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**Stones Displaced: Retaining the Nuances of Maltese Culture through
Short English Fiction**

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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No new datasets were created during the study.

Abstract

This thesis is composed of two parts: a short story collection, entitled *Stones Displaced* and a critical commentary. The title of the collection, *Stones Displaced*, is taken from a line in Oliver Friggieri's poem *We're Gurgling water* (1993), in which the poet mourns a Malta that has lost its identity and compares the Maltese diaspora to 'stones displaced' (Friggieri, 1993). Since my characters are also trying to establish what their identity means to them, either through rediscovering themselves abroad, or through returning to the island, I felt that the line was very apt for my characters.

My research emerged from a desire to explore the experience of unbelonging and hybrid identity of a Maltese community through English-language short fiction. *Stones Displaced* is a short story cycle that depicts the social transitions of Malta through the eyes of lonesome, isolated figures, living on the margins of its society. Through my characters' experiences of transnationality and unbelonging, I try to understand my own journey of growing up in a secular island nation with a foreign parent and surname. This thesis focuses on how the short story cycle is a strong medium for communicating the lives of those from minority groups. Its scope is to find ways by which the nuances of Maltese life could be retained when writing English-language fiction. The critical component is divided into two main chapters. In the first chapter, I explore how my writing practice helped me identify three main ways of retaining the nuances of Maltese in English-language dialogues. Chapter Two looks into the short form itself, and four other techniques that can be used when depicting Maltese setting and life with a foreign audience in mind. This thesis can be beneficial to those who like myself are preoccupied with representing minority cultures in languages other than their own.

Table of Contents

Abstract	3
<i>Stones Displaced</i>	5
The Interdiction	6
Falling Ants	24
Howard Gardens	35
Little Assisi.....	57
B12	73
Sunshine	87
Beach Houses.....	111
Freeport lights	128
The Last Judgement.....	145
The Necklace.....	160
<i>Stones Displaced: Retaining the Nuances of Maltese Culture through Short English Fiction</i>	193
Introduction.....	194
Applying Flower and Hayes' cognitive process theory of writing to my methodology...	200
Analysis of techniques: Dialogue	204
Language techniques I employed in my dialogue.....	216
What justifies writing dialogue in English?	222
Limitations I faced in my Creative Practice.....	226
Analysis of techniques: Character and Setting	230
The Short Story cycle: A sequence of similarity in theme and motifs	230
Historical Milestones: Maintaining a balance between explaining and trusting the reader	243
Retaining nuances through narrative voice: Use of reliability in 1 st and 3 rd person narration .	252
Retaining nuances through analepsis	268
Real Maltese women : Subverting the traditional well-defined roles	272
Limitations	276
Conclusion	279
Bibliography	281
Acknowledgments	292

Stones Displaced

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**Stones Displaced: Retaining the Nuances of Maltese Culture through
Short English Fiction**

Introduction

The short story collection, *Stones Displaced*, and the contextualizing commentary are a unified piece of research, and the reader should first read the collection and then move on to the critical analysis. Both facets of my research deal with the complexities of navigating the idea of belonging in a minority culture. The collection takes a creative angle in exploring this, depicting the social transitions of Malta through the eyes of its unheroic, lonesome, ostracised figures. On the other hand, the commentary offers an auto-critical approach in examining the subject through creative practice techniques designed to render the nuances of a minority culture in the English language. Both parts have been interdependent processes—my research on methodology has helped shape my characters’ stories, while the creative tools I used in the collection have strengthened my perception of belonging to a minority community.

My title for this collection, *Stones Displaced*, comes from a line in Oliver Friggieri’s poem *We’re Gurgling water* (1993). In the poem, Friggieri is haunted by his Maltese identity, an identity that is ‘no longer viable’ as it is not ‘unitary’, since ‘being Maltese no longer means what it used to’, under a changing, modern world (Borg Barthet, 2009, p. 201). He yearns for a stable identity, one that he feels he can belong to, and compares the constantly changing Maltese diaspora to ‘gurgling water nobody will drink’ and ‘stones displaced from ancient temples’ (Friggieri, 1993). Friggieri was disturbed by Malta’s modern conditioning, the fact that at the time, a lot of Maltese people had relocated abroad and that many foreigners had moved to the island. Through his poetry, Friggieri was attempting to ‘anchor a society perceived to be in flux’ (Barthet, 2009, p. 200). Although my collection does not yearn for an old Malta, nor does it idealise ‘a traditional village life which is forever

lost', I still felt that the line 'stones displaced from ancient temples' was very fitting for my characters, all of whom, like Friggieri, are also struggling with anchoring their identity, their sense of belonging, either through escaping the island that they feel limits them, or through returning to it after being away for years (2009, p. 200).

In the following chapters I will look into the process of creative writing, identifying specific choices that developed my research. I will highlight which techniques worked best in addressing my research questions, as well as issues in my writing. This exegesis considers both the collection as an artistic endeavour and a doctoral dissertation. It also contemplates how the practice of both creative writing and auto-criticism can contribute to developing the knowledge of minority literatures written in English.

Stones Displaced arose from an interest in understanding how the social transitions of Maltese society, from 1950s onwards, impacted people who live on the fringes of Malta's 'closely-knit family institution' (Grima, 2010, p. 84). For me, this meant looking at the lives of those who have struggled with maintaining a sense of belonging on the island, including those who seek acceptance elsewhere, in the form of transnational experiences. In addition, I was also particularly drawn to how minority Maltese literature could make its mark internationally.⁸ I wanted to make my work accessible to a much wider audience than simply the speakers of Maltese and writing in English offered an opportunity to bridge the gap between Maltese and Anglophone readers. However, I was also adamant that my stories should retain the nuances of the Maltese culture, that they depict what growing up and living in Malta is like. Therefore, it became obvious that my research had to address how I could

⁸ Jen Calleja and Kat Storace address this aspect in the introduction to *Scintillas*, where they emphasise that the aim of their anthology, in which all the poems and stories by Maltese authors are written in the English language, is to promote Maltese literature amongst Anglophone readers (Calleja and Storace, 2021).

write in the English language while portraying the subtle elements of Maltese lived experience.

Moreover, my investigation developed around how the short story form offers a space for minority literature. I was interested to see how the use of different voices could probe more deeply into an under-represented group. To achieve that, I turned to the short story cycle, a form that can depict different perspectives and interweave them through similarities in theme or place. I came to realise that through having several characters, the short story cycle reaps the benefit of giving readers different aspects of the under-represented community, rather than simply one part, as the novel might.

In addition to the short story cycle, I also used several techniques as tools in foregrounding the Maltese culture. These included code-switching in dialogue, flashback narration, narrative voice, maintaining the balance between explaining and trusting the reader's understanding, as well as subverting traditional female roles. As a result, I believe the main contribution to knowledge in my exegesis is the proposal of creative techniques that can be used in English-language fiction, both short and long, in preserving the overtones of under-represented communities.

Although my research was fuelled by a genuine interest in making Maltese literature accessible to the Anglophone world, what initially motivated me to write my collection was a deep-rooted sense of unbelonging which I grappled with for most of my childhood, mainly because having a Dutch father and surname meant that I never felt like I truly belonged in Malta. As I grew older, and left the island, I began to feel a correlation to it in a way I never had as a child, or when I was growing up there. Not only did being away from it unlock a nostalgia that was new to me, but it also made me reconsider my familial ties and identity. This collection and the

characters within it provided me with the opportunity of delving into my relationship with Malta, as both the country I consider home, and the country where I felt rejected as a child and adolescent.

Ultimately the aim of my project was threefold. The first purpose related to reconnecting with my Maltese identity, which has been impacted, not only by my dual nationality, but also by my transnational experience of living in other European countries. I realised that taking a closer look at my yearning to be accepted in the Maltese community would provide a space for me to explore the concept of the shaping of identity in short fiction.

The second scope was to establish an emotional connection between my characters' experiences and an Anglophone audience, that might not be all too familiar with Malta's postcolonial history and the island's contemporary issues. I wanted to bring to the fore the fact that although Malta is an EU country, there are still some social facets that are strongly determined by the Catholic church, such as the fact that it is the only EU member state to prohibit abortion in any case. Lastly, I wanted my research to examine the role of the short story cycle in unifying the different perspectives I chose to represent, and in putting forward a variegated portrayal of Maltese circumstancing.

Although I believe that the readers of this collection should have a basic understanding of Malta's hybrid identity as an island which until its independence in 1964, had always been colonised, I always intended for my work to be read by anyone, even those who had very little knowledge of the island. Perhaps this is because ultimately, my main interest was in having readers who related to the struggle of minority communities in making their mark and to the concept of hyphenated identities, both of which encapsulate the essence of *Stones Displaced*.

After I establish how I applied my research methodology to Flower and Hayes' cognitive process theory of writing, I move onto my contextual work: *Retaining the nuances of the minority Maltese culture in English*. This is split into two chapters. In the first one, *Analysis of techniques: Dialogue*, I use my own creative practice to explore three main ways by which the nuances of the Maltese language can be retained when writing dialogue in English. All these involve code-switching, and the intention is to create a linguistic landscape that does not jeopardise a wider audience's understanding of the context. At the beginning of the chapter, I identify my main research questions and later include a literature review on techniques that other writers have employed when including their native language in English fiction. Following that, I focus on how my creative methodology has explored ways to comprise Maltese elements in English-language dialogue. Ultimately, the conclusion I reach is that there are many limitations in evincing specific facets of Maltese life in the English language, especially those relating to jokes, politics, or dialect and for this reason, the Maltese culture can never be fully represented in mainstream literature.

In my second chapter, *Analysis of techniques: Character and Setting*, I look more specifically at the form of the short story cycle and how it mirrors the sense of unbelonging that my characters feel. I look into how it can be used as a technique to achieve unity throughout the collection and reflect Malta's nuances. I also focus on four other techniques that enabled me to give a nuanced account of Maltese setting and life, all of which could be useful for those seeking to use fiction to shed light on the complexities inherent in their own communities.

It could be contended that this thesis does not delve into all the subjects that the collection addresses. Since my writing engages with mental health, I could have

referred to the implications of trauma on my characters, especially in relation to their identity. However, my scope was always to pin down techniques I used in my writing to understand the heart of Maltese identity, both in characters who continue to live on the island and in those who pursue transnational journeys similar to my own.

Applying Flower and Hayes' cognitive process theory of writing to my methodology

At the very beginning of my project, I knew that this had to be a short story collection, rather than a novel. This was mainly because I have always been attracted by the idea of multiple voices and experiences, rather than just one. Following the assertion that I was going to use a series of short narratives in underpinning the Maltese experience, my creative process unfolded in 'a series of decisions and choices' that continued right until the end (Flower and Hayes, 1981, p. 365). Early on, I also knew that the choices I would make would be governed by the audience I had in mind, in my case an anglophone one. In the same way that according to Bitzer, rhetorical discourse occurs as a 'response to a rhetorical situation which he defines as containing an exigency, an audience and a set of constraints', I saw my writing as a response to an audience who was curious about a minority culture they knew little about (1981, p. 365). Throughout my creative process, the language, the historical, cultural and political inferences I made had to be tailored for my foreign audience.

Flower and Hayes' cognitive process theory of writing places a lot of emphasis on the 'rhetorical problem' which according to them is what the writer responds to and is split into two categories: 'the rhetorical situation' and 'the writer's own goals' (1980, p. 22). The former category is defined as 'the name we assign to the givens with which a writer must work, namely the audience and the assignment' (p. 26). Since my main research question, (which I will elaborate on in chapter 1), revolved around what narrative techniques I could use to retain the nuances of Maltese language and culture in English fiction for anglophone readers, I felt that my creative practice, much like Flower and Hayes posit, relied heavily on the rhetorical

situation, in this case my foreign audience, and how I was going to write about my minority culture in a way that was comprehensible to them. On the other hand, my goal was also to appease Maltese readers, and I knew that a large majority of them would prefer Maltese literature to be written in Maltese. For this reason, as I reflect in my first chapter, I felt that as a writer I had to justify writing in English, both to myself and to a Maltese readership. Essentially this was my rhetorical problem, and it was this anxiousness about language that shaped my research questions and fuelled my writing. Essentially, it influenced my decision to compensate for not writing in Maltese by including Maltese elements in my work.

Another element of Flower and Hayes' model is the writer's 'long-term memory' which is 'a storehouse of knowledge about the topic and audience, as well as knowledge of writing plans and problem representations' (1981, p. 371). My initial ideas for each individual story relied on this memory, particularly because having grown up in Malta, my experiences and knowledge of its society were bound to colour my writing. One of the problems Flower and Hayes identify with 'long-term memory', is related to the writer having to 'reorganize or adapt that information to fit the demands of the rhetorical problem' (p. 371). Since I was aware that my readership might not be familiar with the Maltese context, I knew that I would have to find ways to recreate my own personal discovery process of Malta, whilst also ensuring that a foreign audience could appreciate and understand the foreignness prevalent in my narratives.

According to Flower and Hayes, 'long term memory' feeds into the actual writing process which is made up of three sections: planning, translating and reviewing. All the stages of my writing underwent these three processes. For me, the planning stage, which Flower and Hayes regard as the act of constructing 'an internal

representation', involved generating images and issues that I wanted to represent in my collection (p. 371). Some of them came in the form of 'fragmentary, unconnected, even contradictory thoughts' (p. 372). For instance, I knew early on that most of my characters would be women and that a significant amount of them would have transnational experiences. However, I also wanted to include the male perspective. Additionally, I wanted my stories to have unifying themes and motifs, but I did not know exactly how that would happen. I initially jotted down a list of characters I knew I had to represent and the reasons I had for wanting to write their narratives. After that, I began the process of organising how the narratives would consecutively appear in the collection. Initially, since my time period ranges from 1950s Malta to contemporary times, I had the idea of presenting the pieces chronologically to reflect the changes that occurred in the island. However, this later changed as I decided to include past episodes and memories in the characters' present-day realities which meant that the past infiltrated each narrative, even the ones with more contemporary settings.

Another essential part of the planning process is the 'goal-setting' (p. 372). For me this consisted of assigning specific voices and viewpoints I wanted to use in each narrative, while thinking about the techniques I could apply to them, to portray an authentic image of Malta. In essence, I had to ask myself : Why were these techniques important in my research? How were they related to retaining the nuances of the Maltese culture? In turn, these goals, together with research I was conducting on the short story form, generated further ideas relating to how I could present my collection and relate the stories to each other, mainly in the form of the short story cycle.

Translating is another critical part of the cognitive writing process. Here ‘ideas’ are put ‘into visible language’, meaning that what the writer wants to articulate is rendered into written words (p. 373). Initially, I only wrote in English, as my goal was mainly focussed on depicting multiple Maltese perspectives through reliable narration, in the third-person viewpoint. However, I soon realised that I could also include Maltese elements in my characters’ dialogues, so I turned my attention to the use of ‘code-switching’, which resulted in yet another goal: that of reproducing my characters’ speeches as authentically as I could (Poplack, 2001, p. 2062).⁹ Therefore, my process of ‘translating’ took on two different forms: that of decoding the images and sensations that surround Malta into English writing, as well as replicating what ‘code-switching’ in Malta sounds like in specific cases, into written words.

Finally, the process of ‘reviewing’, was perhaps the longest one. Flowers and Hayes subdivide it into ‘evaluating’ and ‘revising’ (p. 374). Since I was writing a collection of short fiction, it was easier to constantly re-edit and rewrite individual pieces, depending on whether I had reached my goals or answered my research questions. These revisions resulted in realising other techniques that could help in retaining the essences of Maltese experience. In this way, my writing and planning were constant, ongoing processes, feeding into each other, and essentially, it was through this persistent creative practice-based research that I continued to discover techniques for rendering the nuances of my minority culture.

⁹ Shana Poplack defines ‘code-switching’ as the mixing by bilinguals (or multilinguals) of two or more languages in discourse, often with no change of interlocutor or topic’ (Poplack, 2001, p. 2062).

Analysis of techniques: Dialogue

As a creative practitioner, the ‘rhetorical problem’ I faced at the beginning of my project related to the fact that I wanted to write about the minor Maltese culture and depict its overtones, however I wanted to do this in the English language, so that it could be appreciated by a wider audience. In colonised countries it is often the case that there is a linguistic conflict between the languages of the coloniser and colonised. By default, the language in which the said colonised country’s literature should be written also becomes a disputed issue and often the colonised advocate for literary work to be composed in their native tongue, rather than in a dominant language. In this chapter, I will be focusing specifically on Maltese literature as a minority literature that remains widely unavailable to foreign audiences because it is only spoken by a relatively small group of people worldwide.

I will use my creative practice to investigate the main research questions of my exegesis:

-What narrative techniques and forms can be used to retain the nuances of Maltese language and culture in English fiction?

-What do the limitations to depicting certain overtones mean for Maltese representation?

As someone who grew up all too aware of my country’s colonial past, my ‘long term memory’, certainly influences how I regard both the Maltese language and its existing literature. I have always sympathised with those who insist that the literature of their country should be written in their own, native language. In the case of Maltese, although the language is not yet endangered, it is still at a high ‘risk of disappearing’, because it is ‘used by a proportionally small number of people’ (Bartolo, 2018). According to research conducted by University of Manchester’s

National Centre for Text Mining, the Icelandic, Latvian, Lithuanian and Maltese languages are not acknowledged in the digital sphere, 'on spelling and grammar checkers, on voice activated services such as Siri on the iPhone and automatic translation systems' (The Huffington post, 2012). For Malta, this is highly problematic because it means that in the digital world, Maltese is almost entirely neglected. According to Bartolo, if we do not act quickly, Maltese 'will be unable to survive in today's digital world'. He posits that if it were the case that the Maltese language vanished entirely from 'the online world in 10- or 20-years' time, our language will be in jeopardy' (2018). The fact that young children are far more exposed to English through social media than they are to Maltese and that some parents only talk to them in English is also criticised by Trevor Zahra who believes that this is 'happening at the expense of Maltese' (Vassallo, 2021). He adds that this might result in children learning English well but using Maltese simply 'to get by' (2021).

