Re-inserting Maltese and Gozitan Women's Voices into Post-War Maltese-Australian Emigration Narratives: A gendered examination

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A gendered examination

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Thank you.

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Prologue

On the 18th of April 2024, midway through my research trip on the island of Gozo, I found myself on a bus in the town of Victoria Gozo on my way to meet up with one of my informants in Qala. In typical Maltese fashion, the bus number did not correspond with the direction it was heading in. Before the driver got a chance to set it right, an elderly man seated across me asked if the bus was headed towards the Nadur harbour. An elderly woman sitting two rows behind us answered in the positive paving the way for the following exchange.

Their small talk began with the weather. The wind, which had been picking up for a while, promised to disrupt the operations of the Gozo ferry to Malta over the weekend. The man, set on reaping his fields' harvest in Marfa before the oncoming storm made the task difficult with flooding, appeared concerned. From beyond the bus window, the sea shone through the hills showcasing whitecapped waves. I suppose it was this looming reality that turned the direction of their conversation[1] towards past experiences of travel across the sea.

Woman: 'It must take courage to cross... I've already been back for twelve years but I still remember it'

Man: 'Where did you go?'

Woman: 'Australia'

Man: 'Ah, I also went up! I had gone by ship in '79'

Woman: 'Yes me too, I went up in '58'

Man: 'Australia is far away…'

Woman: 'Let me tell you, our ship burnt and sank close to India…I think a person died. It was the *Skaubryn*.'

Man: 'Yes, I remember hearing about it…'

[1] This conversation originally took place in Maltese and the translation provided is my own.

Woman: ‘Hekk hu. We still made it to Melbourne with another ship. At the time, my husband worked at the ‘wolf’.[2] He was 56 when he retired and then he died at 58…. I took him back down to Malta. And let me tell you, even though I went up to Australia, I came back down when I could and I swore I would move back with my kids.’

Man: ‘Yes, the world was very harsh back then. I only stayed for two years. Emigration was so controlled at the time...not as it is now “kif ġie ġie”.[3]

Woman: Mela, yes.

Man: I had gone to work in the fields but I only stayed there for two years. Now I have my field here to see to and on my days off, I go to village square to drink some whisky. The rest I leave up to God.’

As chance would have it, both passengers formed part of the many Maltese and Gozitans who had emigrated to Australia after the Second World War. Noticing my clear interest in their conversation, the woman turned to me and tried to bring me into their exchange. The woman asked me what I was doing on the island, to which I replied in my anglicised Maltese, ‘I’m here to carry out research for my Masters, I’m looking into the migration of women to Australia.’

This introduction, which I hoped would be an opportunity to explain my interest and to exchange contacts in order to arrange a future meeting ended up having the inverse effect. By mentioning the research, the subject matter turned towards the topic of education and, unable to find an open window to ask for their contacts in time, I had to get off at the next stop for my meeting.

The improbability of this encounter remained with me, with its contents striking me as uncanny in the direct aftermath. The night before this exchange I had come across an oral history which treated the sinking of the ship the woman on the bus had alluded to. The history, captured by the historian Barry York, narrates the Maltese emigrant Georgina Camenzuli’s experience onboard the *Skaubryn* in the form of a song the woman had

[2] Alternative pronunciation in Maltese of the word ‘wharf’.
[3] Colloquial Maltese expression meaning ‘at random’ or ‘haphazardly’, usually used to emphasise a lack of order.

composed. Taking the form of an 'għana tal-fatt',[4] or in English; a 'fact-based song', the piece provides an insight into the way the departure, outbreak of fire, death of a passenger, and ultimate rescue and arrival in Australia was experienced by Mrs. Camenzuli and her family;

[...]

When we heard this alarming piece of news

We were inside our cabin

We were ready to go to bed

Because everyone was feeling tired.

I went and opened the door to inquire further

And saw people running to get upstairs

They were all crying and lamenting

That 'the ship had caught on fire'.[5]

[…]

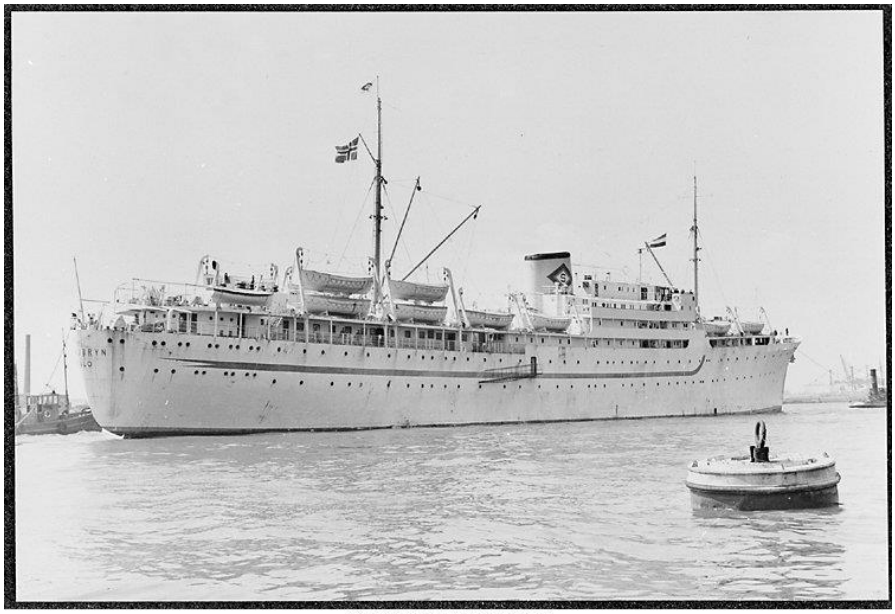
*

Being the only vessel lost at sea during the era of post-war emigration to Australia, the *Skaubryn*'s sinking has been extensively documented. Carrying 1,080 passengers comprised of 736 German migrants, 168 Maltese migrants, and 176 private passengers and crew members, the Norwegian liner sank 800 miles from the then-British port city of Aden and 360 miles from the African coast after a fire broke out in the engine room on the 31st of March, 1958. All aboard, save for a German man who suffered a fatal heart-attack, survived the ordeal. Having lost their belongings, men, women and children were evacuated to the

[4] *Għana* is the general term for Maltese folk singing. For more, see Philip Ciantar. "*Għana*." Bloomsbury Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World, edited by Paolo Prato and David Horn, Bloomsbury, 2017, pp. 325-330.

[5] For the full version see Barry York, "The Saga of the Skaubryn Maltese Folk Song Recorded National Library of Australia 1997," YouTube*, 29 March 2018,* <*www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xc5UlLkD3Uw*>

temporary safety of life boats before they were rescued and transported back to Port Aden on the *Roma*.[6] Many managed to finalise their journey to Australia via assisted passage on the *Orsava*.[7]



Collectie Moluks Historisch Museum

Figure 1 Picture of the Skaubryn sourced from the CJ Worung collection at the Dutch National Archives.[8]

[6] Initially created to be used as an Auxiliary Aircraft Carrier by the British Royal Navy, the *Roma* was converted into a passenger ship in the aftermath of World War Two.
[7] Kim Tao, "Migration and Photography: The *Skaubryn* Archive," *Australian National Maritime Museum*, 28 May 2018, <www.sea.museum/2018/03/28/migration-and-photography-the-skaubryn-archive>
[8] As the source location might suggest, the *Skaubryn* also had a connection to the Netherlands. Apart from carrying Maltese emigrants, the ship was firstly chartered to carry migrants from the Netherlands to Australia, after the Netherlands Australia Migration Agreement (NAMA) was signed in 1951. This agreement facilitated the immigration of Dutch nationals to Australia, including those residing in the Dutch East Indies colonies. For more on the inter-imperial passenger deliveries and routes of this ship, see Huib Akihary, "563 Kinderen Op de Skaubryn," *Moluks Historisch Museum*, 10 May 2020, <museum-maluku.nl/563-kinderen-op-de-skaubryn/>

Figure 2 Port bow view of Skaubryn on fire in the Indian Ocean and temporary accommodation for Skaubryn survivors on the deck of Roma, 1958. ANMM Collection Gift from Barbara Alysen ANMS0214 [002]and [063]. Reproduced courtesy International Organisation for Migration.[9]

This episode has caught the attention of numerous historians and institutions with the 'Saga of the *Skaubryn'* memorialised in song, as well as in publications and exhibits supported by institutions such as Australia's National Maritime History Museum. In their totality, such accounts speak to a grand-narrative of history regarding post-war immigration which underscores the perilous journeys immigrants undertook in search of a better life in the 'promised land' of Australia.

At the same time such histories, especially when approached from a critical perspective, have the potential of shedding further light on the dynamics and causes of human migration beyond the explanations provided by collective push and pull economic models.

For instance, at the start of her song Mrs. Camenzuli highlights the familial influence upon her individual wish to migrate to Australia.

[…]

Our house was nice and comfortable
Full of furniture and hung with curtains
But I was always asking him
To take me to my parents.

[9] For more materials relating to the *Skaubryn's* sinking, see Kim Tao, 'Four Ships, One Lifeboat', *Signals*, 122 (2018), pp. 28–33.

And at last he said, ‘We’ll go
And make your wish come true
To make you completely happy
I shall take you to your mother and father’.

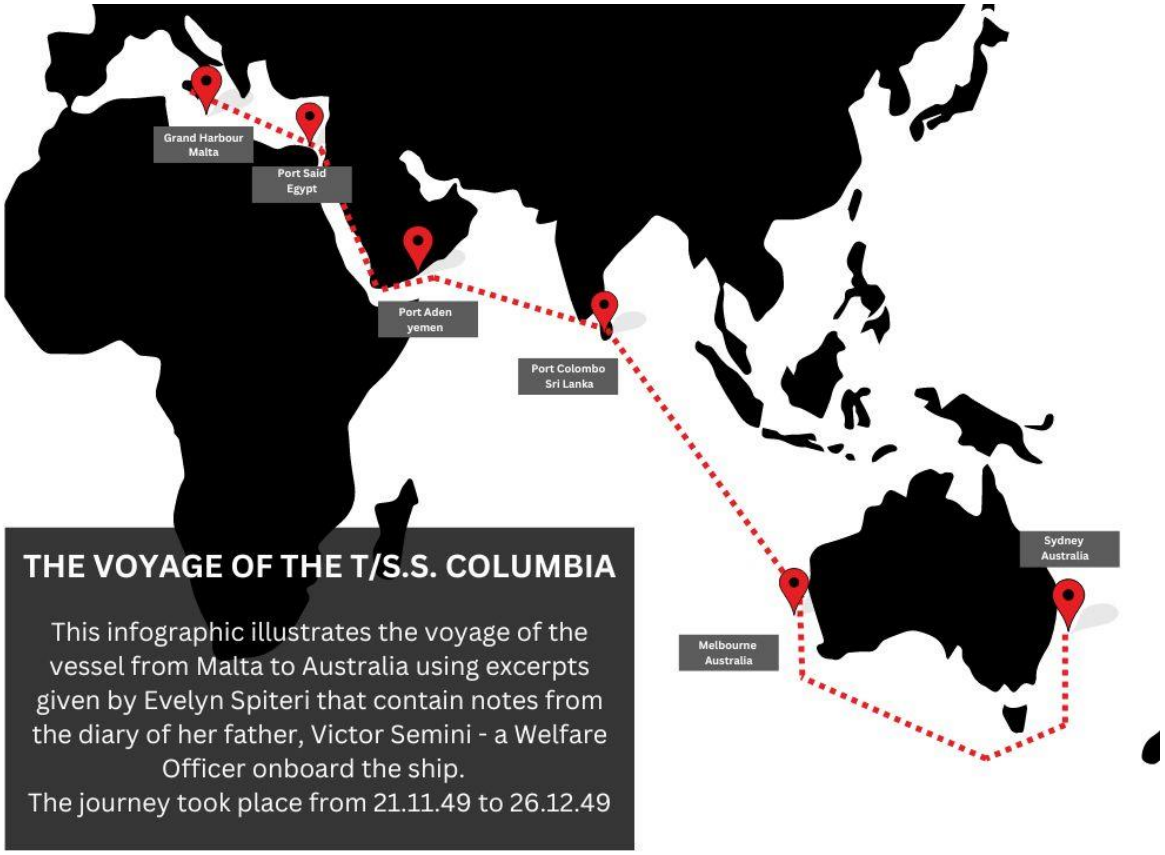
[…]

In comparison, both the man and woman’s account on the bus hint at an altogether different experience. While the man’s shorter narrative focuses on his work on the field, the woman’s centred around her resistance to moving to Australia and her determination to return. It may further be noted that in both cases, the women’s narratives centre around familial or domestic concerns.

Keeping this family focus in mind, one may also find more heart-wrenching and personal experiences of emigrants reflected in the public record. One example includes those documented in the daily writings of Victor Semini – a welfare officer onboard the 1949 T/S.S Columbia voyage.

“By 9.12.49 some of the infants had become dangerously ill. Carmel Bugelli, 45 days old, had contracted gastro-enteritis while Johnny Spiteri aged 4 months developed pneumonia. Both subsequently died and were buried at sea, one at 3.00 a.m. and the other at 9.05 p.m. while the passengers were distracted watching a movie. At the same period a child is born to Carmel and Rita Piscopo. Meanwhile other children come down with gastroenteritis and fears are held for their lives.”[10]

[10] ‘The TSS Columbia’, *Malta Migration*, accessed 12 August 2024, https://maltamigration.com/history/the-tss-columbia.html.



This intimate insight provides a window into what conditions could also be like onboard vessels during the month-long crossing from Malta to Australia. Whilst this is too small a sample to draw out any weighty conclusions from, it is enough to show that individuals may have had different motivations for leaving Malta and Gozo, as well as different experiences of varying levels of intensity during their crossing to Australia.

As will be discussed in the introduction to this work, although a vast body of literature has emerged documenting Maltese-Australian emigration, little has yet been done to critically incorporate and integrate these perspectives into a balanced and representative social maritime history. Within the Maltese and Gozitan tradition, women's perspectives and contributions have been particularly marginalised owing both to patriarchal conditions, as well as their complicated position as racialised colonial subjects in the pre-Independence years. Without addressing, highlighting and connecting the complex ways these historical dynamics and realities have impacted women's life histories, simplified and androcentric interpretations of history and, in this case specifically, emigration will persist. This hinders the ability to get closer to a more genuine historiography and to understand both the complex conditions facing emigrants in the past, differences with those of the present, as well as

creating roadblocks in the identification of the structural conditions of global networks that Maltese and Gozitans have historically formed a part of and engaged with.

Introduction

Aims and objectives

Generally speaking, Maltese and Gozitan women's perspectives remain elusive, with many having been left unwritten,[11] under-researched,[12] and underrepresented in local historical accounts. Furthermore, the underrepresentation of women in Maltese politics combined with the conservatism and patriarchal leanings of Catholic social teachings, have had an undeniably deep impact on the way in which historical narratives have been pursued, written, and taught in Malta since its independence. [13] Within the range of disciplines encompassed by maritime studies, women's memories, experiences and histories, where documented, have tended to illustrate the social group's marginality, with women forming part of 'a forgotten population'.[14] Although a large number of material has emerged demonstrating exceptions to this alleged rule, most publications have continued to promote androcentric gendered imaginings in historical writing and literature through exclusion or, on the other extreme, essentialized and simplified narratives. As a result, these limited perspectives have influenced how maritime culture and history is studied, treated, and understood.

This limited focus has negative consequences for both a historical and current understanding and appreciation of women's agency, social roles and experiences, and in the case of Malta and Gozo - the two main inhabited islands of the Maltese archipelago - this lack is particularly felt with the persistence of discriminatory gender roles and double expectations, as well as acts of violence perpetrated against emigrant women and men. As awareness of the dangers of epistemic violence grows, it becomes clear that historians have a crucial role in challenging exclusionary narratives by providing the knowledge and insights needed to address sensitive issues and foster constructive and collaborative dialogue and action.[15]

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[11] Having been formalised into writing and introduced quite late into educational institutions on the islands by the British in the 20th century, the Maltese language was limited to oral use for most of its existence. Given this context, oral histories and narratives predate written history, presenting a variety of oral styles. For more information on the role of oral histories in Maltese culture, the Dutch ethnographer Veronica Veen (2020) has pioneered the study of Maltese and Gozitan women's storytelling traditions through her ethnographic practice and research. For more, refer to Veronica Veen, Maltese and Gozitan Women's Storytelling Traditions (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 2020).

[12] Sharon Scicluna, Women in Maltese History (Valletta: Midsea Books, 2013).

[13] Maria Cutajar, Gender and Migration in Malta (Valletta: Kite Group, 2014).

[14] David Cordingly, Women Sailors and Sailors' Women: An Untold Maritime History (London: Random House, 2001).

[15] Epistemic violence, as conceptualized by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, refers to the harm done to marginalized groups through the imposition or erasure of knowledge systems, narratives, and voices. It occurs when the dominant discourse suppresses or misrepresents the perspectives of subaltern populations, thereby perpetuating their silence and reinforcing systems of oppression. For more, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak,

Studies such as Silvia Pedraza's work on the social consequences of gender in migration, as well as Anjali Fleury's review on the impact of migration on women's autonomy and social norms, reveal how a study of emigration may contribute to an understanding of the evolving and varied status of women within both sending and receiving communities.[16] In her writing, Pedraza explores how migration processes are profoundly shaped by gender, with women experiencing distinct social consequences in comparison to men. She argues that women migrants often face the double burden of economic challenges and traditional gender expectations, a fact that complicates their emigration and mobility. Pedraza also highlights the agency of women in navigating these gendered challenges, asserting that their migration experiences reshape family dynamics, labour markets, and cultural norms, both in their home and host countries. Furthermore, Fleury's work highlights how the study of migration narratives can also be a source of empowerment for women provided that narratives of autonomy, power and authority emerge alongside those of restrictive social norms and gender-specific vulnerabilities.

In this light, a consideration of Maltese and Gozitan emigration narratives in the 20th century may prove a helpful because, as it stands, scholars of Maltese and Gozitan women's history must engage in retrieval work from primary sources so that the experiences and voices of working-class women are recovered and given their due, just as well as those who are elite, pious, and literate. As will be seen in Chapter 1, this retrieval work is complicated by questions of historical agency given their belonging to a predominantly catholic archipelago whose past consists of varying histories of colonial rule. These elements are particularly evident in the specific history of Maltese-Australian emigration during the 20th century. During this time and especially in the aftermath of the Second World War, a vast body of literature has been produced documenting the departure, arrival, settlement and return-migrations of approximately 70,000 first-generation Maltese and Gozitan emigrants s in Australia.

These have included materials such as oral histories, biographies and autobiographies, as well as more conventional overarching historical narratives and literature. However, and as has

Can the Subaltern Speak?, in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), pp.271–313.

