



# *Gendered spaces and practice, relationality, emotion and affect at the Marian shrine of Ta Pinu, Gozo, Malta*

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***Gendered spaces and practice, relationality, emotion and affect at the Marian shrine of Ta Pinu, Gozo, Malta***

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In this chapter the case study of Ta' Pinu, Gozo, a site of pilgrimage for Marian devotion and the national shrine of Malta, is analysed as a gendered assemblage and an example of the intersection of gender and religion, with attention to the spatial and power relations associated with these flows and processes. Islands have functioned as places of spiritual retreat and subsequent pilgrimage throughout the history of the Christian faith, the liminal character of their coastal landscapes and environments creating particular intertwinings of experience and spiritual practice; yet, whilst this experiential nexus may be extraordinary for visitors, it is the everyday context of daily life for inhabitants (see Maddrell 2011, 2013, Maddrell and della Dora 2013, Maddrell et al 2015, Maddrell and Scriven (forthcoming)). Here my attention is turned to the island of Gozo in Malta, analysing the Roman Catholic shrine of Ta' Pinu, in order to offer a spatial perspective on gender and religion within this specific context and arena. Whilst the journeys to this island shrine *can* have significance, drawing on feminist theories of embodiment, my focus here is less on the journey *per se* and more on the spaces and practices of religious performance and related geographies of spiritual encounter, emotion and affect, with particular attention to the gendered dimensions of these practices at Ta' Pinu. This will be set within the wider context of an overarching analysis of faith practices as embodied in *everyday* spaces and practices, reflecting a need for more scholarly attention to examining those pilgrimages which are embedded in everyday practice rather than a stand-alone extraordinary event (Maddrell 2013). It is hoped that this meshing of perspectives and themes will yield fresh understanding of the specific place-time dynamics of gender and religion at Ta' Pinu, and in turn contribute to a spiritually-inflected understanding of gendered discourses and practices. Before turning to the core discussion, Marian veneration as a form of pilgrimage practice and the history of the Ta' Pinu shrine are briefly outlined, and fieldwork methodologies explained.

## **Pilgrimage and Marian devotion**

Mary, mother of Jesus, characterised as The Madonna, is an important spiritual mediator within the theology and practice of the Roman Catholic denomination of the Christian church. Many of the key pilgrimage shrines within this tradition centre on the veneration of Mary, often at sites where she is believed to have mobilised her agency through material representations of herself such as weeping portraits, or spoken to or otherwise revealed herself to locals, as testified to at Lourdes (France) and Knock (Ireland). Marian shrines alone far outnumber all others dedicated to other saints in the Christian church and indeed outnumber the collected shrines dedicated to other female saints. Furthermore, whilst Marian veneration is a long-standing tradition, it has gathered rather than lost impetus in the twenty first century, as the editors note in *Moved by Mary. The Power of Pilgrimage in the Modern World*: ‘disregarding trends of secularization, Mary, the mother of Jesus, has become a megastar’ Hermkens et al (2009:1).

Undertaking pilgrimage is often represented as an exceptional journey-experience, a ‘once in a life time’ occurrence, but depending upon religious and geographical context, it may be a regular feature of religious observance and practice, as illustrated in Notermans et al’s chapter in this volume. These ‘unexceptional’ or regular pilgrimages include religious adherents travelling to cyclical religious festivals, processions and marches, or to consult healers, teachers and other spiritual guides. Likewise, if we view religion as an *embodied* faith practice rather than institutionalised structures and buildings, then it is necessary to recognise that a person’s religious beliefs and practices travel with them, with varying degrees of visibility. Scholarship grounded in feminist theories and methods has played an important role in bringing analytical attention to questions of gender, embodiment and performance within religion; as can be seen in significant bodies of work on feminist theology (e.g. Walton 2007) and gender and religion (e.g. Jansen and Notermans 2012); geographers have contributed to understanding ideas of sacred places and landscapes (e.g. Dwyer 2012; Kong 1993, 2001; Maddrell et al 2013; Parks 1997; Saunders 2013); spirituality in various contexts (Cloke and Beaumont 2013; Holloway and Valins 2001; Shah et al 2012;);

immigrant integration and religious transnationalism (Dwyer et al 2013); specific religious identities (Aitchison et al 2007; Hopkins et al 2011); and highlighted the significance of embodied and other spatial perspectives on gender and religion (Dwyer 1997; Holloway 2003; Morin and Guelke 2007). This chapter builds on this body of work.