These language debates led me to understand how the production of Maltese literature in English could also form part of the discourse, presenting itself as one of the obstacles preventing Maltese people from accessing their native language in literary form, in preference of English- language texts. In fact, Beecroft observes that the biggest challenge for minority literatures is 'to encourage production and consumption of literature in the regional language when readers have access to larger and more vital traditions' (Beecroft, 2015, p. 277). Apart from that, he also confirms another suspicion I harboured, which relates to the fact that 'readers- are more likely to choose a more central language for literary purposes, as for many other domains' (p. 277). Therefore, I knew that if I were to depict the Maltese minority community in the English language, instead of Maltese, I had to explain my rationale behind it.

It was not until the nineteenth century that Maltese novelists who had previously produced works in Italian reconsidered the language in which they were writing and turned instead to Maltese, their vernacular, the people's tongue.¹⁰ The main reason for this was that it was the only way novelists could hope to be understood by most of the Maltese population (Friggieri, 1988). By then, the Maltese language had not been cultivated politically or scientifically for centuries. In fact, the alphabet wasn't standardized until 1924 (Arevalo, 2014). However, through the historical novels of Anton Manwel Caruana and Ġuże Muscat Azzopardi, self-expression in Maltese was set in motion (Friggieri, 1988).

The success of the Maltese historical novel in the latter part of the nineteenth century preceded the social novel, which began to make its mark in the early twentieth century with novels like *Leli ta' Ħaż- Żghir* and *Ulied in-Nanna Venut fl-Amerka*. The social novel presented itself as an investigation into the working-class condition which in previous literary works had been overshadowed by the urgency to express the importance of 'national identity and constitutional emancipation', from the coloniser (1988, p. 302). Maltese came to be recognised as an important literary language in the island and L- Akkademja tal-Malti, launched in 1920, strengthened its importance even further by validating its purpose as the guardian of the Maltese language and its literature (Times of Malta, 2020). L- Akkademja took an active role in ensuring that the Maltese language was given its due respect, guiding broadcasters on correct Maltese usage, going to Brussels before Malta's 2003 EU referendum to

¹⁰ In the first half of the nineteenth century, many eminent Italian writers and journalists were exiled in Malta and their political activities influenced a lot of Maltese poets and writers. The concept of democracy which Britain seemed to exude, allured many activists of the Risorgimento to evolve their plans in Malta. Their sense of rebellion created conflict between the British culture, Malta's coloniser and the Italian one. The British culture came to symbolize a political system which yielded few rights to the Maltese while Italian culture signified an enlightened force and classical heritage (Friggieri, 1988).

discuss issues relating to translation with the European Commission and Parliament, and in 1989, publicly deploring the lack of importance that Maltese was being given at certain private schools (Casha and Camilleri, 2000).

Following the struggle that went into establishing Maltese as an important literary language, it is understandable that contemporary Maltese writers feel strongly about writing in their vernacular and oppose the idea of Maltese literature being publicized in the English language, of asserting itself ‘through a presencing in the language of the other’ (Callus, 2009, p. 37). In ‘Performativity, precarity and sexual politics’, Butler uses Spivak’s assertion that ‘under conditions of subalternity’, the only real solution ‘to lay claim to rights’ is through ‘assimilating to those juridical systems’ which were structured on the eradication and misuse of Indigenous cultures (Butler, 2009, p. x). Butler goes on to emphasise the importance of using the dominant language, not to confirm its power, but rather to oppose its savagery, ‘to find the language through which to lay claim to rights to which one is not yet entitled’ (p. x). Ultimately, what Butler, Callus and Spivak are pointing at is the importance of allowing the voiceless a right to speak, even if this means ‘negotiating the right to speak’, through using the language of the coloniser (p. x).

It is apt to note that the valorising of the vernacular is not motivated by simple patriotism. It is also influenced by the belief that some things are ‘beyond translation’ and that translating them might actually undermine what is inherently Maltese (Callus, 2009, p. 37). Spivak also claims that ‘unthinking translations’ will always be somewhat flawed, because ‘they rest on flawed ground’. A minority language being translated into English, will always be robbed ‘of its phonetic and cultural substance’ (Spivak, 2015, cited in Maini, 2018). In fact, this was perhaps the main struggle I faced in my creative practice: how could I convincingly write about

the Maltese ‘submerged population’s’ development in another language, in my case English, when according to a survey carried out by the National Council for the Maltese Language and the Department of Maltese at the University of Malta, 97% of Maltese citizens aged between 18 and 80 consider Maltese as their first language? (O’Connor, 1963, p. 18; Borg et al, 2021).¹¹

Fowler conjectures that it is necessary for a novel to confer an assurance of the real on the imaginary (Fowler, 2006). In fact, in most Maltese fiction, a person’s social class and character, as well as the country’s bilingual element, are brought out through authentic sounding dialogue, reflective of real life. Alex Vella Gera’s novel, *Is-Sriep Reġġhu saru Velenużi* is written in both Maltese and English and he does this to reflect the island’s social divide. The narrator’s family are mostly English speaking and this is reflected in the way they code-switch, moving swiftly from Maltese to English as in the example below:

‘Jaħasra the boat dis-sena għadni lanqas ħriġtha. I did some repairs over the winter u qisni I got tired of it’ (2012, p.181). They send their children to private schools and vote for the Nationalist party, yet the other people in their street are Maltese speaking and send their children to government schools. The fact that the protagonist himself speaks Maltese, reveals the ‘cultural and political position’ he has taken in defiance of his family (Vassallo, 2016, p. 218). However, despite this, he cannot escape his very bilingual upbringing as his thoughts and language constantly move ‘to and from English’, highlighting the ease he feels with both languages, as well as the anxiety he experiences at the thought of betraying his Maltese identity (p. 218).

¹¹ The term ‘submerged population’ was used by Frank O’Connor in *The Lonely Voice*. He used it to refer to the characters that are most likely to suit short stories. He claimed that these ‘outlaw figures’ were the most apt for the short story since this form was designed to reflect ‘our sense of marginality in the world, and our often tenuous sense of self’ (O’ Connor, 1963, pp. 18-19).

Vella Gera's experimentation with language fits Evelyn Nien-Ming Ch'ien's definition of 'weird English', which she claims is mostly concerned with 'who the speaker is' and how the latter can commandeer the language in whichever way they want (2004, p. 17). Not only does this variety of English depicted by Vella Gera undermine the traditional language and allow Maltese to share the prestige savoured by English, it also disobeys the rules of the English language (Torres, 2007, p. 76). Lourdes Torres explores how this is done in most Latino texts, where although English is the main language, Spanish 'lexical items and phrases are incorporated into the English-language text' (p.76). Junot Diaz is one such Latino author who mixes Spanish and English in his writing and believes in the coexistence and fluctuation between the two languages (Ch'ien, 2004). Much like Vella Gera, he doesn't use italics or quotation marks when including Spanish elements in his work and for him this is a crucial political gesture, because he argues that 'Spanish is not a minority language, so why treat it like one?' (Diaz, 2000).

However, the difference between Junot Diaz and Alex Vella Gera is that the former affords to promote Spanish in this way, since after all, Spanish is 'a cultural language of the highest order', 'an international language', with 'an official and vehicular capacity in 21 countries worldwide'. On the other hand, Maltese, although a majority language in Malta, is a minor one in the context of major world languages, as it is only spoken by '440 thousand people in at least six territories' (Moreno-Fernandez and Otero, 2008, p. 68; Lindenstien 2018 and Worldmapper, 2021).

Consequently, although a novel like Vella Gera's *Is-Sriep Reggħu saru Velenuzi*, communicates very well Malta's position as a bilingual country with established diglossia and heavy dependence on code-switching, this not only means that it is limited to the reader who understands the humour, politics and nuances

between both languages, but also that the readership is much narrower than Junot Diaz's.¹²

Apart from refusing to italicise Spanish elements, Junot Diaz is also against translating his work. Ch'ien suggests that the reason for this relates to the notion of translation as a process designed by the 'dominant culture' to erase the more minor one, which makes Diaz adamant that the 'representation of another culture in another language should be hybrid' (Ch'ien, 2004, p. 209). In fact, if Vella Gera were to translate his work completely into English, the nuances identified by each language in different contexts are completely lost. An example of this is when in *Is-Sriep Reggħu saru Velenuzi*, the protagonist visits his family's house, right after his mother's funeral and his stream of consciousness switches from Maltese to English, a language he equates with his mother, heightening his sense of grief. This would not come across if the whole work were to be translated into English.

'Id-dar kienet bħal pjaneta oħra, diżabitata the rarefied air of grief and loss and sadness still palpable, especially in certain nooks and crannies' (Vella Gera, 2012, p. 131).

The problems inherent in translation were particularly noticeable with the publication of Francis Ebejer's *Requiem for a Malta Fascist* which was initially written in English and subsequently translated into Maltese. The translated title, *Requiem għal Sieħbi Fauxista* managed to capture 'the flavour of the story', as it emphasised the importance of friendship within the novel and through the use of 'sieħbi', implied both that although his friend was a fascist, he was not, and that despite this, they remained friends (Caruana, 2008, p. 162). These implications

¹² Diglossia is defined by Encyclopedia Britannica as the speaking of two or more languages by the members of the same community, as, for example, in New York City, where many members of the Hispanic community speak both Spanish and English, switching from one to the other according to the social situation or the needs of the moment.

weren't present in the English title. Apart from this, 'the language of translation was able to reflect wholly and accurately the physical and socio-cultural environment which English was unable to do' (p. 162). For instance in Maltese, the term 'gebuba' refers to an interior space that is too small for its purpose, while 'għarix', is 'a stand alone structure in the countryside' (p. 162). While the Maltese version was able to make this distinction, the English version was not, and Ebejer was therefore forced to use the term 'hut' in both cases (p.162). Much like in Gera's case, if *Is-Sriep Reggħu saru Velenuži*, were to be translated completely into English, Ebejer's original English version was unable to depict 'the bilingual context which is Malta', while the Maltese version did so with ease. A particular instance is when both the English soldier and Maltese constable tell Lorenz to move away. In the Maltese version, the soldier's order to 'Hop it!' is retained, while the constable exclaims 'Aħrab 'l hemm!', giving a genuine linguistic account (p.163). However, perhaps the translator truly managed to create an authentic Maltese ambiance through bringing in dialect in the villagers' dialogue which works to infer the social status of those who speak dialect and those who speak standard Maltese (p.163).

The translator, Briffa, was also able 'to exploit the phonological aspects of Maltese' and at times, the text reads as a ballad, helped on by the use of alliteration in lines like, 'Taħriġ ta' kastig u turment' and 'imkemma u mħaffra biż-żmien' (Briffa, 2004, p. 141). In this way, the translation into Maltese 'can be viewed as a reverse process, the local reality being brought back and reunited with its roots', and therefore a much more authentic and honest depiction than the first work (Caruana, 2008, p. 164). However, ultimately Briffa's translation was aimed solely at a Maltese audience, while Ebejer's initial work allowed for a much wider audience.

Much like Ebejer, my objective has always been to publicize my country's concerns, to make our minority culture accessible to a wider audience and it was predominantly for this reason that I chose to write in English. However, through resorting to the dominant language, I found that I was unable to depict what speaking in Maltese means to specific characters, what it reveals about their social class and upbringing, and what different dialects say about the regions in Malta they have grown up in. I also lost the correlation between Maltese and English as, respectively, the colonised and the coloniser's languages. I was at risk of what Clare Vassallo refers to as reducing 'the dialogue, and perhaps also the narration, to a fluent monolingual sameness which would no longer reflect the linguistic reality of the characters depicted in the novels' (2013, p. 51).

For this reason, I was initially hesitant to include too much dialogue in some of the stories, turning to stream of consciousness instead. In one of my earlier stories, 'The Interdiction', the protagonist does not talk to her brother about memories of their mother. Instead the latter are captured in her thought process. A lot of significant actions happen when the characters are alone, removing the necessity for conversation with other characters to ensue. This was a problem because it resulted in not being able to fully communicate the characters' relations to each other and even in flat characters at times, particularly the minor ones in the story whose stream of consciousness is never revealed to the audience. I felt frustrated at not being able to convey my characters' linguistic reality and at having to find ways to avoid dialogue, which is crucial in inferring character.

In the first stage of the reviewing process, to avoid reducing the dialogue to the 'monolingual sameness', described by Vassallo, I started experimenting with including Maltese phrases and terms throughout the story (p. 51). In the first draft of

‘Freeport Lights’, a story where it would not be linguistically realistic for the protagonists to speak English, I used very minimal dialogue and wrote it in Maltese. Initially, the story was written as an internal monologue and there were only two pieces of dialogue present. The first was ‘Oqgħod għassa miegħu,’ a phrase used by officer Carabott, directed to another guard, while Saviour, the inmate sharing Eman’s cell was being wheeled out after a suicide attempt. Through this information, even without understanding the words, a wider audience can infer its meaning, and through the fact that Carabott was pointing to Eman, while talking to the guard, come to understand that Carabott wanted him to keep an eye on Eman, while Saviour was being tended to. Another instance where Maltese surfaced in dialogue was when one of the inmates, ‘a guy everyone called Tal- Mielah’, was talking to the prisoners about his ex-wife, after dreaming of her with another man. Once again, although a wider audience would not have understood the meaning of ‘Noqtolha kont, inħanxrilha għonqa żgur’, through the fact that the inmate drew ‘his right thumb across the base of his neck’, and slammed his hand on the table, it could have been inferred that the man’s sentiments regarding his wife were strong and the thought of her with another man triggered violence in him.¹³

However, although it was a good way of incorporating Maltese, the phrases themselves were not particularly important for understanding the context of the story. I also realised that to give more depth to the character of Eman, and to develop his relationship with his wife, there needed to be a scene in which she visited him, and a discussion unfolded. Since it was an important conversation that an Anglophone audience had to fully understand, it could not be written in Maltese. For this reason, I had to write all the dialogue in English. In addition, I also had to remove the Maltese

¹³ From the collection *Stones Displaced*, first draft.

parts I had included, mainly because it would be linguistically incongruent to have some characters speak Maltese, and others speak in English, especially when in reality they would all be speaking Maltese. Having made these changes gave me the confidence of writing more dialogue in English. However, I still wanted to include Maltese elements, even if some of the phrases would be unintelligible to a foreign audience.

The importance of unintelligibility in the postcolonial has been drawn out by Salman Rushdie, whose writing not only expresses different languages, but also ‘moves in many worlds at hyperspeed, confronting the unintelligibility of existence with multiple narratives’ (Rushdie, 1996). In fact, the reader Rushdie has in mind is the urban Indian. He claims that ‘it is typical of Bombay and maybe of India that there is a sense of play in the way people use language. Most people in India are multilingual... it’s quite characteristic that a sentence will begin in one language, go through a second language and end in a third’ (1996). His characters use a ‘personalized pidgin’ which defies interpretation by those who do not speak it. This pidgin is reflective of reality, of the fact that all families have their own private language and ‘linguistic oddities’ (Ch’ien, 2004, p. 261). Besides this, Rushdie doesn’t believe in using the English language in the same manner as the British (p. 260). He believes in reworking it to suit his culture’s needs. For Rushdie, to conquer and manipulate the English language means completing ‘the process of making ourselves free’ (Rushdie, 1991, p.432).

Irvine Welsh’s use of the Scottish dialect rather than standard English also works in a similar way. His devotion to ‘a vibrant oral culture’ reflects the coarse lives of characters who refuse to be indoctrinated into the coloniser’s values and who remain ‘unbrainwashed by the dominant culture’ (Maley, 2000, p. 190; Ch’ien, 2004,

p. 13). In fact, the importance of the Scottish dialect in defying the colonial and in subverting assertions of inclusivity in wider ‘narratives of nation and empire’, is particularly evident when working-class characters are juxtaposed with middle-class ones (Maley, 2000, p.193). An example of this is in the title story of his collection *The Acid House*, where an acid trip accompanied by being struck by a lightning bolt leads to the junkie Coco Bryce exchanging bodies with the newborn baby of a middle-class couple. The narrative which alternates between Coco Bryce trapped in the body of a baby, and baby Tom, trapped in the body of Coco Bryce, who wakes up in a hospital, having lost all his memory, sheds lights on how dialect is an inherent aspect of Scottish working-class identity. Although mainly written in standard English, the story is initially interspersed with dialect, which in this case functions as a tool that allows Coco Bryce to reinstate his identity after he has been robbed of it.

However, as the story progresses, this identity slowly disintegrates as his ‘new’ middle class mother Jenny, urges him to ‘stop talking like a workman and speak properly’ (Welsh, 1995, p. 171). Eventually, ‘his new knowledge seemed to be forcing out much of his old memories’, and towards the end of the story, standard English takes over completely, emphasising the loss of Coco Bryce’s individuality (p. 172). Not only has Coco Bryce been shaped into the kind of man his girlfriend has always wanted him to be, but the new-born baby in possession of Bryce’s consciousness is also being moulded into the ‘perfect new man’ that Jenny wants her son to turn into (p. 170). In this way, *The Acid House* can function as a commentary of how a person’s sociolect is inseparable from their core identity and how important it is to reflect that in literature.

