimonies make up much of this book. The first individuals I interviewed directed me to others; and as more data was collected, I came to encounter entirely new sources of information (this is known as the snowball method). Naturally, nothing was recorded without the express informed consent of the individuals interviewed, all of whom were offered a transcribed copy of their testimony, which they could then go over, conscious of the fact that their life and experiences were passing from the realm of the private and local to the public stage through this book.

However, this book is *not* a compilation of the interviews collected in the course of my study. Rather, it is built around the most significant of those interviews, which, together with selected documents from the period under study, comprise this ethnography. Thus, it is the subjective aspect of the experiences of these individuals that forms the threads tying the book together; and it is their recollection of the events in which they participated that defines the objective of this work: to demonstrate the existence of collective memories.⁵ One way to access those collective memories is via the use of oral histories.

To get these interviews I sometimes had to go where the informant was most comfortable. Thus I interviewed Captain Josetxo Abal on the bridge of the ship that he was then commanding. I spoke with many of the retired captains in their cities’ marinas. Others I interviewed in their studies where they had memorabilia of their days at sea: sextants, maps, ship’s logs, and the like. These retired captains would frequently interrupt the interview to go to a map and show me where some event took place.

Some seamen told their stories of life on the trawlers using a photo album, so they could show me their ships. Others would have a video that described better than mere words what they did on board. I had a few interviews right on the docks and once I interviewed a former ship’s cook in the restaurant that he then owned. Sometimes I met informants in their offices and very occasionally in

mine. The locales of the interviews were thus quite varied, so I naturally had to adapt my style and methods to those many settings.

Oral history, as it is used here, attempts to reveal the intangible environment of events and discover the perceptions of the seamen and the motivations that led them to the fishery. Concretely, this means discovering how they experienced the sea, what their life was like on board, and what it was like being separated from their families. In short, much of this book is about discovering how these men managed their psychological tensions. What actually brought these men to the Spanish industrial cod fishery changed over the three generations of fishermen studied here and reflected changes in Spanish society. The micro and the macro are always interrelated, which is what lets us use a fragment of sociohistorical reality to understand the internal and external mechanisms, processes, and logics of action by which social relations function and transform themselves (Bertaux, 1997).

As I noted previously, these oral histories are then integrated into the general history—economic, social, and political—of Spain during the period under review here. My objective is to show how the stories of these individuals—microhistory—fit into the broader themes of what we might call macrohistory. Although this approach may be common in history or political studies, it is far less so in anthropology. The first key theme of the more general history was the decision, taken by Spanish business interests in 1926, to substitute Spanish-caught fish for the imported cod that then supplied the country's markets.

The Spanish industrial cod fishery, as recounted by the men of Terranova, began in 1926 with the founding of the pioneering firm PYSBE (Pesquerías y Secadores de Bacalao de España—the Spanish Cod and Saltfish⁶ Company). The fishery began with two Danish-built, one thousand-ton, side trawlers that used the existing facilities of the Basque port of Pasajes, adjacent to San Sebastián, as their home port. In 1926, when PYSBE was founded, Spain imported cod and lacked both the technology and the know-how to mount an industrial cod fishery. Thus, for the first two years of the company's existence, its ships were captained and crewed by Bretons, not Spaniards. Then, between 1928 and the beginning of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, the fleet expanded, still using ships built in Denmark, but now with Spanish officers, like Captain Eustaquio Arrinda, who recruited his crewmen from Basque mountain villages. Obviously, Arrinda's men had no prior knowledge of the sea, but numerous

young Galicians, brought up in their region's inshore fishery, quickly made their way to Pasajes, lured by the higher wages available with this deep sea fleet. So the first Spanish crews were made up of Basque peasants and Galician inshore fishermen, both of whose accounts attest to the harshness of life at sea. As hard as it was, however, being a trawlerman was far better than working a small patch of mountainous soil or heading into the Atlantic in a rowboat.

Perceptions of the hardship of a crew's job changed radically after the end of the Civil War in 1939. The men who joined the cod fishery and went to Newfoundland's Grand Banks in the 1940s and 1950s made special mention of how the onboard lives of the officers differed from those of ordinary crewmen. In particular, they noted how the officers ate better and had relatively comfortable, spacious cabins, while fifteen of the ordinary crewmen bunked together in the cramped confines of a *rancha*: the barracks that served as the crew's quarters. However, in post-Civil War Spain, where jobs were terribly scarce, "to go after the cod" (*ir al bacalao*) was a tremendous stroke of luck for these men. It was not just a job, but one that let them earn more than they could have on land.