### **Practising reverence: embodiment and emotion**

Religiously-motivated travel is simultaneously an embodied and emotional-affective experience. In the last 15-20 years geographers, along with other social scientists, have become increasingly aware of the importance of emotional-affective relationship to spaces and places (e.g. Conradson 2005) and the body as a social space, a site of identity and performance (Moss and Dyck 2003). Focus on embodied experience allows attention to the interleaving of the physical material world and more-than-representational arena of emotional and spiritual experience, so central to pilgrim's motivations and aspirations. In his *The Senses of Touch* Mark Paterson describes such interactions as the 'mutuality of tactile and visual', a 'sensory assemblage through the body' (2007, 90). However, as Paterson argues, this assemblage, which can also include kinaesthetics and smell, is not simply multi-sensory, but rather a synchronous folding together and interaction of sensory experience of surfaces. Even if one cannot actually touch the stimulus-object, Paterson suggests that '...it is the potential for tactility, the sensory appeal of texture and form, an underlying synaesthesia which is the mechanism for the continual crossover between sensory modalities' (*ibid.*, 94). Drawing on Aristotle, Descartes, Deleuze and Guattari, Paterson argues that not only do we experience the world through touch, but that the 'world touches us'. Thus, both touching (Paterson, 2007) and moving in certain spaces and through particular landscapes can be 'moving': visual, haptic and embodied experience of landscapes can evoke affective responses (Maddrell, 2011; Maddrell and della Dora forthcoming).

Mobilities is the conceptual framework for analysing the meaning and experience of journeys which has grown in scope and theoretical purchase over the last ten years. (Urry 2002; Mimi Sheller and Urry 2004). In the same way as place is space seen through a lens of meaning-making (Tuan 1977; Thrift 1997), Tim Cresswell argues: 'Movement is rarely just

movement; it carries with it the burden of meaning ...' (Cresswell 2006, 6) and where movement contributes to this meaningful shaping of *social* time and space it is described as *mobility* (Cresswell 2006); mobilities being experienced through bodies and senses, inflected by place, practice, belief, emotion and affect, but also by the constraints and agencies afforded by socio-economic, cultural and political context, as well as physical capacities. This links firstly to meaning making, emotion and affect and to the often related embodied experience of place and travel (see Davidson *et al*'s (2005) edited collection on *Emotional Geographies* and Smith *et al* (2009) *Emotion, Place and Culture*). It is this attention to situated practices and performances, including their embodied and emotional-affective dimensions, which when combined with non-dualistic concepts of feminist spirituality, can offer particular insight to analysis of religion and belief, especially when these are analytically sharpened by attention to specific individual, place-based and wider contexts, such as gender, socio-economic class, ethnicity etc.. These issues will be discussed further following a brief history of the shrine at Ta Pinu.

### **Ta' Pinu Shrine, Gozo. Gendered roles and practices**

#### **[Insert Figure 1 Ta' Pinu shrine, Gozo, Malta]**

Roman Catholicism is the official religion of Malta, which still boasts regular church attendance of over 50% on Malta and over 70% in Gozo, although this represents a 10% decline over the preceding decade (Archdiocese of Malta 2006). Ta' Pinu is the national shrine of Malta, dedicated to the devotion of the Madonna (see Figure 1) and located in agricultural land outside the village of Gharb, in the north west of Gozo. Monsignor Nicholas Cauchi (2008) published the official account of the shrine, describing how Ta' Pinu, initially a small wayside chapel with a chequered history of curation, came to spiritual fame in the early 1880s. The veneration of a painting of the Assumption of the Virgin can be dated back to the early seventeenth century, when the church became known as 'Ta' Pinu', named for Pinu Gauci, landowner from 1587, who restored the church and installed an altar piece depicting the Assumption, by Italian artist Amadeo Perugino, after complaints were made about the chapel's state of disrepair by Bishop Baldassare Caglianes during a pastoral visit to the area in 1615 (Cauchi 2008). In 1883 a devout woman, Karmni Grima, heard a