Language techniques I employed in my dialogue

As someone writing about contemporary Malta, I also wanted my work to contemplate the reality of Malta's sociolinguistic and postcolonial nature. However, I was all too aware that my position was unlike Rushdie's or Welsh's. Rushdie is writing about a contemporary urban India whose official language is the fourth most spoken language in the world. Welsh's writing is comprehensible by English speakers who may not instantly understand the dialect, but can do so with a little effort, especially by reading it aloud (Ch'ien, 2004). I, however, am attempting to advocate for the language of a small island with just about 440, 000 people (Worldmapper, 2021). Despite this, and despite that my initial attempts at incorporating the language had failed, I still felt obliged to include Maltese elements in dialogue and I found three main circumstances where I was able to do this without risking being misunderstood by a wider audience. In a sense, this process was a change in what Flower and Hayes identify as 'sub-goals' since I had abandoned my initial experiment of using minimal dialogue and was now looking at ways to mainly use English alongside some Maltese.¹⁴

The first circumstance arose when I had Maltese-speaking protagonists in the presence of characters who didn't speak Maltese themselves. These Maltese speakers were therefore forced to communicate in the majority language with the non-Maltese speakers. However, because my Maltese-speaking characters' knowledge of English is minimal, Maltese elements appear in their discourse nonetheless.

In the final drafts of 'Freeport Lights', I managed to include Maltese words like 'ta', 'mela', and 'alleç', as well as colloquial expletives like 'Alla Madonna' and

¹⁴ Changing major goals and establishing new ones according to what one has learnt in the process of writing is one of the major 4 points on which Flower and Hayes' cognitive process theory rests (Flower and Hayes, 1981, p. 366).

‘Haqq l-ostja’ in a Maltese officer’s conversation with the Irish guard Byrne.¹⁵ These are constantly used in Maltese discourse, and yet require no particular explanation or definition. Through showcasing the Maltese guard’s limited knowledge of the English language in phrases such as ‘Issa they investigate again probably,’ or ‘The doctor leave for a bit. Maybe half hour,’ I hoped to create what Vassallo refers to as a ‘particular local flavour’ (2013, p. 51).¹⁶ Moreover, it is a flavor that is indicative of the kind of education the guard has received, as well as the social class he belongs to. In another story, ‘B12’, the only Maltese character, a patrol officer at the detention centre, also uses Maltese elements in his speech when communicating with foreigners, reflecting a weak command of English, such as in, ‘Filkas, you better go to room’.¹⁷

I want to turn now to the second circumstance where I found it easy to include ‘a local flavour’ in dialogue without mentioning anything significant in the minority language. This circumstance occurred when I was writing about characters who speak the variety of Maltese English which Vella defines as ‘the English acquired by children of Maltese parentage in a family Type D’ (Vella, 2013, p. 12).¹⁸ Type D families belong to the fourth family type identified by Vella whose first acquired language is English, and they then learn Maltese through formal education. This

¹⁵ *Stones Displaced*, p. 143.

¹⁶ *Stones Displaced*, p. 143.

¹⁷ *Stones Displaced*, p. 85.

¹⁸ Vella differentiates between four family types when it comes to the use of Maltese and English in Malta. These include: family type A, in which children acquire the dialect first, followed by Standard Maltese; family type B, in which Standard Maltese is acquired first and English is learnt at school; family type C, in which Standard Maltese and English are acquired simultaneously, and finally, family type D, in which the children first acquire English and later learn Maltese at school. According to Vella, children of Maltese parentage are more likely to belong to family type C, however, there are those of Maltese parentage who speak to their young children solely in English and as a result the children grow up being fluent in English and not in Maltese. Vella also argues that speakers of family type C speak Mixed Maltese English, while those of family type D speak a variety called Maltese English. The main difference between the two is that in the latter variety, Maltese is not used as often as it is in the former variety (Vella, 2013, p.12).

means that overall, their preferred spoken language is English. The characters in my story ‘Howard Gardens’ speak this variety of English, and so, are predominantly English-speaking. They also conform to the traits usually associated with these kinds of speakers in Malta, who according to research carried out by Bagley are often white-collar workers, non-State educated and very well-off (Bagley, 2001). Anita’s father is a headmaster, and both she and her sister are privately educated.

A linguistic structure that particularly denotes this sub-variety includes the idiosyncratic use of ‘stay’ accompanied by a verb in the present participle, in an example like ‘I don’t have the patience to stay reading’ (Vella, 2013, p. 15). In the story Anita uses it in a conversation with her father, in which they are talking about the plants he takes care of, and she tells him she could never do it herself, going on to say, ‘Imagine the patience you need to stay taking care of them’.¹⁹

Another characteristic of this Maltese English, pointed out by Vella is the use of ‘but’ at the end of sentences, in an example like, ‘I don’t know what I want but.’ (p.15). Anita also employs this attribute in her speech, ‘They only came when he was a newborn but.’²⁰ Moreover, ‘Howard Gardens’, also highlights how in Malta, second language teaching occurs in the language being taught. In other words, teachers ‘are encouraged to use Italian to teach the Italian language or French to teach French’ (Caruana, 2016, p. 275). However, since Maltese is so necessary for informal communication, according to Caruana, exchanges in Maltese are very common, and in fact, the students that Anita’s father’s boyfriend Stuart teaches, complain when he refuses to translate in Maltese (p. 275).

¹⁹ *Stones Displaced*, p. 39.

²⁰ *Stones Displaced*, p. 39.

Thusat et al consider Maltese English as ‘part of the local linguistic repertoire’, hence, for this reason, speaking it is indicative of Malta’s bilingual nature and by default part of ‘Malta’s heritage’ (Thusat et al, 2009 cited in Vella, 2013, p. 16). It also perpetuates the notion that this could be Malta’s ‘own variety of English’, which proposes the liberty to contemplate this ‘New English’ as ‘a natural resource’, or part of our national identity, and not a foreign language (Vella, 2013, p. 16).

On the other hand, the characters in ‘Little Assisi’ are speakers of Mixed Maltese English.²¹ Like the characters in ‘Howard Gardens’, they are quite wealthy and live in Sliema and St Julians, areas that according to Agius are made up of ‘high income communities’ and are comprised of families who encourage their children to speak Maltese English (1998, 37). Dun Pawl’s parishioners, the Grechs who are also from the same area, code-switch from Maltese to English, particularly when talking to their housekeeper, in an example like, ‘Mar lest the food?’ ‘Mar ħsiltu the dishes?’²² In the instances of flashback narration, when I illustrated conversations between Dun Pawl and his mother, I added some examples of language alternation, reflective of the Mixed Maltese English variety. Here, although specific terms might be misunderstood by non-Maltese speakers, the implication of their meaning is still realised. An example is the word ‘Għazzien’, in the phrase, ‘Għazzien, just like his mother’, a criticism that Dun Pawl’s mother directs at his father. Although the audience might not know that it means ‘lazy’, it is obviously a disparaging term as it is accompanied by the fact that his mother ‘is sick’ of his ‘father for leaving dirty plates everywhere’.²³

²¹ In 1980, Borg coined the term Mixed Maltese English and asserted that this variety occurs when Maltese individuals claim to be speaking ‘English’ amongst themselves and the variety consists of a ‘mixture’ of Standard Maltese and English.

²² *Stones Displaced*, p.57.

²³ *Stones Displaced*, p.59.

Two other examples of Maltese appearing alongside English, are the phrases ‘Meta mmut jien min ħa jieħu ħsiebek?’ and ‘La neputijiet, la aħwa m’ għandek.’ From the context, as well as from what his mother says in English, in the same passage, as she is on her death bed, it can be inferred that she is alluding to the fact that following her death, Dun Pawl will be alone and that he will have no one to look after him. The rephrasing of her sentiments in English, that her son has ‘no children or wife’, that he ‘can’t buy a nice house’ for himself or enjoy his life in the way he wants, serve as a reinforcer, emphasising her concern.²⁴

The third occasion where employing the Maltese language came naturally occurred when I was writing about characters who had emigrated to a country where the ‘other’ language was the vernacular. Characters in a story such as ‘Beach Houses’ have become accustomed to speaking mainly in English after having lived in the UK for years. Nonetheless, they still use Maltese words and phrases in their dialogue, reflective of a ‘semi-conscious interlingua’, ‘a shifting stage between the use of two languages (Brincat, 2006, p. 155). The main characteristic of this shift is that the speakers are acutely aware of the fact that Maltese and English are separate and that the people they are conversing with are familiar with both languages. From the context of the phone call at the end of ‘Beach Houses’ and through the sentences, ‘Ara marelli. It’s been a long time Mar. Int bqajt Morecambe kont?’, the audience understands that the person talking hasn’t spoken to the caller in a long time and that he’s probably asking whether she’s still living in Morecambe. The use of both Maltese and English establishes that the caller understands both, and that she is at ease with code-switching between them.²⁵

²⁴ *Stones Displaced*, p.67.

²⁵ *Stones Displaced*, p.123.

In the case of my story ‘Sunshine’, where the protagonist’s sister has emigrated to Australia, it was harder to depict her linguistic reality for a number of reasons. Since Kady’s sister Lil belongs to the group of Maltese emigrés who arrived in Australia during the sixties and ‘had considerable exposure to British English’, because they were educated under a British system, according to Bovingdon, their ‘morphological Maltese mould’, would have begun ‘to display a definite trend towards assimilating British English-language influences’ (2004, p. 16). This is evident half-way through the narrative, when Kady comments on how her sister’s speech ‘is changing’, as she’s using incomprehensible, British sounding words like ‘farma’, ‘bbażoffja’ and ‘bbornjajt’.²⁶ These are three words that Bovingdon classified as part of the Matraljan ethnolect, a language variety spoken by the Maltese who emigrated to Australia (p. 19). “Farma” derives from the English word ‘farmer’, which to the Maltese ear was ‘phonologically realised as /farma/ in the singular form’, while ‘bbażoffja’ comes from the phrasal verb ‘to buzz off’ and ‘bbornjajt’ comes from ‘to be born’ (p. 20). Since Lil would have continued to use Standard Maltese and Matraljan in her dialogue, I could not represent her speech in an authentic way, since to ensure that my readership could understand her conversations with Kady, I would have had to include Matraljan alongside English, which would have been false, particularly because Lil is a first-generation immigrant and would not revert entirely to English when speaking with her Maltese relatives. In fact, Agius postulates that once Maltese immigrants are ‘united with their families’, they prefer to use standard Maltese or dialect as they feel that the latter is ‘a code of nostalgia and identity’ (1998, p. 39).

²⁶ Stones Displaced, p. 95.

In 'The Necklace', Ramona too is Maltese and living in a foreign country, this time in England. However, because she is educated, she would not include Maltese elements while talking to foreigners in English. Moreover, since she was brought up speaking Maltese, she also would not speak the variety of Maltese English, and with her parents would communicate solely in Maltese. Therefore, since it would not have been reflective of real life to use a small number of Maltese elements in Ramona's conversation with her mother, and since I wanted my audience to understand what they were talking about, I had to write all the dialogue in English.

What justifies writing dialogue in English?

Ramona's reality is one familiar with most people living in present day Malta. This is because standard Maltese remains the first language of the majority of the population (Caruana, 2016). Children in state schools continue to be taught in Maltese, even if the textbooks are written in English. In fact, in a recent study by the National Literacy Agency, it was found that teachers in state schools 'devoted just over 64% of the time to Maltese' while the figure went down to '35.9% for English' (Farrugia, 2019). In addition, Maltese is used in familiar domains such as work places, and with family members and friends. Attitudes towards Maltese are 'integrative, related to the desire to identify, with one's culture or language group'(p. 276). Therefore, a pertinent question that might arise is how can I justify using the English language to communicate my characters' dialogues and thoughts, when in real life, none of these characters would think in English at all? ²⁷

²⁷ According to a 2006 study by Caruana, the attitude towards Maltese was much more favourable among those coming from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, when compared to those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. In fact, while 78.5% of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds expressed favourable views towards Maltese, when it came to people from high socioeconomic backgrounds, the numbers were much lower, at 27% (2016, p. 276).

The answer to this question lies in the perhaps somewhat harsh reality that the most productive way for a 'subaltern literature', a minority one, to make its presence felt is through occurring in the language of 'the other' (Callus, 2011). Deleuze and Guattari define minor literature as 'not the literature of a minor language but the literature a minority makes in a major language' (1975, p.16). By this definition, because Maltese literature so seldom registers in any major languages, it does not qualify as even a minor literature, but is rather 'on the periphery of the periphery' (Callus, 2011). According to Deleuze and Guattari, even Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's English novels are considered 'minor literature'. Such a definition does little to help us when we try to understand his many novels for children, and his plays which are written in Gikuyu and Kiswahili (Jussawalla, 1991, p.145). Under which category would these fall? D'haen too laments the fact that Dutch, although a European language spoken by 22 to 23 million speakers, is still threatened by the uncertainty of 'whether there is any hope of its authors or works to be included in any of the newer world anthologies, even if only in the category of resonances or perspectives' (2014, p.7). The same can be said for Malta and Maltese works.

Damrosch and Moberg's version of 'ultraminor literature' seems to be the most suitable interpretation of Maltese writing, since it considers the size of the linguistic community, as well as its access to publication and literacy rates (2017, p. 134). In fact, all small island literature is considered as 'ultraminor literature', because island communities have limited resources, a small market and 'a high degree of dependency on external forces' (p. 135). Damrosch and Moberg also claim that this kind of literature can be the product of a 'small language community', 'based in a specific territory' and for this reason can be used to enhance the community's

territorial unity (p. 135). The size of ultraminor literatures is crucial, as their purpose centres around delineating their aesthetic and cultural ramifications.

Recently, after the Covid pandemic, there has been a boost in the publication of Maltese books. Between 2019 and 2020, 1143 new book titles were published in Malta, the highest number of books to be published in a single year on the island (Camenzuli, 2021). This was influenced by the rise of digital books which previously, were not included 'in the local market', as Maltese publishers considered ebooks impractical for such a narrow readership (Rossetti, 2016). Although this figure is positive, it is still relatively low compared to the Nordic Island country of Iceland, whose book publishing figures stood at 1,712 in 2019 (Statistics Iceland, no date). In fact, at the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair in 2016, the former chairman of Malta's National Book Council, Mark Camilleri compared Malta's literature to Iceland's and admitted that 'Malta's international literary presence is similar to that of Iceland's a generation ago' and that 'we are doing many things they used to do 30 years ago' and that 'we hope to learn from them' in the future (Camilleri, cited in Rossetti, 2016).

This is all well and good, however a question that remains unanswered is this: how can Maltese language literature make its mark internationally? According to Callus, it is inevitable for postcolonial writers to turn to other languages, more dominant ones, otherwise the literature of the minor country will remain inaccessible to a wider audience (2009, p. 36). A writer must therefore be aware of the absurdity of any commitment to 'monolingualism', established in a 'cult of authenticity, including linguistic authenticity' (p. 37). Ultimately, anything original is already influenced by the foreign, therefore writers from minority cultures need to move past questioning whether it is acceptable for their work to be written in the language of

the other, whether they should just stick to being monolingual, to writing in their own language.

Here it is useful to mention Derrida's assertion that 'all culture is originally colonial' (1998, p. 68). If we are to agree with the latter, we have to submit to the reality that there will always be inequalities among languages and that what is native and primal is always already plagued by what is foreign (p. 68). Moreover, there can never really be such a thing as something that is considered 'integrally Maltese', especially since our island's history is 'a prolonged experience of hybridity' (Callus, 2009, p. 38). English can therefore come to be regarded as a product beyond possession, beyond ownership or appropriation, as a 'nonlocalizable and noncountable' language which 'is less the sign of imposition by political force or cunning, than it is the promise of the singular' (Chow, 2008, p. 25). Derrida configures dominant languages as neutral territories in which the notion of foreignness is separate from that of belonging or nationality and in which any claims of 'my language' are obsolete. This configuration validates using the language of the other, particularly because it is up to the latter to 'summon the heterological opening that permits it to address itself to the other' (Derrida, 1998, p. 129). Just as Derrida claims that he 'only has one language which isn't his', and yet it is the language he must write and speak in, Maltese writers seeking to make an impact internationally must also revert to the 'other', the language which is not theirs (pp. 13-14).

Chow is a critic who questions Derrida's 'utopian stance on language' (Chow, 2008, p. 226). He suggests that through claiming that 'all culture is originally colonial', Derrida is hinting that the few instances where we 'might be somewhat equal' are 'when we are originally colonial' (p. 226). This way of viewing 'egalitarianism' is unhelpful when considering the 'ongoing inequities', caused by

the predominance of languages like English or French in countries that were once colonised, and where ‘such dominance continues to this day’ (p. 227). According to Chow, if we were to fully agree with Derrida’s assertions, we would have to abandon any concerns about ‘inequities among languages’ simply because they are ‘inevitable’ (p. 227). Although I acknowledge that injustices amongst ‘ultraminor’ languages should be given importance, and should not be ignored, Derrida’s declaration that language is to be regarded as a neutral territory, separate from belonging or nationality has helped me feel licensed to write English-language dialogues for characters who would have spoken completely in Maltese. Indeed, I must write such dialogues if I am ‘to bring Maltese literature’s potential to the other’s notice with greater immediacy’ and to ‘impinge upon literature more broadly (Callus, 2011). In fact, the instances of Maltese terms, although present in many of the stories, do not jeopardise the reader’s understanding of the plot or characterisation and in many cases are accompanied largely by English phrases or explanations.