[16] Silvia Pedraza, "Women and Migration: The Social Consequences of Gender," *Annual Review of Sociology* 17 (1991), pp.303-325; Anjali Fleury, "Understanding Women and Migration: A Literature Review," *KNOMAD Working Paper* 8 (2016).

been pointed out by numerous historians, available narratives can only reflect what has been archived. This ought to be kept in mind when dealing with the history of a group, in this case women, whose majority had been pushed into a state of normalised illiteracy. At the same time, given this variety of sources, as well as the biases present in traditional historical writing, efforts to analyse and reintegrate women's perspectives into the historical narrative are both possible, as well as urgently needed for a more balanced view of both past and present.

As many scholars of gender have stated, gender as a category never works alone but 'varies by race, ethnicity, nation, class, and a variety of other dimensions of social life'.[17] In other words, it is only by intersectionally situating women within their wider social environments and realities that one can fully appreciate their social positions without falling into the pitfalls of essentialist narratives. Having noted this, this work would like to specifically highlight how the social construction of gender in Malta has impacted women's emigration experience.[18] By taking these concepts into account and by focusing the research upon the question of female agency and decision-making, this thesis will seek to problematise a local androcentric history, as well as a global maritime history which has often treated the history of women either through a simplistic lens of wives of fishermen who were tied to the land, or as 'a handful of oddities' who have sought to take on men on their own territory. To take from Carol P. Christ's *Toward a Feminist Critical Approach*, 'male experience is not the norm, nor female experience, the deviation.'[19]

As has been mentioned above, given that the Maltese-Australian emigration stream was most intense in the aftermath of the Second World War, this work will seek to highlight women's experiences in the lead-up and direct aftermath of this period. Seeing that travel to Australia was seaborne until 1974, an examination of this era and the experiences of its inhabitants also requires a comprehension of the maritime routes Maltese and Gozitan emigrants had to take into account. The social aspect of the voyage has not received enough attention in the substantial body of historical writing, despite the fact that, considering the risks involved for

[17] Georgina Waylen et al. (eds), The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics, Oxford Handbooks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013; online edn, Oxford Academic, 1 Aug. 2013).

[18] Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1991).
[19] Carol P. Christ, "Toward a Feminist Critical Approach to the History of Religion," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 2.1 (1986), pp. 73-94.

the majority of travellers, it also revealed their aspirations and the conditions they hoped to attain and escape.

As will be argued, the recorded experience of Maltese and Gozitan settlers in Australia remains intimately tied to shifting social, political, colonial, religious, racial, and gendered systems. Out of these factors, the gendered aspect is the least explored in historical literature, despite it being one of the main determining factors for who emigrated, to where and when. In this light, women's perspectives and positions prove essential to understanding the full impact of Malta's and Gozo's inclusion into the global British Empire and its new connections to the English-speaking world. Furthermore, their histories are not only important because women came to form a substantial part of the migratory population, but also because, when recorded, their voices and experiences have provided space for counter-intuitive insights and resistance narratives that have been excluded or left out of traditional historical literature.

Curiously, one of the few detailed historical studies treating women in Malta is Michael Refalo's paper on the presence and role of British female settlers in Malta.[20] To a certain degree, his efforts reflect and complement those of this study. Ending his paper with a call for Maltese historiography to embrace a wider assortment of dichotomies beyond language and religion, his work highlights how a combination of gender and nationality may be applied as an equally valid lens or framework for historical investigation - especially in a tradition of historiography that has been dominated by analyses centred around language, party politics and church-state relations.

On a more general level, Refalo's work fits into a direction of scholarship taken up by authors such as Edward Said, Sara Mills, and Elizabeth Bohls, all of whom have challenged James Clifford's 'travel myth' of the western privileged traveller with unrestricted mobility.[21] Amongst other points, these works have sought to investigate the diverse meaning of travel for different individuals, delving into a wide range of movements and narratives that explore captivity, economic migration, and the ordeals faced by immigrants and refugees. This thesis can thus be said to engage with their scholarship, combining insights from extant

[20] Michael Refalo, "British Female Settlers in Malta," *Journal of Maltese History*, 3 (2011), pp.45-67.
[21] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1991); Elizabeth Bohls, *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics*, *1716–1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

historiography with feminist priorities and concerns over the unrepresentative nature of analysis put forward in the literature thus far.

By critically looking at the historical factors and the experiences of Maltese and Gozitan women, this thesis will consciously seek to at least ponder the effects of patriarchy upon the fashioning of Maltese and Gozitan emigration to Australia during the 20th century.

In short, this work's aims can be summarised by the following questions which likewise inform its structure;

1. What were the historical socio-cultural, economic, colonial, and political factors that informed Maltese and Gozitan women's emigration to Australia?
2. How did specific gender-based dynamics structure and inform the experiences of Maltese and Gozitan women in the context of this specific emigration experience?
3. What insights do their voices and perspectives contribute to the local, global and colonial historiographical record?

Following a section on the methodology employed for this work, Chapter 1 sets the stage with an introduction to the Maltese and Gozitan historical context which is combined with a historiographical review of Maltese-Australian emigration from Malta. This review will limit its focus up to 1974 – the year of the last ship voyage. By limiting analysis to this time period, the chapter will attempt to outline how and why emigration became a matter of government policy in Malta during the 20th century, why Australia emerged as the most popular destination and where women specifically figured in this history. In particular, the role of the Assisted Passage Migration Scheme, the Single Women Migration Scheme and lesser known 'Valentine scheme' will be explored to illustrate the gender-specific components of Maltese-Australian emigration.

In Chapter 2, this work will look into the oral histories of six first-generation Australian-Maltese emigrant women who underwent the crossing. Although their perspectives are highly subjective, their inclusion offers first-hand accounts of the journey to Australia, from pre-departure motivations, to the challenges and experiences faced by the women during their maritime travels and early settlement. Given the short-timeframe of the study and the difficulties of conducting interviews over distance, this study will seek to further elaborate upon women's experiences by drawing from a more-extensive interview conducted with the historian, feminist and author Lou Drofenik. Having done extended interviews with female

participants in Australia, Drofenik's work reveals the intimate, physical and psychological impacts and causes behind this emigration, seen from the perspective of mainly working-class first-generation Maltese-Australian women.

Together, these three chapters will offer a conclusion that examines the gendered aspects of 20th-century migration from Malta and Gozo to Australia. This will include reflections on the lasting effects on individual life stories, as well as insights into the global, colonial, national, and personal historical factors that influenced these migrations and the legacy they may leave behind. Hopefully, such a work may highlight the promise of women's histories, point towards further directions of study and make a clear case for why a gendered lens has the potential of enriching, balancing and humanising a local and global historical record.

Methodology

Given my previous involvement in oral history projects, as well as the fact that a foundation for oral history on this specific subject and theme has already been spearheaded in historiographic literature by the historians Barry York and Mark Caruana, this work has sought to include the voices of Maltese-Gozitan female migrants to add to this record. For this, an open call was created and distributed on social media sites such as Facebook where one may find community-focused and diaspora groups, providing a randomised sample of interviewees. In order to ensure maximal comfort for participants, interviews were conducted in Maltese or English according to participants' own preference. Although a question guide was created and attached in the annex below, numerous difficulties for the carrying out of such interviews remained which are elaborated upon in chapter 2. Despite these logistical challenges, six interviews in total were conducted. Of these, two were overseen by close relatives and four were arranged via Zoom from the Netherlands with participants in Australia. Having taken note of the limitations of this research, as well as encountering difficulties in finding participants, effort was made to also set up an extended in-person interview with Dr Lou Drofenik, a specialist in Maltese-Australian women's journeys to Australia.

In addition to drawing upon oral history, this study was conducted using a multi-sited, interdisciplinary approach. This was rendered possible through a two-week-long intensive research trip in Malta and Gozo that was supported by the Leiden University alumni fund. This trip was pivotal for accessing all of the primary and secondary source materials, most of which are rare to find, not yet being digitised. Additionally, this visit allowed for research

conducted at the Malta National Archives, the Gozo National Archives, the *Dar l-Emigrant* archives and the *Melitensia* collection at the University of Malta. The depth of this research was constrained by the two-week research trip and many materials, such as the collection of visa applications held at the Malta National Archives, may shed new light on the dynamics explored in this work. In terms of digitalised secondary-source materials, this work consulted items held in the *Magna Żmien* archives, published secondary sources online, as well as photographs and audio-visual materials provided by individual historians, as well as historical institutions and maritime and city museum sites in Australia, Malta and in the Netherlands.

Chapter 1: Historical context

The run-up to the Assisted Passage Emigration Scheme

"[…] Maltese disappointments with one ruler and overtures to another go right back to the Romans, and probably earlier still. The price of smallness, and poverty and insecurity. A yearning for freedom mixed with the fear of it. Here was a tiny market fit only for the basic and the immediate. Hence the mirage of a hinterland which, alas, so far consisted largely of salt water. The mountains, rivers and lakes lay beyond, the land masses and forests even of the European mainland were out of sight. The colonial empire offered some scope, if only to emigrate to it; in times past there was Madrid or Rome, Paris or, now London and the English-speaking countries of settlement from the North Atlantic to the South Pacific."[22]

This extract, taken from Henry Frendo's *The Dependence-Independence Syndrome,* provides one perspective of the way in which Malta's inclusion into the British Empire impacted and interacted with local imagination. Although presenting a rather romanticised wish for freedom, the quotation summarises some of the salient features that characterised the island's development during the 19th and 20th centuries, up until the archipelago's independence in 1964.

For readers unfamiliar with Malta's history and geography, the Maltese archipelago, mainly comprised of the islands of Malta, Comino and Gozo, is located in the centre of the Mediterranean Sea between the larger Italian island of Sicily to the north, and Libya to its south. As with other islands in the Mediterranean and as hinted at in the extract above, Malta has had a long history shaped by a succession of colonial rule. This succession can be traced back to a point in time during which the island was completely uninhabited, separating the ancestors of the current population from those who built the islands' oldest megalithic structures.[23] Despite the Islands' small size, (120 quare miles), absence of natural resources, unstable, dry and arid environmental conditions, as well as the historical vicissitudes of carving out sustainable industries,[24] the archipelago's population - which consists of an admixture of settlers - developed and maintained their own language which forms part of the

[22] Henry Frendo, *Post-War Malta: The Dependence-Independence Syndrome* (Midsea Books, 1994), p. 224.
[23] Claudia Sagona, *The Archaeology of Malta: From the Neolithic through the Roman Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp.1-19.

[24] Sustainable here can be taken to mean ensuring environmental and economic sustainability levels beyond mere subsistence. For more on Maltese industrial development, see Jonathan Camilleri's, "Maltese Industrial Development, 1933–1939," *Journal of Maltese History*, 4.2 (2015), pp. 23-36.

semitic language family and which, in its origins, derives from Arabic. At the same time, this language also giving rise to a culture, which by the early 19th century, had come under influence of Italian society and the authority of the Roman Catholic church.

From the 16th to the 19th centuries, the archipelago was settled by the Knights of St. John who came to Malta in 1530 after being granted the islands by Charles V, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and King of Spain. Following Napoleon's take over from the Knights of Saint John and his brief control of Malta from 1798 to 1800, British rule ensued in the aftermath of a successful insurrection which soon rendered the archipelago a British crown colony. [25] At the heart of these local-colonial transactions was the Maltese Dockyard. This was a naval industry located in the historic port-towns of Cospicua and it was one that aided British governors to maintain maritime dominance in the Mediterranean, rendering the islands a useful military base and a comfortable medical pit-stop for the Empire's military and commonwealth troops throughout various wars in the 19th and 20th centuries. [26] [27]

With this role, the Maltese Dockyard came to symbolise within Gozitan-Maltese literature and memory the entry-point to the islands' enmeshment with the British Imperial network. This network was initially connected the seaborne connections the islands were given to other then-British protectorates, colonies and port cities. These included Port Said in Egypt and Port Aden in Yemen which, combined with farther colonial port towns in places such as Sri Lanka and India, facilitated the movement of ships, goods and people along key maritime routes. Thus, over the span of the 19th and 20th century, British-era Malta and Gozo became a stop in a global passageway which connected the Mediterranean Sea and its intermediaries to

[25] The predominantly catholic elites of Malta rebelled against French rule due to their anti-clerical policies, which included taxing the clergy and seizing church property These acts, along with a distaste for French revolutionary ideals, the autocratic character of French rule, and the lack of local representation, stoked political tension and eventually sparked a local elite insurrection that began in September 1798. Taking into consideration Malta's strategic potential as a maritime hub, as well as getting a request for aid from rebelling Maltese elites, the British supported the insurrectionists ending French rule in Malta, in so doing paving the way for their own rule on the archipelago. For more, see Dennis Castillo, 'The Knights Cannot Be Admitted: Maltese Nationalism, the Knights of St. John, and the French Occupation of 1798-1800', *Journal of Maltese History*, 2.1 (2009), p.1-20.

[26] Malta served as a crucial resupply and repair centre for Allied ships, particularly during the Mediterranean campaigns. Malta's position in the Mediterranean was likewise pivotal for Allied operations disrupting Axis supply lines in North Africa and Southern Europe. Crucially, during the first world war, the island welcomed ANZAC troops, establishing connections with Australian and New Zealand armed forces. For more on this well-documented connection, see Australian High Commission, *ANZAC Day: Commemorating ANZAC Day in Malta* (Australian Government, 2023) <https://malta.embassy.gov.au/mlta/ANZAC.html> [accessed 25 August 2024].

[27] Maurice N. Cauchi, *Maltese Migrants in Australia* (Victoria, Australia: Maltese Community Council of Victoria, 1990), p. 5.

the Pacific Ocean and beyond. Economically, this enmeshment also connected a number of previously 'protected' industries to the world of free trade economics, bringing the then-feudal and resource-poor archipelago into contact with a large-scale industrial and capitalist culture and system.

As Paul Caruana Galizia's *The Economy of Modern Malta From the Nineteenth to the Twenty-First Century* shows, the development and centrality of the ship-repair and naval industries in local literature often overshadow alternative socio-political and contemporary undercurrents such as those concerning the decline of the local cotton industry, as well as the shifting patterns in women's education and involvement in the workforce.[28] For instance, while women played a significant role in the national workforce in 1851, constituting about 45% of the working population, by 1948, this percentage had drastically decreased to 14%.[29] According to Galizia, the reason for this significant shift could be brought down to the decline of the cotton industry and agricultural employment, both of which were affected by the inclusion of Malta into the British network. Fuelled by the demands of a global market, these previously protected local industries received no support and were thus unable to survive competition from overseas. Moreover, the inclusion of the islands into the network saw the emigration of many employed in the agricultural field.

For the majority of local women, the decline of the cotton industry combined with the colonial and local elite dependence upon male-dominated labour meant that their economic and social standing had been significantly altered with many being pushed, at least on paper, into the domestic sphere. This position aligned perfectly with widespread patriarchal social ideals, as well as the domestic roles encouraged by Church authorities on the island.[30] At the same time, many men who were previously unable to pay for education at the University of Malta,[31] were able to gain a technical education in British founded technical schools,

[28] To look at education for instance, in the 19th century, schooling in Malta was inexpensive but of poor quality and rarely resulted in the pursual of higher education or better prospects for the majority of the island's population. Effectively this resulted in low enrolment and high illiteracy rates. By 1851, only 10% of the population could read and write. Women fared worse than men, with 85% of women aged 45-50 being illiterate in 1891 compared to 80% of men. For more, see Paul Caruana Galizia, *The Economy of Modern Malta: From the Nineteenth to the Twenty-First Century* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

[29] As Galizia's work highlights, the majority of women were employed in textile work, the cotton industry, and seasonal agriculture. Ibid.

[30] For an in-depth social history documenting the changing status of women in Malta, see Sibyl O'Reilly, 'The Changing Status of Women in Malta', *Journal of the Faculty of Arts*, VI.4 (1977), 23-45, Malta University Press.

[31] Education at the University of Malta was previously private, limiting higher education to mainly local and elite *literati* who looked to Rome and the Vatican. For more on the historical emergence and Italian ties of the

providing them with mixed levels of literacy in both Maltese and English and crucially, an enhanced possibility of looking for work in English speaking countries. These included countries such as Australia where initial free settlers were subject to a language test upon entry.

One aspect that ought to be highlighted here is that the Dockyard industry was selective in recruiting its workforce and that many who were unable to find employment at the Dockyard faced the task of either finding alternative niches on the islands or joining the long precedent of economic emigrants who looked for work elsewhere. As noted by the historian Lawrence E. Attard, '[e]migration on a large scale has been a feature of Maltese life since the early years of the nineteenth century' with migration flows extensively documented in local literature.[32] In this regard, and as has been pointed out by the historian Raymond Xerri, the island of Gozo has a slightly divergent history from its sister island Malta, with its population emigrating at much higher rates to that of Malta.[33] This long precedent served as a vent for the economy's surplus labour with men, women and families making the move, often at their own expense. Such histories point towards trends of resource-motivated dispersal from the archipelago in the 19th century which preceded those of later British-led colonial paths.[34] For the most part, emigration destinations during this period were mainly restricted to the islands' Mediterranean surroundings with reasons including comfort in proximity to home, similarities in language and, towards the early British period, financial aid given to British subjects facilitating their return journeys to Malta.[35] In this light, the dispersal can be considered to have been primarily resource-motivated and its pathways, save for travel costs, exploratory and unmanaged.

Although similar conditions prompted many to look beyond the islands' shores during the 20th century, early Maltese and Gozitan arrivals to Australia emerged directly from British

University of Malta, see Godfrey Wettinger, *The Foundation and Early History of the University of Malta* (Malta: Midsea Books, 1989), p. 34.

[32] Lawrence E. Attard, *Early Maltese Emigration, 1800-1914* (Valletta: Gulf Publishing Ltd., 1983), p. 1.

[33] Raymond C. Xerri, *Gozitan Crossings: The Impact of Migration and Return Migration on an Island Community* (Qala: A&M Printing, 2005).

[34] By 1842, for instance, about 20,000 Maltese, or 15% of the population, had emigrated. Between 1842 and 1865, fluctuating economic conditions drove further migration, with significant communities forming in Algeria, Tunis, Egypt, Constantinople, Tripoli, and the Ionian Islands. By the same year, 40,000 Maltese, or 20% of the population, were living overseas. For more, see Lawrence E. Attard, *Early Maltese Emigration, 1800-1914* (Valletta: Gulf Publishing Ltd., 1983); Maurice N. Cauchi, *Maltese Migrants in Australia* (Victoria, Australia: Maltese Community Council of Victoria, 1990).