disembodied voice call her to pray the Ave Maria three times, which she duly did. When she shared this secret with a friend, Frank Portelli, he also reported hearing similar calls and reported that his mother had been miraculously healed by the intervention of the Madonna of Ta' Pinu. These experiences were subsequently investigated and validated by the then Bishop, Pietru Pace, and the shrine began to attract pilgrims from the whole of Gozo and the neighbouring island of Malta. These numbers grew after an outbreak of cholera and the consistently large crowds of pilgrims required a much bigger church, finally realised in 1935 (*ibid.*). Devout Maltese people travel to the shrine from Malta and elsewhere on Gozo, especially for the feast of the Assumption on 15<sup>th</sup> August and the candle-lit vigil the preceding night, but also as parish or family outings from Gozo itself. The shrine also attracts Maltese migrants returning from round the world to visit family, spend their holidays etc.. Today, the basilica is also deemed a Marian centre and has hosted conferences on Marian scholarship, drawing in an international network of clergy and academics. Tourists also travel to Ta' Pinu on a daily basis, some independently, many due to the shrine being on organised tours of Gozo, along with other attractions such as the natural wonder of the Azure Window and the prehistoric Ggantja Temples. The reputation of the Madonna Ta Pinu's miraculous intervention is a key magnet for worshippers and tourists, but whilst this is a crucial context for the following analysis, the focus of this chapter is on the everyday practices grounded in those beliefs.

Having given this brief introduction to the shrine, a brief word on methodologies employed to study the gendered spaces and practices in and around Ta' Pinu. The observations discussed below are based on two short reconnaissance visits in 2013 and a week of intensive participant observation in June 2014, combined with in-depth interviews with shrine staff (clergy, assistants and volunteers) and 170 short questionnaires returned by those visiting Ta' Pinu (113 residents of Malta and Gozo, plus 57 non-residents). The main period of fieldwork conducted in June coincided with the Festa tas-Sejha tal-Madonna Ta' Pinu on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> June which marks the anniversary of Karmni Grima's encounter with the Madonna, as well as one of the 'Fifteen Wednesdays' that precede the Feast of the Assumption. Both are inherently local practices associated with the shrine itself, initiated by Bishop Giovanni Maria Camilleri who was appointed to the See of Gozo in 1889. 'He himself paid frequent visits to the sanctuary to venerate the sacred image of the Virgin Mary ...

[and] introduced the devotion of the 'Fifteen Wednesdays' before the feast of the Assumption as a preparation for this solemnity ... In order to encourage the faithful to frequent this holy place more often, the Bishop asked for and obtained from Pope Leo XIII, a plenary indulgence for all those who visit Ta' Pinu Church on certain feast days of the Blessed Virgin' (Cauchi 2008). Thus, the period of fieldwork coincided with one of the most significant days in the shrine's annual liturgical calendar, one other day of high significance (i.e. one of the 'Fifteen Wednesdays) and several 'ordinary' days in the peak summer tourism period. Analysis here of field material collected at this time focuses primarily on resident responses, which yielded four key themes that related to gendered spaces and practices at the shrine, which will be discussed below:

1. Liturgical practices
2. Relation to and with the Madonna Ta Pinu
3. Personal ritual and spatial practices
4. Site management

### **1. Liturgical practices**

Liturgical practices are often identified as at the heart of gender differences and inequalities within religious practice. Morin and Guelke (2007: xix) note, 'women and men's religious experiences *may* differ significantly because religions often promote segregation in ritual practices, congregational attendance, ordination, religious life, and religious identities' (my emphasis). At Ta Pinu institutionalised roles reflect the context of an exclusively male priesthood within the Roman Catholic church which excludes women from priestly duties and associated spiritual authority. This institutionalised gender divide was particularly notable on the Festa tas-Sejha tal-MadonnaTa' Pinu, which had some eight services throughout the day between 5.00 am and 10.15 pm, especially the 10.00 am service officiated by the Bishop of Malta. During this service, several priests were present at the altar with the Bishop, as were two altar boys, and male congregants assisted with the distribution of the Eucharist. Whilst participation of the laity has been encouraged since Vatican II (1963), the only roles played by women within this service were firstly, as escorts for the host, processing the wafers up the aisle to the Bishop; and secondly, as members of



a mixed choir, who, with the exception of the female soloist who sang an aria near the altar, were located in the balcony; thirdly, as shrine managers who had prepared the church, took the collection, took mass requests etc.; and fourthly, as one of two in-house camera technicians filming the service for the shrine's webcast and local news. Thus women were located spatially and symbolically at the margins of the liturgy, primarily performing tasks associated with the immanent rather than transcendent (see de Beauvoir 1963). However, observation of some 30 services of mass throughout the fieldwork evidenced wider female participation, as women provided the call to worship at the beginning of the service, undertook Bible readings, and distributed the Sacrament from the steps of the altar alongside the priest and other male lay assistants from the congregation. Interviews revealed that due to the large number of services held daily, visiting groups of pilgrims, usually travelling from a parish in Malta or elsewhere on Gozo, typically brought their own priest, but might ask for assistance from Ta' Pinu's Rector or another local priest; otherwise they organised and staffed the service themselves, drawing on the devout from their own congregations (commonly dominated by women) to assist in the liturgy and the distribution of the Eucharist. However, an observable pattern could be identified highlighting that women's active roles within the liturgy were most common in the services which were held at the most unsociable times and where there was minimal representation of elite clergy. Thus, while women were excluded from the immediate locale of the dais and time-space associated with liturgical blessing of the Eucharist, devout women were nominated to occupy the margins of this symbolic space in order to undertake the spiritual labour of distributing the Eucharist, providing Bible readings, lead prayers or perform devotional songs.