Limitations I faced in my Creative Practice

However, being unable to write in Maltese also means that the dialogue in my work would not reflect many facets of Maltese life, such as the fact that the Maltese mostly prefer to discuss jokes, secrets, intimate things and politics in Maltese, while English is preferred to discuss scientific and technological matters and literature (Caruana, 2006, pp. 278-279). This is mainly because most of my stories are about relationships between family members and friends, who in reality, when talking about something very personal would never talk about it in English and therefore, having them discuss it in the language of the ‘other’ sounds very inauthentic to a Maltese audience. Apart from that, some of the characters would not even be

speaking in standard Maltese but would be using a regional dialect. An example of this is in 'Freeport Lights' when Eman remembers a conversation he had with Saviour when they were sharing a cell. They are two inmates who grew up in the Southeast of Malta and according to Agius, people from South-eastern areas of the island, like 'Żabbar, Żejtun, Żurrieq, and neighbouring villages', whom he distinguishes with the dialectical variety L (D)₂ do not use standard Maltese 'for normal conversation', whereas speakers from North-eastern areas, with the dialectical variety L (D)₁ 'are generally close to Standard Maltese' (1998, p. 40). Also, those like Eman and Saviour, brought up in the Southeast are generally likely to use 'Old Arabic patterns mixed with Old Sicilian and Italian borrowings' (p. 44). However, through having the men conversing completely in English, I am unable to depict any of these elements. In addition, I cannot include any swear words since if I were to throw in a few of these, and have the rest of their dialogue in English, it would make them sound as though they were speakers of Maltese English, whose first acquired language was English, and who then learnt Maltese through formal education. However, this is not the case with these characters since they were brought up speaking Maltese and learnt English at school when they were older.

Another interesting aspect that I was unable to render in my work, because I couldn't write lengthy dialogues in Maltese, was the fact that males from the Northeast part of the island shift from standard Maltese to mixed Maltese English only when they are conducting business, while females from this area are a lot more likely to code-switch in everyday conversations 'because of the prestige they want to create (p. 41). Moreover, there are instances where speakers from these areas will shift from standard Maltese to English, only to emphasise a point. An example is:

‘Għax ma tipprovax tapplika xorta, better late than never’. Translation: ‘Why don’t you try applying anyway, better late than never’ (p.41).

Once again, I could not depict this common utilisation since the most important part of the sentence would have to be written in Maltese for this to be effective. Yet another facet, that would have been interesting to represent in my writing, particularly in ‘Little Assisi’, would have been the oratorical standard Maltese, used by priests during Mass which sometimes shifts to dialectical Maltese to draw parishioners closer in what is called an ‘intimate shift’ (p. 42). However, since I could not write in Maltese, it made more sense to have Dun Pawl belong to a parish where Maltese English and Mixed Maltese English are spoken, and the dialect is not used.

Apart from these limitations, I cannot subtly communicate the reality that opinions surrounding English in Malta are mainly ‘instrumental, linked with the motivation to learn the language for useful and utilitarian purposes’, if the characters mostly speak in English for the sake of being understood by a wider audience (Chow, 2008, p. 225). Even illustrating how proud certain Maltese people are about their language becomes very hard when you’re writing in the majority language. For example, through mostly having to write in English, I would struggle with depicting how some Maltese speakers, when spoken to in English, would still use Maltese. I would also find it hard to delineate that the reason for this is that they ‘do not perceive the use of English positively, as they feel that Maltese is very much part of their identity whereas English is not’, as discovered in Sciriha’s 2004 research on the ‘Sociolinguistics of Mobile Telephony’ (p. 276). Ultimately, many of the language issues surrounding the Maltese and English languages in Malta are hard to depict

when I must mostly write in English and cannot code-switch to Maltese during significant parts of conversations as I risk being misunderstood.

Being unable to showcase the language issues surrounding the Maltese and English languages through dialogue, I resorted to other approaches to create a realistic Maltese ambience nonetheless. These will be thoroughly discussed in my second chapter.

However, despite many attempts at depicting the linguistic nuances of Maltese, the reality is that Malta's sociolinguistics can never be fully represented if a wider audience is to be targeted. Ultimately, Chi'en's definition of 'weird English' only applies to languages that are still widely spoken, such as Russian, Hindi and Spanish (Chi'en, 2004).²⁸ Maltese can only appear in small doses alongside English, as I have illustrated in examples of my own work, particularly if the audience is to be international. If a lot of the writing is in Maltese, a large part of a foreign audience will completely fail to derive understanding of context. Therefore, for this reason, in a sense, Maltese lives do remain 'linguistically disfranchised' and excluded from 'mainstream discourse', simply by virtue of the fact that Maltese has a relatively small group of speakers (2004).²⁹

²⁸ Chi'en defines 'weird English' as English that is 'demoralized, out of resistance to it' and fused with an original language, 'depriving English of its dominance and allowing other languages to enjoy the same status' (Chi'en, 2004).

²⁹ Mainstream literature, means fiction that is available to people from a wide range of 'age groups and gender lines' (Lindenstein, 2018).

Analysis of techniques: Character and Setting

In my first chapter, I focussed on some techniques I employed in rendering the nuances of the Maltese language in my characters' dialogues. In this second chapter, I turn to five other techniques I used in bringing to the fore the overtones of the Maltese cultural reality. These include:

- Repetition and sequences within the short story cycle
- Maintaining the balance between explaining and trusting the reader
- Narrative voice
- Analepsis
- The subversion of well-defined roles in Maltese society

The Short Story cycle: A sequence of similarity in theme and motifs

According to Pasco, the authors of short stories are not at liberty to pause and 'instruct in detail' and have 'to assume considerable background on the part of their reader' (1993, p. 446). For this reason, a lot of description that is necessary for evoking a sense of place and ambience has to be left out. Marc Brosseau has even pointed to the possibility of the short story being 'ageographical', since he claims that the form is somewhat unable to truly depict the 'influence of space on character development, subject formation and social life more generally' (2008, p. 382).

In fact, he even goes on to claim that the short story is characterized by its usage of generic settings which serve an economical function as they are not specific and therefore very easily identifiable. Place is merely regarded as a 'container or setting for social interaction' (2008, p. 382). However, Brosseau also claims that since the short story uses such few and common places, those that do make an appearance, 'acquire considerable meaning and importance' (p, 382). As an example, he uses Bukowski's short fiction, where place is never specific, and comes to represent an

entrapment of some sort, either in the home, in the workplace or on the street.

Although these places are only described briefly, they emphasise the hopelessness and isolation that dominate the characters' lives. These individuals are caught in a double trap- the urgency to earn money and work under terrible conditions, followed by a miserable home environment where 'an unhappy, disenfranchised wife is waiting for them' (p, 388). Some, like Duke in 'A. 45 to pay the rent', even end up on the street, 'the last step at the end of a long process of rejection', in order to make ends meet (p, 390). In this way, place depicts the dismal cycle his characters find themselves in, a cycle they are unable to overcome or quit.

Sheila Hones also corroborates Brosseau's claim that generic places are best suited for short stories and furthers her argument by emphasizing the importance of reader engagement in filling in the gaps when it comes to ambiguities in the short story. Her analysis of Alice Walker's 'Petunias', a story which contains minimal plot and landscape, highlights the necessity of both a reader's knowledge and intuition (Hones, 2010). The readers are merely presented with three specific locations, Vietnam', 'Tranquil Mississippi' and 'The Tearslee Plantation', as well as a highly fragmented narrative. It is then entirely up to them to piece together the fact that there are three voices, the author figure, the frame narrator and diarist, and that the diarist's attempts to preserve order in her house have failed as a result of her participation in the 'civil rights movement' and by her son's determination 'to make a big noise in Mississippi' after returning from Vietnam (Walker, 1981, p. 40). Without a reader's engagement, the story remains fragmented. However, the reality is that the three references the reader is given are relatively easy to decipher; the Vietnam conflict is well known and it is rather obvious that the diarist's son was a

soldier there. Apart from this, the reader can deduce the context and era, simply from the fact that the diarist's 'daddy's grandmama' was a 'slave on Tearslee Plantation' (p, 40).

In these cases, place is crucial in indicating the emotional and cultural connection 'for people to an existing space' (Buell, 2005, p. 63). As Buell postulates, it 'demonstrates a collective history of space or the quotidian idiosyncratic intimacies that go with place' (p. 63). Claire Keegan also uses place to reflect a sense of emotional attachment in her short fiction, particularly in 'Night of the Quicken Trees' where the bog on County Clare, the protagonist, Margaret's home, is depicted as a symbol of 'refuge and opportunity', it is a place in which she chooses the man who will father her child and is completely self-sufficient (Gladwin, 2019, p. 148). Although the landscape's portrayal; the grass, 'long and sour', 'not a withered leaf to be seen in autumn, just the shivering bogland and all the gulls wheeling around, screeching under restless clouds', is redolent of traditional, Irish pastoral imagery, the story subverts the common narrative of the land as allegorical for the nation, as it is rendered in Yeats' *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (Keegan, 2007, p. 127). Margaret does not use her sexuality for the growth of the nation, but rather for women's 'reproductive justice' which ultimately liberates her (Gladwin, 2014, p.147). Much like Walker's 'Petunias', a story such as this one requires an educated reader to understand that Keegan is subverting the traditional notion of motherhood in Ireland while retaining the typical imagery associated with the boglands.

However, the authors mentioned above, still write about places whose population is considerably large, and that are to an extent well-known and well-studied. Therefore, this makes it easier for readers of short stories to make

connections in these cases. However, what of communities that are not as well-known, that are minor and have a small readership? How can such economical stories be written about them when the majority of the mainstream readership will not be familiar with these places, their culture and people?

In their cognitive process theory of writing, Flower and Hayes refer to the 'goal-directed search for the unexpected' as writers 'attempt to explore and consolidate their knowledge' (1981, p. 379). My search for 'insight' consisted of looking at ways by which I could use the short story form to write economical, but nuanced stories about Malta. This led me to discover the concept of 'the short story cycle', which changed the course of my research. Driss defines it as the 'nomadic genre', since it is neither a novel nor a short story, it 'inhabits the intermezzo' and 'moves in smooth spaces' (2018, p. 62). Much like the nomad goes to a pool of water for a short break and then moves on to traverse other boundaries, the short story cycle, goes from story to story in the same way, pausing on each one for a while and swiftly moving on to the next one. According to Ingram and Mann, the individual pieces can be unified through having 'recurring characters' across stories, or through having a similar location or motifs that bind them together (1971, cited in March-Russell, 2009, p. 104). Therefore, since it can depict many perspectives and not just one in the same location, the 'short story cycle' is the perfect medium for stories about minority communities which an Anglophone readership might not be familiar with. It seems better equipped at this than the novel, which as Brada-Williams suggests, runs the risk of giving the 'rational reader' an impression that a 'part of a community' of an under-represented group actually 'represents the whole' (2004, p. 452).

Despite that the stories within the cycle are interdependent, since when arranged together they offer a balanced ‘variety of representations’, they can also work as standalone short pieces (p. 453). This is because each story has its ‘own unity of effect’ and can be treated as separate from the other narratives (Poe, 1846).³⁰ However, it is only when the stories are displayed together that the meanings of the broader context truly emerge. If the stories are published in isolation, these meanings might be lost. In her thesis, ‘The Short Story Cycle and the Representation of a Named Place’, Rebekah Clarkson uses her story, ‘Something Special, Something Rare’, to show how within the backdrop of the cycle, the protagonist, Graham’s epiphany about his family is ‘intended to be ironic, poignant and ultimately tragic’, because the reader detects his daughter’s fate in ‘the gaps between the stories’ (2015, p. 27). Nevertheless, when the story was published independently in *Best Australian Stories* (2014), the meaning changed drastically- people thought the ending to Graham’s story was a hopeful one, the fact that he was ‘on the precipice of the greatest darkness’ was completely lost (p. 27). After reading Clarkson’s thesis, I became intrigued by the idea of including recurring characters in different stories. This new idea interrupted my writing and I decided to evaluate some of my stories and revise them. Flower and Hayes refer to the importance of this process in allowing ‘a flexible collaboration among goals, knowledge and text and a revision of previous goals’ (1981, p. 380). In fact, my main goal of having individual stories that retained the nuances of Maltese life was now slowly changing to the idea of using

³⁰ This term was coined by Edgar Allan Poe and refers to the idea that all the different elements in a short story should work together in producing one main emotional effect in the reader (Poe, 1846).

interconnecting narratives with the intention that the association between some of them would work towards giving the collection a local flavour.

The two stories I started working on linking were ‘Sunshine’ and ‘The Necklace’. Although I wanted them to be read as individual stories that work on their own, I wanted their effect to be realised in the cycle’s context. For this reason, I made sure to exclude some details in one story and include them in the other. For example, in ‘Sunshine’, the reader might be inclined to understand Kady’s indifference towards her husband and her desperation to escape her marriage and be with her sick sister as a completely selfish act. However, in ‘The Necklace’, a story narrated from Kady’s daughter’s perspective, the reader is told how hard Kady had tried to help her husband after his brother’s suicide and how mental illness seems to torment the men in their family, almost making them incapable of functioning. Not only does this context help alleviate feelings of antipathy towards Kady, it also establishes a much stronger link between Kady and her daughter Ramona.

Essentially their experiences come to mirror each other’s- much like her mother seeks to escape her husband’s despondency, Ramona too breaks away from her friend Graham’s mental deterioration, and at the end of her narrative plans to join her mother in Australia. Thus, the ‘short story cycle extends the benefits and demands of the single short story’ (Clarkson, 2015, p. 29). Although it gives more context and elaborates on theme and symbolism, it also expects more from the reader, in demanding that they read between the lines from one story to the next and connect the gaps.

In Jumpha Lahiri’s case, this nomadic genre is reflective of her ‘own hyphenated identity’, since she was born in England to Bengali Parents and became a naturalised American citizen at 18 years old. Her need to ‘belong to a place, either

the one her parents came from or to America', leads to her negotiating her identity through the short story cycle where she could be 'many and one at the same time', and where the 'two worlds she occupied mingled on the page' (Driss, 2018, p. 67). Much like Lahiri's, my identity is also to a degree 'hyphenated', since I am of Dutch and Maltese descent and have been living in England for over five years now. I too started out my collection wanting to establish a sense of belonging, through writing about a community tied to a specific locality, one I know well but never really felt accepted by, one which is somewhat suffocating and isolating to the individual.

I came to realise that the short story cycle was the perfect form for my stories, mainly because as Driss points out, the short story cycle, in not belonging to any genre, as it is neither a short story collection, nor a novel, 'raises the question of belonging' (p. 67). The fact that it is built on fragmented narratives informs the short story cycle with a sense of displacement which perfectly captures 'a diasporic community's' sentiment (p. 67). Like Lahiri, who in navigating between two diverse identities becomes 'a cultural mediator', I too found myself having to translate from one culture to the other (p. 69). In my case, I am writing about a Southern European minority group in the English language.

According to Brada-Williams, what makes Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* a short story cycle is the fact that 'all nine of her stories are woven together with representations of extreme care and neglect' (2004, p. 456). Carelessness typifies a stressful period in the characters' lives- Lilia's parents in 'When Mr Pirzada comes to dine', start cooking boiled eggs and rice when the crisis in East Pakistan unfolds, rather than the good meals that Lilia is used to, while the loss of a child in 'Temporary Matter' results in the parents' failure to take proper care of themselves (Lahiri, 1999). However, this is balanced with stories where attentiveness and

concern prevail, like ‘Mrs Sen’s’, where great emphasis is placed on the title character’s ritualistic acts of preparing food for Eliot, or ‘The treatment of Bibi Haldar’ where the communal love shown towards Bibi results in the community shunning her cousin for abandoning her (1999). I quickly came to realise that similarly to Lahiri, the stories in my collection were also subconsciously woven together, in a sequence in which ‘the themes and motifs progressively develop’. Death presents itself in practically every story, all the characters are mourning a loss —of a relationship, a parent, a sibling, a friend. Shame too is prevalent in the narratives, for some of the characters it is closely tied to their Maltese identity, one which they feel rejected by, that pushes them to escape. However, there are also those who seek acceptance by returning to the island after having lived abroad for years. Thus, my stories are tied together through Malta’s representation as a place capable of both isolating the characters and integrating them in its community, as a place that people return to and escape from (March-Russell, 2009, p.104).

Interestingly, it is particularly alien to those who have never left the island, and I chose to home in on this alienation through the characters’ suffocating perception of the environment they inhabit. I decided to illustrate their entrapment in the construction boom that is literally closing in on them, leaving them helpless. At the end of ‘Sunshine’, Kady decides to leave her husband and go to Australia with her sister, because now that a petrol station will be built in front of her flat, there is no reason to stay, all that will be left are cranes, ‘parked up against the rubble walls’, and the ‘grey mass of concrete and building blocks’ that ‘would take over the fields’.³¹ The obstructive image of the petrol station is a metaphor for her unfulfilling relationship with a man who no longer communicates with her.

³¹ *Stones Displaced*, p. 109.

I also used industrialisation as a barrier for communication in ‘Little Assisi’, where Dun Pawl cannot conjure the image of his dead mother, or hear her voice, as it is lost in the whirl of ‘mechanized sounds of fast life’ that move ‘over the corrugated blocks of apartments’ that are ‘rising slowly over the city’.³² The way Maltese housing is constructed also adds to the characters’ sense of entrapment since the apartments they live in fit so close together that they have little privacy, and are easily disturbed by others, even in their own homes. Once again, instead of making people feel less alone, this heightens their sense of seclusion. Marthese who lives in a council flat in the south of Malta is always woken up to the sound of her neighbour’s religious radio station and she cannot bring herself to stop the woman from playing it, because the ‘persuasive conviction in the woman’s reiteration’ of the prayers she listens to makes Marthese ‘feel inadequate, like she was interrupting an important lesson she wasn’t part of’.³³ Additionally, on having a client’s wife expose her as a sex worker, in front of all the people who live in her apartment block, Marthese’s humiliation prevents her from ‘going out to the courtyard to talk’ to her neighbours as she is used to doing, further alienating her from the community.³⁴

It also occurred to me that having characters who were institutionalised would help strengthen this running theme of entrapment. For this reason, I chose to depict the stories of two characters for whom there is no means of escape. Hani in ‘B12’ and Eman in ‘Freeport Lights’, are literally trapped, the former being locked in a detention centre and the latter in prison. In both stories I made sure to include a similarity in description. Eman describes ‘the long prison fence, topped off with loops of barbed wiring and the mesh of housing structures in the distance’, and Hani

³² *Stones Displaced*, p. 59.