[35] Until mid-to-late twentieth century, most Maltese and Gozitan migrants went to nearby North Africa with the knowledge that British consuls there were obliged to fund return voyages for their 'subjects'. For more, refer to Henry Frendo, *Diaspora: Maltese Overseas Settlement* (Malta: Midsea Books, 2020).

colonial aspirations of Imperial development ad settler-colonialism. These were intimately connected to racial and land-based resource exploitation goals which supported the denial of first-nation sovereignty rights through a *terra nullius* imaginary that held real and oftentimes violent consequences for the prior groups. Driven by a desire for self-governance and a unique national identity separate from British rule, this nationalist sentiment became intertwined with the strict population control and racial policies of the commonwealth of Australia's government.

As some historians have written, the question of how best to exclude coloured immigrants became an issue of determining the extent to which the newly federated colony constituted an independent nation, a fact reflected in the official 'White Australia' policy which was achieved via legal, physical and cultural means.[36] In light of this work's focus, the physical element included the arrival and settlement of European emigrant populations that, amongst other ethnic groups, included the Maltese and Gozitans. As historians such as Barry York have noted however, these settler origins are problematised by the fact that initial Maltese and Gozitan presence on the island began with indentured labour.[37] Indeed, initial emigration into the country was fully controlled and managed by British authorities and, at the start of this connection, exclusively male. Although these are the origins of Maltese and Gozitan arrival to Australia, the early maritime passageways these men undertook laid the groundwork for the routes free settlers in the early 20th century, and later, assisted passengers in the mid-20th century, would take.

In the early 20th century, free Maltese and Gozitan settlers, known as the early pioneers, began to move to Australia. Although the distance was great, many went on return journeys to

[36] One element highlighted in York's work, for instance, is that Australian settler policies showed a preference for Catholic, English-speaking and European workers from "hot climates" who were "neither Negroid nor Asian". Further instances of racism include the much-cited episodes of the *Gange*, wherein the Australian government detained and refused entry to Maltese labourers brought into Australia aboard the *SS Gange* due to wartime xenophobia and union worries over job loss.
For more on the racial categories Maltese settlers had to navigate during the official duration of the White Australia policy, see Barry York, *Empire and Race: The Maltese in Australia, 1881-1949* (Kensington, NSW: New South Wales University Press, 1990).

[37] The first organised migrant group arrived to Australia in 1883 when 61 Maltese labourers were recruited to work on the sugar plantations in Queensland. Accustomed to a small-scale, family-based agriculture in a rather barren and safe environment, the Maltese were horrified by conditions on the lower Burdekin in north Queensland. Moreover, they were exploited by the sugar plantation owners who looked on them as substitute for Pacific Islander labour. For more see Barry York, *Maltese Settler Arrivals: Australia 1947 to 1972/73* (Canberra: Centre for Immigration & Multicultural Studies, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, 1995).

Malta,[38] or kept in touch with their home countries by sending back remittances which were used to provide financial support for their families. According to archival documents, as well as has been noted by Raymond Xerri in his book *Gozitan Crossings,*[39] women were initially not allowed to accompany husbands. This was due to a belief that women would distract the working men and diminish their quality of physical work and effort.

This policy however, was gradually changed under the pressure of Maltese religious and nationalist authorities, who were concerned that the long-distance settlement of Maltese men would disrupt traditional family units and lead to the breakdown of family structure. This was seen to be especially concerning for women, whose social role was intimately tied to the maintenance of family cohesion and domestic stability. In this light, the emigration of male family was understood to increase the burdens on women, leaving them to handle household and emotional challenges alone - a factor that negatively impacted their social and physical well-being. Against this reading, the feminist historian Lou Drofenik added to this perspective by highlighting concerns over power expressed in the fact that the Maltese Catholic church "did not wish for the men to marry Protestant women."[40] Furthermore, archival records show recorded complaints sent to local Australian government officials complaining that Maltese men were showing an interest in the daughters of plantation owners. Combined, these factors set the groundwork for Maltese and Gozitan female emigration into Australia.

The Nationalist Party opposed the Maltese settlement scheme in Australia due to concerns that the long distance settlement of Maltese men would disrupt the traditional family units and lead to the breakdown of family structures. This was especially concerning for women, who were seen as the primary maintainers of family cohesion and domestic stability. The emigration of male family members could increase the burdens on women, leaving them to handle household and emotional challenges alone, which could negatively impact their social roles and well-being.

The first record of a woman migrating to Australia is that of Carmela Sant in 1915. Sant was the wife of Giuseppe Ellul, a successful sugar cane and dairy farmer who worked the lands in Mackay, Queensland.[41] From 1915 onwards, concessions were made to allow in wives and children under the age of 18, however, other members of the family, such as the parents and sisters of Maltese already resident in Australia, had to acquire a special permit from the Home

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[39] Raymond C. Xerri, *Gozitan Crossings: The Impact of Migration and Return Migration on an Island Community* (Qala: A&M Printing, 2005), p.15.
[40] Quotation taken from an interview held with Lou Drofenik referred to in chapter 3 of this thesis.
[41] Yosanne Vella, 'The Search for Maltese Troublemakers and Criminals in Australia', *Provenance: The Journal of Public Record Office Victoria*, 15 (2016–2017).

and Territories Department in Melbourne. According to Raymond Xerri's Gozitan Crossings, despite the fact that many of the women who made this journey were proficient in lacemaking and had education and other abilities, the visa application criteria limited their official job to housewife until the early 1960s.

In 1920, Australia lifted migration restrictions but imposed a quota of 260 Maltese immigrants per year, later increased it to 1,200 annually, with the condition that illiterate Maltese must be sponsored by relatives in Australia.[42] This was done with the aim of boosting its population and economy in the post-World War I era. At the time, the country welcomed three main categories of Maltese immigrants; those with immediate family in Australia, former residents, and holders of Australian passports. Additionally, a special annual quota of 260 was established for others who were in good health and who had basic English skills.[43] In these efforts, Australian officials particularly promoted Queensland as an ideal destination for Maltese from rural areas, highlighting favourable working conditions and wages for those willing to work in agriculture. Comparatively, competing migration streams to other English-speaking countries were restricted by the following measures.

In 1923, Canada's Privy Council Order excluded Maltese from entering as British subjects, classifying them as aliens. This restriction meant that only Maltese agriculturists and female domestic servants were accepted, while the majority were rejected.[44] Furthermore, the U.S. Quota Law of 1921, severely limited Maltese migration in a similar manner to the prior.[45] Although the Aliens Restriction (Amendment) Act of 1919 mainly targeted non-British nationals, it also affected colonial subjects like the Maltese by tightening immigration controls in response to post-war unemployment and social unrest. Additionally, the 1925 Empire Settlement Act promoted migration from Britain to other parts of the Empire, such as Canada and Australia, which created substantial obstacles for Maltese-Gozitan migration to the UK and other Commonwealth countries. As a result, Australia became the most accessible option.[46]

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[42] Maurice N. Cauchi, *Maltese Migrants in Australia* (Victoria, Australia: Maltese Community Council of Victoria, 1990).

[43] Ibid.

[44] Lawrence E. Attard, *The Great Exodus* (Malta: P.E.G. Ltd, 1989).

[45] Ibid.

[46] For comparative statistics on emigration from Malta, see Huw R. Jones, 'Modern Emigration from Malta', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 60 (1973), pp. 101–119.

Furthermore, the Maltese government officially promoted emigration through the promise of union wages upon arrival and employer-provided food. From the Maltese government's standpoint, Australia offered abundant rural land, comparatively attractive wages, and a reasonable cost of living, particularly appealing to those from Gozo and the north of Malta, traditional sites of agriculture labour. Further illustrating this support was the creation of a loan scheme introduced in 1930 which provided emigrants who were unemployed with the financial means of covering their travel costs.[47] This scheme provided loans ranging from £7 to £30 and by 1939, additional grants were available for families with close relatives in Australia, totalling £774.[48] Such funding was deemed necessary given that many could not cover the cost for travel with the income they had access to at home. Consequently, and despite local protests of 'brain drain' and loss of a bountiful worker base, Australia became the most accessible destination for Maltese skilled and working migrants.[49]

Post-war Developments 1946-1974

'[W]hen the mad fury of the Second World War finally abated, organised and subsidised emigration became a basic policy of those who ruled the Maltese from 1945 to the middle years of the 1970's.[50]

Although no immigration was possible during the Second World War, the classification of Maltese migrants as 'white British subjects' in 1944 led to hopes of a joint Maltese-Australian immigration scheme. By 1948, a new Assisted Passage Agreement was signed, resulting in the largest number of departures from the islands in modern recorded history. Effectively, this inclusion meant that Maltese and Gozitan migrants became participants in a

[47] This scheme provided loans ranging from £7 to £30. By 1939, additional grants were available for families with close relatives in Australia, totalling £774. Such a system was deemed necessary given that many could not cover the cost for travel with the income they had access to at home. For more refer to Lawrence E. Attard, *The Safety Valve: A History of Maltese Emigration from 1946* (Malta: Publishers Enterprises Group (PEG) Ltd, 1997).

[48] Ibid.

[49] Loss of workers was pitted against overpopulation concerns, with the latter being a source of continuous debate in Malta throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. For instance, in 1838, the editor of *Il Mediterraneo* expressed concern about Malta's rapidly growing population, warning that relying on events like cholera outbreaks to reduce numbers was not a solution. He advocated for government intervention in emigration. By 1910, little had changed. In this year, the prominent Professor Lawrence Manché, emphasised the need for a government-backed emigration scheme to alleviate the island's overpopulation. He pointed out that low wages indicated a surplus of workers, and criticized influential landowners and businesspeople for opposing emigration to maintain a cheap labour supply. For more on this subject, see Patrick Staines, *Economic History of 20th Century Malta: 1940s, 1950s, 1960s*, vol. 1, compiled by Stephen Staines (Sliema: Dr Stephen Staines, 2022), p.451.

[50] Ibid.

scheme that had previously only been available to citizens of the British metropole.[51] As with the loans beforehand, such a scheme was deemed necessary given that Maltese labourers' wage gap, when compared with destination countries, was high enough to incentivise emigration, but home wages were low enough to make migration costs prohibitive. Indeed, historians not how many labourers rarely got loans to fund their journeys due to their incomes being too low to afford any accumulation of savings.[52] For this reason, most long-distance emigration in the early nineteenth century was indentured labour.

With the introduction of the scheme however, locals nominated by relatives in Australia could receive financial aid for their travel expenses regardless of sex. Nominators were required to cover two-thirds of the passage fare and guarantee the maintenance of the migrants. Selected migrants had to pass a medical examination to meet the requirements of the Commonwealth Immigration Act of 1901, whereupon they could be rejected. Furthermore, married women were also required to present a signed declaration from their husbands agreeing to their departure and for those under twelve, parental consent was necessary. Once they received their papers, nominees had to leave Malta within a month, taking with them both a health certificate and a police conduct certificate, each valid for one month.

The social context for the formation of the scheme during this specific period presents an interesting development in that it coincides with a wider current of post-war emigration out of a war-devastated Europe.

Whereas the Maltese economy previously benefited from wars in the 19th and 20th centuries, the Second World War brought widespread devastation to the population, making Malta one of the most heavily bombed regions proportionally during the war.[53] Facing high levels of destruction, unemployment and a subsequent population boom,[54] a heightened demand for emigration ensued resulting in rates that were so drastic that some villages in Malta and Gozo

[51] For more on the politics of this scheme, refer to Timothy J. Hatton, 'The Political Economy of Assisted Immigration: Australia 1860–1913', *IZA Discussion Papers*, No. 16298 (2023), Institute of Labor Economics (IZA), Bonn.
[52] G. Tavan, *The Long, Slow Death of White Australia* (Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 2005).
[53] Michael Galea, *Malta: Diary of a War 1940–1945* (London: PEG Ltd, 1994).
[54] Patrick Staines, *Economic History of 20th Century Malta: 1940s, 1950s, 1960s*, vol. 1, compiled by Stephen Staines (Sliema: Dr Stephen Staines, 2022), p.451.

were completely depopulated of able-bodied young men.[55] Indeed, as most figures show, post-war immigration from Malta to Australia was predominantly working class, with about 60% of male arrivals employed in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs, such as factory work, construction, and railway labour.[56] Many Maltese immigrants came from rural villages or dockyard cities, where the British navy was a key employer and where employment after the war was hard to come by and difficult to keep.[57]

To provide an example of the extent of the demand for emigration, in 1949, the total population of Malta and Gozo was approximately 311,000.[58] During this time, a significant percentage of people expressed a desire to emigrate, with around 42,000 Maltese registering as potential emigrants with the Assistant Migration Scheme. This figure represents roughly 13.5% of the then-entire population, highlighting widespread interest in leaving the islands. To further put this into perspective, the number of registered potential emigrants was more than double the population of Valletta, Malta's capital city, which had 18,666 residents in 1948.[59] Despite the large number of people hoping to emigrate, only 3,128 actually benefitted from the emigration scheme during that year, meaning that just 7.4% of those who registered were able to leave. Applicants had to meet specific criteria and all had to pay a nominal fee based on their age.

With the introduction of this scheme, Maltese emigration to Australia gained momentum, with the first significant wave of migrants being witnessed from 1948 to 1956. Many emigrants formed part of a chain migration process, sponsored by family or friends who acted as 'guarantors' and who had already settled in Australia. To further assist the emigration effort, the government provided financial aid, including a £200,000 allocation in the 1953-54

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[55] Maurice N. Cauchi, *Maltese Migrants in Australia* (Victoria, Australia: Maltese Community Council of Victoria, 1990), p.8.

[56] Michael Dugan, *The Maltese Connection: Australia and Malta - A Bond of People* (South Melbourne: Macmillan Co. of Australia, 1988).

[57] The concentration of the islands' labour force at the Dockyard heightened discourse on Maltese national identity and collective socialist interests, particularly after workers seen as threats to British colonial rule were exiled to other British territories in North Africa. This confirmed to many that "disloyalty, not dictatorship, was what worried the British in Malta." These collective interests gained prominence following the widespread destruction of World War II. Despite the population being awarded the George Cross by King George VI for bravery, post-war conditions remained difficult for many displaced and unemployed Maltese and Gozitans with the island's main industry seeing widespread dismissals and privatisation in 1959. For more see Henry Frendo, *The Origins of Maltese Statehood: A Case Study of Decolonization in the Mediterranean* (Valletta: PEG Ltd, 2000).

[58] The total population numbers in 1948 for the three islands were as follows: Malta 278,311, Gozo 27,612, and Comino 68. *Eleventh Census of the Maltese Islands, 1948*, taken on Monday, 14th June 1948 (Valletta: Government Printing Office, 1949).

[59] Ibid.

budget specifically for assisted passage.[60] By 1955, allowances were also given to the families of emigrants, with amounts adjusted based on the number of dependents. Thus, by the mid-1950s, emigration had become a vital strategy for the colonial Maltese as a response to economic challenges and a rapidly growing population. By 1955, nearly 32,000 Maltese had emigrated to Australia.[61] In these figures, one must highlight the fact that many ethnically Maltese migrants, including women, also went to Australia not from Malta or Gozo, but from other territories they had previously emigrated to, with examples in the Mediterranean including departures from Alexandria or Port Said in Egypt, or Marseille and Nantes in France.[62] As historical records show, these emigrants were generally of middle and upper class backgrounds having had independent means of sponsoring their first emigrations.

Based on this written record, women's histories remain difficult to gage, although a gendered distribution of Maltese emigration to Australia documented by the Australian Bureau of Statistics provides further insights, showing a clear shift in gendered emigration trends over the decades.[63] For instance, while in 1947, only 17% of Maltese emigrants to Australia were female, by 1976, the proportion of women had risen to 46%. Despite the growing balance in later years, Maltese migration in the 1950s and 1960s remained heavily male-dominated, with 26,000 men emigrating compared to 11,000 women and 13,000 children.[64] This early gender imbalance reflects broader social dynamics, as women were often more hesitant to undertake the long journey, particularly if they lacked close relatives in Australia. Even then, when women had spouses abroad, many were still reluctant to migrate, as evidenced by the efforts of government officials, including then-Minister John J.Cole, who actively encouraged women to join their husbands and leave their families on the basis of marital duty. As recorded by the social anthropologist Jeremy Bonello Boissovain in his 1972 study *Some notes on the position of women in Maltese society, '*the traditional trend on the islands was for men to move to women's villages after marriage.'[65] Perhaps due to this element, official efforts to balance the gender-disparity had limited success with the persistent male-dominated

[60] Carmel Vassallo, *Maltese Emigration in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Malta: PEG Publishers, 1994), p. 115.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ian W. D. Adams, *Malta and the Maltese: A Study in Nineteenth Century Migration* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1988), p. 142.
[63] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Malta: Key Statistics', *Origins: Immigrant Communities in Victoria*, Museums Victoria, https://origins.museumsvictoria.com.au/countries/malta/#data [accessed 21 August 2024].
[64] Ibid.
[65] Jeremy Boissevain, 'Some Notes on the Position of Women in Maltese Society', *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, 4.2 (1972), pp.123-145.

migration trend giving rise to social and political concerns,[66] as well as new incentivised and gender-specific emigration efforts.

In response to this disparity, the Emigrants' Commission of the Catholic Church in Malta launched the Single Young Women Migration Scheme in 1961, aiming to regulate and facilitate the migration of young women to Australia. The scheme provided incentives such as lodgings upon arrival, as well as guarantee of work.[67] Additionally, a lesser-known Valentine Scheme was also introduced to help single women marry Maltese emigrant men by proxy.[68] Although this phenomenon has not been studied in local literature, valuable context and detail about the experiences of women who migrated under such schemes can be gleaned from similar-in-form Italian-Australian proxy bride emigrants,[69] as well as from Lou Drofenik's fictional writings that contain Maltese characters who become Maltese proxy-brides.

The church's role in this matter highlights one of the lesser-evident social causes for the overall success, at least in terms of numbers, of Maltese and Gozitan emigration in the 20th century. While previous British attempts to 'establish Maltese settlements' overseas had met with local disinterest and failure, much of the popularity of emigration after World War Two could be traced back to the church's intervention and presence from the earliest days of this crossing. The dominance of the Catholic church in Malta also appears in more subtle ways, such as in the reported presence of a priest present on every shipment of emigrants to Australia.[70] The intersection of religion and gender in shaping Maltese emigration patterns may further be seen in Huw R. Jones' *Modern Emigration from Malta* which includes a reflection on the emigration of young women in particular.[71] His writings show how in a society where most parents held conservative values and opposed their daughters joining the workforce, the Church came to play a crucial and trusted role in overseeing the migration of

[66] In Wolfgang F. Stolper's 1958 report, while a proposal to set an annual emigration target of 10,000 people to reduce unemployment is evident, the report also points out the demographic issue of emigration, particularly among young men, which resulted in a significantly larger proportion of children, women, and elderly individuals remaining behind. For more see Wolfgang F. Stolper, *The Development of the Maltese Economy* (Valletta: Government Printing Office, 1958), p. 45.
[67] Emigrants' Commission, *Annual Report 1961* (Valletta: Emigrants' Commission, 1962), p. 12.
[68]. Huw R. Jones, 'Modern Emigration from Malta', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 60 (November 1973), pp.101-119.
[69]Susanna Scarparo, *Italian Proxy Brides in Australia* (Monash University Publishing, 2009).
[70] Charles J.M.R. Gulick, 'Reciprocal Migration – A Mediterranean Example', *Journal of the Faculty of Arts*, 6.4 (1977), p. 131 (Malta: Malta University Press).