## **2. Relation to and with the Madonna Ta Pinu**

Histories of the shrine, observation and interview material evidenced a number of interesting ways in which relation to the Madonna Ta' Pinu has been expressed, in the past and in contemporary practice. The first relates to the historic veneration of the portrait of Madonna Ta' Pinu as expressed through material offerings.

Soon after the first large scale pilgrimages to Ta' Pinu started in the 1880s, the infrastructure of the chapel was modified, building out and around the original chapel, which still constitutes the Sanctuary today. The foundation stone for Andre Vassallo's Romanesque design was laid in 1919 by Bishop Camilleri, in the presence of Karmni Grima and a large crowd of the faithful, and completed in 1932. Ta' Pinu was given the status of Basilica in 1935, which was marked by 'crowning' the painting of the Madonna with jewels. Later, Mr Anatoli, a local benefactor of the shrine presented a diamond, which was attached to the Madonna's painting like a ring. The portrait of the Madonna was further embellished by Pope John Paul II in 1990 when he added five silver stars when conducting mass at Ta' Pinu, and by Pope Benedict XVI in 2010 when he added a golden rose, as a sign of papal Marian devotion, during his visit to Malta. While acknowledging these embellishments as symbolic expressions of spiritual devotion, it is notable that these material gifts have clear parallels with European gendered norms of men's practice of gifting flowers and jewels to women they esteem. These costly expressions of devotion by the ecclesiastical and socio-economic elite also reflect gendered patterns of institutional and economic power, and, as is typical for such symbolically important and expensive gifts, are recorded in the official history of the shrine. However, the focus here is on the more everyday and embodied offerings, an ongoing narrative of grassroots relation to Madonna Ta' Pinu, which both echoes and diverges from official discourses.

While official doctrine of the Catholic Church has recognised Mary's unique status as Mother of God, Queen of Heaven, eternally virgin etc., her role as Mediatrix rather than Co-Redemptrix with Christ was affirmed by the *Lumen Gentium* of the Second Vatican Council (1964). However, veneration of Mary, which can be dated to the Second Century, has typically been grounded in experientially-based popular piety, which in turn has generated daily devotion and prompted pilgrimage to Marian shrines. This official teaching of the church is embodied in plans by the clergy of Ta' Pinu to represent this belief materially in the form of a sculpture outside the shrine depicting Mary holding the Christ-child out to greet people as they arrive at the steps of the Basilica. In practice, observation and questionnaire responses evidenced the predominance of popular devotion to *Mary*. Asked why they were visiting Ta' Pinu, the overwhelming majority of the 113 residents who completed the questionnaire identified 'personal/ family devotions', with more than half of

respondents visiting the shrine at least weekly and 93 % visiting at least 12 times a year, representing a major commitment, given that Ta Pinu is not a parish church. Three quarters of resident visitors to the shrine travel with family members (including as part of a larger parish pilgrimage), evidencing the significance of familial relations and practices. This could be seen in the case of parents or grandparents schooling children and young people in religious performance, illustrating intergenerational religious practice (see Hopkins et al, 2011) e.g. leading the family recitation of the Rosary, making the sign of the cross with holy water or genuflecting on arrival and departure, and showing where and how to leave prayer requests at the Sanctuary. These vernacular familial practices of Marian veneration centre on expert and intimate knowledge of rituals and texts is a practice-space where women are typically the acknowledged authority and practice leadership. Likewise, the numerous couples or family groups whose recitations of the Rosary were conducted in the pews outside the Sanctuary, the mature women leading, with men, other women and children audibly following, thereby inverting the gendered roles evident in the formal liturgy. This expertise and authority extended beyond the intimate domestic boundary of the family in the case of the Feast day recitation of the Rosary in the Sanctuary recorded and broadcasted by Radio Maria to the whole of Malta.