³³ *Stones Displaced*, p. 145.

³⁴ *Stones Displaced*, p. 154.

watches ‘the outhouses and cranes, hazy in the dust that swells over the barbed wire and yard’.³⁵ This repetition across stories is necessary in the short story cycle as it ‘functions in a cumulative way to provide the cycle with a textual harmony’ and supplies the stories with ‘a postponed unity’ (Driss, 2018, p. 67). In this way, the similarity in setting reinforces the paralysis and hopelessness that ensnare the characters, even if they have had extremely different experiences.

On the other hand, for the characters who have left Malta for good, the island offers them a familiarity and sense of belonging that England, the coloniser’s country they now live in, lacks. When I was initially writing these more transnational stories, I realised that a nostalgic streak was seeping through them, one which resonated with my own feelings about Malta. When I later revisited these pieces, I focused on that nostalgic streak and sought to amplify it through drawing attention to the way the characters describe Malta. When Anita from ‘Howard Gardens’ returns to Rabat where she has grown up, the descriptions she provides of her hometown are not deprecating, even if she points out the less appealing elements of the streets where she grew up, like the ‘limestone walls streaked with soot’, or the ‘electric cables dangling over the windows and balconies’. There is a sentimentality in her words, a strong longing that ‘mostly it is as she remembers’ and her depictions are accompanied by memories, of her friends waiting at the bus stop or of neighbours who had lived there.³⁶

In making these depictions effective, I decided to contrast them against duller images of her life in London. These are very bare in comparison, illustrated solely in the wealthy symbols she carries with her, ‘a diamond-encrusted Piaget’ and vague

³⁵ *Stones Displaced*, pp. 139, 86.

³⁶ *Stones Displaced*, p. 36.

images of her and her husband ‘on their yacht in the Hebrides’ and ‘wrapped in coats on Portobello Road’.³⁷ The emptiness of her colonial experience is further delineated in the last image of the Mdina moat, which has recently been cleared of all its trees, reminding her of how she has abandoned both her country and family. However, the reconciliation with her father is suggestive of an integration back into the Maltese community, one she is ready to accept.

Similarly, in ‘Beach Houses’, I drew a stark contrast between Ghadira Bay in the North of Malta and Morecambe Bay in England. I described the former in a series of images that Mariam has of her husband, of how ‘blue grey’ its sea was, ‘early in the morning, how shallow the water’, the ‘way you had to keep wading through it to get to a decent depth’.³⁸ These work as a tool in elevating the bay’s beauty, while the English beach is depicted in a negative light. Its colour is ‘metallic’, like ‘fish skin’, and its ‘boulders’ that are ‘heaped on the side of the shore’ look ‘out of place, like they’d been forgotten there’.³⁹

The dullness and desertion that Morecambe exudes is reflected in Mariam’s life, she too has been abandoned by her husband and now inhabits an ‘anonymous’ existence in a house that is completely empty of anything that might ‘indicate the kind of person she was’.⁴⁰ The bareness of the house is symbolic of a loss of roots and culture. In cutting all contact with Maltese associations, her husband and brother-in-law included, she has completely isolated herself and in the end can only start to make sense of her identity through reconnecting to her Maltese past, by re-establishing broken relationships and finally returning to Malta. Hence, in this way,

³⁷ *Stones Displaced*, p. 39.

³⁸ *Stones Displaced*, p. 120.

³⁹ *Stones Displaced*, p. 114.

⁴⁰ *Stones Displaced*, p. 115.

the image of Malta becomes a unifying one, representative of home and connectedness, rather than isolating in its hostility.⁴¹

Lahiri too uses symbols across her short fiction in evoking cultural disintegration in characters who have emigrated from India, their home country. In *Interpreter of Maladies* the guidebook and camera that the Das family carry on their trip to India symbolise their unfamiliarity with their own country, as do the clothes they wear- to Mr Kapasi, ‘they look Indian’ but are ‘dressed as foreigners’ (1999, p. 26). The disconnection the family shows towards the Konarak Sandstone temple is representative of their estrangement from their roots and culture. Much like the bareness of the moat in ‘Howard Gardens’ signifies Anita’s abandonment of her culture and identity, the temple, which is now mainly ‘rubble’ and impossible to enter, marks the Das’ family’s loss of touch with their country (p. 26). In Lahiri, the isolation of characters who have emigrated from India is also at times reflected in the places they end up living in. In ‘Mrs Sen’s’, the title character yearns for the community she was once part of in Calcutta, as she is now made to live in a University apartment on ‘the fringes of the campus’ (p. 61). Like Mariam’s house in England, it lacks warmth and character, the ‘white drum-shaped lampshades flanking the sofa’ are ‘still wrapped in the manufacturer’s plastic’, indicative of the lack of

⁴¹ The sea too is a prominent image in my work, symbolic of change. In ‘Beach Houses’, Lor convinces Mariam to move to Morecambe by telling her that ‘it would be the same as their maisonette number 15 in Mellieħa with the sea looming in the distance’, however the sea there ‘is metallic, the colour of fish skin’. Also, it is when they are at the beach, watching ‘the children take the blazers off and stack them on the sand and chase each other to the sea’, that the pain that her husband wants someone else really hits Mariam. The sea functions in the same way in ‘Howard Gardens’; it is as she stares at ‘the black sea and the sky dragging the last scraps of colour’, that Anita realises she must leave her father’s house. The destruction that news of Saviour’s death will bring his family is drawn out against the image of the sea, and how ‘far out, past the freeport, and the big floating drums and giraffes, past the boats docking at the jetty and the curves of the land, the water would continue its sprawl. Still and dark. On its own’. For Hani in ‘B12’, the journey from Libya to Malta, through the Mediterranean sea is a traumatic one that she relives everyday of her life, particularly the circumstances of the little boy’s death, how ‘no one helped him, not even her’, how ‘they just watched and waited’, ‘as the body hit the still surface’ and ‘the boat drifted away’.

belonging Mrs Sen experiences in this new environment (p. 61). The objects she has kept with her on returning from India, like the ‘blade that curved like the prow of a Viking ship’, or the ‘crushed vermilion’ that ‘shaded her braided hair’ are the only indicators of a heritage she is unwilling to let go of (p. 63).

However, despite the similarities, and despite that the short story cycle does offer an opportunity for the depiction of minority cultures like Malta, Lahiri, like Walker or Bukowski, still has an upper hand here. Although her work does depict a minority community, it still engages with a vast South Asian diaspora, much larger than a Maltese diaspora could ever hope to be. In fact, at the 2018 London Book Fair, Immanuel Mifsud commented on how ‘our language is not very widely known, but our country is not very widely known either’ (2018). This is a disadvantage that Lahiri does not have, because the cultural surroundings that she engages with, like the Bangladesh Liberation War and the significance of the Konark Sun Temple are more likely to be known and appreciated by wider audiences. In fact, Lahiri’s collection was an instant bestseller. It won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction and the Hemingway Foundation/ PEN award.

On the other hand, Maltese literature has scarcely been published in the Anglophone world. The truth is that ‘a lot of the time Maltese work is translated into English as a bridge language and then isn’t published’, which means that although many English versions are available, there is a lack of demand for them which further limits wider audiences from accessing Maltese literature and subsequently learning about its culture (Vassallo, 2018). When Clare Vassallo was asked whether there could ever be a chance of Maltese voices getting bigger publishers, her answer was that the more normal route would be ‘through the smaller ones who might

highlight a particular writer and that could get the attention of a bigger one' (2018). Once again, this emphasises how hard it is for Maltese literature to make its mark internationally and for people to engage with its particularities. Since I was very aware that a wider audience would likely be unfamiliar with such a small country as Malta, an important question that I had to address in my research was how could I write about this minority culture in such a way that I could depict its history both accurately and naturally, without explaining or describing too much of it?

Historical Milestones: Maintaining a balance between explaining and trusting the reader

The truth is that there seems to be a 'bashfulness' in Maltese people, about exposing their work to 'the other', in this case meaning a wider audience, centering around the fear of 'the other's' potential condescension towards it (Callus, 2011). However, Callus suggests that distinctive, Maltese writing can emerge from 'these experiences of non-conformity, non-identity, non-affiliation' and these can appeal to a foreign audience (2011). In fact, 'the other' could be intrigued by an 'encounter with places, situations and experiences that are almost unique to Malta, or that acquire a special charge in a place like Malta' (2011).

Immanuel Mifsud is one of the few Maltese writers who engages with the island's political and 'historical milestones' (Schembri, 2014). He comments about the lack of interest the Maltese feel towards their history, and as an example gives the erasure of their memory of 'the second world war', contrasting 'the way in which Poland and Malta commemorate the suffering of the war' - the Polish cannot understand how plenty of Maltese continue to support Italy in football, even when playing against Malta, when we were bombed relentlessly by them in the war (2014). His work certainly makes up for the lack of historical writing- his novella *Jutta Heim*

is signposted with local historical events (2014). There's mention of the Interdiction, a dark period in Malta's history which saw the Catholic Church declare that endorsing the Labour Party was a mortal sin (Bonnici, 2019).⁴² Anyone who was 'interdicted' by the Church was denied any of the sacraments, and once they died, would be buried in unconsecrated ground, in a section of the cemetery called *il-Miżbla*, meaning the dump. However, in the novel, these facts aren't described or given any detail, it is assumed that the audience will be familiar with them. There is mention that the protagonist's father 'avoided the *miżbla* narrowly', without any context as to what it entails (Mifsud, 2014, p. 46).

Apart from this, the story features the newspaper '*il-Ħelsien*', that Eric's father carries in his pocket; however it is not indicated that it is a socialist newspaper or that he hid it there because having leftist leanings was taboo. The 1987 Maltese General Election is also touched on, further highlighting Eric's Labourite leanings; however once more, this significance is lost on a foreigner who would not be aware that this election brought an end to 16 years of Labour government, with Nationalist leader Eddie Fenech Adami becoming Prime Minister (Cini, 2002).

Additionally, following Eric's retirement in 2013, in the run up to another local election, he gives a memorable speech during a Labour rally, in which he urges people to be 'protagonists' and not 'spectators' in this election, words which echo former Prime Minister Joseph Muscat's 2013 speech, words that only Maltese people will recognize (Mifsud, 2014, p.113). Moreover, the culture of local, Maltese elections, which includes having rallies and billboards with Maltese celebrities on

⁴² In the second half of the 1950's, Mintoff who was leader of the Malta Labour Party called for a separation of Church and State and as a result, Archbishop Gonzi 'interdicted' Labour Party Supporters on the 17th of March 1961. The socialist party's anti-religious elements were highlighted and Labour's decision to form alliances with the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization made the situation more volatile (Bonnici, 2019).

them endorsing a particular political party, is not explained- readers are just informed that the political party has called Eric, urging him to offer his support, and they later take photos of his face. In this way, although Mifsud has managed to render Maltese politics in a subtle way, a lot of the nuances of his writing would be lost on a foreign audience.

Since my collection spans over sixty years, I, like Mifsud wanted to depict historical events, as well as the development of cultural norms and way of life in Malta.⁴³ However, I was more invested in focussing on the ‘emotions that circumstances provoke’, rather than writing highly political pieces (Robbins, 2019, p. 300). This decision related to my target audience, particularly because I wanted to avoid creating work that assumed that the reader was familiar with its context. I mainly wanted non-natives to engage with the stories and understand that each one was tied to Malta’s social developments, without having to worry about knowing the particulars of Malta’s political history. As Graham Mort postulates, in transcultural writing, ‘the effort of communication required remains a decision for the writer’ (2013, p. 215). In essence, it was up to me to what extent I would explain in my work and to what extent I could trust the reader to comprehend what I meant. I realised

⁴³ Together with place, everyday articles are also necessary in shaping a people’s identity. Unfortunately, the same problem ensues; in the short story, the mere mention of an object specific to the Maltese culture which bears meaning to a local, would not be picked up by a wider audience. In Immanuel Mifsud’s ‘Laqgħa ma’ mara morbi’ from his collection *Kimika*, the protagonist reminisces about his childhood, about doing crosswords in the newspaper ‘it-Torċa’ (Mifsud, 2005). Anyone Maltese would be all too aware of the paper’s socialist leanings and therefore able to conclude that the protagonist is left-wing. This is accompanied with his mention that as a seventeen-year-old he would go fishing at St Thomas Bay and to the ‘każin tal- Ħibs’, where he would eat ‘biċċiet żgħar tal- ħobż biż- żejt’ (2005). Together, all these elements serve to bring out the protagonist’s upbringing- that he came from a humble, socialist home in the South of Malta. Interestingly, he now lives in Sliema, a coastal city in central Malta, where property prices are sky high and he has just bought the European car of the year 2003, a Megane II. This contrast highlights his wealth and the fact that he has managed to rise up the social ladder (2005). However, the importance of this distinction would be missed by someone unfamiliar with the inferences used when describing his childhood.

that maintaining that balance was a necessary part of the creative practice, particularly in the slightly more political stories, otherwise I was at risk of either confusing my readers or losing their interest. Also, although I did not want to jeopardise my readers' understanding of the context, I still wanted there to be some elements in my stories that a foreign audience would not necessarily recognise. I felt that this was my way of allowing 'for the possibility of the other', of 'anticipating the reader', of 'trailing my work' against an unknown audience (p. 209). Essentially it was as though I was inviting my reader to experience some of that same non-belonging that the characters were enduring, a non-belonging that might taunt 'the cultural confidence' of an anglophone audience (p. 216).

My collection's first story, 'The Interdiction', also addresses that dark period in 1950s Malta that Mifsud refers to in *Jutta Heim*. However, although in my story I do not go into detail about the political event itself, I refer to the protagonist's cousin who was refused a Catholic burial after he died during a swimming accident, just because 'the socialist newspaper, *il-Ħelsien*', was found 'wedged between his glasses and towel' on the shore.⁴⁴ The small addition of 'the socialist paper', helps establish the cousin's leftist leanings and in doing so gives context to the story. Furthermore, it also adds irony to the piece and heightens its tragedy since the same cousin's mother refuses to allow her niece's mother to be buried in the family grave because of her unmarried status, and in doing so, she mirrors the Church's condemnation of her own son. This irony, which is sustained throughout the narrative, recalls Shen's definition of 'covert textual progression' as 'an ethical-aesthetic undercurrent running throughout the text behind the overt plot development' (Shen, 2014, p. 3).

⁴⁴ *Stones Displaced*, p. 9.

While Anni's father's death 'brought many to their door', 'no one' comes for her mother.⁴⁵ Although it is her father who left his family, it is the mother who is blamed. In the story, the mother's blame is encapsulated in the concept of 'the communal grave', a grave restricted for 'people of a lower socio-economy class, or for those who were not religious' (Lorenz, 2011, p. 509). This concept is not one that a foreign audience is likely to be familiar with (Lorenz, 2011, p. 509). However, rather than going to great lengths to explain the difference between 'a family grave' and 'a communal' one, I decided to bring out the fact that 'common graves' were not 'respected as family graves because they contained the bodies of the poor and secular', through the conversation the protagonist and her brother have about burying their mother (p. 509). The worry, that she will be 'thrown into a grave with the wretched and the abandoned', coupled with the protagonist's brother seeking permission to bury their mother in the family vault, are both highly suggestive that in Malta, only the shunned members of society have a communal burial.⁴⁶ In addition, to emphasise the strong impact of this aspect of Maltese history on the lives of its people, I compared the father's grave to their mother's, a comparison designed to maintain the progressive irony that highlights the tragedy of the piece. While his is one with 'gold lettering carved into the granite' and a 'smiling photo in the centre' with a 'cross hanging over it', their mother's 'is at the very end of the cemetery', and has 'no name, no tombstones'. It is merely 'numbered and lettered'.⁴⁷ These symbols 'act as 'objective correlatives' for states of mind or feeling', in amplifying the

⁴⁵ *Stones Displaced*, p. 18.

⁴⁶ *Stones Displaced*, p. 10.

⁴⁷ *Stones Displaced*, p. 22. In 'Interdiction', I also include the word 'kazin' without explaining that it is a Maltese band club and that 'each locality in Malta has at least one'. Although a foreign reader will not know that the kazin 'serves as a local landmark, as well as a space for family members and old friends to congregate especially during feast days, its addition reinforces the Maltese essence I was looking to create (Grima, no date).

injustice the mother and her children suffer and thus, this covert ironic progression creates a ‘veiled but highly dramatic protest against patriarchal discrimination against women’ (Shen, 2014, p. 6, 12). The protest culminates in Anni’s anger at her father as she presses her ‘fist against the glass, covering his smiling face, wanting to pound it, break the smile, the comic moustache, crack the glass over it’.⁴⁸

I was aware that apart from maintaining the balance between explaining and trusting the reader’s understanding, I needed to keep in mind that certain concerns are subject to ‘different cultural interpretation’ (Mort, 2013, p. 215). Mort indicates how this could lead to a misunderstanding by an international readership, and as an example gives a Maltese student’s account of how someone had questioned the phrasing ‘yellow-bruised’ in a poem of theirs, which was used to describe lemons. The Maltese poet felt annoyed because in Malta it is common for people to have citrus trees in their garden and they ‘don’t look as artificially yellow as those one buys off a supermarket shelf’. As a result, the comment struck them ‘as downright facile and typically imperialist in its attitude’ (pp. 215-216).