[71] Huw R. Jones, 'Modern Emigration from Malta', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 60 (1973), pp. 101–119.

young women for seasonal work abroad. As further pointed towards in Boissevain's aforementioned study,

'The separation of sexes is one of the fundamental principles of social organisation in Malta. […] this is another theme that is constantly repeated to the faithful from the pulpit.'

And

'The way women's role is defined by Catholic moralists, the legal statutes and the segregation of women from men, have given an apparent masculine bias to the social structure in Malta.'[72]

With the persistent popular support of this structure, the Church was able to take upon itself the authoritative role of ensuring that employment and living conditions were suitable, while also working with local priests to select only those women who were considered to have a "sound moral character" for emigration.

Although the requirement for sound moral character was, in this case delivered through the local catholic idiom and private interpersonal relations, similarities can be drawn to early advertisements for female settlers and labourers going to Australia in the late-20's highlighting the patriarchy built-into Australian land-based settlement.[73] Take for instance the following poem published in an advertising call published in a journal advertising "EMIGRATION" to Australia in 1926:

"Man works the land

And Builds the house

But woman makes the home"'.

Apart from the moral leadership and mediation role in familial relationship dynamics, various Church institutions played an equally significant role in Maltese-Australian child migration management and in providing charitable welfare and social services in Australia, including in

[72]Jeremy Boissevain, 'Some Notes on the Position of Women in Maltese Society', *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, 4.2 (1972), p.123-145.
[73] Barbara J. Starmans, 'Female Emigration to Australia 1833–1837', *The Social Historian* (2017); 'Post-Colonial Feminist Theories and Research: Feminist Theorizing of Patriarchal Colonialism, Power Dynamics, and Sexual Relationships', *Springer* (2016).

education and elderly care.[74] This involvement embedded and 'assimilated' Maltese religious and ethnic communities into Australian society, although over time, distance, access to new possibilities and differences in public discourse - which deviated from those on the archipelago - competed with Maltese church authority, with its particularities now reduced to a cultural feature of one out of many of Australia's ethnic (and predominantly Christian) peoples.[75]

To return to Maltese-Australian gender disparities however, the Australian census shows a narrowing of differences into the late 1960s and 1970s. By 1972, a cumulative total of 43,000 Maltese had emigrated to Australia under assisted migration schemes and by the end of the overall emigration period, spanning from 1945 to 1980, around 60 percent of the total 150,000 Maltese emigrants had settled in Australia.[76] Historians who have written about emigration in this period mention that from 1970's onwards, emigration became increasingly fuelled by cultural and socio-political concerns corresponding to the turmoil being experienced in Malta under Dominic Mintoff's politically socialist, secularist and anti-clerical government. Specifically, figures point towards a notable increase in middle and professional class migrants fleeing from perceived reductions in political freedom and democracy on the island, apart from also seeking greater professional opportunities in Australia.[77]

Here too one can see a shift in patterns in terms of gender that are intimately tied to post-war developments on the Archipelago that was undergoing a period of rapid change brought about by a need to diversify the post-colonial economy for post-independence survival. At the same time, given that employment conditions in Malta had marginally improved, a noticeable reduction in the demand for emigration was seen, accompanied by a wave of return Maltese-Gozitan migrants.[78] By 1974, planes fully took over as the main mode of transportation to

[74] For instance, Maltese orphans, including girls, who arrived in Australia were housed at St Joseph's Orphanage in Subiaco, Perth, with a few placed with the Nazareth House Sisters in Geraldton. For more see David H. Plowman, 'A Fragment of the Maltese Exodus: Child Migration to Australia 1953–1965', *Journal of Maltese History*, 2.1 (2010); Barry Michael Coldrey, *Child Migration, the Australian Government and the Catholic Church, 1926–1966* (Box Hill, Vic.: Tamanaraik Publishing, 1992).
[75] Joseph Chetcuti, *From Assimilation to Liberation: A Personal Journey* (Australia, 23 April 2015), written for the IV Convention of Maltese Living Abroad, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
[76] National Statistics Office, *Census of Population and Housing 1967* (Valletta: NSO, 1968), p. 23.
[77] Russell King and Alan Strachan, 'The Effects of Return Migration on a Gozitan Village', *Human Organization*, 39.2 (1980), pp.175-180.
[78] Raymond C. Xerri, *Gozo in the World and the World in Gozo: The Cultural Impact of Migration and Return Migration on an Island Community* (Melbourne: Victoria University of Technology, 2002), p. 123.

Australia and by 1981, the formal Assisted Passage Scheme was phased out with migration to Australia continuing at a reduced level without any financial assistance.[79]

Insights and conclusion

"The problem of definitions (which Edward Said and others pointed out) is still very much with us […] Freedom from fear had to be accompanied from freedom from want, just as wealth has to be created before it can be shared. But the British colonial system was not terribly well geared either to spreading freedom or to distributing wealth or indeed to creating it, least of all in Malta where there was neither gold nor copper, neither rubber nor oil.'[80]

While the Maltese Archipelago might not have had 'gold' or 'copper, 'rubber' or 'oil', it had a capable population intent on improving its conditions despite the lack of natural resources and opportunities on the island. If early Maltese and Gozitan-Australian emigration initially reflected conditions of forced and unpaid labour, in-line with colonial strategies to develop the empire's territories along racial, *terra nullius* and resource-extractive lines, the gradual arrival of free settlers and the subsequent introduction of the Assisted Migration Scheme created distinct and highly managed group of emigrant labourers. In order words, the scheme allowed for a financially accessible pathway for the transposition of Maltese and Gozitan and predominantly male labour power to Australia. Although there were many recorded instances of ethnic-based discrimination upon arrival, the scheme joined the Maltese and Gozitan population to the overall stream of post-war European 'white' subjects.

Governmental overpopulation concerns aside, this scheme attracted regular Maltese and Gozitan labourers via financial incentives that acted as a counterweight to remaining on the island or to emigrating to the closer emigration destinations of the 19th century. In these calculations, Australia proved a better-fit for Maltese men and their families compared to other English-speaking countries which posed greater emigration restrictions, especially on the basis of gender.

Although an androcentric bias was evident, some unmarried Maltese women were increasingly seeking employment outside the home, despite traditional expectations. In 1957, 14 percent of women aged 14 to 64 were economically active, mainly as clerks and shop assistants, with only a quarter working in industry or agriculture. By 1963, this figure rose

[79] Hammerton, A. James, and Alistair Thomson, *Ten Pound Poms: Australia's Invisible Migrants* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 78.
[80] Henry Frendo, *Post-War Malta: The Dependence-Independence Syndrome* (Midsea Books, 1994), p.179

slightly to 15 percent, a trend that anthropologist Boissevain links to the emigration of young men, leaving more unmarried women available for work.[81] However, these women often faced unequal pay compared to men, who were seen as the primary breadwinners. This study also highlights a class bias, as it predominantly focuses on women engaged in paid employment. Moreover, the 1996 Australian Census, based on statistics gathered by Mark Caruana, revealed a significant gender disparity among Malta and Gozitan-born migrants.

Out of 50,582 individuals, 18,769 women were uneducated compared to 16,582 men. The gap was even more pronounced in skilled vocational labour, with 4,450 men versus only 257 women, as well as in higher education, with 624 men holding undergraduate degrees compared to 445 women. Interestingly, among the narratives gathered in community publications of Maltese women in Australia, a recurring theme included struggles with illiteracy and the lost opportunities that came with a lack of education. In stories provided by women such as Maria Grech and Guza Galea, one can see a recognition of how restricted educational access has limited their ability to navigate new lives in Australia, where language barriers and unfamiliarity with the local culture compounded challenges. This is an important point given that the histories provided can only be said to represent women from a literate background.

Indeed, emigration policies and schemes taken at face value effectively obscure the historical reasons as to why the majority of 'skilled' workers emigrating during the 50's were mostly men. As has been pointed out above, the majority of Maltese women making use of the Assistant Migrant Scheme initially found themselves altogether excluded from the labourer category, while also requiring their husband's written consent to emigrate. While the visa procedure was subsequently changed, studies and writings on first-generation Australian Maltese-Gozitan female emigration point towards a mixed picture of what the social reality on the ground was once they arrived, with many studies stressing Maltese-Gozitan women's comparatively low rates of employment, as well as the persistence and continued influence of repressive patriarchal norms.[82]

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[81] Jeremy Boissevain, 'Some Notes on the Position of Women in Maltese Society', *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, 4.2 (1972), pp.123-145.

[82] In *The Maltese Connection*, Helen Borland notes that while the Maltese-Gozitan community had some success stories, they remained underrepresented in higher-income brackets, with Maltese youth, especially women, disadvantaged by post-industrial economic shifts in Australia. In the subsequent chapter, the Maltese-Australian psychologist Henry Briffa adds that traditional gender roles persisted among first-generation women, creating intergenerational conflict and contributing to stress and burnout as migrants struggled to balance

Having brought attention to the primary historical factors contributing to Maltese-Australian emigration as well as to some of the local social forces shaping gendered social roles, the following two chapters delve into the personal narratives of Maltese women who undertook the crossing to Australia, capturing their experiences through the lens of oral histories, first-hand accounts and historical fiction. By looking at these sources and by extending analysis to include fiction, these chapters aim to go beyond the multi-national and social historical and anthropological narratives explored so far in order to understand the emigration journey on Maltese and Gozitan women's own terms. Although this small selection cannot be said to be representative of all women, it should be sufficient to continue to draw attention to both the varied nature of this emigration experience, as well as these women's unique perspectives, desires and strategies in the face of the historical and societal circumstances outlined in the chapter above.

traditional domestic expectations with adaptation to a new society. For more see, Michael Dugan, *The Maltese Connection: Australia and Malta - A Bond of People* (South Melbourne: Macmillan Co. of Australia, 1988).

Chapter 2: Maltese and Gozitan Women's Seaborne Crossings

An Oral History approach

If the previous chapter has sought to capture Maltese and Gozitan migration in broad historical terms, emphasizing the socioeconomic factors, policy decisions, and cultural shifts that influenced mass movement across seas and borders, this chapter aims to deepen the understanding of Maltese and Gozitan emigration history through the analysis of oral history. Specifically, this work will look into Maltese and Gozitan women's journeys to Australia with a directed focus upon the maritime component of this crossing. Apart from Raymond Xerri's *Directory of Ships and Aircraft Carrying Maltese and Gozitan Migrants to Australia*,[83] written historical texts, especially those concerning social history, have tended to exclude emigrants' experience of the voyage in favour of readings prioritising studies of push-pull dynamics, as well as the conditions and results of settlement in Australia upon emigrants vis-à-vis their levels of cultural assimilation, language, class and culture.

Oral histories, on the other hand, have included and looked at the voyage as an important and stand-alone component to understanding emigrants' conditions, desires and experiences when leaving the archipelago. This understanding is underscored in Barry York's preface to Raymond Xerri's ship directory where he states that ship names have the power to 'bring a grin – or tear – to many a Maltese migrant'.[84] Furthermore, and as mentioned in the directory, certain ships such as the *Asturias* and the *Florentia,* amongst others, made multiple journeys to and from Australia and some, such as the *Skaubryn*, brought "close to, or more than, a thousand Maltese to Australia" with each voyage being the equivalent of moving a small Maltese village to Australia. This intensity is particularly seen in the 1950's with ships such as the *Fairsea* (1954), *Surriento* (1954), *Skaugum* (1955), and *Arosa Kulm* (1956) carrying 839, 945, 941 and 507 passengers respectively. To take this random sample of 3,232 passengers, 1818 were assisted passengers, with the rest being unassisted or, in much smaller numbers, former resident passengers. Thus around 56% of total passengers aboard these ships were assisted passengers.

As mentioned in this work's introduction, a precedent for the gathering of oral histories (including a section dedicated to women specifically) has been established by the historians

[83] Raymond C. Xerri, *Directory of Ships and Aircraft Carrying Maltese and Gozitan Migrants to Australia*, 2 vols (Melbourne: Victoria University of Technology, 1997–2000), I, p. 34.
[84] Ibid.

Mark Caruana and Barry York in their *Oral History*.[85] Furthermore, a collection of audio-visual material has been created thanks to the work of Lou Drofenik, Carmel Baretta, and Barry York, all of whom have added to this record.[86] Unfortunately, of these, only York's collection is currently accessible to the public.[87] Within his published recordings, one may see how York dedicates some time to expanding upon emigrant's voyages. For instance, in *Maltese Voices Down Under*,[88] Bella Bugeja offers a detailed portrayal of the conditions she experienced aboard the *Cyrenia* in 1949. After stating that she had crossed over to reunite with her family in Australia using the Assisted Passage scheme, she continues to state the following;

"Cyrenia, it was a real junk. All the boys were in one dormitory, doesn't matter if you're married or not, and all the women and the girls were on the other side of the ship and it was a real filthy ship. I think the rats actually owned that ship. They used to come through all the pipes. It was a junk ship. I mean they used to use anything they could get their hands on to get the migrants out to Australia. I would say in one trip, just Maltese alone, there would easily have been 500 people, which would all be families with little babies, a lot of young women my age, single men coming out, single women coming out to marry someone here. A lot of different circumstances."[89]

Although she acknowledges the less-than-ideal conditions on the *Cyrenia* which she speculated had worse onboard conditions for emigrants travelling third-class as opposed to the ship's wartime refugees, Bugeja ultimately describes the journey as an "adventure". Looking back with some nostalgia, she reflects that, as a child during the voyage, she did not experience a profound sense of loss, a fact she reflects was probably the case given that her departure to Australia was a move towards reuniting with her family, rather than a question of separation. While such information on its own might appear limited, a few points of interest may be brought out based on Bugeja's observations. Firstly, although the different

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[85] Mark Caruana and Barry York, *Oral History: A Practical Guide Based on Maltese Migration and Settlement in Australia (Including a Catalogue of Collections)* (Canberra: Australian National University, Centre for Immigration and Multicultural Studies, Research School of Social Sciences, 1993).
[86] Carmel Baretta and Laraine Schembri, *From Humble Beginnings: Mackay Maltese Pioneers, 1883-1940* (Mackay, Qld.: Carmel Baretta, Laraine Schembri, 2001), p. 520.
[87] Selections of his interviews have been made available on his YouTube channel. Barry York, *Barry the Red*, YouTube Channel, https://www.youtube.com/user/BarrytheRed1 [accessed 25 August 2024].

[88] *Maltese Voices Down Under* CD1: *Memories of Malta and Gozo*, produced by Barry York (Victoria University of Technology, 1998), in cooperation with the National Library of Australia, YouTube video, 1:07:21, posted by Barry York, 30 October 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-8eUOrK-a5Y&t=1861s [accessed 25 August 2024].
[89] Ibid.

circumstances of individual passengers are mentioned, this excerpt is enough to indicate how, for instance, passengers onboard were segregated along gendered lines. Furthermore, her remark on the overcrowded conditions present aboard the *Cyrenia* is indicative of a situation which is mentioned in Raymond Xerri's directory and in the historical research of the Greek historian Ioannis Limnios-Sekeris who studied the transportation of Greek migrants to Australia in the Post-War Era.[90]

As Limnios-Sekeris points out, following World War II, transporting emigrants was extremely challenging due to a shortage of ships, caused by the devastation, bombardment and sinking of many fleets.[91] Indeed, the *Cyrenia* was one of the many 'converted troop-ships' that were used to carry migrants. The few available vessels on the Europe-Australia route, such as the *Cyrenia*, were often overcrowded, with waiting times for a ticket stretching over five months due to high demand. Lastly, Bugeja's recounting also paints the overall journey as one that was personally-empowering and positive, despite the conditions onboard and subsequent nostalgic bouts of homesickness. In this sense, these histories emerge not only as effective means of transporting readers and observers to these women's own personal mindset, but also as sources testifying to the material effects of broader global linkages.

Having listened to York's available interviews and having read through a few community-led publications containing first-person historical accounts, I have sought to collect new material to furnish the existing record, most of which remains inaccessible due to the recent time period of this emigration, as well as various institution's privacy policies. Before presenting the histories of these women, I'd like to address some challenges faced during the interviews. Initially, a structured interview guide was planned, but the interview process demanded more flexibility due to the unique circumstances of each participant, many of whom were elderly. Health priorities imposed further time constraints, limiting interview duration and the depth of responses and in two cases, family members had to act as intermediaries. Furthermore, given that some participants live in Australia, distance required the use of platforms such as Zoom, which affected participants' comfort in sharing personal stories. Nevertheless, and

[90] In 1949, the *Cyrenia*, formerly the TSS *Maunganui*, began to be used as migrant transport vessel. Built in Glasgow in 1911, the *Maunganui* initially operated between Australia and New Zealand before serving as a troop and hospital ship during both world wars. After being sold to a Panamanian company and refitted in Greece, it was renamed *Cyrenia* and it would could carry over 800 migrants, mainly from Italy, Greece, Cyprus, and Malta. For more, refer to Ioannis Limnios-Sekeris, 'Stakeholders and Competition in the Transportation of Migrants: Moving Greeks to Australia in the Post-War Era', *The Journal of Transport History*, 36:1 (2015), 105-124, https://doi.org/10.7227/TJTH.36.1.7 [accessed 25 August 2024].

[91] Greece, for example, lost over 95% of its ships, and rebuilding them took time. Ibid.

despite these challenges, each participant offered a unique account, reflecting a diverse range of ship experiences, travel circumstances and onboard interactions shaped by their age, gender and concerns at the time of travel. The interview guide, which has been included in the annex below, was based on consultations with the literature, as well as feedback from Mark Caruana, Lou Drofenik, and Raymond Xerri. The guide includes questions on pre-departure doctor's visits, family history and professions, as well as conditions and memories of any hardships aboard the ship. Overall, the guide was intended to bring about an understanding of both the individual's social backgrounds, as well as any memorable moments encountered during their crossing.