During his visit to Malta in 2010, Pope Benedict XVI invited the people of Malta to pray to Madonna Ta' Pinu 'under the title Queen of the Family'. Second Wave Feminist critiques of Mariology highlighted the unattainable ideal that Mary presented as a role model for Catholic women (e.g. Reuther 1993), but while title such as 'Queen of the Family' may be read as a reflection of patriarchal theological views of both Mary and women's roles in contemporary society, many women (and other disadvantaged social groups) find empowerment in their relation to Mary (Gemzoe 2009; Hermkens et al 2009; Notermans et al, this volume; Pereya 2015). This agency was experienced through the sense of the presence and intervention of Madonna Ta' Pinu, as expressed through observable embodied acts of veneration and accounts of inner spiritual beliefs and practices. One woman, aged 56-65 years, who visits every month to attend Mass with family and friends, described how 'Every time I come to meet my Mother [Our Lady] she is always there above, she always listens and protects me. It is a place of happiness and contentment'; likewise another

woman of the same age, who visits weekly, reported: 'I feel very happy because Our Lady granted me a special grace'. One retired woman who visits the shrine weekly by herself described her experience of relation to the Madonna Ta' Pinu at the shrine: 'It is the time for me to feel in close contact with Our Lady and to be able to confide in her troubles, sorrows, make requests and put myself and those for whom I pray completely in her hands. I always feel Our Lady answering back and sustaining me in all I request even if this is not always granted'. The time-space of pilgrimage can provide an important space of retreat and renewal (Maddrell and della Dora 2013; Maddrell 2013) and several other women reported feelings of calm and tranquillity; but clearly also being a source of strength and resilience at times of need. For another woman on an annual visit with friends, the visit to the shrine was an expression of hope in the face of adversity and of belief in the agency of the Madonna; she had prayed 'For me to receive a special grace for myself and my family', going on to invite co-participation in prayer for her family, 'Pray a lot for us, for my husband and especially for my son who has a very bad habit'. Shrine volunteers also reported a growing number of prayer requests for divine intervention in the lives of children or grandchildren who were addicted to drugs. Only two men recorded their experience of the shrine in response to an open question on the questionnaire: an older man simply reported that he came to the shrine 'to rest', while another, 36-45 years of age, visited faithfully for each of the 'Fifteen Wednesdays' with his family, stressed his gratitude: 'I thanks (*sic.*) Our Lady of Ta' Pinu for the good things she does for me and my family', echoing the family-centred prayers of the women above. This affirms the Madonna's role as family guardian and women's role as prime mediators with Mary as Mediatrix, but also how this role of spiritual Mothering is undertaken by some devout men as well as women.

Likewise the discourse of family values was replicated in the audio guide to the newly restored museum of the Grima family, in the house where Karmni spent her whole life; for example the kitchen table was used as a vehicle to promote the importance of shared family meals in maintaining the social cohesion of families today. A Catholic family counselling centre is also located opposite the basilica. The role of women as what might be described as spiritual matriarchs is well documented within academic studies of Roman Catholic practice, whereby women take on or are tasked with the spiritual welfare of their family (for example see Gemzoe 2005; 2009; 2012; Harris 2013). This could be seen at the shrine not

only in terms of women's bodily and spiritual shepherding of their families, but also as the overwhelming majority of those who queued to request a Mass be said, and those who bought often numerous religious tokens from the shrine, such as Rosaries or prayer cards, in order to take home and distribute something of its qualities to families and friends.

Prayer petitions at the Sanctuary itself have long been structured through tick lists, with prayers caricatured as 'Catholic boyfriend', 'raise in salary' and 'happy death' (Thomas Cook, 2000) *Travellers Guide to Malta and Gozo* p 133). The current version of the printed prayer request slip has been reformulated to reflect more liberal contemporary life, such as 'my partner/ my boyfriend / my girlfriend' and friends, rather than simply parents, spouses and children; and finding 'fulfilling employment' and prayers for 'my colleagues at the workplace' replaces reference to salary. Nonetheless, the focus remains on family and other relationships, gainful employment, health and well-being (including mental health), death and the clergy. The basilica's official website also has links to blessings of unborn babies and its Pro-Life doctrine; and an annual pilgrimage is held around Candlemas for young mothers to bring their babies and young children to be blessed (Cauchi 2008), although families can arrange for individual blessings of babies at any time, as was observed during field work. Many of the hundreds of ex votos, given in thanks to the Madonna for her intervention and displayed at the shrine, relate to the birth of babies and health of children – although adult health and miraculous escape from injury or death also feature strongly, especially for men (see Figures 2 and 3). During fieldwork, a Hindu family of Indian origin, now living in Malta, visited Ta' Pinu in order to give thanks for their daughter's wellbeing. They explained that when she was born prematurely and hospitalised for six months 'We prayed to the Madonna – we prayed to everyone!'. Fascinated by the architecture and art works on this first visit to Ta' Pinu, they took many photos and on first appearance appeared to simply be tourists, but in fact were fulfilling a spiritual debt of thanks and paid for a Mass to be said for their daughter's continued good health. A Norwegian Protestant family group arrived at the shrine, visibly distressed and asked permission to perform an impromptu choral piece for the dead. Both of these examples evidence the complex interaction of spiritual motivations and cultural tourism at pilgrimage sites, especially those associated with healing, are drawn upon as cross-faith spiritual space and resource. These examples segue to the following discussion of personal ritual.