Incidentally, I had a similar experience of cultural confusion with my story ‘Howard Gardens’, where the initial feedback I received was that it was not believable that Anita, my protagonist had decided to leave the island out of shame about her father’s homosexual relationship. Since Anita was a teenager in the late 1980s Malta, this would make sense to a Maltese audience, especially because even

⁴⁸ *Stones Displaced*, p. 18. Another story where ‘covert textual movement’ occurs, and where Maltese society’s illiberal views are depicted, is ‘The Last Judgment’, where Dora, Marthese’s old neighbour is introduced at the beginning as a character whose purpose is simply to magnify the protagonist’s grim situation of living in a council flat, where she is woken up at six o’clock each morning to the sound of Dora’s radio (p. 1). However, at the end of the story, Dora steps in to care for Marthese and as a result becomes a symbol of hope, of the power of female unity. Once again, the irony is directed against ‘social forces’ as the only care Marthese receives is from a woman whose name she does not know and who is unrelated to her, rather than from the caregivers and partners she has had (p.8).

much later, in 2008, according to the Malta Gay Rights Movement and ILGA-Europe, only 5.2 % of Maltese LGBT people felt that ‘lesbian, gay and bisexual people were accepted and respected in Malta’. The same study also discovered that 77% of the LGBT community avoided ‘kissing or holding hands in public with a same-sex partner to avoid violence or harassment’ (ILGA- Europe, 2008). This would mean that homosexuality was still misunderstood and feared and therefore it would make sense that a young girl whose father was engaging in it, might want to escape possible judgment. In order to eliminate potential confusion whilst also remaining authentic to the Maltese context, I focussed more on Anita’s father’s partner Stuart, and juxtaposed him against Anita’s dead mother whom the protagonist idealizes. Stuart is ‘awkward’, bumping ‘his head against the light fixture that droops over their main dining table’, whereas the memories of her mother depict her as flawless, even ‘Anita’s head fit perfectly in her mother’s lap on the drive home’, ‘the dress sunk between her legs like a little hammock’.⁴⁹

In building this contrast, I wanted to depict the developing resentment in Anita, that culminates in her deciding to leave her family home, following a difficult birthday on which after remembering memories of her mother and mourning her loss, she comes face to face with Stuart and another man. In this way, Anita’s reason for leaving centres around her intense distaste of Stuart, whom her father refuses to abandon, even upon her discovery, as well as the pain she feels at the replacement of her mother, and not because she is embarrassed at her father’s homosexual relationship. However, to show ‘the strict sexual and moral code’ that the Maltese continued to retain by the 1980s, I included the reactions that Anita’s friends had to the news- their shock, coupled with foolish questions around gay sex are indicative

⁴⁹ Stones Displaced, pp. 43, 49, 50.

of the lack of familiarity of Maltese society with homosexuality at the time (Naudi, 2008). The condemnation of same sex relations by Maltese society from the late 1980s to the early 2000s is also reflected in Immanuel Mifsud's writing, particularly in his collection *Kimika*, in 'Zerafa', where all homosexual acts are performed in private and are deceptive, a reflection of how they were viewed by the society at the time of the collection's publication, in 2005 (Mifsud, 2005). The title character Zerafa forces himself sexually on a man who works with him in a storage room and he also engages in sexual activity with Grezzju, a married man who only invites him into his home when his wife is out with their children.

Another instance where I relied on my reader to decipher the meaning of a Maltese word, without attempting to explain it in English, was in 'Falling Ants', when I used the word 'ħasira'.⁵⁰ WordSense translates this term as 'a blind' or 'sunblind', 'used in Malta on windows as well as doors' (WordSense, no date). However, The Oxford Dictionary defines 'blind' as 'a screen for a window, made of woven material mounted on a roller, of wire gauze, etc.; used to prevent the entrance of too much light', when actually, a 'ħasira' is a covering of rubber or reed that protects the front door of Maltese houses (2021). Since I could not find the precise term in English, I decided to leave it in Maltese and simply added the adjective 'reed' to indicate its material. The fact that it 'covered their doorway' encourages the audience to see it as a sheet protecting the door.⁵¹

The same story deals with the issue of abortion, one which also needed to be handled with care in establishing a balance between relying on an audience to understand the volatile situation in Malta and overburdening the reader with

⁵⁰ *Stones Displaced*, p. 32.

⁵¹ *Stones Displaced*, p. 26.

explanations. In Europe it is estimated that over 95% of women live in countries that permit abortion on request; however, Malta continues to have one of the ‘strictest abortion laws in the world and is also the only country in the EU to prohibit the procedure’ (Centre for Reproductive Rights, 2020). For this reason I knew that if I were to write about abortion, European readers from countries where abortion has been easily accessible to women for decades, might not necessarily recognise the strong controversy that such a subject generates, even amongst educated people in my country.

Therefore, I realised that to truly elucidate the narrow-mindedness and shockingly illiberal views that continue to dominate the island, the issue of abortion had to be dealt with from the perspective of someone ignorant of the situation, a figure detached from the argument altogether. For this reason, I decided to write it from the perspective of a child, and the narration is a first-person, reliable one. This is because we get to see the village’s unfair judgment of Mrs Psaila’s abortion, portrayed through the child’s eyes as hypocritical, particularly when she labels her mother as a ‘fraud’, as the latter laughs about the abortion, when only earlier she could barely talk about it ‘without letting slip an insult, a curse, without making the sign of the cross’.⁵² In filtering the unforgiving world of adults through the innocence of a child, I emphasise the irrationality of their condemnation, as well as how unnecessarily conservative the abortion laws in Malta still are. The progressive irony I mention earlier in referring to ‘The Interdiction’, surfaces here too. In this case it is an undercurrent ‘against social forces which largely account for the weaknesses of the protagonist’ (Shen, 2014, p.8). Although the young Lina is influenced by the adults’ cruel words and punishes Mrs Psaila’s son, she becomes overwhelmed with

⁵² *Stones Displaced*, p. 25.

guilt, and confesses to throwing the rock, unlike the disparaging adults who throw eggs at Mrs Psaila's door and continue to humiliate her without remorse. This irony, that a child is able to recognise the immorality in her violent act against another child, while the adults are not, 'shortens the distance between the protagonist and the author/narrator/reader' as all these come to sympathise with Lina who is essentially caught up in a world of illogical intolerance (p.8).

Retaining nuances through narrative voice: Use of reliability in 1st and 3rd person narration

It was also when I was in the process of 'free exploration' or just 'writing it out', that I started to think a lot about the concept of the 'reliable' and 'unreliable' narrator. According to Booth's definition, 'unreliability' in narration relies on the reader first noticing incongruencies on the narrator's part and then connecting them with what the implied author meant (1974). Nunning's framework takes the definition further since according to her, the identification of 'unreliability' is confirmed based on the readers' own cultural biases and opinions (2004). To demonstrate this, Nunning uses *The Vicar Of Wakefield*, a tale about a pastor and his family. Initial perceptions of the main character, Primrose, were positive, and he was thought to be reliable as his views were widely accepted as normal at the time. Primrose's 'piety and fortitude', were praised, as was his 'glowing benevolence' (p. 241).

However, two hundred years after its 1766 publication, Primrose is seen as 'unreliable', 'a hypocrite', 'whom Goldsmith obviously conceived as the butt of authorial irony' (p. 242). For instance, nowadays, according to Hopkins, Primrose would appear pompous for a priest, especially in the sort of vocabulary he chooses when he describes his family as having 'an elegant house, situated in a fine country,

and a good neighbourhood' (Goldsmith p. 18, cited in Nünning, p. 243). On the other hand, these specific adjectives would be deemed as completely normal by 'eighteenth century' standards (p. 243). This reflects how reliability really depends not only on the epoch in which something was written but also on the culture of that place and time. However, my intention was never to make ironic figures out of my characters. Unlike Goldsmith's Primrose, they were never designed to be mocked. Nor was I interested in writing about figures whose moral centre was diametrically opposed to my own. Besides, if I were to create an unreliable character, the audience would have to understand the culture surrounding the figure to recognise the ironic nuances inferred, and since I had a foreign readership in mind, I knew that this would be unlikely.

On conducting further research, I found that James Phelan's definition of 'reliable narration', as the 'implied author communicating matters that she endorses through the filter of an ontologically distinct character', seemed like the perfect fit for the narrators I wanted in my stories (2017, p. 95). In this kind of narration, the filter which Phelan identifies as 'the distance between implied author and narrator' varies, meaning that the author and narrator can have views that are much more similar than those shared by the author and an 'unreliable narrator' (p. 96). He goes on to point to three main subtypes of 'reliable narration', which include 'restricted', 'convergent' and 'mask' narration (p. 96). In 'restricted narration', the implied author gives interpretations that the character narrator continues to be unaware of, by directing attention to other characters. On the other hand, 'convergent narration' entails the concurrence of 'the implied author's', the character narrator's and the 'authorial audience's views', while in 'mask narration', the character narrator's actions are given importance, while their 'interpreting and evaluating' are pushed

aside (p. 97). From these three, I knew that ‘convergent narration’ would be the most apt for my stories, mainly because of the ‘bonding effects’ that it creates through the ‘alignment of author, narrator, character, and audience’ (p. 97). My intention was always to create relatable characters with flaws that the audience could sympathise with. I wanted my readership to feel close to the characters and to instead see some of the Maltese cultural structures in place as archaic and damaging to the individual’s sense of autonomy.

Tirrell claims that ‘the distinction between first and third person perspectives has epistemological consequences for both the teller and the listener’ (1990, p. 118). This is because, when a narrative is written in the first person, the reader is more likely to empathise with the narrator’s judgements and claims, whereas it would be harder to empathise with a third person omniscient perspective. Essentially, in ‘reading a story, we adopt, temporarily and to some extent, the perspective of the narrator’ (p. 118). This is the main reason why I did not just want my stories to belong to the category that Friedman labels ‘neutral omniscience’, where ‘the mental states and settings which evoke them are narrated indirectly as if they have already occurred— discussed, analysed, and explained— rather than presented scenically as if they were occurring now’ (1955, p. 1173). I wanted my audience to adopt the perspective of my characters and I knew that rendering their thoughts directly would encourage this.

According to Phelan, ‘convergent narration’ occurs in narratives that follow the growth of a character ‘in maturity or wisdom’, and this is true for all my stories (p. 97). In most of them, I use free indirect speech, or third-person intimate, also known as ‘selective omniscience’, in ‘peering into the minds’ of my characters, zooming in on their interior monologues, and in capturing their development. In ‘Freeport

Lights', through the unrestricted access the reader gets into Eman's mind, they get to see the intense guilt he feels about the crime he has committed, reflected in the 'images' that keep coming to him, of 'his wife, shaking her head as she paced the kitchen with their son in her arms', and the 'old couple in the pew at court, their thick white heads pressed together, like a blanket'.⁵³

In addition, they also get to witness the incompetence of the Maltese prison system which is highlighted in Eman's frustration when a guard informs him about his wife's visit only an hour before, so that he doesn't have any time to prepare. The helplessness he feels is captured in his anger, as he 'curses, slamming his fist on the sink', swearing at the guards for not 'telling him', as he 'has nothing. Not even control over how to manage his feelings, or permission to train and hone them, so when they were targeted, the pain would feel familiar, real, like something he knew and was only being confirmed'.⁵⁴ In this case, the reader, implied author and narrator are all on the same page in feeling sympathy towards Eman and frustration at the flawed Maltese prison system. This feeling continues throughout the story, as we learn of his former, fellow inmate's suicide through the uncaring guards' conversation, in which they only seem concerned with the investigation that could ensue following the suicide, rather than the tragedy of the man's demise. Eman's compassion and growth is truly reflected at the end of the story when his train of thought centres around the human casualties, the people impacted by Saviour's suicide, further highlighting the poignancy of the tragedy. His thoughts veer to his friend's family reeling from the news, 'the small girl, Saviour's niece, hurrying to the kitchen through the corridor to see her grandmother kneeling at a wall, or folded

⁵³ *Stones Displaced*, p. 129.

⁵⁴ *Stones Displaced*, p. 136.

onto the kitchen table'.⁵⁵ In a sense, through revealing Eman's direct thoughts, I was attempting to encourage the readers to 'enter into sentiments' that are not theirs, by sympathising with a man whose situation they might be completely unfamiliar with (Tirrell, 1990, p. 119). According to Tirrell, this is storytelling's 'most significant contribution to our development as moral agents' since it is through reading and writing these stories that we 'make subtle shifts in point of view', in how we come to see these characters (p.119).

To some extent all the other stories written in third- person intimate provide an opportunity for readers to sympathise with the protagonists, even if the latter's circumstances are wildly different from the readers'. In 'Little Assisi', the priest's stream of consciousness captures Dun Pawl's pain at cynical episodes of Maltese life. Dun's Pawl's growing disillusionment with religion is displayed alongside drastic changes in people's perception of the Catholic Church. Dun Pawl goes from being 'the first to be called when people are dying, before even the doctor sometimes', to seeing 'empty pews at Mass', 'gaps in the front ones', and having mothers come up to ask 'if their children could skip catechism because it clashes with football and ballet'.⁵⁶ Moreover, the dark reality of 'dying children in the hospital wards' and another priest sexually assaulting orphan boys is also mentioned. It is a revelation that causes his world to 'cleave in half', as he realises that 'evil is everywhere'.⁵⁷ In following his development from a man of great faith to someone who comes to experience intense pessimism and regard religion as merely 'some words to comfort and reassure, some promises and hopes', the reader truly feels for

⁵⁵ *Stones Displaced*, p. 144.

⁵⁶ *Stones Displaced*, p. 65.

⁵⁷ *Stones Displaced*, pp. 65, 67.

Dun Pawl's loneliness, and once again, the implied author, narrator and reader are aligned in their feelings regarding the character's trajectory.⁵⁸

In 'Sunshine', too, Kady's mental state is dramatised, at the start of the story in frustration at being unable to get the right information on how to file an appeal, to prevent the petrol station from being built in front of her house. This frustration is disclosed in a series of thoughts in which she thinks about going 'back out, to see what her neighbours thought about maybe organising a petition' and reasons with herself that 'they had to fight this'.⁵⁹ Her private ramblings highlight the incompetence of the council and the Planning Authority, both of whom refuse to help her and make things seem infinitely more complicated, asking her to use the 'E-apps system'.⁶⁰ The reader and implied author understand her irritation at both the Planning Authority and her husband who while she deals with the 'chaos mounting around their home', remains 'completely indifferent', simply 'watching the television'.⁶¹ However, it is not simply with Kady that the reader is allowed 'intimacy', even if through 'selective omniscience', the reader is 'limited to the mind of only one of the characters' (1990, p. 119). When Kady goes to visit her sister Lil in Australia, the use of indirect speech, (in which Kady is telling the audience what Lil has told her), provides unfiltered entry into Lil's mind, even if for a short while,

⁵⁸ *Stones Displaced*, p. 72.

In an article published by the Times of Malta on the 12th November 2020, it was reported that according to the Catholic Church in Malta's safeguarding commission, six priests and two lay persons have had 'substantiated claims' of child abuse made against them in the previous two years (Times of Malta, 2020).

⁵⁹ *Stones Displaced*, p. 90.

⁶⁰ *Stones Displaced*, p. 88.

⁶¹ *Stones Displaced*, pp. 89.

The Planning Authority in Malta is often criticised by NGOs for approving permits for structures that are incongruent with the traditional Maltese landscape. In 2021, The Planning Authority decided to remove objections to development applications from public view, which meant that no one would know the 'number and nature of objections made against planning applications'. This decision was met with outcry from the NGO Graffitti, causing the Planning Authority to reverse its decision. The NGO claimed that the Planning Authority was 'trying to hide more basic information from a system which is already geared to work against its citizens' (Times of Malta, 2021).

which evokes pity in the audience for this woman who has ended up alone in a foreign country. The reader learns that ‘she didn’t know how she’d cope’, without her husband, ‘she considered coming back to Malta’ and then ‘immediately dismissed the thought’ because ‘it would be hard to go back’ and ‘where would she live anyway? She couldn’t move into their parents’ house, they would drive her mad’.⁶² The indirect speech provides unfiltered entry into Lil’s mind which evokes pity in the audience for this woman who has ended up alone in a foreign country.

‘The Necklace’ is another story where the reader is allowed intimacy with two characters. Reliable, ‘convergent narration’ occurs through the character of Ramona, whose account the audience trusts because her narrative discloses ‘justifiable decisions’, such as the fact that she helps her mother get ready to leave for Australia and also takes it upon herself to help Graham through his illness by going to his house and ‘sorting out the debris of objects that had accumulated over the week’ and ‘doing his laundry’ (Tirrell, 1990, p. 118).⁶³ On the other hand, details of Graham’s experiences and thoughts, communicated through indirect speech, bring the audience close to the man’s plight, especially when his suicidal impulses and attempts are brought to the fore in a description of how after overdosing, ‘he felt the afternoon heat grow on his skin, pulling him away from the table, the chair, the kitchen. The sharp sounds of the music jarred over the afternoon noises of lunch at the café below which he’d lived. The room heaved and he felt himself slipping under it, under the air, thicker than the heat’.⁶⁴ Ramona’s reliable perspective, juxtaposed against Graham’s distorted view of the world cultivates ‘concern’ in the reader who pities both characters, the former for her isolation from her country, her family and for her

⁶² *Stones Displaced*, p. 101.

⁶³ *Stones Displaced*, p. 185.

⁶⁴ *Stones Displaced*, p. 167.

futile attempts to help Graham, and the latter for the hopelessness that his illness offers (p. 119).