The Interviews

The interviews below introduce six Maltese women who emigrated to Australia in the 1950s, each at different stages of their lives. Unfortunately, apart from the interview conducted with the single women's scheme beneficiary Lou Drofenik (explored in the penultimate chapter), no participants were found who made the journey privately, on the Valentine's scheme or through church-mediated migration, limiting this chapter to those making use of the Assisted Passage scheme. Moreover, all interviewed made their journey to Australia in the 1950's, limiting understandings of possible shift until 1974. However, despite these limitations, the ships these women embarked on still present a rich variety of experiences which may give an indication to subjective elements, as well as bring out some of the common experiences of seaborne voyages. The ships mentioned within these intervies include the *La Fontaine* (1950), the *Sorriento* (1955), the *Arosa Kulm* (1956), the *MS Skaubryn* (1956), the *Flamina* (1958), the *Strathnaver* (1959), and the *Achille Lauro* (1971). All in all, the period covered by these women spans nearly 10 years of seaborne migration and Australian settlement beginning from 1950 and ending in 1959 – a time period corresponding to one of the most intense periods of this migration trajectory. Effort has been made too furnish the record via reference to Raymond Xerri's aforementioned directory of ships and planes that provides information on the Maltese and Gozitan status of migrants aboard the ships.

The earliest recorded voyage was that of Beatrice D'Amato who along with her "mum, younger brother who was 7 and [her] three sisters, 11 years 16 years and 18 years old", embarked one year after Bella Bugeja from Nantes, France. Unlike the steam-powered vessels of the rest of the interviewees, D'Amato recalls the overcrowded conditions on the three-masted wooden barque named the *La Fontaine* in 1950 calling it 'an old small ship'. As

a 13-year-old child, the choice for the move lay mainly in her parent's decision to reunite their family after her father and older brother, who "came to Australia 6 months prior," sent for them. Taking "minimal possessions" consisting of mainly clothes her mother packed, D'Amato expresses fond memories of the journey aboard the ship. Of her journey aboard the vessel, D'Amato remembers passengers "eating in one big room" with "wine and glasses" sliding "off the table in the rough seas." Meals were prepared by an on-board cook, with her reporting frequent bouts of seasickness, with all those going through the same being served "dry food" to aid their condition.

Of the room arrangements, she mentions her family was sharing a cabin with "three other Maltese families' and that their sleeping arrangement were those of "bunk beds" with there being "no males except for minor children." During the journey, she recalls stopping at other towns such as Port Said and passing through the Suez canal, although, she stated passengers "were not allowed off the ship." This, however, did not prevent interactions with locals from passed-by port towns as "boats would come up to the ship and try and sell merchandise, clothes, jewellery to the passengers" while the *La Fontaine* was docked. This is exchange is described in the following highly positive terms: "We all loved to see the new things and were excited when the boats came. The merchandise and money were exchanged through a rope and basket being pulled." At the same time, her memories hint towards possible moments of tension and conflict as "some people would not send the money back down in the basket when they received their goods." D'Amato's memories aboard the ship also reflect the presence of semi-organised children's activities with a "French lady on the ship who used to gather us children around and teach us French songs", as well as a more mysterious encounter with who a coloured "Indian prisoner on board" who the French lady took the her and other "children to see." Perhaps a stowaway, D'Amato points out the presence of a "snake tattoo on [the woman's] neck going up to her face", as well as the fact that the ship crew "were going to drop her off along the way."

By the end of the interview, D'Amato characterises her journey as a positive one, mentioning how they "were all excited and happy to go" and how the children had a particularly good time being allowed the time to play together. Arriving in Sydney, her family "took the train to Melbourne and first settled in Carlton and then Northcote." Apart from sharing her story, D'Amato was kind enough to also send over some pictures, with the first image showing a photograph taken after the journey of the four families that shared the same room, and the second, containing her family's passport photo, required for the visa application and scheme.

Figure 1. Beatrice D'Amato's family with the other three they shared their cabin with.

Figure 2. Beatrice D'Amato's family passport picture

The second interviewee Mary Scerri moved to Australia from Qala, Gozo and similarly to D'Amato, "came to Australia in 1955 with [her] mother and two sisters" as a 5-year-old child. As with the prior Scerri went to Australia through assisted passage chain migration,

crossing the seas with her female relatives in order to "join [her] father who was already settled in Melbourne Australia." The ship they boarded was the *Sorriento.* which, according to Raymond Xerrri's Directory departed from the Grand Harbour on the 5th of May 1955 and arrived in Australia on the 6th of June of the same year. Furthermore, the *Sorrienta*, which carried a total of 242 Maltese-Gozitan assisted passengers, was the 13th vessel to undertake this journey to Australia year out of a total of 17 ships, and 10 aircraft carriers.[92] Onboard the *Sorriento*, Scerri reported being placed in the same cabin as her mother and two sisters, with food being delivered directly to the room. While her account of the voyage was short, she reminisced on the difficulties of settling down in the new country, recalling how "at the time it was hard and I didn't want to be there, I wanted to go back home, meaning Gozo. But then we all settled. School was far away in Australia. We had no neighbours and there was no street, just mud. It was really hard." As time passed however, she states that they were able to settle and make friends with neighbours who became frequent visitors. Interestingly, her account is also the only one that mentions the Vietnam War, which she suggests was one of the possible factors specifically influencing male return-migration in the 1960's:

'I grew up in a peaceful time, apart from the Vietnam war which we were lucky that we didn't have to go to. But many people (Maltese and Gozitan Boys) from my school skipped conscription to war by returning to Gozo or Malta.'

The third participant, born in 1945, is Mary Vassallo who travelled to Melbourne at the age of 11 aboard the *Arosa Kulm*, which her uncle had previously sailed on. According to Xerri's Directory, the *Arosa Kulm* was the fourth ship to Australia in 1956, carrying 267 assisted and 240 unassisted passengers.[93] According to her, the move was motivated by increased "job opportunities" in Australia and by the wish to reunite with her three married sisters who were all already in Australia. After selling everything in Malta and packing "clothes, school books," Vassallo, her parents, older sister, and younger brother set off. The family shared a cabin, and her father, an army man, was appointed a welfare officer for Maltese passengers. She remembers, "People would come to [their room] with any problems," with all her recalled and observed interactions having been with Maltese passengers.

[92] Raymond C. Xerri, *Directory of Ships and Aircraft Carrying Maltese and Gozitan Migrants to Australia*, 2 vols (Melbourne: Victoria University of Technology, 1997–2000), I, p. 21.
[93] Raymond C. Xerri, *Directory of Ships and Aircraft Carrying Maltese and Gozitan Migrants to Australia*, 2 vols (Melbourne: Victoria University of Technology, 1997–2000), I, p. 22.

The ship's route included "Port Said, Colombo (Sri Lanka), Fremantle, and Melbourne," and, as with D'Amato, Vassallo recalled traders coming to the ship at the Suez Canal, though she mentions that "money was short for many passengers." Lastly, its curious to note that she recalls doing schoolwork assigned by Maltese teachers and attending English classes organised onboard using a book called "English on the Way". Thus, as an 11-year-old passenger, her days were "regimented daily with schooling, playtime, eating, and sleeping." Although her mother and younger brother suffered from seasickness, Vassallo describes the journey positively, concluding, "I enjoyed the experience."

The fourth interviewee is Mary Mizzi, who emigrated to Melbourne in 1956 at the age of 17 aboard the MS *Skaubryn*, alongside her mother, sister, and seven brothers. According to Xerri's directory, the vessel did two journeys in 1956.[94] Their trip, which was the second ship trip to Australia of that year, carried 86 assisted passenger and 367 unassisted passengers with 4 former residents. The ship left the Grand Harbour on the 23rd of February 1956 and arrived in Melbourne on the 26th of March of the same year. As with the previous interviewees, Mizzi's journey, was organized and funded by her father and brothers who had already settled in Australia and who had, in turn, joined their married aunt who had moved there before. Her experience aboard the *Skaubryn* was largely positive. The ship, though full, was comfortable, with her family sharing a room. Mizzi recalled the "delicious food," friendly crew, and religious services such as mass held in the dining room. However, she also remembered the fright of a fire on board that was quickly extinguished. Most notably, however, she met her future husband during the journey whom she stayed in touch with after disembarking.

Unlike other passengers, Mizzi also talked about disembarking briefly before their final stop in Fremantle, where she remembered and enjoyed "the freedom and the dancing." Upon arrival in Melbourne, she said she was happy to reunite with her father and brothers. Mizzi's first impression of Australia was coloured by comparisons to Malta noting that the streets were wider, and that the weather was similar. After settling settled in a neighbourhood in Melbourne with her family, she soon found work in a nearby handbag factory. She's lived there ever since without ever returning to Malta and losing contact with her extended family that remained on the archipelago.

[94] Ibid.

At the age of 17, the fifth interviewee Josephine Vassallo, was born in 1940 in Rabat. She emigrated to Australia in 1958 onboard the *Flaminia*. The ship made two journeys in 1958, with the first on the 24th of July and a second on the 10th of October. Vassallo boarded the first voyage with her husband, with the ship arriving to Australia on the 23rth of August 1958.[95] Fluent in English and having worked as a typist and bookkeeper, Josephine and her husband decided to leave Malta in search of better opportunities, hoping to "carve out a better life." Being her first journey abroad, their journey to Sydney was motivated by the support of her uncle, who lived in Newcastle, Australia already and who provided the necessary guarantee for their passage. She recalls, "We didn't have a choice," stressing the move was essential for their survival. Her departure was comparatively more difficult due to the separation she went through from her family. Commenting on this difficult decision, Vassallo stated:

"Our relatives accepted our decision although it was difficult to separate from the family as it was a question of survival. The week before we left, I felt a lot of anxiety as I was about to leave my parents and siblings, but we didn't have another choice. The day I left home I remember my mother crying a lot and my father stood in front of her so that she couldn't see us leaving. My father died while we were away so I never saw him again." Vassallo also provided a description of the departure saying that the couple was "accompanied by [their] Aunts, Uncles and cousins and everyone was in tears" further bringing attention to this moment of separation with "I felt heartbreak when we reached the Greek shore. It was difficult to say that this was not my land."

Describing the ship as "a mercantile ship that was converted into a migrant passenger ship", she described the couple's voyage on the *Flaminia*: "The first floor was for Italians, the second was for Maltese and on the third there were Greek passengers. There was a family from Rabat which we knew on the ship and all the passengers slept in segregated cabins. We would be eight in each cabin of Maltese-only women."[96] Her recollections also include the presence of a Maltese priest onboard, as well as a welfare officer. Furthermore, unlike the earlier interviews, she recalls no organised or leisure activities on the boat. Moreover, she mentions how "[t]here was only one sink in the cabin, no shower," recalling that showers had to be taken in a separate room down the corridor. Onboard meals included boiled eggs, toast,

[95] Raymond C. Xerri, *Directory of Ships and Aircraft Carrying Maltese and Gozitan Migrants to Australia*, 2 vols (Melbourne: Victoria University of Technology, 1997–2000), I, p. 24.
[96] A simple online search of this ship name reveals a wealth of cross-cultural passenger retellings and experiences.

croissants, and porridge for breakfast, followed by bean stew and pasta for lunch and dinner. As with the previous accounts, seasickness was also a constant struggle. Moreover, her account is unique for her descriptions of her experience of the Suez crisis, as well as of the Monsoon, both of which she experienced from aboard the ship:

“I remember that we had also only disembarked in Greece as they did not let us go down in Port Said given that there was the war between the English and the Egyptians at the time. We didn’t go down as we were British subjects, nor did we disembark in Port Aden.”

“I remember we were caught in extreme storms between Port Aden and Perth. We were passing by at the end of the monsoon season and they covered the boat with a sheet because the water was rising up to the Captains level. We had to put on the safety vest so that we would be able to survive in the case that the ship would drown.”

On a more intimate note, she was also open enough to share the fact that the ship’s rough journey had caused her to suffer a miscarriage onboard and that she was able to receive assistance from the staff and medics onboard. Upon arriving in Sydney, Josephine and her husband were greeted by “a crowd of people behind walls of metal barriers. Many [passengers] went to greet their relatives or those who had signed the guarantees.” Amongst them was her uncle, Lorrie Gauci, who met the couple. Although they originally planned to stay for only two years, they remained in Australia for 17, drawn by the "quality of life" and work opportunities. She fondly claims Australia as "our second home and the best place to live." However, after traveling back to Malta and Europe in their later years for holidays, nostalgia and homesickness for those they left behind in Malta prompted a return migration. Reflecting on her time abroad, Josephine expresses no regrets about their decision, noting that many women chose to stay in Australia for their children’s futures.

Born in 1933, the final interviewee was Gugina Xuereb whose journey to Melbourne was made on the *Strathnaver* in 1959. According to Xerri’s Directory, the ship left the Maltese Grand Harbour on the 29th of June 1959, arriving on the 25th of July of the same year.[97] In her short interview she recounts how hailing from a family from *Rabat* with a housewife mother and a farmer father, she went with her sister to Australia to look for work at the age of 24. As with all previous interviewees, members of Xuereb’s family had already made the move to Australia, with her father and siblings already based in Melbourne prior to her departure. Her

[97] Raymond C. Xerri, *Directory of Ships and Aircraft Carrying Maltese and Gozitan Migrants to Australia*, 2 vols (Melbourne: Victoria University of Technology, 1997–2000), I, p. 25.

journey saw her share a cabin with her sister and her recollections of interactions onboard the ship was with other Maltese passengers. Vis-à-vis work, she stated that "I found work in Melbourne in a cotton factory and I stayed there for 12 and a half years before moving to Sydney." As mentioned earlier on, she was the only participant to have made the return journey also by boat with her husband in 1971 when they returned to Malta aboard the *MS Achille Lauro.*

Analysis

Taken together, these interviews present a variety of women's emigration journeys at varying age groups aboard a collection of vessels. For those leaving family behind, the journey was heartbreaking; for those younger at the age of travel, the journey was an adventure; and for those with family already abroad, it was a reunion they looked forward to. Although the interviews lacked detailed accounts, it was evident that having family members in Australia played a crucial role in their decision to migrate, as these relatives could act as guarantors for the women and their families. Remarkably, despite varying ship conditions, each woman's voyage left a lasting impression, with all participants recalling the ship's name even after many years. This highlights the profound psychological impact of these journeys. Despite some vessels having worse conditions than others, the overall memories were positive, with none of the interviewees expressing regret or negative feelings about their migration, despite the hardships they faced.

As oral histories often reveal as much in what is unsaid as in what is spoken, the following chapter will seek to uncover the silences and suppressed emotions that shaped these women's journeys and their adaptation to life in Australia. While the above interviews provide rich insights into the external challenges of migration, they remain mostly descriptive due to the aforementioned limitations. Thus, the next and final chapter of this work will delve into an exploration of the political, emotional and psychological dimensions of this emigration through the works of the Maltese-Australian author, historian and emigrant Lou Drofenik. Her historical insights, that feature strongly in her fictional narratives can allow readers to explore the unspoken traumas and complex emotional landscapes which are not as easily articulated as the voyage experiences recounted above. With this inclusion, this work hopes to provide a more well-rounded picture of the local and global migration process.

Chapter 3: Maltese-Australian crossings in the work of Lou Drofenik

"I felt very confined and I thought there was no future for me here. I just, because I used to read a lot. You know, I read a lot. And I used to read about mountains and rivers and valleys and dream of forests and birds, and I suppose, when you are 20 you can be a bit crazy, yes, and I just wanted…. and everybody knew me in Birkirkara. I couldn't do anything, you know? I'd go out and the neighbours would tell my mom 'I saw your daughter in Valletta with that boy from Rabat or from Sliema'…You know, I felt as a woman, I had no rights. I had no rights, especially as a woman born in the village with a father who was a stonemason. My father was not a doctor, he was not a lawyer. I couldn't get anywhere in those days. I mean, you're lucky you're born now, you can do whatever you like, but in my time, you know. Missieri kien jaħdem fil-ġebel,[98] Look. I went for a job interview to teach, and one of the questions was 'What does your father do?' And I said, 'what does it have to do with this?' you know? I had amazing marks. when I did my exams or whatever it was. I said what does my father have to do with it?. He [the interviewer] said, 'you have a very long tongue', Għandek spirtu pront', and mom said you're not going to do very well. But I said to her, I'm not staying here, I made the decision there and then I'm not staying here."

This is the response Dr. Lou Drofenik gave regarding her decision to emigrate to Australia during a detailed interview where we discussed her novels and the experiences that informed them. Having travelled by plane to Australia in 1962 under the single women's migrant scheme, Drofenik not only witnessed the rise of the second-wave feminist movement but also conducted extensive interviews with many first-generation Maltese and Gozitan women who settled there. These interviews, part of her PhD research, included formal and informal conversations with "[h]ousewives who worked in factories or who stayed at home," most of whom had "been to school up to maybe grade 5," having had to stop due to the outbreak of the Second World War. Her novels, written in the genre of historical fiction, draw inspiration from these interviews, as noted in the preface of many of her works. *Echoes, Birds of Passage, The Confectioner's Daughter* and *In Search of Carmen Caruana*, works which present the majority of her writing output, make clear the focus on the ordinary lives of predominantly working-class heroines and the conditions and situations that either lead them to emigrate to Australia, or to trace back and discover their Maltese and Gozitan heritage. Within these works, both currents often feature within the same book through an

[98] 'My father used to work as a stonemason'.

intergenerational mode of storytelling or through the inclusion and juxtaposition of multiple characters. Of these works, *Birds of Passage, Echoes* and *The Confectioner's Daughter* stand out for their ability to integrate relational, political, psychological and religious dynamics that underpinned and informed the backdrop to women's move from home. Including women's letters, and alternating between a first-person voice and a third-person narrative voice, Drofenik's ordinary heroines emerge as active subjects, rather than the objects of history. In Malta, Drofenik's works and strong characters have received appreciation and recognition for the way in which her perspective stands in stark contrast to more conservative literary tropes that have characterised the Maltese literary scene. Specifically, her work has been appreciated for the way in which it provides a counter-narrative to traditional and patriarchal depictions of women in Maltese literature, a sentiment that has been captured by the literary critic Adrian Grima;

'[T]he emergence of women writers, in the late 20th century, who refuse to perpetuate the patriarchal culture on which much of Maltese literature has stood and propose a literature and a discourse about literature that explores other experiences, perspectives and value systems can in turn help Maltese society to bridge the gap between what is narrated about it and the variety of experiences and perspectives that have transformed it in the past and continue to change it.'[99]

However, this appreciation doesn't fully capture how Drofenik's historical literature also illuminates aspects of Maltese culture, particularly regarding Maltese-Australian migration, beyond its literary significance. Scholar Diana Wallace has noted that the historical novel became "one of the most important forms of women's reading and writing during the twentieth century," largely due to women's exclusion from traditional historical narratives.[100] In this context, Drofenik's works are significant, offering valuable and accessible insights into Maltese-Australian emigration. This is particularly significant because earlier historical accounts have primarily emphasized the economic and political aspects of this migration, which have been largely male-centred. While her narratives are creatively reconstructed and could be considered 'fictional,' Drofenik's novels adopt a revisionist approach to

[99] Adrian Grima, "Cultivating Complexity: Maltese/Australian Women in Lou Drofenik," *Acta Scientiarum. Language and Culture*, 32.1 (2009), pp.83-96.