### **3. Personal ritual and spatial practices**

Services, especially on high days, operate as an assemblage of activities. On both the anniversary feast day and the pre-Assumption Wednesday, services were conducted with core participants engaged in the central rite of Mass, but with others joining the service at the back or sides of the main body of the church, while others still queued to be heard in the confessional or made a brief visit to pay their respects or leave a prayer or Mass request. Even the briefest visits, which were typically confined to the more informal open space between the main door and the rear pews, could be elaborate shows of embodied veneration, with both men and women of all ages dropping to their knees on the stone floor. Shrine volunteers identified these worshippers as likely parishioners who had attended Mass at their own church, but who wanted to pay their respects to the Madonna at the shrine on the feast day, so popped in to make a brief, but sincere, observance. The sense of deep connection between some residents and the Madonna Ta Pinu was also reflected in a number of vernacular ritual practices, including the recitation of the Rosary and making of petitions at the Sanctuary.

It was noticeable that many petitioners remained praying outside of the Sanctuary itself, even when there was clearly room to enter and sit, suggesting the space of the original chapel and home of the Madonna's portrait was treated as an inner sanctum by many; it was also interesting to note that while men typically accounted for 40% or more of the congregation at Mass, very few men entered the Sanctuary to be in proximity with the painting of the Madonna. More women than entered the Sanctuary, suggesting comfort in being in proximity to the Madonna; for them the Sanctuary was relational space, a place they felt at home because of their relation to and with the Madonna.

During periods of the day set aside for quiet veneration, individual women were observed approaching the Madonna across the length of the Sanctuary on their knees (as observed at other Marian shrines, e.g. along the approach to the shrine at Fatima (Gemzöe 2005)). This practice was reiterated at the grave of Frenc Tel Gharb, a twentieth century devotee of the Madonna from Gharb who was reputed as a healer. Despite the grave being roped off, two women in their thirties were observed removing the ropes, approaching the grave on their knees quickly and leaving votive offerings of flowers or prayer cards. Such veneration is not

officially sanctioned and shrine managers explained these women were likely members of Frenc's extended family who feel entitled to remove the ropes and approach his grave directly. Interestingly, by comparison, the graves of Karmni Grima and Frank Portelli (not associated themselves with healing powers) were decorously decorated with flowers and candles for the anniversary feast, but were not approached with the same combination of familiarity and reverence. A few women were also observed approaching the altarpiece of the Madonna in the Sanctuary on their knees). The shrine attendants reported that while some men were very devoted to the Madonna, they never seen men approach on their knees, observing that 'Men tend to give money to Our Lady rather than walk on their knees ... women are less ashamed to do these things'.

Other signs of combined reverence and familiarity were evident in gendered departure rites as pilgrims left the shrine. Great reverence was observed in the case of numerous middle aged and older men who genuflected deeply to the altar before they left the church. While some women echoed this practice, others, young and old, kissed their fingers as they left the Sanctuary and blew kisses to the Madonna as they left the church. This was a familial act of devotion by these women, an act of everyday vernacular reverence and affection, as one would to a beloved member of one's family.

#### 4. Site management

Day to day site management of the Ta' Pinu shrine is devolved to the lay workers and volunteers, in consultation with the Rector. In keeping with socialised Southern European gendered norms, the maintenance of external space is tended by male gardeners; the inside space of the shrine by female attendants. Two women work full time, supported by a small cohort of volunteers and additional part time paid help at peak times. These attendants act as both personal assistants to the Rector, keeping the complex shrine diary of daily services and events, washing and preparing vestments, making coffee for official visitors, taking the collection during services and responding to the Rector's queries when called to his office by a bell. Located at a kiosk near the main entrance, these attendants also welcome the constant stream of visitors to the shrine, take prayer and Mass requests, collect donations, sell souvenirs, wash and fill recycled bottles with blessed oil, clean the church and arranging flowers around the dais for special services. At first glance the gendered division of labour

between the male clergy located in the rear of the church in the sacristy and at the altar, engaged in transcendent work contrasts markedly with that of the female lay workers engaged in front line immanent tasks. However, a more complex set of practices emerged under close observation and analysis.