In his short story cycle, *L-Aqwa Żmien*, Mifsud too juxtaposes a reliable account against an unreliable one, in bringing Maltese issues to the fore. In the collection, he includes real-life episodes in two of his stories. In ‘Wahda Mara’, he writes about a local entertainer who was pelted with eggs, and in ‘Wiehed Raġel’, about the man who was involved in the act, who later went on to shoot and kill an immigrant. The former story, uses a reliable narrator and internal monologue as techniques in rendering the local entertainer’s lethargy and desperation. She is unwilling to leave her bed and remembers that ‘she’s forgotten to take her evening pills, however she doesn’t feel like getting up’, ‘if she could, she’d sleep all day’ (Mifsud, 2019, p. 50). Apart from that, to truly elucidate the internal misogyny very much alive in a Maltese culture that permits and normalises dehumanising behaviour, Mifsud switches from third-person narration to first, bringing us closer to the atrocities the narrator faces during the pelting scene. The horror she experiences culminates in her shouting for them to stop, as the men aim the eggs at her ‘breasts, clapping each time they hit the target’ (p. 56). In this moment the reader feels the woman’s terror, and hatred for the men is ubiquitous.

However, Mifsud balances this reliable account with an unreliable one, in which the overwhelming sadism and cruelty the woman receives is continued in the internal monologue of the man who assaults her in ‘Wiehed Raġel’. His perspective reveals a non-sensical hatred of women and foreigners. He enjoys the act of pelting the entertainer and feels proud that ‘he was the first to hit her in her face’ (p. 107). The internal dialogue expresses further distaste towards Doriana, a woman who has rejected him, whose face he has slapped, and a cashier at a supermarket whom he

fantasises about raping (pp. 109-110). The darker side of Maltese society is brought out in yet another atrocious act he commits, which results in the racially-motivated murder of an immigrant, based on the killing of Lassana Cisse who was shot at in 2019 in Ħal Far (Malta Today, 2022).⁶⁵ Since all we get is unrestricted access to the man's reflections, there is no attempt to explain or justify the reasons for the unnamed man's unprovoked hatred, and this stresses the senselessness of the act, as well as the racist and misogynistic undertones that continue to pervade Malta's underbelly. In this case, the unreliable narration works to distance us as far as possible from the character narrator. As Phelan puts it, the 'author, authorial audience and actual audience' all come together in recognising what is 'off-kilter' about the narrator (2017, p. 94).

'Howard Gardens' is perhaps the only story in my collection that I would classify as having an unreliable narrator in the way Phelan defines it. This is because Anita's teenage perceptions of her father's boyfriend are somewhat unfounded and biased. Although she describes him as a 'half-wit' and 'a fraud, desperate to disguise who he truly was', she does not provide any evidence of why she sees him in this way.⁶⁶ Moreover, she becomes convinced that Stuart is an alcoholic as she can smell cognac on his clothes, however she never catches him drinking. When he is reunited with her father, years later, she admits that she 'was jealous' because she wanted her father all to herself.⁶⁷ However, despite the unreliability in her account, the reader still sympathises with Anita's situation, and understands her pain, mainly through the poignant memories of her mother, all of which reflect an idyllic image of Malta, of

⁶⁵ 42 year old Lassana Cisse was murdered in a drive-by shooting in Ħal Far as he was walking home on April 6, 2019. Two soldiers were accused of his murder, Francesco Fenech and Lorin Scicluna, and also for the attempted murder of another two men and a hit-and-run incident (Malta Today, 2022).

⁶⁶ *Stones Displaced*, p. 44.

⁶⁷ *Stones Displaced*, p. 48.

‘bathing in Mellieħa, her mother wrapping them in towels, warning them to stay on the mat, their father carrying them to the car so they wouldn’t dirty their feet with sand’ and ‘Sunday mornings at the Mdina bastions, her mother holding Rena, her father holding her, pointing at the mass of trees down the moat where the elves who stole the little girls lived’.⁶⁸

Despite including an unreliable perspective, I was still adamant about using reliable narrators in my fiction. This determination relates to Goyet’s intimation that reliable narrators are ‘never representatives of the world portrayed’ (2014, p. 159). The reliable viewpoint simultaneously provides an animated perception and an exteriority to the subject which calls readers’ ‘prejudices into question’ and in doing so creates an authentic image of what a place or situation really is like (p. 160). Since I was writing about characters who live on Maltese society’s margins, I felt that to truly show how distanced they are from the social constructs of their world, I needed to use a viewpoint that provided an exteriority to the subject, one that matched that of my foreign readership. As an example to demonstrate how reliable narrators do not fit into the ‘world portrayed’, Goyet gives Henry James’ ‘Daisy Miller’, with Frederick Winterbourne whose ‘outlook is stamped with a freshness of perception’, reassuring the reader that contrary to what the other characters think, Daisy Miller isn’t immoral (p. 160).

In ‘B12’, Hani’s account is similar to Winterbourne’s, since she provides the reader with a foreigner’s experience of Maltese detention centres, and this reassures the reader that her representation is accurate. The horrors of the centre, with ‘the thick stench of unwashed bodies’ in her room, or ‘a pool of water’ at the toilets’

⁶⁸ *Stones Displaced*, pp. 49, 50.

Analepsis is a technique which I will closely discuss in the next section.

entrance ‘with floating clumps of thick, dark hair spreading over the uneven tiles’, are designed to fill the audience with pity for Hani and distaste at a structure that treats immigrants like criminals.⁶⁹ In a sense, Hani becomes a ‘mediator between the reader and a bizarre world’ (p. 160). The pathos that is evoked through brutal descriptions of Hani’s journey overseas, together with images of the people ‘who rescued them’ with ‘thick rubber gloves chafing against Hani’s skin, as they checked to see if she was carrying anything illegal’, and the woman with ‘golden nails’ who harasses Hani about ‘why she’d left Somalia’, all work towards asserting Hani’s transparency, in making us trust her. In fact, the reader does not doubt it when at the end Hani feels ‘she can’t tell anyone’ about her assault, that she is sure ‘no one will listen or believe it’.⁷⁰ The audience recognises the system’s negligence and the injustice inherent in the island’s detention facilities (p. 160).⁷¹

Since ‘B12’ is written from the perspective of a Somalian immigrant, I was aware that I might be accused of ‘cultural appropriation’, an act that Loretta Todd claims occurs when ‘someone else speaks for, tells, defines, describes, represents, uses or recruits the images, stories, experiences, dreams of others for their own’ (Todd, 1990). More specifically, the appropriation I am responsible for is ‘subject appropriation’, as I am making ‘the culture /lives of insiders the subject of a painting/ story/ film/other work of art’ (Young, 2005, p. 136). Although my primary intention was a commentary on how the island of Malta is lacking in the necessary resources, on how it does not offer what immigrants are looking for, how their actual

⁶⁹ Stones Displaced, pp. 76, 77.

⁷⁰ Stones Displaced, p. 86.

⁷¹ In a 2012 study about the detention of Somali women in Maltese detention centres, it was documented that the ‘perpetration of sexual violence and forced pregnancies in Detention Centres has been compounded by the extensive system of gendered social control in Malta’, because the people there are ‘intensely Catholic’. Apart from abortion being illegal, there is also little access to sexual health education. Additionally, the government does not distribute condoms in detention (Gerard and Pickering, 2012, p. 520).

destination is ‘usually Lampedusa or Italy’, and are actually ‘forced to come to Malta due to circumstances outside of their control’, I knew I would still have to justify writing from the perspective of a Somalian refugee (Mainwaring, 2014, p. 115).

Initially, as I was deciding which narratives to include in the collection, I considered entirely omitting the immigrant experience, despite that the refugee crisis in Malta has been a pressing issue in the last three decades, since the number of asylum seekers reaching Malta has continued to escalate since 1993 (macrotrends, 2022). However, photographs of the dismal conditions of the overcrowded detention centres emerged in Times of Malta, and later in *Politico* (Carabott, 2021; Demarco and Delia, 2022). These photos depicted showers without showerheads, crammed rooms with loads of mattresses spread over the floor, and damp clothes hanging over beds outside. The shocking images, together with a report that was published in March 2020 by the CPT, in which the centres were described as a ‘system of institutional mass neglect’, fostering ‘inhuman and degrading treatment’, pushed me to conduct further research on these detention centres and write ‘B12’ (Amnesty International, 2021). I felt that the brutality of these centres could not be simply ignored, especially because I recognised that this was a major social injustice, perpetrated by the Maltese themselves, and to truly explore the nuances of Maltese affairs, I had to address the darker side of the island’s political situation.

Some might argue that I could have written ‘B12’ from the perspective of someone who worked at the detention centre. Although I did think about doing this, on reading many Maltese short story collections, I came to realise how although most of them included a story on the ‘west African migrant, crossing the border between Libya and Malta’, in each case, every story was told from the point of view of the Maltese, and in nearly all of them, the Maltese are depicted as either patronising, or

merely brutal and racist, targeting the immigrants for no apparent reason, other than pure hatred (Overgaard, 2014, p. 39). Mario Azzopardi's 'L-istorja ta' l -Afrikana', is about two local Maltese women who take it upon themselves to close a refugee centre that has opened in their village, Immanuel Mifsud's 'In-nies ta' maç- ċint' is about a Maltese girl who is tormented at school because her sister is dating an immigrant, while Clare Azzopardi's '/no adjective describe story/', portrays a similar experience where a girl called Rachel whose father smuggles immigrants, is mocked by her friends for befriending Adiam, an Eritrean refugee (Azzopardi, 2007; Mifsud, 2019; Azzopardi, 2006).

To avoid creating the same characters I often encountered in Maltese literature, and to truly reflect the horrendous conditions of the detention centres in Malta, I decided to write this piece from the perspective of someone who had experienced them first hand. In an article about cultural appropriation, Young considers how artists who appropriate responsibly often do so 'to understand matters that they find to be of pressing importance', and their intention 'is to create works of art and engage in self-realization and inquiry' (2005, p. 140). I feel that this applies to my decision to write 'B12' from Hani's perspective. I wanted to understand the huge failure on the Maltese system's part to provide refugees with adequate accommodation on arrival and I felt that exploring the direct consequences through one of its victims was the strongest way to do it.

Of course, I am aware that despite this careful contemplation, my decision might still be criticised. I also understand that 'freedom of expression' 'carries with it certain responsibilities' (p. 141). Young recognises that 'when outsiders appropriate content from a disadvantaged minority culture, the source of the appropriated material ought to be fully and publicly acknowledged' (p. 141). For this reason, I

have used footnotes to reference every source I used for 'B12'. Apart from that, to distance myself from Hani's voice, I wrote the story in the third-person perspective, and made it a point to centre her narrative around the dire situation in the detention centres in Malta and the loneliness Hani experiences in Malta, rather than in Mogadishu. In these ways I tried to be as respectful and sensitive as I possibly could to the suffering of the refugee fleeing Africa to Europe.

The stories I wrote after 'B12', were all written in the third-person, limited omniscient point of view, and at that point, I began to realise that I was a lot more comfortable writing in this viewpoint than I was in the first-person. I think this preference has its roots in my desire to portray the characters and their situation as realistically as possible. Since I am writing in English about characters who in reality would talk and think in Maltese, it felt inauthentic to write both their dialogues and internal monologues in English. This is mainly because in first-person narrative fiction, it is common to include 'idiolects and personal characteristics', and since these characters were Maltese, I could not portray these elements in English anyway (Nielsen, 2004, p.138). At least, writing in the third-person allowed me to use it as a mediator through which I could translate my characters' thoughts without having to directly replicate the exact ways in which they would think or feel in their native Maltese. Essentially, the limited omniscient narration allowed me to justify writing the characters' stream of consciousness in English.

However, in the collection, two of the narratives are written in the first-person point of view. It is not by accident that they are the first two stories in my collection. I realised that using the first-person at the very beginning, could be a very useful device in immersing a non-native reader into the world I would be portraying. The very first story, 'The Interdiction', is also told in the present-tense, which together

with the first-person perspective works to fuel the narrative with an immediacy that intimately communicates all the pain, confusion and anger Anni feels at the sudden death of her mother. I felt that this was necessary as I wanted the reader to feel close to the narrator, to feel as though they were inside the narrator's mind and could directly experience everything the character was feeling. I knew that this technique would lay the groundwork for the trust I wanted to establish between my foreign readership and the characters in the stories. Additionally, this was a primary way by which they could truly familiarise themselves with the Maltese context as their experience as readers would bring them much closer to the narrative than if I had immediately used third-person. The lines, 'In the wall behind me is a small niche holding the statue of the Madonna of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. I work in the flickering light of the three candles around the figurine, watching the shavings slip off into the bucket,' almost force the reader to feel the dark atmosphere of the yard, and watch the potato shavings fall in the flickering lights.⁷² Had I used the third-person instead, I would have created a gap between the narrator and character, distancing the reader further away from the scene, involving them less: 'Carved in the wall behind her is a small niche holding the statue of the Madonna of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. She works in the flickering light of the three candles around the figurine, watching the shavings slip off into the bucket.'

Interestingly, Cohn believes that using first-person in the present-tense, in the way I have used it, does not work, as while the characters' thoughts are rendered well, the same cannot be said about the actions (Cohn, 1966). As an example, he uses an extract from *Portrait of an Artist* which he transposes from third-person past to first-person present. He concludes that 'I kneel in the silent gloom and raise my

⁷² *Stones Displaced*, p. 6.

hands to the crucifix suspended above me’, not only sounds impractical, but also ludicrous, taking on the tone ‘of an athletics instructor’ . However, the character’s thought that ‘God can see that I am sorry’, is effective as it is distinguished from the rest of the narration as a thought (Joyce, 1928, p. 165, cited in Cohn, 1966, pp. 98-99).

I was aware that having lists of actions in the first-person perspective might make for an impractical, awkward reading. However, I compensated for this by balancing my present-tense narration with long fragments of narrative that occur in the past tense, a technique I will elaborate on in the next section of my exegesis. In this way, the immediacy of Anni’s present actions do not risk becoming repetitive or unrealistic, as the constant shifting to the past creates a distraction from the present-day reality, as well as evoking the poignancy of her mother’s death, as in the example below:

I sit at the table and run my fingers along its chipped edges, staring at the picture of the Virgin Mary hanging on the main wall. Its colours startle me, bright blue, red and gold. As a child I couldn’t understand why the Virgin’s long hand pointed at the sword-pierced heart. Ma said it meant that loving someone could hurt your heart.⁷³

In the second story of my collection, ‘Falling Ants’, I felt that the first-person narrator was necessary, not only to continue the desired effect of bringing the reader closer to the Maltese ambience, but also because I was writing from the perspective of a child and wanted my audience to truly grasp her innocence and naivety, particularly when contrasted with the malice of the older villagers, in their

⁷³ *Stones Displaced*, p. 10.

condemnation of Mrs Psaila, as I have already explained in the previous section. On the other hand, I wanted to start the process of slightly distancing my narrator from my character, so for that reason, I used the past tense instead of the present, to separate ‘the narrating self from the experiencing self’ (Cohn, 1966, p. 99). The third story, ‘Howard Gardens’, is the first narrative written in the third-person voice, a voice which continues for the rest of the collection, acting as a translator, in interpreting the characters’ thoughts and feelings which would realistically occur in Maltese, into English, and achieving the distance between narrator and character.

Retaining nuances through analepsis

I will now turn to how I used the method of flashback narration in both giving depth to the characters, and in highlighting the country’s more subtle elements. As I have mentioned in the previous section, most of my stories work in such a way that the narrative alternates between the characters’ present-day reality and memories of the past which establish the changes they have lived through. This is a technique that Alice Walker also makes use of, in elevating the significance of the development of American historical events. In her story ‘Abortion’, from *You can’t keep a good woman down*, Imani recollects her first abortion, an illegal one she had had when she was still in college. The fact that back then she paid a thousand dollars for the procedure and ‘passed out’ and ‘haemorrhaged steadily for six weeks’ as a result, works to exhibit the development that has occurred ‘seven years later’ where ‘an abortion law has now made it possible to make an appointment at a clinic’ and get a ‘painless abortion’ ‘for seventy-five dollars’ (Walker, 1982, p. 69). This development raises the importance and necessity of the procedure; however there is irony in the fact that when abortion was illegal, the experience for Imani was

‘wonderful’, ‘bearing .. all the marks of a supreme coming of age’, and now that it is accessible and safe, it causes the dissolution of her marriage (p. 67).

Another story from the same collection, entitled ‘A sudden trip home in spring’, also uses flashback narration in underpinning the importance of African American history and the responsibilities Sarah feels towards her family. The piece is littered with recollections of her past, of her parents’ struggles in establishing a life for themselves in Georgia where racial stereotypes were still very much alive and African Americans were misunderstood by white people. By the end, the recollections of her family, mingled with the image of her grandfather at the funeral, ‘his back straight, his eyes dry and clear’, ‘solemnly heroic’, help her come to terms with the responsibility she has of paying her debt to her ancestors, by making ‘her grandpa up in stone’, meaning that she will take pride in depicting him in her art and in portraying him as strong, just like he was at the funeral (pp. 134-137).

Reading Walker’s work was essential for me in discovering another way by which I could preserve the details of Maltese life. This was by littering my stories with memories of the past. In my story ‘Sunshine’, the combination of Kady’s current situation and flashbacks reflects the development that Malta underwent, alongside the changes in the sisters’ relationship. This is truly brought out in Kady’s recollections of Independence Day. When she tries to stop Lil from leaving for Australia, Lil’s response is that she has to leave, and in this way, Malta achieving its independence mirrors Lil cutting off her dependence on her sister and finding her own way in life. Ironically, in present-day Independent Malta, the situation for the two sisters has changed, since Lil now needs Kady to take care of her. Essentially,

the flashback highlighting such an iconic moment in Maltese history, also draws attention to the dramatic change in the sisters' situation.⁷⁴

Moreover, the flashbacks in this story are imbued with images of 1960s Malta, with shops that have since closed down, like 'Ha-ro and Sylvia House' (Farrugia, 2013, p. 32).⁷⁵ Although a foreign audience will not be familiar with these iconic clothing shops in Malta, their mention is still necessary in evoking a sense of nostalgia in the narrative and in establishing the specific period the characters grew up in. These are also accompanied by references to the 'Carol Dane and Rudy Reed articles in the fashion section' (p. 25).⁷⁶ Once again, although a foreign reader will not recognise these allusions, they work towards creating an authentic ambience that refers to a specific time in Malta. In addition to this, they will be appreciated by a local reader. The same can be said for Mariam's flashbacks in 'Beach Houses'. Here, Maltese traditions are underscored in her recollections of meeting Lor for the first time, at the 'village feast', at the 'doughnut stall' his family ran, amidst 'the crackling of the oil and the bursting fireworks'.⁷⁷ Although it is a brief memory, it still helps towards colouring the narrative with a local flavour, something that is also achieved through the mention of Maltese delicacies like 'minestra, kusksu, kawlata'.⁷⁸

On the other hand, flashback narration in 'The Last Judgement' serves as a mechanism that recalls Maltese Catholic imagery from Marthese's childhood which

⁷⁴ *Stones Displaced*, p. 94.