[100]Diana Wallace, *The Woman's Historical Novel: British Women Writers, 1900-2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 18.

historiography by prioritizing the perspectives of those historically considered insignificant. Additionally, Drofenik broadens the scope to explore not only the histories of ordinary, working-class women but also the complex class tensions among women from different levels of Maltese society. In doing so, she not only adds nuance to her narratives, but she also captures the workings of a constrictive classist and patriarchal system she herself was aware of and sought to escape. Thus, while the previous chapter examined women's migration experiences through an analysis of first-hand oral histories, this chapter will explore Drofenik's *Birds of Passage* and *The Confectioner's Daughter* in order to highlight the manner in which her works challenge not only extant historiography, but also point towards the ways in which historical fiction widens the ground for the emergence of multi-vocal narratives that not only highlight real historical facts, but also defy traditional formats.[101]

Drofenik's novel *Birds of Passage,* the clearest exploration of Maltese and Gozitan women's journey to Australia, is structured around the lives of five women—Katerina, Susanna, Franceska, Virginia, and Cecilja—each with a unique background and reason for migrating. Katerina is an orphan from Gozo, Susanna and Franceska are in love with men outside their social class, Virginia is trapped in a loveless marriage with an English navy officer, and Cecilja remains single. Of these, Franceska's story is particularly poignant, illustrating the limitations imposed on women by both gender and class. At 17, Franceska's budding romantic relationship with Luigi, the son of a local elite, is sabotaged by Luigi's mother, who intercepts their letters. With Franceska's father exerting strict control over her after her mother's death, she looks for a way to get out and, having received no response from Luigi, she writes him a final letter that reads, "Father guards me as if I am his prisoner. If you cannot find it in your heart to come to Mintafuq then I will leave. I will be the one to Cross an Ocean never to come back."[102] With no response from Luigi, Franceska goes through a marriage by proxy to Charlie, a Maltese labourer in Australia and embarks upon the ship to begin her new life.

In the work, Franceska's journey to Australia, both literal and metaphorical, is emblematic of the transformative experiences that migration can bring. The harrowing voyage, described as "long and tedious," with the ship "heaving and tossing like a cork in a bathtub," becomes a metaphor for Franceska's uncertain path toward personal autonomy.[103] Her story underscores

[101] Lou Drofenik, Birds of Passage (Victoria, Australia: Steam eReads, 2005); The Confectioner's Daughter (Victoria, Australia: Steam eReads, 2015).
[102] Lou Drofenik, *Birds of Passage* (Victoria, Australia: Steam eReads, 2015), p. 57.
[103] Lou Drofenik, *Birds of Passage* (Victoria, Australia: Steam eReads, 2015), p. 83.

the emergence of individual agency in response to the oppressive control exerted over her by her father and societal norms. Drofenik uses Franceska's character to highlight the harsh realities faced by Maltese and Gozitan women from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who were marginalized not only because of their gender but also due to their class. Amongst other things, the novel employs a postmodern narrative device by including multiple points of view, which emphasizes the subjective nature of historical narrative. Linda Hutcheon identifies this strategy as a key feature of historiographic metafiction, which involves the 'problematised inscribing of subjectivity into history'.[104] This approach challenges the notion of historical "fact" and questions the ability of authors and historians to represent reality accurately. By using multiple viewpoints, Drofenik underscores the subjective and interpretative nature of narrative construction, reminding readers of the social, political, and ideological context in which these narratives are created.

This narrative strategy has proven particularly useful for feminist historical authors such as Drofenik and Wallace, for example, notes that "multiple or unreliable narrative viewpoints [are] often used by women writers to disrupt any view of history itself as unitary and closed." Both suggests that such "intertwined narratives […] propose that many categories, including gender and identity, are much more fluid and varied than the normative narratives about them suggest".[105] The constructs of gender and femininity are central to these narratives, reflecting the fluidity and complexity of these identities.

In contrast to *Birds of Passage*, Drofenik's novel *The Confectioner's Daughter* focuses on the life history and family of Guditta who single-handedly comes to run a local confectionary shop. Exploring difficult themes such as domestic violence and family-related trauma, the work puts a lens upon the push factor of inter-personal relationships and the way in which they might have contributed to women's move to Australia. Unlike the collective narratives of *Birds of Passage*, this novel presents an inter-generational history that sees her Australian relatives look to the past in order to discover their grandmother's history and connection to the Archipelago. Guditta's romantic choices, often constrained by societal expectations, highlight her struggle for personal autonomy and her desire to break free from traditional norms, a desire that ultimately leads her to migrate to Australia. Throughout the novel,

[104] Linda Hutcheon, "Pastime: The Uses of History in Postmodern Fiction," *Modern Language Association*, 106.3 (1991), pp. 482-500.

[105] Diana Wallace, *The Woman's Historical Novel: British Women Writers, 1900-2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 2.

Drofenik intertwines references to parallel migrations to Canada through Guditta's friends and relatives who send her letters documenting their own migrations. This insertion normalises emigration within the time period for both the characters and readers with references providing a broader context for the migration experience, showing that the search for better opportunities overseas was a common thread among many Maltese families, as well as women.

Traditionally, historiography has tended to focus on the public sphere, often excluding personal letters and journals as legitimate historical sources. The epistolary mode, however, has been a genre traditionally associated with women, particularly during its peak popularity in the eighteenth century. This mode of writing allowed women to express themselves in ways that society would not otherwise have permitted. The novel of letters confronted the "question of identity […] to do with a whole gender's choice to speak, instead of being silent, and to subvert, instead of being subservient."[106] As a medium for unmediated expression and confession, the epistolary mode regained popularity as a feminist genre in the latter half of the twentieth century, continuing its association with the "personal, feminine, and […] interiority."[107] When employed as a means of narration in historical fiction, the epistolary mode is particularly interesting, as letters occupy a liminal space between the private and public spheres.

In an interview, Drofenik remarked on the significance of letters in her work, stating, "[M]any people received letters from these places, in *Birds of Passage* I mention Canada but I think it was America they all wanted. America was number one - the promised land, yeah… America was number one, number two, England was number two, Canada was number three, and at the bottom of the list was Australia. Yeah, yes, because Australia was far, you know, you can't come back. And the ocean, that journey across the vast ocean, cut them off completely from their culture. They would ask themselves How am I going to come back? How am I going to repeat this journey?"

Although Drofenik's oral history interviews are not publicly accessible, they significantly influence her works. Her novels contain material and ideas that not only challenge existing literary tropes but also illuminate the historical, social, and political reasons behind women's

[106] Walid El Hamamsy, 'Epistolary Memory: Revisiting Traumas in Women's Writing / المراسلة والذاكرة: عود على الفجيعة في الكتابات النسائية', *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 30 (2010), 150-75.
[107] Ibid.

emigration during the post-war period. As a feminist scholar and Maltese emigrant who documented women's histories in both Malta and Australia, Drofenik is uniquely positioned to interpret this migration. Her novels offer a nuanced, if fictionalized, window into their experiences leading up to and following their emigration.

While the reasons for emigration are individual and circumstantial, the crossing on the ship serves as a common denominator that separates the women from their homeland, both physically and psychologically. In *Birds of Passage* and *The Confectioner's Daughter*, Drofenik consistently addresses themes of cultural heritage, personal identity, and the complexities of migration. Her narratives highlight how women, despite difficult circumstances, act as agents of their own destinies. The key moments or "final straw" that lead individual women to emigrate often reflect resistance, reaction, and frustration with patriarchal structures that limit their political, emotional, and sexual roles. Conversely, these characters seek liberation through the choices available to them. On a wider level, Drofenik's historical fiction fits within a global trend of modern female writers who are turning to historical fiction as a discourse within which women can be made central. In his study of the historical novel, Jerome de Groot argues that the success of the genre "situates female historical fiction writers as 'writing back', bringing their subjects from darkness to light."[108]

[108] Jerome de Groot, *The Historical Novel* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 45.

Conclusion

As most historians of Empire have observed, the two primary factors driving the transformation of the world in the modern era have been the dramatic increase in the European population and their migration and settlement overseas, as well as the emergence of the modern capitalist economy and its development into industrialism. From a British Imperial standpoint, and as noted by the historian B.R Tomlinson, both of these phenomena peaked during the second half of the nineteenth century – with both having been closely linked to British Imperial expansion into 'the periphery'. Such studies however, have tended to limit their focus to movements in and out of the metropole, excluding the many colonial subjects who were included within Imperial migration streams.

This work has sought to expand the focus of such movements by investigating and outlining Maltese-Gozitan women's migration through a three-tiered level of analysis; historiographical, oral historical and historical-fictional. The first chapter, which consisted of a historiographical review, sought to capture the way in which the archipelago's inclusion into the British Empire, combined with a local patriarchal society and catholic religious culture, informed the specific Maltese-Australian colonial migration path and the way in which this specific path was intimately tied to specific gendered roles tied in religious ideals and understandings. On a global and colonial level, such a history illustrates how the British Empire, in its endeavour to fortify its dominions, championed migration as a tool for cultural and demographic consolidation. However, this imperial vision was predominantly centred on male settlers, whose physical labour was attractive for the purposes of building and expanding the empire. Women, in this schema, were ancillary, their primary role being the maintenance of familial units and the birthing of future citizens. Over time however, such a clear-cut division created a social necessity for women to emigrate, with the pathway eventually shifting to allow in those women emigration goals explicitly included finding work, as opposed to travel on the basis of domestic duty.

As seen in the second chapter, communal bonds forged in diaspora communities facilitated this transformation with Maltese enclaves in Australia becoming crucibles where traditional values interfaced with new cultural dynamics. Women, often the linchpins and guardians of these communities, played pivotal roles in preserving cultural heritage while simultaneously adapting to their new environment. They organized social gatherings, facilitated cultural

exchanges, and, in many instances, ventured into the labour market, contributing both socially and economically to their new home land.

As seen in chapter 2, a sample of women who travelled in the 1950's show how women's decisions to emigrate were often not solely personal but mediated by familial obligations, marital arrangements, and community. The presence of family members already in Australia prior to their move willing to guarantee their journey was a feature shared by all women interviewed. Moreover, an analysis of the different ships embarked upon by the various women helped to furnish their social histories and accounts, helping to show the varied condition of those who embarked on vessels to Australia using the Assisted Passage Scheme. Lastly, the final chapter of this work, which investigates the feminist readings of Lou Drofenik, illustrated how efforts to advance historiography on this emigration has been achieved through the creation of fictional-historical narratives which delve into aspects most would not be comfortable with sharing in interviews. This has been investigated through the literary devices Drofenik draws upon, as well as some of the reasons she explores in the works, all of which are supported by her memories of the interviews she personally conducted with Maltese-Gozitan emigrants in Australia.

Thus, in reflecting upon the emigration of Maltese and Gozitan women to Australia in the post-war era, it becomes evident that their experiences cannot be monolithically categorized. While overarching structures of patriarchy, religion, and imperialism influenced their trajectories, individual agency and resilience played decisive roles in shaping these women's destinies. Furthermore, their journeys underscore the transformative potential emigration had for some, with recorded instances painting the passage to Australia as one from confinement to liberation and from anonymity to self-assertion. For those who were able to adapt to the new socio-cultural milieu of Australia, they were able to find a canvas upon which they could redefine themselves, negotiate identities, and envisage futures previously deemed out of bound or unattainable.

In contemporary discourse, as migration continues to be a focal point of European and Global debates, the experiences of Maltese and Gozitan women serves as poignant reminders of the multifaceted nature of what is usually only seen as an economic-migratory phenomena. Their stories highlight the imperative of incorporating gendered perspectives to fully comprehend the intricacies of migration and their tales, replete with challenges and triumphs, resonate with universal themes of aspiration, resilience, and transformation. Navigating the

tumultuous waters of societal expectations, religious doctrines, and personal aspirations, Maltese and Gozitan women crossed the seas in a way that not only redefined their own lives but also enriched the cultural tapestry of their old and new homeland. Their stories, when viewed through a gendered lens, challenge and enrich our understanding of migration, urging a nuanced appreciation of the individual narratives that underpin broader historical movements.

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ANNEX

INTERVIEW WITH LOU DROFENIK 2024

Contact with Lou Drofenik was established at the start of the thesis research. As a scholar and author who has dedicated her life's work to the documentation of Maltese and Gozitan women's emigrations to Australia, her input was invaluable to the writing of this thesis. Based in Australia, I contacted her online and asked her if it would be possible to arrange two online interviews during the writing stages for the purposes of introducing my research direction, to discuss the themes she explored in her own work and to ask for any possible leads relevant to this study.

Given that the Oral Histories she conducted in Australia remain difficult to access, the insights and anecdotes she provided during this conversation help to give an indication of the highly varied individual circumstances of Maltese and Gozitan women faced in the lead up and aftermath of their journeys to Australia. These insights prove indispensable for the scope of the final two chapters of this work and I'd like to thank her for her time, patience and openness.

Insertions in brackets have been added to clarify some points.

VERONIKA: Thank you for agreeing to come to this meeting. As I told you during our call earlier on, the goal of the interview is not for it to be extremely structured, but rather to speak about these different aspects, to get a sense for the different motivations and experiences which I feel my research might not fully capture, especially given that academic work tendes to be bounded by existing literature.

DROFENIK: Oh, absolutely.

VERONIKA: I know we've touched upon a few of these following questions in our earlier calls, so I hope it's not too repetitive.

DROFENIK: Yes, I mean you'll find that a lot of my research is to be found in my books.

VERONIKA: So, one of the first questions I wanted to ask was, I mean, it's more of a general question, because we have met online before, but given that this meeting will be recorded, I wanted to start off with your own personal reasons as to why you left Malta. I'm aware you also studied then in Australia. So, if you can, introduce yourself and how you left Malta, with the single women's scheme.

DROFENIK: I felt very confined and I thought there was no future for me here. I just, because I used to read a lot. You know, I read a lot. And I used to read about mountains and rivers and valleys and dream of forests and birds, and I suppose, when you are 20 you can be a bit crazy, yes, and I just wanted…. and everybody knew me in Birkirkara. I couldn't do anything, you know? I'd go out and the neighbours would tell my mom 'I saw your daughter in Valletta with that boy from *Rabat* or from *Sliema'*….
You know, I felt as a woman, I had no rights. I had no rights, especially as a woman born in the village with a father who was a stonemason. My father was not a doctor, he was not a lawyer. I couldn't get anywhere in those days. I mean, you're lucky you're born now, you can do whatever you like, but in my time, you know. *Missieri kien jaħdem fil-ġebel,*[109]
Look. I went for a job interview to teach, and one of the questions was 'What does your father do?' And I said, 'what does it have to do with this?' you know? I had amazing marks. when I did my exams or whatever it was. I said what does my father have to do with it?.
He (the interviewer) said, 'you have a very long tongue', *Għandek spirtu pront',* and mom said you're not going to do very well. But I said to her, I'm not staying here, I made the decision there and then I'm not staying here. Full stop.

VERONIKA: And can I ask, at what age did you migrate?

DROFENIK: Twenty-one, because mom said there's no way I'm going to sign. I said ok, I'll wait another year and I'll go. Because mom said, the neighbours will say you're pregnant. That's why you left. There's no way I was pregnant because when you did (emigrated), you know they gave you a *full* test, medical. So, you know, I always had a very strong sense of myself and what I wanted to do, and I really felt, well Malta has changed a lot, you know, all these years, *luckily*, and I used to find the gossip in *Birkirkara*, you know, everybody

[109] My father used to work with stones.

gossiping about each other. I wanted to go somewhere where nobody knew me. You know, I wanted to start, you know, have my own identity. Does it sound crazy?
When I got to Australia I worked, because I could touch-type, I had a job in International Harvester. It's a huge business which sells farming equipment, they sold tractors and trucks and I worked there because I could type and I could speak Italian and French and English. So, I was popular with my peers because they had a lot of mail from Italy and France, so I was also translating the invoices. It was very good. And I also, I only lasted there three months. I got another job. You know I arrived on Friday and on Monday I had a job. The scheme I came on (Single women's migrant scheme) found me a job, but then I looked around and found another job, started teaching and the rest is history.

VERONIKA: And what led you to conduct the oral histories with the women who went to Australia? At which point did you move into a more academic field?

DROFENIK: I wanted to learn how to write. Look I always wrote, I've been writing since I was a kid in Malta. My mother used to say 'oh, you waste too much paper, you're always sharpening pencils', 'go away, go hang the washing on the line', you know, 'you're always wasting time', anyways so, I wanted to learn how to really write and to write you have to learn, you know because writing is a craft. So, I had to do a BA to teach, years later I did a masters and then I did a PHD because I really, really wanted to learn how to write. For my masters, I covered Maltese identity in Australia amongst mothers and daughters, and I did here (Malta) and there (Australia) too. And I contrasted and compared, and then for my PHD, I interviewed women and they told me so many stories.

VERONIKA: I'm wondering, based on the interviews you conducted, I'm wondering to what extent agency was a thing that your interviewees felt that they had. What was their main sentiment?

DROFENIK: I mean, they loved the interviews, I'd go in their kitchen and we would eat together and spend the afternoon together. It was more of a conversation I had with them rather than a formal interview. They told me amazing stories, you know, amazing stories. Their daughter would need an abortion, their mother wouldn't want them to get one. You know because when they came, Australia was opening up, they came in the 50's in the 60's. We had amazing panel discussions on television talking about women at the time, discussions

on disabilities, you know that's the way feminism started in Australia. These women had their moral values that they brought from here (Malta and Gozo), you know.
'The church said I have to have twelve babies but you know, I can only afford two.
So, whether the church says its right or wrong, I'm going to go on the pill'. These are the decisions they had to make, so in some ways they had to go against what they had learned. You know they found Australia much more open.

VERONIKA: It seems like it was a crazy situation to be thrown into for sure. I'm wondering if you also managed to interview any women who also made the decision to come back to Malta or Gozo? Or maybe those who were not able to or who didn't experience the different culture in as positive a light or who maybe didn't see it as liberatory as described?