Because it represents three generations of men of Terranova, the mosaic constructed from the ethnographic text constitutes an ethnohistory. Obviously, this is not a substitute for conventional historiography but rather a complement to it that fills the interstices among facts with personal experiences, narrated in the first person. Oral history plainly offers an individual a means by which to relate personal experiences, but more importantly, it gives those who would otherwise be anonymous before history a space in which their experiences are recorded. Yet, not everyone is a gifted narrator. In the course of my research, I discovered that some men were particularly skilled at drawing others into the distinct experiences of their lives. At the same time, I also found men whose stories were filled with subtle shadings that they had not been able to express personally but which emerged in the narrations of others. In the end, I chose those informants whom I found to be most representative of the whole as the basis for the ethnographic text.

My interviews with 306 individuals⁷ are the heart of this book. Not all of these interviews are life histories; some focus solely on parts of the individual's life and others are standard, fact-seeking interviews. Nearly 250 of the individuals interviewed were direct, active participants in the fishery.⁸

Obviously, the content of each interview varied according to the person being interviewed, the information being recorded, and whether or not the person was retired or still active in the fishery. Regarding the latter, I performed interviews with active captains who asked me to switch off my tape recorder so they could speak more freely. I obviously acceded to their wishes, but this was a request I never got from an individual who was retired, regardless of rank. Nevertheless, it is necessary to understand that some of the information presented was given “not for attribution” and on the condition that it formed only background and that both conditions would be respected. There is one other conditioning factor to bear in mind: every one of us constructs his or her own story in a very personal way.

Here arises the obvious question: how can we know that the interviewees were telling the whole truth? Memory is selective and individuals forget, overlook, or even censor things that are not broadly accepted in the contexts in which one operates. Nevertheless, all of these constructions of lived experiences form part of an environment where collective memory is a product of the social consensus that one constructs and uses to rationalize the contradictions inherent in the life of any human group.

The major focus of this book is on the fishermen, the officers, and the crews of the trawlers who went to the Grand Banks. However, this focus also necessarily includes the testimonies of those who worked in the onshore side of the cod fishery. Here we find the shipowners (*armadores*), biologists, and politicians, without whom the fishery would not have worked as it did. What is recorded here is their truth; that is, the truth as they wished to see it revealed. What people think—even what they think they think—has its place in the historical record.

At this point, the reader might ask whether a woman who has not gone through what these men have, who could not have lived in the world of these men, is the right person to write this book. I often asked myself that question, and I can do no more here than repeat the answer I gave myself. It has two parts: First, I am the daughter of a man who fished the Grand Banks, although I did not interview him for this book,⁹ thus I know from my own experience the social context in which these men lived. I know what it is for a child to construct an idealized image of an oft absent father, just as I know how wives on land struggled to maintain their families while their husbands were at sea most of the year. Second, my training as an an-

thropologist and my earlier work collecting intergenerational oral histories (albeit of mental representations of death in rural and urban settings) gave me the technical tools I needed. Together, my family background and my anthropological experience equipped me well for this undertaking.

The Book's Structure

Besides this introduction, the book has ten chapters. Chapter 2 traces the development of Spain's industrial fishery from its beginnings in 1926 through the start of the Civil War, ten years after the Civil War, and then on to 1950. This chapter describes how Spain learned to run the industrial (or deep sea) fishery, as well as describes the relationships that began forming between land-based and seaborne sides of that fishery. This period from 1926 to 1950 also saw the arrival of diesel engines, which completely replaced coal-fired steam engines soon after the Civil War ended in 1939. Although that change cost stokers their jobs, the fleet could then spend more time at sea: where a steamer could go for at most a month before having to make for port to take on more coal, diesels were able to operate for three months without difficulty, allowing more time to search for new grounds. Further, after 1939, the dictatorship of Francisco Franco financed the domestic construction of Spain's trawlers with soft credits, thereby using the fishery to advance the country's industrial development—a policy that continued until the 1970s.

This part of this book also recounts the appearance of two concepts, both expressed as aphorisms, which became central to the fishery and which would return to haunt the Grand Banks fishery—not just Spain's, but those belonging to everyone else. The first is “time is money,” which in practice meant keeping ships at sea to fish as long as possible. This would maximize their catch, which maximized the owner's profits. The second concept, summed up in the phrase “the resource is inexhaustible,” implied that the fish were there if the captain were smart enough and tough enough to find them and catch them. No one could imagine that the stocks could actually be destroyed as a commercial resource, as the Grand Banks cod would be by 1992. The skipper's astuteness, his ability to take advantage of the freedom of the sea, was the key to success.