A key role played by the attendants is to 'police' the shrine, acting as authority on and enforcing visitor decorum in dress and behaviour. Many places of worship have a dress code e.g. it is considered appropriate for men to cover their heads for prayer in synagogues and to remove hats in Western churches; modest dress of varied definition is typically expected of women. Beyond ritual requirements, what is characterised as modest dress is an issue within many religious sites where inappropriate clothing is considered distracting or indicative of a lack of respect either for the divine, clergy or those at worship. While modest dress is a personal issue, principally for women, across a number of faiths (e.g. Muslims and Jehovah's Witnesses (see Lewis 2013)), it is commonly an acute issue at religious buildings or centres which also attract tourists, especially if – as in the case of Ta' Pinu – located in a warm climate coastal destination, where people are typically dressed for the beach. The solution most typically offered is the provision of shawls and wraps which allow the visitors to comply with dress code, as is offered at the likes of the Blue Mosque, Istanbul and was the case at Ta' Pinu, where both men and women are required to be clothed from shoulders to knees (see Figure 4). The attendants themselves wore a uniform of skinny black jeans and close fitting polo shirts in aqua or fuschia, the polo shirt being replaced by a blue silk shirt on Sundays. This contemporary casual outfit complied with the dress code requirements but might not be deemed 'modest' in other contexts. By in large, Maltese and Gozitan visitors knew and understood the protocol, with men typically wearing knee length shorts and t-shirts or short sleeved shirts and women similarly dressed in skirts, long shorts or dresses. Even those residents who were clearly en route to the beach wore appropriate clothing on top of their swimsuits or knew to pick up shawls on entry, e.g. the mother and young daughter who put on their short sleeved shrug cardigans over strappy sundresses as they entered the church (seven years of age being deemed the 'age of responsibility' in the Catholic church). Long trousers were occasionally worn by men and women, but were not widely worn because of the ambient summer temperatures. However, attendants reported that most tourists (who accounted for 70% of non-Sunday/ feast day visitors to the shrine)



required intervention and instruction to cover their bodies, and that occasionally visitors, locals and tourists, men and women, refused to conform to the dress code, preferring to leave than comply, often mocking the requirements. For the shrine attendants, who love their job, dealing with issues of clothing was one of the most stressful aspects of their multitude of tasks. However they see their work as part of their devotion to the Madonna and felt it was very important that people embodied their respect for the Madonna in their dress: 'its appropriate to show respect by covering, dressing decently'. Their personal emotional attachment to the Madonna was apparent when they spoke of the emptiness of the church when the painting was taken to Malta for Pope Benedict's visit in 2010, as well as their recognition and appreciation of pilgrim-visitors' experiences at the shrine. They also highlighted the emotional cost their work could entail, ranging from having to welcome people and talk to them, 'even if you are not [feeling] good yourself' and having to deal with people who are distraught with grief or worry as they log requests for prayers or a Mass to be said, or begging for multiple bottles of consecrated oil for suffering friends or family. While the emotional labour aspects of work in the hospitality industries and caring services have been researched (see Hochschild, 1983; Grandey 200, 2003, including gender dimensions (Pugliesi and Shook 1997), this study suggests there is significant research to be done on the gendered emotional-spiritual cost of spiritual hospitality-related labour. This also evidences the blurring of boundaries assumed between the spiritual work of the male clergy and the practical work of the female laity in the shrine, and thereby the binary divide between the immanent and the transcendent through caring work of all types. This was also emphasised by a volunteer in the shrine who expressed her devotion to the Madonna through her volunteer work and reported that she always took the opportunity to share her experience of the Madonna with visitors, usually tourists, who came to look at the ex votos and museum collection, but often knew little of the shrine's full story.

## **Conclusion**

Institutionalised roles at Ta Pinu reflect the wider context of an exclusive/ exclusionary male priesthood within the Roman Catholic church. This is reinforced by the employment of women to undertake the day-to-day 'housekeeping' activities of the shrine. However, intensive observations of practice at Ta Pinu shows that lay women as well as men participate in the Mass, including the distribution of the sacrament during Mass, and that

the women who oversee the day to day practicalities of the shrine play an important role, literally as managers and gatekeepers, monitoring and enforcing dress code requirements of men and women, and that they see this as ensuring that due respect is shown to the Madonna, rather than the institution per se and are prepared to act as gatekeepers in order to ensure the protection of the sacred space of the shrine. The work of these women also included spiritual and emotional labour when dealing with prayer requests, booking a requiem mass etc. directly from visitors.