DROFENIK: Well, all the women I interviewed here were all very sorry that they came back. I interviewed quite a few people who came to Australia, I'm trying to remember. I remember one woman and she missed her mother a lot so she kind of forced her husband to come back and she's happy here. But then I interviewed other women whose husband wanted to come back and then they found that the wages here were lower than what they earned there and they had brought money with them. But then they were kind of thinking I made a mistake. But by that point they had brought all their furniture, you know whatever they had, they were kind of stuck. So, I interviewed women who were very unhappy here. I interviewed a woman, she was lovely, she was born in Australia and she came here when she was nine and she missed her friends at school and she said she found the school in Malta very different because in Australia they don't learn things by heart, they have thing like sports on Friday, um so she found it very difficult to settle and she struggled with a bit of a romantic idea of her memories of childhood in Australia.

VERONIKA: It's interesting to hear these perspectives because the way it's presented here at least publicly, with houses being named after cities in Australia, or Canada for that matter, paints these return moves as a complete success of sorts. So, it's good to hear these perspectives because I haven't come across anything similar in the literature yet. I've also had a few issues with conducting the oral history interviews because of the distance and many of the participants' health conditions, so in some cases the interviews were either very short or they were conducted by close family members. I appreciate you sharing these perspectives.

DROFENIK: What did they tell you in your interviews?

VERONIKA: I don't think anyone said they regretted the time they spent in Australia but those who returned seemed happy to be back.

DROFENIK: Home is always home, isn't it? And homesickness is a terrible disease, it's a black disease, and it's very hard, the first few years. I mean, oh my god, a woman told me, she used to stand, because we talked a lot about home sickness in my interviews – Paula, her name was Paula. She said she used to stand by the back-door. She was very dramatic, she loved drama. She would stand by the back door and say 'can my guardian angel come and take me back to Malta on his wings.' *Kienet tgħidli, kont nitlob l-anġlu kustodju li jieħodni fuq il-ġwienah lura Malta.*[110] We all suffered from home-sickness.

VERONIKA: I'm wondering if from your experience and time you might agree with the observation that the kind of women that went to Australia after the 1970's were different to the ones you interviewed and met. In particular that those who left with the 'pioneers' and those who after the war stand in a bit of contrast to those who joined at a later stage when the communities had already formed and when there was a wish to go that was more about looking for work and better conditions as opposed to survival.

DROFENIK: A lot of people left you know through chain migration. So, a whole street, all of its young men.

VERONIKA: From what I've read this is mostly documented in Gozo rather than in Malta. Some scholars said that almost entire villages would be on a single ship.

DROFENIK: Yes, we found that. Yes. We found that. Many young men from Malta in Gozo. There were 15, 16-year-olds, 19-year-olds. Their mother's left behind. And the most poignant thing I ever heard was, I interviewed a woman in Rabat, and she said 'my mother wanted', all her family had gone to Australia, hers was a nuclear family, and she said, 'my mother didn't

[110] 'She used to tell me that she would pray to her guardian angel to take her back to Malta on his wings'

have anybody in the family to be a godparent' for the baby, for the babies that she had. So really, it split families, didn't it, migration? But you know, they did pretty well in Australia.

VERONIKA: When I met up with Dr.Xerri[111], he told me of a case of a Maltese family which started off by working in the fields and who currently own land which is larger than the size of Malta and Gozo combined.

DROFENIK: I just got the book, *The Sugar Key* that documents these kinds of stories.

VERONIKA: And of the women, who you interviewed in Australia, all of them were working? Would you say that the majority found a place to work outside the home?

DROFENIK: Some and some. Some didn't want to go to work or they were not allowed to. Yeah. And some went, they found factory work. Yeah. There were lots of sock factories. Manufacturing. You know, materials. There were lots. There was lots of manufacturing in Australia in those days. But there were some women who said, 'oh, no. My husband won't let me go too early', you know, because they still had the mentality that the woman stays at home. It depended where you lived. I lived, I went to live in Brunswick, and then I went to live in Ivanhoe. In Ivanhoe, there were no Maltese at all. But if you went to live in Sunshine or Saint Albans, it was just like living in Malta, you know. So there were Maltese shops, Maltese *pastizzi*, everything. But we kind of looked down a bit on sunshine. I don't know why we had to look down upon them, but, lots of people went to live in North Melbourne, which was quite nice. Yeah. I think I really didn't mix with Maltese in Australia. You know, I always mixed with, well because I went to teach. Yeah. The staff where I went to teach were all Australian. I went to live in a hostel of about 80 young women, and they were all Australian. Yeah. So I was the only - they had never seen a Maltese before. Yeah. So, I learned a lot from them. Oh my god. They were so assertive. I couldn't believe it. They were amazing.

VERONIKA: I mean, this is what I'm finding interesting as well is because you said that I mean, obviously, it's very difficult to generalize, and one of the points in the history which

[111] A reference to an in-person meeting I had with Dr. Raymond Xerri to discuss the thesis, gather some materials and to discuss the work that had been done on this topic thus far.

I'm say which I'm trying to put forward is it's difficult to capture the migration experience in a historical sort of format and writing because, obviously, every different every person their own kind of circumstances. So I'm just trying to give a bit of an insight.

DROFENIK: Yes. Yes. You can't generalise. No. You aren't doing a quantitative study right?

VERONIKA: No, it's a social history. Yes. Social history. Yes.

DROFENIK: You can't generalize.

VERONIKA: It's interesting, this idea sort of going to Australia in order to kind of emancipate and get away from the culture, but then once you go to Australia, it's sort of recreated in its own bubble. So the women who would go there and would still be at home, but they would be doubly removed from their home in Malta.

DROFENIK: Of course. Of course. But they made, they used to have. Maltese women are very, very good at finding other Maltese women. Like, my mom couldn't speak English. Her mom came to Australia, and she was in her fifties. And, you know, after we migrated, after I migrated, she came and I take her to the market and she sees someone and she'll go up to them 'you're Maltese, aren't you?' And, yeah, 'where do you live?', 'I live there. Come and have a coffee'.
So we are very good at connections. Yeah. So women, Maltese women, had a lot of Maltese friends. Yeah. And that's why probably many of them didn't learn how to speak English properly when they were in Australia for a long time. Because, you know they kept their culture. I mean, the cooking was the same. You know, they could cook *patata l-forn*, *ravjul*, *fennek*, you know? Yeah. So the culture stayed, you know. You brought that with you. *Hobz biz-zejt*. So I think food is a connector and also the language.

VERONIKA: I mean, one other thing which from the history and from the resource I found is that a lot of Maltese women who were sent to as well who were, like, supported by these schemes would be either also Maltese teachers or also nurses? A lot of women in the medical sort of sphere. And I'm wondering if you had any interviews with either teachers or with women who were already educated when they emigrated.

DROFENIK: No. I only interviewed housewives. Housewives who worked also in factories or who stayed at home. Most of the women I interviewed had been to school up to maybe grade 5. Many left school because of the war (WW2). There was no school, so they left school IN year 3 or year 2 or year 1. But look, I met a woman. She never went to school in Malta, and she taught herself English. She was amazing. She knew…she had an amazing garden, and she knew all the botanical names of the garden. She was amazing, and she made it (To Australia) by proxy marriage.

VERONIKA: What were the experiences for the woman who married by proxy? Do you have any specific anecdotes, because, I mean, this is also really fascinating.

DROFENIK: Well, she was the eldest in the family. I have to remember because it's a long time ago. It's because she lived in *Hamrun*. Yes. The eldest in the family. Her brothers had gone to Australia. She was at home. Her father was *very* strict. He used to belt her with the buckle of the belt. She said she used to get marks all over her back with the buckle. Her brother said he found someone. There was a man who wanted to get married. 'Would you want to marry him?' And she thought, 'I have to get out of here'. So she said, yes. So she, she..she got the priest to write her a letter because she couldn't write. So the priest wrote her a letter and somebody else in Australia wrote a letter for him, George, because he couldn't write. So she, she got married to him. And, before he came to Australia, his father had given him a beating on his head with a *masqgha* -

VERONIKA: A farming tool...

DROFENIK: - He gave him a beating with the farming tool. But yes, she had to go to the priest to confirm the marriage, and the priest said, 'you have the wrong papers'. And she said, 'what do you mean I have the wrong papers?' He said, 'you have the wrong papers. You have to apply for the right papers'. So he wrote a letter to Malta to make sure. So she said, 'I couldn't sleep with him (George). I came here, I couldn't sleep with him'. He was furious. He said I'm married to you, I'm going to sleep with you'. She said, 'no, you can't because I'm not married to you yet. The priest hasn't approved'. Oh, my God. She said that was so stupid. Anyways, so she noticed about a month after they got married that he had a tremble in his hand. So she said, oh. She said, he couldn't hold a cup in his hand properly. So she told him, 'What's the matter? Do you drink?' He said, no. I don't drink. You know, I've had this for a

while’. And she oh. Anyway, it got worse. She was still young. She was still in her twenties, and he was young. She took him to the doctor. The doctor said, you have the beginning of Parkinson's disease. You have been, I mean in the sixties, they didn't have as many things as they have now. Yes. But he said you've got some damage to your brain. Have you had a trauma? The doctor asked him. Oh, he said I don’t know. And she asked him, did something happen to you? And he said, oh, yes. I did something and my father whacked me with the tool on my head.
It caused permanent damage. Permanent damage. So they were married for about 10 years, and then he died. You know, he got very sick. He died. So she raised 2 children by herself, you know, in Australia. She worked very hard. So there was a lot of domestic violence, wasn't there? And child abuse. Lots. Because this was a very prominent feature. It was common. It was very common. I mean, one woman said that she had a watch, a permanent watch, where her mother used to bite her. Okay. You know, she used to bite her on her arm. I mean, because people, you know, they lived in small houses. They had a lot of children. You can't blame the women, you know. They were poor. There was a lot of violence. A lot of violence. It was never spoken about.

VERONIKA: I’d like to think there's a lot more awareness about this now.

DROFENIK: Of course. And people speak. And there's help. There was no help back then, you know? And strange stories, you know, strange stories you hear. Oh, there were some strange stories.

VERONIKA: Another aspect which I found very interesting, it was about the role of pregnancy specifically and that in Gozo, for instance, women had a history that if, and also in Malta, they got pregnant and they didn't want the people around them to know, they would go for, like, a few months to the sister island to hide the pregnancy, and there was a similar kind of thing happening as well with women being, sent to Australia.

DROFENIK: Not for single women, no, at least not early on. They wouldn't let you get in Australia if you were a single woman and pregnant. Australia has always been very strict with the borders. And well, I remember a woman, tell you what's really true, because you had to have a urine test. And this woman in Sydney said to me, she had, you couldn't get in if you had diabetes. And they gave you a little specimen bottle and they said, go in the toilet and,

you know, bring me a specimen. And she said she had really bad diabetes so she took a little boy with her, her little boy, or her grandson or whatever, and she took him in the toilet and she told him, do peepee now. And that's what she gave the doctor. She passed. You know? Australia didn't want to have the burden of sick people, so they were very selective, very choosy. But people always subverted the system. You know, you could subvert the system. Yeah. I mean, people still do, don't they?
Australia in the 50s, was also obsessed with tuberculosis. They didn't want people with tuberculosis to come in, so they had chest X rays, and many of the women and the men, had calcification of the lungs, which is probably - because I asked a doctor, why would they hold most of them, you know, like 90% of the people who came here. I mean, who came to Australia. When I say here, I'm thinking Australia. When they came to Australia, they had calcification of lungs. Maybe it was the dust, because they had just come after the war, and maybe there was a lot of dust when the bombs… you know, or they would have had a lung infection. So.. but the remarks the doctors made about the women and the men were *really*… first of all about the women. They were very misogynistic. They were very raci-even though they were, I think they were Maltese doctors, some I think there would have been Australian doctors too, here, employed by the government, and where they said,
'This person is not intelligent, does not look intelligent'.
You know, how can you say that? How can you label a person? This person is 'fat', 'obese'. Some of these women, there is a woman, we found in her record, her medical record, she had 20 live births, 20 babies, and she came to Australia with 11. So nine would have died, and these women never went out of their village. They couldn't speak English, many were illiterate. They couldn't write. So, you know and that passage from Malta to Australia was *enormous* psychologically, wasn't it?

VERONIKA: Yes, I had an interview with a participant who went during the time when there was the Suez Crisis

DROFENIK: Oh yes

VERONIKA: ….and she was explaining, she was talking about her experience on board of the ship, and I mean, she told me she had a miscarriage on the ship. They also experienced the monsoon on the ship. And apart from that, they were also not allowed to disembark, because there was the Suez crisis and there was a war, they were seen as British subjects at

the time. So she had all of these aspects packed into a single thing, and the miscarriage almost seemed like the smallest event on the ship, when she talked about she was she, she remembered it sort of just like ‘Oh, and that also happened’,

DROFENIK: Yes, well, I interviewed two women, especially, one in Melbourne, one in Sydney. The Melbourne woman came to Australia. Her husband had been in Australia two years, and she had a little two-year-old boy called Johnny, and a girl called Mary. And Mary must have been about three, and Johnny was two. Johnny got very sick. He had meningitis, but he made it to Melbourne. When they went to Melbourne, they rushed him straight from the ship to the hospital, and he died. And you know, she told me, the first piece of land that we bought in Australia was a grave. Oh- it's terrible, isn't it? And another one. The other one is Sydney. She had a horrific journey. She had a little boy and he must have been four and she said he was so beautiful, and he got very sick. And they came on a Greek ship. The Greek ship was filthy, it stank of vomit and urine. They couldn't wash. They had to wash all they had in the sink. The boy got very sick. He had pneumonia, and the Greek doctor put ice on his chest, and she said, you can't do that. And he said, oh you're a stupid woman, you're stupid, that's what we're going to do to get his temperature down – put a pack of ice on his chest. But he died, and he was very much sick. They buried him at sea and she said they had to tie her to a chair because she was going to jump after him.

VERONIKA: Part of the reason why I wanted to actually speak to you as well is because I’d like to create some space in my thesis for these kinds of stories as well, because a lot of people who I did interview had quite positive ship experiences as well. Oh, you know, the food was nice, you know, we had a lot of fun dancing. And so they brought up a lot of these kinds of experiences. And I'm interested in your works in particular as well, because you don't shy away from delving into these harder aspects.

DROFENIK: Of course.

VERONIKA: It's a bit difficult at the moment, based on the oral histories, to say how representative or not they are. But I'm sure that there's a lot of research which could be done further in this area.

DROFENIK: Of course. I've interviewed a lot of women, and you know, really, when I did my PhD interviews, I signed a document that I cannot release the tapes. So I have amazing, amazing tapes. Maybe we can release them after 50 years or something, but I will have to ask my university what to do with them, because I am bound not to. But another girl from Birkirkara, she came to Australia when she was 12 by herself. She was going to Australia. Her sister was going to have a baby, and her sister wrote home, and she said, 'Oh, send Nina to look after the baby'. And so this 12 year old girl was sent with a neighbour. She had her period on the boat, and she didn't know what it was, because nobody had told her. And she was terrified. She said, I looked down and there was blood pouring down my leg. Oh, my God. She said, I'm dying, you know? And she said, 'What am I going to do?' So she went and asked the neighbour, and the neighbour told her, Oh, don't worry. '*Waqajt it-tarag'*, you know. So people tell you, I think when you're a woman speaking to women, they tell you their, you know, their intimate stories like that.

VERONIKA: I mean, one of the questions which I also asked was sort of, how did you feel as well as you were leaving the ports? Like, do you remember what you felt at that moment?

DROFENIK: And what did they tell you?

VERONIKA: One of them, which I found very powerful, was that she said she couldn't believe it. And when they approached the Greek shore, she took the otherside as Malta. So she was constantly feeling that she was going back home, the further away they were getting.

DROFENIK: Yes. Yes. It was very difficult, especially the scenes of goodbye before they left, yes. And apart from that the women and the men were separated on the ship. So the women slept away from their husbands, you know, because all the women slept in cabins.

VERONIKA: From what I've found it seems it really depended on the type of ship that they were aboard, because in some of my interviews the women were in the same room as their husband or their family. So it appears it was dependent upon class.

DROFENIK: Ah yes, but I think most of the 10-pound migrants were separated. There was a woman, and she said to me, coming on the ship, she was on one side of the ship, and her husband and her 14-year-old son was on another, and her 14-year-old son was started to bed

wet, you know, so she had to, and he was very embarrassed, because he was sleeping with other men, with his father and other men in the cabin. And she said in the morning she had to go to the men's cabin, and she wasn't allowed to do so, to grab the sheets, so she washed them in the sink, because he was bedwetting all night. So, you know these stories come up often. And you know she said it was terrible because she had to do this every day. And he was pretty traumatised by this, by the journey.

VERONIKA: I've had some responses that also told me that they had a wonderful time, but I guess it is also in comparison to the conditions which they left from here.

DROFENIK: Of course, because there was no work. But then there was always the final straw. I always, in every interview, I found the final straw. They couldn't get on with their mother-in-law, like the girls, the women didn't want to go to Australia, didn't want to go to Australia, and then they would have had a big fight with their mother-in-law, and she'd say, 'Yep, I'll go. I can't stand her anymore'. Eh? Or another woman said the landlord, you know somebody, her husband left. She didn't want to go to Australia. And the person who used to come and pick the rent, told her, 'this is the last rent I'm picking'. You're not staying in this house anymore. So that was the push. So yeah, she was in a *kerreja* (rental home) – so the push and pull is there, but there was always the final thing, the 'I can't stand this place anymore' moment, you know when they felt they had to go.

VERONIKA: And from the interviews you've done, or from the general feeling you got, were there any common reasons they had to leave Malta, would you be able to pinpoint any specific political or economic measure?

DROFENIK: You know they were following the men, their husbands. But even then it is interesting. You know some women, I've found recently in archives, two women, went to Australia in the 1950's, they were glass-cutters. I never heard of glass-cutters. They didn't say they were glass-blowers, they were glass cutters. They were very young, I think one of them was 22 and another was 23. That's so interesting isn't it, two sisters coming on their own. The things you find! I mean the passport photos are also amazing, one with a dog and another with a man with a cigarette in his mouth. You can't have that now, my goodness. They're beautiful. So what points are you using in your thesis? What points of reference?

VERONIKA: I mean, at the moment because I'm trying to understand from a historical perspective. First of all, why the emigration took place in Malta? How or why Australia became the main point of arrival? And then also how women's experiences, how there is reason to believe, that women's experiences were significantly different from men's because of their social role, and that sort of the models which are generally used for the reason for emigration in in local literature, the push and pull models are very androcentric and that they are sort of focused on the male experience. So my general overarching point is the fact that women's experience -

DROFENIK: The women had agency too.

VERONIKA: Had agency and that they had a different experience and that while they had agency, it was sort of

DROFENIK: - in a Roundabout way.

VERONIKA: Roundabout way. So they were still navigating this, and I think your works, perfectly illustrate this.

DROFENIK: Yes. Yes.