The next two chapters of this book, chapters 3 and 4, describe the history of the *grandes bous*—the side trawlers that worked alone—and trace the beginning of the end of Spain's industrial Grand Banks

fishery, as the cod stocks declined from abundance to scarcity. This process started in the middle of the last century in the decades following the end of World War II. At first, it was the historic European fishing states—France, Spain, the United Kingdom—that came to the Grand Banks, but by the 1960s and 1970s, they had been joined by the Soviet Union, Italy, East and West Germany, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, South Korea, and Japan. In all of these cases, the fishery served a triple economic purpose: it produced food; it created jobs on land and at sea; and it sent a steady supply of orders to ship yards, engine builders, and all the industries producing fish-detection and -catching gear. Standing out among the last mentioned was a range of electronic devices (radar, LORAN, and fish finders) that made the fishery both more intense, for it could work around the clock in all types of weather, and more efficient, because it could take more fish—“kill more fish,” as they say in the industry—in less time. The apotheosis of this technological adaptation came in the form of factory ships, the best known of which were the Soviets’, which could catch fish and either freeze them or turn them into meal.

These more efficient fleets generally practiced a selective, one-species fishery, which meant that the by-catch, other species brought up in the trawl, was discarded. In the case of the Spanish Grand Banks fishery, the focus was on cod. Selection amounted to simply discarding any bycatch (i.e., fish other than cod). Though enormously destructive of fish resources generally, a selective fishery was very profitable. Maximizing profits naturally meant fierce, nearly unrestricted competition among both nations and ships. An ultimately failed attempt to impose a modicum of order came in 1949 with the foundation of the International Convention for the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries (ICNAF). Like its successor, the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO), which began operations in 1979, ICNAF was unable to control competition and protect stocks, although it did begin a tradition of scientific study that NAFO has continued.

Europeans should have foreseen the consequences of intense, continued fishing pressure, because there were signs of stock collapse in their own waters as early as the 1930s. In the case of Spain, evidence of the costs of an uncontrolled fishery came in the 1950s when the failure of the North Sea hake fishery led the Spanish to send their *parejas* (two ships towing a single, much larger net) off to the Grand Banks to join the *bous* that had been working there since the 1920s.

Chapters 5 and 6 describe how the *parejas*, the pair trawlers, worked. Once on the Grand Banks, it took them only a few days to fill their holds with cleaned and iced fish. Their owners soon decided to maximize the fishing effort by having the trawlers unload their catches in Saint Pierre, for transshipment to Spain. This quest for efficiency peaked in the 1960s when the *parejas* were changed from side trawlers to stern trawlers, which were much larger and used constantly upgraded technology.

Chapters 7 and 8 examine the golden age of the *parejas* in detail. Throughout the 1960s, the Spanish government, still under Franco, continued subsidizing the construction of fishing vessels. By this time, a second generation of men of Terranova had arrived. These men, an ever-increasing number of whom were Galicians who had been schooled in “cod culture” by their fathers or uncles, joined the fishery to earn money rapidly. This new generation was better organized and more assertive than its predecessors; thus, these men got higher wages and more benefits.

However, the unrelenting growth of the fishery produced unexpected results in the form of glutted domestic markets. So serious were the conditions that not even a concentrated effort to export cod could avoid price wars that saw the cost of unloading the catch at dockside exceed the money brought by the sale of the catch. This translated into losses for the shipowners, but the government covered these. All the same, the shipowners came to distrust the government when they learned that the authorities in Madrid had known about Canada’s intention to impose a two hundred-mile EEZ well before Ottawa acted in 1977, but that it had told Spain’s fishing interests nothing. That action left the country with over one hundred *parejas* that had nowhere to fish. Spain eventually devised mixed, public-private fishing firms to exploit new fishing grounds, but for many shipowners, that came too late for them to save their businesses.

In chapters 9 and 10, the focus shifts to how Canada’s two hundred-mile EEZ affected Spain. Until 1982, Spain had held some licenses to fish within Canada’s EEZ, but this left the many ships without licenses facing the impossible choice of fishing outside the 200-mile limit, which was unprofitable, or fishing illegally within the limit and running the risk of apprehension and prosecution by Canadian authorities.