⁷⁵ *Stones Displaced*, p. 100. Ha-ro was a clothing shop located in Valletta and Sliema that sold cocktail dresses made from material like 'dupion-nylon, shantung and sheers'. Sylvia House was another store which advertised its sale on evening and cocktail dresses in the Times of Malta in August of 1955 (Farrugia, 2013, p.32).

⁷⁶ *Stones Displaced*, p. 100.

These were articles about women's fashion that were published from '1955 to 1985', 'every five years' (Farrugia, 2013, p.32).

⁷⁷ *Stones Displaced*, p. 113.

⁷⁸ *Stones Displaced*, p. 116.

reappears in her present-day reality. The images Marthese recalls from her childhood, of the painting of ‘The Last Judgement’, ‘the marbled tombstones at St John’s Cathedral’ and Sister Frangiska’s warning that ‘If you live a life of sin you’ll be like these wretched souls down here,’ all capture the suffocating Maltese obsession with religion, one which ironically both isolates Marthese and embraces her.⁷⁹ By balancing an image like the marbled tombstones at St John’s Cathedral that would not be known by a non-local readership, with one which is iconic, like the painting of ‘The Last Judgement’, I managed to pay homage to an important gem of Maltese Baroque art, while still making sure that the readers could recognise the association between sin and guilt that these religious symbols create in Marthese.⁸⁰

Similarly, to ‘The Last Judgement’, ‘Freeport Lights’, too uses analepsis in recalling past images and linking them to the characters’ present reality. My idea for the story initially came to me from looking at Pretty Bay on a summer day.⁸¹ The bay itself is beautiful, the sea light and clear, however, the stretch of water is marred by the large, looming port in the inlet with all its industrial noises. I wanted to portray the nuances of this experience, of the mingling of beauty and ugliness without explaining it or describing the scenery. For this reason, I decided to portray it in the conflicting images the bay evokes in Eman’s recollections. Although Pretty Bay is the place where Eman first meets his wife and comes to associate it with the beginning of their relationship, it is also equated with a dark childhood, one in which he was ‘woken to the sounds of the neighbour fucking a client on a Sunday’, and in

⁷⁹ *Stones Displaced*, p. 146.

⁸⁰ The entire floor of St John’s Cathedral in Valletta is covered with marble tombstones and each one has symbols, the most popular being the image of death, ‘represented by a skeleton, often with a sickle and an hourglass signifying the passage of time’ (<https://www.stjohnscocathedral.com/explore/tombstones-and-monuments/>, no date).

⁸¹ Pretty Bay is located in Birżebbuġa, a man-made bay in the South of Malta.

which his father ‘dunked’ him in hot water ‘for what felt like hours’.⁸² Furthermore, through the character of Saviour, the freeport is identified with mental illness as when he overdosed, he was looking at the port from his room, and the lights coming from it, ‘had cut through the water, making long lines of colour that trembled and cried like babies did’.⁸³ The men also joke about going there and swimming up to the freeport. The conflicting image finally comes to exude a strong sense of indifference, as in the end, after Saviour’s death, Eman imagines the water continuing ‘its sprawl’, around ‘the boats docking at the jetty and the curves of the land’, and in this image, the freeport comes to mirror the indifferent prison system itself.⁸⁴

Real Maltese women : Subverting the traditional well-defined roles

Apart from the flashback narration that features in Walker’s collection, something else that truly drew me to her writing was her choice of female characters. All of them ‘are successful’, they are free to make choices and escape conventional roles to fulfil their ambitions. However, the men are ‘in an inverse relationship to the women’s success’, not only because they are feeble or bland, but because they barely ever feature, and when they do it doesn’t end well for them- Bubba in ‘How Did I Get Away with Killing One of the Biggest Lawyers in the State? It Was Easy’ is shot, the title character in ‘Laurel’ winds up in a coma and Ellis is abandoned by the nameless narrator in ‘Lover’ (Petry, 1989, p. 14).

Incidentally, according to Adrian Grima, Maltese literature has not much succeeded in recounting the tales of ‘real Maltese women’, since it has depicted them ‘in stereotypical ways as weaklings who live in the shadows of their men or as mothers who are exclusively committed to their families’ (2010, p. 83). I knew early

⁸² *Stones Displaced*, pp. 137, 138.

⁸³ *Stones Displaced*, p. 131.

⁸⁴ *Stones Displaced*, p. 144.

on that I wanted my creative process to challenge this assertion, that I wanted it to reflect and celebrate ‘real Maltese women’ without being militantly feminist. It was important that I write nuanced characters and not stereotypes, particularly in depicting what living in Malta is like. Clare Azzopardi’s collection, *Kulhadd Halla isem warajh* does exactly this. Her short story cycle presents female characters who work together to subvert the patriarchal connotations linked to Maltese women. However, despite the disruption to ‘well-defined roles’, they still inhabit a relatively conservative environment.

While the story ‘Sandra’ illustrates the experience of a woman whose whole life is characterised by manipulating people, especially men, through leaving them keys, either to lockers, boxes or her house, there are indicators of old-fashioned practices throughout the account. Sandra’s mother, on finding out that her elder daughter who is at university is using condoms, punishes her, and on discovering that Sandra has cheated on him, her husband forces her to leave their house, and prevents her from ever seeing her daughter again. In another piece, Rita, a woman who has emigrated to England, too defies the traditional roles by being the sole provider of her family, as her husband has not worked since he lost his job at the factory. However, at the end of the story, when her husband refuses to accompany Rita to Malta for her father’s funeral, she stops packing and decides not to go, reinforcing old patterns of Maltese women’s dependency on their husbands. In ‘Lily’, the narrator has a comfortable job and no interest in men, however the fact that she lives alone in a bare house, causes an old neighbour to suspect that she might be involved in prostitution, like one of the women who frequent the house 51 opposite her own (Azzopardi, 2014).

Although my female characters are unified in their disillusionment with traditional roles, like Azzopardi's, they exist in a world that is still characterised by misogynistic attitudes. I knew that to truly bring out the nuances of Maltese life I had to maintain a balance between presenting my women as belonging to the 'submerged population group', while existing in a society where the roles are still 'well-defined', and nothing is clear cut.⁸⁵ Although Mariam is independent and lives in England on her own, she does so against her will and is ashamed that her husband has left her. Kady has affairs and plans on leaving her husband to join her sister in Australia, however she has spent a lifetime looking after her family. Marthese is ashamed of mingling with her neighbours because of the kind of work she engages in and Mrs Psaila doesn't retaliate or defend herself when her neighbours throw eggs at her door after finding out about her abortion, a sign that she is all too aware of the social mores of her culture.⁸⁶

Meanwhile, the only two male narrators in my stories do to some extent reflect 'well-defined roles'. Dun Pawl's image of the perfect woman is a subservient one. What draws him to Anna, a woman whose husband is an alcoholic, is her 'softness', 'the way she remained calm, when her husband refused to come out of their

⁸⁵ See page 13 for O'Connor's definition of 'submerged population'. Interestingly, in reflecting on the 'submerged populations' found in short fiction, O'Connor completely ignores women, choosing to focus his attention on 'colonized and impoverished peoples' (Robbins, 2019, p. 295). This omission was criticised by many, including Ruth Robbins, who believes that the term 'submerged population' certainly applies to 'women in the later part of the nineteenth century and to a range of its subsequent performances in the twentieth century and beyond' (p. 295).

⁸⁶ In 'Abortion: Breaking the barriers of patriarchy', Mary Grace Abela posits that as a patriarchal society, in Malta 'men are the ruling class and women the subjugated class'. (Vella, 2018, p. 526). This comes as no surprise and is reflected in many facets of Maltese society like Parliament, where there are currently '10 women and 57 men', or in the fact that Malta 'stands out as the country in the European Union with the highest inactivity rates for females in the labour market' (Azzopardi, 2014). Apart from this, in light of recent femicides, it has been pointed out that the laws currently in place 'do not fully protect women who experience domestic violence incidents' (Balzan, 2022). In fact, 'Only one in three sexual assaults are reported to the police in Malta and between 2010 and 2015, 25% of the murders committed in Malta were related to domestic violence and femicide' (Balzan, 2022). Marceline Naudi has suggested that the main problem is one of 'attitude', since it leads to women being looked down on in the 'public sphere' (Naudi, 2019).

bedroom, knocking gently on the door'.⁸⁷ In addition, Aldo's wife's dominance makes him angry, and he thinks of Aldo as weak for allowing his spouse to discard the statues 'without a single thought', highlighting a very traditional outlook on gender, in which the man has the final say and makes decisions.⁸⁸ Eman's perspective also betrays a somewhat patriarchal stance. When he thinks about his wife, his memory of her is restricted to her role as a mother to his son, cutting up 'sandwiches on the counter' or 'bending over to fix his son's seatbelt'.⁸⁹

However, both these men rely on women whom they have essentially lost- Dun Pawl's mother is dead and Eman's incarceration means he is estranged from his wife. Their dependence on women who cannot help them marks their narratives with a hopelessness that is absent from my female narrators' tales. At the end of the stories, they are entirely alone, Dun Pawl is resolute in his pessimistic vision of religion as some 'words to soothe the bereaved', and Eman contemplates his friend's suicide in his prison cell.⁹⁰ Even 'Barbie Girl's' Graham succumbs to mental illness. This brings attention to the 'covert progression conveying irony' that I mention earlier in my second chapter (Shen, 2014, p. 3). In this case the hidden irony that runs through the short story cycle is directed against a patriarchal society where women are 'weaklings who live in the shadows of their men' (Grima, 2010, p. 83). This is because in all the narratives, the women manage to find hope in the situation, while the men do not, essentially subverting the 'well-defined' roles traditionally assigned to each gender in Maltese literature.

⁸⁷ *Stones Displaced*, p. 64.

⁸⁸ *Stones Displaced*, p. 62.

⁸⁹ *Stones Displaced*, p. 137.

⁹⁰ *Stones Displaced*, p. 72.

Limitations

As I was in the process of revising and evaluating this short story cycle, it became clear to me that establishing a sense of setting is particularly vital when writing about a minority community that an international audience might be unfamiliar with. Not only does it allow for a foreign reader to envisage how the community's people live and what their landscape looks like, it also enables the reader to engage with what growing up in that community might feel like and better understand the development of that country's social problems.

However, there were limitations and aspects of the island that I struggled with evoking. One of them is the island's 'division', 'rooted in classes' (Camilleri, 2021, p. 99). In *A Rent Seeker's Paradise*, Mark Camilleri describes the North South divide of the island, with the 'harbour in the North' reserved for the 'middle class' and the harbour in the South for 'the working class (p. 99). He references the educational and language disparity between the two — the South being Maltese speaking and the North choosing to speak a 'mixture of Maltese and English' (p. 99). Since Malta is such a small island, its landscape doesn't vary much, so there are no obvious markers in setting that distinguish the North from the South. Therefore, in my creative practice, I could only use small signs that suggest that some areas in the South are somewhat impoverished, like in 'Freeport Lights' where Eman feels 'proud' that he has managed to buy a 'maisonette, in one of the quieter, central villages of the island, far away from the South'.⁹¹ In 'Little Assisi' I indicate that the characters live in areas where the properties are expensive. The priest's friends who drive a Bentley, live in St Julian's, a central area in the island, where the priest also lives, in 'a two-

⁹¹ *Stones Displaced*, p. 137.

bedroom maisonette with a terrace' that his mother has left him.⁹² However, despite including these small characteristics, I was aware that the connotations generated by the North and South of Malta can only truly resonate with a local audience who is familiar with them, and essentially, for a foreign readership the names of the places and their geographical location are meaningless.

The fact that specific locations will not mean anything to a foreign audience, also means that if mentioned, they will need to be accompanied by some context, which would not be necessary if the text was solely targeted at a local audience. In fact, in some contemporary Maltese-language fiction, there is scant description of place. Names of towns are thrown in and the narrative seems to assume that the reader is familiar with specific locations. An example of this is Clare Azzopardi's collection, *Il-linja l- hadra*. In many of her stories, names of places aren't accompanied by their description and a foreigner reading a translated version might be confused as to where the protagonists are. In 'No adjective describe story', Ruth and Rachel meet in Valletta at a coffee shop called 'l-iSweets' at Ta Liesse, where you can smoke and watch St Angelo (Azzopardi, 2007, p. 43). Someone unfamiliar with the environs wouldn't know that 'Liesse' refers to the Church of Our Lady of Liesse or that it overlooks the sea and that Fort St Angelo is across the waters, opposite where the protagonist and her friend are drinking coffee. The same can be said for 'Ir-ragel li waqaghlu l- mobile fil-loki' (p. 56). Here, one of the characters describes a car accident and all the reader is told about the setting is that it happens when the protagonist and his then girlfriend were coming back up from Għadira and that the last he saw of her was her car going up the 'central strip' (p. 64). A reader unfamiliar with the fact that Għadira is a beach will miss the implication that the

⁹² *Stones Displaced*, p. 58.

couple had probably spent a long day there and were quite tired, as well as how the accident occurred, where his girlfriend was driving and what the scene actually looked like. This might not bother a local all too much, as the latter would be familiar with the kind of accidents that are likely to occur on the steep turns that overlook the Bay, but it would certainly confuse a foreigner, who would require more explanation to visualize what is going on.

Therefore, it was essential that in my stories any town or village mentioned needed to be accompanied with a description. In ‘Little Assisi’, I mention that the town of St Julian’s has a ‘promenade’ and that it is flanked by ‘cafes and restaurants on one side’ and ‘Balluta Bay’ on the other, while in ‘Freeport Lights’ I describe the freeport in Pretty Bay in quite some detail.⁹³ However, those who have experienced these places first hand will have the advantage of having a much clearer image of what I am referring to, than those who have never heard of them and must simply rely on the descriptions I provide. Also, despite that I tried to evoke Maltese locations as distinctly as I could, there are still place markers in my stories that are simply mentioned and not elaborated on in much detail. Some examples include ‘Valletta’s old gate’, ‘Axis club’, ‘Republic Street’, ‘Zampa jewellery shop’, ‘Farsons’ Brewery’.⁹⁴ The reason for this is that it felt too artificial and forced to describe each one in detail, especially when a protagonist was just looking at photos of these places like in ‘Beach Houses’. Therefore, these references are likely to resonate more with a Maltese reader than they are a foreign one, putting the latter at a disadvantage.

⁹³ *Stones Displaced*, p. 57.

⁹⁴ *Stones Displaced*, p. 125, p. 17, p. 19, p. 93.

Conclusion

In my previous chapters, I explained my methodology in connection with Flower's and Hayes' cognitive process theory of writing. This enabled me to demonstrate how my creative practice developed around six main techniques through which I depicted my country's issues and nuances and shared them with a wider Anglophone audience.

My practice was essentially fuelled by a strong sense of inadequacy which presented itself in two main ways: the inferiority that comes from writing about a minority culture whose literature is not widely available to non-local readers and the insecurity of writing about it in the English language, when so much work has been done to promote Maltese language literature.

I dedicated the first chapter to addressing the use of 'code-switching' in some of my characters' stories. Here I found three main instances where shifting from English to Maltese could be done in an authentic way. In my second chapter, I looked more closely at the short story cycle and four other devices that could provide a nuanced, yet palatable reading of Malta to an Anglophone audience. These include the short story cycle as a means of linking sequences and themes, maintaining a balance between explaining and trusting the reader, the use of reliable narrator in first- and third-person narration, analepsis, as well as the subversion of traditional female roles. What emerged from my research was that the use of multiple voices and perspectives enabled me not only to show Malta's differing and varying issues, but also the complexity of feeling that it raises in its people. Ultimately Malta surfaces as a space that is both accepting and alienating, solitary and populous. There is no clear-cut answer to the incongruity it proposes. In the collection's final story,

Ramona's dissatisfaction with her life in England and her choosing to visit her mother in Australia strongly implies that the theme of non-belonging that permeates the entire collection, is not one reserved for Malta and its people. Essentially it is a universal theme, one which the characters continue to carry with them, even when they leave the island, in attempt to establish their identities abroad.

My central themes of loss, inferiority, uncertainty, and longing to fit in were necessary in the creation of my characters and my creative process. They are themes that a vast diaspora of peoples is likely to engage with. In addition, I believe that this study is useful to those who like myself come from minority cultures, whose literatures are not widely known or celebrated, who must rely on a majority language to make their writing accessible to a wider audience. I believe that transnational writers can use my techniques, both in short and longer English fiction when navigating ways of preserving the essences of their minority communities.

Moreover, I am also confident that this study can help Maltese writers rethink their position and hybrid identity and come to recognise the importance of the English language as a tool in promoting our lived experiences.

Mostly I hope that through opening a window to these characters' narratives I can give some comfort to those who have ever experienced non-belonging or displacement.

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