Interviewer takes out a copy of Lou Drofenik's The Confectioner's Daughter

VERONIKA: In this specific work, I found it to be interesting how you captured the decisive moment or final straw in Frances' journey. Her difficult relationship with her mother was especially interesting, and really captured this moment I think. And also, another thing which I found really interesting, was the way in which you also included, for instance, other women traveling to places such as Canada or the US. It seems to show that there was already that kind of knowledge and that many were deciding how to go about emigrating or staying on the islands and how such knowledge informed their horizon of possibilities when it came to making their own decisions.

DROFENIK: Oh yes. Because many people received letters from these places, in the book I mention Canada but I think it was America they all wanted. America was number one - the

promised land, yeah… America was number one, number two, England was number two, Canada was number three, and at the bottom of the list was Australia. Yeah, yes, because Australia was far, you know, you can't come back. And the ocean, that journey across the vast ocean, cut them off completely from their culture. They would ask themselves *How am I going to come back? How am I going to repeat this journey?*

VERONIKA: I was reading Barry York's writings on the episode of the *Gange*, because that's also, I think, one of the episodes which is most remembered today, especially with the migration crisis.

DROFENIK: Yes, yes and the racism..

VERONIKA: But it also got me thinking about the impact it's had on the woman back home. Because, I mean, these were men who were going to support their families, and these sort of delays meant repercussions for women back at home as well and you wrote about this aspect too.

DROFENIK: I think I wrote about that in *Birds of Passage*, didn't I, yes. That's quoted a lot I mean even in Australia. It's quoted because it is seen as a prime example of government racism, not just in the Maltese sphere. I mean, Australians were very racist. I mean, we all are racist in some way or another. And if you read Barry York, you know how bad it was, because we were classified as coloured people, we were not white. Not that there is something wrong with being coloured, but it was in their mentality, wasn't it.

VERONIKA: In fact, a lot of the material which I was given by Raymond Xerri, in terms of history, when I looked into it, a lot of it had to do with colonial forms of population control and statistics

DROFENIK: So there you have further proof.

VERONIKA: I mean, it's interesting that it was created, but also doesn't really give a lot of information on the personal histories and the reasons why people went. Then there were also documents documenting who was not let into Australia and why. And I mean, a lot of it came down to a lot of relative judgments. Some arrivals were deemed possible to cause issues in

the new colony and then the reasoning would be left to the people in charge. I saw cases too of stowaways, highly specific conditions...

DROFENIK: Of course. You know, I interviewed the daughter of a stowaway. You know, he was from *Mellieha*. He was 14. He was a cabin boy on one of the ships. And,oh wait sorry, he was not a stowaway. He jumped ship. Yes, he jumped ship in Melbourne, and he, I mean, he became a grandfather and a great grandfather, and he stayed in Australia.

DROFENIK: And what did you make of the other novels, which did you look through?

VERONIKA: I only had time to go through *Echoes*, *The Confectioner's Daughter* and *Birds of Passage*. I think they were very well written. I liked how you turned the last two into an intergenerational story. It's a mode of storytelling which I like quite a bit. This sort of idea of having different characters, and in each character and through their perspectives, you have sort of a condensed version of their struggles. And I mean, personally, I find it to be a very effective form of storytelling, especially when it comes to historical literature. But, yeah, the characters, I mean, I really, I found them multi-dimensional and the ending of *The Confectioner's Daughter* got me emotional. It was a new experience for me, at least because of the personal dimensions you explored. I especially appreciated the mother daughter relationships you looked into.

DROFENIK: Mother Daughter relationships are very hard, aren't they? Yes, I know I have two daughters,

VERONIKA: I feel like it's a perspective which often goes missing because so much literature which unfortunately, people are still exposed to, in terms of family dynamics, the stories they're all mostly written by men as well. So it was very wonderful to read through it. And also it's, I think, it's also very interesting being able to talk about a kind of colonial history through the language of the colonisers and mixing it with, as in, there were certain sentences which, once I read through them, if you have the knowledge of Maltese, you can decipher a lot more.

DROFENIK: Yes. Yes..

VERONIKA: Yeah, those were the aspects which struck me the most.

DROFENIK: And what did you think of *Echoes*?

VERONIKA: I think it showed how emigration was really and intimately tied to political dimensions back at home in a way that was very accessible..

DROFENIK: That is about migration too. You know how they waited to get their papers? Because you had to have guarantees. You know that? Yes, someone had to guarantee you.

VERONIKA: I saw in an interview uploaded by Barry York that they would sometimes be met by the guarantees, once they arrived. This is just based on one of the oral histories which I heard in which the woman said that the person who provided the guarantee met them at the court.

DROFENIK: She was very lucky. She was very lucky because sometimes I've interviewed people who were guaranteed by someone who lived there. They arrived in Australia, got down from the ship. Everybody left, and they are left on the wall. Nobody coming to pick me up, nobody coming to me. Oh my gosh. What do you do? It happened mostly to men.
Also, I've interviewed two women who came - they got married by proxy. You know, they used to marry here, your husband would be in Australia. And you know, she saw from this ship - Her name was Lucy, I interviewed her in Bega, which is in the country, She got married. She saw him, she hit she said he was short and dark. She said, I'm not going down the ship. I'm staying here! So she kept going to Sydney and she was married to him!

VERONIKA: Yes I believe you have a character in *Birds of Passage* who goes through the proxy marriage after her relationship at home is thwarted due to class divisions on the island..

DROFENIK: Yes.

VERONIKA: Do you have information as well, on how these proxy marriages - It's just very difficult to find any resources, especially from afar. Would you be able to explain how these proxy marriages were conducted based on the interviews you've done?

DROFENIK: Yes, well there was the Valentine's scheme. So there was a scheme, a valentine's scheme - it was run by the church. So people would write to the parish priest 'find me a girl, find me a woman', and the parish priest would have a list of women, young women who wanted to get married, and he would match them up. That was that.

VERONIKA: And the women, I mean, generally, would they speak? Would this be something which the family would tell the priest, or would it be the woman's own choice to go and to tell the priest, listen I want to get married? From the women you've interviewed as well, do they want to marry someone who was specifically in Australia, or ? because it seems like a very difficult…

DROFENIK: Well because what happened was that so many men went to Australia and Canada that there were seven women to one man in Malta, that was the ratio.

VERONIKA: So I what I found, and what I knew is that in Australia, the male population was very high. There went a lot of Maltese women, and so they wanted to bring in women to marry them, so that the population kind of stabilizes.

DROFENIK: Well that but also the church didn't want Maltese men to marry Protestant women. They were afraid that Maltese men would marry protestant women. One reason. The Catholic Church is very powerful here. Also, there were many women who wanted to leave home and they wanted to get married, there were women who were living on the edge financially. They wanted to improve their lives. So, there are a lot of factors, aren't there? There are lots of pushes. So it was financial, it was religious, and it was also women who wanted to escape this culture. You know, because this culture used to be very constrictive wasn't it? I was one of them. I didn't want to stay in this culture and then I'd come back every year. How stupid is that.

VERONIKA: And how do you then position yourself when writing about these stories?

DROFENIK: Well, I guess similarly to your writing, you're writing for an audience beyond that in Malta. Because now you're an outsider and that's why I can write. If I was in Malta I wouldn't be able to write that. Because I'm an outsider-insider – I've always seen myself as an outsider-insider so I know what's going on inside but I look through a window and I can

say whatever I like and really I'm not afraid of the repercussions, they can't excommunicate me or anything, not that I write anything that is ex-communicatable…

VERONIKA: hm, and as you've said, at the PHD level you always wanted to transform your writing also into novel form and that you've always wanted to be a writer.

DROFENIK: Yes

VERONIKA: How did you go about merging the historical with the fictional. Did you have any process for the way in which you chose or selected the stories you wanted to include in your works? Did you merge different participant experiences together?

DROFENIK: I don't really plan them out. I get an idea and I follow it.

VERONIKA: So you don't look at the interviews you conducted before writing?

DROFENIK: No, I am influenced of course but it's not a conscious part of my writing process.

VERONIKA: Can I also return quickly to the interviews and ask what language you conducted them in? From what I've read and from what you've also told me so far, it seems that some women who moved to Australia never learnt English, even while living in Australia.

DROFENIK: Yes, yes, well most talk a kind of pidgin Maltese-English, you know it's a mixture. So they usually start talking in Maltese and then they cross-talk.

VERONIKA: I noticed you would add this to the novels and I was wondering if it was intentional or done for emphasis.

DROFENIK: That is the way they would speak in Australia yes. Even here.

VERONIKA: Yes, I guess this interview shows that too, the switching to Maltese. Actually, this was a question which I wanted to ask you specifically in terms of the education. So, the

women who you interviewed, did you ever come across them wishing to have more education? I read other oral histories, and they mentioned *Kieku kelli iktar edukazzjoni.*

DROFENIK: Absolutely. They all wanted to. They all yearned to have a better education. Yes, oh, *absolutely*. And many of them, because in Australia, we had in, we still have it. We had an organisation and I use volunteer for this, which is migrant Educational Studies. So there is to teach you how to teach English as a second language. Yeah. So you go to this place and then you volunteer. I used to teach Turkish people, volunteer. But in the 60s, there was the Good Shepherd foundation. And there were women, Australian women, going to the houses with migrants to teach them English. And some of the women, yeah, they took advantage of , they had these women coming into their houses to teach them, which was a very good concept.

VERONIKA: So Maltese women would have Australian women come in and they would teach to speak English.

DROFENIK: It was on a free basis, yeah, okay, free volunteers. Australia is a great place for volunteering. You know, I think without volunteers, Australia will not survive. We have volunteers for everything. But yeah, the Good Shepherd Foundation was ordinary people going into people's migrants homes to teach them English, and I had a few women taking advantage of that, and it was good. So they were looking after children, and they were loved, the women, you know. The primary schools used to also have classes in the evening for migrants to teach them English. In fact my mother went. My mother couldn't read or write. She learned to read and write, you know, you know in Australia. Oh, she was so proud of herself.

VERONIKA: You said your mother emigrated to Australia after you had gone, so she had come to actually join you.

DROFENIK: Yeah. She loved Australia, oh, my God, because here, because mom was from the village, she was illiterate, so she'd go to the bank and they would ignore her. Yeah. She, she was not even… you know, she was plumb. She came to Australia. She sold her house so she had money. So we took her to the bank, and she had to check, and the bankers here said, Mrs. Zammit, come in the office.

She couldn't believe it, ‘would you like a coffee? Mrs. Zammit. She couldn't believe it. She's been treated as a human being, you know. In a week’s time we bought a house, no problem. And she was respected, you know, she was not ignored. And then she said one thing to me, I have to cut my hair because someone called her Mam. I'm not his mother, she said. And she cut her hair and she looked amazing. But, you know, Australia gave my mom her self-respect.

VERONIKA: I realise that it's very dependent on and obviously it's moving between cultures, and you get this, there's, there's one question, which is like, maybe a bit tougher, or which is kind of complicated, because, again, I did study anthropology before, and we looked, for instance, at the situation of the first nation peoples in Australia, and given its global and colonial history, it's like this is a gray zone as well. Because, I mean, the Maltese were a colonized nation, and there was the movement of free settlers to Australia. And I'm wondering, in terms of the like, kind of colonial aspects, how you might place Maltese and Gozitan settlers in light of this?

DROFENIK: hmm, yes, well, the Maltese, unless they went to work in the Northern Territory, they did not come across First Nations people at all, because they were pushed into the fringes. When I arrived, first Nations people, first Nations people were having their own fights. Yeah and emigrants, their own fights. Feminists were their own fight. So really, it's a very complicated, so I don't think it ever crisscrossed. Australia, I think, always had its own niches. You know, populations were kept separate, the Jewish Quarter, diaspora. Then, Christian migrants, European migrants. Feminists are doing their own thing. And I don't think they intersect. For the Maltese and Gozitans, unless they worked with, say, the people who worked in North Queensland in sugar cane, they would have not come across this.

VERONIKA: I mean, I'm not expecting to answer, but I'm just wondering if this, to what extent this features or doesn't as well.

DROFENIK: Because, no, because, I think, hmm I’ve never been asked that question, actually. So those are very separate issues because, oh, they're very big issues, very separate, separate, big issues. It’s a light history, isn’t it? For this kind of history to be written, you have to leave the context.

VERONIKA: Yeah, I mean, I cannot even begin to imagine being thrown into the women's circumstances. Obviously, I can appreciate that they would learn a lot, they had to learn a lot of skills to survive also as you get to a new context.

DROFENIK: Of course. Of course. You have to.

VERONIKA: One thing you mentioned in an earlier interview that showed me this was how, for instance, the passengers would leave Malta in summer, for instance, to arrive there in winter with summer clothes.

DROFENIK: Yeah. Yeah.

VERONIKA: So, obviously, the whole season and everything. I read that the climate in certain areas resembles Malta. So one of the colonial reasons, at least, for why the Maltese were seen as appropriate for Australia was the climate.

DROFENIK: Yes. That's why Yeah. I left here in August. Yeah. It was hot and I arrived in Australia. It was so cold. Oh my god. I never felt so cold. And the next, in the next few weeks, I got chilblains on my finger. I've never had chilblains in my life. Yeah. Do you know what chilblains are?

VERONIKA: Yeah. The skin sort of hardens and becomes sore. Feels like blisters.

DROFENIK: My god and my toes. And I got sick in the stomach, and I went to the doctor and he said, the cold. You know, it's been through your system. Yep. Took me quite a while to adjust because we went from heat to cold. You know because I went by plane. But I loved Australia. You know, Australia was exciting. The music Oh, my god. It was so beautiful. I just loved it. I fell in love with Australia straight away. You know, I went dancing every Saturday night. My mother didn't have to say come back at 8 o'clock. But there were lots of dances going on all around the place. Music. Beautiful music. Because I was staying in a hostel. So we went out every night. Yeah. 'You're coming?' Okay. 'Let's get a taxi'. It was amazing. I loved it. I loved the freedom. I loved the freedom it gave me. I felt like I was out of prison.

VERONIKA Can I also ask if the women you interviewed as well, if many of them ever recounted that they tried to maybe go to the US or to the UK before going to Australia because you said Australia was the last place that they wanted to go?

DROFENIK: Yes, I interviewed one woman. Yes. She went to Canada Yeah. First. Then she came to Malta because her mother oh, her mother said come home. And she said my mother thought I'm coming home from Gozo, not from Canada. Yes. She went to Canada as a single woman too. She was working, I think she said some, Saint Louis, somewhere in Canada. And she said her mother wrote and she said, 'I'm sick. Come home'. And she said she was in Gozo. You know, I can't just come home. Anyway, so she came to Malta and it was the Mintoff era. Yep. So and they were *Mintoffjani*. And her mother was giving pamphlets out in *Bormla*. And this woman, Chettie was her name, Chettie wanted, a job, so she went to the parish priest to get a job, to get a reference. And I think I wrote that in *Echoes* that he put a red sign near her name (because of her labour leanings). And she went to work in the union, in the Mintoff era, and she said the coming and going, and she knew so much about the, you know, the ministers, the labour ministers, how they were swearing and deals and shady deals and everything. Anyway, so her mother, her mother got very sick, and she said, if you die, mom, we have to stop being with labour because if you die, they're going to bury you in the Mizbla.

Her mother said, I don't care. I'll be buried there. So she said, Mom, you can't be buried in the Mizbla, you have to be buried in the Adolorata cemetery where Dad is. So they went to the doctor, and the doctor said, you have to walk every day. So she said, I told mom, you have to walk every day. So they used to walk from Bormla, she said, they used to walk 1 block, 2 blocks, 3 blocks, until her mother. She said because, 'Gonzi is not going to live on. He's not going to be here forever. He's going to die one day'. Yep. So her mother got better, and she said, you know, she died, I think she died after Gonzi died, and the *interdett* and when she died, she was buried in the Addolorata cemetery world. And then her sister got cancer in Australia and she went to Australia and she came to Australia to look after her sister. Her sister died and she looked after her children. And she was a knitter. She knitted. Oh my god. She knitted so many things. Yeah. She was, she was a single woman.

VERONIKA: Did the men mention any of these similar kinds of personal dynamics or because I think you interviewed men as well. No?

DROFENIK: Yes. Oh, sometimes men would be there, you know, listening and putting their point in.

DROFENIK: Look. Men, especially in the Mintoff era, came to Australia not only because they didn't have work, but because they were against Mintoff. So there was, I remember one man telling me the church. The church, he said the church said you have to have as many babies, you have to increase and multiply. You know, you have to have as many babies as you can. He said, I'm not going to have more than 1 child. So that was one reason he left. Yeah. A couple said, a couple came to Australia because of the Mintoff caffafle that was going on.

VERONIKA: Yeah. I'm wondering about this as well because, I mean, a lot of the reasons as well for men's movements and then migration I mean, a lot of what has been written had to do with the, you know the economic and overpopulation concerns.

DROFENIK: They lost their job. You know? There was no work. Yeah. And they, you know, their cousins wrote, their uncles wrote. 'Come over, you know, I have a shop'. They said 'I'm gonna work in the shop'. I'm earning £7 a week or £17 a week. And here (in Malta) they were earning £1 and I mean. Yeah. And it's sort of also a bit of a madness that overtakes you, you know, to exile yourself from your country is a big thing, especially in a I mean, if you go to England, you can always come here very quickly. But to come to go to Australia it's another thing. The vast distance, you know, that ocean crossing. It's vast, those women. Absolutely vast….Which ships did you come across?

VERONIKA: I interviewed women on the *Flaminia*.

DROFENIK: The *Flaminia*, that was a bad ship. Yeah, the conditions on that one were particularly bad. It used to be a cattle ship. And I interviewed two people who came on the *Flaminia*. And they said it used to carry cattle backwards and forwards to Australia. And it even had the rings in the hold to hold the bulls and the cows. Yeah. And that's where they slept. It was a very bad ship. That was a terrible ship. The *Flaminia* was one of the bad ones.

VERONIKA: I have participants who I interviewed who are up to 90 years old, and they all, without fail, everyone remembers the name of the ship that they were on, because that is something which I found worth mentioning. I also came across the *Orania*. The *Orania*, yeah. Then there was the *Roma*, the *Sydney*. Funnily enough, I found material at the Dutch National Archives, because *the Skaubryn* was also used to deliver Ducth passengers. But yeah, it's, I'm trying to find the like. the way to portray it, because at the end of the day I wanted to show that it's a very kind of complex, difficult history. And the issue in multifield and historical narratives and studies is that most histories are written to drive a specific point or a specific generalization. And when it comes to immigration history, it's very difficult to do this.

DROFENIK: Of course, because it treats human beings, doesn't it?

VERONIKA: I think that’s a good note to end the interview on. Thank you for your time, writings and insights. I’m sure they will remain an important source for those interested in looking into womens history in Malta.