These changes in the legal framework of the fishery were accompanied by significant changes in conditions onboard. The crews made concessions that gave up hard-won improvements in wages

and working conditions and found themselves with frozen salaries and facing stretches of seven months at sea. There were further complications: should a crewman be injured or become sick, he might have to wait for the arrival of a ship that had not been photographed fishing illegally in Canadian waters by a Canadian patrol before he could pass through Canadian waters to be taken to a hospital. At times, these “clean” ships would deliver as many as eight crewmen from “contaminated” vessels.

Spain’s industrial fishery struggled to survive. This demanded the downsizing of the fleet, cutting the trawlermen’s wages further, and reducing their benefits. Thus, the third generation of the men of Teranova found that there was little reason to go to sea. Wages on board had fallen to levels like those paid to unskilled workers on land, and those who did sign on faced lengthy periods of unemployment while waiting for their ship to get a license to catch more fish. It is not surprising, therefore, that fewer and fewer Basques or Galicians joined the trawler fleet and that their places were taken by immigrants, many now from Africa, who were as happy to have any job as was the first generation of men who sailed from Spain in the 1920s and 1930s. Going to sea on a trawler ceased being the way for a young man from coastal Spain to get ahead.

Chapter 11, the book’s conclusion, moves from presenting the history of the Spanish cod fishery on the Grand Banks of Newfoundland to ask about the future of any deep sea fishery anywhere. It does this by raising a series of questions about the manipulation of concepts and symbols, and how this affects how fisheries are conducted. Among the themes discussed are the issue of overfishing, the effects of the 1992 collapse of the cod fishery in Atlantic Canada on the fishing communities of Newfoundland and Labrador, the symbols that Newfoundlanders have developed to interpret that collapse, and the moratorium on much of the cod fishery that has been in place since 1992. The book concludes with some reflections on the management of extensive EEZs by coastal states, questioning why such management has often produced economic and environmental disasters.¹⁰

¹ This introduction was translated by David Close.

² There are several other books about industrial fisheries, though none of them that I know attempt to give a history of a nation's fishery. Villiers (1951; 1970) and Zulaika (1981) describe specific campaigns—the word used in both Spanish and English to describe a ship's fishing expedition, while Warner (1983) concentrates on the work of factory freezer trawlers in the late 1970s. For works not in English, consult Gauge (2003), Giraldez (1997), Martin (1986), and *Recit d'un ancien pêcheur* (1986/1905).

³ Although interviews were carried out with 306 individuals—only a handful of whom were women—fewer than 80 are cited in the text. The redundancy was helpful, because it gave me the opportunity to verify themes and to hear similar experiences repeated in different words.

⁴ Although some women were interviewed for this book, it really is a story of the men who made the fishery. I am currently working on a companion volume that collects the oral histories of the women of Terranova, principally the wives of those who went to sea.

⁵ Collective memories is the term used by Maurice Halbwachs (1968).

⁶ Saltfish is the word for salted cod that is used in Newfoundland.

⁷ See Appendix A.

⁸ There were 233 officers and crewmen, and 15 owners and managers.

⁹ It did not seem proper to include my family in this work. Nevertheless, many discussions over many years gave me a lens through which I have come to view the fishery and those associated with it.

¹⁰ Though not included in this edition, interested readers may obtain from the author two interviews that were appended to the original Spanish edition. One examines the evolution of fisheries' technology and the other treats communications technology.

THE EARLY DAYS OF THE *GRANDES BOUS*

Introduction and Historical Overview

This chapter examines the beginnings of Spain's commercial cod fishery as it developed with the side trawlers, or *grandes bous* of the Spanish firm PYSBE. Although the Spanish were among the first Europeans to fish off Newfoundland beginning in at least the sixteenth century, the political and economic order that developed in Europe after the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) saw Spain increasingly marginalized. One consequence of this was that by the middle of the eighteenth century, the Spanish cod fishery declined dramatically and did not recover until the Spanish steam trawlers took to the sea in the late 1920s.¹

France was the first European nation to use steam trawlers, launching its first in 1904. Just two years later, it had a fleet of six. Although commercial fishing was severely affected by World War I, the industry recovered quickly. For example, in 1920, the European long-distance cod fleet—made up of British, French, and Portuguese ships.—had 33 steam and 71 sailing vessels, with a total of 3,379 men working on the Grand Banks of Newfoundland (*Bulletin Oeuvres de Mer* 1921, p.33).