Interviews and questionnaires stress the very strong sense of personal relation to the Madonna felt by many Maltese and Gozitan worshippers at Ta' Pinu, especially women, illustrated in embodied form by those blowing kisses to the Madonna after genuflecting when they leave. Observations also showed the lead role played by women in family rituals at the shrine, leading husbands and/or the wider family in the recitation of the rosary for example. Thus, what on first appearance seems to be an impermeable set of gendered hierarchical practices, which relegate women to passive roles or the immanent work of 'housekeeping', within certain constraints, women are empowered by their relation to the Madonna, not least when feeling disempowered in everyday life and family relations (as shown elsewhere by Gemzoe 2009, Notermans et al, this volume); many women are also power-brokers, acting as intermediaries between their families and the Madonna, not only in private prayer, but in leadership of non-liturgical ritual and devotions. This familial role occasionally extended to the public sphere in cases of radio broadcast of the recitation of the Rosary.

Marian devotion has been strongly linked to the interests and experiences of women, such as fertility, childbirth, family care and relationships (Gemzoe 2009; Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans 2009) and can be seen as part of the popular or tactical religious practices of women (Williams 1999, Woodhead 2012) in the face of masculinised agenda and control of institutionalised strategic religion. The intersection between these strategic and tactical interests and associated gendered roles could be seen most obviously in the liturgical leadership and day-to-day running and management of the shrine, with its male clergy and largely female front-of-house staff, but also in personal ritual within the shrine, the subject focus of the shrine's website, petition proforma and exhibited ex votos. It is of further note that while Pope John Paul II used his visit to Ta' Pinu to call for increased devotion to Mary,

Pope Benedict used his predecessor's term to call for devotion to Mary as 'Queen of the family', arguably reinforcing the gendered role of the Madonna herself, and related implicit gender roles within the contemporary family. Despite Pope Benedict's assertion that 'the People of God is the 'teacher that goes first' and must then be more deeply examined and intellectually accepted by theology' (Papal General Audience, 7/7/2010; [www.Vatican](http://www.Vatican)), as Pereya notes, the official church tends to give little credence to tactical expressions of religion and popular forms of living a sacred life, which are often dismissed as superstitious or sub-standard (2015: 591).

At Ta' Pinu there is a strong sense of a boundaried sacred space to the interior of the shrine (after Eliade 1953), the main entrance acting as a monitored threshold to that sacred space, with the original chapel literally designated as an inner sanctum within the shrine. Liturgical spaces and practices at Ta' Pinu inevitably reflected an institutionalised male clergy who retain the monopoly on the priestly duties of confession and blessing of the Eucharist; women were active leaders in worship and distribution of the Sacrament, this was in keeping with the ethos of laity participation enshrined in Vatican II, but was especially notable when there was a shortage of male clergy, for example at early morning services or for visiting pilgrim groups travelling with a single priest. In contrast to formal liturgy, were typically the leaders and teachers of informal family prayers and rituals, such as collective recitation of the rosary at the shrine. This reflects the socialised widely-held belief in Malta that women, particularly mothers, are the spiritual guides of any Catholic family. While this constitutes a burden, women's entry to the sacred space of the Sanctuary and the respectful but familiar way in which they spoke to and of the Madonna, reflected their sense of confident relation to their locally-situated mediator. The women working as site managers/personal assistants to the Rector were the most visible and mobile permanent presence at the shrine; they were fiercely protective of the respect the Madonna deserved, very much in her own right, expending considerable emotional-spiritual labour when needed, in order to 'protect' the Madonna, but also to support the needs of pilgrim-visitors, while ensuring that the numerous practical tasks were completed that facilitated the various practices and performances undertaken in the shrine on a daily basis. Thus, while a number of institutionalised spaces and practices were highly gendered, within other activity-spaces and times gender hierarchies were reversed or at least blurred and relationality was a key to

those practices and authority. Feminist analysis encourages a move away from assumed dichotomies, here the dichotomy between gendered transcendent and immanent work is challenged, as is a simplified notion of spiritual authority and agency.

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**Figure 1 Ta' Pinu shrine, Gozo, Malta**



**Figure 2 Ex votos at Ta' Pinu (note baby clothes and medical equipment)**





**Figure 3 An ex voto in thanks for safe rescue for a fisherman**



Figure 4 Sign outside the entrance to Ta' Pinu advising both men and women on the shrine's dress code