It was apparent even then that a new fishery was taking shape. Not only were there new vessels, but how the commercial fishery was run was changing, too. For example, any damage to ships “had to be repaired as quickly as possible, since...time was money” (Grossetete 1988, 414). This meant that shipowners (*armadores*) were

then demanding an onshore infrastructure which would allow the work to be done quickly and efficiently.

When the Spanish cod fleet was formed in 1927, it consisted exclusively of steam vessels. The year 1926 had seen the creation of the pioneering firm PYSBE in San Sebastián, in the Basque Country. The neighboring port of Pasajes de San Juan would be home both to the first fleet and to the infrastructure which would grow around it. Years later, in 1942, another company appeared: PEBSA (Pesquerías del Bacalao, S. A.—Spanish Cod Fisheries, Ltd), based in the port of A Coruña in Galicia. A third company, COPIBA (Compañía de Pesca e Industrias del Bacalao—Cod Fishing Industries), headquartered in the Galician city of Vigo, began operations in 1944.

These steam-driven side trawlers dominated the Spanish cod fishery until the arrival of the first pair trawlers² in the late 1940s. The extraordinary success of the pair trawler fleet would, with time, cause the displacement of single trawlers. In the 1960s, there also appeared a few stern trawlers³ belonging to companies besides the three already mentioned. Then, in the 1970s, PEBSA's six great stern trawlers, the largest Spanish fishing vessels ever built—over 1,500 GRT (gross registered tonnage)—made their appearance. Their presence in Newfoundland, however, was short-lived, due to Canada's declaration of a two hundred-mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in 1977. Of all those ships, only a few *parejas* still exist, having survived the closure of their historic fishing grounds, and now operate only near Spitsbergen in northern Norway.

Although a substantial part of this chapter focuses on the first days of PYSBE, the founder of Spain's industrial cod fishery, that history in a sense forms the backdrop to the real subject of this book: the men who created Spain's industrial fishery. My immediate objective is to describe how officers and crews were recruited and trained, as well as to describe what they did and how they lived on the side trawlers that formed PYSBE's first fleet. As throughout the rest of this book, I do this via the medium of oral history, collected from those who sailed the ships or worked on shore to catch cod in Newfoundland and bring the catch to Spain.

The First Period, 1926–1939:

The Creation and Development of PYSBE

Spain has a long tradition of consuming cod and a long history of importing the fish. As early as the late nineteenth century, studies,

such as that done by Ernesto Lyders (1893), a Danish merchant marine captain, were already stressing the need for Spain to launch its own commercial cod fishery. In order to reduce its imports and build a national offshore cod fleet, a group of businessmen in San Sebastián founded PYSBE in 1926.⁴

Giraldez (1997), however, argued that the cod fishing industry began in the mid-1920s with the steam trawler *Melitón Domínguez*, owned by the shipping firm D. Manuel Domínguez y Hermanos de Panjon, located in Pontevedra, Galicia. Nevertheless, Giraldez acknowledged that it was PYSBE that succeeded in replacing imported cod with Spanish-caught fish by the end of the decade. It was PYSBE, in fact, that built an integrated fishing industry and molded a whole generation of experienced seamen. These later brought their knowledge to other enterprises, such as PEBSA and COPIBA, that grew thanks to the government-subsidized loans that were part of a policy to ensure Spanish control of the cod fishery, so that Spain would no longer have to import cod. Eventually, the process reached its apogee with the pair trawler fleet.

When considering the relatively recent origins of Spain's industrial cod fishery, one must remember that the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 created conditions that quickly excluded Spain from Newfoundland's fishery. Until 1926, then, there was a period of roughly two hundred years when Spain had no large-scale cod fishery at all. This meant that in order to learn the industry's new techniques, it was necessary to rely for a time on foreign captains and crews, specifically those of Brittany.

Although PYSBE was a private company, it and the rest of the industrial cod fishery enjoyed substantial state support. Of particular significance was the Franco government's post-Civil War proclamation of the Law of June 2, 1939, concerning fishing subsidies.⁵ Government loans aimed at expanding, as well as reconstructing, the fleet were channeled through the Naval Reconstruction Credit Institute, which granted attractive benefits to shipowners who had suffered losses during the war. Although the amount of credit extended normally could not exceed 60 percent of the total value of the vessel built or modernized, under certain conditions it might reach 80 percent or even, upon providing additional guarantees, the entire cost. Interest was set at 2 percent, and repayment schedules were very generous: six years for wooden vessels and upgrades, and twenty for new steel ships in the deep water fleet. This boosted both the construction of new fishing boats and the renovation of older vessels.⁶

The story of PYSBE's founding is told in the remarkable testimonies of Anastasio and Donato Arrinda, the two sons (both of them priests and historians) of the first captain to command a PYSBE vessel: Eustaquio Arrinda, of Lekeitio, Basque Country. We will now see how the crews were recruited and how their organizational and operational structures were established.

Captain Eustaquio Arrinda

How Captain Eustaquio Arrinda came to work for PYSBE was recounted by Donato, the younger of the captain's sons: One day in 1926, while just a child, Donato was having lunch with his father in the old section of San Sebastián. A man, who already was a PYSBE captain, came up to his father and said "Hey, Arrinda, we're setting up a company to fish in Newfoundland. Would you be up for signing on as skipper?" And he said he was" (D. Arrinda, interview). The captain who asked the question, according to Anastasio, had trained as a seaman with Eustaquio, who was a sailing vessel skipper. By the age of fifteen, Eustaquio Arrinda had sailed as far as the Indian Ocean, putting in the sea days required to eventually obtain his captain's papers.

The woman who would be Eustaquio's wife was born in Lazkano, Basque Country. She was working in a bar in Barakaldo when she met her future husband. It was in Barakaldo that their family life began and within a few years, when Eustaquio's home port moved from Bilbao, they moved to Lazkano. Their taking up residence in this village would play an important part in the composition of PYSBE's first crews.

In the early days of the new company, there were no Spanish crewmen trained for commercial fishing of this kind. Thus, the company decided to contact M. Legasse, a Basque businessman in Bayonne, France, who was the director of La Morue Française, a French firm engaged in the cod fishery. The Legasse family had long been a dominant presence in Saint Pierre and Miquelon. Legasse would go on to train part of PYSBE's first management team and would bring most of the company's first crews from Brittany.

In this initial phase, then, a crew of Breton seamen and officers was brought in to train local sailors in the techniques being used in new industrial cod fishery that was built around salted cod, called salt cod or saltfish. It was with this Breton crew that Captain Arrinda made his first fishing campaign or expedition in 1927. In total, the crew comprised forty-two Bretons and twenty Spaniards, distributed

among the bridge (captain, *patrón de pesca*,⁷ and officers) and engine room (engineers and stokers) and divided up as petty officers and deckhands.⁸

Although the Bretons were an essential part of the earliest days of the Spanish cod fishery, this study does not include any testimonies from the Breton crewmen who sailed on the first PYSBE vessels. The story relayed here is drawn exclusively from the memories of the Spanish crews. For some aspects of this first period, I relied on information provided by Raimundo Pérez Bretal (2003), formerly a chaplain in Saint Pierre and a native of Corrubedo, Galicia. He related how his father, a net mender (or netter) who lived in Trintxerpe, worked on these first PYSBE trips with Breton crews. The Bretons, however, had no interest in the Spaniards learning their trade: Pérez Bretal's father actually had to measure the nets secretly with his belt, as he was not allowed to work directly with the trawl.

This training phase lasted until 1928 and accounted for a total of four campaigns.⁹ The first trip landed four hundred tons of fish, and during this initial period, the company fixed this as the quota for these vessels. After the four campaigns with the Bretons, Eustaquio told the administrative board that this quantity could easily be acquired without the help of the Bretons.

When Eustaquio would return home to Pasajes from Newfoundland, his son Anastasio, then a student, would meet his father at the docks. As a result, Anastasio was in a good position to recreate the atmosphere of those early years, during which he often had the chance to read the captain's logs his father kept. Anastasio mentioned that he was struck by a phrase that he frequently encountered in them: "día con tablón."¹⁰ When he asked his father about this, he was told it meant that the *patrón*, the officer responsible for the fishing itself, was drunk and that consequently, no work could be done that day.

Work on Deck

Although the organization of work on deck first followed the Breton model, within a few years the Icelandic method became dominant and has persisted to the present. PYSBE began fishing Icelandic waters in 1932.¹¹ That was also the year of its second trip to the Grand Banks, with a few Icelanders being added to the crew at that time.¹²

The adoption of the Icelandic model combined with good catches to substantially strengthen the company. According to Captain